**Recovery Projects and Life Recovery in the Disaster Area: Current Situation and Challenges for Disaster Survivors:**

**The Example of the Disaster Prevention Collective Relocation Project in Ogatsu District, Ishinomaki City, Miyagi Prefecture, after the Great East Japan Earthquake**

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**Abstract**

3 years have passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake disaster. In the disaster area, recovery projects are underway. If disaster victims want to live in their home town, they have to wait for the recovery project to be completed. Under the recovery projects, victims have to wait to have housing on his site. Some victims have to rebuild houses in other area for their life recovery. So in disaster the area, the population is continuing to decrease.

This documents reports whether or not victims can join the process in one coastal area to make recovery plans based on the government's recovery project.

**Keywords**: LIFE RECOVERY RECOVERY PROJECT THE GREAT EAST JAPAN EARTHQUAKE

**1. Introduction**

There are various ongoing recovery projects in the Great East Japan Earthquake disaster area. Ogatsu district, the case introduced in this paper, is located on the rias coast of north east Japan, where the main recovery project is Disaster Prevention Collective Relocation. In Disaster Prevention Collective Relocation, the government buys land in areas that were damaged by tsunami, and where residential rebuilding is forbidden, and prepares new land for residential use at high elevation. Residents can purchase this land and build new houses there. 3 years have passed since the tsunami, but only 5% of relocation projects in the disaster area have completed land preparation.

The Ogatsu peninsula is an area that became prosperous from bonito fishing. Fishery product cultivation in Ogatsu started after the 1967 3rd United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS,) which allowed free use of natural resources for cultivation of fishery products. Scallops, sea sqirts, and oysters are the main fisher products, with scallops production ranked number 1 in Miyagi Prefecture. Before the tsunami, the population of Ogatsu was 4,300. The population had been declining since 1995, when the peak population was 11,214. In 2005, Ogatsu Town was incorporated into neighboring Ishinomaki City.

Between spring and summer of 2012, it was decided that Disaster Prevention Collective Relocation would be carried out in Ogatsu, and city government surveyed residents about their intentions to move to the new relocation area in higher land. Of the 1150 households in Ogatsu who had suffered damage and were eligible, 280 households (24.3%) declared their intention to join the relocation project .

On August 19, 2012, the Ogatsu Branch of the city government called a meeting to announce the town recovery plan, including the preparation of high land areas based on the results of survey and number of residents who had responded in the survey that they wanted to move to the relocation areas.

Before the relocation project had been announced, 58.1% of residents had responded to a survey in July 2011 by Ogatsu residents organization that they wanted to raise the land level and rebuild on their own properties.

One reason that relatively few people chose to return to Ogatsu is that most residents from Ogatsu were living in temporary housing in other areas, and it was difficult for them to gather and have a chance to discuss their own plans and get information about other residents returning or not. Opportunities for discussion were also limited by a rush to decide on collective relocation for the recovery project in order to get funding from the national government.

Discussion about other reconstruction by raising land and rebuilding on site were seen as delaying the process of deciding on a recovery project, so it was difficult for residents who supported this way to suggest it.

Instead of asking which type of reconstruction (collective relocation or on site reconstruction), the choice that was presented to residents was the option to join collective relocation or not.

For collective relocation, the disaster-affected land must be designated as high-risk areas where building is forbidden. If the disaster-affected area is designated as one in which on-site reconstruction is allowed, it can not be designated as a high-risk area, and therefore will become ineligible for collective relocation.

Therefore people who wanted to use on-site reconstruction felt pressure not to oppose collective relocation, and it was difficult for them discuss plans for other types of reconstruction, such as land rasing on rebuilding on former site.

By designating the high-risk no-build area, the land available to build housing is reduced. New land developed for relocation is limited to disaster survivors only, so in the future it would be difficult to build and new houses for newcomers, etc., so the future population will be limited to the number of households included in the current recovery plan. This will make town management more difficult and also restrict daily life, as facilities needed for residents daily life will be disappear along with a decreasing population.

**2. Residents’ Intentions toward Recovery**

Starting on May 1, 2011, Ishinomaki City carried surveyed residents about where they wanted to live. 56% of Ogatsu residents responded that they wanted to moved to a different area with the city, which means away from Ogatsu Peninsula but within larger Ishinomaki City. 8% of Ogatsu residents responded that they want to move outside Ishinomaki City. Soon after, in June 2011, the local committee for recovery carried out another survey of every household in Ogatsu, based on the idea that “they are actually more people who want to return.” 58.1% of survey respondents said they wanted to raise the land and rebuild on their former house lots.

On July 29, the local committee for recovery made a request to the Mayor of Ishinomaki City that included several issued related to recovery Ogatsu Peninsula, including the preparation of land for relocation in higher areas. Even though most of the residents had responded that they wanted to rebuild their houses on their former lots with land raising, by committee requesting collective relocation, it started the process leading towards collective relocation as the recovery project that was selected for Ogatsu.

