

# Learning *together* for the community

Key concepts and values from project leaders' viewpoints



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# People-led Learning and Community Development through *Kominkan* Mechanism



Matsumoto City Education Board Mr. HIRABAYASHI Yusuke

Background	
<b>Overview</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>① Community development based on resident-led learning at the small community level such as autonomous town councils and community halls (<i>kominkan</i>), which characterises Matsumoto City</li> <li>② A positive cycle of learning and practice, where resident autonomy is strengthened through learning and practice, which in turn are enriched as resident autonomy increases.</li> </ul>
<b>History</b>	<p>In Nagano Prefecture, including Matsumoto City, concrete activities and initiatives were born during the post-war reconstruction period based on resident-led learning in a wide range of fields related to daily life, such as industrial promotion, welfare, and sanitation. <i>Kominkans</i> were the base for this "learning and practice" in the community, and its directors and staff (both are local government officials) have been leading community building initiatives as coordinators. (In the case of autonomous <i>kominkans</i>, residents hold these positions.)</p> <p>On the other hand, engaging in learning and practice together with residents itself has stimulated staff development, enabling policy formulation rooted in people's daily lives.</p>
<b>Broadly defined learning</b>	<p>The term "learning" here refers not only to learning and educational activities to acquire knowledge, but also to the process of discussion, analysis, and action by diverse residents. The entire process of self-governing activities, in which local residents deepen mutual understanding, foster solidarity and cooperation, come to terms with different opinions and put into practice as a community or association can be interpreted as learning in a broad sense.</p> <p>The <i>kominkan</i> arrangement and its staffing in all 35 districts comprising former municipality are also the result of residents' movement against the city's policy to merge districts. And it is also the foundation of our current community development system.</p>
<b>Learning to turn diversity into strength</b>	<p>Unlike an association or theme-based community, a local community is home to a diverse population. In order to overcome today's social issues, which are difficult to foresee, it is important for us to recognize and transform our differences into a strength rather than closing our eyes to things we do not understand about each other and working together solely on things of common interests. Resident-led learning is an important process for recognizing and transforming our differences into strength.</p>

Let's start  
with the idea

### Informal learning and dialogue

(Drinking and tea parties/chatting/calling out for participation/actively enjoying and having fun)

In Matsumoto City, people always get together for drinking and tea parties after local meetings and events. While community development tends to be dominated by sectionalism and projects fragmented by sector, learning and dialogue based on openness, creativity and imagination in informal settings allow us to reconfigure it into initiatives that encompass a variety of fields and are rooted in the daily lives of the community people.

Openness

#### A place where you can express your true feelings and concerns as an individual

At meetings and events, participants speak on behalf of the organizations to which they belong such as town councils and community groups, taking into consideration the collective will of the group. On the other hand, in a place for informal conversation such as a drinking party or a tea party, people speak as individuals without titles and often reveal their true feelings. In addition, while meetings are attended only by the board members, informal gatherings provide a space where residents from diverse backgrounds can casually discuss issues in an equal relationship. This "openness" will lead to increased mutual trust.

Creativity

#### A place for free discussion and ideas based on one's daily life, without setting goals or destinations

Diverse statements and opinions, which do not come out in meetings with clear agendas and positions, are often generated in informal settings. We believe there are four reasons.

- 1) One can think and act actively and proactively for things that excite and interest them.
- 2) People make decisions with hesitation and sometimes live with regret. In informal settings, where one can speak as individuals, there is room for hesitation making it easier for people to speak freely.
- 3) Naturally, people's daily lives span across various sectors such as welfare, environment, labour, leisure, etc. Free discussions based on individual interests and concerns allow us to think in terms of our everyday lives in which various sectors are multilayered and interrelated, and generate free-minded ideas.
- 4) One can think and voice their opinions while reflecting on the activities and discussion at meetings and events.

Imagination

#### A place for discussion where one can embrace diversity

When you speak on behalf of a group, you are expected to make a clear statement. However, as an individual, you can freely speak out what is not necessarily "for/against" or "black/white," and express your concern and understanding for both sides of the opinions. It is with this mind of embracing diversity within yourself that you can be tolerant of differences with others and be considerate of other communities, the past and future, as well as others with different positions. Therefore I believe that informal learning makes it possible for us to communicate with a broader perspective in regard to space, time and individual differences.

I also think it is important for the local government staff to be involved in these learning opportunities, to think about the community and daily lives of the residents together, and to support resident-led community development. By participating in both formal (official meetings and events) and informal (drinking/tea parties, chit-chatting in the lobby, engaging as a citizen rather than as a government official) occasions, we are able to understand the true feelings of the residents.

