

UPDATE on the TOHOKU EARTHQUAKE & TSUNAMI in JAPAN

It has now been three years since a powerful earthquake off the coast of Japan churned up a devastating tsunami that swept over houses, towns and farmlands in the country's northeastern Tohoku region, and caused one of the world's worst nuclear accidents at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuke Power Station on 11 March 2011. More than 18,000 people lost their lives and 260,000 are still living in temporary shelters or evacuated somewhere else. ACHR friends Hosaka, Seiji and others in Japan have been visiting affected communities, contacting local architects for a pilot house reconstruction scheme, helping arrange temporary housing in other cities for Fukushima-evacuees, encouraging a women's support network in Tohoku, and organizing exchanges with Sri Lankan tsunami-affected members of Women's Coop, using support from ACCA and Misereor, along with funds raised locally. It is challenging to explore a more inclusive, more people-centered reconstruction process in this extremely difficult "triple disaster" situation in a highly-institutionalized country. Here are brief notes from Hosaka on their work in the past years **up to April 2014**. For more information, please contact Hosaka at: hosaka.m@k6.dion.ne.jp

Community Architects for Shelter and Environment (CASE-Japan) is a group of community architects and planners which was founded in 1999 and has been actively ..involved with ACHR. CASE's chief planner is Seiji Terakawa, who suffered from the great earthquake in Kobe in 1995 and has since been involved in several Buraku community improvement projects in Osaka. **Mitsuhiko Hosaka**, who is an old ACHR friend and member of the ACHR-Japan group (he teaches at School of International Social Development, Nihon Fukushi University) is helping to coordinate the ACHR-Japan's work and communicate with ACHR and donors. **Tsudoi**, meaning "get together", is a non-profit organization formerly established in June 2012 to promote people-based reconstruction of devastated Otsuchi town. Sachiko Motomochi came back to her home town Otsuchi after the disaster, became one of the core founders and serves Secretary of the organization. She is also a graduate student of Nihon Fukushi University.

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. In this new disaster, a considerable number of people would have to leave their native areas and resettle in other parts of the country - either temporarily or permanently. Even so, in some affected areas, it may still be possible to sustain a social space for community interaction for people-led reconstruction processes.

Advocating for an alternative housing rehabilitation process:

Bearing above concerns in mind, ACHR-Japan started policy advocacy. Early on Keke and his Kitashiba community were involved in collecting and distributing relief materials to Tohoku. During their site visits, Seiji and Hosaka felt it important to develop a model building which would provide space for community interaction in the temporary housing areas. The model could be combined with incremental housing. Meanwhile, Hosaka joined an NGO's advocative actions to create a community space throughout all the stages, from evacuation camps to temporary housing and eventually to permanent housing. The concept of a community space was partly accepted by the two key provincial governments, but institutionalizing the concepts of incremental and participatory temporary housing was more difficult. The government did not release funds to community groups



willing to build, but only to major contractors coordinated in Tokyo. Individual housing was permitted only on



lands designated by the government as such, and this designation was a difficult and time-consuming task. Local donors rejected an idea of evolutionary housing of local wooden structure, prioritizing housing production as many and as fast as possible over participatory, environment-

friendly housing. Otsuki (who teaches at Tokyo University), an ACHR-Japan member, also observed it too hard to change the policy-level concept of temporary housing, though he succeeded, in a limited scale, in making modifications and additions, by changing layout to promote more neighbourhood interactions and introducing barrier free wooden structure for people with disabilities

Setting up a community space in Otsuchi Town:

Seiji and Hosaka visited Otsuchi in June 2011 on invitation by Sachiko and a medical relief NGO called AMDA, and examined a site for construction of a community space. Its design was prepared by CASE as a tool of demonstrating community-based incremental housing: consisting of a steel skeleton frame structure to have 39 sq m building area, almost same with the standard area of the government temporary housing (with an attempt to show an alternative to rigidly-standardized government housing). Using this unit frame, the structure may be shifted to a permanent site if and when needed, or may be multiplied to accommodate shops, facilities and houses. A unit of various stages of completion may be sold or leased for dwellers to complete, depending on their needs and resources. Such flexible “core housing” may be produced by community enterprises to be developed. Applying this scheme, a local contractors’ cooperative was expected to compete with Tokyo-based big contractors for permanent public housing construction.



A number of local people, tsunami-affected or not affected, living in temporary housing areas or outside, including high



school students came together to assist a local contractors’ cooperative in construction. In December 2011, the structure was completed with funding from AMDA and Misereor, and Sachiko became a manager of the community space where local women’s groups, aged people, disabled groups and children have voluntarily organized such activities as tea ceremonies, physical



exercises, handicraft classes and one-shelf shops. From these activities, the *tsudoi* was born out. The building had to be dismantled later, due to locational problems, while the “evolutionary” house construction system of frame structure was still to be disseminated. But *tsudoi*’s activities continued in a new place.

