Comments from people in disaster-stricken areas, five years after the earthquake

Progress in the reconstruction of Fukushima including the revitalization of the Hamadori area is drawing attention. Little by little, people have been returning to areas that suffered from the nuclear disaster and have begun to build new communities. What are the issues that they are now trying to overcome, and what are the goals that they are aiming to achieve? Let’s hear from those leading these efforts, five years after the earthquake.

Five years have passed since 3/11. In Fukushima, where reconstruction efforts are being made in the wake of the nuclear disaster, the evacuation orders for Tamura City, Kawauchi Village, and Naraha Town were lifted in April 2014, October 2014, and September 2015 respectively. The restrictions on automobile traffic on part of Route 6 were removed, and subsequently, the Joban Expressway was fully reopened, which strengthened linkages with the metropolitan area. Furthermore, Fukushima Prefectural Futaba Future School was founded, and radioactive waste began to be transferred to interim storage facilities. These and many other important measures toward reconstruction are being intensified. New guidelines for accelerating reconstruction were also formulated.

Nonetheless, it is still necessary to solve many issues in order to recover from the damage caused by the earthquake. The number of evacuees from throughout Fukushima Prefecture is 99,000 (as of January 2016). The progress of reconstruction varies by municipality, and the true damage to housing, as well as the mental and physical health issues caused by prolonged evacuation orders has gradually been coming to light. In order to reconsider these conditions and to present a dynamic pathway toward reconstruction, the national government formulated a revised version of the guidelines titled, For Accelerating the Reconstruction of Fukushima from the Nuclear Disaster (June 2015). It calls for the enhancement of measures seeking the safe and prompt return of residents, including plans and policies concerning decommissioning and contaminated water management, as well as the expansion and enrichment of efforts to rebuild the businesses and occupations of disaster victims so that they may return to self-reliance and reinvigorated lives. In March 2015, the Intensive Reconstruction Period ended, and FY 2015 marks the launch of the Revitalization Period. This journal edition explores the ideas and thoughts of communities, companies, and individuals in the disaster-stricken areas as we enter this new phase of revitalization.
It is meaningful to “continue here.”

Representatives of the taiko-drumming group, the Tenji Daiko Ushiokai

Ms. Kaneko Takahara

Naraha Tenjin Daiko Ushiokai is a Japanese taiko (drum) performance group formed by Ms. Takahara. The number of members of Honobono exceeds 80.

Ms. Takahara, representative of the Naraha Tenjin Daiko Ushiokai, a drumming group whose members are children from Naraha Town, and also the leader of Honobono, a Japanese fabric handicraft workshop, is one of those who have been dedicated to rebuilding local communities. She gathered children who had been dispersed as evacuees in various areas to hold a concert in Tokyo. Her activities also include holding exhibitions of hanging decorations for Japan’s Girls’ Festival and dolls handcrafted by the members of Honobono, both in and outside Fukushima Prefecture, and their works have drawn attention for their refinement and brightness.

Naraha Town is the first to have its evacuation order lifted by the government among the municipalities from which all the residents had to evacuate.

With the slogan “Reviving Naraha,” its new journey toward creating a future has started. What are the expectations and challenges for the town’s future? Key persons from the town explain.

Mr. Tsutomu Sato

Mr. Tsutomu Sato, a town official, said in December 2014, it was adopted as a recovery project by the Reconstruction Agency in March 2015.

Mr. Sato is also an active member of the Nankashita Squad, which stands for “We hope to be of service to someone in Naraha Town.” The Squad’s members conduct activities such as cheering up residents using the disaster radio system and planning various community events. Through these efforts, “I started to strongly feel the importance of helping each other in the society in which I have been living,” he said.

“During the activities, what makes me happy is to hear participants say, ‘Although it was hard work, I enjoyed it.’ The town’s ideal reconstruction should be one that starts with fun.”

