Making a community drama for disaster preparedness

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“Instead of the official meeting, let’s prepare a drama,” said the residents in Boukai-district, Akashi city, Hyogo, Japan, wanting to stage a drama that identifies and solves community issues. Through thinking, acting, and appreciating the drama, issues may be shared and solutions can be communally developed. A community drama will be prepared through the following process:

1. Analysis of issues that are highlighted through discussion in community meetings and questionnaire surveys.
2. Identification of local issues and desires.
3. Creation of scenes that incorporate residents’ desires.
4. Consideration of scenarios by residents and professionals (including doctors, healthcare workers, welfare workers, and city officers).
5. Practice within the dramatized setting over several months during which the relationships among local residents expand and the human network grows in the process of finding actors and practicing together.
6. Enactment of the drama, which will produce effects on people who play and watch the drama.
7. Realization of community desires that are included in the drama.

The theme of 2018 was “Issues of elderly community members and preparation for disasters”. Residents of this district experienced the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake Disaster and utilized the lessons to create a community that is resilient against disasters. A self-appointed government chairperson who is part of the organizational committee of this event said “to build a community that is strong in the face of disasters, it is essential to make it safe and secure for its members to live in.”

The disaster preparedness stage drama included a scene of actual evacuation when a disaster occurred. Through the stage drama, the audience was asked questions on how to provide support during the evacuation of residents who needed help, such as those who use wheelchairs. The stage drama also helped families decide on meeting places and contact methods prior to the occurrence of a disaster so that they can reunite.

The disaster drama, one of authors of this image essay presented a lecture on “Disaster preparedness for communities” (Fig. 1).

The disaster preparedness stage drama included a scene of actual evacuation when a disaster occurred. Through the stage drama, the audience was asked questions on how to provide support during the evacuation of residents who needed help, such as those who use wheelchairs (Fig. 2). The stage drama also helped families decide on meeting places and contact methods prior to the occurrence of a disaster so that they can reunite.

The establishment of networks and confirmation of the role of community members were proposed. Many residents, including elderly people, disabled people, and children practiced over several months and acted on stage. Due to the high number of parents who came to the venue to watch their children perform, residents who were from the child-rearing generation had ample opportunities to hone their disaster preparation skills (Fig. 3).

These beneficial community stage dramas have been developing since 2000. An evacuation map was created...
as a result of the previous disaster-related stage drama. A mutual-help system was created after the performance of the 2012 stage drama titled “To develop a town where it is easy to ask for help.” In order to support people who need assistance during disaster evacuation, a system for safety confirmation of those living alone, elderly couples, and vulnerable people, as well as a registration system of those who require support and those who can offer support, were established. To establish networks, activities for home visits were introduced.

We are looking forward to seeing how this stage drama will help us to realize potential for greater disaster preparedness in the future (Fig. 4).