



UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador Yuko Arimori visits JBIC, JICA, and UNFPA Projects in Vietnam

Yuko Arimori: Born in 1966 in Okayama, Japan. After graduating from Nippon Sport Science University, joined Recruit Co., Ltd. Won the silver medal in the women's marathon at the Barcelona Olympic Games and the bronze medal at the Atlanta Olympic Games. Retired from professional marathon running after the Tokyo Marathon 2007, the first large-scale citizen's marathon in Japan in February 2007. Established the NPO "Heart of Gold" and became its representative. Established "Rights Inc.," a management company for professional athletes in April 2002 and became Director. Presently serves as UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador, Special Member of the Women's Committee, Japan Association of Athletics Federation, and Women's Committee Member of the International Association of Athletics Federation (IAAF). Currently resides in Boulder, Colorado in the United States.

Projects visited

Small-Scale Pro Poor Infrastructure Development Project (Japanese ODA loan)	A project aimed at improving living standards in remote and mountainous regions where the poverty rate is high through the development and improvement of small-scale infrastructure such as roads, electricity, water supply, and irrigation. Ms. Arimori visited the provincial roads No. 433 and No. 434, and Phong Mao irrigation works.
Red River Bridge (Thanh Tri Bridge) Construction Project (Japanese ODA loan)	A project aimed at improving logistical efficiency in the northern area of Vietnam, including the city of Hanoi, by constructing the third bridge over the Red River and its approach roads. Ms. Arimori visited the bridge and approach roads.
Improvement Project of National Highways Nos. 5, 10, and 18 (Japanese ODA loan)	A project aimed at improving logistical efficiency in the targeted areas by improving NH No. 5 which links Hanoi to Haiphong, NH No. 18 which links Hanoi (Noibai Airport) to the Chinese-Vietnamese border via the scenic Haron Bay, and NH No. 10 which starts from Bi Cho located on NH No. 18 to Ninh Binh, a major city located in the southern part of the Red River Delta. (All of these highways are major trunk roads in northern Vietnam.) Ms. Arimori inspected the roads while traveling by car.
Bay Chay Bridge Construction Project (Japanese ODA loan)	A project aimed at promoting the development of the entire northern area of Vietnam by constructing a cable-stayed bridge and approach roads in the Bay Chay Bay, which is the mid-point of the NH No. 18. Ms. Arimori inspected the bridge.
Pha Lai Thermal Power Plant Project (Japanese ODA loan)	A project aimed at providing stable electricity supply in northern Vietnam where the electricity demand has been rising by constructing a new thermal power plant adjacent to the existing plant. Ms. Arimori inspected the facility while traveling by car.
Upgrading General Hospital of Hoa Binh Province, and the Project for Strengthening Health Services Provision in Hoa Binh Province (Grant aid, JICA Technical Cooperation)	A project aimed at upgrading the technical block and medical equipment of the General Hospital in Hoa Binh Province, strengthening the referral system, conducting training for medical personnel, and improving the capacity of healthcare organizations throughout the Province. Ms. Arimori visited the General Hospital of Hoa Binh Province and Da Bac District Hospital.
7th Country Programme (UNFPA support)	The program is to build and strengthen capacity of central government ministries, relevant agencies and selected priority provinces to improve the quality of life of the people with a focus on services and policies for sexual and reproductive health, population development, and gender mainstreaming. Ms. Arimori visited the headquarters of Phu Tho Province Women's Union, a café operated by the Provincial Youth Union (in Viet Tri), community-based activities of a club for domestic violence prevention, and a commune health center in Chi Dam district.

—What was your impression of Vietnam as it was your first time to visit the country?

Arimori: Although the time spent in Vietnam was quite limited, I felt that, in comparison with the countries I visited in Africa as a UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador, Vietnam does not face very serious poverty conditions. Of course, Vietnam is still a developing nation, but it has already reached a certain level of development compared to other Asian countries. I found the Vietnamese people very earnest, so I felt that Vietnam has very high potential.

—Could you tell us about Japanese ODA loan projects? What impressed you most?

Arimori: I was convinced that this kind of assistance is also needed. Seeing with my own eyes the fact that people can benefit only after large-scale infrastructure are provided,



Ms. Arimori with the Bay Chay Bridge in the background.