Tsudoi’s community fund:

ACHR-Japan has been closely working with *tsudoi*, and the organization has been trying to create a community fund. Though it has not been revolving yet, the initial fund, to which the support from ACCA and MISEREOR was supplementary, was effective in initiating a number of experimental activities encouraging affected people. It has so far supported (1) seminar sessions on handicraft work, mental care, housing information, etc. (2) regular tea parties, (3) arranging small outlets of local products for marketing to areas outside, (4) linking local residents and fleeing evacuees, (5) coordinating voluntary workers, and (6) organizing festivals. This contributed to reviving community organizations and their local events, and led to rediscovery of local resources and opportunities. It is expected the fund will also be used to construct more skeleton structures on request from individuals, for incremental housing or community care facilities on a hire-purchase basis, or retail shops on a rental basis. The fund may also help create work-share job opportunities, and organize training sessions and field visits for community managers. More participatory reconstruction processes will thus evolve.



Organizing exchange visits.

Early on, Hosaka began trying to communicate to the affected people some lessons from the 2004 tsunami and to organize some regional exchange visits, but he found that the people were overloaded by so many outside groups bringing new ideas and had less space in their lives to listen to people from countries that they had never seen. But he assisted Sachiko to bring Usuzawa, a young leader of a newly established local organization in Otsuchi, to participate in ACHR meeting of community-initiated disaster management in Indonesia, January 2012. In parallel, information sharing and local exchanges were underway soon after the disaster between the affected areas and with communities known for people-led development including Kitashiba. It was observed that such local and regional exchanges were effective in transferring ideas and encouraging local initiatives.

Using ACCA and MISEREOR assistance and mobilizing local sponsors such as Nihon Fukushi University, *tsudoi* organized a field visit programme sending five tsunami-affected woman leaders from Otsuchi-Kamaishi to Sri Lanka in August 2013. Women from Japan were impressed by visiting Women’s Coop groups in Colombo and in tsunami-hit fishing villages, as well as CLAPNET network working with local authorities. Among many lessons they discussed was that new opportunities were created in a vacuum of institutional

control after Japan's disaster, so that one may be able to learn from countries where community solutions could be relatively easily born and practiced by people themselves. People must first get together, the visiting women noted, to discuss their needs mutually and discover their strengths and resources, without waiting for government professional directives.



As a follow-up, a group of five from Women's Coop stayed in Otsuchi town and neighbouring Kamaishi City in September-October 2013. They visited affected families, temporary housing sites, government support centers, women groups of fishing cooperatives, local community leaders, and small shops and handicraft groups that started after tsunami. They participated in an affected people's town forum, organized by *tsudo* and ACHR-Japan, to speak on the comparison of post-disaster activities between two countries. The group, joined by local community representatives, also visited mayors of Otsuchi and Kamaishi. The people's town forum and their courtesy calls on mayors were highlighted in local newspapers. The group told that "Asian culture" of living together with the nature, even if it is violent sometimes, was common among people between the two countries, and suggested the mayors to reconsider the planned construction of 20m-high breakwater dike all along the coast. After listening about Women Coop activities, a local woman community leader noted that while there had been many exchange programs for friendship in the past, they could now establish solidarity linkage for practical actions and that organizations and funds could be created from within, though both had been brought to them by external agencies since the disaster.



Accommodations for evacuees:

As of January 2014, more than 48,000 people fled from Fukushima province and still temporarily settle outside. They are spread nation-wide and tend to lose contacts with their original areas. Many women, with children, left Fukushima where the husbands are still working. Seiji and CASE worked closely with a non-profit Community Management Association (CMA) and, after negotiating with a private house owner in Osaka, started substantial physical renovation of several units in row houses into collective housing for evacuee

families. Funding support was obtained from the government, ACCA and Misereor. This collective housing consists of individual dwelling units and a common living space. In the living space have been organized job training, mental counselling and community gathering for both evacuees and local people. The project has so far accommodated several women-headed families and migrant workers evacuating from radiation in Fukushima. The location is close to Kitashiba, Asaka and other buraku communities in Osaka, and it is expected to further upgrade the housing for interactions between evacuating mothers with children and local vulnerable groups including abused youth and old people in surrounding areas.



Local authorities and some private house owners became amenable to the house improvement for similar purpose. Toyonaka City in Osaka, for example, was active in accommodating evacuee families in their public housing, facilitating communication and extending life support, and recruited an ACHR friend Risa as an advisor and care supporter for evacuees.

Meanwhile, some evacuee leaders currently staying in Osaka established a mutual-aid association. The government permanent housing for affected families in Fukushima, and site preparation for it, is not really progressing. The association identified a vacant plot within Fukushima Province, and decided to build low-cost rental housing collectively. Some 50 evacuee families, both within and outside the province, have already agreed to join the project. The leader of the Association says their housing may not necessarily be a permanent one, but reasonable accommodations will support processes for self reliant livelihood of disaster-affected people including himself. ACCA II may support this initiative.