

Iwate: Home Rehabilitation Project to be Completed

Habitat Japan's First Scalable Housing Project Assists 150 Families

With some repairs, many families of Ofunato can return to their houses. Funding from Japan Platform and others enabled Habitat Japan to conduct house rehabilitation project since last year, assisting those who needs extra financial aid (maximum 500,000 yen) to cover the partial cost of repairs. Out of 250 applications, we have carefully selected 150 households that could use this aid to greatly better their living conditions in their disaster-hit houses. Over the past year and a half, this first scalable housing project in Habitat Japan's history, touched many people's lives to turn to a better future. Now it is coming to an end and we are starting to walk in a new direction.



Home Partner Stories

Takako Funato (63) got her house damaged by tsunami. As the lower floor was completely wrecked, she now lives in a registered temporary shelter and hopes to repair the upper floor of her house to return. However the staircase to reach upper floor was washed away leaving her to use a ladder instead; not



only it posed issues of safety but also difficulty in daily lives, repairing was almost out of question. (Image above)

In a case for Takejiro Toyama (68), plumbing for his bathroom was in need of repairs. For a long time after the disaster, he and his wife had no choice but to drive to a bath house 30 minutes away from their house.

Junko Sano (52) repaired her own house with scavenged materials for floors and

walls. When Habitat Japan conducted the assessment, many scars of the disaster



was seen as holey walls and debris under the floor was escalating the damage to the house.

Worries of Taking the First Step

Earthquake damaged a home for Akira Sato (71, Image above). His house was on a high enough ground to escape the tsunami, but the strong shake tilted the whole structure. Forced to live in this house for a year after the disaster, he was suffering from constant disorientation and increasing squeaky noise around the house. "I would often get dizzy looking at leaning walls, and the noise was so irritating that my wife and I were fighting all the time," Akira tells us about his life before meeting Habitat Japan. When he read about the project in the news paper, he thought "I could not get to aligning the whole structure

because it would be expensive. Habitat's project helped me to take the first step for repairing my house and restart our lives in it." Now the foundation of his house is leveled and the structure is standing straight. "I am living in relief in my own safe house, unlike being worried for a roof to collapse anytime when the next quake were to strike," Akira shared.

Housing Consultations

In response to the changing needs, the house rehabilitation project is coming to an end. Facing policy changes like relocation to higher ground and construction of government housing, people of Ofunato are in need of correct and timely information to plan for the future. Many cases require professional advice such as dealing with the loans left on disaster-hit houses. Habitat Japan will continue providing housing finance consultations across the city, in partnerships with lawyers and financial planners.



Miyagi: Revitalizing a Fisherman's Island

Building Future Through Fisherman's Work Sheds in Onagawa

Located 11km off the port of Onagawa, island of Izushima was one of the severely hit by the earthquake and the tsunami. Waves reaching up to 20m subsided the coastal land for about 1m, majority of houses washed away and 2% of the island's population lost or missing. After 4 months of evacuation to the mainland, the people got to go back only to find the hometown completely destroyed. A year and a half later, less than 100 people managed to return home to restart their lives on the island.



Voices That Were Never Heard

Main source of income of Izushima had been fishery, namely the clam farming. The disaster destroyed the farms and it will take four years to start harvesting again. Some chose to switch to seaweed farming just to survive till they can revive the clam farms, which is a pride, heart and soul of the islanders for generations.

The prefectural government announced the relocation of two communities to higher grounds outside the island. However, many of the residents wanted to stay rooted within the island to see it restored back to its original state.



In result, temporary shelters were put up but the reconstruction progressed slowly and to the minimum scale. Disconnected from the resources and attention given to the mainland Onagawa, fishermen hardly received any help even when they were ready to restart their lives. They were in desperate need for assistance that gives lasting impact on recovery.

Reasons to Stay on the Island

In April, while Habitat Japan was working in cities of the mainland such as Higashimatsushima and Ishinomaki, a local resident requested us to come see the island left out of any aid. Need assessment confirmed that one of the urgent needs was that there were no place for the fishermen to store, plan and prepare for their work on the island. Tents that were distributed as emergency relief were replacing the fisherman's work shed, but strong winds from the sea have almost destroyed it as well.

In addition, the local school had been closed keeping young generation even further away from the island. With no reason to stay on the island anymore, it was very difficult for the people to sustain their will and motivation to return to their home town.

Looking to the Future

In response to some of the islanders wanting to revitalize the life on Izushima, Habitat Japan decided to build work sheds to assist local fishermen to restart their work, and in turn reviving the local economy. Our priority was to bring the reason for the people to move back and stay in the island again.

In July, construction of 4 sheds were built as a space for the fisherman to gather and work before heading out to sea. Within two months in September, volunteers have gathered to complete the work.

Designed to be simple enough for unskilled volunteers to build a sturdy structure, the sheds were put up so efficiently and in such a short amount of time thanks to many people from across Japan and neighboring communities' help.

A volunteer mentioned how it was an "eye-opening experience to know that there are places still in great need but left out of help." On the other hand, an islander shared "it is great to have all these people come all the way to help us here. I really hope the island will be filled with people again."

Kikuo Suda, a community leader and a person in charge of maintenance of these shed (image above, middle) said "this is only a step in the long way to recovery. We need to come together and find a way to bring young generations back and rebuild our future here. These sheds would give us a space for us to move forward."