These grassroots activities have become a major driving force for the new Naraha Town.

Naraha Town was established in December 2014. It was adopted as a recovery project by the Reconstruction Agency in March 2015.

“The events conducted by Naraha include health-themed festivals and the dissemination of culture as well as tours to experience Naraha Town.”

Mr. Eni Noguchi, Public Welfare Department

Living standards at evacuation sites might be higher than those here in Naraha Town. However, this doesn’t necessarily indicate whether the minds of residents at evacuation sites are more happy or satisfied. I want to start collecting each resident’s opinion, bring it back to the office, and make use of it for further projects. I will also find ways for collaboration among the various departments at ‘Town Hall’.

Ms. Emi Noguchi, Public Welfare Department

Mr. Kenichi Yamauchi, Industry Promotion Department

My theme is “Restructuring food systems.” Last year in 2015, for the first time in five years, salmon fishing resumed and we were able to hold a pole-and-line fishing event. In addition, flowers and rice grown in Naraha began to be sold in the market, so we now have an impression that our efforts are gradually bearing fruit. We believe that our persistent and steady efforts to address challenges will certainly pave the way for revitalizing the town’s agriculture, forestry, and fishery industries within a 10- to 20-year timeframe. I feel our desire to “bring back the vitality and original scenery of times past” is getting stronger.

Mr. Masahiro Matsumoto, Reconstruction Promotion Department

I strongly feel that “youthful energy” is coming into the area, which allows me to expect that we will be able to create a town that will become even more fun and full of life than it was before the earthquake. I think many people outside the town are watching closely as it will be transformed. I’m wondering how we can best reach out to them to communicate the town’s attractive and unique qualities.

If we build the town back up, with new, fresh, and invigorated foundations, then little by little it will not simply resume its former identity before the earthquake, but it will transcend it.
“It’s been about 16 years since I returned from Tokyo to this village in order to take over the family farm. At first, I had very little idea what to do, but after working for ten years, I began to feel that I was becoming accustomed to working as a farmer. Then, the earthquake occurred,” said Mr. Kunihisa Matsumoto.

“Surely, five years removed from farming has had significantly negative adverse effects on farmers. Some may feel that although they wish to resume farming, they have lost the physical strength that they once had before the earthquake to work the field and barnyards throughout the year. At this moment, I’m not sure whether we will be able to continue to earn our living through farming in the future.”

Exploring new methods while continuing to cultivate

Although Mr. Matsumoto faced harsh realities, he was one of the first people to take action at an early stage. He began to cultivate rice on a trial basis together with his peers in 2012. After repeated tests on the rice, they shifted to cultivation on a demonstration basis, having actual shipments in mind. At meetings of the Study Group on Irrigated Rice, which consists of seventeen households and is chaired by Mr. Matsumoto, members are continuously exchanging opinions on rice cultivation using new methods.

“When evacuation orders are lifted, the number of people visiting this village will increase little by little. They will see us cultivating rice wherever they travel through this village, which will surely encourage them. We should look for what we can do for the time being, and in so doing be better prepared to take on various challenges in the future.”

I want to remember the individual faces of the 1,500 villagers

Mr. Kota Saito

He described the impression he had of Katsurao Village when he first visited before being hired by the Office, saying, “I found the village really quiet and felt as if there had been no one living there. And to be honest, I felt a bit frightened at first. At the same time, I knew that I wanted to see a brighter future for the village while being most closely connected with it.”

Mr. Saito, who was born in Ibaraki Prefecture, came to know about Katsurao Village for the first time while reading a newspaper. The article said that the Katsurao Village Office was to conduct employment examinations because of a personnel shortage.

“The article made me wonder why the Office was facing a personnel shortage, because I had the impression that there were plenty of persons who were willing to support disaster-stricken areas.”

