

# Australian & Japanese Experiences & Challenges of Emergency Management Volunteers



Keio University



**Akhilesh Surjan**

**Charles Darwin University, Australia**

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# Neither Disasters nor Volunteers 'know no borders'

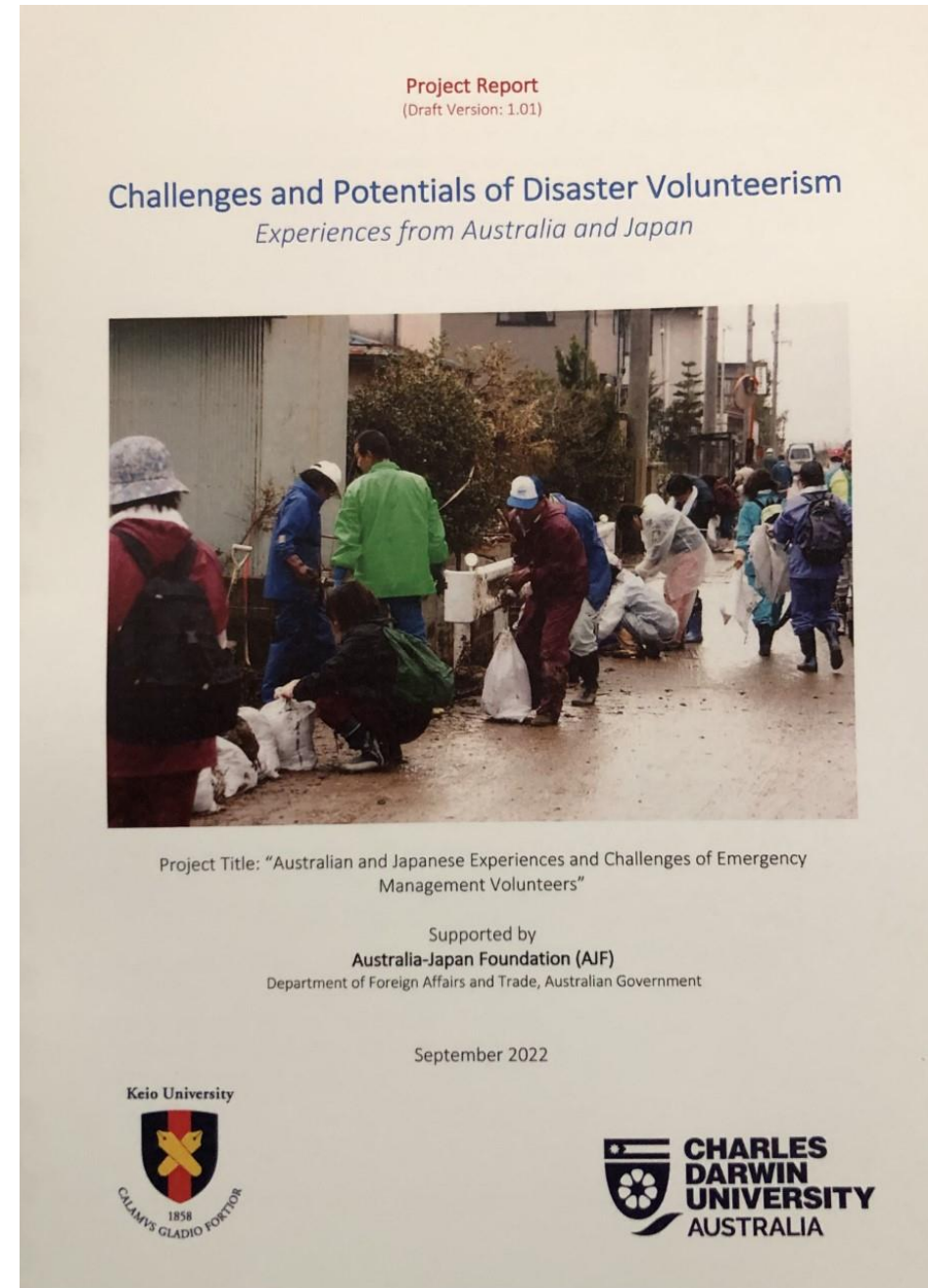
Disaster Volunteers come from various walks of life, from all age groups and gender and serve .....

