Japan, as a country which experiences 20% of the earthquakes of magnitude 6 and higher that occur in the world, has learned in a harsh way the importance of investing in disaster preparedness and it is using those lessons to help other countries. Therefore, Japan has a long history of awareness of the importance of disaster risk reduction and it has incorporated proactive disaster risk reduction (DRR) measures as cultural norm in society in order to minimize disaster-related damage.

In Asia, typhoons and cyclones happen frequently, Africa experiences droughts while Europe is mainly hit by floods and forest fires. On the other hand, Japan, which experiences frequent and diverse natural disasters, understands very well the viewpoint of disaster prone developing countries.

Japan applies its accumulated knowledge in cooperation with developing countries to help train personnel and develop research in this area. The goal is to ultimately spread a culture of disaster risk reduction and economic growth in the affected countries. The international community also shares the view that DRR is indispensable for sustainable development.

Since 1994, the UN World Conference on DRR has been held every 10 years to discuss policies related to DRR. The first session in 1994 adopted the Yokohama strategy, composed of 10 principles designed to make the world safer. The second session in 2005 formulated Hyogo Framework for Action to build disaster resilient communities. And in 2015, the Sendai Framework for DRR set seven global targets in coordination with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Member countries are now working on DRR measures as 2030, the target year for the fulfillment of the goals, approaches.

Balkan region is also prone to natural disasters and in recent years floods and forest fires have hit most of the countries of the Western Balkans. In Macedonia, JICA assisted Crisis Management Center of Macedonia (CMC) to create Macedonian Forest Fire Information System (MKFFIS) through Technical Cooperation with an aim to strengthen the disaster prevention and reduce the effects of the natural disaster caused by the forest fires. Furthermore, CMC carried out a training to share their results and experiences related to the management of forest fires with the other countries in the Western Balkans.

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 other relevant institutions aiming at preventing natural disasters by using the advantages of the ecosystem, such as forests.
Future of Tourism in Balkan region enlightened

Over the last two years, JICA had appointed a Regional Tourism Advisor to Balkan region. Series of activities had been undertaken by the Project which in overall aimed at establishing the sustainable mechanism for tourism promotion in the region towards Japanese market. Undertaken activities include participation in Tourism EXPO Japan, organization of media tours, development of regional strategy etc.

At the end, the Project was found to help contribute increasing the number of Japanese tourists in the region. In particular, the regional approach in tourism promotion was found to be strategically effective. Furthermore, custom made tours organized in Japanese style were well praised, as well as learning both Japanese and Balkan profiles by both sides.

JICA hopes that the momentum gained from the Project implementation will continue to be carried out by those benefited countries in the region, and will monitor their continued efforts in promotion for the increase of Japanese tourists.

In conclusion, the Project would like to express its deep appreciation for all countries in the region for their cooperation in the successful Project closure.

Mr. Takahiko MAKINO (Expert in Tourism Promotion Project)

Award for SME Mentors

The 2nd Mentor award was held 10 - 11 May.

More than 20 people including 11 mentors, representatives of Development Agency of Serbia and JICA experts attended the event. In addition to the above mentioned people, Representatives from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Macedonia were also invited.

During the event, each mentor made presentations on their best mentoring activity. Their presentations were evaluated by all participants of the event. In the end, JICA experts emphasized that the skill and performance of the mentors had been greatly improved from last mentor award.

Ms. Ljiljana Markovic, from Regional Agency of Belgrade, got first prize for the best mentoring activities in 2017.
First Seminar on promotion of Ecosystem based Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)

On 8th May, 2018, Eco-DRR project, which has being implemented since November 2017, conducted the 1st Seminar on Promotion of “Ecosystem Based Disaster Risk Reduction” in Skopje, Macedonia.

This seminar was held for the purpose of the common understanding with all stakeholders concerned about Eco-DRR (Disaster Risk Reduction based on the Ecosystem) concept, as a new approach in disasters risk reduction, as well as explaining the activity contents of the project.

In the seminar there were participants from counterparts, i.e. Crisis Management Center (CMC), The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Water Economy (MAFWE) and Public Enterprise Macedonian Forests (PEMF) and also from the City of Skopje and the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning (MEPP) who will be cooperating on the implementation of field pilot activities in the future. There were 34 participants present at the seminar.

At first, Mr. Agron Buxhaku, Director General of CMC and Mr. Hideya Kobayashi, Chief Representative of JICA Balkan office gave an opening address. The CMC Director General explained the background where past JICA technical cooperation and this project were formed, and Chief Representative Mr. Kobayashi emphasized the importance of the dissemination of Eco-DRR concept successively.

A project manager of CMC, Dr. Stevko Stefanoski, Head of Department for Analysis, Assessment and Strategic Planning at CMC, introduced project activities, and JICA expert Dr. Inada explained Eco-DRR concept afterwards. As an input from Japanese side, JICA Expert (Mr. Toyoda, Mr. Yumiyama) shared experiences from Japanese forest management and how it would be incorporated in this Project for the disaster risk management.

Through the discussion, participants realized that it will be important to incorporate Eco-DRR in the forest law and the city planning including the regulation of development for disaster prevention.

Hopefully, these issues will be deeply discussed by all stakeholders in near future.