When the earthquake occurred, Mr. Saito was a university student. He was shocked by the earthquake, and at that time, he almost lost sight of the meaning of studying in a university. He made up his mind to apply for this job while also being encouraged by what his father said: “I think you are suitable for this kind of job.” He looked back on those days, saying, “I wanted to contribute to the village, and I also wished to change myself.”

I feel happy when villagers greet me, calling me "Kota-kun"

In 2013, Mr. Saito became an official at the Katsurao Village Office. “I was not fit for the job at first,” he laughed. “Here, the Office and the villagers are building very close relationships, and all villagers know each other. Katsurao Village truly is the kind of town and countryside that we often see in movies. Nature here is rich and beautiful.”

He belongs to the Citizens’ Affairs Division, which deals with certificates of residence, family registers, and pensions. In addition to these tasks, he dedicates himself to providing responses to matters related to the nuclear disaster.

Mr. Yoshitaka Fujimoto (right)
Mr. Masahiro Nishizaka (left)
Katsurao Village Office Comments by the personnel in charge

I’m really happy when the villagers greet me, calling my name, ‘Kota-kun.’ When I visited a women’s association that was preparing meals for a festival the other day, they had me eat a lot, saying that I should put my feet up and stay awhile,” he laughed. “On this kind of occasion, I think that I may have been accepted as a member of this village.”

Plans for building the Reconstruction Interchange Hall are being carried out for the return of evacuated villagers. “It seems things are beginning to move in a good direction,” said Mr. Saito. He mentioned one of his goals, saying, “I wish to work here for a long time, and to remember the faces and names of all the villagers to the extent that I can immediately describe anyone in the village when asked about him or her.”
If we become pioneers in this town, many people may follow.

From the left, Mr. Yoshiki Itakura, Mr. Hidehiro Asada, Mr. Munehiro Asada, Ms. Miho Kubota.

NAMIE Town
A total of 18 business operators have returned to the town to reopen their businesses. With the prospect of integrating with the Innovation Coast Scheme, seeds for building a new town and creating new ventures have been nurtured.

Mr. Munehiro Asada (Representative Director and President)
Asada Mokuizai Sangyou Co., Ltd.
As enterprises return to the town and provide job opportunities, people should follow, and facilities like shops and hospitals should increase in number. Bearing this in mind, we launched business in February 2014. In the Hamadori region, Japan’s first CLT (Cross Laminated Timber) processing and distribution facilities are scheduled to be constructed. In preparation for this, we have already strengthened our production systems. As chairman of the Fukushima Prefectural Federation of Lumber Cooperative Associations, I am now holding meetings for a study group regarding the CLT project jointly with relevant officials from the prefectural government and university researchers. With the hope of doing away with groundless rumors and realizing strong sales of lumber produced in Fukushima Prefecture, we are taking steps forward.

Mr. Hidehiro Asada
(Representative Director)
At present, our company has 14 employees. They commute from distant places, determined to stay at our company as they have a strong desire to come back to live in Namie Town. As the town is located in the northern gateway to Fukushima Prefecture, it will have a good opportunity to influence the entire region as reconstruction proceeds. I would take on as much cooperation as possible to realize that. Most importantly, we would like to demonstrate that we are able to continue our business in this town.

Mr. Yoshiki Itakura
Manufacture and Commerce Section, Industry Promotion and Compensation Management Division, Namie Town Office
Reconstruction cannot be achieved only through the efforts of Town Hall officials. It is of course the residents and business operators who should play crucial roles. We feel that we have been led by people like Mr. Asada. Improving the living environment and providing infrastructure are our minimum responsibilities. By being proactively involved in the Innovation Coast Scheme, we will assist business operators so that they can rebuild their businesses and take part in the core of the new industries in the disaster-affected areas. When this is achieved, we can say that the town has truly been revived.

Ms. Miho Kubota
Although the subsidy system is available to support the reopening of businesses, more than a few people are “anxious about the future” as they weigh the many challenges. We are considering what additional kinds of support measures we can work out in coordination with business operators. In addition, in order to counter the demand expressed by groundless rumors about the local area, we are responsibly disseminate the status of the town’s recovery and the activities of business operators through events held both locally and afar.

