

Unique Policies of Municipalities: The Future of the Disaster Victim Support System

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I read an article titled “Tottori Earthquake: First in the Country to Support Homes Receiving Some Damage with Public Funds, Maximum of 300,000 Yen in the Prefecture” (Yomiuri Shimbun, 1st page of the Osaka morning edition, 26 October, 2016). In the article, the author found the “future of the disaster victim support system.” Generally disaster law is characterized by gradual growth after experienced a shocking disaster. The disaster victim support system that is responsible for one section of disaster law has been growing hectic, starting with the Act on Support for Livelihood Recovery of Disaster Victims (abbreviated hereafter as ASLRDV) which was enacted in 1998 with the Great Hanshin/Awaji Earthquake. One factor in the promotion of this growth is the unique policies of municipalities.

Unique policies from municipalities can be defined as “policies taken which differ from the policies being taken by high level government bodies (such as the national or prefectural governments).”

The Western Tottori Earthquake in October of 2000 highlighted these unique policies. At this time there was no support given in the ASLRDV for home rebuilding and repair due to this being as a general rule a personal responsibility and due to homes being privately owned and support was only to be given for the supply of household possessions. Despite this, support actually was given for home rebuilding and repair. In this way these unique policies have the ability to break through the wall of the exiting legal system. One could say that Tottori Prefecture holds a position as a pioneer of the disaster victim support system for these unique policies.

Behind the fact that municipalities have often taken unique support policies for disaster victims is (1) the insubstantial nature of the national disaster victim support system which is the main agent of the ASLRDV and the Disaster Relief Act and (2) the demand for policies from municipalities due to the occurrence of large or shocking disasters while having such an insubstantial national system.

Looking at the Kumamoto Earthquake, Oita Prefecture in Kyushu, which was one site of the Kumamoto Earthquake disaster, is one prefecture that is advancing with such unique policies. Since there is a unique support system in Oita Prefecture (the Oita Prefecture Disaster Victim Home Rebuilding Support System), people are provided with a basic support fund of 500,000 yen even for partially destroyed homes with as much as 1.3 million yen when one includes additional support funds (800,000 yen for home rebuilding, home purchases, and home repair or 500,000 yen for rent). Upon further investigation, it was revealed that Beppu City actually provides 500,000 yen in support for partially destroyed homes and 200,000 yen in support for homes that have received some damage. It is not uncommon for municipalities to implement unique policies. On the other hand, since Kumamoto Prefecture does not have these unique policies this kind of support for partially destroyed homes in the disaster area in Kumamoto Prefecture was not given.

Because of the unique policies of Oita Prefecture and Beppu City more unique policies are to be expected going forward for partially destroyed homes, homes that have received some damage, and damage to land. Actually, 410,000 yen has been provided for partially destroyed homes in Kumamoto Prefecture using donation money. Furthermore, 100,000 yen has been provided for homes that have received some amount of damage exceeding 1 million yen in repair costs through donation money. Support funds for damage to land have been provided from Kumamoto Prefecture’s recovery fund. By becoming aware of the unique policies of municipalities we can glimpse the future of the disaster victim support system, such as by seeing where the national disaster victim support policies are lacking

and seeing what sort of development will occur for the system in the future.

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