

Promoting the Society of Mutual  
Assistance  
Aiming to build new “ties”  
(Summary)

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Council for Promotion of the Society of  
Mutual Assistance

## Table of Contents

Introduction

1. What is the “Society of Mutual Assistance”?
2. Efforts and Challenges of Actors of Mutual Assistance: Eight Agents and 24 Challenges
  - (1) Local residents (Challenges 1-2)
  - (2) Community-based organizations (Challenges 3-4)
  - (3) NPOs, etc. (Challenges 5-7)
  - (4) Companies (Challenges 8-11)
  - (5) Social enterprises (Challenges 12-14)
  - (6) Regional financial institutions (Challenges 15-17)
  - (7) Educational institutions (Challenges 18-20)
  - (8) Government (Challenges 21-24)Column 1) Current situations and challenges of volunteer activities  
Column 2) Current situations and challenges of donations
3. Concrete Image of the Society of Mutual Assistance We Should Aim for and Paths to Realize Such a Society: Three Images and 27 Paths
  - (1) Establishing ties (Paths 1-9)
    - (i) Place for the society of mutual assistance
    - (ii) Roles of NPOs, etc.
  - (2) Vitalizing local communities (Paths 10-18)
    - (i) Regional financial institutions
    - (ii) Companies, etc.
    - (iii) Community-based organizations and educational institutions
  - (3) Promoting participation (Paths 19-27)
    - (i) Significance of volunteer activities and donations
    - (ii) Expanding the number of volunteers and breeding of the culture of donation
    - (iii) Fund flows within the community

Conclusion

Bibliography

Image of the “society of mutual assistance” we should aim for proposed by members of the Council for Promotion of the Society of Mutual Assistance

List of charts

- (Document 1) Summary of major issues raised at the meeting of the Council for Promotion of the Society of Mutual Assistance, etc.
- (Document 2) Regarding the discussion at the 2013 working group

List of members of Council for Promotion of the Society of Mutual Assistance  
Process of discussion

## Introduction

In our country, the issues of a declining population and a super-aging society are rapidly worsening. In particular, local communities are faced with many challenges. Such challenges are not limited to just the severe financial situation and a shrinking consumer market but also include exhausted economies and problems with medical and long-term care caused by serious labor shortages, diminished public transportation networks, responses needed to frequent disasters and global competitors. In addition, as challenges become more diverse and more complex, it becomes apparent that there are limitations in a variety of aspects in addressing such challenges only through the traditional efforts of government, and it is pointed out that there are concerns over the frayed safety net systems.

In order to improve such a situation and lead to sustainable and stable economic development, first of all, we should engage in efforts tailored to our different regional characteristics while recognizing and sharing a sense of crisis among all of the people. To that end, it is essential to have a spirit of mutual assistance, that is to support each other, establish organic ties among the diverse agents and overcome the challenges together, rather than a one-sided relationship between providers and receivers of support or dependence on others.

In addition to agents such as community associations, fire brigades and shopping districts which have been playing a prominent role in the local community, various other agents should be included in order to promote the society of mutual assistance: Corporations and other organizations which are engaged in public-interest activities such as specified non-profit corporations (NPOs), private companies, operators of social enterprises, financial institutions, educational institutions, the government, and then each of local residents. All people must share an awareness that they play their own role as actors in the promotion of the society of mutual assistance.

From such a perspective, the Council for Promotion of the Society of Mutual Assistance has discussed the image of the society of mutual assistance that we should aim for and the efforts made by the various agents who support the society of mutual assistance.

Also, in our country where regional revitalization and promotion of the work-life balance are critical issues, promotion of the society of mutual assistance plays an important role, and its importance will be increasing in the future.

We hope that this report will be a milestone in the promotion of the society of mutual assistance in Japan.

## 1. What is the “Society of Mutual Assistance”?

There are growing concerns about the future among local residents, including concerns over shortages of human resources that will support the community, as well as facilities for medical and long-term care, and concerns over weakened local economies. On the other hand, the majority of people believe that voluntary efforts made by local residents are important to address these social needs and challenges. In fact, in the event of a major disaster, mutual aid between local residents plays an important role in things like living assistance and this in turn largely depends on the degree of relationships or ties that neighbors have established in daily lives.