From the left, Mr. Yoshiki Itakura, Mr. Hidehiro Asada, Mr. Munehiro Asada, Ms. Miho Kubota.

If we become pioneers in this town, many people may follow.

Promoting the Innovation Coast Scheme
We will introduce two of the many projects being carried out under the Fukushima International Research Industrial City (Innovation Coast) Framework, which aims to build new industrial infrastructure in the Hamadori area of Fukushima Prefecture and to develop towns and communities from a regional perspective.

Fukushima Hama-Dori Robot Testing Zone
Robot testing has been conducted at “five locations” such as bridges, tunnels, dams, fields, and mountainsides. Test demonstrations began in response to applications from many companies, universities, and research institutions.

Fukushima Drawing Attention as “a Place for Rapid Progress of New Business”
Mr. Yoshiki Itakura

The first company to expand into Fukushima under the Project for Promoting the Establishment of Businesses in Fukushima was Race Corporation, which decided to construct a factory at Hirono Industrial Park (Hirono Town). “The sincere attitudes of the town officials as well as the conditions of the subsidies were impressive. It takes just two minutes to reach the industrial park from the Hirono interchange,” Mr. Yoshiki Itakura, President of Race Corporation, said. “The sincere attitudes of the residents are also impressive.” Mr. Itakura added. “I was very much encouraged and Impressed by the sincerity of the residents. We did a lot of surveys and got a lot of good information.”

This is a test facility in Naraha Town for smoothly proceeding with the decommissioning of Fukushima Dairi Nuclear Power Station. Partial operation of the facility began in September 2015 in order to conduct full-scale demonstration tests and training using virtual reality.

Mr. Yoshiki Itakura

The signing ceremony for the establishment of a factory held in August 2015. The factory will start operations in 2017 and will employ about 30 to 40 people.

Mr. Yoshiki Itakura

We hope to be a model for the future. We are granted to use taxpayer money, so we think that we should return the benefits we have received to society if only a little, by increasing the employment of people in Fukushima.”

Mr. Yoshiki Itakura

By being proactively involved in the Innovation Coast Scheme, we will assist business operators so that they can rebuild their businesses and take part in the core of the new industries in the disaster-affected areas.

From the left, Mr. Yoshiki Itakura, Mr. Hidehiro Asada, Mr. Munehiro Asada, Ms. Miho Kubota.

If we become pioneers in this town, many people may follow.

Promoting the Innovation Coast Scheme
We will introduce two of the many projects being carried out under the Fukushima International Research Industrial City (Innovation Coast) Framework, which aims to build new industrial infrastructure in the Hamadori area of Fukushima Prefecture and to develop towns and communities from a regional perspective.

Fukushima Hama-Dori Robot Testing Zone
Robot testing has been conducted at “five locations” such as bridges, tunnels, dams, fields, and mountainsides. Test demonstrations began in response to applications from many companies, universities, and research institutions.

Fukushima Drawing Attention as “a Place for Rapid Progress of New Business”
Mr. Yoshiki Itakura

The first company to expand into Fukushima under the Project for Promoting the Establishment of Businesses in Fukushima was Race Corporation, which decided to construct a factory at Hirono Industrial Park (Hirono Town). “The sincere attitudes of the town officials as well as the conditions of the subsidies were impressive. It takes just two minutes to reach the industrial park from the Hirono interchange,” Mr. Yoshiki Itakura, President of Race Corporation, said. “The sincere attitudes of the residents are also impressive.” Mr. Itakura added. “I was very much encouraged and Impressed by the sincerity of the residents. We did a lot of surveys and got a lot of good information.”