In community development, there is rarely a right answer that everyone can agree on, and there are often times when we have no choice but to choose the next best solution and come to terms with it. By building a relationship based on mutual trust among and between residents and government officials, we can reach a compromise, which is difficult but important in community development, and put it into concrete actions and practices rather than ending with discussions only.

In addition, ideas and plans that are born from informal learning opportunities are easy to take on as a challenge and can be changed flexibly. This is because they are easy to put into practice by simply letting whoever is interested to join, without involving consensus building in the community. The advantages of



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such ideas and plans are that the voices of the vulnerable which tend to be overlooked in formal processes can be incorporated and that they are highly feasible. I believe that experimenting in this way can bring creativity and diversity into formal activities such as those of community associations.

For example...

In one of the residential areas, there is a pedestrian space called Matsubara Mall with a stream running through it. However, with the declining birthrate, ageing population and motorization, the number of people visiting the area has declined and maintenance activities such as weeding and sweeping had become a burden.

At a meeting of the district board, the chairman of the Environment and Health Council proposed spraying herbicides. Since the Matsubara Mall was administratively regarded as a road and the majority of the residents were in favour of reducing the burden, it was decided that herbicides be used.

Later, a mother of a toddler who visited a community welfare centre expressed how she actually felt about the plan -that the children in the community played in the stream, infants of neighbourhood nursery schools went there for field trips, and that the mother herself had memories of playing there as a small child, so she wished the Matsubara Mall continue to be a place where they could spend their time in peace.

A *kominkan* manager, who happened to be present, consulted with the board members. The mother's concern was taken seriously and this eventually led to the implementation of cleaning activities as well as the organization of a music concert at the Matsubara Mall, supported by volunteers and *kominkan* staff.

As these activities were carried on, the local government realized that the Matsubara Mall was a place that many residents cared about, and they evolved into a community event supported by the district community association.

## Tools and methodology

When we think about certain matters or implement activities, it is important to ensure that there are opportunities for both learning based on one's official position and learning as an individual. Of course, "learning" here means learning in a broad sense.

### ① Build relationships among the members participating in the meeting

In order to think broadly about a certain matter from the perspective of bettering our daily lives, it is effective to organize learning opportunities such as casual meetings at a salon or cafe where people can state opinions and discuss with ease without any predetermined goals and nurture common and mutual understanding regardless of one's position.

### ② Develop feasible plans and make decisions through meetings with goals and objectives

While informal discussions as described in 1) allows for creativity and imagination, it is often difficult to connect it to concrete action and activity. Democratic and feasible planning, decision-making and implementation that ensure creativity and imagination are possible when the implementing body is composed of and is institutionalized by members who have gone through the informal process of 1).

By reiterating 1) and 2), we can create initiatives that meet the needs of the community and those of the people's daily lives without being bound by preconceived ideas. In addition, many residents will be convinced and willing to participate in these efforts.



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For more information on the mechanism and process of collaboration →



# Human Resource and Community Development through Environmental Learning



Mizushima Foundation Ms. FUJIWARA Sonoko

## Background

Located at the mouth of the Takahashi River basin, one of the three major rivers in Okayama Prefecture and facing the Seto Inland Sea, lies Mizushima, Kurashiki City. This is where a vast petrochemical complex was built as part of regional development and where a court case was fought. With a portion of the settlement money from the Kurashiki Pollution Lawsuit, which was settled in 1996, patients and their supporters established the Mizushima Community Environmental Restoration Foundation (Mizushima Foundation) in 2000 to create a community for environmental restoration.

In 2013, the Mizushima Foundation launched the Council for Human Resource Development and Community Building through Environmental Learning so that people from diverse backgrounds can work together and take charge of community development through environmental learning as a starting point.

The Council members broadly viewed their environmental learning activities as learning practices to open up a vibrant future for the community. This viewpoint was essential in order to bring the diverse entities in the Mizushima region to work together. We have created diverse learning opportunities for the locals, young people, and visitors from outside the area by connecting various learning resources.

Through a series of discussions, we proposed to the local community the vision of Mizushima as "Mizushima: where its rich nature, history, healthy lifestyle, and vibrant industry nurture the world's best city for environmental learning." As a result, three working groups were set up: the Environmental Learning Promotion WG, the Corporate Citizen WG, and the Community Exchange WG, and each group was responsible for creating educational materials, a communication platform, as well as promoting various learning initiatives such as the Mizushima Studies classes.

