

## COMPLETION REPORT

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### **Subject of Research Project: Humanitarian supply chain standards against epidemic disasters: case of COVID-19 in Japan and other countries**

The project aims to investigate the application of standards in Japan for humanitarian efforts during disasters, explicitly focusing on the case of COVID-19. This study employs a qualitative research design, a widely adopted approach to gain in-depth insights into a phenomenon. Primary and secondary data were collected as major research materials. The raw data, including transcripts and field notes, were systematically organized and analyzed to interpret the findings.

The Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards published The Sphere Handbook with extensive global involvement to provide standards and improve the quality of humanitarian responses worldwide. Under the circumstances of the COVID-19 outbreak, by June 2020, the Japan Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (JVOAD) quickly developed and released disaster response guidelines for volunteers and NPOs in collaboration with its associated members, although most of the common relief activities for earthquakes and floods are no longer viable. A major issue deals with how to provide relief to the affected people on site and make sure that supporters protect themselves and do not spread the virus. The guidelines cover complex issues such as rules for infection prevention, decision criteria on disaster relief responses, and developing information sharing and active collaboration among local governments, social welfare councils, NPOs, and other supportive organizations.

The primary data were collected through face-to-face interviews with representatives from two non-profit organizations, A and B, working in Kanagawa prefecture. These interviews aimed to understand the processes of information and knowledge sharing among humanitarian actors and flexible adjustments of operational practices to evolving epidemic situations. The main activities of both organizations are supporting international students and residents living in Japan, including various activities such as teaching the Japanese language, organizing cultural exchange activities, and assisting with administrative procedures at locations such as ward offices and hospitals. Besides, the nature of support activities varies based on individual cases and capacities of the members.

The results show that neither representative was familiar with JVOAD guidelines or another humanitarian document like the Sphere Handbook. Instead, they followed the guidelines and standards mainly from the local government and information from the media supporting the beneficiaries during the COVID-19 pandemic. Organization B, with approximately 320 members, reworked the government guidelines with more detailed and practical information, then documented and distributed them to its members. The other organization, consisting of around 100 members, transferred the instructions informally through the president and during the member meetings. To facilitate their supporting activities, both organizations provided instructions and training sessions for members on remote and virtual support systems. Notably, NPO A established a new ICT dedicated to online support. Both representatives from the two organizations agreed that, given the financial aid provided by the Japanese government for residents during the COVID-19 pandemic, the support from NPOs and volunteer groups tended to address the Safety, Love, and Belonging needs in Maslow's hierarchy. This is a different characteristic from the humanitarian supply chain for natural disaster causes such as earthquakes and tsunamis, in which physiological needs generally take the first priority.

Findings drawn from the case of Japan suggested that the Sphere Handbook's core principles seem inappropriate in the case of COVID-19. Instead, guidelines from the government, both central and local levels, and the media were widely recognized and played an essential role in guiding NPOs and volunteer organizations.

Publication of the Results of Research Project:

Verbal Presentation (Date, Venue, Name of Conference, Title of Presentation, Presenter, etc.)

1. August 23-25<sup>th</sup> 2022, Online, The 6th World Conference on Production and Operations Management – P&OM 2022, Humanitarian supply chain standards against epidemic disasters: the case of COVID-19 in Japan, Presenter: Nguyen Hue Minh.
2. May 21-25<sup>th</sup> 2023, Orlando (Florida, USA), Production and Operations Management Society 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference - POMS 2023, Humanitarian Operations Standards for Epidemics: A Case in Japan, Presenter: Yoshiki Matsui.
3. November 19<sup>th</sup> 2023, Atlanta (USA), Decision Sciences Institute Annual Conference 2023 - DSI 2023, The Structure of Humanitarian Operations Guidelines and Standards in Japan, Presenter: Yoshiki Matsui.

Thesis (Name of Journal and its Date, Title and Author of Thesis, etc.)

Book (Publisher and Date of the Book, Title and Author of the Book, etc.)