



# JAPAN

## WHY IS A “RICH” COUNTRY LIKE JAPAN ASKING FOR FUNDS FROM ACCA?

Community groups and professionals in Japan have taken part in ACHR’s meetings, exchanges and regional activities since the coalition was formed in 1989. But there has always been an assumption that since Japan is a rich and highly-developed country, it wouldn’t do for those groups to dip into the limited funds ACHR has been able to muster for regional work, since the problems and needs in other Asian countries were so much greater. So early on, some key people in Japan’s housing rights movement set up their own coalition of mutual sharing and support within the country, which they call ACHR-Japan, and which they fund themselves. The two projects being supported by ACCA in Japan are the first case of Japanese groups receiving financial support from ACHR. Why the turnaround? Hosaka explains: “It is important for people in Japan to realize that we are now, in a sense, poor, and in need of assistance from our Asian neighbors, as equal partners. The ACCA support for the project in tsunami-affected areas was the first time for us to receive financial support from ACHR. That was followed by a second project to help revitalize *buraku* communities in Osaka. These two initiatives have created a momentum and helped to revitalize the ACHR-Japan network. Receiving this ACCA support has also given great encouragement to people here, and helped us to leverage more resources from local agencies.”

### ACCA in JAPAN :

#### PROJECT CITIES (total 2)

- Tohoku (tsunami disaster area)
- Osaka Buraku

#### SMALL PROJECTS

Small projects approved : 0

#### BIG PROJECTS

Big projects approved : 1  
Total budget approved : \$10,000

#### SPECIAL PROJECTS

- Tohoku tsunami and nuclear disaster rehabilitation, budget approved \$52,700.
- Osaka buraku community revival, budget approved \$20,000.

#### SAVINGS + CDFS

No community savings or city development funds yet in Japan

#### IMPLEMENTING GROUPS

The ACCA projects in Japan are being implemented by the ACHR-Japan team, in collaboration with the local NGO “Tsudoi” (in Tohoku), the Buraku Liberation League (in Osaka) and the architects at CASE-Japan.

## Showing a more people-driven rehabilitation alternative after the “triple disaster”

On March 11, 2011, a powerful earthquake off the coast of Japan churned up a devastating tsunami that swept over the country’s northeastern Tohoku region with 10m high waves. Some 20,000 people lost their lives and more than 200,000 became homeless. Many may never be able to go home, since their towns and farmlands have been contaminated by radiation from the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station, which was also damaged by the earthquake and tsunami, creating the world’s worst-ever nuclear calamity.

Hosaka and Seiji were involved in relief efforts from the beginning, visiting affected communities, contacting local architects, helping arrange temporary housing in other cities for evacuees and establishing a special women’s support network in Tohoku. They also used support from ACCA and Misereor (along with funds they raised locally) to implement a pilot housing and village rehabilitation project, to demonstrate a more inclusive, more people-centered reconstruction process in this extremely difficult “triple disaster” situation.

The government began very early on to construct temporary housing whenever possible, but progress was slow, and the experience from the Kobe earthquake in 1995 showed that the top-down allocation of temporary houses and then shifting of the occupants later to permanent public housing led to the destruction of communities, and many people (particularly the elderly) suffered and died in isolation. Seiji and Hosaka felt it was important to develop a more participatory alternative, in which the construction of incremental houses (which could be moved to permanent sites later) would be combined with community rebuilding, livelihood recovery and people-led, town-wide reconstruction, with a variety of activities that would get the affected communities actively involved in all aspects of their rehabilitation. They identified Ohtsuchi town, a badly-devastated fishing town in Iwate Prefecture, as a pilot area, and worked there with a local support organization named Tsudoi (“getting together”), which was established by disaster-affected people.



## CASE-JAPAN

Community Architects for Shelter and Environment (CASE-Japan) is a group of community planners and architects that was founded in 1999 and has been actively involved with ACHR. CASE’s chief planner is Seiji Terakawa, who lived through the great earthquake in Kobe in 1995, has since been involved in several Buraku community improvement projects in Osaka, where CASE has its office. Professor Mitsuhiro Hosaka, an old ACHR friend and member of the ACHR-Japan group helps coordinate the work and communicate with ACHR and donors.



## BIG PROJECT: Temporary evacuee housing in Osaka

As of January 2014, some 48,000 people who fled from Fukushima are still staying in temporary situations around the country. Many are women with children, whose husbands are still working in Fukushima, and many may never be able to go back but will have to start new lives elsewhere. As part of the ACCA project in the “triple disaster” area, Seiji and the team from CASE-Japan worked with the non-profit Community Management Association to find a cluster of six adjacent rowhouses in an old working-class district of Osaka, close to the Asaka *buraku* community, to make into temporary housing for some of the evacuees. Using a \$10,000 big project grant from ACCA, and another \$28,000 they raised from Misereor and the government, they quickly rented and renovated these units to welcome the first evacuees, and created a common living space, where these traumatized families could gather, and where various support activities like job training and counseling could happen. Nine families stayed for a couple of years in the housing, and all of them have left now, after getting jobs elsewhere or deciding to move back to Fukushima.



Many times, even in a close-knit community like Asaka, they have noticed newspapers piling up for several days on someone's doorstep, and then discovered that the elderly person inside had died alone. The new Cafe Cosmos, and the other facilities and activities the burakus in Osaka are planning, are helping to bring people back together.