- their own community
- neighbourhood
- Village / town / city
- also go to other cities or states within their country
- or even cross oceans to help disaster affected people in other countries, internationally!



# This Australia-Japan Foundation supported project is an attempt to:

- capture experiences and challenges of volunteers in these two countries – Australia and Japan
- identify areas of mutual learning, and
- find new ways of enhancing quantitative and qualitative base of and for sustainable volunteering in pre & post disaster settings.



# Japan: Vital role of Volunteers

- Japan possesses unique experience of managing large number of *'Spontaneous Volunteers'*.
- Japanese NGO/NPO's and local governments play a key role in managing various tasks performed by volunteers.
- Training to disaster volunteers is mostly offered *'on-site'* by *'Experienced Volunteer Leaders'*.
- Most of disaster volunteering peaks immediately after the disaster, continue for few months, and gradually volunteer number go down (*episodic style* of volunteering)
- **Formal** / long-term volunteering is rather uncommon in Japan, barring few exceptions.

# Australia: Vital role of Volunteers

- Australian emergency management system predominantly consists of '*Formal Volunteers*', having long-term association and high-commitment.
- Significant resources deployed in regularly *recruiting, training and retaining volunteers*.
- Growing concern about declining emergency service 'formal' volunteers. 421,000 (in 2010) to 233,000 (in 2021)
- Alternative form of volunteering (digital, episodic, private sector, skill-based, etc) is increasing but yet to be mainstreamed. It is mostly happening in post disaster phase.

**Volunteers are  
'beacon of hope'**



.....be it Japan





.....or Australia





# Disaster Resilience calls for Expanding Volunteering base (i)

- **Invent new language and create new messages** - to encourage and inspire more people for volunteering
- **Identify existing entities where future volunteers** can be nurtured - such as schools and universities.
- Identify existing entities to augment **current volunteer** numbers - such as retired people, corporates, resident associations and CBOs.
- Find **new entry points** in a society which is rapidly becoming diverse: multicultural associations, hobby and sports clubs, religious/worship centres where people congregate, interact and also volunteer for a cause.
- **Volunteering is fundamental** for realizing vision of 'Community Based DRR'.

# Disaster Resilience calls for Expanding Volunteering base (ii)

- **Nurture inclusive volunteering:** people with different abilities, First Nations People, Newly arrived migrants, Gen-X who communicates more in digital/virtual world!
- **Localization of Volunteering:** Disaster/Emergency Management Plans exist, but communities need handholding to understand do's and don'ts, preparing emergency kits, conducting neighbourhood level mock drill, etc.
- **Volunteering provides 'purpose in life':** a great way to build 'social and emotional well being', reduce cost of mental health.
- **Australia and Japan invest in international volunteering** – enhance proportion of disaster/emergency volunteering to learn more from other cultures.

# Disaster Resilience calls for Expanding Volunteering base (iii)

- **Volunteering exist across Individualistic & Collectivist culture:** borders are getting blurred, islands of both types exist in same town/city - First Nations people and a great share of migrant communities have 'collectivist culture'.
- **Consider making 'volunteering' a compulsory activity:** it can turn the tide from 'reactive' to 'proactive' volunteering.
- **Make volunteering fashionable:** neighbourhood walks, town-watching, storey telling by elders and children too!; Celebrate Disaster Day/Week.
- **Volunteering can reduce complacency:** and bring realism (taps will never run dry, power outage will never happen, hospital will always be open to treat, ambulance is just a phone call away).



# Naka Ward of Yokohama population 140,000

## Getting to Know Your Neighbors Jichikai and Chonaikai (Neighborhood Associations in Local Communities)

Have you heard of *jichikai* or *chonaikai*? They are voluntary organizations of each community that work to link neighbors and promote the common good. There are more than 130 such organizations in Naka Ward.

