

International Forum on Telling Live Lessons from Disasters (Kobe, Japan, 20-22 March 2010)

Summary

The International Forum on Telling Live Lessons from Disaster was held in Kobe, Japan, 20-22 March 2010 by the Implementation Committee of the Forum (Chairman: Dr. Isao HAYASHI, Associate Professor of the National Museum of Ethnology), co-organized by The Japan Foundation Center for Global Partnership (CGP), National Museum of Ethnology, JICA Hyogo Center, The Yomiuri Shim-bun and The Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake Memorial Disaster Reduction and Human Renovation Institution (DRI). The Forum was financed by CGP, Hyogo Prefecture Government, National Museum of Ethnology and the Nippon Foundation. It received some 150 participants from Algeria, Armenia, Bangladesh, China, El Salvador, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, The Netherlands, The United States of America and Turkey, including those from 22 places of the world which were struck by disasters in the past. Over 40 reports were presented on various cases and initiatives of preserving and disseminating real live stories and lessons from the experiences of disasters.

Why the Forum on Telling Live Lessons from Disasters?

Natural disasters have the power in mere moments, to destroy the livelihood and human societies built over generations. And yet, the sad memories engraved on our minds also help us move forward: further understanding the threats of the nature, while realizing the preciousness of life and importance of communal living.

In many disaster-struck areas, various initiatives are in place to remember and convey the stories of survival and recovery. Those have been undertaken through various mediums: oral story-telling, films, images, artifacts exhibition, monuments, artistic works, etc. Such activities substantiate and communicate local histories; deepening our understanding of the bonds between ourselves and the meaning of the co-existence with nature. Sharing such stories strengthens reconstruction efforts and generates a sense of solidarity. This kind of preserving and disseminating of real live stories and lessons from the experiences of disasters, "Telling Live Lessons", is an invaluable activity even for the larger society as a whole.

Unfortunately, the significance of such activities is not recognized enough. On the one hand, there are many individuals who are committed to communicating the stories and lessons of disasters; but, on the other hand, networks or systems are still weak to unite these people and to facilitate mutual learning. Further research is also needed to examine the ways in which the stories and lessons are compiled and transmitted.

In this context, the International Forum on Telling Live Lessons from Disasters was held with a view to strengthening exchange between those committed to Telling Live Lessons around the world, appealing for the importance of such initiatives, examining its significance and process, and promoting its continual implementation globally for strengthening the disaster prevention and mitigation in the future.

Theme of the Forum

- **Motives:** What motivates us to conduct Telling Live Lessons? Why, for whom, and for what purposes do we preserve and disseminate real live stories and lessons from the experiences of disasters?
- **Significance:** How should we envision the significance of Telling Live Lessons? From whose perspective should we understand the significance: those who try to convey messages, the audience of the message, the citizen of the disaster-struck areas, the larger society...?
- **Process:** To make sure that the activities of Telling Live Lessons are effective, what should we consider in terms of delivery and method? What kind of role would museums take in accomplishing the objectives of Telling Live Lessons?

Open Symposium: Deliberating on Telling Live Lessons from Disasters

The Forum began with the open tripartite talk by Dr. KAWATA Yoshiaki (Executive Director of Disaster Reduction and Human Renovation Institution (DRI) and Professor of Kasai University), Dr. Thin Aye Aye Ko (Director of Thin Myanmar Language Center in Myanmar), and Mr. USUI Makoto (Teacher of Meishin Elementary School in Kobe, Japan). Dr. KAWATA stated that after the 1995 Earthquake in Kobe he came to believe that the researchers of disaster reduction must envision victims in their research scope and ultimately aim at the bettering of the society; and stressed the importance of such research as "implementation science". Dr. Thin Aye Aye Ko presented her activities in her home country, which she is conducting by making use of her past experience in Kobe as a disaster victim then; and she highlighted the worldwide chain of assistance whereby a former disaster-struck place later extends assistance to a newly struck place. Mr. USUI stated that, through the song "Bring Happiness to the World" that he composed two weeks after the 1995 Earthquake, he wished to convey his hope that Kobe would recover; and manifested the important role that the music can play in Telling Live Lessons by being able to effectively convey the hope of disaster victims to other places and times.

