

A Daily Predicament: Searching for Hope

The lives of single women forced to evacuate

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Introduction

The purpose of this study:

- To explore the damages of the Fukushima nuclear accidents based on the experiences of forced evacuees.
- Do not forget that affected regions in Fukushima is still under emergency declaration.
- In February 2016 at Hanyu City, Sumiko (pseudonym) told me:
“I am alone, I would be in limbo, where would I live? As my life has been disrupted by the nuclear accident. I didn't come to Saitama Prefecture to decide where to live on my own.”
She was in her late fifties in single households at the time. Before the accident she lived in an apartment at Futaba Town, working as a care worker.

Contents

- **1. Evacuees from Nuclear accident.**
- **2. Compensation for nuclear damages.**
- **3. Reading from the narratives of forced evacuees in single households.**
 - (1) Disparity in compensation.
 - (2) Impact of living environment during evacuation.
 - (3) On social capital.
 - (4) Thoughts on hometown.
 - (5) Evacuees are to speak out.
- **4. Final remarks: Hope and a sustainable care system**

1. Evacuees from Nuclear accident

- **Forced evacuees**

Evacuees from the following regions:

Namie Town, Okuma Town, Futaba Town, Katsurao Village, Kawauchi Village, Tomioka Town, Naraha Town, Hirono Town, Minamisoma City, Tamura City, Iitate Village, Kawamata Town, making a total of 12 municipalities.

- **Voluntary evacuees**

Evacuees from outside the above regions:

