

JWCU's reconstruction efforts to cooperate with disaster victims

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1. Introduction

1-1. Purpose

Natural disasters, such as earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes and floods, are inevitable and part of lives for people around the world. More and more countries around the world have been experiencing natural disasters these days, and natural disasters have been global issues. The reconstruction from disasters has been a world concern, even though the situation may differ in each country. As we cannot stop or avoid natural disasters, it is possible for us to prepare for them by sharing reconstruction efforts and experiences and learning from each other.

Japan Workers' Co-operative Union (JWCU) has been working together with people in affected areas so that they could stand on their own feet to create their own jobs and reconstruct their communities. Jobs are essential for living and key elements to reconstruct communities in disaster-affected areas. People have to leave their communities without job opportunities and move to other places with job opportunities. A lot of job opportunities could lead to reconstructing and revitalizing affected communities.

Our reconstruction efforts, especially centered on securing jobs in the affected areas as an organization with experiences in creating jobs for 30 years, would be useful for countries which also have faced or will face natural disasters.

In this article, we would like to share with you our reconstruction efforts to cooperate with and involve disaster victims.

1-2. Outline

This article first explains damages caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake. Then it discusses actors which have been involved in reconstruction efforts and examines JWCU's reconstruction efforts. Lastly, it offers lessons we have learned from our reconstruction efforts and challenges for the future.

2. Damages caused by The Great East Japan Earthquake

The earthquake and following tsunami, which hit our country on March 11th 2011, caused a vast amount of damage, particularly in Tohoku (northeastern) region. In this section, we would like to go over the damages of this disaster.

2-1. Damage by the earthquake and tsunami

At 2:46 p.m. on March 11th 2011, the northeastern Japan was hit by the largest earthquake in Japanese history, a magnitude 9.0. The epicenter extended from the coast of Miyagi Prefecture to the coast of Ibaragi Prefecture, extending 500km north to south by 200km east to west. The massive earthquake generated tsunami over 40 meters high, and about 400 square kilometers mainly in the coast were flooded due to the tsunami. Almost 16,000 people were killed, and over 3,000 people are still missing. It is expected that about 330,000 people had to evacuate due to damages by the disaster, and about 120, 000 people (about 200,000 people, if including self-employed workers) lost their jobs.

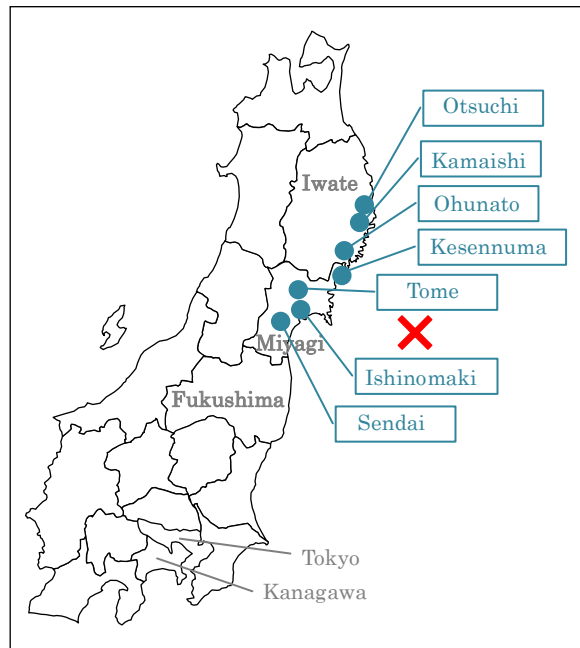


Figure 1: Map of Tohoku

2-2. Damage by nuclear power plant accident in Fukushima

The nuclear power plants in Fukushima Prefecture were severely damaged by the earthquake and following tsunami, and a large-scale radiation leak occurred. People are banned from approaching within 2 kilometers of the nuclear power plants and many residents have been forced to live in shelters.

Moreover, in the wake of the accident, large amounts of radioactive materials were released to the air, soil and ocean, and the major concern is health damage by radiation-contaminated agricultural and marine products. The government set provisional regulations and kept away agricultural and marine products exceeding the maximum stipulated content from markets. Compensation for damages, including by rumors, has been a major issue. Also, many people are concerned about mid- and

long-term environmental contamination. Removal of radioactive materials is an urgent issue.

2-3. Loss of jobs

The employment situation in the affected areas has been very severe. According to the news report in January 2012, the population decreased by 65,000 at 45 municipalities in Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima Prefectures, and 80% of them (49,000 people) were aged under 30's. Even though job opportunities in construction work, such as clearing debris and building new buildings, have doubled, most of them are short-term employments and do not result in stable and long-term employments.