The panel discussion then followed with three panelists: Mr. YAMAMOTO Kenichi (Deputy Executive Director of DRI), Ms. Donna SAIKI (Director of Pacific Tsunami Museum in Hawaii) and Dr. Muhammad Saidur RAHMAN (Director of Bangladesh Disaster Preparedness Center), and two commentators: Mr. SAKATO Masaru (Special Assistant to the President of The Japan Foundation) and Mr. Sanjaya BHATIA (Knowledge Management Officer of Secretariat of IRP (International Recovery Platform)). They discussed the significance of Telling Live Lessons, and exchanged opinions such as: "The young generation can generate chain of Telling Live Lessons by telling their experiences to younger children who may further relay to next generations."; "The traditional means of Telling Live Lessons are greatly effective, such as folk songs, folklores and poeties which often have strong impacts to the heart of the local people of developing countries."; "Our Museum operates with very little capital but lots of passion, and we have dedicated volunteer."; "It warms my heart that I come here and I can validate what we have been doing all those years of gathering stories because we started with nothing."; "The disaster is something very rare to one place, but if we share memories of disasters across country borders, our memory of disasters can remain for longer time."; "The efforts for Telling Live Lessons fits very well into the Priority Number 3 of the Hyogo Framework of Action, i.e. educating awareness of disasters."; and "The know-how of museums and the mechanism of Telling Live Lessons are very effective to those countries that are struggling for reconstruction from disasters."

Sessions

The Forum then had several sessions separately, discussing the role of museums, the direction of research, the role of media and the role of NGOs in implementing Telling Live Lessons. In the Museum Session, presentations were made by the representatives of over 20 museums of different places of the world on their activities for specific disasters, such as: Eruption of Mt. Asama and consequent Mudflow, Japan, 1783; Ansei Nankai Earthquake and Tsunami, Japan, 1854; San Francisco Earthquake, USA, 1906; Eruption of Mt. Usu, Japan, 1920, 44, 77 and 2000; Storm-surge and Floods, Zealand, The Netherlands, 1953; Tsunamis, Hawaii, USA, 1946 and 1960; Tailing Dam Failure, Stava Valley, Italy, 1985; Spitak Earthquake, Armenia, 1988; Eruption of Mt. Unzen-Fugen, Japan, 1991; Hokkaido South-West Offshore Earthquake and Tsunami, Japan, 1993; Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, Kobe, Japan, 1995; Marmara Earthquake, Turkey, 1999; Chi-Chi Earthquake, Taiwan, 1999; Indian Ocean Tsunami, Indonesia, Thailand and Sri Lanka, 2004; Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, USA, 2005; and Great Sichuan Earthquake, China, 2008. The museum exhibition on Bumerdes Earthquake, Algeria, 2003, was also presented in another session. The Session observed a wide variety of initiatives: type of funding and management (publicly-organized vs. volunteer-led), coverage of display (disaster response phase vs. reconstruction), style of display (facts in the past vs. counter-disaster measures in future), function of museum (exhibition of artifacts vs. forum where people meet), and concept of exhibition (in-house exhibition only vs. "field museum" or "geo-park" inclusive of ruins and monuments outside of museum).

In the Research Session, the researchers of disaster reduction from Algeria, Bangladesh, China, Japan and Nepal exchanged opinions and outlooks to consider the role of Telling Live Lessons in further developing the human society. In the Media Session, some 10 journalists from Japan, Sri Lanka and USA discussed the responsibility of mass media in implementing and promoting Telling Live Lessons activities. In the NGO Session, 7 NGO activists from Indonesia, Japan, Myanmar and USA reported their achievements and considered the significance of human exchange across borders in sharing stories and experiences.



DRI, Kobe, Japan,
For 1995 Earthquake
(Photo: Secretariat)



Pacific Tsunami Museum,
Hawaii, USA, for 1946 & 60
Tsunamis (Photo: Fukasawa)



Flood Museum, Zealand, The
Netherlands, for 1953 Storm-surge &
Floods (Photo: Museum's website)



Earthquake and Culture Museum,
Adapazar, Turkey, for 1999
Earthquake (Photo: Sakamoto)



921 Earthquake Museum,
Chi-Chi, Taiwan, for 1999
Earthquake (Photo: Sakamoto)



Mimatsu Masao Museum, Usu,
Japan, for 1920, 44, 77 & 2000
Eruptions (Photo: Mimatsu)

Conclusion

In January 2005 which coincided to the tenth anniversary of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, the United Nations World Conference on Disaster Reduction was held in Kobe; and one year later, the International Network of Telling Live Lessons from Disasters, TeLL-Net, was founded. In March 2010, thanks to the continued cooperation of many partners, the Secretariat of TeLL-Net is pleased to report that the International Forum on Telling Live Lessons from Disaster was held successfully.

While we are struggling for early recovery in the aftermath of the devastation caused by the Great East-North Japan Earthquake and Tsunami of 11 March 2011, this harsh reality only strengthens the importance and necessity of promoting Telling Live Lessons activities. Currently, the Secretariat is processing preparation of uploading detailed information of the Forum, in particular the reference to a wide variety of Telling Live Lessons activities in many parts of the world. We will soon open a portal site whereby we encourage and promote sharing of information and human exchange among those who are committed to preserving and disseminating real live stories and lessons from the experiences of specific disasters, and thus we hope to contribute to promoting further implementation of disaster reduction and to early reconstruction of disaster-stricken areas as well.



Speakers and Facilitators (Photo: Omote)



Tripartite Talk (Photo: Omote)



Panel Discussion (Photo: Omote)