In March 2018, the Mizushima Stay-based Environmental Learning Consortium was newly launched by realigning the Corporate Citizen WG. To scale up the initiatives, we requested the planning department of Kurashiki City to join the consortium, strengthened our partnership with local companies, and welcomed the chairman of a local company to chair the consortium. The fact that Kurashiki City needed to embody the Kurashiki Declaration, adopted at the G7 Kurashiki Education Ministers' Meeting in May 2016, as well as the launch of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030 also facilitated this process.

Kurashiki City was selected as an SDGs Future City in July 2020. Collaboration with different communities along the Takahashi River is emphasized and the consortium's initiative is also included as one of its specific activities. In addition, the consortium was selected as one of the ten excellent initiatives and awarded the Okayama SDGs Award.

## Strategy of collaboration #1

Let's start with the idea

**"We can work together in this area." What are the common thoughts of the members?**

After sharing objectives, it is essential to look for areas where everyone can feel comfortable collaborating. In the case of Mizushima, we found that people had two common feelings: "We want to make Mizushima a good community" and "We want to support children's learning." Building upon these common feelings, we repeated implementing specific environmental learning activities and sharing the results. We believe that the accumulation of such experiences -planning and implementing exciting and fun activities and sharing the joy of children's growth and achievements- has led to building a relationship based on trust.

For example...

To develop a "merely knowing the person's face" type of relationship into a more dynamic one, we first created the Council as a table of communication. Even though we share a community, our views and values differ depending on our positions. As we proceeded with our discussions, we noticed the differences and were sometimes surprised. I think it is necessary to recognize the differences and to value what the other party values in the collaboration.

### Tools and methodology

In order to share our thoughts on the community, we organized a workshop to write down the following three points on paper.

- 1) Three things I like about XXX (name of the community).
- 2) The value of XXX (name of the community) in my eyes.
- 3) Things I expect from this Council.

In the course of discussions, it was felt that there was a slight discrepancy in the understanding of the Council's direction and initiatives, as people from various standpoints such as local residents, businesses, government, and educational and research institutions were involved. As a result, there grew a difference in awareness between members who wanted to clarify roles and responsibilities and to proceed in a speedy manner and those who wanted to put more importance on their own initiatives.

Therefore, we thought it was important to express in words and confirm in writing what we could agree on at the sixth meeting of the Council. Learning from other examples of collaboration, we were able to propose in writing a platform that even organizations with different fundamental principles could ride on and reached an agreement. We understood that the process of decision making differed depending on the person's position and learnt the importance of putting consensus in formal writing.

## Strategy of collaboration #2

Let's start with the idea

### Taking a broad view of the environment, learn from the past and acquire new knowledge

In order to discuss the future of the community and carry out activities, it is essential that everyone understands the importance of learning from the past. To move on from confrontation to sharing and trust, we tried to take a broad view of the concept of "environment" in our learning activities.

For example...

It is important to learn and accept that people in the same community may have different views and values depending on their positions. While learning about the past is important, there was a risk that our relationship and activities will become rigid once we referred directly to the pollution issues.

For this reason, we decided to view "environment" more broadly and define environmental learning as a learning practice to open up a vibrant future for the community. In this effort, we as a team have worked to create various learning opportunities for a wide range of people.

### Tools and methodology

More specifically, we worked on the following:

- Lectures on local history that do not focus solely on pollution
- Setting up a platform of mutual learning where a loose dialogue is nurtured
- Working together as supporters (lecturers and organizers) of the environmental learning model tour



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Let's start  
with the idea

### A loose and dynamic relationship that enables co-creation of values

Rather than a membership in which everyone is forced to participate and roles are clearly defined, we emphasized a loose partnership in which those who can do try to implement what they can while others support it. We created such an atmosphere that appreciates making flexible changes and a supportive relationship.

For  
example...

The Council has evolved and changed over the years. For example, one of the three working groups has evolved into the Mizushima Stay-based Environmental Learning Consortium.

Another example is when a *kominkan* director joined us as a new member, and we were able to organize joint learning activities on disaster prevention with a senior high school and local residents. In addition, we also expanded our linkages to a local junior high school, where the director used to serve as principal.

One of the latest developments is that the Mizushima Foundation is preparing to build a museum of environmental pollution where resource materials will be stored, organized, open to the public and utilized so that people can learn and study about the anti-pollution movement and how the issue was resolved. This is where the collaborative members are now loosely involved.

#### Tools and methodology

##### ◎ About letter of agreement

While it is important to clarify the roles and responsibilities in a written agreement to promote collaboration, we decided not to prepare a letter of agreement in order to ensure the participation and activities of diverse stakeholders. The reason for this was that we feared such a formal arrangement would become a hindrance.

