Ethical considerations on the empowerment of people affected by contamination after a nuclear accident

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• Fukushima as previously Chernobyl highlighted the importance of involving the population with the support of national and local authorities and experts to ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of protection actions.

• The empowerment of inhabitants is a key for the success of this involvement.

• Radiological protection and health issues are only one of the dimensions of the post-accident situation. The human dimension and ethical values are decisive.
The purpose of the presentation is to discuss the ethical dimensions of empowerment of individuals in post-accident management.

Involving stakeholders in the post-accident management immediately raises questions such as:

- Is this a strategy to let inhabitants alone to face the post-accident situation?
- Is there not a risk of manipulation inasmuch as being involved, individuals would be forced to accept the situation?
- Is the involvement of stakeholders not a risk of leading to the disengagement of authorities and experts?
The human dimension of the post-accident situation

- Strong concerns about potential health effects particularly for children
- Loss of control of daily life and autonomy
- Distancing from the familiar environment
- Disintegration of family and social relationship
- Loss of confidence in authorities and experts
- General feeling of helplessness and abandonment
- Strong apprehension of the future
- General feeling of discrimination and exclusion reinforced by the look and attitude of outsiders
What is at stake for the affected population?

- Four years after the accident the dilemma for affected people is:
  - to leave or to stay in the contaminated areas where it is allowed to live
  - to return or not in these areas for those who have been evacuated

- The Chernobyl experience has shown that interrogation regarding the decision to leave or stay can last for years.

- Complex decision involving many factors (health, economic and social environment, radiological situation...)
  - The radiation dimension is only one aspect
  - This is an individual and/or family decision
  - Each decision has to be respected regardless the motivations
The stakeholder involvement process in Fukushima (1)

- In Fukushima, a stakeholder involvement process has been implemented successfully in a few communities:
  - Mapping of the local contamination by inhabitants
  - Personal dosimeters to monitor individual exposures
  - Monitoring of local foodstuff
  - **Sharing measurements results within the local community**

- The measurements allow to make radioactivity visible and to talk about it with others (family, friends, neighbours) : where, when, how are we exposed ? can we improve the situation ?

- **People build progressively their own reference and regain power to make choices** (decision on eating or not sansai)
Measuring, sharing, exchanging
The stakeholder involvement process in Fukushima (2)

• This process has evolved in a similar way to that of Belarus, however with differences regarding:
  o The initiation of the process by the local people themselves
  o The personal engagement of voluntary experts and local professionals at the service of the local people

• The Belarusian experience (ETHOS and CORE) and the Norwegian experience of the Sami people played a key role in the engagement of the Japanese stakeholders.

• The Fukushima experience confirms that the empowerment of affected people through their direct engagement in the evaluation of the local situation is the condition for each individual to regain control on her/his radiological situation and to restore her/his autonomy of decision, her/his freedom to make choices i.e. to restore her/his dignity.
What authorities and experts have to do?

- After a nuclear accident, the authorities are responsible to quickly implement a level above which it is not authorised to reside permanently and the adoption of different criteria to guide actions taking into account the prevailing circumstances (food contamination levels, ..).

- Authorities and experts must ensure radiation monitoring and health surveillance of the population.

- But for the rehabilitation of living conditions in contaminated area, radiation protection and health issues are part of a more global challenge:
  - This call for a governance involving the inhabitants
  - Authorities and experts have the duty to accompany and support all affected people in their local projects to restore decent spiritual, moral and material living conditions
A responsibility for authorities and experts: making available an effective stakeholder involvement process

• Support the establishment of **places for dialogue** allowing experts to listen and to discuss together with affected people about their questions, concerns, challenges, but also expectations

• Contribute to a **joint assessment of the radiological situation by inhabitants and experts** in order to identify the **room for manoeuvrer** to improve this situation taking into account the prevailing circumstances **for the individuals and the community**

• **Support the implementation of local projects** to address the problems identified at the individual and the community levels with the support of local authorities, experts and professional community workers

• Encourage and support the evaluation and **dissemination** of results

  ➔ **Help the development of radiation protection culture and self-help protection (ICRP111)**
The ethical principles underpinning the empowerment approach in post-accident situation

Following our experience in post-accident situation:

- **Some pitfalls have to be avoided** regarding people empowerment:
  - Trivialising the radiological risk
  - Abandoning people facing the risk alone
  - Manipulating people to make them staying in contaminated area
  - Trying to protecting people without (against ?) them

- **Ethical principles have to be adopted**:
  - Refusal to take decision for the people about their future (respect of their autonomy and freedom)
  - Commitment to be at the service of improving the protection and living conditions for the population (well-being)
  - Adopting a prudent attitude toward the radiological risk
Empowerment and optimisation of protection

- Experience of Chernobyl and Fukushima have demonstrated that empowerment of affected people is:
  - A way to help them to *regain freedom*, to make informed decision and to act accordingly, i.e. to *regain dignity*
  - An effective way to reduce exposure as low as reasonable by contributing to the development of prudent attitude and vigilance towards exposure and favouring adoption of efficient and sustainable protection strategies (*optimisation principle*)
- In the case of post-accident situations (typical existing exposure situation) *optimisation is* not only focussed on dose reduction but also *on improving living conditions of the affected people* (well-being).
 Radiation Protection and ethics in post-accident situations

- Every individual choice is respectable and the **RP system must be neutral** with regard these choices.
- It is a moral duty for ICRP to highlight these choices with the resources of science, experience, and the ethical principles which underline the RP system.
- It is the responsibility of authorities to **implement reference levels to restrict inequity** between individual exposures.
- It is the responsibility of authorities to **implement the conditions allowing respect of freedom and justice**:
  - Based on the respect of individual choices and decisions
  - Based on a sufficiently fair support to allow individuals the freedom of choice and informed decisions

A key challenge for RP professionals is to prepare themselves to be at the service of inhabitants and their concerns and to support participative decision-making processes in which RP is only one aspect.