

Report on Ishinomaki and surrounding areas

Based on a visit by David Lee, 19-26 June 2011

Report Objectives

It is hoped that the report that follows will be helpful to academics and policy makers as an overview of the situation on the ground. It is also intended to encourage further fundraising, volunteering in Tohoku and ideas that can be put into practice with good collaboration between interested parties to enable direct, focussed funding to help local communities.

This report is based on what I experienced in the area around Ishinomaki in mid April and again on 19-26 June. Many of the views have been developed using opinions from volunteers, residents and evacuees, some of whom I have liased with since April and will continue to liase with. This is meant to be an informative report to suggest ideas and provoke open discussion but I accept that others may have different personal experiences or knowledge. Further images and videos including interviews from the trip can be accessed via the Helping Hands for Japan website;

It is the nature of such reports that problems are highlighted but my overall impression is that the actions taken at all levels of government were much better than the after the Kobe earthquake, when I was living in Kyoto. I am by no means an expert in these issues but given the extremely complex nature of this natural disaster, the unfortunate distractions of the Fukushima nuclear plant and the weak political position of the prime minister, I think the initial political response was as good as could be expected. The immediate and continuing use of the self-defence forces has been vital, whereas they were hardly visible in Kobe.

Index:

About David Lee and Helping Hands for Japan

Lessons from a previous tsunami

Summary of the Damage

Volunteer Work

Evacuees

Examples of NPOs and projects that deserve support

- Ishinomaki Sports Recovery Centre (石巻スポーツ振興サポートセンター)
- Kids Club (NPO 石巻子ども避難所クラブ)
- Ashinaga Foundation (あしなが育英会)
- Ipponmatsu Project
- Photo Restoration

Summary

The Continuing Work of Helping Hands for Japan

Issues facing evacuees - an initial assessment by Yoshiyuki Matsumura

About David Lee and Helping Hands for Japan

David Lee has lived and worked between Japan and UK in the travel and education industry for nearly 20 years. He learnt Japanese in Kyoto and now lives in the UK with his wife, from Osaka, and two children. He continues to manage two companies organising travel to Japan, and educational programmes based in Oxford for Japanese students. He established a new charity, Helping Hands for Japan soon after March 11th and joined with the local Japanese community to hold two initial main fundraising events in Oxford. The charity has moved forward to consider further activities with support from the other trustee, Paul Brankin, Professor Arthur Stockwin and Phillida Purvis.

Lessons from a previous tsunami

There is a very informative study of the 2004 tsunami relief effort by Grantmakers Without Borders called “Tsunami Learning Project” which can be viewed online;

http://gwob.net/issues/pdf/tlp_exec-summary.pdf

Some of the main points made were;

- coordination among responders was inefficient.
- local communities and community groups were excluded from much of the decisionmaking that went on by international NGOs, governments, and other major players.
- the tsunami response was largely an exclusive process that barred local organizations and communities from involvement in decision-making.

While the scale of the damage may be similar, Japan has far more resources and as a developed country without civil unrest, there are far fewer complications to the recovery response.

However, it is now approaching 4 months since the earthquake in Japan and all of the above points seem to be entirely valid from my observations. I hope some of the readers of this report will be in a position to address these issues on a larger scale than I can. However the examples at the end of the report demonstrate what a small organisation can achieve in a short period of time.

Summary of the damage

- Worst areas, where almost nothing remains, are steadily being cleared but still several months work remains with some areas still almost untouched since the tsunami.
- Severely damaged areas are difficult to clear quickly with many complications over whether to repair some buildings.
- ***There is a need for some sense of a planning process, or at least a timetable for when a plan may be put in place.***

This was my second visit to Ishinomaki, the first being in mid-April 6 weeks after the tsunami. In terms of total figures, Ishinomaki was the worst hit of all the coastal towns, with almost one quarter of the total dead and missing in this relatively small area. This is due to its size, lack of natural protection and the fact that most of the housing is spread along a flat 5km stretch within 1km of the coast. As you move away from the coast you pass through an area of almost total destruction, followed by housing too damaged to save and then houses that escaped damage on the second floor.

