

Creative Reconstruction After the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake

Thirty years ago, on January 17, 1995, a magnitude 7.3 earthquake originating north of Awaji Island struck urban areas with an aging population. It caused tremendous damage, resulting in the loss of over 6,400 lives and injuring over 43,700 people. With significant support from across Japan and the world, Hyogo Prefecture has taken a new approach called Creative Reconstruction, aiming to build a better society rather than returning to the pre-disaster state.

<阪神・淡路大震災の概要>



Immediately after the earthquake

Overview of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake

Date and time: 5:46 a.m., January 17, 1995
 Epicenter: North of Awaji Island, at a depth of 16 km
 Scale: M7.3 (Maximum seismic intensity: 7)
 Damage: 6,434 dead; 3 missing; 43,792 injured; approx. 100,000 houses completely destroyed; approx. 140,000 houses partially destroyed

● Responses in the emergency phase

- Earliest possible rescue operations
- Improving living conditions in shelters
- Building numerous temporary housing units
- Early restoration of public utilities
- Demolishing collapsed houses



Rescue operations by firefighters

The Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake Reconstruction Plan (est. July 1995)
 [Basic theme] Harmonious Coexistence Between People and Nature, People and People, and People and Society
 [Budget] 17 trillion yen over 10 years (actual amount: 16.3 trillion yen)

Priority Three-year Plans on housing, infrastructure and industry were formulated based on the above plan.

Priority Three-year Plans on housing, infrastructure and industry

Category	Housing (incl. private housing)	Infrastructure (e.g., road, railroad)	Industry (Net Regional Product Index)
Target	125,000 units (number of orders placed)	5,700 billion yen (budget)	100.0 (compared to FY1993)
Achievement (Mar. 1998)	169,000 units (135%)	5,870 billion yen (103%)	101.7

● Responses in each reconstruction phase

[Period]	[Major issues]	[Major responses]
From August 1995 Restoration Phase (Temporary Housing Phase)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting elderly and other temporary housing residents who have left their familiar places • Securing funds for livelihood reconstruction support • Early recovery of infrastructure, housing and industry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing new communities (Launching Fureai Community Centers) • Implementing the Priority Three-year Plans • Building reconstruction housing • Building temporary shops
From April 1998 Early Reconstruction Phase (Permanent Housing Transition Phase)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting livelihood reconstruction as residents move to permanent housing • Economic recession due to declining reconstruction demands • Securing and creating job opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizing local support networks for elderly people; launching Community Plazas; supporting community development • Supporting revitalization of shopping districts • Nurturing community businesses
From April 2000 Late Reconstruction Phase (Full-scale Reconstruction Phase)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting elderly people's self-sufficient lifestyles • Restoring vibrancy to local areas • Creating a safe and secure society • Passing down and sharing lessons learned from the earthquake 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhancing local support networks for elderly people • Lump-sum subsidies aimed at restoring local vibrancy • Promoting the use of vacant lots and spaces • Launching the Mutual Aid System for Housing Reconstruction • Opening the Disaster Reduction and Human Renovation Institution

● Specific initiatives for Creative Reconstruction



Local support networks for elderly people

In the housing provided for those who had lost their homes, local communities organized activities such as regular visits to provide support and address issues like unattended deaths, which had become more common as the population aged.



Support for post-disaster urban planning

Development of disaster-resilient, livable communities was promoted by involving residents in discussions to determine the details of urban development plans.



Development of HAT Kobe

The Kobe New Eastern City Center (HAT Kobe) has been developed to host a cluster of global DRR agencies, including Disaster Reduction and Human Renovation Institution, which organizes exhibits and conducts research on disasters, as well as UNDRR Kobe Office.

Passing Down and Sharing the Concept of Creative Reconstruction

The concept of Creative Reconstruction, which originated in the aftermath of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, has become a universal approach in domestic and international reconstruction efforts, including those following the Great East Japan Earthquake. It was incorporated in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030—the outcome document of the third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction—as the principle of “Build Back Better,” establishing it as a global standard.

