

Child-Rearing Support and Boosting the Local Population

Shimojo Village



Background and Purpose of Project

Japan faces a declining birth-rate and an aging population. Concerns about society's aging and depopulation are particularly pronounced in hilly areas, or areas situated between plains and mountains. Though such areas play an important role in land preservation and food supply, many young people are leaving to move to urban areas. The village of Shimojo, located in a hilly area, saw its population fall from 6,410 in 1950 to 3,859 in 1990, a decline of as much as about 40% over the four decades. Kihei Ito, who became mayor of the village in 1992 insisted that depopulation threatens the existence of the village, and worked hard to increase the population.

Outline of Project

1. The construction of housing for young people

The village government built 10 buildings with a total of 124 apartments for young people between 1997 and 2006. Many young people moved into them thanks to low rents that were half the levels of private-sector houses in neighbouring municipalities.

Construction costs: About 110 million yen per building. The construction was financed only by general-account revenue and municipal bonds while no state subsidies were used.

Eligible occupants: Households with children or young people planning to marry. They are also required to join local community bodies and volunteer fire companies.



Apartment houses for young people

2. The development of land for houses.

The village government developed land for houses to help families who have moved into the apartments for young people relocate and live in the village permanently. Forty lots of land were put on sale in 1999 and 15 more in 2006. All of them were sold by 2014.

Prices: About 60,000 yen per 3.3 square metre (in line with market prices)

Buyer conditions: None. Buyers included those from outside the village.

3. Construction of housing for workers

The village government built an apartment building in 2008 for non-Shimojo residents who live and work in the village and are unaccompanied by their families. Companies that hire such workers conclude occupancy contracts with the village government on their behalf.

4. Creation of subsidies for housing construction, land development, and purchases in the village.

In fiscal 2015, a subsidy programme was launched to support those aged 45 or younger

who build houses and develop and purchase land in the village.

The programme provides up to one million yen in subsidies that cover up to 10% of costs for housing construction and up to one million in subsidies that cover up to 50% of costs for land development and purchases.

5. Gradual reduction in nursery school fees

Nursery school fees were lowered in stages starting in fiscal 2007. Fees for a second child are half the level of those for a first child, while there are no fees for other children.

For fiscal 2015, nursery school fees are between 8,900 yen and 48,100 yen for a child aged under 3, depending on household income, compared with 9,000 yen to 104,000 yen in state standard fees. Fees for a child aged 3 or older are 5,800 yen to 28,700 yen, compared with 6,000 yen to 101,000 yen.



Children at a nursery school

6. Medical fees are not charged for children aged up to high school third grade (from 2010).

7. Providing gifts to those who enter school (from fiscal 2014).

In the initial year, those who entered elementary school received 20,000 yen in shopping vouchers that can be used within the village, and those who entered junior high school 50,000 yen. The amounts were raised to 30,000 yen for elementary

school and 60,000 yen for junior high school in fiscal 2015.

8. Providing baby birth gifts.

Cash gifts of 50,000 yen are offered for a second child and 200,000 yen for a third or other children.

Features and Advanced Aspects

The village government was able to set occupancy requirements for housing for young people in line with its policies because it did not use state subsidies for their construction. In particular, requiring occupants to join local community bodies and volunteer fire companies helped them easily assimilate into local communities.

The village government tried to encourage young people to live in the village permanently by offering housing, child care, medical and education support in a comprehensive manner.

Effects of Project

-The village had a population of 6,410 in 1950, 3,859 in 1990, 4,024 in 2000, 4,204 in 2005, 4,163 in 2010 and 3,986 in 2015.

Hilly areas across Japan had a total population of 16.54 million in 1990, 16.28 million in 2000, 15.64 million in 2005 and 14.63 million in 2010, a sharp decline that is in stark contrast to the situation in the village of Shimojo.

-The village had a fertility rate of 1.97 children per woman on average between 1998 and 2002, 2.20 in 2010, 1.92 in 2011, 1.73 in 2012, 1.88 in 2013 and 2.03 in 2014. The numbers were higher than the national average in general, which was 1.36 on average between 1998 and 2002, 1.39 each in 2010 and 2011, 1.41 in 2012, 1.43 in 2013 and 1.42 in 2014.

Problems and Responses

◆Before Project Implementation

Mayor Ito's proposal to use village funds to finance

measures aimed at getting more people to live in the village came under criticism from the municipal assembly and others. He successfully persuaded opponents by explaining the need to take pioneering steps.

◆After Start of Project

The village's population started falling again after peaking in 2005. This is because the number of deaths tends to be higher than that of births as the village has many elderly people. In addition, the village is losing its allure as neighbouring municipalities have started providing similar housing and child care support services..

Outlook

At a time when the population is decreasing across the country, the Shimojo village government needs to increase the inflow of people by promoting the village as a more attractive municipality than others. It is considering ways to add more value to education and other child-rearing support measures.

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