This is a test facility in Naraha Town for smoothly proceeding with the decommissioning of Fukushima Dairi Nuclear Power Station. Partial operation of the facility began in September 2015 in order to conduct full-scale demonstration tests and training using virtual reality.

Mr. Yoshiki Itakura

The signing ceremony for the establishment of a factory held in August 2015. The factory will start operations in 2017 and will employ about 30 to 40 people.

Mr. Yoshiki Itakura

We hope to be a model for the future. We are granted to use taxpayer money, so we think that we should return the benefits we have received to society if only a little, by increasing the employment of people in Fukushima.”

Mr. Yoshiki Itakura

By being proactively involved in the Innovation Coast Scheme, we will assist business operators so that they can rebuild their businesses and take part in the core of the new industries in the disaster-affected areas.

From the left, Mr. Yoshiki Itakura, Mr. Hidehiro Asada, Mr. Munehiro Asada, Ms. Miho Kubota.

If we become pioneers in this town, many people may follow.

Promoting the Innovation Coast Scheme
We will introduce two of the many projects being carried out under the Fukushima International Research Industrial City (Innovation Coast) Framework, which aims to build new industrial infrastructure in the Hamadori area of Fukushima Prefecture and to develop towns and communities from a regional perspective.

Fukushima Hama-Dori Robot Testing Zone
Robot testing has been conducted at “five locations” such as bridges, tunnels, dams, fields, and mountainsides. Test demonstrations began in response to applications from many companies, universities, and research institutions.

Fukushima Drawing Attention as “a Place for Rapid Progress of New Business”
Mr. Yoshiki Itakura

The first company to expand into Fukushima under the Project for Promoting the Establishment of Businesses in Fukushima was Race Corporation, which decided to construct a factory at Hirono Industrial Park (Hirono Town). “The sincere attitudes of the town officials as well as the conditions of the subsidies were impressive. It takes just two minutes to reach the industrial park from the Hirono interchange,” Mr. Yoshiki Itakura, President of Race Corporation, said. “The sincere attitudes of the residents are also impressive.” Mr. Itakura added. “I was very much encouraged and Impressed by the sincerity of the residents. We did a lot of surveys and got a lot of good information.”

This is a test facility in Naraha Town for smoothly proceeding with the decommissioning of Fukushima Dairi Nuclear Power Station. Partial operation of the facility began in September 2015 in order to conduct full-scale demonstration tests and training using virtual reality.

Mr. Yoshiki Itakura

The signing ceremony for the establishment of a factory held in August 2015. The factory will start operations in 2017 and will employ about 30 to 40 people.

Mr. Yoshiki Itakura

We hope to be a model for the future. We are granted to use taxpayer money, so we think that we should return the benefits we have received to society if only a little, by increasing the employment of people in Fukushima.”

Mr. Yoshiki Itakura

By being proactively involved in the Innovation Coast Scheme, we will assist business operators so that they can rebuild their businesses and take part in the core of the new industries in the disaster-affected areas.

From the left, Mr. Yoshiki Itakura, Mr. Hidehiro Asada, Mr. Munehiro Asada, Ms. Miho Kubota.

If we become pioneers in this town, many people may follow.

Promoting the Innovation Coast Scheme
We will introduce two of the many projects being carried out under the Fukushima International Research Industrial City (Innovation Coast) Framework, which aims to build new industrial infrastructure in the Hamadori area of Fukushima Prefecture and to develop towns and communities from a regional perspective.

Fukushima Hama-Dori Robot Testing Zone
Robot testing has been conducted at “five locations” such as bridges, tunnels, dams, fields, and mountainsides. Test demonstrations began in response to applications from many companies, universities, and research institutions.

