

People in damage houses need aid too

The massive tsunami on 11 March caused wide scale devastation to northeastern Japan, and continues to affect hundreds of thousands of people. Otsuchi town in Iwate was almost completely wiped out, and the recovery here is very slow. Mountains of rubble and the broken sea defense wall are all that is left of the town centre. Even the town hall and mayor were lost to the sea.

The government has now assessed all affected buildings in the disaster-struck areas of Iwate and categorized them according to the scale of damage. The official certification then enables the residents of 'completely destroyed' and 'extensively damaged' houses to receive relevant insurance compensation and government donations of up to ¥350,000 (US \$4,300). Yet people in houses classified as 'partially damaged' are receiving no aid.

Walking around Otsuchi, some of the houses further inland look fairly undamaged, but external appearances can be deceiving. One lady told me that her daughter is in a partially damaged house, forced to live upstairs with her family, as the tsunami swept through the first floor of her home. Her windows are still boarded up, she has no money to fix the ground floor of her house, and she cannot cook for her family as all of her appliances were destroyed in the flood. She is grateful that her house is still standing, but she cannot understand why almost four months after the disaster, the government has still not given any financial support or relief aid to those struggling to live in their partially damaged houses.

CARE is responding to this need by providing essential items to people in partially damaged houses in both Otsuchi and Yamada, supplied by local businesses.

Yahata Family Shop is a small business in Otsuchi that is working with CARE to provide rice and miso bean pasteto people living in partially damaged houses. The shop is in a small district called Sakuragicho, next to a river. Yukiko Yahata has run the only shop in the district for fifteen years, but in March it was destroyed as the tsunami surged inland down the river and turned Sakuragicho into a flood plain. For the last three months, families in the area have had to travel to neighboring towns to get supplies, and those in partially damaged houses have not received any relief aid. After an expensive renovation, the shop reopened on June 7, but the watermarks on the ceiling remain. Watching a steady stream of well-known faces visiting their reopened shop, it is clear that with a large elderly population, the shop is not only essential for supplies, it is the heartbeat of the community. Yukiko Yahata wears a T-shirt with the logo "Cheer up Otsuchi!" and sees everyone in the neighborhood as family. Over 720 people from partially damaged homes have received locally grown rice and miso from Yukiko's shop, purchased by CARE. "The community is so grateful for the food supplies provided by CARE. We have had very dark times here, so it means so much to receive external support."

CARE has also partnered with local businesses in Yamada to provide residents of 187 partially damaged homes with vouchers to buy food and replace broken kitchen appliances. CARE firmly believes in enabling the people of Iwate to help themselves. Through supporting local businesses, CARE aims to boost the independence of communities and consequently enable them to restore their disaster affected region.