Food preparation businesses including seafood processing, which had been mainstay industries, were severely damaged by the disaster. The working-age population has been decreasing. Especially, many of women who had been involved in those industries before the disaster have had difficulties in finding jobs, since there are mismatches between jobs which victims look for and jobs to be offered. Besides, the population had been decreasing since 2000 in northeastern Japan. Young people try to leave the region of less job opportunities, and the disaster could further encourage them to do that.

2-4. Collapse of communities

Regarding communities in Japan, neighborhood associations are organized by local residents, and they conduct various community activities to build social ties among local residents, such as planning festivals in collaboration with traditional shrines, helping each other at funerals, and cleaning neighborhoods in turn. However, these days, many people avoid having connection with neighbors and joining neighborhood associations. Also, since single households, two-earner households and young families cannot or do not want to have any role in the associations or be involved in activities, the percentage for people to join neighborhood associations has decreased nationwide. Moreover, under the Natural Disaster Countermeasures Basic Law passed after the Ise Bay Typhoon in 1959, the importance of autonomous disaster-prevention activities among local residents and the set-up of autonomous disaster-prevention associations are stipulated.

In the wake of the earthquake in March 2011, many houses were destroyed, and evacuation centers were set up at community centers and schools. In most cases, neighborhood associations played a role in the operations of evacuation centers. As disaster victims who had been forced to live in evacuation centers moved to temporary

houses, people in neighborhood associations were separated because families with elderly people and small children took priority and the number of temporary houses was limited. This had an influence on rebuilding of neighborhood associations in temporary houses, such as taking a long time to rebuild neighborhood associations or making it difficult to do so.

3. Reconstruction efforts by various actors

3-1. Relief efforts under the leadership of the government

The Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake in 1994, when young people including university students were involved in volunteer activities, triggered enactment of the NPO Law. Since then, more than 400,000 non-profit organizations have been established, and more and more people are involved in volunteer activities. Also, after the earthquake in 1994, Japan was hit by natural disasters such as earthquake in Niigata and tsunami in Hokkaido, and in each case people come to be involved in volunteer activities from across the country.

In the wake of the disaster, volunteer centers were set up mainly by social welfare councils under the leadership of the government and served as contact points to coordinate about 970,000 volunteers from nationwide and receive relief materials such as food and clothes. These volunteers were involved in cleaning up debris and providing support in evacuation centers. Also, the Self Defense Forces (SDF) deployed about 100,000 troops to rescue human lives and clean up debris over a long period.

Even though volunteer activities and relief efforts were orderly promoted under the leadership of the government, they had negative effects. For example, volunteers and relief goods were brought to volunteer centers and then distributed equally to each evacuation center. However, volunteer centers could not be aware of needs of people who were staying home or isolated, not in evacuation centers. Therefore, although there were many goods collected from nationwide in evacuation centers, relief goods were not delivered in some areas, and support based on people's needs was not provided. Also, even regarding relief funds, it took time for the government and social welfare councils to take measures to distribute relief funds equally to disaster victims, and it was the end of July 2011 when the first relief money was paid. Everyone was frustrated about the slow responses.

3-2. Japan Workers' Co-operative Union (JWCU)

As volunteer activities and relief efforts were promoted by various actors and organizations under the leadership of the government, they have not met needs of disaster victims and communities fully, nor have they cooperated with or involved disaster victims. In other words, they have treated disaster victims as people who receive support, not as people who play active roles to rebuild their communities. Besides, more job opportunities are still needed in the affected areas. Under such a circumstance, JWCU, a national federation of workers cooperatives, has played important roles to meet needs of people and communities in Tohoku and to create jobs by cooperating with communities.



JWCU is a cooperative in which workers contribute to the capital, manage businesses democratically, and provide work. For 30 years, JWCU has created jobs in communities for elderly people, people with disabilities and young people through various businesses across the country. There are 11,867 worker-members in total as of March 2010, and our turn over in fiscal year 2009 amounts to 27 billion yen. We put great value on 3 levels of cooperation; cooperation among members, with service users, and with communities. For example, we do not treat service users and community residents as customers but rather as part of us, that is, actors playing active roles to share and resolve issues which communities face. We call the way we work with 3 levels of cooperation “associated work”.

We have been creating jobs to promote the well-being of communities through associated work (See Figure 2). Also, these days, we have strengthened activities through social solidarity to discuss problems we cannot solve by ourselves with community residents through social gatherings and solve them together, such as activities to support the elderly who suffer from isolation and poverty.

