

Reading Material

Advocacy to local government: Experience of KOBE after the great earthquake, relation between NPO/NGO and local administration

Roles of NPOs in Community Development
A Case of the Post-Earthquake NPO:
“Machi-Communication” in Mikura, Nagata Ward, Kobe City

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Roles of NPOs in Community Development

A Case of the Post-Earthquake NPO: “Machi-Communication” in Mikura, Nagata Ward, Kobe City

Chapter 1 Case Study Summary

At 05:46 on January 17, 1995 a massive earthquake of magnitude 7.2 struck in south Hyogo Prefecture. Because the earthquake occurred in the densely populated Kobe-Hanshin area, the cost in human lives and property was extremely serious. More than 6,400 people died, 34,600 were injured, and 250,000 houses were halfway or completely destroyed. Basic lifeline infrastructure, including electricity, water, gas, railways, highways, etc., was destroyed. Millions of victims were evacuated to schools and community centers nearby. It was all too apparent that the government could not meet all the immediate and various needs of the victims.

Such a situation evoked strong response among the Japanese. Just after the earthquake, many Japanese, including those who had never before participated in the volunteer projects, headed to the disaster-struck area and supported the victims in various ways. This surge of groups of volunteers and their activities after the earthquake led the government to enact the so-called “NPO (Non Profit Organization) Law” which made acquiring legal status easier for volunteer groups.

For these 10 post-quake years, quite a number of NPOs have been established in Kobe. Many of them still continue to have various activities such as community development, welfare, foreign residents support, community business, etc. In spite of a difference in issues and approaches, major NPOs in Kobe form a loose network and examine together their roles they played in the process of earthquake rehabilitation, and the role they can play in the future. Their examination and discussion was once compiled into a book “Action Plan Kobe after the earthquake – Creating Civil Society” in 2001.

“*Machi*(town)-Communication” (hereafter Machi-Commi) is one of such NPOs in Kobe. Machi-Commi was established by young volunteers and an owner of a small company in Mikura, Nagata Ward, an earthquake decimated area in Kobe City. For these 10 years, Machi-Commi has focused its activities on community development in Mikura, based on its belief that “reconstruction cannot be achieved without revitalizing communities”.

The group has organized various unique activities and projects to revitalize the community by promoting collaboration between residents and outsiders as well as among residents.

By examining the case of Machi-Commi, this reading material aims to explore the possible role and attitudes of outsiders, especially NPOs, in community reconstruction; how NPOs can build trust with local residents, how they can facilitate the development process of the community, and what the strength and limitation of NPOs in community development are.

Chapter 2 Background of the case

1) Massive earthquake destroys infrastructure and community

As mentioned in the summary, at 05:46 on January 17, 1995, a strong earthquake of magnitude around 7.2 struck in the greater Hanshin metropolitan area. The epicenter of the earthquake was on northern end of Awaji Island, just 20 km away from the cosmopolitan city of Kobe. Toppled stone lanterns and bookcases in homes as far as 100 km from the epicenter were reported.

Because the earthquake struck in the densely populated area, more than 6,400 people died, 34,600 were injured, 7,000 houses were burned down, and more than 250,000 houses were partially or completely destroyed. Basic lifeline infrastructure, including electricity, water, gas, railways, highways, etc., was destroyed. Millions of victims were evacuated to schools and community centers nearby.



A) 10:00 a.m., 17 January, 2005



B) Emergency shelter (School gymnasium)

2) Surge of voluntary activity occurs ----- NPOs created for victim support

The government was apparently unable to efficiently meet the immediate and various needs of the victims. Provoked by the catastrophic situation daily broadcast by mass-media, enormous number of NGOs and volunteers from all over the country, including ordinary citizens who had never before participated in such voluntary works, came to disaster-stricken area to help.

This surge of volunteer-ism led the government to establish the “NPO (Non-Profit Organization) Law” in 1995, which made acquiring legal status easier for volunteer groups.

