EMPOWERING ELDERS THROUGH
COMMUNITY COALITIONS FOR RESILIENCE:

THE
Ibasho
APPROACH

"WRITE THE PLAY FIRST, THEN BUILD THE STAGE."

ibasho

Background

This case study documents three initiatives where local elders are working in partnership with Ibasho to improve community resilience. This report aims to demonstrate the value of coalitions and partnerships to help and empower elders to strengthen community resiliency to climate-related disasters and to prepare for global aging. The "Ibasho" approach helps strengthen the social capital of communities recovering from disaster events by giving community members of all ages and abilities a place where they can develop deeper connections with each other. These community hubs provide a platform for useful and relevant contributions to the community, and create an enabling environment for traditionally excluded groups, including elders, women, and persons with disabilities, by bolstering their resilience and agency. Successfully demonstrated in Ofunato, Japan after the Great East Japan earthquake (GEJE), Ibasho is a community driven initiative, owned and operated by elders who share their wisdom and experience with community members. Elders are thus empowered and included as an essential part of the design, construction, and operation of the community site.

With the simultaneous rise in the numbers of elders and natural disasters, societies worldwide are increasingly facing two critical questions: How can we care for unprecedented numbers of elders in our society, and how can we reduce the vulnerability of older populations during and after catastrophic natural disasters and epidemics? To respond to these societal challenges, we need both intelligent policy-making and practical solutions that emerge from citizen engagement. The Ibasho model enhances the capacities of local partners and elders to facilitate such ends.

In many societies, an aging population is often seen as a burden, and older people are treated as liabilities - a vulnerable population in need of care and support - especially in the wake of a disaster. Such a narrow interpretation of aging, however, overlooks the positive contributions elders can make to our society. In marginalizing older people, elders lose opportunities for interaction, the ability to contribute to society by sharing experiences, and young people lose the wisdom and talents that elders have to offer. Such knowledge and experience that can be particularly valuable when standard systems cease to function due to disruptions caused by natural disasters.

The Ibasho model first and foremost necessitates the identification of local partners from numerous entities, including community groups, local government, international NGOs, private sector, and research institutions. The Ibasho project in Ofunato, Japan was implemented via public and private partnership building after it was heavily damaged by a tsunami during the Great

East Japan Earthquake of 2011. During coalition building and needs assessment interviews conducted 11 months after the Tsumani, it was found that older people wanted to do something to help the community recover. Participating partners worked with community elders to create an "Ibasho café"—a gathering place operated by elders who share their wisdom and experience with community members. Elders were an essential part of the design and construction of the café, aligning with Ibasho's participatory and community-driven approach to sustainability, resilience, and recovery.

Since the café was completed in June 2013, generations have connected in the space, with children coming to read books in the library, older people teaching young people how to make traditional foods, younger people helping elders navigate computer software, etc. To sustain the operation, elders operate a child day care center and a noodle shop, and sell food they grow at their farmers' market. In their first three years of operation, they organized approximately 500 events and welcomed more than 18,000 visitors.

Ibasho Ofunato, Japan hosts an array of daily activities, including sushi-making (below) and intergenerational story-telling (next page).

Children in Oromoc, Philippines help to harvest and cook vegetables from the Ibasho garden after school.

Since the inauguration of Ibasho Japan, the Ibasho model has been successfully replicated in the Philippines, and will soon launch in Nepal. Barangay Bagong Buhay, Ormoc province, Philippines has a population of 6,361, and was heavily affected by Typhoon Haiyan in 2013. The typhoon caused extensive damage to many homes in the community, a large majority of which are still unrepaired. Due to limited income and scarce job prospects for elders in the community, the elder members of the community expressed pressing needs around livelihood activities that target their age group, as well as a desire to improve the local environment, and improve nutrition and health of local schoolchildren.