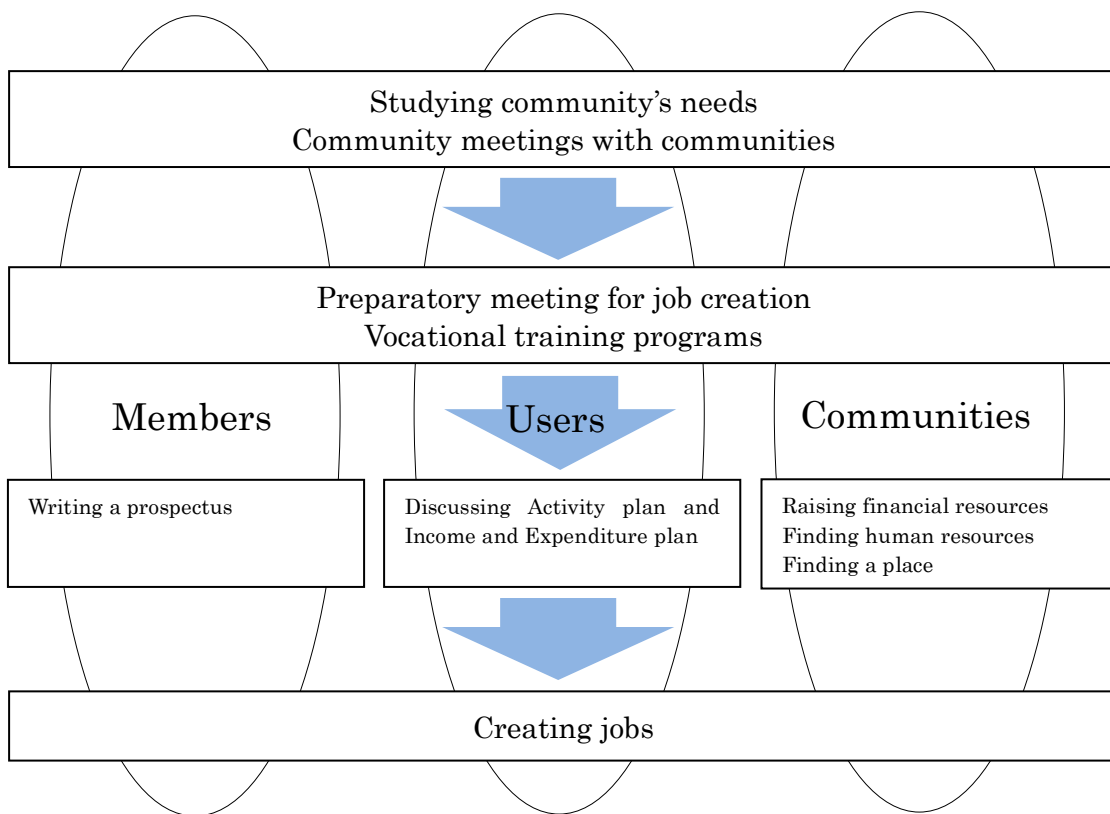


Figure 2: *Process of job creation through associated work*

Also, the United Nations has declared 2012 the International Year of Cooperatives (IYC), highlighting the contribution of cooperatives to socio-economic development, with the theme of “Cooperative Enterprises Build a Better World”. Cooperatives trace the roots to activities by workers in Rochdale, England in 1844 to make good quality items and sell them at a fair price. As communities were severely hit by the earthquake, creating jobs to rebuild communities with disaster victims is a mission of cooperatives. JWCU has been working on reconstruction efforts based on our experiences in creating jobs that meet needs of communities. The next section gives you some examples of our reconstruction efforts.

4. Working together to overcome the disaster: JWCU’s reconstruction efforts with the spirit of cooperation and solidarity

JWCU has been making as much effort as it can to support the members and affected communities, not only for the short-term relief immediately after the disaster

but also for the long-term reconstruction of the communities. About year and a half have passed since the earthquake, and our efforts have changed gradually to job creation and total support of livelihood for disaster victims. In this section, we would like to introduce our efforts of emergency support and reconstruction support.

4-1. Emergency Support- Material, Financial and Human Support

The earthquake and following tsunami caused a vast amount of damage to our member worker cooperatives. Immediately after the disaster, JWCU provided the emergency relief to support our members and their communities, serving “human needs”, through associated work, which is to say, with cooperation and solidarity among members, with users and communities.

4-1-1. Cooperation among members

Even though many JWCU members in Tohoku region lost their property such as houses and cars, all of them survived the disaster. Immediately after the earthquake, the JWCU head office collected information from the affected areas about changing needs and secured the items accordingly. We collected goods, such as foods, water and clothes, from our members across the country and distributed them to the members in the disaster areas according to members’ needs.



