Universal Health for All

In Japan, most people have access to the basic health services without major financial hardship due to the financial protection systems and quality health services. However, that is not the case in a global context. According to the Global Monitoring Report, issued by the World Health Organization and the World Bank, 400 million people cannot access essential health services and every year 100 million people become impoverished due to the high expenditures on health services. Therefore, the Government of Japan and JICA, together with WHO, the World Bank, UNICEF and UHC 2030, will organize the Universal Health Coverage Forum 2017, an international conference with an aim to accelerate the achievement of UHC, in December 2017 in Tokyo.

What is UHC?
UHC means that all people and communities can use preventive, curative, rehabilitative and palliative health services of sufficient quality, while ensuring that the use of those services would not impose an unbearable financial burden to the patient. Therefore, two essential criteria for achieving UHC are access to quality health services and protection against financial risk. Moreover, UHC aims to improve the following three kinds of access:
1. Physical access to the medical facilities, supplies and equipment, as well as doctors and nurses in each community
2. Economic access in terms of affordability of medical expenses and transportation costs
3. Social access in terms of realizing the importance of the services, no language barriers and no bribes demanded

Universal Health Coverage(UHC)

In addition, every year 100 million people are pushed into poverty because of the out-of-pocket expenditures which make some people refrain from using the health services. UHC is based on the principle of affordable contributions and sufficient benefits providing the financial protection where the whole society bears and shares the expenses.

Japan achieved UHC in the early stages of its economic growth by introducing a health insurance system for all citizens in 1961. Japan’s social security system, including the health insurance, is said to have contributed to the equitable economic development and social stability. As a result, Japan has achieved high level of health compared to other developed countries at a comparatively low cost.

A resolution on UHC was adopted at the 2005 World Health Assembly and Japan has taken leadership in advancing UHC as one of the targets in Goal No. 3 of the SDGs adopted in 2015 “Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all the ages.” More than 300 government personnel and health care experts will gather in Tokyo on Dec. 12-15 for the UHC Forum 2017 to discuss its further promotion.
The Overall Coordination Meeting (OCM) of the “Project on Establishment and Promotion of Mentoring Service for Small and Medium Enterprises in the Western Balkans (Phase 2)” was held on 20th September. Meeting was attended by more than 40 people, including the representatives of each counterpart country, Mr. Suga, Minister of the Embassy of Japan in Serbia, Mr. Nakamura, Director General of Industrial Development and Public Policy Department of JICA, and JICA experts.

The purpose of the OCM was to review the results of the previous cooperation and discuss the future plans for the Regional mentoring project. One of the new challenges of the project will be introducing “KAIZEN”, Japanese management philosophy, which will be transferred to the Western Balkan region. In the end, Mr. Nakamura thanked for the cooperation over the past ten years and expressed his high expectations from this project.

JICA has been appointing a Regional Tourism Advisor to Balkan region since May 2016. As a part of his activities, which aim at enhancing the tourism promotion of Balkan region in Japanese tourism market, the Advisor has successfully concluded participation in the Tourism EXPO Japan 2017 from 21-24 September 2017 held in Tokyo, as well as the familiarization tour for key Japanese tour agencies from 9-16 October 2017, a second in series of collaboration with the Turkish Airlines, which was held in Albania, Montenegro, and Serbia.

Participation in Tourism EXPO Japan was remarkably well praised. Enjoyed by more than 190,000 visitors, this year invited additionally Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia representatives into the regional booth. Equipped with additional promotional materials, such as a complete set of Japanese PR brochures for all countries and various side events, including quiz shows, the region reaffirmed an improved recognition and potential to the Japanese tourists.

Eight-day familiarization tour included visits to the key touristic sites and wineries in Albania, Montenegro, and Serbia, as well as an intensive discussions with local travel industry representatives at B2B workshop with an aim to realize the direct business opportunities for both ends.

The results of these promotional activities will certainly contribute to the increased exposure of the region to the Japanese tourism market, and enable a few steps toward the increased number of tourists from Japan.
Seminars for the development of Physical Education Common Core Curricula based on learning outcomes

The first of three seminars for the development of Physical Education and Common Core Curricula (hereinafter, CCC), based on the learning outcomes, was held in Mostar in September 2017. Creation of CCC is a part of the education reform, undertaken by the government, for a modern and harmonious curricula instead of the existing traditional ethnic one. Led by the Agency for Preschool, Primary and Secondary Education of Bosnia-Herzegovina (APOSO), approximately 20 experts gathered from all parts of the country to create a CCC that does not integrate only motor skill acquisition, but also values related to social skills such as positive attitude, mutual respect, cooperation and problem-solving skills. Additionally, one of the seminars was attended by professors Yoshinori Okade and Tatsuo Araki, both from the Nippon University of Sports Science in Japan. Prof. Okade delivered a presentation on “Japan Physical Education System in Schools” whereas Prof. Araki introduced participants to the concept of “Gymnastics for All”.