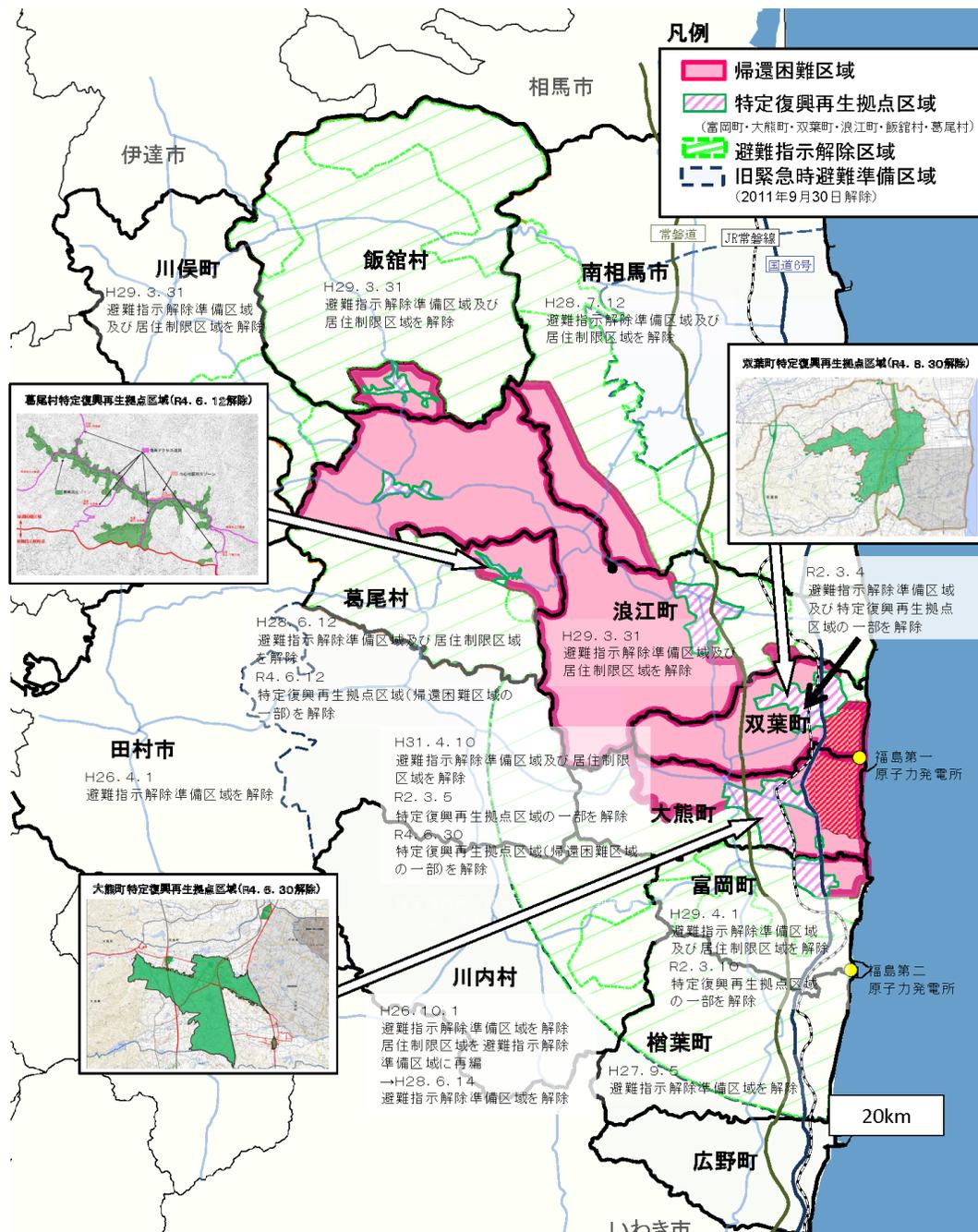
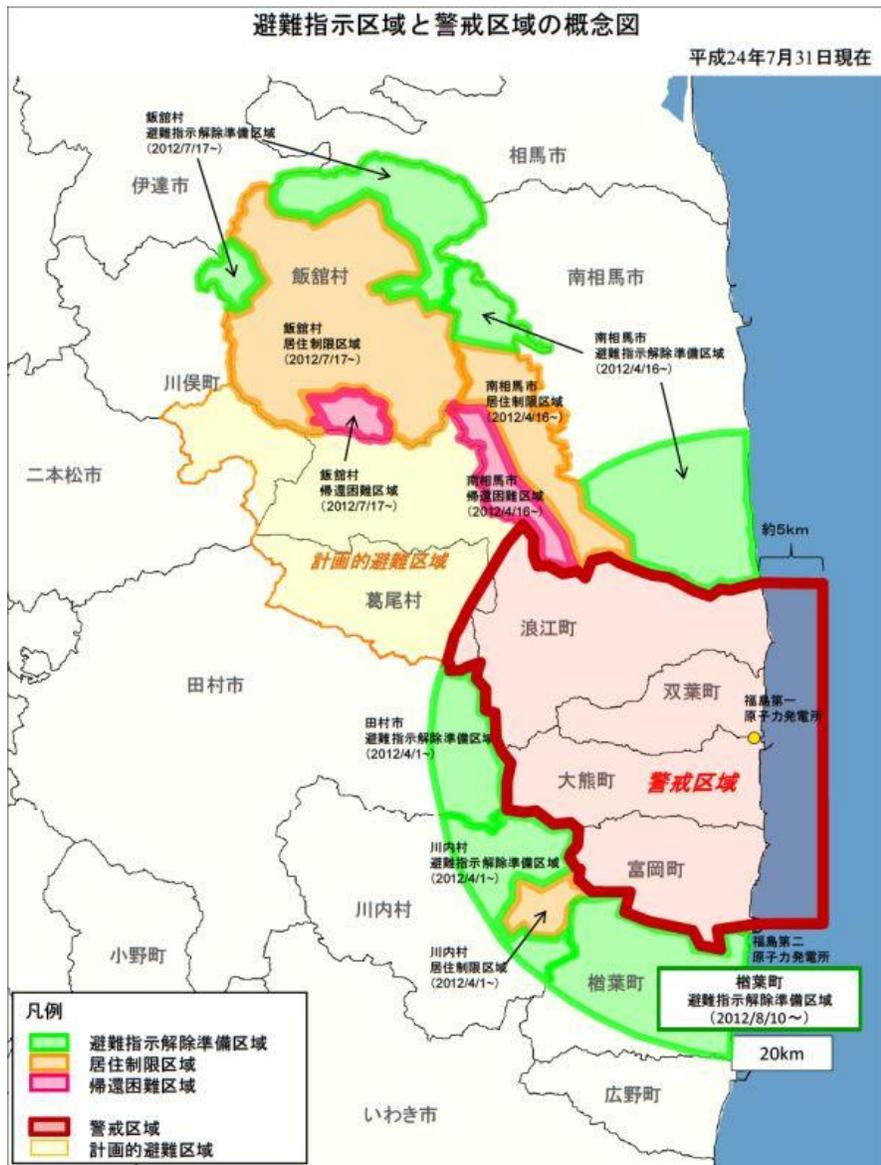
Such as Fukushima City, Koriyama City, and Iwaki City.

- *See the chart on the next page.

The map of evacuation ordered areas

避難指示区域の概念図

令和4年8月30日時点 双葉町特定復興再生拠点区域の避難指示解除後



The numbers of evacuees

Number of evacuees: 164,856 in May 2012 with peak.