3) Focus shifts from emergency relief to community development

NGO/NPOs as well as individuals and groups of volunteers have organized various activities concurrent with the changing needs of victims during the reconstruction process. During the first stage, their main focus was emergency relief. Later this outside support gradually shifted its focus to support for the recovery process at temporary housings, support for the rehabilitation process by at new housings, and to the facilitation for community development. After the urgent needs for emergency relief had been somewhat satisfied, the majority of volunteers returned to their homes all over Japan. Yet there were some who continued to stay in Kobe in order to organize reconstruction activities as well as community rehabilitation activities after the disaster.

Machi-Commi is one such volunteer group/NPO that has continued their activities since its establishment just after the earthquake to the present time. One characteristic of Machi-Commi is its focus on community development in the Mikura area(block 5, 6, and 7 of Mikura), Nagara Ward, Kobe City, based on their belief that “reconstruction cannot be achieved without revitalizing a community”. Another is how Machi-Commi has successfully promoted collaboration between young volunteers from outside the community and the senior citizens of Mikura.

Chapter 3 Description of the area

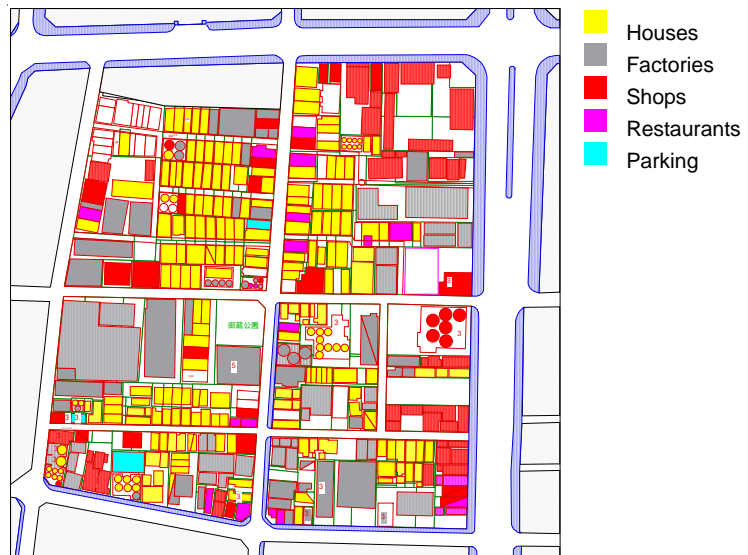
Before the Earthquake

As mentioned above, Mikura area is a part of Nagara Ward, Kobe City, Hyogo Prefecture. Prior to the earthquake, Mikura was typical old sections in Kobe, with many small wooden houses closely packed along narrow streets no more than two meters in width. The total area of Mikura is about 6 ha, and this was densely populated with around 300 households. In addition to residences, were many small factories of the rubber, iron, or steel industries; restaurants and shops used by the workers of the area, and other buildings. These were interspersed in a fashion that allowed people to work in close proximity to their home, and to maintain relatively close social ties with each other as they frequently passed one another on the street.

This is the very physical arrangement that encouraged fires to ignite and spread immediately after the earthquake, burning 80 % of the area to the ground. 70 % of the households lost their houses and workplaces the very day of the earthquake. Twenty-seven fatalities were reported in this area alone. Nagata Ward and its neighboring Hyogo Ward are the two most seriously quake-damaged areas.



C) Mikura before the earthquake



Map of Mikura before the earthquake

After the Earthquake

On March 17, 1995, two months after the earthquake, Kobe city government announced a new urban re-zoning and reconstruction project for the area in order to make it more disaster-resistant. The landscape of Mikura is no longer recognizable to its former residents. The government has replaced the narrow streets and small wooden buildings with wide thoroughfares, to enable fire engines easy access, and high-rise concrete apartments. The population of Mikura is now 2/3 of what it was before the earthquake and half of these residents have come to Mikura from other areas. As a result, ten years after the disaster, only 1/3 of the original residents of Mikura have been able to return to their town.