Creative Reconstruction presented by Hyogo Pref. Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake Reconstruction Plan

- Established: July 1995
- Basic policy: Creative Reconstruction



A reconstruction model aimed at creating a mature society for the 21st century, rather than returning to the pre-disaster state

Adopted in Japan

① **Great East Japan Earthquake** (March 11, 2011)
[Miyagi Pref. Disaster Recovery Plan] (excerpt)

Basic Principles 3.

Far-reaching reconstruction that does not stop at restoration

② **Kumamoto Earthquake** (April 16, 2016)
[Recovery/Reconstruction Plan from the 2016 Kumamoto Earthquake] (excerpt)

Three Principles of Recovery/Reconstruction 2.

Not only returning to the pre-disaster state but also aiming to build back better



Privatization of Sendai Airport (2018)

Tsunami-damaged Sendai Airport became the first of Japan's government-managed airports to undergo privatization, aiming to revitalize the region by expanding the non-resident population during the reconstruction process.



Kiyama Hatsuichi (2024) [Mashiki Town, Kumamoto]

The traditional festival was resumed along the Kiyama-Yokomachi Line, a road constructed as part of post-disaster urban planning, and the town regained its vibrancy.

Adopted worldwide

Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction
(March 14–18, 2015 in Miyagi)

Two decades of efforts in the areas affected by the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake were assessed to create a new DRR framework based on the Hyogo Framework for Action.

Outcome document: Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 (excerpt) Priorities for action 4.

Enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response and to “Build Back Better” in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction.



A century of Creative Reconstruction [North Tajima Earthquake]



The 1925 North Tajima Earthquake, which occurred 100 years ago, claimed many lives in Toyooka and Kinosaki and devastated most of the areas.

During the reconstruction process, in the Kinosaki Onsen district, the road width was doubled to reduce disaster risks and to accommodate the upcoming automobile society. Additionally, the river was widened and its banks were raised to mitigate flood damage.

These efforts from the past demonstrate ingenuity, not merely in restoring the areas to their pre-disaster state but in revitalizing them to create a better society.

30th Anniversary Programs for the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake

To mark the 30th anniversary of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, a new concept —“To Connect”—was added to the existing themes of “To Remember,” “To Share,” “To Utilize,” and “To Prepare.” Hyogo Prefecture collaborates with its citizens and related institutions and organizations to develop Hyogo Safety Day events and commemorative programs.

To Remember

To Share

To Utilize

To Prepare

To Connect

“To Connect” : Transcending generations and regions to widely pass on and share experiences and lessons learned from the earthquake

Outline *DRR: Disaster risk reduction

- 1 Hyogo Safety Day Memorial Ceremony
A place for remembrance and pledging
- 2 Commemorative programs
Activities encouraging DRR-conscious culture
- 3 Public engagement programs
Boosting 30th anniversary momentum
- 4 Grant programs
Supporting citizen-led DRR activities



There is no memory that will not fade away. There is a determination to connect.



Special website

Major initiatives

Hyogo Safety Day Memorial Ceremony

The 30th Anniversary Memorial Ceremony of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake was held on January 17, 2025 at Hyogo House and HAT Kobe. It served as an opportunity for participants to offer their deepest condolences to the victims and to express their commitment to creating a safe and secure society, both in and outside Japan, as well as to the next generation.



Public engagement programs

•Project by Young People to Connect the Lessons Learned from the Earthquake

An initiative where university students and other young people in Hyogo, as members of the project team, produce videos to prevent the memory of the earthquake from fading away and to connect the experiences and lessons to future generations

•Remember 117

A project where young people in Hyogo choose their own topics, conduct interviews, and create and share web articles and other materials in their own words.



Commemorative programs

•Resilience Session: Earthquake and Future Expo Kobe

An event where participants connect the memory of the earthquake to future generations and learn about the latest DRR technology and initiatives through hands-on programs (April 2025)

•Creative Reconstruction Summit

A conference where representatives of disaster-affected areas and related organizations in Japan and overseas discuss the theme of Creative Reconstruction, a concept that emerged after the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, and share their findings globally (September 2025)

レジリエンスセッション

震災と
未来の
こうべ博

