

Community-based disaster recovery planning and relocation

Elizabeth Maly¹

1. Residential relocation for disaster mitigation after the Great East Japan Earthquake

The 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami caused massive destruction along the northeastern Tohoku coast of Japan. With a history of disasters, Japan has established policies and precedents dealing with disaster recovery and housing reconstruction. Drawing on recovery programs used after previous disasters, the Japanese government created a menu of recovery projects for the municipalities affected the 3.11 earthquake and tsunami. In particular, coastal municipalities in Tohoku are using a program called “Collective Relocation for Disaster Mitigation” at an unprecedented scale.

Similar to funding from the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program for residential buyouts in the United States, in Japan Collective Relocation projects are intended to relocate residents away from hazardous areas, but are often implemented during the recovery process and function and support for household recovery. Unlike residential buyouts in the United States, Collective Relocation in Japan includes both compensation for former land (which is designated as hazardous, and all future residential construction is forbidden by law) along with the provision of new residential lots which residents can rent or buy and use to rebuild a new house.

In the past, Collective Relocation in Japan was used at a smaller scale in rural areas to move residents away from areas at risk of landslides, etc. However, after 3.11, Collective Relocation became a primary recovery program used throughout the disaster area; reconstruction of towns which formerly were home to mixed uses in low-lying central areas are being reshaped by new residential-use areas in high-land areas.

2. Perspectives for collaboration

Can the situations of Tohoku, Japan and coastal Washington be considered through lens of people-centered housing recovery and community-based planning processes? Although the contexts of recovery planning and reconstruction after a mega-disaster in Japan and preparation for a mega disaster predicted for coastal Washington vary both according to the policy contexts of the respective countries, as well as different phases in the disaster cycle, communities in both places are facing similar issues of living with disaster risk.

Potential themes for collaborative research:

- international comparison of policies related to pre-disaster planning and implementation of post-disaster recovery programs framed by the goal of disaster risk reductions
- community involvement in the planning process
- how do residents evaluate impacts of housing recovery and relocation on their lives and living environments?
- how can recovery policies be more supportive of residents' needs?

In addition, other topics for potential long-term collaboration include: community-based evacuation planning, including vertical evacuation and the integration of schools and evaluation buildings.

References:

1) Robert C. Freitag, Daniel B Abramson, Manish Chalana & Maximilian Dixon (2014) Whole Community Resilience: An Asset-Based Approach to Enhancing Adaptive Capacity Before a Disruption, *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 80:4, 324-335

¹Associate Professor, International Research Institute of Disaster Science, Tohoku University, Japan
(maly@irides.tohoku.ac.jp)