

# ROAD TO RECOVERY

Earthquake Updates by JWCU  
Japan Workers' Co-operative Union  
February 28, 2014

## The Last Issue (at least for now): Summing Up the 3 Years

Almost 3 years have passed since the major disaster hit Tohoku region in March 2011. As reported in the August 2013 issue, we (JWCU) have been moving forward, slowly but surely, to rebuild the disaster-hit areas. In the Year 3, our members finally reached the point of actual job creation. A number of new worker coops have been launched by the graduates of our training programs to create jobs and to rebuild their own communities.

The next questions: How can we make these efforts sustainable? How can we contribute to community reconstruction? How can we expand our circle of support? In this issue, we'd like to introduce some examples from our experiences. Although each site is developing its unique projects, there seem to be something in common, including:

- Listening to the community's voices,
- Building networks through various activities (going beyond "business as usual"),
- Active community involvement (e.g. as advisors, volunteers, donators, participants, etc.), and
- Focusing on community resource (asking ourselves "What does our community have?").



Our efforts in Tohoku region have also been attracting increasing attention from wide communities outside of the cooperative society. In this issue, we would also like to introduce some of such media and global attention.

Last but not least, we would like to share our experiences in Fukushima, where things are far from "back to normal" but people are working hard to move forward despite the difficult situation.

This issue may be the last one, at least for a while, to share our experiences (because the editor is leaving JWCU). But it does not mean things are back to normal. We still have a long way to go.

We are grateful for your continuous support, and we hope some of our experiences will be of any help!

# Rebuilding Our Community: Worker Coops in Disaster-Hit Areas

## Creating an Inclusive Community, Leveraging Local Resources (in Tome City, Miyagi Prefecture)

In Tome City, the number of worker-members has grown to 23, providing various services to create an inclusive community and developing businesses to leverage local resources.

### <Day Care Center for the Elderly>

As reported in the August 2013 issue, the graduates of our job training program launched a day care center “Happy Days” in December 2012. The number of service users has grown from 9 to 11 in the last 6 months, and the Center is gradually getting on track.

The Center has also built a circle of support beyond its service users. For example, the Center organizes “Mini Day Care” twice a month for relatively healthy older people in the community, providing various activities. Some participants of this Mini Day Care serve as volunteers at the Center, others refer their neighbors to the Center, and still others become users of the Center when their physical functions decline. Also, neighbors sometimes donate vegetables to the Center.



### <Combining Food Business and Job Integration>

As reported in the August 2013 issue, the members have also launched a food-processing business “Minyo” in April 2013. To make the best use of their own local resources, the members have developed original donuts, made with local honey, soy milk and Okara (soy pulp). They sell the donuts and other products not only locally but also in various places, including events in Tokyo, to promote the products and the Town itself.



Moreover, the members also started a job assistance program for people with disabilities “Heart Ripple.” As the first step, the 4 Heart Ripple clients started taking a training program to become direct care workers in October 2013. Currently, the clients of Heart Ripple also work with the Minyo members, engaged in farm work, Tofu-making and cooking. The clients also join the weekly mobile store at temporary housing and a children’s hall in the community.

Hearing many voices calling for place for children with disabilities, the members are also preparing to launch an after-school program for children with disabilities in collaboration with local residents.

## **Engaging with Various Community Stakeholders through Business & More (in Watari Town, Miyagi Prefecture)**

As reported in the August 2013 issue, Power of Okkah project started a farmers market (Hamamichi), farming and food processing in the spring of 2013. The members are now working very hard to develop special ice cream using Watari Town's specialty: strawberry. What characterize this project is a wide range of efforts to engage with various community stakeholders through business and more. The following are some examples.

### **<Lunch Boxes Filled with the Community's Ideas and Hard Work >**

Currently, the biggest earner of Hamamichi is lunch boxes. The members sell them at Hamamichi and deliver them to regular customers. These lunch boxes are made possible thanks to the cooperation from and collaboration with various community members.



For example, the members provide “lunch box of the day,” which means they have to come up with different menus every day. A group of temporary housing residents work with the members in developing the menu for this lunch box. Moreover, the lunch boxes are made with fresh vegetables and fruits grown by local farmers.

