



## **Side Event of the 20th General Assembly of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)**

### **"Faster, Stronger, Better: Strengthening RCRC Emergency Response System - Are We Prepared for Emerging Risks? –"**

#### **Reflection report of the side event by The Simplest NAIC**

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At the end of December 2015, The Simplest NAIC members who prepared the presentation for the side event of the 20th IFRC General Assembly held a report meeting about the side event held in Geneva. They reflected on the preparation process of the presentation. They also looked back on their experience of dialogue workshops that The Simplest NAIC had organized as part of their activities. The meeting also offered an opportunity for reflection of their various other experiences as well as their findings in Geneva.

(The following text was contributed by The Simplest NAIC.)

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- What the side event in Geneva made us aware of:

We had been anxious about how the world would evaluate our presentation until we gave it at the side event. Soon after our presentation, we received positive comments such as: "I was moved." "Your presentation is helpful." Some of the participants who gave us the comments were coping with problems from more complicated backgrounds than the ones we dealt with in our dialogue workshops in Japan. Furthermore, when we took part in a conference for Red Cross and Red Crescent youth volunteers from around the world in Geneva, some of the panelists mentioned the importance of dialogue in solving problems. We learned that people in other countries have the same idea as ours, which is the importance of the dialogue that we hoped to convey at the side event. This experience allowed us to feel that our activities are headed in the right direction.

Outside the conference hall, we saw the participating youth volunteers from across the world openly discussing various problems they faced. The youth from different backgrounds encouraged each other to address the problems and made suggestions for solutions. Some youth volunteers whom we just greeted at the venue continued to speak to us. We explained our activities to them and they listened to us very carefully. Then they talked about their problems earnestly. From the discussion, we naturally had an interest in their problems and hoped to have further discussion with them. This was unbelievable in Japan where people are often hesitant to express their thoughts and feelings. We found the same mindset as ours during the youth conference, which is to focus on the importance of dialogue that we suggested during our presentation at the side event.



What made the dialogues between the youth volunteers go so smoothly? We recognized later that it was because they shared the same mindset: “Try to understand the different backgrounds.”

- What is necessary for a dialogue: Ways of creating a dialogue forum and the mindset of dialogue participants:

Are we able to share this mindset of understanding different backgrounds with participants of our dialogue workshops in Tokyo and Fukushima? In order to make it happen, we tried to review our dialogue activities from the two perspectives: “ways of creating a dialogue forum” and “mindset of dialogue participants”.

To begin with, we discussed how we should create a dialogue forum and facilitate the dialogue.

At the youth conference that we participated in Geneva, two fundamental principles for volunteers in trying to solve problems were mentioned: (1) respecting views and opinions of others; (2) securing impartiality. The bias that a facilitator may have when organizing many opinions during a dialogue session is a challenge which all dialogue facilitators around the world face in trying to maintain impartiality. This was what we have learned from the participation in the youth conference.

Next, we discussed the mindset of dialogue participants.

The youth volunteers who participated in the conference represented their countries’ volunteers. We strongly felt their enthusiasm for addressing issues which their countries face and their aspirations of taking as many take-home messages as possible from the conference. We also felt that they might be from families with enough financial resources to give them a high-level education. In many of their countries, it is essential to correctly use international languages such as English and Arabic as well as their mother tongues when working with people from other countries. To allow them to develop such language capabilities, their families need to have financial resources enough to give them a high-level education. We thought that the youth volunteers we encountered in Geneva might be financially lucky and had received a high education, but that was not always the case for their entire countries. On the other hand, in Japan, we are able to receive higher education only in Japanese or our mother tongue. That means very little disparity occurs from language capabilities. We recognized that Japanese people are very lucky in this regard. It would not be so easy to promote dialogues on a daily basis around the world both in terms of mindset and language abilities of dialogue participants. Our presentation was appreciated probably because we have continued our dialogue workshops.

What then is the challenge in terms of a mindset which Japanese people have during a dialogue? In Japan, being different from others is not appreciated. This subconscious mind prevents Japanese from having the mindset of understanding different backgrounds or accepting a dialogue requirement that



all people are different, which we shared in Geneva. As a result, they hesitate to speak or they talk awkwardly in a dialogue and this prevents each person from talking openly.

The Japanese respect harmonization. However, this Japanese character may rather lead to a potential pressure which forces people to harmonize instead of talking about their opinions or backgrounds and making the difference apparent.

What is the challenge in facilitating dialogues in Japan? Based on our experiences and the Japanese character, we discussed how we should create a dialogue forum.

To ease the potential pressure which forces people to harmonize, it is helpful to remove a sense of tension from dialogue participants and consciously create a “relaxed” dialogue forum where they can respect different opinions. In Geneva, we have learned about “impartiality of equally accepting diverse opinions”. This impartiality is indispensable in reducing the potential pressure.

- Towards the future:

At the end of the reflection of our dialogue activities and the experience in Geneva, we shared our comments. One member shared a view: “By having honest dialogues with the youth of the same generation, I was able to hear many opinions which were new to me and it was a fresh experience.” Other member said: “Our dialogue activities changed me, without my awareness, into a person with flexible perspectives.”

Our challenge for the future is to continue to create dialogue forums which allow the dialogue participants to speak up and be changed with the forum power.