Consequently, we were able to respond flexibly to the evolution of the structure, such as the establishment of working groups within the Council and the creation of the consortium, and, by leaving it to those who can take action, we succeeded in ensuring the accountability of each member and creating new values. However, after a few years, a member from the local government was replaced, and there were times when things did not go as well as before. It has become clear that there are situations in which the existence of a written agreement makes it easier for the government to take action, which remains an issue to this day.

##### ◎ Searching for new attractions of the community and sharing them with people

We are working steadily to create a museum of environmental pollution. As part of this effort, we launched a new project called "Mizushima Community Cafe" in search of new attractions in the Mizushima area, which is filled with various charms of modern Japan. We visit people and places of our interest and listen to their stories. Based on what we hear at the Mizushima Community Cafe, we edit and compile the information into a booklet of 16 pages titled "Mizushima Memories" and deliver it to the local community. Collaborative members are loosely involved, participating in events and offering cooperation in publicity.







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For a video presentation on the project ↓



For more information on the mechanism and process of collaboration ↓



## Oki-Dozen Education Miryokuka Project



Dozen Hometown Miryokuka Foundation Mr. SAWA Masaki

### Background

The vision of the Oki-Dozen Education Miryokuka\* Project is to create an attractive and sustainable school and community. In the Dozen District of the Oki Islands in Shimane Prefecture, comprised of three towns, namely, Nishinoshima, Ama, and Chibu, we have been aiming to contribute to the long-lasting happiness and affluence of island life through education. More specifically, with the project's objective of creating an attractive school and learning environment that students want to attend, parents wish to send their children to, the local community wants to utilize, and teachers and staff wish to be assigned to in mind, we aim to achieve the following:

- **Attractive school:** A school that creates and connects to the future
- **Attractive community:** Islands where people grow together, circulate and learn from each other
- **Attractive people:** Glocally-minded people loved by others

These are stipulated in the Third Oki-Dozen Education Miryokuka Framework (5-year plan), and they serve as a reference point in our planning and implementation of learning in the community.

The framework is updated every few years, starting from the Oki-Dozen Senior High School Miryokuka Framework (2013), followed by the Third Oki-Dozen Education Miryokuka Framework (2018). Each time we formulated the framework, we set up a new committee and opened it up to the school and community to collaborate on its development. In 2016, the project's name was also changed to Oki-Dozen Education Miryokuka Project and expanded its target from the senior high school to the entire district.



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Since the start of the project in 2008, we have established a coordinator position to connect the school with the local community, the island study programme to recruit students from all over the country, a boarding facility and the island parent system where an "island parent" is assigned to each student coming from outside the district, a public tutoring school, curriculum with inquiry-based learning to solve local issues, as well as the global inquiry programme to study abroad. As a result, the total number of students has recovered from 89 to 184. The percentage of junior high school graduates going on to Dozen Senior High School has also increased from 45% to 77%. This has created a virtuous cycle that has led to an increase in the number of I-turners (people migrating from other parts of the country) among the younger generation and the revitalization of the entire district.

To further promote the in-flow of people to the Dozen district, we started the Island Study and Experience Project for Adults in 2020. The project provides people in the younger generation with an opportunity to try moving into the area while gaining work experience. On the other hand, the most pressing issue now is the decrease in the number of children in the Dozen district. Looking at the current number of students, the number of local junior high school graduates will continue to hover around 30. Even if they all decide to go on to Dozen Senior High School, it will be difficult to maintain two classes. If we need to shift from two classes per grade to one, the number of teachers will decrease and, in the worst-case scenario, we may face the reorganization of schools and lose the only senior high school in the district.

The sustainability of human and financial resources is also an issue. With regard to human resources, the number of remote islands and mountainous regions that are engaged in similar initiatives is increasing nationwide, and it has become increasingly challenging to ensure the quantity and quality of human resources than it was when our project began. In terms of financial resources, the importance of education is now widely recognized, and a certain amount has been earmarked. However, it does not last permanently, and therefore we need to resort to different sources.

\* *Miryokuka* literally means making something attractive in Japanese.



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Let's start  
with the idea

### Coexist, co-learn, and co-create beyond differences and instability of values

Local and global, education and community, school and tutoring, U-turn (act of people moving back to their hometowns) and I-turn, local students and visiting students -there are values that at first glance seem contradictory. Each has its "rightness", and they often criticize, confront, or exclude each other.

However, these differences and instabilities are the sources of vitality, and it is through opening up to and mixing with others that the attractiveness is developed. Letting go of the obsession of being the same and embracing diversity is the condition for continuing with collective learning and action.

In order to achieve this, we need to have a soil that fosters being together, learning together, and creating together, as well as dialogue techniques and mechanisms that allow us to enjoy the process itself.



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For  
example...

