



## Actress Miki Sakai Visits JBIC, JICA and World Vision Projects in India.

**Miki Sakai:** Born in 1978 in Shizuoka Prefecture. Received the 19th Japan Academy Prize for Rookie of the Year for her role in the movie *Love Letter* in 1995. Gained recognition after a leading role in *Hakusen Nagashi* on Fuji Television in 1996. Played her first leading role in the movie *Aisuru (To Love)* in 1997 and received the Rookie of the Year Award in the 21st Fumiko Yamaji Award and in the 10th Nikkan Sports Award. In the same year, received the 21st Japan Academy Award for Performance by an Actress in a Supporting Role for the *Yukai (Abduction)*. Also appeared in numerous movies including *Koi to Hanabi to Kanransha*, *Juvenile*, *Tomie re-birth*, and *Shorou Nagashi*. Has been assigned as the Goodwill Ambassador for World Vision Japan since 2007.

### Projects visited

Delhi Mass Rapid Transit System (Japanese ODA loan)	A project aimed at alleviating traffic congestion by constructing a mass rapid transit system including the first subway in Delhi. Ms. Sakai took a test ride on the Delhi Subway and visited the construction site of a new elevated train track currently under construction.
Karnataka Sustainable Forest Management and Biodiversity Conservation Project (Japanese ODA loan)	A project aimed at reforestation and improvement of the living standards through tree planting with the participation of the local residents as well as the provision of vocational training and micro-financing for those who depend on forests for their livelihood. Ms. Sakai visited the reforestation site and took part in discussions with the beneficiaries.
Yamuna Action Plan Project (Yamuna River Basin Sewerage Improvement Project for Cities along the Yamuna River Basin) (Japanese ODA loan)	A project aimed at abatement of the water pollution of the Yamuna River, which was becoming a serious problem, and improvement in the environment and hygiene of the population through awareness activities relating to sewerage and public toilets in cities along the Yamuna River basin including Delhi. Ms. Sakai visited a sewerage treatment plant, crematorium, public toilets, a public hygiene campaign, and environmental education for children.
Project for Strengthening Extension System for Bivoltine Sericulture (JICA technical cooperation)	A project aimed at the domestic production of high quality bivoltine silk thread through the development of bivoltine sericulture technology and bivoltine sericulture. Ms. Sakai visited farmers engaged in silkworm culture, a cocoon market and cocoon quality test center, and a thread production plant.
Sumatra Earthquake and Indian Ocean Tsunami Relief Effort (World Vision Japan)	A project aimed at providing emergency and recovery assistance in areas devastated by the 2004 Sumatra Earthquake and Indian Ocean Tsunami. Ms. Sakai visited permanent residential accommodation for fishermen and the Nissan Child Care Center.
Madras Area Development Project (World Vision Japan)	A project aimed at improving medical care, health services, education, and basic residential and economic infrastructure in 22 slum areas in Tamil Nadu, as well as improving the living environment of the people and assistance to achieve self-reliance. Ms. Sakai engaged in informal discussions with local people from the sponsored child program, primary schools, a self-reliance support group, and children's associations. She also visited workshops for making candles and incense.

—Although you have been involved in various TV programs such as *Sekai Ururun Taizaiki*, showing the culture of many countries, I understand this was your first time to visit India. What was your impression of the country?

**Sakai:** Before leaving Japan, my friends told me so many unique stories about India. But Delhi, the capital, impressed me as an orderly city, and services in the city operated much more smoothly than I imagined. In rural areas, on the other hand, everything from humans, to cows, horses, bicycles, rickshaws, auto-rickshaws, and motorcars—and every kind of smell—are all fused together, just like a curry, and exist alongside each other without distance. While I was somewhat surprised by this situation, I also felt it was one of the attractions of India.



—Why did you decide to participate in this site visit?

**Sakai:** Two years ago, my assignment on the TV program *If the world were a village of 100 people* Part 3 for Fuji Television was the catalyst for drawing my attention to poverty in the world. When I saw with my own eyes, a young girl living in dire poverty on a heap of rubbish in the Philippines, I was so shocked I could not even speak. I wondered what I personally could do to help people in such circumstances and I then learned about the activities of World Vision Japan (WVJ), an international NGO. I decided to take part in their child sponsorship program and started supporting children in Vietnam. I decided to come to India, where I had never been, because I wanted to see the reality in a developing country. Also, I wanted to see what kind of impact development assistance had and how people felt about it in the country.