Japanese people traditionally treasure neighborly relations as seen in the use of such words as *chien*, which means shared territorial bond. Although there is a tendency for that bond to weaken in large cities, this is not the case in Yokohama City, where local communities are active and smoothly connected to the local government.

We are aware that many foreign citizens are unsure whether they can join such organizations, think that the groups are exclusive to Japanese citizens, or are puzzled as to what they do because there is little information. Please do not worry because they are open to anybody living in the area regardless of nationality.

In Japanese society, people help and cooperate with each other in everyday life. Here, we will introduce examples of the annual activities of neighborhood associations.

### ● Cleaning the Neighborhood

This is an occasion to clean the neighborhood together. There is a saying in Japan, *muko sangen ryodonari*, meaning you should maintain close relationships with the three houses on the opposite side of the road and the two houses adjacent to yours. Because of this value, it is not rare for Japanese people to sweep the street in front of neighboring houses. In addition, neighborhood associations clean garbage stations and encourage the separation of garbage by type.



### ● Rice-Cake Pounding

This is a traditional winter event that takes place at the end of the year. Local elementary and junior high school students join to pound rice into sticky rice cakes. You can eat them on the spot by dipping them into bean jam or sweetened soy flour. Some communities distribute rice cakes to member households for such uses as New Year decoration.



### ● Anticrime Measures

Neighborhood associations take charge of maintaining anticrime lights, such as paying electricity bills and changing lightbulbs (excluding the lights along main roads, parks, and shopping streets).

Also, for the safety and comfort of the area, the associations engage in patrols to prevent crime. In winter, they also engage in patrols to prevent fires. You may have heard the tapping of wood as they call out, "Hino yojin" (be careful of fires).

### Examples of Annual Activities of Jichikai and Chonaikai

#### Spring

- Patrolling streets that children use to walk to school for traffic safety
- Cleaning the neighborhood
- Patrolling to prevent crime

#### Summer

- Radio gymnastic exercises
- Summer festival

#### Autumn

- Disaster prevention drill
- Celebrating the elderly
- Athletics meet
- Bus trip

#### Winter

- Christmas party
- Year-end patrol to prevent crime
- Rice-cake pounding
- Disaster prevention drill

#### Occasionally

- Group collection of resources
- Distribution of information from the local government (circular notices, etc.)
- Maintenance of anticrime lights

### ● Summer Festival

Neighbors get together to have fun and get to know each other more. Everyone from children to the elderly can enjoy the festival by, for example, eating pan-fried noodles, scooping goldfish, or playing with yo-yos. Some communities hold a bon dancing festival in mid-August.



### ● Disaster Prevention Drill



Close relationships with neighbors are important to survive disasters.

Communities hold a disaster prevention drill once a year to prepare for major earthquakes and other disasters. In the drill, residents of each community prepare to offer soup runs and learn first-aid skills. Some communities draw up local maps useful in times of emergency.

### How to Join a Neighborhood Association

Please contact the neighborhood association of your area or the Regional Promotion Division of Naka Ward.

**Inquiries:** Regional Promotion Division

Tel: 224-8131 (in Japanese)



## Volunteer Leadership Program

**Supports the local leadership capability of disaster resilience and emergency management volunteers amongst community organisations, not-for-profits, disaster relief organisations and local government.**

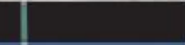


Australian Government

Department of Families,  
Housing, Community Services  
and Indigenous Affairs

# Spontaneous Volunteer Management Resource Kit

Helping to manage spontaneous  
volunteers in emergencies





# DRR is and will remain a 'Shared Responsibility'

Continuous, proactive and sustainable engagement of volunteers in preparedness and prevention (not just response and recovery) is key to the resilience.

For more information about "Australia-Japan Emergency Management Volunteers Project", please contact:

Akhilesh Surjan

Charles Darwin University, Australia

Email: [akhilesh.Surjan@cdu.edu.au](mailto:akhilesh.Surjan@cdu.edu.au)

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