

Why do we have to reach out to the general public? -The liberal arts of disaster scientists–

Satoko Oki[1]

[1] ERI, Univ of Tokyo

The national project to educate science communicators has started at several universities. The number of Public Relation Offices at research institutes is gradually increasing. The Basic Law on Science and Technology declares the importance of the connection to the public. All these occur in recent 5 years and we can see that the outreach activities are now coming under the spotlight. On the other hand, many of the researchers regard them as just volunteer works held by certain organizations or scientists. Some scientists even hates those activities. In this presentation, I would like to confirm why we should reach out to the general public especially for those major in disaster sciences.

The reasons why outreach is not to scientists taste are; 1) the big difference of research style between outreach and general sciences, 2) the difficulty to see the feedbacks to the community or the individual, and 3) the tendency to avoid so-called 'Sagan phenomenon', standing out against social activities. The research outcomes of disaster sciences, however, are in high demand, for they directly affect on the safety and/or security of lives. Without any outreach of the scientists, this naturally brings public to over-expectation or even to misunderstanding of the research fields or what the researchers do. In deed inquiry survey showed that seismology is almost regarded as 'earthquake prediction study'. Once a big disaster hits human lives, these over-expectation and misunderstanding may lead to deep disappointment or to the great anger.

One of the most important roles of outreach activities by the scientists is to minimize these gaps between publics and researchers. It may never be weighted on one-way education from the professionals to the non-professionals or on the accountability of using the national foundation. The outreach activity of disaster sciences should not be just the report of the research outcomes, but to honestly speak the research limitations to refrain from the over-expectation and to bring research environment sustainably last long.