However, it is difficult to expect residents alone to support each other in the community in a traditional manner, considering a current situation, where the population is rapidly declining and aging while fewer babies are being born, and relationships or community-based ties are weakening, particularly in urban areas..

Meanwhile, diverse agents, such as the NPOs and general/public interest corporations, etc. (NPOs, etc.), private companies, social enterprises operators, financial institutions, educational institutions and the government, have started to take part in activities aimed to solve local challenges and involved in the promotion of the society of mutual assistance.

We expect that more diverse actors will participate in such efforts and vitalize their activities in the future. In the society of mutual assistance, it is important that such diverse actors cooperate with each other to support local residents and the residents themselves also choose to participate as an actor in activities that fit their values and living situation.

In particular, it is significant that people such as youth who could not find their place in the community, the elderly who tend to be isolated, and women who could hardly raise their voice, all participate actively, not passively, in the promotion of the society of mutual assistance in their community. As they start to have opportunities or places to participate in the community, it is expected that the unheard voices of vulnerable people will be reflected in the local community. This will help to vitalize the communities and create new “ties” among the people, which leads to the revitalization of new regional communities.

Furthermore, the ties between people and the capacity of the community will be a base for the resilience and vitalization of the community. Similarly, by participating in the society in a meaningful manner, all people can make their life more active which in turn will lead to the realization of robust growth in our country.

From that perspective, we believe that the image of the society of mutual assistance that we should aim for is:

The society built up by all, where new “ties” are established, while the various values and wills of individuals are respected.

In promoting the revitalization of the Japanese economy and regional communities, it is important for all the various agents to engage in activities in their familiar areas in the spirit of “mutual assistance,” that is, to help and support each other, while maintaining a spirit of “self-reliance” which means taking care of their own issues. Also, it is necessary to work on establishment of systems and mechanisms from the perspectives of those actually engaged in the relevant activities, in order to encourage such movements and maximize their capacity to “promote the society of mutual assistance”.

In doing so, we believe that we should aim to realize the “society of mutual assistance”, that is, a ‘society built up by all, where new “ties” are established, while the various values and wills of individuals are respected’ and opportunities and places for their participation are offered to each individual.

In this report, we organized the efforts and challenges of the various actors involved in the society of mutual assistance into eight agents and 24 challenges. We also set the year 2020 when the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics will take place as our goal in working to promote the society of mutual assistance, and presented specific efforts to be made as three images and 27 paths.

## ◆ Eight Agents and 24 Challenges ◆

### < (1) Local residents >

Challenge 1: Recognize the challenges which exist in the local community and have an awareness as a stakeholder

Challenge 2: Establish a better local community through making efforts for mutual assistance

### < (2) Community-based organizations >

Challenge 3: Share information such as the contents of activities of community-based organizations

Challenge 4: Vitalize activities by community-based organizations, etc.

### < (3) NPOs, etc. >

Challenge 5: Share information on volunteer or donation opportunities

Challenge 6: Develop human resources in intermediary organizations and reinforce their financial base

Challenge 7: Identify and share local challenges

### < (4) Companies >

Challenge 8: Increase a role of companies as actors that support the community

Challenge 9: Promote sustainable development of companies through CSR activities

Challenge 10: Actively share information on the CSR activities of companies

Challenge 11: Increase employees' motivation and establish social brands through CSR activities

### < (5) Social enterprises >

Challenge 12: Make social enterprises economically self-reliant

Challenge 13: Improve management know-how of social enterprise operators

Challenge 14: Facilitate local SMEs' entry into social enterprises

### < (6) Regional financial institutions >

Challenge 15: Increase a role of regional financial institutions as advisors

Challenge 16: Promote information exchange and mutual understanding among financial institutions and NPOs, etc.

Challenge 17: Establish a local platform for cooperation centering around regional financial institutions

### < (7) Educational institutions >

Challenge 18: Develop human resources that will play a central role in promoting the society of mutual assistance in the future by educational institutions

Challenge 19: Increase the opportunities of CSR activities in school education

Challenge 20: Promote CSR activities by universities as local bases

### < (8) Government >

Challenge 21: Understand the importance of solving challenges through voluntary efforts

Challenge 22: Need cooperation within government and in a wider area among neighboring local governments

Challenge 23: Need researches on the impact of providing grants for NPO activities, etc.