Fukushima Drawing Attention as “a Place for Rapid Progress of New Business”
Mr. Yoshiki Itakura

The first company to expand into Fukushima under the Project for Promoting the Establishment of Businesses in Fukushima was Race Corporation, which decided to construct a factory at Hirono Industrial Park (Hirono Town). “The sincere attitudes of the town officials as well as the conditions of the subsidies were impressive. It takes just two minutes to reach the industrial park from the Hirono interchange,” Mr. Yoshiki Itakura, President of Race Corporation, said. “The sincere attitudes of the residents are also impressive.” Mr. Itakura added. “I was very much encouraged and Impressed by the sincerity of the residents. We did a lot of surveys and got a lot of good information.”

This is a test facility in Naraha Town for smoothly proceeding with the decommissioning of Fukushima Dairi Nuclear Power Station. Partial operation of the facility began in September 2015 in order to conduct full-scale demonstration tests and training using virtual reality.

Mr. Yoshiki Itakura

The signing ceremony for the establishment of a factory held in August 2015. The factory will start operations in 2017 and will employ about 30 to 40 people.

Mr. Yoshiki Itakura

We hope to be a model for the future. We are granted to use taxpayer money, so we think that we should return the benefits we have received to society if only a little, by increasing the employment of people in Fukushima.”

Mr. Yoshiki Itakura

By being proactively involved in the Innovation Coast Scheme, we will assist business operators so that they can rebuild their businesses and take part in the core of the new industries in the disaster-affected areas.

From the left, Mr. Yoshiki Itakura, Mr. Hidehiro Asada, Mr. Munehiro Asada, Ms. Miho Kubota.

If we become pioneers in this town, many people may follow.
Focusing on Measures against Reputational Damage Caused by Harmful Rumors or Misinformation

The goal is to realize sound reconstruction. To this end, the national government is focusing on measures against damage caused by groundless rumors or misinformation, for example, release of the Policy Package on Response to Harmful Rumor. How can we resolve issues such as the reluctance to chase products produced in Fukushima Prefecture and the decrease in the number of tourists? …

We picked out three past activities to help answer these questions.

- Kasumigaseki Fukushima Reconstruction Fair
  Adopting “Buy, Eat, and Support Fukushima!!” as a catchphrase, seven government ministries held the Kasumigaseki Fukushima Reconstruction Fair in a relay, from July 25 through August 6, 2015. At the event, products produced in Fukushima Prefecture such as fruits, processed food, confections, beverages, and brand-name sake were exhibited and sold, and tourism in Fukushima Prefecture was promoted. In METI, specialties and new products including peach, a well-known product from Fukushima were sold. Also, an antenna shop called Nihonbashi Fukushima-kan (MIDETTE) was introduced, and applications for credit cards to support the reconstruction of Fukushima (Fukumon cards) were accepted. This was the first intensive effort in a short period of time by state ministries.

- Sale of Rice Produced in Namie Town at the University of Tokyo
  The University of Tokyo has concluded a support agreement with Namie Town and championed its decontamination and reconstruction efforts after the earthquake. Rice produced in Namie Town has been sold at the university cooperative store since November 2015. The Faculty of Agriculture and the Radioisotope Center at the University of Tokyo have cooperated in demonstrations of rice-farming in Namie Town since 2014. The safety of the rice, which was harvested in 2014 and again in 2015, was ensured through careful inspection of all sacks. After safety was confirmed, sales of the rice were realized. Additionally, this time, rice from Namie Town was served in the student cafeteria. A Namie Combo (500 yen), with tempura and other foods, became popular among students.

Dissemination of Fukushima Attractiveness by METI

Starting with the “Support Fukushima Fair” in May 2011 and other activities, METI has continued to conduct events and carry out efforts aiming to reconstruct industries in Fukushima. For example, the fourth Fukushima Industry Reconstruction Fair, held in January 2015, earned approximately ¥40,000 yen by selling products such as strawberries and amgo-pickled persimmons. And, time-limited assortments of foodstuffs produced in Fukushima Prefecture such as rice, fish, chicken, and vegetables were served at the cafes in METI. At convenience stores, specialties from Fukushima such as processed food, confections, beverages, and brand-name sake are available.