JWCU members heading to Tohoku with boxes of foods

In addition to delivering goods, some of our members also went to the disaster areas to remove debris, clean up the areas, and provide care. For example, JWCU members from Hyogo Prefecture, where the big earthquake hit in 1995, were in Miyagi to help our members in Ishinomaki City to clean up the area. They brought their own machineries and removed debris in the area at unbelievable speed. They know how support from members nationwide helped them overcome difficult times, and they wanted to provide support to members in Tohoku region based on their experiences.



Members in Hyogo Prefecture helping clean up the community in Miyagi

4-1-2. Cooperation among our service users

Not only JWCU members, but also our service users provided support to help members and communities in disaster areas. For example, one of JWCU members who provide various social services, a child support center in Sendai (Miyagi Prefecture) was severely hit by the earthquake and needed various supplies, including slings and dust clothes. Over 500km away, another group of JWCU members, who operates a small senior center in Toyama Prefecture, heard the story in Sendai and stood up with their service users, who were willing to offer help. “We are too old to go to Tohoku, but we can support Tohoku by sewing.” About 10 elderly people came to the senior center every day, and almost everyone was hard at work on sewing. Finally, 4 slings and 100 dust clothes were sent from Toyama to Miyagi.



Our service users sewing slings and dust clothes

4-1-3. Cooperation with communities

JWCU members also called for cooperation and support to communities in order to raise funds to support our members and communities financially, to cover their wages and to purchase necessary goods. For example, one month after the disaster, JWCU members who run a children’s hall in Fussa City (western part of Tokyo) held Charity Bazaar so that residents in the community around the hall can support people in Tohoku region through contributing and purchasing goods. People of all ages were involved in this event. For example, elementary school children at the hall made posters for the event, middle-school students donated their toys and comics, and an elderly person brought a bottle filled with coins for donation. The money raised at the event was sent to people in Tohoku.



Charity Bazaar in Tokyo

4-2. JWCU reconstruction efforts

While the emergency phase is over, rebuilding lives and communities has been a

serious challenge and it will take many years. Our members have been determined to cooperate with people and communities in the affected areas to make the areas better than ever.

4-2-1. Setup of Tohoku Reconstruction Head Office

In July 2011, as the first step to rebuild the communities in Tohoku, JWCU set up Tohoku Reconstruction Head Office in Miyagi Prefecture to support job creation and community reconstruction. Ms. Yoko Tanaka, the director of the Head Office, said in an inaugural ceremony of the office held on July 15th 2011, “I am sure that we can overcome this difficult time if we join hands with people in the affected communities and bring together their wonderful power.”



Inaugural ceremony of Tohoku Reconstruction Head Office

4-2-2. Building a network for cooperation in the affected areas

However, in the face of devastating damages, we did not know what to do and could not figure out the situations in the affected areas. Also, we had few connections with local communities. Therefore, what we did first was to make a great effort to build a network in the affected areas. We held social gatherings as many times as we could in temporary housing sites, to meet as many organizations and local residents as we could and develop a network for cooperation. We were fortunate to meet people who try to stand on their own to build new communities despite the difficulties. These efforts made it possible for us to realize and share with people various needs in the communities and to find the ways to create jobs which are needed in the communities.

4-2-3. Vocational training programs to create jobs in the affected areas by disaster victims

Around fall of 2011, when about 8 months passed, victims' needs shifted to housing and work. However, where they used to work were destroyed or washed away by the disaster, and they could not find any job in the affected areas even though they wanted to start working again for living. How to create jobs has been a critical issue.

It is crucially important to create jobs locally. Otherwise, people try to find employment outside Tohoku and this would hamper reconstruction. To create job opportunities for people in the quake-hit areas, JWCU has been commissioned by

several municipalities in disaster areas to provide vocational training programs through which trainees study about welfare programs for the elderly and create jobs according to communities' needs. Those vocational trainings were started in Tome, Ofunato, Otsuchi and Kesennuma (See Figure 1 for the location of each city).

What is unique about our programs is that we not only provide training itself but also work with trainees to create actual jobs that benefit communities after graduation, rather than waiting for someone to hire them. Each program is for about 20 people who have lost their jobs due to the disaster. With emphases on care, food security and community, JWCU's 6-month training programs consist of such contents as: how to create jobs, current conditions and challenges in the community, community assessment, training to become home care workers, field practicum, development of business plans, and the actual preparation to start a business.

However, it is not easy to create jobs and we have also faced difficulties. Many of trainees have lost houses or property, some lost their families, and some were not ready to work yet. Also, trainees have frequent disagreement with each other, as they have differences in terms of affected situations, their career, and environment in which they had grown up. Besides, since vocational trainings are just "trainings", we can make a curriculum to acquire a skill or obtain a qualification and to engage in a practical training, but not to start a business and get to work (except the vocational training program in Tome City). Even though we provide trainings to create actual jobs and trainees try to start a business after the program, it is very difficult for them to raise start-up and operational funds.

