

Role of FM Radio in Post-Tsunami Recovery Process in Natori, Miyagi Prefecture

Ai Ideta

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1. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

After the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011, 26 emergency broadcast stations specializing in disaster information mainly in the Tohoku area were established in Iwate, Fukushima, and Miyagi, which were among the areas most damaged by the tsunami. Their establishment is mainly to provide a mechanism that speeds up information delivery to disaster victims. Temporary emergency FM, unlike regular radio stations, open immediately after being authorized via a simple procedure. But it has an operational expiration date of two months to two years. On the other hand, community FM are started to contribute to improving the condition of society by providing information on local communities. This study investigates the temporary emergency FM called “Natoraji,” which was established in Natori City, Miyagi Prefecture, focusing on the role of Natoraji in the post-tsunami recovery process and on the process of changing from being a temporary emergency FM to being a community FM. This study discusses the forms of the broadcast stations and how a partnership between a station and the local community is forged.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS

A questionnaire survey was conducted among 782 households consisting of people who are residents of the area affected by the tsunami and residents now living in temporary housing, with the aim of extracting the people’s opinion about FM radio which is in the process of changing from a temporary emergency FM to a community FM, a permanent local media. The questionnaires were distributed through the Natori City Hall. The method of collection was through post. The survey was participated by 160 households (participation rate was 20.3%). As a result, this study has shown the vital role of the temporary emergency FM as a source of disaster information for local people. Comparing before and after the earthquake, the radio use rate increased from 36.7% to 52%, by up to 15.3%. The reason "Because of access to such detailed information about the local area not broadcasted on TV" is the most popular response. In addition, about 53.8% of the respondents of the questionnaire survey answered that they are willing to contribute money for funding the community FM in order to get disaster information from the radio. The respondents believe that the funding issue will be big challenge for Natoraji in the future. Most important for the sustainability of the community radio is to encourage cooperation among stakeholders in the local area, like schools, township office, fire department, and listeners.

FUNDING AND OPERATIONAL FORM There exist three types of operational forms of the community FM in Japan: 50% are of the Government-type (type I), 40% are of the Company-type (type II), and 10% are of the NPO-type. The differences between them are in their source of funding and in their broadcast content. Regarding the temporary emergency FM, it is stated in the Constitution that the rightful holder of its license is the township office. Thus, the temporary emergency FM belongs to type I. In the case of Natoraji, since it is classified as type I, about 25% of its funding is supported by Natori City Hall. However, it has a limit in its broadcast content due to the government’s involvement and it has been suggested that this causes loss of listeners who are uninterested in very serious radio programs. So the new model of radio suggested for sustainable broadcasting is one that draws elements from both temporary emergency FM and community FM.

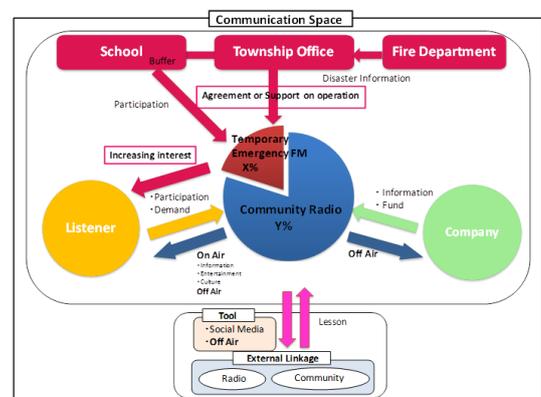


Figure1 Future of “Natoraji”