

## Report on Participation in KUASU Challenge+ Program

Alayna Ynacay-Nye

Year level: M2

Faculty/Graduate School of: Economics  
Kyoto University

From February 5<sup>th</sup> to February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2020, I traveled to Ishinomaki City in Miyagi Prefecture to interview a diverse group of individuals in Ishinomaki City. Thanks to the financial support of the Challenge+ Program I was able to complete nine interviews without worrying about the burden of financial costs. This program allowed me to fully discover what life is like for local people in rural areas of Japan. This program has not only provided me the opportunity to write a meaningful masters thesis, it has also made it possible for me to explore local livelihoods in depth for future research projects. The program has made prospects for future research trips possible and exciting.

I had the opportunity to interview nine individuals during my stay in Ishinomaki City. Ishinomaki City, while larger in terms of population than most rural communities in the Tohoku region, gave me a glimpse of what fishing communities are like in Japan. It also showed me some of the struggles these communities are still dealing with post-disaster. While the Great East Japan Earthquake (3.11), completely collapsed the fishing industry in the Tohoku region, it also devastated communities, leaving many people in temporary housing for years afterwards. Not only that, many people still suffer from socio-ecological issues that were happening even before the disaster such as, rapid urbanization/aging populations and climate change impacts. While all these issues are going on, I got the strong feeling that everyone is trying so hard to recover and focus so much energy on trying to get back to the way things were before, or even try to make things better than before. Overall, through my interviews, though not everyone may agree about how the future of Ishinomaki City will be, I got the sense of hope and determination from all of my interviewees.

During my time in Ishinomaki City, I interviewed a diverse group of individuals, ranging from a Prefecture level politician to small-scale fishermen. Not only did I learn a lot about local life in Ishinomaki City, I was able to get in-depth knowledge from my interviewees that would lay the groundwork for my Master's thesis. While my thesis is based on the overall power structure of the fishing industry, being able to talk to those on the ground, those who are directly impacted by it, was an unforgettable experience. Talking directly to those who experienced the disaster and survived was life changing. I am so grateful they took the time to talk to me and I can only hope my research does something to give back to them.

This fieldwork allowed me to explore the broad and diverse experience of socio-ecological issues of a fishing community post-disaster. Therefore, the door to future research opportunities is wide open for me. I plan on continuing to research this topic and it will be the introduction to my Ph.D. thesis. After graduating, I plan on continuing my research career in academia. For me, this program was not just a way to get data for my Master's thesis, it was the beginning of a research career, that will explore this topic and more in the future.