—Then, how did you feel about it?

**Sakai:** It was very important for me to get a total picture of the various schemes of assistance including the infrastructure development assistance provided by JBIC, the technical cooperation from JICA, and the grass-roots level assistance by WVJ. Until then, I was mainly interested in the assistance provided for children, but thanks to this visit, I learned the importance of assistance for the development of economic and social infrastructures, which form the very foundation that enables a country to develop and provide people with employment and income. There may be an enormous gap between this kind of assistance and the efforts that, for example, can improve the livelihood/support independence of the poorest in

society by raising their standard of living from “0” to “1.” However, I felt strongly that these are closely related to each other. It was also beneficial to learn how important it is to combine aid activities to create a good cycle of integrated activities, rather than promote stand-alone activities. The objectives of ODA and NGO assistance are ultimately the same. I think it would be beneficial if they could cooperate even more for the benefit of people in developing countries.

—What was your impression of the Japanese ODA loan projects you have visited?

**Sakai:** When I visited the new subway, which the citizens of Delhi are very proud of, I was very impressed by the attention given to detail and the way in which Japanese know-



Ms. Sakai visiting the Delhi Mass Rapid Transit System Project.

how has been applied in various areas. For example, to ensure safety, the workers at the construction site all wear safety helmets and safety shoes. Flame-resistant materials were used for the train seats, and the escalators in the stations were designed to prevent women’s saris from getting entangled. Access from the subway to the streets has also been carefully designed. It was indeed a global subway that incorporated both inexpensive methods and advanced technologies from around the world. I also realized that in addition to developing the physical infrastructure, the smooth operation of the subway could occur only in combination with certain “soft” elements. I was impressed by the enthusiasm of the Japanese consultants who were not only trying to apply their technical skills but were also passionately adamant about establishing a gentle manner for subway users, a positive aspect of Japanese culture. The forestation project implemented by a Japanese ODA loan, on the other hand, was a slow project which required a period of eight years for seedlings to grow to 10 meters high. I was very impressed with the forestry management association, which was well-organized and operating smoothly. I was also impressed by the people who cooperated to protect their forests and promoted environmental conservation, and the women generating an alternative means of income by keeping cows and sheep using



Ms. Sakai with a cocoon at the site of the Bivoltine Sericulture Technology Development Project.

the sub-loans. I felt a strong sense of determination in the smiling faces of the people and enthusiasm of the children saying that they want to become a teacher or a doctor, to work for the benefit of others in the future. In fact, I felt both inspired and energized by it. I hope that this project will become a model for other projects and that the same smiles of the people will be seen elsewhere, creating a positive chain of events in the future.

—What other projects were impressive to you?

**Sakai:** I would say JICA’s sericulture project. I was very moved by the actual process of producing silk threads from cocoons. I was also surprised that the cocoon itself is a natural material which can be fully utilized without any waste. The image of the farmers, who had challenged themselves to master the new technology and had succeeded, under JICA’s project was also impressive. They were ambitious about expanding the operations and looked very happy. Silkworm techniques having become obsolete in Japan are serving a useful purpose in other places where these techniques are beneficial in improving the livelihood of the local people, which results in mutual pleasure. I visited a group of women under the eaves removing cocoons for shipment. This is good work for women, and it provides income if they take the cocoons to a silkworm market. I thought it was wonderful that this project has been able to achieve such impressive results in 16 years with JICA’s support. This project will finish this year, so how people can sustain this benefit is the key. The operation and maintenance of the thread-making machines, the prevention of diseases in the silkworms, and the overall continuity of the benefit will in the future depend on the Indian people, and I hope they will continue their hard work to keep this project going.

—During your visits, you have met many project beneficiaries, such as people living in slums, self-help groups, and forestry management associations. Could you tell us about your experience?

**Sakai:** Well, I think that what is important is what kind of effect the projects have provided to the beneficiaries in the end. One of the children from the slums under the WVJ assistance program told me that he and his community had gained confidence and a “we can do” attitude. That was a heartwarming moment for me to realize that the benefits of assistance were not only the material changes but also the changes in the children’s mentality. One of the teachers at a school in the slums expressed to me her earnest desire to learn from Japan, as a country which had recovered from the devastation of the atomic bomb. I felt encouraged to know that leaders with “vision” are being nurtured, and I saw a brilliant future in them. I was moved that assistance provided by ODA and WVJ is contributing to a change in the awareness of the people and is cultivating self-confidence and hope as well as independence. I was exhilarated by the smiles of those people. Their enthusiasm was contagious and made me feel that I wanted to live my own life with more smiles. I was pleased that the spirit of the local people and their dedication to the project were delivered to me clearly through the interaction with them.