Similarly, in Kathmandu, Nepal, the 7.8 magnitude earthquake of April 2015 caused massive destruction, affecting more than 8,000 people. Elders and persons with disabilities (PWD) were among the most negatively affected, both physically and mentally. The village of Matatirtha, in Kathmandu District in the Bagmati Zone of central Nepal, was recently selected as the Ibasho Nepal site. Community members identified similar needs regarding sustainable livelihood projects, as well as the need for improved farming practices, nutrition, hygiene, and broader social roles for women.

The village of Matatirtha, Nepal

Women in Matatirtha work to build an irrigation system.

Coalition building in the Ibasho model

The Ibasho approach necessitates strong partnerships with local actors and stakeholders in order to achieve project objectives, including but not limited to local governments, researchers, technical experts, social and entrepreneurial organizations, and community elders, women, and youth. Factors that galvanize common interest within the coalition often include a strong community-based focus, moral alignment with the desire to empower marginalized populations (particularly elders), and timing with regard to organizational capacity and identified community need *(catalysts)*.

The Ibasho approach is a bottom-up approach, with elders and community members identifying priorities and needs, which can evolve over time based on mid-course reassessment. Throughout the process, elders are included and encouraged to take a leadership role to work with the members of the coalition in order to apply knowledge effectively in their communities. Although the Ibasho team and implementing partners share common goals with regard to effective translation and implementation, the goals of the team are often shaped by the goals of each community *(prioritization)*.

During the early phases of translation, a community-needs assessment is conducted to identify unique needs of each community in order to foster successful adoption of the Ibasho approach to community resilience. This is one of the most vital activities that occur early on in the process as it establishes clarity on member roles and engagement. Technical experts and local partners are identified at this point, and memorandums of understanding (MOUs) are issued in order to define scope of work and expected roles *(Management)*.

Identified experts then assist with technical aspects of implementation, including the development of culturally appropriate designs and the construction of resilient community infrastructure that can withstand future natural hazards, research tool development, pilot testing and data collection, and capacity building workshops. Both local and non-local coalition members meet quarterly at the selected Ibasho sites during the beginning phases of implementation in order to monitor the translation process and assess on-going needs of local stakeholders *(Information Flow)*.

Once into the operational and monitoring phase of implementation, coalition partners may evolve and in-country team meetings occur bi-annually in order to assess midcourse impact of and project progress via research tools developed as part of the implementation tool-kit *(sustainability)*.

The strength of the Ibasho approach lies in the fluid nature of the coalitions. Coalition members can be both permanent and fluid depending on the phase of implementation, but altogether provide several key technical aspects of the Ibasho approach:

- First-hand knowledge of local community and culture.
- Capacity to troubleshoot as needed, with guidance from the Ibasho Organization team.
- Knowledge and experience creating community resilience during recovery from natural disasters.
- Disaster policy expertise.
- Development of community-driven evacuation maps.
- Technical expertise for disaster-resilient design.
- Post disaster construction and participatory design with community members
- Program evaluation and research (social capital and ethnographic).

ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS WITH TECHNICAL SKILLS

ARCHITECTURE/DESIGN

LOCAL COORDINATION/
PROJECT MANAGEMENT

CONSTRUCTION/
RETROFITTING

EVACUATION MAPPING

LOCAL
MUNICIPALITIES

IBASHO

**IBASHO PROJECT
ESTABLISHED BY COMMUNITY**

**LOCAL
PARTNER**

LOCAL COMMUNITY GROUPS AND ORGANIZATIONS

WOMEN'S GROUPS/
YOUTH GROUPS

SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS
FOR ELDERLY

SCHOOLS

LOCAL NGOs

RESEARCH

**FUNDING
SOURCES**

Example of fluid coalition model in the Ibasho approach. The model can be
adjusted depending on context and community to address identified goals.
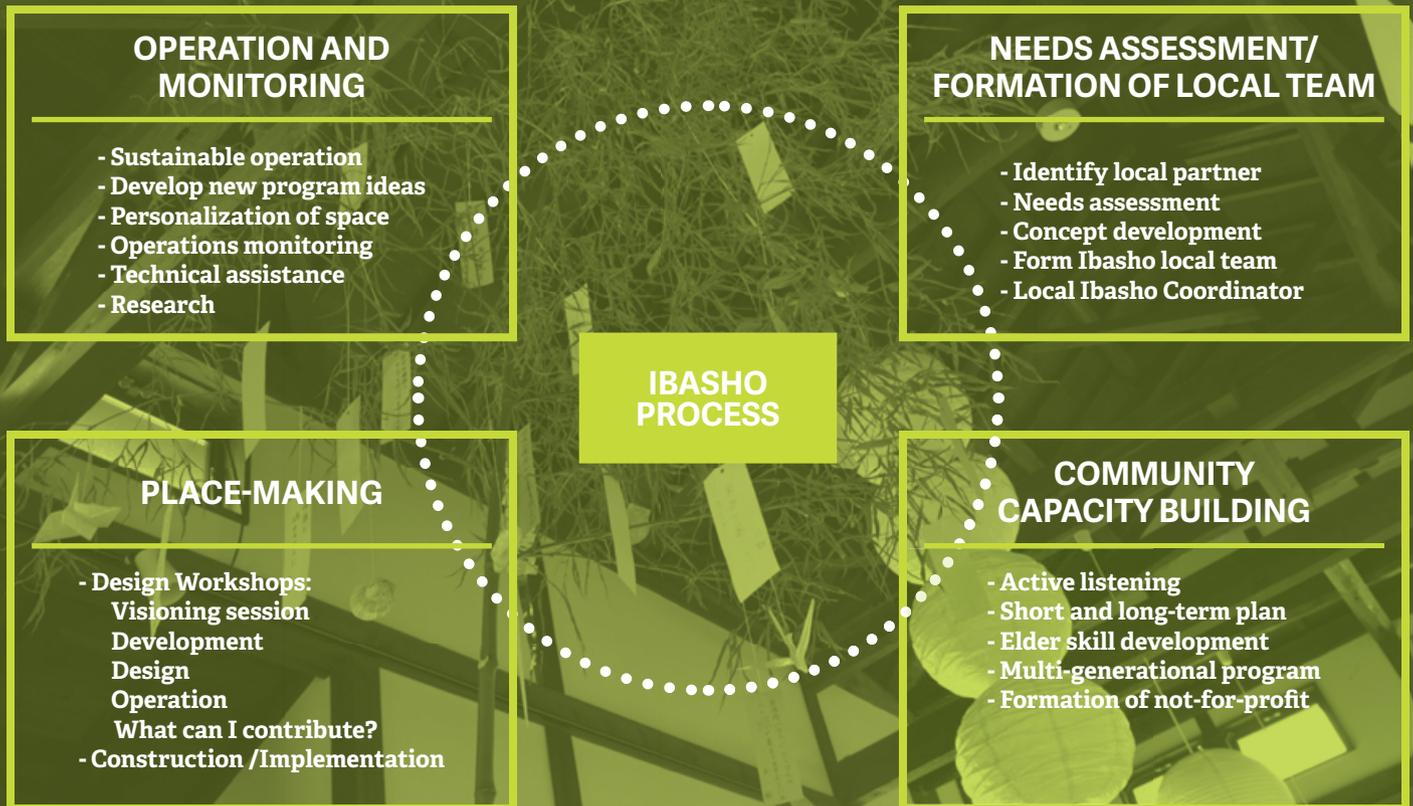
Implementation

There are four primary elements/phases of implementation within the Ibasho approach: (1) Community needs assessment, (2) Capacity building (3) Place-making, and (4) On-going monitoring, research, and programming. First, the community needs assessment phase serves to identify a local implementing partner, identify potential communities for Ibasho implementation, and to begin concept development with the local Ibasho coalition members. Since Ibasho subscribes to a community-driven approach, local organizations/implementing partners are asked to identify 5-7 local communities who fit the Ibasho criteria for implementation. The criteria include:

1. The need to engage community elders due to social isolation and lack of livelihood activities;
2. Solid leadership within the community;
3. Strong motivation among community elders for improving their communities;
4. The potential to engage community members from different age groups;
5. Support from existing local organizations that understand and embrace the Ibasho approach, and
6. Communities that are not currently receiving significant support from additional international organizations, donors, or NGOs.