ALBANIA

Joint Coordination Committee (JCC) for Financial Inclusion

In February, the kick-off seminar and JCC of Small-holder families’ financial inclusion project took place in Tirana. The seminar welcomed the participation of the Deputy Financial Minister, the Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Rural development as well as the Ambassador of Japan, and informed about the project overview. The seminar gained considerable media coverage and we expect that the project will promote financial inclusion mainly by developing new financial products and core banking system.
Capacity Building Training for the Sports Association of the City of Mostar

For the purpose of business improvement, Sports Association of the City of Mostar (hereinafter, SSGM) visited the Sports Association of the City of Zagreb (Croatia) and the Sports Association of the City of Velenje (Slovenia) from February 18-24, in order to gather information and exchange opinions.

Through this training, participants acquired knowledge on how to ensure fairness and transparency in business, as well as, how to approach citizens and promote sport in the city.

During the meeting, the Deputy mayor of the City of Velenje said: "I hope that, as a result of this visit, the exchange between our two cities will further develop.", whereupon both parties agreed on the importance of strengthening the future cooperation among the associations and creation of opportunities for ideas and experience sharing.

The Project is hoping that through this network SSGM and its fellow partners in the neighboring countries could successfully secure EU joint funds, which would help foster cross-national trust relationships in the future.

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Research on the integration system of spatial environment analysis and advanced metal recovery to ensure sustainable resources development (SATREPS)

The counterpart training in Japan has been held from 3rd to 11th March.

Key persons of the project from Ministry of environment and Ministry of energy and mining have participated in the training. They visited Akita University, neutralizing processing facility in Matsuo mine, Saganoseki smelter and other facilities and saw the Japan’s current environmental program.

They also discussed about the future plan and challenges of the project. It is expected that the results and outcomes of the project will be disseminated to Serbian society in the future.
In January, the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning held the National Seminar of Waste Management, which became the first opportunity in the country to discuss the issue among the central and local governments. Through the presentation of the results of national survey on waste management, each municipality was able to build the common understanding on the current service standards, available resources and the challenges to address. The seminar also introduced the Prizren Model, a good practice which has drastically improved the garbage collection rate and waste management services in Prizren.

SENIOR VOLUNTEERS

My Volunteer Activities—Toshimitsu TSUKADA (JICA Senior Volunteer at Nasa Kuca)

I am involved in activities at NasaKuca, an Association supporting the employment of persons with developmental disabilities, from an aspect to develop and support the staff. The Association itself has been managed by the parents for about 11 years now.

Young persons with developmental disabilities are mainly engaged in making chocolates and sandwiches on daily basis. They are always in good mood and willing to work.

Recently “Nasa Kuca” has launched new products which are absolutely delicious, Coko Sljiva (Choco sandwich made of two layers of fine Belgium Chocolate and dry prune paste between them) and Coko Malina (Chocolate pralines with dried raspberry chunks). Choco Sljiva is strongly recommended by Doris, National staff at JICA Balkan Office, and Choco Malina is the favorite sweet of Mr. Kobayashi, Chief Representative of JICA Balkan Office. Please try both of them and then decide which one is your favorite.

For ordering and inquiries→ nashakuca@gmail.com.
Experience of Ex-Training Participant

Training participant: Ms. Daniela Mihajlovska-Vasilevska
Institution: Economic Chamber of Macedonia
Name of the Course: Regional Economic and Social Vitalization through Tourism Development: Regional Branding and Marketing in Hokkaido
Course period: 28th January to 23rd February 2018

In a one-month program packed in 19 working days, 25 lectures with interactive exercises were held, with exceptional quality and well-selected lecturers who managed to retain the attention and concentration of the participants. I can say that this was a rather complex training which gave us a certain image of the experience of Hokkaido, as part of Japan, in the field of Regional Economic and Social Revitalization through Tourism Development – Regional Branding and Marketing in Hokkaido. The completion of the course was marked by awarding certificates to all the participants, in a very good atmosphere with great respect for our venture. We are all very thankful to JICA team and the Hamanasu Foundation, as a partner in the whole process.

When talking about the organization of the course, I was very pleased with the facilities of JICA center, where apart from the well-organized official and working part, the space offers the opportunity for entertainment through various forms of planned events, such as the presentation of Japanese culture, tradition, opportunities for recreation, sports activity, movies, music and social games.

Especially interesting part of the training program were the organized study trips as part of the overall arrangement (Niseko, Sapporo, Shiretoko and Biei) where we had the opportunity to visit specific destinations with attractive tourist offers.

We had the opportunity to get acquainted with the specifics of the destinations and to learn what makes them special and attractive, how they manage to ensure sustainability through the continuous introduction of tourist attractions, following the needs of the tourists. We also learnt about Japanese society, various kind of food with all their specifics, people’s habits, culture of living, roles in the society and their behavior. We have also participated in the Tourism Conference organized by the UNWTO.

Within the activities organized by JICA and supported by the Hamanasu Foundation, we received information about significant segments in tourism development. My final report was focused on the functioning of DMO, organizations that are based on the use of comprehensive statistical data, SWOT analysis, application of the marketing, planning and branding rules in the communication and cooperation with the stakeholders with the final objective for a sustainable development to be achieved and which contribute to even greater development of tourism.

After visiting Hokkaido I made a presentation in Economic Chamber of Macedonia, with proposing the adjusted measures as the option to make proposals or recommendations aimed at central, local and institutional levels for social and economic vitalization through developing tourism.

My overall impression of the Japanese people, especially those from Hokkaido, is that after a certain period of time I realized that behind the restrained and serious attitude were hidden warm and friendly people willing to help you fit in their system of operation, and share their experience and knowledge as well as the model of successful functioning of the entire system.