

INSTITUTE OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

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TOWN MEETING: JAPAN  
INITIATION PHASE 1979-1980  
REPORT FOR 1979

## THE CONTEXT

The revolutionary nature of this century is sharply demonstrated by the multitude of struggles that have created a time of ferment and change. This list is nearly endless: the awakening of the third world, the rise of minority peoples such as the blacks of America, the new militancy of the Islamic world, the massive change in China. Beneath all of these is the demand by local people to participate more fully and effectively in the design, implementation and benefits of the social and economic development of their nations and communities. Beyond particular issues which differ from place to place the underlying issue is that of human development, releasing the untapped resources of human creativity and energy which are the key to breaking through to new solutions to old problems. Very quickly this issue resolves itself into one of method, how can this process of human development be facilitated in such a way that the revolutionary nature of this century becomes the basis for a constructive advance in human society?

In this context, the ICA has assumed the responsibility to develop a method and a series of programs that will assist the cause of human development in communities of every kind around the world. The focus of this effort has been the local community, the village or town or neighborhood, which universally forms the most basic unit of human society. The secondary focus has been the non-geographic community formed by a company or an institution. ICA consultants are now working in over 30 nations in situations ranging from the rural villages of India to the multi-national corporations of the developed world. Structures have been created that encourage an active relationship between people and communities of various nations and allow an interchange of social technology and resources. Japan, in all of its historic and contemporary uniqueness, is deeply involved in the issue of human development in its communities and companies, and in its relationship to the world.

## THE DESIGN

The ICA and its companion organization, the Ecumenical Institute, have conducted training programs in Japan for 10 years. In 1977, the Oyubari Human Development Project in Hokkaido was initiated as a demonstration of a new approach to community development. Several pilot Town Meetings were held during 1977 and 1978 to demonstrate the method and to test its results in this nation.

The Town Meeting: Japan program was initiated in January, 1979. Each Town Meeting is a community workshop or forum in which the participants carefully define the underlying problems and create constructive proposals for solving them. The meeting is a profound event in which a new spirit of unity, pride and hope is born. A 2 year Initiation Phase was announced during which meetings would be held in all 47 prefectures and relationships developed that would lead to an extensive use of Town Meeting in selected prefectures. A total of 1000 meetings was projected.

A funding scheme was created that was based on a budget of ¥50,000,000. Since initiating a new national program requires a relatively heavy investment before the program becomes self-supporting, it was decided that 50% of the funds must come from companies as contributions while the other 50% would come from local community sources as consultant fees for specific meetings. Thus the business community would join with ICA to present Town Meeting to Japan and to enable its subsequent adoption by local government.

It was further projected that this 2 year phase would allow for a large number of volunteers to be enlisted and trained to assist ICA staff in conducting the meetings. The experience gained in this phase would assure an effective use of the ICA method in serving the human needs of Japanese communities.

#### THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

At the conclusion of the first year the following accomplishments can be reported:

1. To date, 105 Town Meetings have been held in Japan and 73 additional events of a similar nature for special groups. At least one meeting has been conducted in 39 of the 47 prefectures. Meetings are scheduled in 5 of the remaining prefectures.
2. Eleven companies, both Japanese and international, have become Sponsors of the program and have committed a total of ¥8,500,000. An additional 18 companies are Contributors and have provided approximately ¥1,500,000. Companies have recruited employees to work as volunteers with ICA a few days each month as a company supported activity. Altogether, more than 200 people have served as Town Meeting volunteers and some are now highly trained in the use of the ICA method. Fifty business and professional men are serving as Advisors to the ICA, most of whom are also actively involved as volunteer staff.
3. Town Meeting: Japan has received assistance and support from many organizations and agencies active in the field of community development and local affairs. Included in this list are the following: 1. The Local Government Research and Data Center; 2. The Shin Seikatsu Undo (New Way of Living Movement); 3. The National Governors Association; 4. The City Mayors' Association; 5. The Village and Town Mayors' Association; 6. The Local Authorities Systems Development Center; 7. The Junior Chamber of Commerce; 8. The Osaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry; 9. Social Education offices in various prefectures and municipalities; and 10. Community Development and Community Movement sections of several prefecture governments.