

Letter to the Editor

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The Importance of the Taliban and the International Community Collaboration in Building Support Systems for Experts Working in Earthquake-Affected Areas in Afghanistan—Perspectives from a Triple Disaster Experience in Fukushima

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A 5.9-magnitude earthquake in eastern Afghanistan on June 22, 2022, led to more than 1000 fatalities, 3000 injuries, and 4500 housing collapses. As with the 2015 earthquake in Nepal, the sun-dried, brick-made houses might have contributed to the extensive damage.¹ The residents here are one of the most backward people worldwide, and poor health care access and hygiene problems have been noted even before the disaster. Furthermore, since the new Taliban reigned in 2021, proper trust and partnerships with Western countries have been lost, leading to the withdrawal of financial and practical support, thus the recovery of the affected areas may take substantial time.

Despite some background differences, based on our long-term experiences for support works in Fukushima following the 2011 triple disaster (earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster),² we would like to highlight the importance of having researchers and health care professionals in the affected areas for step-by-step recovery from disasters. Our activities in Fukushima started within a month after the triple disaster brought various benefits. First, we could address high-priority issues promptly. Initially, we worked on radiation-related issues, but, after several years, when it became evident that the impact of radiation exposure on health was limited, we could move to provide more timely support for secondary health issues that turned out to be problems locally, such as lifestyle-related diseases.³ Second, by remaining in the affected areas, we could build the relationships and trust necessary for disaster research. Recently, ethics in disaster research have been highlighted,⁴ and our involvement as health care professionals in Fukushima worked positively.

Therefore, the exodus of highly educated personnel from Afghanistan is of serious concern.⁵ Indeed, it is reported that more than tens of thousands of Afghan intellectuals have already left the country since the Taliban Government took control. Our key collaborators from Kateb University, with whom we have partnered since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, have also left the country. Most wished to contribute to the health and well-being of Afghan citizens, but there is still no prospect of their return due to the uncertainty of the government system, and the anxiety stems from the previous Taliban Government.

In this context, the Taliban and the international community need to cooperate, based on past disaster experiences, to support researchers and medical professionals for disaster reconstruction. Humanitarian assistance and political issues should be kept separate, and we look forward to greater global understanding and support for Afghanistan.

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