

Helping to Make the World a Better Place for Everyone

When we think about volunteer work, we usually assume that it is for the benefit of the people we are helping. Yet, through the experience of helping others, we come to realize that volunteering is not a one-way process at all—we too are receiving something valuable in return.

Tsuyoshi Kitazawa Experiences the Enthusiasm of the People of Bangladesh

Former Japan soccer representative Tsuyoshi Kitazawa is an Official JICA Supporter. In this capacity, he visited Bangladesh in March 2009, where he toured several of JICA's cooperation projects and held a soccer clinic for schoolchildren. This was Mr. Kitazawa's sixth overseas visit as a goodwill ambassador for JICA. Previously he has visited Syria, Paraguay, Ecuador, the Palestinian Authority and, in 2008, Indonesia. This article provides a brief overview of current conditions in Bangladesh as well as an outline of JICA's activities and the soccer clinic held there.



Children listen intently as a JOVC member reads aloud the storybook presented by Tsuyoshi Kitazawa, translated into Bengali. © KTP

The Bangladesh capital city of Dhaka has experienced rapid economic development and a surge in its population in recent years. Consequently, one of the city's most pressing issues is how best to facilitate waste disposal. To help deal with this problem, JICA is implementing the Solid Waste Management Project in partnership with Dhaka City Corporation. This project involves the participation of local residents in an effort to improve waste collection. Mr. Kitazawa visited the city's central commercial district of Old Dhaka to observe first hand improvements in the city's waste management.

Mr. Kitazawa also visited a rural village where many women have received microcredit loans from Grameen Bank.* After observing the women's weekly loan repayment ceremony, Mr. Kitazawa visited the home of one of the group's members. "I wouldn't have the life I do now if it weren't for Grameen Bank," she told Mr. Kitazawa. Despite her continued use of dried livestock dung as cooking fuel, her living room boasted such modern appliances as a television and electric fan. One of the women had received an educational loan from Grameen Bank to pay for her son's education through to university. Despite living in a

small outlying village, these stories of success, based on individual efforts, deeply impressed Mr. Kitazawa.

Mr. Kitazawa visited the Bangladesh Institute of Sports (BKSP) to observe the work of three JOCV sports coaches helping train future top Bangladeshi tennis players and swimmers, offering his encouragement for their efforts.

After his tour of JICA projects, Mr. Kitazawa commented, "What impresses me about Bangladesh is the diversity of the people and their irrepressible energy. From a long-term perspective, I think training and educational opportunities are the key to a brighter future for Bangladesh. I am happy to see my home country, Japan, contribute to a part of this growth. It would be even better if we could also build up the facilities."

The much-anticipated soccer clinic was held for a total of around 50 children. Students attending Dhaka's Japanese School, pupils from a local elementary school and children who live at a nearby NGO-run facility for former street children took part. As the soccer ball was passed among the children, some with shoes and others barefoot, the atmosphere created

was quite different to the numerous soccer clinics held previously in other developing countries. However, when the game got underway, differences in nationality and footwear became irrelevant. Every child became intently focused on giving it their all.

At the clinic's closing ceremony, Mr. Kitazawa presented each of the children with a storybook he has written, titled *Luna and the Magic Soccer Boots*. One of the JOVC members then read the story aloud, translating it into Bengali. When it came time for a final group photo, the children seemed to take the story's message of teamwork to heart. Without prompting, they linked arms shoulder-to-shoulder as the scene turned into a sea of smiles.

Mr. Kitazawa observed, "Anything you teach the Bangladeshi children, they'll immediately try and apply it to the next thing they do. If the people of Bangladesh have the determination to capitalize on every chance they get, I think the country will have a great future."

* Grameen Bank provides microcredit loans to the poorest segment of the population in mainly rural areas of Bangladesh. These loans do not require collateral and have a low interest rate. In the 1990s, Japan extended an ODA loan to Grameen Bank. According to an ex-post facto evaluation of the loan, microcredit from the bank has helped improve the lives of many residents.

MISIA Meets the Hardy Orphans of Malawi

In 2007, popular Japanese singer MISIA visited Kibera Slum in the Kenyan capital of Nairobi. There she witnessed some of the harsh realities of life in one of Africa's largest urban slums but also experienced the warmth of the brave smiles of the many children she met. This visit inspired her to establish Child AFRICA, a voluntary organization that supports African children. More recently, MISIA visited facilities for orphans in Malawi, where she came into contact with some of that country's many orphans. The story below outlines her encounter with the youth there.



MISIA meets a young girl at a Consol Homes Orphan Care facility near the Malawian capital of Lilongwe

Malawi is a landlocked country situated on the eastern side of southern Africa. Although Malawi has not experienced the severe level of conflict that has affected many parts of the region, it is still one of the world's poorest countries ravaged by such problems as famine and an HIV/AIDS epidemic. Despite such harsh conditions, the ubiquitous smiling faces of Malawi's people leave a lasting impression of true human strength. JICA shares MISIA's vision of working toward a better future for the children of Africa. She has described her activities as "getting as many people involved as we can, to learn and think together—about schools, about education and about the living environment of children. Then we need to act together. If we can build connections I think our actions can make a difference." From this common ground, JICA worked with MISIA to plan her visit to meet the children of Malawi.

On November 3, 2008, MISIA visited Consol Homes Orphan Care in Namitete, near the Malawian capital of

Lilongwe. Consol Homes was founded in 2000 by a former priest and his wife. Their first facility cared for 63 children in Kalolo, central Malawi. The organization has since grown rapidly to comprise 101 orphan centers supporting a total of 19,681 children and their families. JICA began dispatching JOVC members to Consol Homes facilities in 2004. There are currently four volunteers from Japan, harnessing their skills in such fields as early childhood education, youth activities, rural community activities and horticulture.

Consol Homes does not focus on material aid but rather on providing children with psychological care. MISIA showed particular interest in the way each child received individual attention and the involvement of many local residents in the facility's activities. In observing obstacle races among children from various facilities, MISIA not only saw the children's abundant energy but also gained a sense of the importance of recreation and physical activity to help heal the psychological scars the children carried.

The following day, MISIA visited the home of Elina, who had lost both her parents and lived with her disabled grandmother. "I used to feel very lonely, thinking about my parents every day. Since I started going to Consol Homes I have made many friends and I enjoy my time there. Now I don't think about my parents so often," explained Elina. Talking to Elina, MISIA realized how vital the support of the local community is for these orphans.

At the end of her visit, MISIA said, "In just two days I have learned so much from everyone here. Thank you all so much." The next stop on her trip would be in Kenya. Inspired by her visit to Malawi, in July 2009 Child AFRICA launched a campaign to support the children cared for by Consol Homes, particularly focusing on the importance of malaria prevention. Please visit the Child AFRICA website for further information at <http://child-africa.org/en/campaign/>.

MISIA presents children with soccer balls.



MISIA listens to an explanation of the activities undertaken by Consol Homes Orphan Care.

