

Role of Concern Assessment in Flood Risk Communication

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In 1997, by revising river law, the Japanese government adopted a device for considering the opinions of community residents to help shape basic policies for the improved management of rivers and a river improvement plan. To conduct this device, public participation is required. Public participation for flood-risk management and planning requires scarce resources, such as time. It has been found that if the public thinks that there will be little return on the scarce resources they spend, they will lose the motivation to participate. Thus, an important question is what induces public participation? When governments and experts give careful attention to public concern, and strive for remedial measures, public participation may increase. If public concerns are not reflected in the government's planning, the residents may devote less time to risk management. In recent years, the use of concern assessments in risk management has been studied with keen interest by those in the field. Simply put, countermeasures taken by community residents (hereafter referred to as "residents") against potential environmental hazards play an important role in risk management. For example, when residents create hazard maps, they are not just plotting shelter locations for estimated flood areas. They are also sharing information such as evacuation routes and timings with both the government and community members. Therefore, if concern assessments of residents are not conducted, the residents may devote less time to risk management.

Residents possess knowledge and understanding of community concerns that might be harder to grasp by outsiders or experts. Although experts possess general

knowledge about the many kinds of disaster damage, in many cases, they may learn about more specific concerns (e.g., the range and limit of action due to unique community environments or the extent of the route of damage,) through communication with residents. Often, residents facing flood risk cannot share their concerns unless a dialogue develops between members of the communities and officials of local government.

In order to reflect residents concern to "basic policy of river basin management", Shiga prefecture held "public meeting". At public meeting, resident representatives (ten residents who represented all residents), administrative members and audiences discussed river basin management. That was, so-called, "deliberative democracy" and focused on not a targeted area but whole areas of Shiga prefecture. Presented problems, interests and opinions -as concerns- from public meeting are very important for river basin management. Contents of discussion at public meeting are first, role of resident and the things that residents expect to local governance with respect to flood risk reduction, second, countermeasure with respect to dissemination and collaboration for river basin management.

By performing concern assessments, the authors gained a better understanding of the problems faced by residents when they attempt to develop a flood reduction plan. These results show that the use of concern assessments plays a vital role in risk management. Residents facing flood risk need to share their knowledge of the risks faced by their communities with each other and with local government officials.