

# Are the Local People's Voices Reflected in the Assistance?

Responders who come from outside the affected community do not know much about the community. On the other hand, disaster survivors have a lot of information that can only be obtained in the local community, such as "This kind of aid is not needed here but is needed elsewhere," or "They have many non-Japanese residents among the evacuees over there."

It is important for responders to listen carefully to the voices of survivors and encourage their participation in decision-making regarding aid provision. By doing so, the quality of assistance will be enhanced, and the survivors will be empowered.

Newspaper headlines read "Community car sharing as transportation for shopping and medical appointments," "Takeda District in Kyotamba Town first to introduce this system in the Prefecture," and "Operated by resident volunteers." Aid organization listened to the residents' opinions and supported their operation, and now a mutual aid effort has taken root in the community. This has also led to the residents being able to enjoy interacting with each other. [Kyoto Shimbun, June 12, 2021]



## Typical Example of How the Quality of Assistance Worsens

### Lack of communication with survivors



When a disaster strikes, there are times when people have no choice but to dispose of familiar furniture and precious mementos. As a responder, stopping to take enough time to listen to the survivors and waiting for them to make decisions are also part of your assistance work.

## Check List

- ✓ Are the responders letting disaster survivors know that they have the right to be proactively involved in the post-disaster reconstruction of their own livelihoods and of their community?
- ✓ Are the responders delivering necessary information to disaster survivors without delay?
- ✓ Are the responders asking the disaster survivors for their opinions on aid content and recovery plans, and encouraging them to participate in the decision-making process?

## Best Practice Cases

Great East Japan Earthquake

### Assisting Community Building with Cars as a Resource

Reconstruction Phase

Japan Car Sharing Association (JCSA)



Residents caring for and helping each other as they operate the service ©JCSA

Japan Car Sharing Association (JCSA) supported the community with a car sharing service in Ishinomaki City, Miyagi Prefecture, where people who lost their cars in the disaster (or the transportation insecure) could use shared vehicles (as a resource) to secure a means of transportation. The goals of this service were not limited to solving mobility issues through the sharing of resources, but also included the promotion of community building, disaster prevention, regional development, and cultural formation.

By having service users decide the rules and assign roles themselves, their community gradually became a place where people spontaneously helped each other, such as by assisting elderly residents on their outings. This has continued even after the residents moved out of temporary housing to the more permanent post-disaster public housing.

This system has now been adopted not only in disaster-hit communities but also in various other communities throughout Japan where residents experience mobility issues.

### Responders' Wisdom

- Any issues the community faced were discussed and decided at the ochakko (a salon or gathering for chats over tea) where the service users gathered regularly, and the responders limited themselves to only providing operational support.
- In communities newly starting out the service, the barriers were lowered by referring them to how model communities have been operating the service.

Kumamoto Earthquake

### Responders from Within the Prefecture Supporting Coordination Efforts in the Disaster-Affected Municipality

Reconstruction Phase

BULBY



Meeting facilitated by an aid organization supporting the local community ©BULBY

After the emergency phase passes, emergency activities among aid organizations that rushed to the disaster-affected community come to an end. In many cases, responders specializing in emergency relief withdraw from the area at this point. However, the assistance needs in the community do not disappear just because many responders leave.

In Mifune Town, the goal during this period was to provide the local community with a long-term and hands-on support throughout the reconstruction phase so that they could carry on reconstruction activities themselves. Aid organizations based within Kumamoto Prefecture that could operate elsewhere in the prefecture collaborated with each other to assist the Mifune residents, and this reduced the burden on the residents while reconstruction efforts were being fully handed over to the local community.

These aid providers supported the operations of the residents' activities by holding information-sharing meetings and meet-and-greet events, and planning visits to previously disaster-hit areas, all the while remaining in the background and encouraging the local people to take initiative. As a result, discussions between the local government and private/civic sectors became more active, and a full handover to the local community, which was now capable of taking charge of reconstruction, was complete.

### Responders' Wisdom

- From the initial involvement to the withdrawal, the responders were committed to a more auxiliary position supporting the local community so that the residents would become the main players in the reconstruction process.
- By creating an environment that allowed the local people to fully express their opinions, people were able to connect with each other, build working relationships, and share information.