The Ibasho team, along with the selected local implementing partner, then visits with the potential communities to discuss their interest in implementing Ibasho, and gauge the potential for successful replication given the aforementioned criteria.

It is important to note the fluid nature of the coalition members. Members come and go throughout the translation of the project depending on evolving needs and goals. Next, the capacity building phase consists of initial meetings with potential stakeholders. Community leaders, organizations, and individuals come together to listen to one another's ideas and work on community-building activities. Next, the place-making phase consists of a series of "visioning workshops" with selected local stakeholders. Here is where the Ibasho model is adapted to fit the needs and goals of each community. Community needs, skill sets, and goals are all identified and ultimately both short and long-term plans are agreed upon to move forward with implementation. Lastly, on-going operations and monitoring involves the sustainable implementation of the unique Ibasho project within the community. With on-going technical support from the Ibasho team leaders, the local implementing partner assists the community stakeholders with implementation and evolution of program ideas and goals.

OPERATION AND MONITORING

- Sustainable operation
- Develop new program ideas
- Personalization of space
- Operations monitoring
- Technical assistance
- Research

NEEDS ASSESSMENT/ FORMATION OF LOCAL TEAM

- Identify local partner
- Needs assessment
- Concept development
- Form Ibasho local team
- Local Ibasho Coordinator

IBASHO PROCESS

PLACE-MAKING

- Design Workshops:
    Visioning session
    Development
    Design
    Operation
    What can I contribute?
- Construction /Implementation

COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING

- Active listening
- Short and long-term plan
- Elder skill development
- Multi-generational program
- Formation of not-for-profit

Tools/Mechanisms for Implementation

The Ibasho approach employs several tools and mechanisms that provide structure and fidelity to the translation and implementation process, as well as unify diverse aspects of the coalition. These tools allow for engagement of partners and stakeholder and should not be seen as prescriptive, rather mechanisms to support the process in diverse settings and contexts. The tools include the following:

WORKSHOP GUIDELINES

As part of phase 3 of Ibasho implementation, *Place-Making,* a series of "visioning workshops" with selected local stakeholders are conducted.

Activities conducted during the vision workshops typically include the following:

1. Meeting with local implementing partners to discuss implementation plans;

2. Identifying local leaders in order to communicate the Ibasho approach for potential replication in the selected location;

3. Convening a series of workshops with local stakeholders, including elders, children, women, and persons with disabilities to (1) discuss the current role of elders in the community, (2) discuss the role of youth and women, (3) to identify the most pressing issues faced by the community, and (3) to identify local capacities within the community; and

4. Deciding on several potential community-based projects that will address identified needs and goals of the community.

Visioning workshop activity in Philippines

Visioning workshop in Nepal

'Ibasho' is a place where you feel at home being yourself.

COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH GUIDELINES

Evaluating the impact of Ibasho at the quantitative level:

Social capital

- Develop questionnaire with local community members and university-level researchers
- Pilot test research tools (with local dialect)
- Recruit and train enumerators from the local community, including local college students and young professionals
- Data collection
- Modify the instrument based on the feedback from enumerators
- Review of the instrument by local elders

Enumerator training conducted by research coalition members in Kathmandu (left); Ibasho researchers and local translators pilot test the research tools with elders in English and Nepali (right)

Understanding the impact of the Ibasho approach at the qualitative level:

Ethnographic research and dissemination

- A researcher/local coordinator collects information about participants' everyday life and demographic information.
- Participant-level observations are obtained during Ibasho-sponsored activities, and field notes are recorded daily during the beginning phases of implementation.
- Progress reports are submitted to the Ibasho leadership team every 3 months, as well as shared with local stakeholders and community-members at large in order to learn from the field experiences of local staff and participants.
- Peer-reviewed publications, as well as visual materials (e.g. videos, pamphlets, storybooks, etc.), are developed to disseminate lessons learned from local communities with broader local and global audiences.