D) Mikura after the earthquake



Map of Mikura after the earthquake and re-zoning project

Chapter 4 Timeline of the case

i) The beginning : an accidental encounter between young volunteers and a local resident

Machi-Commi was founded through a chance encounter between young volunteers and an owner of a small company in Mikura. Mr. Ono, a volunteer from Tokyo, is one of the key-persons who led the establishment of Machi-Commi. Just after the earthquake, Mr. Ono came to Nagata Ward, together with other volunteers from a NGO based in Tokyo. They brought a printing machine with them, facilitated by the idea of the president of a printing company where Mr. Ono was on staff, "Let's take a printing machine to Kobe and issue a daily newspaper for the victims." Upon their arrival, Mr. Ono and his friends began to issue "Daily Needs", which provided relief distribution schedules, location of the public baths, etc., and distributed to the houses in Nagata Ward.

Mr. Tanaka, who was a local firm owner, received this "Daily Needs" at his warehouse, one of the few structures that remained standing. One rainy day, he happened to visit this newsletter's production "headquarters" where Mr. Ono and other young volunteers were working in a corner of a public park. According to Mr. Tanaka, this accidental visit turned out to be an important turning point in his life. Later, he recollected, in an interview in one of the national newspapers, how moved he was by the sincerity of the young volunteers.

"I thought that they had something that I didn't have. Before I met them, I believed that what is important in life is to work hard and earn money. But after I met them, I deeply felt that I had been mistaken. It is so empty if a person works only for money. Meeting them changed my life."

Triggered by this encounter, Mr. Tanaka proposed the volunteers relocate to the prefab building that he had built at his parking lot. More than 7 volunteer groups/NGOs gathered at his building.

ii) Initial stage issues : How to bring the original residents back to the community

By the summer of 1995, most of the victims who had lost their houses had been moved from relief shelters to temporary housing complexes built in the suburbs. The

majority of volunteers had also shifted their focus to issues at temporary housing complexes. However, Mr. Tanaka, Mr. Ono and his friends decided to continue to work in Mikura where the majority of people had been evacuated to other areas. They established “Machi-Commi”, based on their belief that **“reconstruction cannot be achieved without revitalizing a community”**. The first major issue they wished to revolve at the initial stage was **“how to bring former residents back to the community.”** By establishing a system to insure full-time staff remained in the community, “Machi-Commi” also played the role of secretariat for the “Mikura Area Community Development Association” (hereafter referred to as the Association).

To provide an opportunity for residents who had evacuated to temporary housing complexes in other areas to return to the community and meet again even for a short time, Machi-Commi, hand in hand with the Association, facilitated and coordinated various events such as Bon Dance Festivals, rice cake pounding and memorial services in Mikura. Through helping out with these events and working hard with the residents, Machi-Commi gradually built close relations and trust with the residents.



E) Bon Dance Festival (Aug. 1996)



F) Mikura 5 : Residents and supporters

Joint housing “Mikura 5” construction project

However, the Association and Machi-Commi soon learned the difficulty of residents who once moved out of the area to return. In order to solve this issue, they started a joint housing (apartment house) project with several households. The Association asked an architect to propose a joint housing plan and held several study meetings. Machi-Commi played the role of mediator and facilitated the discussions between architectural and legal specialists and the Association. In cooperation with a university laboratory, Machi-Commi also conducted a survey, interviewing around 50 households to explore the practicality of realizing the joint housing project. They also

dealt with the difficult task of coordinating and readjusting the residents' rights to land and housing.

Although the project was gradually scaled down, 9 households finally agreed to participate in the project and the construction of the “Mikura 5” joint housing complex began in January 1999. “Mikura 5” has since won acclaim in some circles as the only construction in Kobe to be coordinated and completed by a volunteer group. Machi-Commi played the role of coordinator, facilitating the construction process by coordinating tenant, planners and construction company. It also facilitated the rehabilitation process of the people to daily life, such as removal from the temporary housing, since many of the tenants were elderly people.