After that, it decreased gradually. The number was 30,216 in April 2022 (6,549 people in Fukushima prefecture, and 23,677 people outside the prefecture).



1. Nuclear disaster area and evacuation order

- Concentric evacuation instructions was made by time series distance from the nuclear power plant.
As to 2km, 3km, 10km, 20km, and 30km.
- By 20-100mSv of the emergency exposure situation specified by ICRP, 2008, so that the limit was increased up to 20mSv. Before the accident, the limit was 1 mSv per year. Against this policy a withdrawal movement occurred.
- Japanese government measures for victims and the accident area are to provide compensation and to promote decontamination first. When decontamination accomplished the evacuation orders are cancelled.

2. Compensation for nuclear damages

- **Compensation is made by following the Act on Nuclear Damage (Nuclear Compensation Act).**

Establishment of the Nuclear Damage Compensation Dispute.

Reconciliation Board to resolve disputes between victims and perpetrators.

Elaboration of general guidelines. The first guideline in April 28, 2011, implemented to December 26, 2013, although a fourth supplement as to the "intermediate guideline" was added.

There was no review of the amount of compensation.

- **Compensation procedure**

1) Direct billing to TEPCO - limits approved by TEPCO;

2) ADR (Nuclear Damages Dispute Resolution Center) Complaint – there were numerous cases where settlement proposals were rejected;

3) Filing a lawsuit in court.

2. Compensation for forced evacuees

- For emotional damage to compensation: per person 100,000 yen per month.

Mental anguish associated with life as an evacuee, anxiety on future prospects and health effects of radiation exposure.

- For property compensation: housing land, buildings, leasehold, housing security costs, fields, household goods, graves, depreciable assets, inventories.
- Payment of actual expenses: transportation expenses for evacuation and return, moving, temporary home, transportation expenses for family visits, rent for deemed temporary housing, damages for incapacity to work.

3. Reading from narratives of forced evacuees in single households

(1) Disparity in compensation

- Setting uniform compensation without considering attributes.

(2) Impact of living environment during evacuation

- Evacuation center \Rightarrow Temporary housing \Rightarrow Disaster reconstruction public housing.
- Collective housing condition: what effects the body and mind, a space where privacy cannot be protected.

3. Reading from narratives of forced evacuees in single households

(3) On building social capital at the site of relocation

- Unfamiliar land, difficulty of getting used to it, the relationship between evacuees vs. local residents.

(4) Thoughts on hometown

- “I want to go home when the place would be clean.”

(5) Evacuees are to speak out

- We have had a great experience and the time to tell the accident to people.
- Getting and learning a specialized knowledge on nuclear power.

3-(1) Disparity in compensation damages

- Uniform attributes: predominantly large rural family based on patriarchy (for example, grandparents, parents, 3 children).
- No consideration for single-person households. If she (he) is in a informal employment, living in rental house, compensation of 100,000 yen per month and housing support are the main benefits.

- Sumiko said:

“ How much do we get per head, well, I guess you have to be happy that you get it, but we are a refugee. People are very strict when they look at us in this situation from the outside. If they say, ‘don't be spoiled,’ that's the end of it, and I think that's true myself.”

3-(1) Disparity in compensation damages

- In the case of young couple with three kids, Minae's family evacuated from Tomioka town to Tokyo. For salaried households without property coverage, it may be easier to make a living for a household.
- Minae told me:

“ My husband's salary can cover our monthly living expenses. We are planning to buy a house somewhere in Fukushima Prefecture if possible, as close as possible to where our relatives live, and since our children are still in preschool, we hope that my husband's new job will be in Fukushima Prefecture. ”

3-(2) Impact of living environment

- The general process of evacuation as follows:

March 11, 2011 entering emergency or temporary evacuation centre designated by municipalities, or relatives' homes at somewhere in Japan
⇒ Temporary housing built by Fukushima Prefecture ⇒ Buying own house to somewhere or return home town.

① A case of forced evacuees from Futaba Town

- Sumiko's case:

Her relatives' house at Kawamata City ⇒ evacuation facilities in Fukushima Prefecture ⇒ Saitama Super Arena ⇒ the building of Kisai High School at Kazo City ⇒ employment promotion house.

3-(2) Impact of living environment

- Sumiko told me about her two and half years of life at Kasai High School.

