

# EMPOWERING ELDERS FOR RESILIENCE IN NEPAL AND THE PHILIPPINES

Sharing Japanese experience to build resilience among the most vulnerable

## AT A GLANCE

**Countries** Nepal, Philippines

**Risks** Disproportionate impact of natural hazards on elders

**Area of Engagement** Building social resilience

Japanese communities' experience has been leveraged to strengthen community-led recovery, preparedness and longer-term resilience in developing countries, including Nepal and the Philippines.



Community members from Nepal learn how to make paper jewelry crafts from Ibasho-Japan members.

Photo Credit: Margaret Arnold/World Bank

## ELDERS AMONG MOST AT RISK FROM NATURAL HAZARDS

Elders, women, persons, with disabilities, and other marginalized groups can face higher risk to natural hazards and can have less access to relief and recovery resources. This was illustrated during Typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan), which struck the Philippines in 2013, and is considered the strongest typhoon ever to make landfall. According to estimates, 6,300 people were killed in the event, while 2.3 million people fell below the poverty line as a result of the disaster. Strikingly, the number of people affected aged 60 years or over was 1.27 million, or 8% of the total number of the affected. The three areas most severely affected by Yolanda, Eastern Visayas, Western Visayas and Central Visayas, have higher proportions of older people than the national average, which is 6%.

After the 2015 Nepal earthquake, HelpAge International reported that most of the residents in affected areas were older men and women, as many younger residents had migrated in search of work. Santoshi Rana of Bihani Social Venture, who was working with elder community members in Kathmandu, noticed that many efforts only engaged youth in relief and recovery activities. "Our elders were completely left out of the

equation and were treated as passive beneficiaries in need of care," Rana emphasized.

## STRENGTHENING RESILIENCE BY SHARING JAPANESE EXPERIENCE

Elder community members affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011 led recovery efforts and rebuilt social capital in their community. In Ofunato City, elders planned and built the Ibasho Café with their community, which serves as a hub to rebuild and strengthen the city's social fabric which was gravely affected by the disaster. Ibasho Café is an informal gathering place where the entire community has gathered and worked together to recover from the earthquake. All generations connect in the space, with children coming to read books in the English library, older people teaching young people how to make traditional foods, and younger people helping elders navigate computer software.

With elders actively engaged in the operation of Ibasho café, the space is building social capital and resilience, while at the same time changing people's mindsets about aging. The café runs as a sustainable business, and over time, it has

developed a noodle shop, organic farming, and farmers market to further support the operations and the livelihoods of community members.

Based on this experience, Ibasho Japan has promoted community-led recovery and resilience strengthening in Matatirtha, Nepal and Barangay Bagong Buhay, Ormoc, Philippines, where elders, women, and persons with disabilities play a leading role. Since March 2017, with the support of the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR) and the World Bank, the Ibasho team has worked directly with local elders both in Ormoc City and Matatirtha in order to enhance inclusive community resilience using the Ibasho approach.

Through a series of peer-to-peer exchanges and workshops, elders in Ofunato, Matatirtha and Ormoc have supported each other and shared their experience in building back better after major disasters and empowering each other to lead longer-term resilience strengthening in their own communities.



Participants of on site peer-to-peer learning visiting Ibasho farm and future construction site in the Philippines.

Photo Credit: © Ibasho

## RESULTS AND LESSONS LEARNED

### Elders have led the way to strengthened community resilience.

A study of the impact Ibasho has had on community members found that individuals who were part of Ibasho believe that they have more control over their environment than those who were not. As a result of that heightened self-efficacy, they felt more strongly that they could make their community a better place and they have initiated actions – establishing self-sustainable operation through the organic farm and

market, applying for grants, etc. – to ensure the sustainability of Ibasho as a community resource for all generations. They have also become more active in communal governance and undertaken activities to help fellow community members prepare for future hazard events. Through their work with Ibasho, they developed confidence to make an impact not only on their own communities but also on others in their countries and abroad.

Elders and community members set their own priorities and have designed the Ibasho activities in ways that respond directly to the distinct needs of each community. Outside experts act merely as facilitators to support local community members to create the community they want. This fostered Ibasho's solidarity and a shared sense of ownership among the elders who manage the activities. In Ormoc, elders demonstrated the knowledge and skills of farming and construction, and their community considered them active players in the recovery and reconstruction process.

### Community level peer-to-peer learning contributed to success.

Exchange visits were undertaken between the elders in Japan, Nepal and the Philippines. There was also a symposium at the Asian Development Bank in Manila which brought all three groups of elders together to share their experiences and lessons. Visiting each other's communities provided an opportunity for the elders to learn from each other on how to succeed and overcome challenges in implementing and maintaining the Ibasho program. For instance, when they visited Ormoc, elders from Japan and Nepal advised the Filipino elders on how to better prepare their soil via composting using leaves in the farm. They also taught them simple ways to build more resilient structures that could withstand strong winds.

Peer-to-peer learning traditionally focuses on governments. This project has demonstrated the critical value of peer-to-peer learning among communities, particularly those that have been through similar experiences. Community members have reported that they feel inspired, empowered, and connected to people that understand exactly what they have been through and what they can achieve. The bonds between the Matatirtha, Ormoc and Ofunato elders are strong, and they will continue to support each other.

*"We know we can overcome this disaster because we have now seen others do it. Everyone has something to contribute, including the elderly, and people with disabilities."*

Pancha Kumar Shrestha, community leader, Nepal