#### ◎ Discrepancies between the trust from the islanders and expectations from the outside

What the parents of students on the islands want for their education does not necessarily overlap with what those off the islands want. There can be discrepancies between them, such as the need to improve non-cognitive skills as opposed to cognitive skills, or autonomy as opposed to cooperation. Rather than putting energy into resolving these gaps, we have found value in them instead. While going back and forth between confrontation and harmony with those who are different, we have created a soil in which everyone can grow and nurtured multicultural cooperation while enjoying the meaning of differences.

#### ◎ Formulation of the Miryokuka framework

As mentioned earlier, the project updates its framework every few years, and so far we have formulated the Oki-Dozen Senior High School Miryokuka Framework (2013) and the Third Oki-Dozen Education Miryokuka Framework (2018). The committee consists of the Miryokuka Promotion Committee members, school principals, PTA presidents, presidents of the alumni association, and others. It has taken more than a year to formulate each plan as we try to respect the perspectives of both education and the local community and move back and forth between the two.

#### 📚 Tools and methodology

- ① **A tool to encourage daily inquiries: "Questions to future self"** (*available only in Japanese*)  
→ Questions like "What are the things you love or love to do?" "What weakness of yours are you willing to accept?" help us unwind our values as we move back and forth between "same" and "different."
- ② **A tool to encourage dialogue beyond positions and roles: "Pattern language to connect school and community"** (*available only in Japanese*)  
→ It helps to discover commonalities and nurture relationships while embracing diversity and respecting others as they are.
- ③ **A tool to promote evidence-based discussion: School Miryokuka Evaluation System** (*available only in Japanese*)

→ While wisdom certainly lies at the field level, if one goes too far, he or she tends to fall into the trap of “legitimacy” and argue about what or who is right or wrong. We build our discussion based on evidence and try to move back and forth between tacit and formal knowledge.

④ **A tool to stimulate information communication in the community: Shimashima (Oki-Dozen Education Miryokuka Project News)**

→ A quarterly magazine is issued and made available at libraries and other public places in each town. This effectively fosters the awareness and attitude of the entire community to nurture children and students as consorted efforts.



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## Project Prajwala: Validating Scalable Models for WASH in Schools

Centre for Environment Education (CEE) Madhavi Joshi, Priyanka Sinsinwar

### Background

Girls are more vulnerable to the impact of inadequate sanitation and hygiene conditions. Promoting hygiene and sanitation practices too would enable improved WASH (Water, Sanitation & Hygiene) behaviour and positively impact their health. In this context, Rajasthan Elementary Education Council and the National Stock Exchange Foundation proposed a comprehensive WASH intervention for residential girls' schools at the upper primary level (G6-8) called Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBVs): Project Prajwala - Swachh Balika Swachh Vidyalaya (Clean Schools for Clean and Healthy Girls).

The KGBV initiative was launched in July 2004, setting up residential schools for girls studying in grades 6-8 who belong predominantly to the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Castes, and other minority communities. The scheme is being implemented in Educationally Backward Blocks of the country, where female literacy level is below the national average and the gender gap in literacy is above the national average. In Rajasthan, 200 KGBVs have been set up in 13 focal districts. The Centre for Environment Education (CEE) is the knowledge and implementation partner of the Prajwala project and UNICEF supports the initiative as its technical partner. The project is operational in 200 KGBVs of Rajasthan.





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The Project's main objectives are to

- 1) work towards awareness, capacity-building, and behavioural changes regarding WASH amongst students, teachers, and communities around the KGBVs;
- 2) ensure WASH compliance at KGBVs by renovation and retrofitting of existing WASH facilities and setting up performance benchmarks; and
- 3) develop operation and maintenance protocols with continued monitoring for sustainability.

To achieve the above objectives, a series of training activities for capacity building of various stakeholders was organized. Accordingly, Project Prajwala has demonstrated visible changes in the behavior of the girls, their families and the communities.

For example, long handled ladles are now used for taking drinking water from pots in 58% of schools instead of dipping a glass directly into the water and glasses to drink water in 84% of schools, an increase in hygiene practices among staff is reported, and the menstrual hygiene management and waste disposal have improved. These quantitative achievements point towards a marked positive change as a result of the project.

Qualitative outcomes include improved awareness among the students, integration of WASH in school management plans and the government guidelines, and collaboration at various levels to improve WASH in schools. With its whole-school approach, the project has enhanced awareness of all stakeholders resulting in improved WASH systems and practices.

It has supported curricular activities, built leadership and involved students in hands-on action. Through the School Management Committees, it has further strengthened community's awareness and practices.