## Reviving the hard-won community spirit in vulnerable buraku settlements in **OSAKA**

**An ACCA “special strategic support” project is helping Asaka and other buraku communities in Osaka face down the city’s “integration” plans**

Japan is getting older and poorer, and that includes the 3 million people who live in the country's *burakus* (“outcaste settlements”). Many inner-city *burakus* that were upgraded and revitalized in 70s and 80s are becoming run-down and deserted. In 2002, government subsidies that were fought hard for by the Buraku Liberation movement, to make up for centuries of discrimination, were stopped. And since 2007, new rental policies have driven up public housing rents and driven out young people, with the result that many *burakus* (including Asaka) have become half-empty settlements of mostly elderly and poor people living alone. Osaka's mayor has made matters worse by pursuing a policy of taking back and selling off the public land, housing and amenities (schools, community centers, playgrounds and public bathhouses) in *burakus*, further eroding the quality of life and capacity of these communities to manage themselves.

Faced with this alarming impoverishment of people, facilities and support in their communities, people in several *burakus* in Osaka (including Asaka, Yata and Kashima) got together and formed a research group, to figure out how to cope with these changes. With a \$20,000 “special strategic activities” grant from ACCA (which they used to leverage another \$100,000 locally), they surveyed their settlements, with help from ACHR-Japan and Osaka City University, organized a series of planning workshops and set up a new “people-based town development agency” to help the residents in these *burakus* regain their self-management capacities and revive their once-strong communities through a variety of community activities. This is important, Yamamoto-san says, not only for Asaka and the neighboring communities, but for the national Buraku movement, to keep it active and to create a new generation of leaders.

Some people - like the mayor of Osaka - believe that *buraku* people should not remain in isolated islands like Asaka, and that the discrimination against them will disappear only when they “integrate” and become indistinguishable from other Japanese people. But Yamamoto-san doesn't buy this line. “I am proud to be from a *buraku*, where we have built mutually-supporting communities of people who live together and help each other. But this doesn't mean we should be an island. Because we have been discriminated against, we have become aware of other forms of discrimination against women, against elderly people and against those with lower incomes. That is why the Asaka BLL has built welfare programs and organized so many community activities over the years, to give space to these various groups, both inside and outside *burakus*, to rekindle the community spirit. Through this process, *real integration* will be possible.”

## CAFE COSMOS

Perhaps the most immediately transforming project the new town development agency has undertaken is the opening of a little cafe in Asaka. The community negotiated with the city to use one of the vacant rental housing units, and in August 2013, they converted this little apartment into a cafe, where the community's young and old people can gather, enjoy coffee and traditional Japanese food, organize house maintenance consultations and generally mingle.

They call their new place “Cafe Cosmos”. Because so many community facilities in these *burakus* where people gathered have been closed down by the city, people were becoming increasingly isolated. So it's no surprise that Cafe Cosmos has been a hit and is almost constantly packed, with 20 - 30 customers at a time, filling all the tables. The cafe is run by two community women volunteers, Akiko and Etsuko, who prepare and sell inexpensive plates of *okonomiyaki* (Japanese pan-cakes), *ramen* noodles and a popular breakfast set (toast, coffee and a boiled egg for 250 yen). Four months after the cafe opened, the smiling Akiko said, “Older people here used to isolate themselves, but gradually, they are becoming regular customers at the cafe.”

Inspired by the success of their Cafe Cosmos, Yamamoto-san and other *buraku* leaders in Osaka are planning to occupy other vacant public housing units, expand the functions of Cafe Cosmos and add a “life-support consultation” center, where elderly community members who live alone can be assisted and linked to various welfare programs and social support services. There are also discussions about starting community-oriented businesses and other community-managed welfare programs.

By showing a revitalized model of community management in these three *burakus*, Yamamoto-san hopes the project will expand to involve many other low-income settlements in Osaka and other parts of Japan, who are all facing similar problems coping with these same overwhelming market forces and adverse, market-oriented policy trends.



(above) The Asaka buraku before and after redevelopment.

## **BURAKU:** Like India, Japan also has it's “untouchable” caste . . .

Five centuries ago, Japan's feudal society was organized into a strict caste system of warriors, artisans, farmers and merchants. Those who slaughtered animals, dug graves and worked leather were the system's “untouchables.” Called first *eta* (filth) or *hinin* (non-human) and much later *buraku* (villagers), these outcastes were forced to live in squalor, poverty and social exclusion in designated settlements (*burakus*) on the outskirts of towns, where they were easy targets for abuse. Discrimination against *buraku* was outlawed in 1871, but hostility continued right up to the 1960s, when pressure from the century-old Buraku Liberation League (BLL) induced the government to launch a series of programs to improve the lives and settlements of *buraku*. Besides improvements to education, employment and welfare, these programs provided support for the physical upgrading of Japan's 6,000 Buraku districts, where 3 million people live.

Yamamoto Yoshihiko, who was one of the founders of ACHR, is the charismatic leader of the Asaka branch of BLL in Osaka. In the 1970s, Yamamoto and his colleagues challenged the discrimination and changed the city's planning to accommodate the needs of people living in burakus and subsidize their housing and upgrading projects. In 1988, they even persuaded the local government to demolish a subway train yard that blocked access to their riverside community and then took part in redeveloping that public land as parks, playgrounds, housing and schools. They also established small companies, community enterprises and community-managed welfare programs, to wean themselves from dependence on government funding and to find their own sources of income to fund their communal self-development activities.