### **<Active Communication with Local Producers>**

The project once faced declining sales. But the members took this crisis as an opportunity to revisit their efforts. They rediscovered the importance of “customers' perspectives.” At a monthly meeting with local producers, the members asked for their cooperation in reviving the project. The meetings have become more interactive, and the members have been working harder to provide them with feedback and results of what had been discussed at the previous meeting. The members started a monthly Karaoke Party to bring more customers, and the local producers are also actively involved in this event.



### **<Joining Community Events>**

The members also participate in various events in the community. For example, at a town festival in September 2013, about 20 children harvested sweet potatoes at the project's farm and sold them at a booth.

### **<Listening to the Community's Voices>**

In Watari Town, there are few jobs for younger people. Job creation is therefore crucial so that young people and children can stay in this community. The question then is: How do we do it? One of the answers the members have come up with is “listening to voices of people in the community.” The members went door to door to collect voices of 60 households, asking for their comments on the farmers market and additional needs. The members are planning to

conduct additional interviews with 140 households, bring the feedback together, and take action to improve and expand their activities, which will hopefully result in additional job creation, based on the feedback.

### <Media Involvement>

Local radio and newspaper are also introducing Hamamichi, which has been quite helpful in promoting the project. The radio web site is available on <http://www.datefm.jp/shisei/watari/entry/000992.html>, and the newspaper article is available on [http://www.kahoku.co.jp/spe/spe\\_sys1087/20130404\\_01.htm](http://www.kahoku.co.jp/spe/spe_sys1087/20130404_01.htm).

## Power of GAGA: Growing, Processing and Selling Delicious Local Foods (in Ishinomaki City, Miyagi Prefecture)

Since its start in September 2012, Power of GAGA (GAGA=Mama) has been growing and growing. In addition to producing, processing and distributing seafood and Tofu, now they also cook and distribute lunch boxes and grow their own soy beans for Tofu. From Monday to Saturday, the members also visit temporary housing, not only to sell their Tofu but also to listen to the voices of temporary housing residents to build a better community.

In winter 2013, the members developed and promoted “GAGA Set” (about US\$30), the assorted delicious seafood of Ishinomaki, for the holiday gift season. Their products are also introduced online (<http://www.roukyou.gr.jp/index.php?itemid=515>).



## JWCU's Efforts Attracting Media/Global Attention

Our efforts in Tohoku region have been attracting growing attention from a wider society. The following are some examples of such media and global attention. It is worth noting that some of them introduce not only specific reconstruction efforts but also the overall concept of worker cooperatives as a model to rebuild post-disaster communities.

### 2013 United Nations General Assembly: Secretary-General's Report Mentions JWCU

The Secretary-General's report for the 68<sup>th</sup> session of the UN General Assembly in 2013 “Cooperatives in Social Development and the Observance of the International Year of Cooperatives (A/68/168)” mentions JWCU's efforts in job creation following the disaster.

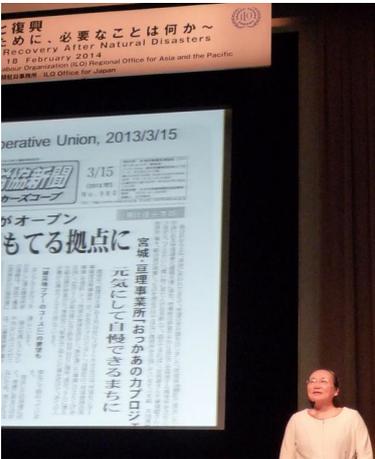


The report reviews the size and scope of cooperatives and discusses their contribution to social and economic development. In Section IV of the report (economic and social impact of cooperatives), it says “Cooperatives have demonstrated the capacity for effective reconstruction and peace in disaster areas, as shown by their recent response following major earthquakes and tsunamis.” As an example of such efforts, the report introduces JWCU’s services through job training and job creation to the population of the areas that were hit by the tsunami following the earthquake in March 2011.

You can download the report on the UN web site by going to <http://www.un.org/en/ga/third/68/documentslist.shtml> then clicking “A/68/168.”