Back up Self-Reliance Launch of Public-private Joint Teams

A policy of “intensively developing support measures to be taken for the self-reliance of disaster-stricken business operators over the next two years” was stipulated in the Policy for Accelerating the Reconstruction of Fukushima from the Nuclear Disaster (revised), which the Cabinet approved in June 2015. In response to this, the Public-private Fukushima Soso Reconstruction Joint Team was established in August 2015. It is composed of representatives from three entities: the Nuclear Emergency Response Headquarters under the Cabinet Office, Fukushima Prefecture, and Fukushima Soso Reconstruction Corporation. The plan is to individually and closely support about 8,000 disaster-stricken business operators by having a total of about 180 team members regularly stationed at four bases in Fukushima, Koriyama, Iwaki, and Tokyo. Specifically, they individually visit business operators in 12 municipalities in areas such as evacuation zones and gain an understanding of their requests and intentions. Moreover, a team which is composed of experts such as consultants and Small and Medium Enterprise Management Consultants has been organized and provides support for the solution of issues such as the restarting of businesses, career changes, and the reconstructions of lives. They have visited more than 3,500 business operators during the first seven months since they started their activities. They are fully backing up every possible business operator so that they are able to restart their businesses.

Facing business operators --- From the sites of individual visits

The importance of “meeting face to face”

“I had thought about retiring, but after visitors like this, I thought I’d like to start again.” This kind of story from a business operator remains in my heart and reminds me of the importance of meeting face to face. When I asked business operators about the future direction of their region, I heard many express the wish for community facilities that allow people to gather in a collective setting, in addition to stores and medical institutions. I’m feeling the importance of support that reflects real people’s voices while taking the whole region’s future into consideration while simultaneously reflecting on individual businesses.

Showing prospects for the cities

Motivation for the self-reliance of business operators themselves is essential for the reconstruction of businesses. So, when visiting them individually, I ask them about what they’d like to do and their visions for management. Through these conversations, I noticed that there are many business operators who have not yet determined the future direction of their businesses. In such situations, we seek to discover “businesses that can play active roles in the region” and to encourage their growth. Moving forward with these activities, I’d also like to contribute to the development of the new town.

Thinking, “If I were you…” and putting myself in their shoes

When visiting business operators, sometimes I begin the conversation by talking about their daily lives so that they can be more relaxed and feel free to talk about their true concerns and real intentions. Their opinions vary, depending on factors such as their family, town, region, and family structure. I was reminded that support measures should correspond to particular circumstances. In the future, it will be important for me to be the person whom business operators continue to talk to. So in my work, continuing the “If I were you...” approach.

Focusing on Measures against Reputational Damage Caused by Harmful Rumors or Misinformation

The goal is to realize sound reconstruction. To this end, the national government is focusing on measures against damage caused by groundless rumors or misinformation, for example, release of the Policy Package on Response to Harmful Rumor. How can we resolve issues such as the reluctance to chase products produced in Fukushima Prefecture and the decrease in the number of tourists? …

We picked out three past activities to help answer these questions.

- Kasumigaseki Fukushima Reconstruction Fair
  Adopting “Buy, Eat, and Support Fukushima!!” as a catchphrase, seven government ministries held the Kasumigaseki Fukushima Reconstruction Fair in a relay, from July 25 through August 6, 2015. At the event, products produced in Fukushima Prefecture such as fruits, processed food, confections, beverages, and brand-name sake were exhibited and sold, and tourism in Fukushima Prefecture was promoted. In METI, specialties and new products including peach, a well-known product from Fukushima were sold. Also, an antenna shop called Nihonbashi Fukushima-kan (MIDETTE) was introduced, and applications for credit cards to support the reconstruction of Fukushima (Fukumon cards) were accepted. This was the first intensive effort in a short period of time by state ministries.