In most cases houses that were only damaged on the first floor can be renovated and the majority of the volunteer work has been concentrated on removing mud and rubbish from these houses. Even in these areas, though, there were deaths. One lady I spoke to said the tsunami reached 1.4m inside the house (about 1.8m outside) yet one neighbour died trying to escape in her car while two others died perhaps as they did not expect the tsunami to reach them and could not escape quickly once it came. This interview can be viewed on youtube: <http://www.youtube.com/user/HelpingHandsForJapan>

The nature of the damage in other areas was often quite different, in some cases the tsunami would be funnelled up a valley damaging buildings 5km or more from the coast. In other cases, most notably Rikuzen Takata there is almost nothing remaining.



(Photographs taken between 18-26 June, from left to right: Rikuzen Takata railway, Onnagawa, Kesennuma, Iwaki City)

I found Onnagawa especially disturbing where there is evidence of damage above 30m combined with enough force to knock over complete concrete buildings. In Kesennuma there may be as many as 10 large fishing boats still sitting in the worst hit areas of the town.

I also saw considerable damage a lot further south in Iwaki where 60 people died, confirming the vast length of coastline that was badly hit. Overall what I saw would confirm the estimates of years as opposed to months just to clear up.

Volunteer work

- Volunteer numbers are decreasing with virtually none in some areas
- There seems to be little planning towards more skilled volunteering
- ***Key Volunteers should be given support outside the mainstream organisations. Many have given up their normal lives to be in Tohoku and are a tremendous resource.***
- ***Good long-term volunteer leaders should be given more opportunities to liaise directly with local residents and groups that need help. They can also communicate new ideas and liaise between various groups (NPOs, evacuees, residents and volunteers)***

Compared to 6 weeks after the tsunami I would say the number of volunteers in Ishinomaki has declined and many of those that are there have been there for many weeks. There does seem to be a continuing push to get more volunteers from amongst the volunteers themselves, but government measures have had little affect. In the end the independent motivation of individuals and companies or organisations seems to be the source. It is no way near enough and there is a risk that the numbers will continue to dwindle. I heard from many volunteers that the informal teams were not good at choosing suitable leaders, with volunteer experience taking precedence over natural ability. You might expect this in Japan but it leaves some volunteers feeling underused and frustrated. As a result some of the natural volunteer leaders have chosen to leave this system as their voice is not heard.

I also saw some disturbing signs that larger volunteer organisations are involved in politics which can be to the overall detriment of the relief effort.

I should say that the local volunteer centre in Ishinomaki works as smoothly as can be expected, accepting volunteers on a daily basis and trying to put them into teams according to their skills. They were also willing to arrange transport for groups operating independently, as discussed below. However while compiling this report I have heard that volunteers will be expected to sign up with an organisation before travelling to the area. This restriction could further narrow the scope of volunteer work and reduce the flow of more independent volunteers.

My other concern is that there has not been much thought about new types of work for volunteers as the process moves forward. Within Ishinomaki volunteer groups conduct daily analysis rather than discussing longer term planning. The day I was in Iwaki with Team Heal Japan (www.teamheal.jp), 20 volunteers worked all day to clear out a house and garden, separating the rubbish into 5 categories for recycling. This house would later be pulled down so one of the main aims is to salvage important personal items. This is an important job but I think this group in particular, which has many very skilled volunteers, could also be used effectively in many other ways. At a time when volunteer numbers have been declining this group deserves support as it has been able to grow in numbers, despite going to areas avoided by others due to radiation concerns. You can see an interview with the founder, Sean

Muramatsu, of Team Heal Japan on youtube;

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MqpnoYVdj54>

Meanwhile areas such as Rikuzen Takata are desperately short of volunteers now, even to do the most basic initial work.

There was one very interesting group in Ishinomaki that had come together from individual volunteers and now operates independently liaising directly with a resident and following her instructions based on the requirements of her neighbours. She would prepare a substantial lunch with other residents each day. Not only did this avoid wasting time over coordination through the volunteer centre but it also meant the volunteers had much more contact with the residents which was clearly more satisfying and beneficial on both sides.