Another efforts to bringing the residents back

Besides the joint housing project, Machi-Commi also tried to distribute information on the newly built government housing in Mikura to the dispersed residents in order for them to be aware they could come back to the area. In 1999, government housing with the capacity to accommodate 95 households were finally completed in the Mikura area. Although pre-quake Mikura residents were given priority in becoming tenants in this apartment, few of them knew about this government housing. This was because 4 years had lapsed the earthquake and completion of the housing. Machi-Commi therefore investigated contact addresses and helped them to move into the government housing in their original community. Although both the Association and Machi-Commi did their best to identify, locate and enable the former residents of Mikura to relocate, only 23 households could return to Mikura area government housing

Now, 10 years since the earthquake, Mikura remains at 2/3 of its pre-quake population and half of this number are newcomers to the area. In other words, only 1/3 of the original residents were able to return to their community.

iii) Efforts to strengthen the community ties

Buildings and roads can be completed by the government's urban re-zoning project. However, the residents of Mikura area often say they feel, “roads and building are next to useless without a close-knit community who know and look out for each other.”

As detailed above, the pre- and post-quake Mikura are neither physically nor socially

recognizable as the same place. A cozy old town with small wooden houses and narrow streets has become a modern town with high-rise concrete apartment buildings and broad streets. Half of the current residents are newcomers.

To accommodate the need for strengthen the social ties, Machi-Commi has organized various activities.

Support for local groups

One such efforts is a technical assistance to local groups. After the earthquake, housewives remaining in Mikura formed a group known as **“Our Town Society”**. The group held various kinds of events residents could easily join. Led by the Our Town Society, residents of Mikura area started to reaffirm their connections with each other, based on the lesson that they learned through the earthquake; “When emergency strikes, we rely on neighbors.”

The Our Town Society is merely a voluntary group with no legal status as opposed to the Community Development Association, which has a certain legal status stipulated by the city ordinance. Thus, Machi-Commi backed the group by helping to apply for subsidies to raise funds and assist with its management.

Establishment of a community space called “Plaza 5”

Day to day community development can be more easily facilitated if there is a place residents can casually drop in. With this in mind, Machi-Commi set up a community space called **“Plaza 5”** in April 2000, on the 1st floor of the joint housing complex “Mikura 5”. Through Plaza 5, Machi-Commi was able to establish a system that enabled local residents to take care of the elderly and children in the community by themselves. Various opportunities for exchange such as tea parties, luncheons, dinners, and computer classes were planned and held with the support of the volunteers from outside the community. At computer clubs organized by the graduates of the computer classes, each member became an instructor and shared their knowledge and skills with others. Plaza 5 has become a place where residents and volunteers can communicate and start something together to make the town more attractive.

In addition to the activities at Plaza 5, Machi-Commi has coordinated and facilitated activities in which residents and volunteers can work together in a physical sense, such as planting flowerbeds at parks and erecting a monument for the deceased. All of

these activities were useful to strengthen the formerly disaster-destroyed community.



G) Activities at Plaza 5



H) Activities with children



I) Erecting a monument



J) Planting flower beds in a park

“Community Hall” construction project

The construction of a community hall is an epoch-making activity for the Mikura area. Again, Machi-Commi played an important role in coordinating and facilitating this process. Discussions leading up to the construction of a community hall started around October 2001. The plan was discussed repeatedly, and community halls in other areas were visited. After the implementation of the urban re-zoning project, the once old town of Mikura with wooden houses and close community ties had changed into a hurriedly constructed new town with many prefabricated houses and modern apartments. Some residents said “The town looks nicer now but has lost its warmth”, “I miss daily communications with neighbors which were around every corner.”

After a series of discussion, the residents of Mikura area decided to move an old

traditional wooden house from the countryside of Hyogo Prefecture to Mikura and reassemble it into their community hall. It was expected that this construction project would result in a place where people could gather, recollecting and enjoying a sense of old days in wooden houses.

There was another expectation in this project. Today, most people consider that a house is something to be bought. Yet, not so long ago, it was common that a house was built together by local people by working together. Through the communal construction process, people come to appreciate other people, and learn that there are things that cannot be bought with money. **The Community Hall construction project** was expected to reproduce the interpersonal connections of communal labor in quake-ravaged Mikura area.

