

Tzu Chi Rebuilds Schools and Communities to Mitigate Disaster Risk

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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In continuous efforts to safeguard society's wellbeing and to prevent disaster, Tzu Chi Foundation is rebuilding 21 schools in Taiwan remote areas, relocated 22 households in Pingtung County and made capital improvement to 158 residential homes all around Taiwan.

Undergoing the disaster risk reduction project

Tzu Chi was invited by the Government to adopt disaster risk reduction project for schools and communities in need of assistance. After the government identified these buildings to be at risk of natural hazards, they reached out to Tzu Chi due to funding limitation and the urgency in these cases. After careful evaluation, Tzu Chi staff, volunteers and contractors worked together with schools for construction.

Rebuilding of schools started this summer with various target completion dates in 2016. All of these schools are scheduled to be completed by the end of 2016.



Most of the 21 schools rebuilt by Tzu Chi are located in remote mountainous areas in southern and eastern Taiwan. These 21 schools are located in the following counties: six in Hualien (Yuli Junior High School, Guo-Feng Junior High School, Huaren Junior High School, Chung Yuan Elementary School, Jia-Min Elementary School and Ming Yih Elementary School), nine in Taitung (Guanshan Junior High School, Tau-Yuan Junior High School, Chihpen Junior High School, Luye Elementary School, Guang Ming Elementary School, Ma Lan Elementary School, Kang Le Elementary School, Fuh-Shing Elementary School and Jian Huo Elementary School), five in Pingtung (Fang Liao High School, Gwong Jheng Junior High School, Li Kang Junior High School, Nei Pu Junior High School, and Gao Tai Junior High), and one in Kaohsiung (Shanlin Junior High School).

Some of them are located in indigenous communities known for insufficient resources and poor infrastructure. When rebuilding schools, Tzu Chi's first priority was to provide students a safe place to study. Tzu Chi also designed these buildings to serve as community or tribal emergency shelters. Local authorities were very happy to have these emergency shelters. Because of the facilities, the lives of local residents are better protected in time of disaster.

Resettlement of Laiyi Village

For areas truly susceptible to natural hazards, Tzu Chi convinced residents to move away from high risk areas and resettled in safe areas. Relocation of 22 households in Laiyi Village of

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Pingtung County was an extension of Tzu Chi relief operation for survivors of Typhoon Morakot since 2009. As of October in 2015 for the Typhoon Morakot relief, Tzu Chi had built new and permanent homes in safe zones for a total of 1,281 families in five new settlements. In the larger settlements, Tzu Chi also built community centers, schools, senior centers, power stations, waste water treatment plant and churches.



In 2009, Typhoon Morakot triggered flash floods and massive landslides that destroyed farms and buried mountainous indigenous tribes in southern Taiwan. Tzu Chi had worked with the government and survivors to offer charity solution with reduced disaster risk, hence breaking their vicious cycle of suffering. With Tzu Chi's assistance and insistence, these families were able to move away from high disaster risk zones. Their lives and assets would not remain threatened by natural hazards.

In these resettlement projects, Tzu Chi also hopes to give the mountains and other nature resources a break from human development and to converse natural environment. Tzu Chi believes that when these high-risk areas in the mountains are given sufficient time to recuperate, forest and its ecology will be restored. Therefore, risks of landslides, flash floods, droughts and other disaster will be reduced or prevented.

Importance of capital home improvement

Capital home improvement for Tzu Chi charity cases includes replacing roof, fixing leaks, packing holes in the walls and other remodeling and cleaning to revitalize the entire home for a healthier and safer living environment. Tzu Chi continues to improve building safety for care recipients and inspires neighbors and community members to join Tzu Chi volunteers in helping these families at risk. In the process, Tzu Chi also enhances community unity and resilience to disaster. From January to October in 2015, Tzu Chi has helped 158 families all around Taiwan to have a safer and healthier home so that they can sleep at night without worries. Since 2005, about 1,200 homes have been improved by Tzu Chi.

According to the World Bank "Natural Disaster Hotspots: A Global Risk Analysis" report in 2005, Taiwan is identified to be the place on Earth most vulnerable to natural hazards, with 73 percent of its land and population exposed to three or more hazards. Typically from June to October, Taiwan is constantly on the watch for typhoons. In 2015 so far, six typhoons had threaten Taiwan and half of them were super typhoons. Situated on the Pacific Ring of Fire, Taiwan is also in a seismically active zone. Data from Taiwan's Central Weather Bureau shows about 22,000 earthquakes will occur annually.

Living with constant threat of natural hazards in Taiwan, disaster risk reduction is very important. Prevention is better than relief aid. Therefore, Tzu Chi works closely with communities and government to reduce such vulnerability. Currently, discussion and planning is in progress to help three indigenous tribes resettling from landslide risk areas to safe areas.

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