The volunteers themselves had some incredible personal stories, some coming after personal experiences of loss in the Kobe earthquake, others making difficult journeys to get there; one had cycled for 6 days from Tokyo; This volunteer can be viewed on youtube;

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gSqvF_HkD_U

Another was a carpenter and shipped his car full of tools from Okinawa (taking 3 days) while he took a flight. It was a privilege to meet such people and telling their stories should inspire others. An American volunteer, who happened to be a carpenter came despite twice being advised not to, in one case because he doesn't speak Japanese. In reality, any carpenters from anywhere are extremely useful. Having volunteered many times since Sudan in 1984 he plans to be here 3 months (until the end of his visa), yet it is not clear if immigration would welcome him if he had told the truth on arrival.

One other volunteer had been in Higashi-Matsushima for 11 days and returned to Tohoku after finding he could not settle back in to his job in Osaka. Originally from the UK, he is now conscientiously writing a daily report about his experiences. It is personal and at time brutally honest but an extremely valuable resource given the lack of this kind of information;

<http://itsnotjustmud.com/>



(Photographs taken between 18-26 June, from left to right; Team Heal Japan, House to be cleared by volunteers, Yutaro briefing volunteers, volunteer camp in Ishinomaki)

It would be desperately unfortunate if such devoted volunteers could not stay because of relatively small costs or visa issues. I estimate that 2,000 yen per day will cover most

volunteers costs as they usually have no accommodation costs. There are larger volunteer organisations, most notably Peace Boat, who will cover daily costs, but it is vital to have a variety of different groups with different ideas. While there is a very important role for large volunteer organisations, many very intelligent volunteers will not be able to apply the skills they have or discuss their ideas within that system. It also became clear that there was very little contact between the volunteers and local NPOs and the examples given below show how beneficial this can be.

The evacuees

- Communities are broken up again when moving to temporary housing
- Dependency, lack of motivation and no work contribute to a worsening situation in the evacuation centres.
- ***Evacuees need a plan for building a community.***
- ***Evacuees need to have a leadership structure which gives them proper representation in decision making processes.***

In mid-April there were many more people in evacuee centres but some have now returned to live upstairs in homes that have been cleared of rubbish downstairs (virtually none have had downstairs renewed yet), while others have moved into temporary housing. I think it is understandable that those who have homes to return to, have much less mental stress. Although friends, neighbours and relatives may have died, there is some sense of continuity in their lives. For those going into temporary housing the future is very unclear. One could argue that community was the one thing they could hold on to, and if they are at least with ex-neighbours it would be very beneficial. However, temporary housing is being allocated on a lottery system and this is splitting up people into different locations. In some cases, they may have made new friends in the evacuee centres but may now be around strangers, possibly for the 2nd time. Conceivably, it could happen again for the 3rd time when permanent housing is completed. This is what happened after the Kobe earthquake and there were similar problems then so it is not clear to me why they are doing it this way again. It may be for simplicity and to try to move people quickly. But less urgency and more planning may be better. I have seen little evidence that the evacuees themselves are involved in this process. One TV programme highlighted the fact that in some areas, many of the local government employees died and they are now desperately short of workers to deal with the paperwork. Government workers are coming from other areas to help but usually just for one week so there is a lack of continuity and understanding of the issues. Some evacuees do not want to move to the temporary housing where they will be expected to be totally independent. If they do not move, the allocated house is kept in their name so presumably they will eventually have no choice. The temporary housing is springing up throughout the region, wherever a reasonable area of flat ground can be found, usually in blocks for up to 100 families or so.



(Photographs taken between 18-26 June, from left to right: Evacuee children, Tsuyoshi Nagabuchi performs in a evacuation center, Yoshiyuki Matsumura interviewed by NHK as an unofficial spokesperson for the evacuees)

Another enormous problem is work for the evacuees. With various local industries destroyed there is little work and this may be as disturbing for evacuees, as not knowing where they will eventually live. There is much concern (voiced by more proactive evacuees) that they have slipped into a state of dependency, and without much clarity about their future they lack motivation to move forward and become more independent. I have no knowledge of this but experienced volunteers have told me that dependency has become a big problem in relief efforts in Haiti. One very interesting project which starts to address this issue is the Ipponmatsu project described below. The evacuation centre where this is located is in a large sports hall facility with individual tents (apparently from rotary in the UK) for each family. This almost has the appearance of a village and no doubt makes a huge difference, for a relatively small cost but I am not aware of this anywhere else. Almost all other evacuation centres I have seen are simple marked areas on a floor in a hall, with the better ones having cardboard divisions to give some privacy.