The Importance of Cooperation related to Disaster Risk Reduction (Eco-DRR) in Macedonia

The Republic of Macedonia is located in the mountainous area of Balkan Peninsula where the management of forests is a serious issue. Lives of many people and whole communities are affected by the landslide and floods which are caused by the soil erosion. One of the factors that cause soil erosion is forest fire. In 2007, 620 forest fires occurred in a year and the state of emergency was called on the national level.

Therefore, the Crisis Management Center (CMC) of Macedonia developed Macedonian Forest Fire Information System (MKFFIS) through JICA Technical Cooperation with an aim to strengthen the disaster prevention and reduce the effects of the natural disaster caused by the forest fires. Moreover, CMC carried out a training to share their results and experiences related to the management of forest fires with the neighboring countries.

Following this, in November 2017, JICA and CMC started the implementation of the “Project on Capacity Building for Ecosystem-based Disaster Risk Reduction (Eco-DRR) through Sustainable Forest Management in Macedonia” together with the Public Enterprise Macedonian Forests and other relevant institutions. The project is planned to be realized in next five years and the goal is to prevent natural disasters by using the advantages of the ecosystem, such as forests.
On October 24th, the Project on Geospatial Information for Sustainable Land Development organized the JCC in Tirana together with a workshop to share the results of the past deliverables produced in Kosovo and Macedonia.

Despite the rapid urbanization in recent years in Tirana and Durres, 1:2000 topography map has not been updated since 1980s. The topography map is the basis of urban planning. Therefore, this project aims at strengthening the government capacity in developing the topography map and managing its quality. The topography map, which was made publicly available on-line at geo-portal would enable people’s access to geospatial information. Albania will be the last country for JICA's support in creating the topography map in the region.

On November 2nd, Capacity Development Project for Air Pollution Control had the JCC and the project officially started. Permanent Secretary Citaku and the representatives of respective institutions attended the meeting. Kosovo suffers from a serious air contamination largely due to the obsolete power plants fueled by lignite. Therefore, through technical cooperation, it is highly expected to identify the source of pollution, which can testify the policy development as well as to raise awareness of local communities.
Seminars by Japanese and Israeli Experts through FU Project “Promotion of Satoyama Initiative”

From October to November, for balancing nature/environment protection and local development, seminars by the Japanese and Israeli experts were held in Suhareka/Suvareka municipality located next to the National Park Sharri. The project was initiated by the JICA training participants who learned SATOYAMA initiative-based local development in Japan and MASHAV training participants who studied Israel’s rural economic development; and it aims to make recommendation on SATOYAMA program as well as to show examples of Israel’s ecotourism development for Suhareka/Suvareka’s development of tourism.

The most astonishing was that the residents, although proud of their rich natural and cultural potential, were wishing to reduce the size of the protected areas of the park as it had been hampering the area’s economic development. In response to that, experts respectively shown Toyooka city’s effort for breeding storks through SATOYAMA activities in Japan as well as WHOOF movement mobilizing volunteers for ecotourism development in Israel, in order to motivate local actors to proactively participate in activities for rural development through cohabitation of nature and society.

Through this follow-up project, it is also planned to rehabilitate water source fountain areas and installation of touristic signs at several locations in the target area.

JICA Consultants on Breast Cancer Control Project

It is said that more than 90% of the breast cancer patients can be cured if they are diagnosed at an early stage and receive appropriate treatment. However, approximately one third of women diagnosed with breast cancer lose their life due to breast cancer detected at the late stage. Considering such situation, the Serbian government formulated the National Program for Early Detection of Breast Cancer (NPEDBC) to expand the organized screening in the entire country. This three-year Project was launched in November 2015 in order to strengthen management capacity of the NPEDBC implementation.

The Project mainly focuses on 1) Strengthening management capacity at the national level, 2) Introducing uniformed processes of the organized screening, 3) maximize utilization of the resources (equipment and human resources). The Project team works with the Serbian counterparts for strengthening capacity of the implementation body of the Program.