Challenge 24: Expect government employees to play a role as coordinators to solve local challenges

## ◆Three Images and 27 Paths◆

### < (1) Establishing ties >

- Path 1: Establish “places for the society of mutual assistance” according to regional characteristics
- Path 2: Share information on challenges and attractiveness of the local community and set up a discussion forum
- Path 3: Establish “places for the society of mutual assistance” by the various agents and expand the scope of their activities
- Path 4: Develop human resources to serve as coordinators to solve local challenges
- Path 5: Vitalize personnel exchanges beyond each sector
- Path 6: Establish new ties between people through NPO activities, etc.
- Path 7: Increase the number of those who sympathize with NPO activities, etc. through a system of “visible” participation
- Path 8: Provide effective consulting services in collaboration with experts
- Path 9: Expand the scope of NPO activities, etc. through the participation of women, the elderly and youth

### < (2) Vitalizing local communities >

- Path 10: Vitalize local communities through reinforcing the foundations of diverse agents in the community
- Path 11: Vitalize the activities of regional financial institutions aiming for coexistence and mutual prosperity with the community
- Path 12: Establish a system for regional financial institutions to utilize the know-how of retired employees
- Path 13: Engage in efforts to link the core businesses of companies with solution of social challenges
- Path 14: Make efforts toward self-reliance and development of social enterprises
- Path 15: Promote the socialization of local SMEs
- Path 16: Restore “Kinjyo” relationships (relationships of mutual assistance with neighbors) using opportunities of disaster drills, etc.
- Path 17: Promote CSP activities in the school curriculum
- Path 18: Promote Development and certification of experts by universities in collaboration with companies, NPOs, etc. and the government

### < (3) Promoting participation>

- Path 19: Organic collaboration with CSR and pro-bono activities of companies
- Path 20: Develop an environment where people can easily participate in volunteer activities
- Path 21: “Visualize” volunteer activities
- Path 22: Develop fund flows within the community through experience of successful donations
- Path 23: Improve the fund-raising capacity of fund raisers and reinforce the foundations
- Path 24: Increase recognition of community foundations and civil funds in the local community
- Path 25: Promote collaboration among community foundations and civil funds, and reinforce their functions
- Path 26: Vitalize fund flows in the community through promotion of social investments
- Path 27: Consider various efforts to expand social investments

## Conclusion

In this report, we proposed to work on “promotion of the society of mutual assistance” as a prescription to overcome many structural challenges that local communities face, such as the deterioration of the economic situation or the decline of local communities caused by the declining population and a super-aging society.

Challenges for the local communities are getting more diverse and more complex. It is natural that there are diverse prescriptions for such challenges and it will take a significant time to solve them. This is why we believe that we should not solely depend on the traditional efforts made mainly by the government but also need to create a society of mutual assistance where all of the various actors in the local community, such as local residents and companies, actively participate and help each other. In doing so, what is important is nothing but respect for the diverse values and wills of individuals.

What is needed is a spirit of mutual assistance to support each other, establish organic ties among the diverse agents and overcome the challenges together, rather than a one-sided relationship between providers and receivers of support or dependence on others. We believe that the ‘establishment of new “ties” among people’ and shared thoughts, “shared feelings” or “sympathies” through such ties will improve the capacity of communities and serve as an important driving force toward solutions of various challenges that local communities face.

Finally, along with discussions within the Council for Promotion of the Society of Mutual Assistance, we organized meetings of the “Regional Council for Promotion of the Society of Mutual Assistance” in 11 different places across the country in fiscal 2014, from the perspective of deepening discussions of the challenges which are unique to regional communities or solutions for such challenges. Local residents and those who are actually engaged in activities as actors in the local communities, such as local governments, NPOs, etc., community associations and companies, participated in these meetings and actively exchanged opinions. In preparing this report, we largely relied on their opinions we received on these meetings. We would like to thank again the local governments and NPOs, etc. for their efforts in organizing these meetings<sup>1</sup>.

*Nobuhiro Okuno*

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<sup>1</sup> Opinions provided during the council meetings but were not included in the body of this report are re-organized in line with the items of this report and attached as a separate piece of reference material titled “Major Issues”.