- Sale of Rice Produced in Namie Town at the University of Tokyo
  The University of Tokyo has concluded a support agreement with Namie Town and championed its decontamination and reconstruction efforts after the earthquake. Rice produced in Namie Town has been sold at the university cooperative store since November 2015. The Faculty of Agriculture and the Radioisotope Center at the University of Tokyo have cooperated in demonstrations of rice-farming in Namie Town since 2014. The safety of the rice, which was harvested in 2014 and again in 2015, was ensured through careful inspection of all sacks. After safety was confirmed, sales of the rice were realized. Additionally, this time, rice from Namie Town was served in the student cafeteria. A Namie Combo (500 yen), with tempura and other foods, became popular among students.

Dissemination of Fukushima Attractiveness by METI

Starting with the “Support Fukushima Fair” in May 2011 and other activities, METI has continued to conduct events and carry out efforts aiming to reconstruct industries in Fukushima. For example, the fourth Fukushima Industry Reconstruction Fair, held in January 2015, earned approximately ¥40,000 yen by selling products such as strawberries and amgo-pickled persimmons. And, time-limited assortments of foodstuffs produced in Fukushima Prefecture such as rice, fish, chicken, and vegetables were served at the cafes in METI. At convenience stores, specialties from Fukushima such as processed food, confections, beverages, and brand-name sake are available.

Back up Self-Reliance Launch of Public-private Joint Teams

A policy of “intensively developing support measures to be taken for the self-reliance of disaster-stricken business operators over the next two years” was stipulated in the Policy for Accelerating the Reconstruction of Fukushima from the Nuclear Disaster (revised), which the Cabinet approved in June 2015. In response to this, the Public-private Fukushima Soso Reconstruction Joint Team was established in August 2015. It is composed of representatives from three entities: the Nuclear Emergency Response Headquarters under the Cabinet Office, Fukushima Prefecture, and Fukushima Soso Reconstruction Corporation. The plan is to individually and closely support about 8,000 disaster-stricken business operators by having a total of about 180 team members regularly stationed at four bases in Fukushima, Koriyama, Iwaki, and Tokyo. Specifically, they individually visit business operators in 12 municipalities in areas such as evacuation zones and gain an understanding of their requests and intentions. Moreover, a team which is composed of experts such as consultants and Small and Medium Enterprise Management Consultants has been organized and provides support for the solution of issues such as the restarting of businesses, career changes, and the reconstructions of lives. They have visited more than 3,500 business operators during the first seven months since they started their activities. They are fully backing up every possible business operator so that they are able to restart their businesses.

Facing business operators --- From the sites of individual visits

The importance of “meeting face to face”

“I had thought about retiring, but after visitors like this, I thought I’d like to start again.” This kind of story from a business operator remains in my heart and reminds me of the importance of meeting face to face. When I asked business operators about the future direction of their town, I heard many express the wish for community facilities that allow people to gather in a collective setting, in addition to stores and medical institutions. I’m feeling the importance of support that reflects real people’s voices while taking the whole region’s future into consideration while simultaneously reflecting on individual businesses.

Showing prospects for the cities

Motivation for the self-reliance of business operators themselves is essential for the reconstruction of businesses. So, when visiting them individually, I ask them about what they’d like to do and their visions for management. Through these conversations, I noticed that there are many business operators who have not yet determined the future direction of their businesses. In such situations, we seek to discover “businesses that can play active roles in the region” and to encourage their growth. Moving forward with these activities, I’d also like to contribute to the development of the new town.

Thinking, “If I were you…” and putting myself in their shoes

When visiting business operators, sometimes I begin the conversation by talking about their daily lives so that they can be more relaxed and feel free to talk about their true concerns and real intentions. Their opinions vary, depending on factors such as their family, town, region, and family structure. I was reminded that support measures should correspond to particular circumstances. In the future, it will be important for me to be the person whom business operators continue to talk to. So in my work, continuing the “If I were you...” approach.