CHAPTER 6

Collaborative Disaster Management: Lessons from Taiwan’s Local Governments

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Introduction

In recent decades, challenges stemming from both human-made and natural disasters have become increasingly serious with the coming of a risk society. Traditionally, one function of the government, particularly local governments, has been to deal with disaster to secure citizens, making it inevitable for the government to operate based on bureaucratic norms and hierarchical command systems. It is important and critical for governments, facing the new and transformational challenges of disasters, to adopt alternatives to improve their capacity to cope with disasters in the new age.

At the same time, the emergence of extreme climates and rapid changes in the environment has resulted in many serious and unexpected damages. These accidents immediately challenged the capacities of governing authorities around the world. According to the statistics from the emergency disaster database established by the United Nations, more than 4,491 natural disasters occurred from 2000 to 2009, reflecting a 51 percent increase compared to the previous decade (i.e., from 1990 to 1999). These disasters seriously damaged local infrastructures and resulted in heavy casualties in the affected countries.

Taiwan is often regarded as one of the most geographically crucial places on earth when discussing disaster management (Wang...
and Kuo 2014; Yang 2001, 2009, 2010). The importance of sharing Taiwan’s lessons stems not only because of its plentiful experience, but also because of the varied topography and complex tropical island climate, which have resulted in high risk of frequent earthquakes, typhoons, floods, and other natural disasters (The Earth Institute 2005). In the past two decades, Taiwan has suffered many serious disasters and damages. For example, the 921 Chichi earthquake in Nantou County in 1999 resulted in 2,444 missing or dead people and collapsed more than 100,000 buildings. On August 8, 2009, Typhoon Morakot made a landfall in southern Taiwan. According to conservative estimates, this natural disaster caused unprecedented heavy losses in Taiwan, with almost 700 people being declared missing or dead, 1,764 houses being damaged or collapsing, and the total amount of losses totaling nearly $200 billion. The most well-known tragedy of this disaster was the eradication of the rural village Xiaolin, located in Jiasian township, and the death of nearly 500 people, when a landslide suddenly occurred (Central Emergency Operation Center 2009). In summary, these unprecedented large-scale natural disasters have destroyed Taiwan’s infrastructure developments and caused a serious loss of human lives. These catastrophes have challenged the capacities of Taiwan’s government to carry out disaster management.

To improve disaster management effectively, this chapter explores the adoption of an alternative approach of governance to address the critical elements involved in coping with disasters among different actors. The public administration literature usually defines “governance” in terms of policy networks, collaboration governance, collaborative public management, cross-border governance, and regional cooperation, among other terms. We deliberately define three crucial aspects—namely, trust, information sharing, and accountability—for effective framework collaborative disaster management. Through in-depth interviews with representatives of local governments, including Taipei City, Nantou County, and Kaohsiung City, we analyzed the collaborative relationships among local governments, civil society, and entrepreneurs. These findings related to Taiwan’s local governance expand our understanding of key elements of disaster collaborative management.

This chapter is divided into five sections. The section “From Disaster Management to Collaborative Disaster Governance” briefly describes the concepts and theories of collaborative governance on disaster management as well as the analytical framework. The section “Methodology” presents the arrangement of Taiwan’s disaster management system and introduces the research procedure for the in-depth interviews conducted in this study. The findings and discussions of Taiwan’s disaster