In the summer of 2002, a traditional old house in Yasuki Village, which was scheduled to be scrapped, was dismantled. Student volunteers studying architecture stayed together at a gymnasium in the village for two weeks to engage in this work. Women of Mikura area supported them by preparing meals. The village residents, who had watched the work suspiciously at the beginning, gradually started to empathize with the students' efforts and even to lend their support. The residents of Mikura and volunteers worked together in carrying the dismantled materials and preparing additional materials by cutting down wood and bamboo.



K) Working together at Yasuki Village

The reassembly work in Mikura area started in July of 2003. Though the framework was put together by the construction company, most of the other works were done by

local residents and volunteers under the guidance of carpenters and plasterers. Elementary school students and elderly people in their 80's also participated in such light works as bamboo latticework and mud wall coating.

Because everyone worked together, the total construction cost was scaled down to 2/3 of the original estimate. A part of the cost was borne by the government in the form of community hall construction subsidies, yet the rest of the funds were raised through collecting donations from concerned citizens throughout the country as well as the residents in the Mikura area. As the government subsidy was available only after the building was completed, necessary operational cost for the moment was collected through the donations from the residents.

In total, more than 2,000 people were involved in the project. Everyone contributed labor, time, skills, and networks according to his/her ability. Those who were physically strong joined in the construction work, those who were good at cooking prepared meals for the workers and volunteers, and those who could not join in during the daytime cooperated by raising funds.

Through the process to work together toward a common goal, everyone felt something very humane, which is difficult to experience at ordinary times. Some commented, "This building has already become a community hall, where people gather and cooperate, since the construction stage." In January 2004, nine years after the earthquake, the Mikura 5-7 Community Hall was completed as a symbol of the community.



L) Construction process (above)



M) Mikura Community Hall (right)

Chapter 5 Actors and stakeholders

There are several organizations / groups that are active and important in promoting community development in Mikura area.

1) Mikura Community Development Association

The Mikura Community Development Association (hereafter Association) is an association of all the residents of Mikura area (block 5, 6, and 7), organized for the purpose of implementing the city government's re-zoning project. According to the Kobe City Ordinance on Community Development, each community that was designated as an area for city re-zoning is obliged to organize a "Community Development Association". Although it is called a "Community Development Association", the expected role of the Association was to discuss and implement the city government re-zoning project, whose main purpose is to develop (broaden) roads/streets, parks, and other infrastructure in the area.

The city government designated Mikura area as re-zoning area on 17 March 1995, just after the earthquake. The Association was organized to urge consensus among the residents and implement the re-zoning project. In the case of the Mikura area association, however, the Association stepped beyond this role and hand in hand with Machi-Commi an has been active in organizing various activities to promote community development, providing support to the residents in rehabilitation and housing, holding workshops to plan community parks and streets, constructing the community hall, and much more.

- Established : 23 April ,1995
- Major activities: Construction of the Community Hall, Community Park, etc. publishing newsletters
- Chairperson : Mr. Yasuzo Tanaka
- Members : Residents of Mikura (block 5, 6, and 7), owners of land and houses in Mikura

2) Mikura Town Committee (*Jichikai*)

A Town Committee (*Jichikai*) is an organization of the residents living in a certain locality (block, ward, etc.). It has a long history in Japan, and has played an important role especially in linking the community and the government. Although the name is

different from place to place and from time to time (*Jichikai*, *Chonaikai*, or sometimes *Burakukai*), most communities in Japan have Town Committees.

According to Torigoe¹, Town Committee has the following 5 characteristics in common; 1) a household (not an individual) as a member, 2) only one Committee in one certain geographical area (no overlapping), 3) every household in the area is a member, 4) its activities cover all aspects of everyday life, and 5) it has a strong link with the local government.

In Mikura, Town Committee existed long before the earthquake. Yet it became inactive because of the earthquake. In April 2002, the Mikura Town Committee resumed its activities under the leadership of the new president.

- Major activities: Maintenance of the community park, management of community hall, trainings for disaster prevention, etc.
- Chairperson : Mr. Hiroyuki Shibata
- Members : All the residents of Mikura (block 5, 6, and 7)

3) Machi-Communication

Machi-Communication is an NPO organized by volunteers and concerned local residents for the purpose of supporting and promoting community reconstruction and development in Mikura area.