**ILO Symposium:  
“Working out of Disasters: Job-led Recovery after Natural Disasters”**

On February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2014, ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific held an event “Working out of Disasters: Job-led Recovery after Natural Disasters” at UN University in Tokyo to shed lights on the issue of people’s jobs in post-disaster settings and to discuss how to build back our life better, in a job-rich way.



At its talk event to introduce 4 people who have been engaged in job creation and community reconstruction in the disaster-hit areas, Ms. Yoko Tanaka (Director, JWCU Tohoku Reconstruction Head Office) spoke about JWCU’s experience in Tohoku reconstruction, including not only accomplishments but also struggles.

As an increasing number of “natural” disasters hit communities across the globe, there must be so many things we can learn from each other: How can we prevent them? How can we overcome them? What are the steps to take? By sharing our experiences and learning from each other, we should be able to take more effective measures.

**National TV Appearance: Worker Coop as a Reconstruction Model**

NHK, the Japanese national TV station, broadcasts a program “Reconstruction Support” nationwide to introduce innovative practice in reconstruction of Tohoku region. On October 20<sup>th</sup> 2013, the program featured “Support for single parents in disaster-hit areas,” and it introduced the concept of worker cooperative as an example to reconstruct a community.



According to the TV program, whereas almost 3 years have passed, single parents in the disaster-hit areas are still in crisis. Government subsidies will be provided only for a limited time, and a number of single parents will lose the foundation not only of their own but also of their

children's lives. As one example to overcome this challenge, the TV program introduced the concept of worker cooperatives, in which local residents create and manage their own businesses that are needed in their own community, with some specific examples by JWCUC, such as Tofu Kobo (please see <http://www.cicopa.coop/Tofu-Kobo.html> and <http://www.ica-ap.coop/sites/default/files/2011%20successful%20case%20%28JWCUC%29.pdf> for more details on Tofu Kobo).

One of the JWCUC members in Tohoku region was invited to the TV studio and introduced our after-school program in another region which was launched in collaboration with single parents with similar concerns.

## Never Forget FUKUSHIMA

We have reported on our reconstruction efforts, and it is true that things are moving forward, albeit slowly. We are also hearing less and less of post-disaster situations in Japan, as if things were already back to normal. However, we must not forget that Fukushima Prefecture is still suffering from radiation problems even after nearly 3 years from the Nuclear Accident. People are still kept out of their own communities, farmers and fishermen are suffering from harmful rumors, and some communities are still untouched since March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

“Together with Fukushima Project” by JWCUC and its research unit Japan Institute of Co-operative Research organized a study tour to Fukushima from December 25<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup>, 2013, to see what is really going on in Fukushima and to find ways to work together in rebuilding their communities. Over 30 people participated in the tour.

We visited some coastal areas, including Tomioka Town, about 10km south of Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, where people are still not allowed to live. Please note that the following pictures were taken during the study tour; that is, December 2013. They are NOT the pictures in March 2011. The area is still filled with debris; contaminated soil is put in black bags and covered with green sheets, with no specific plan to move them to anywhere else; houses are still untouched since the tsunami; and certain areas are still closed with a barricade and guards because the radiation level is too high.





During the study tour, we also had chances to hear stories of people in Fukushima. An organic farmer who lives about 50km west of the Nuclear Plant says he is still suffering from harmful rumors even though products are tested and proved safe. A woman in her 60s who still lives as an evacuee says she'd like to go back to her community but is not sure she can wait that long. It can take decades, if ever, before she can live in her sweet old home. A monk who still lives as an evacuee mentions, "People say we are not certain about the future. But we do know the future. We know that only people who would come back to our community will be older people, not younger ones. We will have no place to work."

But these people are not just crying about this difficult situation. For example, the farmer is planning to develop a biomass plant to link farming and renewable energy. A group of evacuees has launched new food businesses.

Their biggest wishes: No more radiation, and never repeating the same mistake of Fukushima Daiichi Plant ever again.

What can the cooperative movement do, after hearing such voices of people in Fukushima? Things are far from over.