“In Serbia, there are several critical issues for program implementation such as insufficient resource allocations (human resources, budget and other resources). These issues cannot be easily solved within short term, and therefore are more likely to reduce motivation of the health professionals. Bearing in mind such difficult circumstances, we can meet the health professionals who make maximum efforts with enthusiasm to provide better services in the medical field. Sometimes, we face difficult situations, but we are encouraged to move forward for expansion and improvement of the organized screening as long as we have such motivated medical professionals. We would like to put maximum effort in establishing the national mechanism to respect this enthusiasm and efforts in the field and support them through the Project activities, which lead to achieving a big goal, “increasing the number of early detected breast cancers and reducing the breast cancer mortality rate” “ JICA Consultant team reported.
**Messages from the Counterparts: Development Agency of Serbia (RAS) and JICA**

**More than a Decade Long Partnership**

A long-term and more than successful cooperation between the Development Agency of Serbia (RAS) and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) in the field of mentoring resulted in a new project "Establishing and promoting mentoring services in the Western Balkans, Phase 2", 2017 – 2020, which was launched in an official event on September 20, 2017 in Belgrade.

The Project refers to the improvement of standardized mentoring services in Serbia, and continuation of transfer of Serbian expertise in the field of mentoring in Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Macedonia, and it will be implemented in cooperation between RAS, JICA and development agencies from these neighboring countries.

This is one of the few JICA’s projects with a regional character, and a rare example of JICA supporting the fourth project in a row in one country.

So far, more than 1,600 micro, small, medium-sized enterprises and entrepreneurs have received mentoring assistance for business operations through RAS programs in the last 4 years, with the methodology developed in many years of cooperation with JICA. Also, RAS’ research about the relevance of mentoring support in Serbia has shown that as many as 98% of clients expressed the wish to receive additional mentoring support, i.e. to be the clients again, and 90% underlined that they improved their business performance thanks to support provided by mentors.

The focus of the new project will also include the training of new mentors and mentors’ trainers, as well as the improvement of the mentoring scheme, evaluation and recertification. Also, a successful transfer of Serbian expertise is expected in the following three years in the countries in the region – Montenegro, Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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**Messages from the Counterparts: Crisis Management Center CMC of Macedonia and JICA**

The Crisis Management Center (CMC) of the Republic of Macedonia, as the Governmental Agency responsible for coordinating with national Disaster risk reduction (DRR) efforts, has established an excellent cooperation with the Japan International Cooperation Agency in the last ten years. Since the previous projects have been highly evaluated by both Governments for its contribution to disaster risk reduction, both parties (JICA and CMC) agreed to explore the possibility of further cooperation on DRR and management. Therefore, a new "Project on Capacity Building for Ecosystem Based Disaster Risk Reduction (Eco-DRR)" was formulated and the implementation started in November 2017.

The expectations of CMC regarding this 5-year project are the following:

- Strengthening inter-sectoral cooperation between disaster management institutions and forestry/environment agency and developing common plans and capacities for prevention and mitigation of risk related to natural phenomena,
- Introduction of the Eco-DRR concept in the Republic of Macedonia as a new approach in DRR
- Promotion of Ecosystem-based solutions (Ecoengineering) and the needs to work in synergy with infrastructure related activities
- In cooperation with Japan's Eco-DRR experts who will be involved in the project to exchange useful experiences and good practices and apply them in Macedonia,
- To increase awareness among local communities and local and national governments on the importance and benefits of Eco-DRR based solutions for disaster risk reduction and increasing resilience against natural hazards,
- Through the implementation of the Eco-DRR concept in Macedonia, to contribute to its Regional Promotion and strengthening the capacities of the countries from the Region for Disaster Risk Reduction,
- By Eco-DRR measures and activities in synergy with sustainable forest management, on a long-term basis to reduce disaster risks of floods, landslides, soil erosion, soil destabilization and forest fire in Macedonia.
Workshop by JICA SV at JAPANIS

From 2nd to 8th October 2017, a workshop, related to Japanese culture, JAPANIS was held at the premises of University Library in Nis (Serbia). At the opening ceremony, now former Japanese Ambassador to Serbia, H.E. Mr. Juichi Takahara addressed the attendees. The main topic of this year’s manifestation was Bushido, and day after day there were different lectures and performances on various topics. The participants had a chance to try making sushi or drinking matcha. Beside this, other activities included Japanese language, calligraphy, bushido, aikido, ninjutsu, anime, game go, karate, judo, cosplay, manga, haiku, tournament in video games etc. All activities were fully attended by the citizens interested in Japanese culture. JICA Senior Volunteer, Setsuko Sato, coordinated the workshops related to Japanese language, tea ceremony and calligraphy. Many people had an opportunity to see tea ceremony for the first time, and they were really excited about it. TV agencies also reported about the event which aroused interest in Japanese culture among the people of all generations.