4-2-3-1. Creating jobs through a labor policy of a municipality to support for starting a business

As we mentioned before, the vocational training which started in October 2011 (till March 2013) is unique in terms of the program to support for starting a business.

While we developed a closer relationship with people in the affected areas, we visited municipalities, interviewed their officials on labor policies, looking for possibilities to submit a proposal to create jobs. Through these



Vocational training in Tome City

interviews, it turned out that few affected municipalities have policies to create continued employment. However, we found that Tome city did have a public offering of

manpower development program, which supports disaster victims to start their own business and provides a comprehensive support from vocational training to starting a business.

Our proposal was adopted by the municipality, and since October 2011, we have been working on programs to create jobs with disaster victims and people in the community. The training consists of how to create jobs by learning from our nationwide experiences, interviews to understand communities' needs, training to become home care workers, and visits to various facilities.

As part of the training program, the trainees conducted community assessment with temporary housing residents to hear the residents' voices that would bring hints to start their own businesses. In order to bring as many people as possible to hear their voices, the trainees organized a mobile shop and singing café at the temporary housing. Through these assessments, they found needs for farmers market, transportation and places to learn some cultural activities.



Singing café at the temporary housing

As they finished those trainings, they were divided into five groups according to residents' needs; elderly care, persons with disabilities, agriculture and food processing, handyman services, and craft. Each group has been making a business plan and moving to the next step to actually start a cooperative that will benefit the community.

4-2-3-2. Vocational training and job creation through the network built by associated work

In Kesennuma City (Miyagi Prefecture), since the beginning of the training, we have had understanding and cooperation of local shopping street association and support organizations in the community.

In August 2011, we had an opportunity to talk with people in the Kesennuma shopping street association. The shopping street was washed away by the tsunami, and many people were about to close their businesses. Yet, people in the shopping street association built temporary shops and have been working to reconstruct the shopping street and revitalize the community, discussing framework for the future of the street and community. As the community reconstruction partners, JWCU and Kesennuma shopping street association decided to work together for a vocational training to create jobs to rebuild the community. As the program went on, various

organizations, such as municipalities, neighborhood associations in temporary housing and people in the community, became involved in the program.

Trainees, most of whom have lost their jobs due to the disaster, studied care and welfare to become care workers in Kesennuma. Also, as part of the program, trainees discussed future plans for Kesennuma. Each trainee talked about what he/she had thought about issues which Kesennuma faces, saying, “We need a place for the elderly,” “There are no play spaces for children” and “There are few places where people with disabilities can work and live until the end”.



Trainees at the graduation ceremony

All of the trainees finished the training program in May 2012. At the graduation ceremony, trainees said, “I realized that there were many challenges around us. I want to contribute to the community welfare by using my ability”, “I had been working to make a lot of money before the disaster. However, the training program changed my attitude. I learned that there was the way of working to benefit the community”. The program was a great improvement for each trainee.

Now, three of them have been planning to start a business, and they have already held several preparatory meetings with organizations in the community to discuss what kind of business they should start. Also, the second program started in June 2012 with 17 trainees.

The member of Tohoku Reconstruction Head Office says, “Our role is to support people who try to stand on their own feet.” It is people in the affected areas who rebuild and reconstruct their communities.

In Ofunato (Iwate Prefecture), the program started in November 2011. This program provided skills and know-how in businesses that link the primary industry (agriculture, forestry and fishery) and community welfare.

The program consisted of lectures about the youth, child care, and support for people with disabilities and also community assessment to bring hints to start their own businesses, so that



Trainees and JWCU members in Ofunato

trainees can be ready to create a job by themselves.

As the program finished in March 2012, five of the trainees are finding a way to start a business. Through the community assessment which they conducted in temporary housing, they found that there are few shops around the area. Therefore, their idea is to open a tofu shop, produce and sell agricultural products by guidance of local farmers, and open a produce stand in cooperation with those who want to process and sell marine products such as local seaweed or octopus.

4-2-3-5. Two projects in Otsuchi: Creating jobs to provide food, energy and care for their own communities

This disaster and nuclear power plant accident have also reminded us how much we rely on outside for our basic needs. JWCU members across the country are working to improve self-sufficiency in food, energy, and care at a community level.

In Otsuchi (Iwate Prefecture), we have been working on two vocational training programs for disaster victims to create jobs since April 2012; one in forestry to leverage local resources and the other in provision of food, energy and care for their own communities.