Examples of NPOs and projects that deserve support

- ***There are proactive local people that need funding and resources.***
- ***Ideas need to be shared so good projects can be expanded to other areas.***

In my limited time I visited projects I knew about beforehand and came across a few others. On this trip I did not have much contact with established larger NPOs or NGOs operating in the Tohoku area (my meetings with Ashinaga have been in Tokyo). I was more interested to concentrate in meeting some smaller grass root NPOs to find out what they are doing and what problems they face. I have no doubt there are many more good local projects and I hope these are being discovered, supported and promoted. Currently they lack resources, funding and visibility. It is important to seek them out and then find ways to support them and grow these potential valuable seeds of recovery. In some cases a small amount of communication linking different groups has the potential to expand good ideas and greatly increase the benefit.

Ipponmatsu project – A potential model for cottage industry style work

One very interesting project which is helping to address the issue of work for evacuees, is the Ipponmatsu project based in a evacuee centre in Rikuzen Takata. The Ipponmatsu (meaning

single pine tree) project is named after the one surviving tree in Rikuzen Takata where there used to be 70,000 lining a spectacular beach. It has become a symbol of survival against all the odds and perhaps an inspiration to the evacuees to do the same. The main project is to replant the trees that have gone but it may be the fundraising part of the project that could be more important at this stage.

The main project website is <http://www.ipponmatsu-pro.com/>

A realistic image of the tree has been made into a logo and brand for a few goods which are being made by volunteer evacuees and sold through a website;

<http://www.ipponmatsu-goods.com/>

I was very keen to meet the person who set this up to suggest expanding the concept to involve more evacuees and other products. Despite the fact, there is more demand than they can handle and a real need to find such work for other evacuees, he was very cautious about my suggestions. This may be because he himself is not a evacuee and therefore is very wary of their feelings, seeing himself as an “outsider”. The T-shirt with the ipponmatsu logo wasn’t even on the website. Another brand in other place may allow this project to be replicated. However I think it would be much better if the products were of daily use, rather than “omiyage” style gifts which will not lead to a sustainable work unless the products are of value to future tourists. One idea is a common Tohoku brand that encourages cottage industry style production by evacuees throughout the area with a central system for marketing and selling that would allow anyone to concentrate on making products without needing to make a business. A project that would set up the establishment of this central system may be worth considering.

Ishinomaki Sports Recovery Centre (石巻スポーツ振興サポートセンター)

- An experienced NPO director - potentially an ideal spokesperson for the evacuees

I met the founder, Matsumura Yoshiyuki san in April and he has been an immense source of inspiration for showing what some local evacuees can achieve. His nephew is also involved with the NPO and continued a blog after the earthquake;

<http://blog.canpan.info/suport2007/>

His house was near the coast and completely washed away in the tsunami. He fled to his sports shop and his staff had the composure to film from the second floor (1st floor in the UK) as the tsunami rose almost to the ceiling below. The video posted on their blog on 22nd March shows cars and debris being swept along outside and at one point the 5 metre shop window snaps with the force.

<http://blog.canpan.info/suport2007/daily/201103/22>

On the same page there are still images that show a person climbing out of their car and eventually standing on it. Their shop building survived as it is mainly concrete and the downstairs was cleaned sufficiently for the shop to reopen. It is likely that half of the building will be demolished as the structure is severely damaged.

Matsumura san has been running an NPO for about 10 years which operates sports camps for

children to get more involved in sport. They have good contacts with sports professionals who sometimes come to these camps. His original idea was to continue to operate the sports camps, now for evacuee children. In reality many of the children at the sports camps have become evacuees anyway. Their new website developed since the earthquake shows their current projects;

<http://www.i-support.or.jp/>

An official (Japanese) summary of their NPO can be found here;

https://canpan.info/open/dantai/00002210/dantai_detail.html

He and his wife live in an evacuation centre themselves and he has taken on the role of representing the evacuees there and liaises with other leaders in other evacuee centres. He is now trying to prepare a proposal for how the temporary housing sites can become integrated communities to make sure evacuees can continue to get emotional support from those around them once they are relocated. A translation of his initial document is attached to the end of this report.