ALUMNI Serbia Teaching Environment Protection through Origami Workshop

In November 2017, a member of JICA Alumni Serbia, Ms. Aleksandra Vucinic held origami workshops at 4 elementary schools in Belgrade. All together 110 pupils from different grades took part in these workshops. The aim was to promote Japanese culture and tradition through Origami, and at the same time, teach children about the importance of environment protection. Ms. Aleksandra read her picture book “Ekologijanka” to the pupils and through the interactive approach she tried to connect Origami, as a creative Japanese art, with recycling of used papers. After the workshop, each student received a small pack of sweets and a “Certificate for Nature Lovers”. JICA Alumni Serbia also provided a plant as a gift to each class, with an obligation to take good care of it, and as a reminder to preserve the environment which surrounds them.

ALUMNI Macedonia Conference on Energy Efficiency for University Students

From 23-25 November 2017, JICA Alumni Macedonia (MAK-JAMS) co-organized a three-day conference on Energy efficiency and sustainable development with the student organization SKEEOR and two host faculties, The Faculty of Mechanical Engineering and the Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computer Sciences from Skopje.

More than 50 students attended the event where the university professors and the representatives of more than 15 domestic companies held presentations on the current topics and projects in the domain of energy efficiency and sustainable development. This was a unique opportunity for students, professors and the representatives of Macedonian companies to exchange views and knowledge on the current issues and obtain new information.

The goals of this conference were to raise awareness among the students about the needs for energy efficiency and sustainable development, present scientific work on globally important subjects, exchange views with the experts in this area and create networks at different levels among students, professors and companies, for future cooperation.
Trainee: Srboljub Kovačević (Serbia)
Training Course: Financial Regulation and Supervision
When and Where: October 11th – 28th, 2017, JICA Tokyo Center

The training was very comprehensive and I have had an opportunity to get acquainted with almost all important aspects of the Japanese financial system, the regulation and supervision thereof. We had a lot of study visits, and frankly the schedule was quite hectic on certain days. I had the opportunity to meet a couple of really exceptional lecturers, who gave me “food for thought” for some business ideas. The visit to Tokyo Stock Exchange was the highlight of the entire training, as I have had the privilege to witness how the third largest stock market in the world looks like and operates.

Tokyo and Fukuoka
I was constantly feeling the “Blade Runner” vibe while being in rainy Tokyo, especially so once I started discovering the city a bit more on my own. The shiny neon lights, crowded streets and tall skyline of the city really leave a deep impression on a first-timer to Tokyo, particularly in the areas of Shinjuku, Roppongi and Shibuya. I was mesmerized by the size and cleanliness of the city center (Tokyo Central Station and Emperor’s Palace with its huge park). The view from the sky deck of the Tokyo Skytree is an once-in-a-lifetime experience, and only when I climbed there did I start to grasp the vastness of this great city. I enjoyed Japanese cuisine as much as I could, given that one can only eat a certain quantity of rice, and I have never seen more restaurants than in Tokyo. The cleanliness is also a strong point, and the metro network, punctuality and passenger load is simply mind-boggling. Fukuoka city, on the other hand, did not leave much of an impression on me. It struck me as a pretty grey city with no distinguishable landmarks, and I was quite surprised by the poor quality of its roads. However, the visit to the Dazaifu Tenmangū shrine was truly great, and I really enjoyed the complex of the shrine with its countless plum trees and colorful fish ponds. I was also grateful that we were able to attend a Shinto ceremony while we were there, and to witness how profoundly spiritual certain Japanese people are.

Trainee: Radojka Cirkovic (Montenegro)
Training Course: Competition Law and Policy
When and Where: 23 July-11 August 2017, JICA Kansai Center in Kobe, JICA Tokyo Center

The training aimed at familiarizing participants with competition regulations in Japan, i.e., the provisions of the Japanese Antimonopoly Act, which is closer to the US competition regulations, as well as to the way of work and cases of the Japan Fair Trade Commission - JFTC. The training was organized through lectures of professors from Japanese universities and JFTC employees, exercises, active discussion among participants and exchange of experiences. In addition, the participants were obliged to hold presentations on the situation in this area in their countries. The training program was attended by 21 representatives from the competition authorities from 16 countries: Fiji, Ukraine, Bangladesh, Sudan, Serbia, Iraq, Macedonia, Mongolia, Tajikistan, Kenya, Iran, Indonesia, Philippines, Laos, Papua New Guinea and Montenegro.

In addition to the training, we tried to get to know Japan from the tourist point as well. In Japan, we came across the kindness and willingness of the people to meet our needs in every moment, and what was interesting- at each of our questions they approached and spoke to us with a smile on their face. Beside Kobe and Tokyo, we also visited Kyoto. Kyoto is a seat of Japanese traditional culture with a multitude of Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines and other places of incredible beauty spreading throughout the city.