I became familiar with the Japanese ODA loans. The most impressive point, I would say was the "scale," or the amount of the Japanese ODA loan projects. It surpasses by three digits a NPO project that I am currently involved in. Then, actually seeing such large infrastructures like bridges, for example, I again realized the magnitude and impact of the projects. It may sound like an exaggeration, but I got the impression that even one project has the potential to impact the entire country (its economy, etc.).

—During your visit, you also visited other types of projects such as a JICA technical cooperation project and a UNFPA program. Could you please comment on these visits?

Arimori: I have been a UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador since 2002 and I personally have a keen interest in issues related to maternal and child health, HIV/AIDS, and gender. I visited a Japanese ODA loan project for the improvement of a major road and irrigation facilities in the provinces*, which have a higher poverty ratio, and I had the opportunity to hear the voices of the beneficiaries. I came to realize that this kind of infrastructure project actually helps improve the conditions of maternal and child healthcare in Vietnam indirectly. For example, JICA has provided technical cooperation to the Hoa Binh

Provincial Hospital and the Da Bac District Hospital, and JBIC has provided financial assistance for the road between these two hospitals. Travel time between them was dramatically reduced from two to three hours to 30 minutes. I believe this is a good example of a project with both “hard” and “soft” elements that combines to provide effective assistance to one area. I also strongly felt that infrastructure projects should be provided with such “soft” elements at the same time in order to enable the users to utilize the facilities effectively. It is important to formulate and implement better projects in a timely manner by collaborating with a wide range of local groups such as NGOs/NPOs which specialize in “soft” elements, allowing them to demonstrate their respective strengths. I hope that JBIC further promotes this kind of collaboration. If JBIC is already doing so, it should be shared with the public.

* A province is one of the local administrative divisions. A province is further divided into districts.



Yuko Arimori is welcomed at the General Hospital of Hoa Binh Province



Yuko Arimori makes a speech at a UNFPA-sponsored project (Women's Federation activity)

—What was your impression of Japanese ODA in general based on your visit? Did your view change after your visit? If so, in what way? Also, what are your expectations of Japanese ODA in future?

Arimori: Frankly speaking, until this visit, I did not have a good impression of Japanese ODA projects. But, closely looking at how much benefit the Japanese ODA projects have delivered, I recognized their importance and felt very happy. Although I understand that many ODA projects are implemented every year, I wonder if sufficient and appropriate consideration is taken regarding whether recipient countries could not actually implement those projects by themselves. I am also afraid that it is taken for granted for that one gives assistance and the other is given assistance. Since ODA projects as well as activities

of NGOs and NPOs are based on goodwill, that is, helping the less fortunate, most people will assume that providing such support is good. However, the more the idea of “goodwill” is emphasized, the more unappreciated it could be. I think it is important from time to time to stop and take a good look at our activities and to reconfirm our original objectives. My NPO activity is ultimately aiming at seeing those activities come to an end. After all, the ideal we are working toward is a world without need for help.

Another point I would like to comment on is the importance of public relation activities for the Japanese public. It is important to ensure Japanese ODA loan projects are more easily understood by the Japanese public who are not able to visit project sites. A huge amount of Japan's resources in terms of money and time is spent on such projects and these projects are playing a vital role in the world. Therefore, I think it is important to provide easy-to-understand explanations and active development education especially for children, who will be leaders of the next generation. Through marathons, I take advantage of my background as an athlete to spread information about my NPO activities. Similar methods can be applied to Japanese ODA loan projects. For example, in conjunction with an opening ceremony of a bridge, an event can be held to make both the local people and people in Japan familiarized with the project, and to make them feel closer to the people who actually implement the project. There, it would be possible to hold a workshop on traffic safety as “soft” support.



Yuko Arimori listens to the explanation of a woman farmer near the Phong Mao Irrigation facility.

—Through your visit to Vietnam, what message would you like to convey to the Japanese people?

Arimori: I would like the Japanese people to realize that many things they take for granted in their daily lives are precious luxuries in developing countries. Also, I would like them to know that Japan's ODA projects are actually providing what developing countries need. I would like Japanese to appreciate the quality of life they have. I believe that there are many Japanese people who are not aware that Japan also received assistance in the post-war era from the World Bank in order to construct a bullet train (New Tokaido Railway Line) and the Tomei Expressway. I would like the Japanese public to understand that our development today owes much to the assistance from foreign countries in the past and I would like them to consider the importance of the ODA projects currently being implemented. I will do my best to promote understanding of the value and importance of Japan's ODA projects through my speeches and activities.