(Photographs taken between 18-26 June, from left to right: The founder of the Ipponmatsu project in the evacuation centre where goods are made, Sports camp run by Ishinomaki Sports Recovery Centre)

He and his wife are very kind and friendly, talking about serious issues without any bitterness or resentment. He talked about how the centre of Ishinomaki needs to be re-planned from scratch. Out of town shopping centres had a big impact on the small businesses there and they should not try to go back to a past that already had many problems. Instead a total renewal of the centre, with a pedestrian area, and memorial park would attract tourists and locals alike back and create a much brighter future for all. He openly accepted that his own shop may need to be destroyed in the process. He pointed out that the famous Japanese architect, Tadao Ando is on the main renewal committee so he suggested we should seek his support for such a plan. His nephew has been coordinating a project for an event “Ishinomaki 2.0 Re-birth week” which is planned from 23rd July. We have added English to this event document which can be downloaded from our website;

www.helpinghandsforjapan.org.uk/others/ishinomaki_high.pdf

Matsumura san is full of good ideas but has no resources or funding to put them into practice. His nephew runs some the projects and the website but he is not sure how to cover his living costs in the coming months. There are funds which they have been applying to, but the

amounts received have been small and the process is slow. I have been so impressed with their work and agreed to make a donation of 300,000 yen to allow them to continue their plans while other funding is sought. Time is also a big problem and they need extra staff. I was at least able to introduce a Japanese volunteer who is studying overseas. He agreed to work alongside Matsumura san for a month to help him translate documents and organise events. He will look for a suitable replacement when he leaves so this assistance can continue. The translated documents will be used by Helping Hands for Japan to continue promoting Matsumura sans work and appeal for funding from overseas.

Kids Club (NPO 石巻こども避難所クラブ) – *evacuees making a difference*

This NPO was newly set up after the earthquake to organise small play and activity groups for the children in evacuee centres.

<http://kodomohinanjoclub.cocolog-nifty.com/>

The person I met had lost her house but was happily volunteering to play with one group. She said they would be glad of volunteers getting involved but they did not have contact with them. This is another example of a evacuee who has lost everything but is actively making a difference. You can see her on this youtube video;

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5qQ8ZulbAUM>

Ashinaga Foundation (あしなが育英会) – *representing orphans*

Ashinaga are a well established charity based in Japan who have been helping children who have lost parents for over 40 years. They have been involved in projects all over the world, especially in developing countries. After the Kobe earthquake in 1995 they built Rainbow House, a building with facilities and counseling for children who had lost parents.

<http://www.ashinaga.org/en/programs/rainbowhouses.html>

They now have a plan to build a similar Tohoku Rainbow House for children who have lost parents in the earthquake and tsunami in March 2011. Due to the geographical scale of this disaster they are planning one main center in Sendai and 3 satellite centers in other towns. Their initial fundraising was very successful and was used for making direct payments to the affected children. The new rainbow house will need additional fundraising to raise the estimated costs of US\$37 million. One of the most noteworthy aspects of this charity is that more than half of the people who work for them are “graduates” of the charity, having lost parents during childhood themselves.

Photo Restoration – *a great idea that can be expanded to all the affected areas*

On 24th June I travelled north to visit the All Hands base in Ofunato. They are an established organisation set up after the 2004 tsunami and based in the US; <http://hands.org/>

I wanted to meet a volunteer who had the idea of applying her professional job as a re-toucher to the damaged photos often found in the debris. I knew that cleaning photos was a big project in Ishinomaki but most photos would still be in a very bad condition. On 22nd June she started

contacting other professionals that she knew by email and by 27th June she had 80 professional re-touchers from all over the world offering to help. During the meeting I suggested we could liaise with the Ishinomaki photo cleaning centre via our new charity representative who I knew had done this work himself. As I write today they are preparing a proposal of what would be required to make this project extend to the whole of Tohoku. There were announcements on the radio about evacuees reclaiming photos before the end of July but once digital the need for a time limit is gone and the option to claim photos online (possibly by relatives in other areas) becomes possible. I cannot overstate how important these photos are for some people as it may literally be the only thing they have left to remember family members who have died.