**3. The Process of Making the Recovery Plan**

Ishinomaki City Basic Recovery Plan was completed on December 22, 2011, and the Recovery Implementation Plan was complete February 15 2012. These plans were based on tsunami risk simulations, and designated that for the fishing villages on the peninsulas in Ishinomaki City, reconstruction of housing would not be allowed in the areas that had been inundated by the tsunami.

On December 7, 2011, the “Great East Japan Earthquake Special Area Law” was enacted and became the basis for allocating *kofukin,* a type of government funding available after the Great East Japan Earthquake to subsidize recovery projects. This law including a list of the kinds of projects that would be eligible for this funding. Local governments in the disaster area started preparing for this project in earnest.

**4. Recovery Planning and Residents Opinions**

Towards the completion of the Basic Recovery Plan, Ishinomaki City had explanation meetings for Ogatsu residents on Nov 27, 2011 and Dec 10, 2011. At these meetings, the plans were presented to the residents. For the majority of Ogatsu residents who had not participated the local committee for recovery, this was the first time they saw the contents of the plan. There were questions about “what was the process that led to this plan?”

In addition it also became clear that collective relocation in the fishing villages and the central area of Ogatsu would be very different because in the fishing village there was high land areas available relatively close by, while there was not in the center area.

Therefore was decided that the decision to use collective relocation to high ground would be decided by each neighborhood committee, which for the fishing village meant by each village.

Because land relocation is related to roads and other aspects of the plan the affect all neighborhoods, and also because it would be possible for more than 1 of them to chose the same high land area for relocations, the 6 neighborhoods in central Ogatsu formed the “Group to Think About Ogatsu” to discuss these shared issues and relocation together on December 11, 2011. In February 2012, this group created and distributed a proposal for land raising the on site rebuilding (not only collective relocation to high land) and mailed it to Ogatsu residents, asking them to identify under which plan (land raising or collective relocation) they would return to live in Ogatsu. Of the 37% of residents who replied to the survey, 31.5% said “if this plan (land raising) is used, I think I would return.”

In October and November 2011, Ishinomaki City surveyed each household from Ogatsu about their intentions for collective relocation to high land areas. The first question was “where do you want to life?” options were 1)in Ogatsu District, 2)outside of Ogatsu District, 3) have not decided yet. After this question was the following: “For people who chose 2 or 3, this completes the questionnaire. Thank you for you your cooperation.” Therefore, people who don't chose collective relocation, have no other opportunity to voice their opinion to local government.

**5. An Example of Planning for Disaster Prevention Collective Relocation Project in one district of Ogatsu**

For the first time after the disaster, the Shimo Ogatsu district general meeting was held on June 17, 2012. 54 out of 102 households participated. The majority supported disaster prevention collective relocation project, and it the result was 45 for and 7 against. Supporters of collective relocation felt “it was a little delayed, but by having this meeting, I think the recovery project is moving forward”. Those who opposed collective relocation had the opinion: “we never even received an individual survey; it was too hasty to make a decision at that meeting. Is it really OK to make this decision at the first meeting held 1 year and 3 months after the disaster?” There were no information about recovery plans or maps distributed at the general meeting, instead, the only documents that were distributed were about collective relocation and rent for disaster recovery public housing. The meeting only focused on whether or not to support collective relocation, and there were no other project options presented. In the case of the collective relocation project, the price and conditions in which land would be bought from individuals was also not decided. In this situation, collective relocation, which should be one option for recovery project, became the only option.

Disasters survivors want to speed up the recovery of daily life. However, although there are a lot of concerns about future life recovery, and it is difficult to make individual choices, in order to be included in the recovery project, decisions must be made quickly to advance the recovery projects. Within these conflicts, meetings about community planning for disaster recovery tend to try to speed up recovery projects, and opportunities to express individual options are reduced.

**6. Conclusion**

This article concludes with the author’s current opinions about the challenges of recovery community panning.

Currently, with few temporary housing located in former areas, and with the difficulty of rebuilding on former land, the situation of few people in the disaster area continues. As of May 2013, even if all the residents of Ogatsu who wanted collective relocation retuned to Ogatsu, there would only 35% of the pre-disaster population (1541 out of 4300 people).

Without an opportunity to discuss their own intentions for the for each persons’ recovery, and without the time for this to be reflected in the recovery plan, without choosing collective relocation, people who want to come back and rebuilt on site lose their position. In this case, where the collected relocation project is presented in terms of 2 options (i.e. join collective relocation or move out permanently), individuals who don't choose one of these are seen as being against reconstruction entirely, which causes friction between people in the local community.

In additional, town management after the recovery project (because of land regulations, new people will not be able to move into the area, population decline is evident), there is no opportunity to talk about recovery planning for that the younger generation hopes for. Losing the momentum for people to return to their region, and if this situation continues, and with the lack of chances to meet, based on the available information, people will decided not to return, and the number of people who move out will increase.