

2011 4 4
21

Turning the Great East Japan Earthquake into an opportunity to rebuild the nation
The rebirth of Japan, a mission for universities

Junichi Hamada

manner. The University has established the Headquarters for Disaster Countermeasures for the first time in its history and in accordance with the basic principles of risk management. This organization gathers and communica

So far, I have outlined challenges facing the University of Tokyo. It seems difficult to generalize the steps for universities to take, for I believe the degree and nature of challenges vary from one university to another. But what needs to be done is unmistakably clear.

Offering assistance to the disaster victims

First and foremost, we should offer assistance to stricken universities and affected students and local residents. The university community as a whole must mobilize personnel and relief supplies, and provide much-needed financial assistance. Creating a donation scheme is a viable option in this regard. The Japan Association of National Universities has received and has already started responding to offers of assistance. The University of Tokyo has also delivered emergency supplies on several occasions.

Medical doctors from university hospitals around the country are scrambling to help victims in affected areas. Motivated student volunteers will be expected to do their part when conditions permit. As educators, we have to set the stage for encouraging and supporting such student-led initiatives.

In the meanwhile, we will call on businesses to give utmost consideration to students' job-hunting, such as delaying recruitment activity, so as not to disadvantage affected students.

In the long term, this disaster will prove to be a major turning point for Japan's entire social and economic system. Undoubtedly, our conventional energy policy, people's livelihoods, and our values must undergo a fundamental change. It is essential for Japanese society to tackle head-on reconstructing the nation and building the human capital needed to take on that daunting task.

Each university should play its role and fulfill its share of responsibility for reconstruction based on its unique characteristics and strengths. A failure to do so means universities would lose their social *raison d'être*. Members of the university community must bear in mind that the key to rebuilding Japan from the debilitating blow of this disaster is none other than knowledge—the knowledge generated and acquired every day by university faculty, students and alumni members.

The University of Tokyo aims to become a “world-leading center of knowledge.” It is at times such as this that our true worth is put to the test. The University is entrusted with the tasks of nurturing a “civil elite,” who dedicate themselves to the public cause, and of finding solutions to social challenges, by employing the achievements of diverse

scholarly research. Greater efforts are expected of us to fulfill this mission. The power of nature inflicted an unimaginable level of destruction on northeastern Japan. Amidst this ongoing crisis, we should not falter in our resolve to pursue the truths about natural phenomena and the fabric of human society.

With waves of information inundating our society, it is the responsibility of the university to cope with the unfolding crisis, examine facts objectively, and disseminate accurate knowledge to society at large. Furthermore, in concert with the wisdom of the world, universities must proceed steadily forward on the long path toward realizing a better world to come. It is my hope that every single faculty member and student will ask themselves what role they can play as a member of the university, and will take appropriate action accordingly.