

The Recovery and Reconstruction Stage

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LESSON 5

## Giving Women a Voice in Reconstruction

Jusanhama is a fishing village on the coast of Miyagi Prefecture that was destroyed by the 3/11 tsunami. After the disaster, it was decided to rebuild on safer ground, and discussions began toward forming a consensus among village residents. So in October, seven months after the tsunami, a coalition of volunteers – including academics, NPOs and the Architectural Association of Japan – traveled to Jusanhama to hold workshop-style events and exchange views with residents.

By tradition in a village like this, all major decisions are made by the local patriarchs – so that was what people were expecting. But having studied similar reconstruction efforts, officials from the local municipality – Kitakami Ward of Ishinomaki City – recognized the importance of giving women a voice. So they held a women-only meeting in November.

Out of the shadow of the local men, the women spoke frankly of their anxieties over the move to higher ground and their fears about the cost of it all. Gradually, their familiarity with the surroundings and everyday family needs led them to provide very detailed criteria for reconstruction – things like how sidewalks should be gently inclined to make them accessible to seniors.

Plan for a new, safer village informed by the voices of local women.