Let's start with the idea 1

## Multi-stakeholder and participatory dialogue; Respect and Trust-building based on dialogue

Collaboration can be between a variety of stakeholders and at various levels. In the case of Prajwala, at one level, it is between the project proponents, funders, knowledge partners, and government bodies; at another level, it is between the school management, students, staff, parents, and larger community; at yet another level it is between the NGO, the school management and the school community. For a collaboration to work between all these different actors with different views, agendas etc., a dialogue process which ensures everyone's opinions are valued is important.

Let's start with the idea 2

## Shared value and vision while maintaining ownership

For collaboration, it is important that stakeholders agree to a common purpose and a shared value. At the same time, these entities are unique and therefore maintain their uniqueness, adding value to the collaboration.

Let's start with the idea 3

## Recognizing and leveraging mutual strengths

Different stakeholders bring to the collaboration different strengths. A mutually workable collaboration model where people respect and leverage these different strengths towards a common purpose can strengthen the process.

For example...

The project was conceived as a multi-stakeholder one with several layers in which collaboration and partnership was essential. Roles and responsibilities of each of these stakeholders had to be clear and mutually supportive. The collaboration between the project partners, between the NGO and the schools, within the schools - all of these required the aspects mentioned to work for a successful outcome.

Taking concrete actions in collaboration with various stakeholders is crucial, based on dialogue and consensus made through training and consultations. Child-friendly WASH facilities were constructed following the Government of Rajasthan guidelines and UNICEF, with the active participation of teachers and students. Intensive work with the schools through the holistic approach has led to an institutional transformation with whole-school approaches and management, prioritizing WASH facility augmentation in the school development plans and grants available to them.

### Tools and methodology

- Participatory training methodologies
- Consultation and dialogue
- Subject expertise and knowledge
- Alignment with the school system (i.e., integration of documents, monitoring and evaluation processes within the school activities, and demonstration of solutions at school)

As specific methodologies, we organized training focusing on WASH-related behavioural change in school staff members, Student Councils, Adolescent Girls Groups, and other students in dealing with the emerging and existing problems with sanitation in schools and communities. Concrete actions followed to tackle specific issues and problems. Furthermore, experience-sharing workshops on areas such as solutions to waste management, water, sanitation, and hygiene were organized with non-teaching staff members. As participatory dialogue processes provide an equal playing field to the stakeholders and are not prescriptive, solutions evolve through such a dialogue process that builds mutual respect and trust among collaborators.





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## Ganokendra: A people-centred approach to rural development



Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM) DR. Ehsanur Rahmanm, Sk. Shafiqur Rahman

### Background

Ganokendra is a Bangla word that means people's centre, popularly called Community Learning Centre (CLC) in many countries. It is a community-based institution managed by its members. The members are primarily disadvantaged rural people. At Ganokendra, the local people organise themselves, act together and address their needs and issues. They protest unitedly if they find any injustice in the community. Ganokendra thus functions as a people's organisation for their development through social, economic and cultural activities. Rural people from all walks of life visit Ganokendra regularly. They meet here to tell stories, discuss problems, identify issues, find solutions, and collectively make decisions. They dream about their future advancement.

The philosophical perspective of Ganokendra is relentlessly striving for disadvantaged and poor people's empowerment through tapping their untapped potentialities. Through an interactive discussion, people discover the causes of their deprivation and try to eliminate those. Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM) in Bangladesh started the programme with 20 Ganokendras and around 2,000 members, mostly for continuing education and post-literacy of neo-literate women. Gradually new elements were added to the activities of these centres by the community as they felt the need. For example, poverty alleviation and income generation activities were added in 1995, supplemented by skills training and microcredit. Water and sanitation activities were introduced in 1997, and anti-drug and anti-tobacco activities in 1998. With the increase of child and women trafficking incidents, particularly in the border districts in the west part of the country, awareness activities on this issue were added in 2000. Since then,



Ganokendra has been expanding roles to build a learning society, for people's economic self-reliance, access to entitled services and support to flourishing people's inner potentialities. So far, DAM has established 1,169 such centres spread over eight districts in Bangladesh.

## Strategy of collaboration

Let's start with  
the idea 1

### Sharing management-related responsibilities with the community

Let's start with  
the idea 2

### Functioning as a lifelong community learning centre

Let's start with  
the idea 3

### Creating opportunities to discuss social issues

Let's start with  
the idea 4

### Providing information communication services

Let's start with  
the idea 5

### Facilitating service delivery to people by various agencies

Ganokendras are locally managed institutions and, as such, each Ganokendra is developed according to local needs and expectations. Ganokendra focuses on creating the scope for literacy practice and for acquiring life skills through the provision of a mini-library providing access to information and organising community development activities through local initiatives. Each element in Ganokendra reinforces the others. Basic literacy skills allow issue-based information materials such as health and hygiene to be read and understood. The availability of easy-to-read materials that people can read facilitates the retention of literacy skills and promotes lifelong learning. The availability of reading materials in Ganokendra brings the community together. The provision of development services from various agencies encourages the community to ensure that CLC-based services are retained.

