

The JOCV Experience: Sharing Opportunities for Growth

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I was 14 years old when I learned I had received admission to the Kapsabet Boys High school in Nandi County, Kenya. That was in February 1979. I still remember how excited I was when my father took me to report to the school. In those days, new students were often subjected by the older students to a form of hazing known as "monolization," which was meant to help arrivals acclimate to their new surroundings. It was here that I first met Michiko Machida, a 24-year-old participant in the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV) program who was charged with teaching mathematics at the school.

It was the first opportunity for many of the students to meet and interact with someone from Japan. My classmates and I were curious about our foreign teacher and learned a lot about Japanese culture during the time Ms. Machida taught us. Not only was she adept at teaching us about her homeland, but she was also an extremely capable math teacher. Her method of instruction enabled students to easily understand the basic principles of mathematics. It is thanks to her that so many of us from the school went on to university and were able to forge successful careers. In my case, I continued my studies to the doctoral level. After graduating I earned a teaching position at Moi University in Kenya. Along with my position as a lecturer, I have also worked as the chief executive of the Kenyan government's Horticultural Crops Development Authority and as joint secretary for the Kenya Agricultural and Livestock Research Organization.

The idea behind the JOCV program is, in my view, a very noble one. My own experience has shown me the importance of allowing individuals still in their formative years an opportunity to interact and learn in a foreign culture among traditions vastly different from their own. Such an experience has a transformational effect by opening up volunteers' minds to broader worlds of possibilities and experiences. The impact on young participants from such an experience serves as a positive guiding force directing the course of their lives as well as those of the people they come in contact with. Thanks to the JOCV program and my

teacher I was given the opportunity to learn mathematics in a way that allowed me to easily understand what was being covered, which meant I did not have to struggle to understand the subject. I am certain that my fellow students and those who have had a chance to be taught by other Japanese volunteers have enjoyed their own unique experiences.

I have found that the opportunities I had to interact with Japanese volunteers have made it easier for me later on to work with other Japanese experts. In my career, I have had the occasion to work with JICA experts in the Small Holder Horticulture Empowerment Project (SHEP) and the SHEP UP project. I was able to establish a good rapport with my Japanese colleagues in part thanks to my earlier interaction with my teacher, Ms. Machida.

It was my dealings with one Japanese expert in 2008 that allowed me to re-establish contact with my former teacher after 30 years. I have subsequently continued to forge strong working relationships with other Japanese while working on various programs. I have also visited Japan twice, once in 2008 and then again in 2013, to attend the Tokyo International Conference for African Development (TICAD).

It is my sincere hope that future volunteer programs will include an alumni program to enable former beneficiaries to maintain contact with previous JOCV program participants. The opportunity of working with JICA experts is what enabled me to track down Ms. Machida. However, there are many other former beneficiaries who have not been as lucky as I have

and who would enjoy the opportunity to reconnect with their past teachers. If an alumni system were to be initiated, it could have many lasting benefits, such as the establishment and development of academic exchange programs.

Coincidentally, my connection with the JOCV program goes beyond just the experiences I spoke about above. I was born in 1965, the same year the program was founded. I find it a great joy and honor to be celebrating my fiftieth birthday with the JOCV. Please join me in wishing the organization a happy fiftieth anniversary!



Working Together to Reduce Risk and Build Resilience

The UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction was held on March 14-18 in Sendai, a city severely affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake four years earlier. In attendance were public works ministers: Gerson Martínez of El Salvador and Rogelio Singson of the Philippines. The two ministers took time to share how JICA support is helping strengthen the disaster-response capabilities of their countries.

Rogelio Singson
Secretary of Public Works and Highways, Philippines



The Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) remains steadfast in its vision of improving the lives of Filipinos by providing quality infrastructure. JICA remains a key partner in our development efforts, providing a wide array of assistance, such as technology, experience, and financial support.

One area where JICA's expertise is helping the DPWH meet challenges is in the area of disaster risk and reduction management (DRRM). Natural disaster such as Typhoon Yolanda, which devastated Leyte and Samar Province in 2013, are perennial threats. JICA's participation in preparing a master plan for flood control has been vital, allowing the DPWH to implement bold and broad reaching measures to mitigate damage and loss of life and to ensure that infrastructure is quickly restored and improved. These and other efforts addressing DRRM is crucial to the long-term sustainable development of the Philippines.

JICA has also been involved in implementing the National Building Code and National Structural Code of the Philippines. Likewise, JICA-assisted studies have helped ascertain risks from flooding, earthquakes, and other disasters, allowing the DPWH to identify common defects affecting government facilities, such as poor design or faulty construction methods. As a result, building codes have been updated to incorporate stronger standards and guidelines. As the new codes are implemented, JICA continues to provide expertise to ensure that changes are properly applied at the local level.

Throughout my career, I have kept an eye on developments in Japanese technology and I feel there is much to be gained through stronger bilateral cooperation between Japan and the Philippines. I have visited Japan several times to see how DRRM techniques are implemented and the DPWH has also sent staff to Japan to learn about new approaches for flood management.

Moving forward, opportunities remain to strengthen cooperation, and I wholeheartedly welcome the mutual transfer and exchange of knowledge and ideas between our two countries. The result will be greater resilience in the face of disaster not only for Japan and the Philippines, but for the region and the world.

Gerson Martínez
Minister of Public Works, Transportation, Housing, and Urban Development, El Salvador



El Salvador faces the need to implement measures to raise the disaster prevention and response capabilities of the government and society.

According to the 2014 United Nations World Risk Report, El Salvador ranked eighth among countries at most risk from natural disaster. With assistance from Japan and other countries, we hope to address issues and leave the top ten once and for all by 2019.

El Salvador must take a close look at the various risks it faces. It must also analyze the impact of natural disasters to clearly understand the country's vulnerabilities and strengths. In this way it can introduce strategies and preventive measures to protect human life and reduce economic loss.

With the help of JICA, the Salvadoran government is taking steps to protect lives, property, and infrastructure by promoting a culture of disaster risk reduction and prevention.

As part of this strategy, the Ministry of Public Works established the Department of Climate Change Adaptation and Strategic Risk Management (DACGER). A first of its kind in Latin America, the department develops technical manuals that bolster disaster risk management in social and economic infrastructure and are used to strengthen the country's disaster response.

JICA is also providing support through three important projects: the Taishin, Bosai, and Gensai projects. The Gensai project, for instance, focuses on enhancing social and economic infrastructure against climate impact and increasing engineers' capacities.

Japan remains a crucial partner toward implementing an effective long-term strategy to address climate change and boost disaster prevention and response. The Salvadoran government will continue to look to Japanese experts to provide technical support and training that is not restricted to El Salvador, but that benefits the entire Central America region.

El Salvador's strategy for reducing risk from natural hazards has been designed for greater regional cooperation as a way to enhance international competitiveness for all of Central America. The Salvadoran government is committed to this goal and will introduce measures to improve logistic, transportation, and port capabilities and mobility throughout the entire region.