“I was given bento boxes three time a day. The life there was like a bird in a cage. Since I couldn’t do what I used to be able to do on a daily basis. There was a kitchen, but they wouldn’t let me use it. It is a borrowed one, so we can't do anything.”

- She said her motivation to do something was ruined, losing the purpose to life. This might cause by such life style there.

She continued to say:

“I think it’s not a normal life, you don’t know where you are going, you don’t know where you can go. If you have a family, you know your way. They build or rent houses. For their children’s education, they will find a place. They seem to be progressing better than I am.”

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3-(2) Impact of living environment

② From Namie Town to Tokyo

Shigeko, 60-year-old woman, a single household who evacuated from the Ukedo district of Namie Town to a relative's house in Tokyo. She then moved to new Shinonome Civil Servant's Housing.

In the tower block she was given one room with a small kitchen and a bathroom, living for one and half years. There were also tenants from Namie town. She sometimes enjoyed the city life with freedom. She often worked for her sister's laundry shop at the suburb of Tokyo.

- She is a singer of traditional local art culture, "Ukedo Rice Planting Dance" at Ukedo district in Namie town. Encouraged by the voices of those around her, she begins to practice the dance.

“I commuted from Tokyo to Nihonmatsu city in Fukushima Prefecture. The children gathered from Niigata and other places for dancing. They wanted to see their friends, and the mothers wanted to talk to each other.”

3-(3) On social capital

- Difficulty building human relationships at evacuation sites.
- Refugees = outsiders, placed on the fringes.
- To be single.

Sumiko said,

“If you are a mother with children, I think it is possible to build relationships with local residents by starting conversations about their children's education and school life as common topics.”

“It is difficult to get used to this place. Here, I'm an outsider, and I'm conscious of being an outsider.”

3-(4) Thoughts on hometown

At the end of 2021, Sumiko visited Futaba Town for the first time in a while. She had to go to see the room since the apartment had to be demolished. She said,

“The room was completely ruined, and a fox I saw on the way stared at me, so I looked back and ran away. For some reason, it felt like there was haze over the town. It was the haze that had existed before the accident.” *haze means radiation.

“I want to go back to Futaba Town when it’s decontaminated. But I don’t know when that will be. If it’s not Futaba, I don’t have to stick to Fukushima Prefecture. Then, I can stay where I am now. It is difficult to chose a right place. I feel like I am floating.”

3-(4) Thoughts on hometown

Shigeiko said,

“In March 2016, I suddenly went home by myself. There was no one around. Only the sound of the machinery to be heard. Standing in front of my house, I said to myself that this was the entrance, kitchen, and living room, but somehow I couldn't enter the foundation. I know it's my house now because I recognize the foundation. If you take it, it's nothing. I couldn't enter beyond the front door, so I wonder if I'll be able to settle down if I live here. Where should I live.”

“The explosion is very serious. We won't be able to live there anymore. Everyone is wondering whether they will go back there or what will happen after the evacuation.”

“I would like to go back to my home if they would return it to its original state. The best thing is to ask our government to restore our lives so that we don't have to worry.”

3-(5) Evacuees are to speak out

- Kotori is late forties from Namie Town, living in Tokyo at the time of 2018 saying that:

“In the near future, I would like to be on the side of providing support. The evacuees are gradually becoming unwilling to be seen as vulnerable. Now is the time to make a statement. We must not erase the voices of Fukushima. We must not let this experience fade away.”

- As an evacuee and a supporter, Yayoi was involved in the trial. She is late seventies now. She said at the time September 2016

“We are not responsible for the damages, but we are being forced to pay for it, and we had to be compensated properly. I think that we, the affected people, have to speak up.”

3-(5) Evacuees are to speak out

Yayoi continued to say:

“The Act for the Support of Child Victims of Nuclear Power Plants has been completely omitted, and I believe that a law really needs to be passed on reconstruction. I think the role of the prefectural government should been to prevent the victims who are living with various contradictions from being divided among each other. But they do not do that, rather it seems they actually is fueling it. I'm not convinced of that.”

- In a court case in which four families of voluntary evacuees are being sued by Fukushima Prefecture on housing, she supports the side of evacuees in 2022.

4. Final remarks

- Review of the "interim guidelines" established by the Nuclear Damage Compensation Dispute Council.
- Revision of the Child Victims Support Act.
- Eternal examination for health check related to radiation exposure.
- Implementation of TEPCO's pledge²⁰ to “ensure that every last person is compensated and that we stay close to the victims until the last person is able to start a new life”.
- The need for measures other than compensation, the establishment of a sustainable care system and social services.