In June 2012, we established a civic council for reconstruction, where citizens who are disaster victims discuss community developments and work together. Participants said, “I want to foster musical and cultural industries,” “I want to create jobs for biodiesel fuel business.” We hold the meeting every month.



Opening ceremony of vocational trainings in Otsuchi

Also, as the part of the training, trainees conducted interviews to understand people’s needs in 21 temporary housing sites. These interviews revealed serious situations in Otsuchi, such as a shortage of facilities and workers in elder and child care, as well as the growing number of people leaving the community to look for jobs and living places.

We have been trying to start a business with trainees, listening to voices and needs of communities.

It will take time to create jobs truly needed in affected communities with disaster victims and it is challenging for us. But we will never give up, and we are determined

to build better communities with them.

4-2-4. Reconstruction support with social solidarity in Kanagawa

Our members across the country have provided support for Tohoku (such as efforts to grow rice and send it to Tohoku, Parents' Plaza for evacuees), and now we would like to introduce reconstruction support in Kanagawa, which the first author has been involved in. JWCUC members in Kanagawa have been to Tohoku to support people and communities in the affected areas fifteen times since March 2011, and more and more people in various sectors are getting involved in our activities.

4-2-4-1. Collaboration with local NPO in Ishinomaki

JWCUC members in Kanagawa have been carrying out support activities in collaboration with local NPO Fair Trade Tohoku in Ishinomaki City (Miyagi Prefecture).

Fair Trade Tohoku, which provides support for youth such as NEET (young people Not in Education, Employment or Training) and young people who stay at home and do not work, has been responding quickly to communities' needs, even though its members were also hit by the disaster. When we learned about them, we were determined to support their activities as much as possible and engage in support activities for elderly households and people in small villages who cannot get enough support.

When we visited Ishinomaki in April 2011 and attended a meeting for disaster prevention (meeting which the Ishinomaki City mayor organized every day after the disaster, where relevant authorities gathered to share their activities and coordinate activities), associate professor Lee from Ishinomaki Sensyu University who also supports Fair Trade Tohoku expressed his concern. "Volunteer groups from outside the city provide only one-sided support. Since the disaster, many of local people have been leaving the city. We need to coordinate activities so that people in Ishinomaki could engage in reconstruction of their communities on their own initiative and volunteer group would support their reconstruction efforts." Inspired by his message, we have been focusing on reconstruction efforts and job creations in which local people play active roles for reconstruction.

4-2-4-2. From relief efforts to activities with social solidarity

Since we were concerned that JWCUC efforts lacked manpower and continuity, we asked for support and solidarity of NPOs and other cooperatives in Kanagawa, citizens, and students in several universities. One of the key features of our activities is that various actors across occupations and social positions, such as private companies,

citizens and students, come together (See Figure 3). That is our strength to make us different from activities by other groups. The broad network we have built through our activities is a great asset for us. The variety of social positions, ages and views made it possible for us to listen to voices of many disaster victims, understand changes and needs of affected communities, and develop our support activities.

Many of elderly people, who are our service users in welfare centers and public facilities were also hurt by the tragic situations. Even though they could not go to Tohoku with us, they contributed to our activities for Tohoku by donating money and supplies.