—What was your impression of Japan's ODA? Did your views change after your visits to various sites?

**Sakai:** To be honest, I previously had the impression that ODA was more about politics, and I had no idea how ODA programs/projects would affect the people. When we are in Japan, we only hear about the results of what ODA provides abroad. The voice of beneficiaries and the changes that occur in their lives are hardly conveyed to us, so during my visit I was very pleased to listen to their voices. I am also very proud that the expertise, technology, and money provided by the Japanese people were playing a useful role for local people and were appreciated by them. I felt very heartened by the people working in the project sites, i.e., the JICA experts and coordinators in the silkworm culture project, and the Japanese consultants working on the subway construction projects in Delhi. I was also impressed by their ardent desire not only to provide technology but also to introduce the positive aspects of Japanese practices, and to build a relationship of trust with the local people. To work as a team with the local people in a steadfast, modest way, devoting all of their energy for India was really wonderful.

—What do you think are the future challenges or expectations for Japan's ODA?

**Sakai:** Recently, I met for the second time a young girl living on the rubbish heaps in the Philippines after two years. I had met her through the TBS program *If the world were a village of 100 people* Part 5. Although her family had been given a house by the government, they still did not have enough food or sufficient employment. The quality of her life had not improved at all, and there appeared to be no solution in sight. During my visit to India, I saw many successful examples. On the other hand, I also heard about projects that did not work well due to inadequate maintenance and lack of training and education. To achieve effective outcomes in projects, education, training, and mastery of skills that promote self sustainability are essential in addition to the infrastructure development. I believe that ODA can be effective only when it is accompanied by an awareness and change in attitude on the part of the beneficiaries. It is also essential that leaders are trained and people take initiative in tackling their problems and gaining the skills, and that they apply such skills and broaden them on their own. This leads to the sustainability of projects. Ultimately, it can be said that Japanese assistance benefits the people in a true sense. Now, I understand what Japan's ODA is exactly aiming at. However, I could not help but feel that ODA is not reaching the people in the lowest level of society. I feel that it is important for ODA to cooperate more with NGOs that possess the know-how to work with the poor, such as WVJ, in order to help bridge the gap separating the wealthy and the poor. Of course, it is easy to say but difficult to actually apply them in real life. There is never "enough," and so, with a limited budget, it sometimes feels frustrating that the aid provided seems just like a drop of water in the big ocean. At the same time, this is all the more reason why it is important for aid programs to provide people in developing countries with the skills to improve their countries using their own abilities. It is also important to know what the needs of those developing countries are, and what kind of country

the people want to create. Rather than pushing our own ideas on them or simply developing major infrastructure, if we grasp the needs of the people properly and provide assistance accordingly, we may not need vast amounts of money with more effective aid.

—What message would you like to convey to the Japanese people through your visit?

**Sakai:** Through my experience in India, as well as in more than 30 countries I have visited to date, I not only "learned" many things but was also surprised by the number of things. For example, I realized how little I knew even about my own country, and this made me want to learn more about Japan. When I learned of certain developing countries, it made me realize how special Japan is. Of course Japan has its problems, but I think it is important for us to become more aware of the situations of the world and live our lives being thankful that our fundamental needs are being met. Since I started participating in WVJ sponsorship, I have been trying to be more mindful of the environment and poverty in the world on a daily basis through personal efforts, such as turning off lights. It is very difficult to eradicate the roots of poverty. On a personal level, we do only what we can do. At the same time, I believe we could make changes by keeping in mind, at a minimum, issues such as the environment and poverty in our daily lives. I would like Japanese people to live like that. By realizing that we are all individuals living on the same earth, we can value the lives and pursue happiness for all people on earth. My experience in India kindled a strong desire within myself to absorb more about the world in the future and to give something back to society.

—How do you plan to use your experience in your future activities?

**Sakai:** My visit to India gave me tremendous learning experiences that I could actually see with my own eyes, hear with my own ears, smell the odors, and feel that environment with my body. I am very grateful that I had the opportunity to visit the actual project sites. I would like to convey to others what I saw and felt, and how Japan's assistance is making a real contribution to the people in India. I would like to say all this in a way that will resonate in the hearts of the Japanese people.