Summary

I believe that almost all parties involved have wholly good intentions but there is a sense that the initial planning has not been reconsidered at any stage and new ideas are not being encouraged.

Collaboration between NPOs, evacuees, local residents and volunteers is very limited and potential volunteer resources are not being utilised well.

Most people talk about the need to get the evacuees and local residents directly involved in the recovery process but they feel isolated, concerned about the future, and not engaged in discussions about what that future should be.

While projects should move towards involving evacuees and local residents in a sustainable way, it is important to use outside resources as well, especially skilled volunteers where it can be beneficial.

The Continuing Work of Helping Hands for Japan;

- We will continue to help local NPOs, evacuees, residents and volunteers share ideas, work together and access funding in Japan and overseas.
- We will support key volunteers and help to bring more volunteers with various skills to the area. We will provide advice for potential volunteers and also cheap but sustainable support from staff based in Tokyo and Ishinomaki through a volunteer programme.
- We will support individuals and organisations who are representing evacuees especially proactive individuals who are evacuees themselves.
- We will continue to provide up to date information (such as this report) to help other organisations and individuals to provide support where possible.

Further images, videos and general information can be found here;

www.helpinghandsforjapan.org.uk

www.facebook.com/pages/Helping-Hands-For-Japan/200795169944140

<http://www.youtube.com/user/HelpingHandsForJapan>

Issues facing evacuees

– translation of an initial assesement by Yoshiyuki Matsumura,
Director of Ishinomaki Sports Recovery Centre (石巻スポーツ振興サポートセンター)

Community of Temporary Housing

Temporary housing

It is an artificial society which suddenly appeared as a consequence of the disaster.

The emergence of temporary housing could forever affect the lives of the residents in the surrounding areas.

There are many elderly households, the unemployed and low-income families among the residents of the temporary housing.

It is actually another form of evacuation center, only this time under the name of “temporary housing”..

Depending on the area, there may be as many as 10 to 300 different temporary homes in the given area.

The selection process for assignment of temporary housing was viaa random lottery draw, and as a result, people from all over the city have been amassed, the vast majority not being familiar with their new neighbors.

The need of community organization

The resident’s have not yet formed any sort of community or established any community leader. This is very important for them to have a representative that will be heard and included in planning discussions.

Despite the existence of common leisure areas, very few people use these areas, due to not knowing anyone around them.

For those who do use the areas, it’s very difficult to have an enjoyable conversation or make connections, due to the uncertainty of their future and the mood surrounding them. If there are disputes or problems in the area, there is no one to talk to go to, no community head or someone who might solve these problems or give advice.

As some residents start to be able to return to their original homes, the ones left behind are left with a feeling of “How long will I be in this place?”.

These factors leave the residents with very little options in terms of helping themselves or problem solving, and the assistance from the public sector or NPO’s is equally limited, as they are outsiders and not a part of this “community”.

The focus should be on getting people out of temporary housing, and not the current “how long can we afford to keep this temporary housing going” mindset,

The first step is establishing a real community, with community heads people can respect and follow. This will give people a sense of independence, and in turn, give them someone to rally behind, therefore giving them motivation to work.

The Establishing of Community Organization

Voluntary establishment by local residents.

Active encouragement by NPO or volunteers.

Visible support from official government including guideline community rules and regulations

Temporary Housing and the Society of Surrounding Area.

A link between temporary housing and existing council, or administrative district.

Planning and the implementation of PTA action. Community (Fellowship) events and collaboration work with people in the surrounding area.

Temporary Housing and the Support System

Support by theme - childcare, the elderly, people with special needs, the poor and needy (those who were homeless before the disaster).

Support by area - neighborhood association, administrative district, social welfare council, city and prefecture.

Support by service options - Welfare and healthcare services, Temporary stores, moving stores (selling daily goods such as bread, milk, toiletries etc).

Logistics - volunteers, NPO

Recovery of community bonds similar to that which the residents used to have before the disaster.

A sustainable community which remains even after residents return to their reconstructed homes.

The victim's independence and sharing an awareness of co-production and continuing it.

Development of support system for temporary housing resident by the local city's headquartered district, branch office district and general branch.

Support for establishing inter-community connections and assisting other communities to become more established.