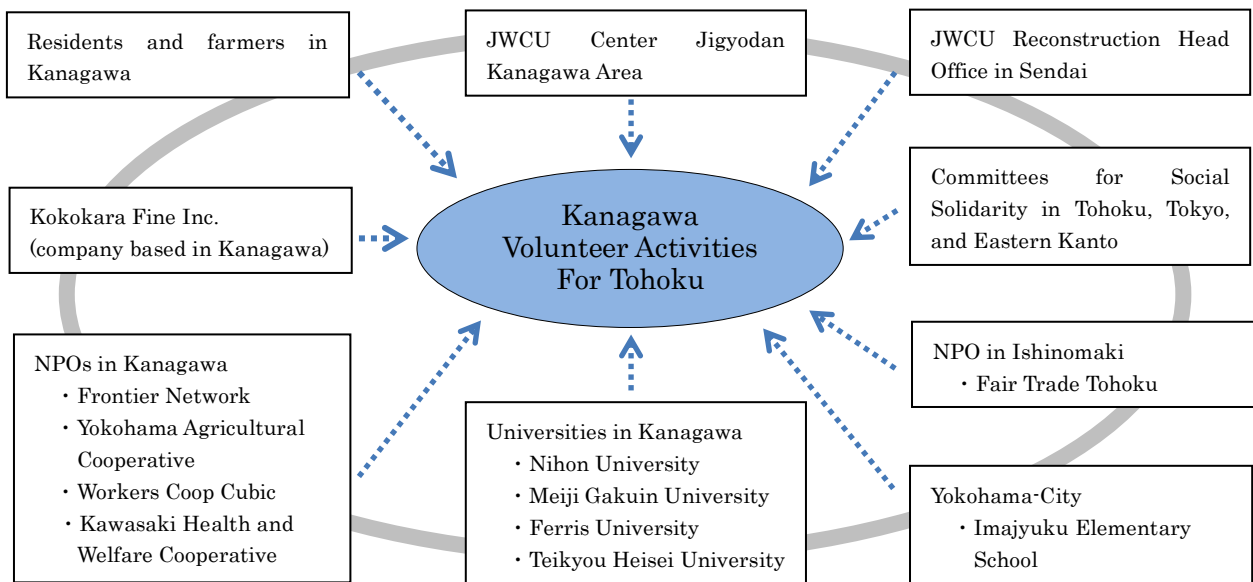


Figure 3: Structure of Kanagawa Volunteer Activities for Tohoku

4-2-4-3. From disaster victims to supporters

In May 2011, we started a soup kitchen project in Ishinomaki City. 24 people, including JWCU members, civic volunteers, students and members of JWCU's partnering organizations, got on a bus at night, headed to Miyagi, and arrived in Ishinomaki in the early morning. They met with other volunteers from other prefectures, and the total of 40 volunteers set up 2 soup kitchen sites near evacuation centers. By the late morning, the place was filled with 100 people lining up for the foods. The volunteers cooked fried noodles, rice balls, fried rice and others for about 500 people. The foods and equipments for this project were donated by local farmers, shops and neighborhood associations in Kanagawa area. Since May 2011, we have been organizing this project more than 10 times.

This project is not just about providing foods. This is where we see the reality of the affected areas, learn the needs of people, and build networks with people and communities there.

As we go to Ishinomaki, we build stronger partnerships with people in the affected communities. In mid-September 2011, when they made the 10th trip, we not only provided meals and supplies but also helped organizing a sport festival in the community, which brought 1,000 people together. The manager of a nursery school, where the number of children dramatically decreased due to the relocation by the disaster, asked us to work with them to organize a sport festival. This event was by students who were involved in our support activities planned to encourage the nursery school, children and their community.

Our members are also beginning to understand the lives in the temporary housing as they deliver goods and conduct a survey with the residents. Many residents do not



Disaster victims lining up for foods



Participants after volunteer activities



People in the community enjoying the sport festival

know their new neighbors, and sometimes they have no one to speak with for all day. They are mostly older persons and live on \$500/month pension. And unlike the evacuation centers, they now have to pay for utilities and foods. Volunteers are also disappearing from the community. The biggest worry is that the housing will close in 2 years and they have no idea where to go after that. Many young people have already left the community, and older persons are left in the temporary housing.



Volunteer participants preparing meals

When one year had passed since the disaster, our activities changed from activities supporting disaster victims to those cooperating with and involving them.

In March 2012, we prepared meals outdoors and cooked sakura mochi (cherry flavored soft sweet rice cake) in cooperation with affected people, so that we can support them in rebuilding mutually-supportive relationship and social ties in their communities. Twenty people in the affected areas, mainly women who lost their jobs due to the disaster, were actively involved in our activity and enjoyed displaying their abilities to prepare for meals. This activity was a great opportunity to promote a community activity.

Also in July 2012, we supported an event by neighborhood associations in temporary housing sites. Now, our role is to support affected people and communities in standing on their own feet.

4-2-4-4. What we have learned from our activities

Our activities changed from relief efforts by JWCU alone immediately after the disaster, to activities with social solidarity by various actors including companies, citizens and students. The variety of actors involved in our activities enabled us to promote support activities and to continue activities over a long period.

Also, the continued support activities with empathy encouraged independence of affected people. In temporary housing sites where we continue to provide support, we prepared 350 meals outside and cooked Japanese traditional sweets in cooperation with disaster victims. Through those activities to cooperate with affected people, we could create situations where they play central roles to rebuild and reconstruct their own communities.

The fact that participants of our activities told others how they had felt and what

they had experienced when they visited the affected areas enabled us to further expand our circle of cooperation. As a result, we become a hub of support for Tohoku, and our activities have been strengthened. Also, acting on their own initiatives created changes and growth within themselves. They were given an opportunity to reconsider their way of living and grow as a human by learning about affected people's experiences and way of living.

4-2-4-5. Direction for future activities

Continued support from various sectors is needed in order that disaster victims who lost houses and property could stand on their own feet. There is only so much that affected people and communities can do by themselves for reconstruction. People not in the affected areas need to connect with them and be involved in their support in one way or another. Therefore, we would like to involve as many people from various backgrounds and actors as possible in our activities and provide continuous support.