Community-based programmes are implemented to raise social awareness on issues such as gender, drug abuse, environment and so on. For example, campaigns are organised through Ganokendra addressing health issues such as the high death rate during childbirth, infant mortality, diarrhoea, and drug abuse, with the COVID-19 pandemic lately added. The campaigns are also organised coinciding with national days. Ganokendra offers information services collected from local offices of government and NGOs.

Ganokendra links up with various service providers in its periphery. Gradual strengthening of Ganokendra as an institution helps local people fully realise their potential for accessing services that are already available in the community. It also facilitates linkage with health, nutrition, agriculture, skill training, micro-credit facilities and other rights-based organisations.

For  
example...

Ganokendra has wide and diverse community stakeholders with whom it keeps linkages and mobilises the resources and potentialities in favour of the people in poverty and disadvantaged situations. The community stakeholder groups are linked with each other and importantly play a role in improving the life and livelihood of the people. DAM usually starts its operational intervention at the household level and gradually mobilises the households to work through an organised framework. Thus, a micro intervention pathway moves from families to the community and then to the union (the last tier of the government administration), gradually linked with the national structure.

Alongside the expanded roles, there are many examples of sharing management-related responsibilities. This has resulted in an increased role of the community in organising and managing Ganokendra activities.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the main activity in Ganokendra was to engage learners in awareness building on health safety measures. In addition, in order to support the students learning amid the pandemic, various approaches were followed. These include online/live classes, phone-based communication, home school trail, each-one teach-one, connecting learners to broadcast classes on television for school students, etc. DAM's education institutes and education project staffs used Ganokendra as a hub for disseminating COVID-19 related information. Solutions that are considered relevant and feasible reached all affected families. Ganokendra was also used as a meeting room and relief material distribution centre during this pandemic situation.

Senior citizens are one of the most vulnerable groups during a pandemic. At this time, they were made aware of social distancing, safe health practices, and frequent handwashing as a precaution against coronavirus. The committee also made their family members aware of following the guidelines to stay safe. At the initiative of Ganokendra, the poor, vulnerable older people were also linked with some government schemes for the pandemic affected families.



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### Tools and methodology

At the Ganokendra level, steps are continuously taken to **flourish the inner potentialities of people**. A few examples are cited here. Adult neo-literates, youths and children practice creative writing as part of Ganokendra's regular activities and publish magazines by compiling interesting stories. Sometimes, the stories are published in the form of books. Moreover, various cultural activities, games and sports are organised in different centres for nursing creativity. Different types of life skill development and leadership trainings are conducted in the centres. Other activities of Ganokendra include book and magazine reading, video shows and discussion with family members and neighbours. All these activities aim to flourish their inner potential and dream of an improved life.

In institutional sustaining, each Ganokendra **practices democratic leadership and transparency principles** from the beginning. They maintain records of members, accounts, assets and internal governance and accountability systems.

As a self-sustaining initiative, **building linkages and networking** among Ganokendras and with other potential local institutions also proves quite effective.

Each Ganokendra has its unique characteristics and excellence that may differ from others and is very context, culture and need-specific. The most common feature for all these centres is **keeping the community people in the central focus**. Community development work with the people and their participation plays a critical role in sustaining the process.



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## Inclusive Community-based Disaster Risk Reduction

People’s Initiative for Learning and Community Development (PILCD) Ramon Mapa

### Background

The project is a community-based education and capacity development intervention that promotes disability-inclusive disaster preparedness and response. It was implemented in two coastal cities of the Samar province, namely Calbayog and Catbalogan, in Eastern Visayas, Philippines. Hydrometeorological hazards make these areas susceptible to disasters due to typhoons and heavy rains that cause flooding and storm surges.

Vulnerability during disasters is the main issue faced by poor and disadvantaged communities of the project. Persons with disabilities are disproportionately placed in a more vulnerable situation during disasters. The project was designed to make disaster-risk-reduction and management (DRRM) disability-inclusive with the following objectives:

- 1) to increase the capacities of high-risk groups and individuals in government engagement and participation, especially in DRRM planning and decision-making processes.
- 2) to strengthen the capacities of local government and communities in disability inclusive DRRM planning and emergency response.
- 3) to increase awareness of local communities about climate change and its relationship to the increasing risks of natural disasters.
- 4) to establish linkages and partnerships between and among non-governmental and peoples’ organizations, local government units, schools, academia and other stakeholders in inclusive DRRM and climate change education.

