

CAPI Blog 1

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Knowledge and Accessibility



Watching a seismic tremor display at the Tokyo Rinkai Disaster Prevention Park

Last week I woke up at 3am to tsunami sirens. It was not the first time that I had heard Japanese emergency alarms; I had heard earthquake warnings in that past and I attended the annual Yokohama Disaster Drill two weeks ago but even having had those experiences there was something that bothered me with the tsunami sirens. They are spoken in fast Japanese and I wasn't even really sure that I understood the alarm right. Also there is a melody that plays when the alarm ends. I couldn't even believe that a short jingle could mean that it was the "end" that I actually got up out of bed to check if someone was at my door because it sounded more like a doorbell ringing than an alarm finishing. This may have been because of the fact that I was tired and it was 3am but I feel like there must be a more accessible way to release warning information in Japan considering the large number of foreign tourists who visit Japan every year as well as the many foreigners living in Japan who do not speak Japanese.

*A very active Mount
Aso in December 2013*



Earthquakes, typhoons, tsunami warnings, volcanic eruptions, and flooding, it has been quite an eventful first few weeks in Japan. Living in disaster prone Japan gives you a reality check, a reminder of just how little control you actually have in this world. What you can control though is your level of preparedness for future disasters, ways to mitigate risk and build resilience.



*Lost in the mountains of
Wakayama Prefecture*

Natural disasters are an everyday occurrence in Asia, by some reports there is on average 0.8 disasters a day in the region (IFRC and RCS). More than 75% of the world's volcanoes and 90% of the world's earthquakes are in Asia Pacific region (World Bank) and a week doesn't go by without someone reminding you in passing that Japan is in the ring of fire.

In addition to being the most disaster prone continent it is also the continent with the largest population at 4.1 billion (UN). Asian cities are also experiencing a large urban migration and it is estimated that there are at least 2 million

new urban residents every month in East Asia alone (World Bank). This means expanding urbanised areas without disaster risk reduction (DRR) initiatives. For a number of reasons building sustainably is seen as an inaccessibly luxury, which is a fair assumption because building sustainably comes with a hefty cost, a cost that most countries do not think they can afford and they don't even know where to start.

This continent alone is home to 60% of the world's hungry with more than 933 million living on 1.25\$ to 2\$ a day (UN). There has been a lot of research done on the relationship between disasters, income, and human capital and how one disruption can leave individuals in a poverty trap; Asia is the perfect case study (World Bank). How does one target these vulnerable groups, show them how to prepare for future disasters? Where do you even start?



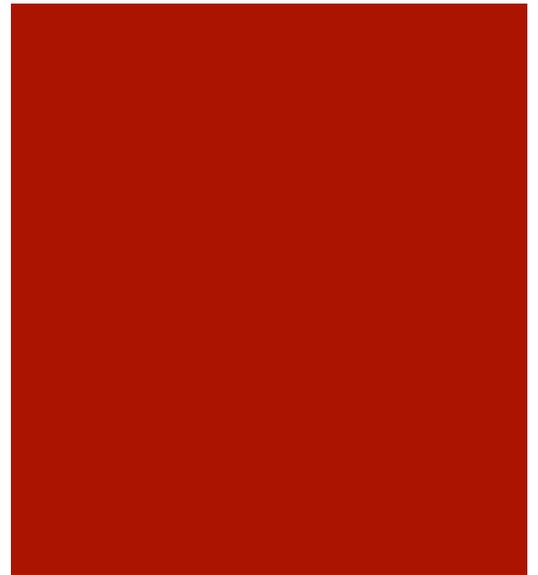
My balcony view over Yokohama and Tokyo Bay

The other day one of my friends asked me what has been the project that made me the most proud this past month. This was a hard question to answer and took me slightly off guard. I have had an amazing first month working for CITYNET in their Yokohama office. I learn something new everyday and my position here is opening my eyes to new dimensions of knowledge accessibility.

What I realised was that *that* was the answer to the question. There is not a single project that has made proud but instead the fact that I could say that I was working with CITYNET. The Yokohama office is the lead city in the CITYNET Disaster Cluster and most of my work this past month has been related to the disaster cluster programs. CITYNET works to target vulnerable groups on the local level, one of their on-going programs being the Community Based Adaption and Resilience Against Disasters (CBARAD), which is in its second phase. The program works in the local communities in Iloilo, the Philippines, to help create DRR initiatives and increase community involvement and awareness in disaster prevention. This has included establishing disaster education programs for children and creating emergency facilities that are equipped for people with disabilities.

At the beginning of September our office hosted the 8th CITYNET Disaster Cluster Seminar. Participants were from nine cities in Bangladesh, Nepal, and the Philippines. It is an event for networking and sharing of best practices. What I liked most about the itinerary is that in addition to having “in-class” seminar type activities there were also study visits to sites around the Yokohama area.

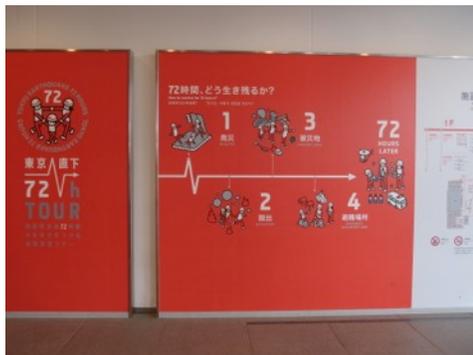
The DRR initiatives that were presented to participants were



The annual Yokohama Disaster Drill on September 6, 2015



Learning how to set up an emergency tap to access water during a disaster



Learning about how to survive for 72 hours at the Rinkai Disaster Prevention Park – exhibit material by Plus Arts



presented in a simple manner; in a way that localising them was attainable. My favourite presentation was by an organisation called Plus Arts that is based out of Kobe. The organisation has a disaster education program for children and other at-risk groups. The program is simple and easily localised which has led to its success in countries all around the world. The CITYNET Yokohama office has been working closely with them in Nepal and in the CBRAD project in the Philippines. One of my favourite things about the program is its philosophy that teaching disaster prevention education to children and creating awareness can be fun for both teachers and participants. The program is completed through games and activities. Their material is clean and simple, very visual and recognisable.

One of the study visits we took was to the Tokyo Rinkai Disaster Prevention Park. Here Plus Arts has worked to create a permanent exhibit to teach individuals how to survive for 72 hours after a disaster. There are arts and crafts like how to make plates and bowls out of newspaper and how to make emergency toilets, flashlights, and other essential items.

Plus Arts has also created a permanent exhibit in the mall across from my office building. By creating permanent exhibits in open public spaces the amount of new individuals they can reach out has no limit; the knowledge it provides is accessible.

In terms of DRR initiatives, it is great that the UN has worked to create DRR frameworks such as the Hyogo Framework

for Action and most recently the Sendai Framework for DRR but there are a lot of issues regarding the accessibility of their framework. It's one thing to provide organisations, governments, and various other stakeholders with long lists of investment recommendations but without providing them with clear ways of how to find the resources needed to introduce those DRR initiatives, that knowledge remains inaccessible. Accessible knowledge is key when it comes to DRR and it saves lives. As the Asia population continues to grow its urban spaces grow with it, climate change is affecting disaster strength and frequency, increasing vulnerability to disasters. Sometimes the most effective way to create change is to start at the local level. Target vulnerable groups; provide them with life saving knowledge that has been localised to their context. Show them learning can be fun and link communities together. Knowledge is power so why isn't the knowledge accessible.



Learning about Tsurumi River flood mitigation with their giant tapir mascot