"Community is something that we have to negotiate and create with others, not something that we can passively receive."

EVACUATION MAPS

In collaboration with local municipalities and mapping experts, the evacuation mapping process serves to initiate a conversation among elders about how to make their communities more resilient through the map-making process. They are tasked with uncovering existing challenges and resources within their communities, a process that fosters a shared understanding of the issues faced by each community (e.g. emergency response, transportation, shopping access, etc.). It empowers elders to find their own solutions, take ownership of the process, and take action within their capacity to develop this new resource that will be a benefit to the community at large. Ultimately, the developed tools include General Evacuation Routes, Services Access Mapping (shopping, hospital, and services), Transportation Mapping, and Mobility/Action Mapping.

PEER- TO-PEER EXCHANGE PROGRAM

Ibasho currently implements a Peer-to-Peer exchange program between elders involved in Ibasho Japan and Philippines in the hopes that the experience will foster a global network of elders. This program has enhanced self-efficacy and facilitated cross-cultural friendships and support system among elders.

Left: Finalized evacuation map for Ofunto, Japan

Right: Evacuation mapping workshop, Ibasho Japan

During the peer-to-peer exchange program, Filipino elders visit Ibasho Ofunato, Japan to teach Japanese elders about Filipino cooking (top) and Japanes elders visit Ibasho Philippines to assist with the farming initiatve (bottom).

Sustainability and impact of Ibasho

A primary focus of the Ibasho approach is local capacity building. The team works with local partners to train community leaders on many aspects of implementation. This includes the application of implementation toolkits and research guidebooks currently under development. The trained community members serve as a valuable resource to train other communities looking to implement similar community hubs and livelihood projects using the Ibasho approach. Additionally, community members receive training from coalition partners on how to maintain and update evacuation maps in their local communities, use social media to advertise events, and how to identify and apply for funding sources. Overall, this approach builds the necessary capacity within the communities to foster sustainability and replicability well past the project implementation period.

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

The Ibasho project is a self-sustainable livelihood model that community elders can leverage to generate income from activities they select to engage in as a community. Operational funding from Ibasho or local governments is not usually provided. The exception to this is the earmark by the Congress of the Philippines to sponsor part of the local construction needs via state-funded aging program funds. Otherwise, seed funding is leveraged to develop necessary infrastructure and cover start-up costs, which include training and travel costs for both the Ibasho team and local implementing partner.

Several differences can be noted between the current Ibasho sites in terms of financial sustainability and start-up funding. Infrastructure costs and land needs have been secured through private donors, grant money, and volunteer construction work (Ibasho Japan), as well as through large scale fundraising events in both the United States and abroad (Ibasho Philippines). Funding from the World Bank was secured to both strengthen the use of technical experts within the global Ibasho coalition, and to coordinate the peer-to-peer learning program among elders from Japan, Philippines and Nepal. As part of the technical assistance strengthening aspect of the funding, an existing building in Nepal will be retrofitted to be earthquake resistant by a team of experts in both Nepal and Japan.

Overall, the Ibasho approach functions regardless of community, culture, or country-level context, primarily due to the fact that Ibasho is based on a set of principles, rather than prescriptive implementation instructions. More specifically, the 8 guiding principles of the Ibasho approach are:

1. Older people are a valuable asset to the community (elder wisdom): In modern society, the elderly are often considered to be a burden and people who need care and looked after. However, the elders' wealth of wisdom is something to be valued and treasured. Ibasho believes in a society where the elderly can contribute to the society with confidence and are leaned on and valued.

2. Creating informal gathering places (normalcy): Living with strict rules and schedules are confining and limiting. Ibasho believes in places of normalcy where elders can pop in at any time at their leisure.