The development and implementation of the project involved engagement and collaboration among different stakeholders ranging from relevant government units at different levels (i.e., municipal, Barangay or village-level) to civil society organizations representing different sectors (i.e., persons with disabilities, women, youth, the elderly, farmers, and religion), as well as partners from the academic and educational institutions, each tasked with clear roles and responsibilities.



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Let's start with the idea 1

## Common vision and perspective on the issue

For example...

The very nature of disasters that they affect everyone regardless of social and economic status provided a solid basis for the different stakeholders to work together to address the problem. There was also a common understanding that addressing disasters require a multi-stakeholder and inter-disciplinary approach. Facilitating a common understanding of the issue was done during the project's early development stage through a series of consultations and dialogues in the community.

The project idea was first presented and laid out to all for validation and analysis of the issue. After jointly identifying how the issue affects them at the personal and institutional levels, the process then developed into a collaborative planning and decision-making where different groups from different sectors and agencies arrive at a common understanding of how to address the issue.

The multi-stakeholder approach in analyzing the causes and effects prompted people in the community to share their own experiences. The re-living of these shared experiences somehow created a sense of personal attachment to the issue and bonded them to take collective actions.

### Tools and methodology

The "Community Disaster History Timeline" is valid in facilitating a common understanding of the impacts of disasters in a community. The process asks the workshop participants to share their stories of disasters in the community during the past ten years. They discuss how the community was affected, how they responded as individuals and as agencies or institutions, and what the results of these responses were. An important part of this process is the identification of gaps in their previous responses and how they can collectively address these gaps.

Year	Name/ Disaster	Effects		Response			Unaddressed Needs	Lessons Learned
		Sector	Effects/ Extent of Damages	Community	NGO	Government		
		Persons with disabilities						
		Older People						
		Children and Youth						

Community Disaster History Timeline

Let's start with the idea 2

## Institutional and personal commitment of key stakeholders

For example...

Commitment to undertake a role and carry out specific responsibilities and tasks is key to making the involvement of each stakeholder active and meaningful in achieving the project's goals. This must be ensured at the institutional level down to the individual level directly involved in the initiative. We ensured this during a consultation with the stakeholders at the early stage of the project development. Necessary information and technical support was provided to stakeholders in the project's entire process for them to carry out their roles and responsibilities.

Building institutional and personal commitment of key stakeholders took off from the result of the joint analysis and shared

understanding of the issue. The process then transforms into a joint planning session where individual and institutional roles are identified. The needs assessment and analysis of each stakeholder's capacity in taking on these roles followed and capacity-building activities are identified to address the gap. These activities somehow become a source of motivation for individuals and groups since they provided a training and learning opportunity for their personal and institutional development. They also became part of our project's strategies.

Let's start with the idea 3

## Inclusive, flexible and dynamic project design and learning framework

For example...

Successful collaboration requires an inclusive framework, especially for the lead agency. Context, needs and interests, including institutional mandates, should be considered and aligned within the project framework and design. This was very important in the early stage of the project's development process, as being inclusive starts with understanding the context of each stakeholder and identifying their capacities and limitations. This process is very similar to identifying their roles, except that it focuses on the social, economic, political, cultural, and physical factors that may limit or prevent them from actively participating in the project.

### Tools and methodology

Social Venn Diagram is used to identify the different stakeholder groups, determining their level of importance and role in the community. In our project, stakeholders that require more attention to be able to participate were also identified and a separate capacity-building activity was designed and implemented specifically to meet their particular needs.

Another helpful tool is a basic "SWOT" analysis, with the addition of "barriers" under the W (weakness) and T (threats) areas. This is primarily done using group-based methods to ensure participation, and inter-sectoral group work to facilitate exchange and understanding between and among different stakeholders.



Social Venn Diagram

Let's start with the idea 4

## Managing power balance

For example...

Different stakeholders have varying degrees of power and influence over the planning and decision-making processes in collaborative undertakings. The project acknowledged the existing dynamics between participants from the government, academic institutions, and the community. Participants from low income and disadvantaged groups tend to be at a disadvantage in terms of power. The project addressed this by providing specific capacity-building support in leadership, facilitation, public speaking and working in groups to more disadvantaged groups like persons with disabilities. Adopting and utilizing participatory and group-based methodologies also enabled disadvantaged groups to express and participate in discussions and activities, facilitating engagement and exchange between different stakeholders and provided awareness-raising among groups with more power and influence.





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