

The Road to Revival

Overseas Students and Local Leaders Working Together Towards Recovery and Beyond

As the cold winter wind blew outside, a group of young people from abroad visited enterprises in the areas hit by the Great East Japan Earthquake, discussing business strategies passionately. They were students from the Harvard Business School (HBS) with Professor Hiroataka Takeuchi, also of HBS. Their visit to Japan consisted of two weeks of fieldwork in the school's Immersion Experience Program, an elective course in the second year of the MBA program. Since 2012, HBS students have been coming to the Tohoku region every year. In 2015, the program had twenty-eight participants. Let's take a look at their activities.

Aiming for the Global Market with High-Quality Marine Products

Five of the students visited a group of young fishermen and marine product retailers aiming to make changes in their industry. Yuki Tsuda runs fish shops based in Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, and he is working to raise the quality of marine products. "Branding, quality control, and marketing are important aspects of this business. I would like to establish unparalleled best practices that lead to a movement to increase the quality of all Japanese marine products." Tsuda and his colleagues are looking for new markets at home and overseas and will branch out into Southeast Asia. "I want people in other countries to taste the fresh, high-quality fish we produce in Japan. And we also want to disseminate ways of eating fish and the culture associated with it to avoid having our products be thought of as 'merely expensive.'"

The students were impressed by Tsuda's passion and asked him many questions. The discussion went on for over two hours. Comments by students included, "I was moved by the way he was working, not just for his own profit, but for the good of society," and "This will become a global case study for recovery and development after a natural disaster."

Creating Local Employment with New Work Styles for Farming

Another four students visited a chrysanthemum and tomato farm in Minamisanriku, Miyagi Prefecture. Before the earthquake, Masamichi Ono ran a farm with his family. He established a company based on his family farming business to create employment and is now proposing new ways of working for people in the area who lost both their livelihoods and the occupations they loved. Says Ono, "It has nothing to do with age or experience. An hour at a time, even twice a week, is enough. I wanted people to come out to the fields the same way they'd go out for a walk and to make some money in agriculture—that's the sort of environment I wanted to create." People who suffered damage in the disaster have spent time together in the fields, and human contact has helped them recover. "When people told me they were sleeping better, I felt as though I had helped them in some ways," he says.

The students listened closely as Ono spoke with great conviction about his experiences. One student said, "It seemed very Japanese to me that he thought of his employees as if they were his own family and put the importance of his employees finding 'meaning in life' ahead of his own profits."

Expanding Possibilities for New Businesses

Deeply inspired by the leaders of Tohoku recovering from the unprecedented Great East Japan Earthquake and their creating new ways to develop their enterprises, HBS students from overseas, offer ideas on management and business strategy. They will play a major role in the next-generation business arena, and this sort of collaboration will expand the possibilities for new businesses.





1. HBS students observe farmed oysters being shucked at an oyster plant. 2. A discussion between Yuki Tsuda and the students. 3. Says Tsuda, "I would like to increase the awareness of problems among people connected to the fisheries and expand our group." 4. Kazuki Suzuki and his freshly harvested farmed oysters. 5. Students and Professor Takeuchi meet with local fishermen.



6. HBS students listen closely to Masamichi Ono (center) at his workshop. 7. Delicate chrysanthemums raised by Ono. One of the students said, "I can almost see Mr. Ono's gentle personality in his chrysanthemums." 8. A smiling Ono shows the group his chrysanthemum greenhouse. 9. Students make bouquets of chrysanthemums and discuss ideas on how to turn them into products.