3. Community members drive development and implementation (community ownership): Ibasho believes in each member of the community to share a sense of ownership and pride of its place. It is not something that is created for them but it is created with them.

4. All generations are involved in the community (multi-generational): Connecting within one's own generation is easy and comfortable but why stop there? Ibasho believes in a place where the young learn from the richly lived lives of the elderly and the elderly learn from the young's ability to pick up new things quickly.

5. All residents participate in normal community life (de-marginalization): A cross section of a community includes the young, elderly, disabled, family rearing, care taking and even the socially disconnected. Ibasho is a place to not to worry about what one "cannot" do but rather what one "can" do.

6. Local culture and traditions are respected (culturally appropriate): Each community has its own history and culture. Perhaps it is not something you can quite put your finger on. Ibasho is where one can discover and reflect on the treasures of the community.

7. Communities are environmentally, economically, and socially sustainable (resilience): Ibasho is a place where we strive for the environment, economy and the people to be in harmony. Ibasho will protect the nature that brings bounty to life, be economically self-sufficient, and cherish the connections between each individual. How special it will be if those connections forge beyond the boundary of the community or even beyond its own country.

8. Growth of the community is organic and embraces imperfection gracefully (embracing imperfection): Ibasho does not strive for immediate perfection. It is adaptive and flexible in working with life, as life is forever changing. Each community has its own path to balance and perfection. Ibasho believes in the possibility of change. With time, with people, Ibasho will gently embrace imperfection.

As noted, there are many unifying factors that facilitate the adoption of the Ibasho model, all of which have serious economic and social implications if left unaddressed. These factors include urbanization, migration, the increase in natural disasters and epidemics, the impact of "global aging" and a shortage of caregivers, inadequate physical infrastructure to support an aging population, shortage of proper housing, prohibitive expense of long-term care, social isolation amongst the elderly and PWD, increasing prevalence of dementia, and poverty.

Due to the aforementioned factors, particularly migration, urbanization, and aging of communities in many low- and middle-income countries, traditional family support for elders has slowly been changing. Among some of the key problems faced in the target communities is migration of men who seek employment, and lack of livelihood activities for elders and women, which become much more pronounced after natural disasters strike.

For these reasons, the Ibasho model largely revolves around self-sustaining activities spearheaded by local elders and women's groups. These activities have an impact at many levels, including both the community-level and individual-level. Communities that implement Ibasho have a platform to retain, sustain, and honor older citizens; provide a social hub and new community resources; stimulate economic growth and job creation; and promote environmental stewardship. Elders are provided with opportunities for integrated, meaningful, purposeful lives, as well as a venue to mentor and support younger generations. Youth can similarly benefit from the wisdom of older generations, as well as from feeling like they too have a voice in the programs and activities that are implemented as part of Ibasho.

Lessons Learned

Ibasho serves as an example of engaging elders to improve the physical and social infrastructures of their neighborhoods and community, in order to better accommodate community and elders' needs. The Ibasho model empowers elders as change agents, providing a platform for useful and relevant contribution to the community. It also strengthens the community, drawing on a typically under-utilized pool of knowledge, experience, and volunteer work that contributes to the resilience of a community in the event and aftermath of a disaster or epidemic.

There are several factors that contribute to the overall success of Ibasho. These include:

- Identification of strong local implementing partners with the capacity to oversee operations and troubleshoot as necessary;
- Careful selection of each community (ideally a community with strong leadership, vision, and desire to implement an Ibasho site);
- Flexibility with regard to identifizcation of coalition members and experts throughout the iterative implementation and operational process;
- Creative and thoughtful identification of community gatekeepers within each unique culture and setting; and
- The establishment of sustainable and community-driven livelihood-projects.

More broadly, an initiative like Ibasho will help to ultimately strengthen inclusive community resilience, which is beneficial not only for disaster risk management but also for building capacity to support the growing elderly population. Such elder-led community driven initiatives are particularly important in developing countries where financial resources are limited and services for elderly are not yet well established.

Acknowledgments

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