

Mercy Corps in Japan

Helping people recover and rebuild after historic earthquake and tsunami

More than one year after the worst natural disaster in Japan's history – the massive earthquake and tsunami of March 11, 2011 – Mercy Corps continues to work with PlaNet Finance Japan to help the people of Japan recover. Although our emergency response work is complete, there is still plenty of work to do to restore businesses and strengthen communities.

Mercy Corps has benefited from partnerships with two local organizations that normally focus on international disasters and development but in this case were well placed to assist their countrymen. Over the past decade, Mercy Corps has partnered numerous times with **Peace Winds Japan** to respond to disasters. Our partnership with **PlaNet Finance Japan** is more recent, combining our expertise in disaster recovery with their local knowledge and experience in the finance sector.

Boosting Economic Recovery

As soon as immediate humanitarian needs were met, our team began helping affected communities recover economically. A rapid transition from relief to recovery is a hallmark of Mercy Corps' approach.

Mercy Corps is partnering with PlaNet Finance Japan and a local banking cooperative, Kesenuma Shinkin, to help small businesses rehire workers and rebuild their operations. The Sanriku Fund for Economic Recovery directly increases employment and supports recovering businesses, helping them become stable and sustainable in their communities.

The fund also provides resources to encourage the startup of new businesses. Now this program is expanding to encourage small businesses to hire, or provide services for, people with disabilities. With PlaNet Finance, we are reaching out to new tsunami-affected locations and entrepreneurs, helping to revitalize more communities.

Shortly after the disaster, we quickly initiated a number of economic recovery projects:

- In Ofunato, we helped the fish market quickly restore operations, supporting the sale of fish and speeding the recovery of a local economy that's

heavily dependent on the sea. We provided a generator, forklifts, fish tanks, ice storage, scales and a copy machine to help restart the industry.

- In Rikuzentakata, where almost all commerce was destroyed, we supported mobile shops that brought goods to locals and provided a living for merchants.

- In Minamisanriku, we provided essential supplies and support to rebuild a fish hatchery -- a project that will return the investment many times over by restoring a multi-million dollar salmon industry.

- Also in Minamisanriku, we helped fishing associations restart the production and processing of wakame, a staple of the local diet. We bought equipment to grow seaweed and harvest and process the crop, helping to create jobs for local women.



Peace Winds Japan and Mercy Corps helped revive the Ofunato fish market – an important center of commerce and a source of fresh food. Photo: Mao Sato/Peace Winds Japan

Bringing Relief After the Disaster

In the days and weeks right after the disaster, our team focused on providing relief items to survivors. Mercy Corps and Peace Winds provided tents, tarps, blankets, mattresses, space heaters, kerosene, clothing, water, diapers, school supplies and food to 42,000 people living in shelters.

We distributed vouchers that survivors used to purchase essential goods from local merchants. People prioritized their own needs while supporting local economies. And, we started a bus program to allow survivors to shop for supplies and essential services, like medical care and banking.



Mobile shops brought goods to the people and helped commerce resume. Photo: Chris Cabatbat/Mercy Corps

Helping Children and Youth Recover

The disaster was especially hard on children and youth whose home and school lives were disrupted. Mercy Corps and Peace Winds instituted three programs to help young people recover from the trauma and resume their normal lives.

Our signature Comfort for Kids program builds the ability of local communities to help children recover from the emotional effects of a large-scale disaster. It has provided post-trauma assistance to children and caregivers in settings as diverse as New York City after 9/11 and Syrian refugees in Lebanon. In Japan, we trained caregivers to help their students and supplied information in a variety of settings.

We partnered with Peace Winds and Nike to introduce Moving Forward, a program that uses sports to help young people recover physically, socially, mentally, and emotionally from traumas associated with disasters.



Comfort for Kids uses play and other therapies to help children heal after a disaster. Photo: Chris Cabatbat/Mercy Corps

And, we worked a Japanese art therapy specialist to offer art activities to affected children. Art Caravan aims to help kids through a fun, creative activity that lets them express their feelings.

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