Even though surveys conducted in several temporary housing sites revealed that there were expectations for job creation, we have not been able to make concrete efforts to create jobs in Ishinomaki. We need to support affected people and communities in creating jobs in cooperation with not only Fair Trade Tohoku but also Tohoku Reconstruction Head Office and JWCU members in Tohoku.

This is the second year of our reconstruction efforts, and now we need to shift our focus from direct support to indirect support for affected people and communities. As we prepared meals outside and cooked Japanese traditional sweets to work with disaster victims, the important thing is to create the environment where they play central roles to rebuild and reconstruct their own communities, such as soup kitchen projects and activities for Ikigai (meaning life-worth-living) of the elderly, to cooperate with affected people. It is people in the affected areas who are central players, and we are just supporters for them. We would like to support affected people in addressing challenges in their communities and revitalizing their own communities by their own hands.

5. Conclusion: Lessons learned and challenges for the future

5-1. Affected areas as a miniaturized version of Japanese society

As we have been involved in volunteer activities for reconstruction, we have learned three things. The first thing is that many people join our activities if we call for support. The second thing is that we could provide support for reconstruction efforts

by disaster victims through asking them to participate in these activities. Thirdly, like in Tohoku, even in Kanagawa area, which is next to Tokyo and which has the second largest population in Japan (9 million), there are many elderly people who are isolated, such as those living in food deserts, and the situation would be worse across the country in the future. Therefore, rebuilding a community is a challenge not only for Tohoku, but also for other regions. Affected regions are a miniaturized version of Japanese society, and communities that are successfully rebuilt in Tohoku could be a model for Japanese society.

5-2. Building a new society from the Tohoku region

The Great East Japan Earthquake showed that Japanese society has seen limits. We cannot prevent all of natural disasters by artificial products. Also, we should not give the market all control over areas such as food, energy and care which are directly linked to human life. In the face of difficult times, without any relationship with communities, it takes time for people to take action.

We must have been warned about the way Japanese society has worked, where people have put the corporate society at the center, have left our livelihood to services by for-profit companies, have looked for efficiency, and have not placed any value on relationships among people. Now is the time for us to return to the starting line again, live in coexistence with nature, and be self-sufficient in things closely related to our livelihood within our own community. Through these efforts, it is also important to rebuild a closer and face-to-face relationship with neighbors.

5-3. Roles of cooperatives to build citizen-centered communities

The devastating disasters have made us reconsider roles and values of cooperatives.

Once, our neighborhood had a “community tie”. People used to be proactively involved in various activities in a community by associations such as neighborhood community association, association for the elderly, association for children, parent-teacher association, fire brigade, and local shop association. They used to support and revitalize their own community through these activities. However, as the population ages and fewer babies are born, and women’s participation in the workforce is promoted, many people tend to feel burdened with relations with their neighbors and emphasize individual right, rather than solidarity of the community. The disasters have made us realize again the importance of social bonding in a community and the need of building our own community by our own activities.

However, many community associations have been in danger of continuing their

community activities because of population aging, falling birthrate and overwork. In order that local residents play core roles in activities to overcome challenges their community faces, cooperatives have important roles in; first, conveying a situation to community residents; secondly, involving community activities in danger; thirdly, developing human resources in the community; and lastly, working on community building. Cooperatives need to play a role to coordinate these activities.

Also, there is only so much we can do on our own. We need to further promote cooperation with various actors. As public, private, and the citizen (third) sectors develop individually, they should try to work hard and improve by learning from others. Now must be the time when various people in different fields, sectors, communities break down the boundaries and cooperate together toward common goals to build better communities by their own hands. JWCU would like to build a society in which people can live in peace.

About the author:

Takeshi Takanarita received a bachelor's degree in economics from Aoyama Gakuin University (Tokyo, Japan) in 1997. He has been engaged in various businesses of JWCU and set up many Community Welfare Centers to provide social services for people across the generations. He also contributed to the book "Creating Jobs through Co-operation" published in November 2011, introducing various activities by worker co-operatives in Japan. He is currently a member of the board of directors and the director in Kanagawa region of Center Jigyodan, which is the biggest member of JWCU.

Takako Tsuchiya, Master in Social Science (Ochanomizu University, Tokyo), studied about Gender and Development, and partnership between Japanese NGOs and developing countries. After her experience in several businesses of JWCU, such as maintenance of hospitals, services for the aged and vocational training for people with disabilities, she has taken up her position of International Relations at JWCU head office since 2010.

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