- Established : April 1996
- Major activities: Support to Mikura Community Development Association (as secretariat), coordination of joint housing construction, planning of the various events and activities for community development, etc.
- Chairperson : Mr. Akira Miyasada
- Staffs : Volunteers (students etc.) mainly from outside

4) Plaza 5

In order to further promote community activities in Mikura, a community space called Plaza 5 was established at the 1st floor of Mikura 5. Plaza 5 is managed by a steering committee consist of concerned residents, Machi-Commi, and professionals of social welfare and community development.

¹ Torigoe, Hiroyuki. "*Chiiki Jichikai no Kenkyu* (Study on Town Committee)" Minerva, 1994, p.9

- Established : April 2000
- Major activities: Tea parties among the elderly, welfare services for the elderly, classes on computer use, etc.
- Chairperson : Mr. Ueda
- Staffs : Volunteers (mainly local residents)

5) Group “Moe”

Group “Moe” is a group of local residents, mostly the elderly, in and around Mikura area to create a good relationship and networks in the community to enjoy life together and support each other.

- Established : April 2001
- Major activities : Handicraft making, mini-golf, etc.
- Chairperson : Ms. Chieko Takeuchi
- Members : Residents of Mikura area, Kita-machi, Kagura, and Hosoda

As mentioned above, each group has different characteristics. Community development in Mikura has been, and is being, facilitated through good combinations of concerned persons and collaboration among such people as: local residents and outsiders, the youth and the elders, and men and women.

Chapter 6 Lessons learned

The experiences of Mikura have given us several precious lessons to explore as regards community development, and particularly the role of outsiders in community development.

- One of the lessons is that **community development cannot be achieved only through physical infrastructure development**. Although the major task of the Community Development Association established in stipulation with a city ordinance was the implementation of the urban re-zoning project, the Association in Mikura focused on the social aspect of development based on the belief “reconstruction cannot be achieved without revitalizing communities.” It has organized various activities to strengthen community ties in good collaboration with Machi-Commi..
- In facilitating activities for revitalizing community, **Machi-Commi as an outsider for the community plays multiple roles**. Sometimes it plays the role of translator or mediator for the residents and linked them with outside resources, including professionals, young new volunteers, the city government, etc. Sometime it becomes a consultant for the residents to conduct surveys on the community, or a secretariat to document and manage administrative works. It also becomes a mirror for the residents to reflect on themselves, as Mr. Tanaka reflected his life when he met the volunteers. Mr. Miyasada, a chairperson of Machi-Commi, mentions in his essay, outsiders become good mediators among residents, as they are free from the interest of local politics.
- Although Machi-Commi is one of the very important actors in Mikura, community development cannot occur without active participation of the residents as the main actor of development. One of the key factors for success in Mikura is that **Machi-Commi could build good relationship and collaboration with various local organizations and groups** with different characters, including the Community Development Association, Town Committees, Our Town Society, Group “Moe”. Timing-wise, the initial stage is seen to have been a good entry point for Machi-Commi to become a secretariat for the Community Development Association. According to Mr. Miyasada, their daily presence in the community itself is also important to build trust with the residents. As a chairperson who works daily in the secretariat in Mikura, he says that he sometimes helps the residents in fixing

electricity changing light bulbs, if he is asked, as he is one of the few young men staying in the community during the daytime. According to him, such casual communication with the residents is sometimes more important than organizing events or seminars to build good relationship with the residents.

There may be more lessons that we can learn from the experience of the Mikura area. In the context of your country, what kind of lessons do you extract?

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【Reference】

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<http://machicomi.blog42.fc2.com/blog-entry-215.html>

Chinese (video and report and info)

<http://machicomi.blog42.fc2.com/blog-entry-883.html>

Korean (report and info)

<http://machicomi.blog42.fc2.com/blog-entry-850.html>

Spanish (report and info)

<http://machicomi.blog42.fc2.com/blog-entry-884.html>

French (video)

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