



Ms. Mitsuyo Kusano Journalist, Visits ODA Project Sites in Bangladesh

Mitsuyo Kusano: Graduated from Department of Mathematics, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Tsuda College, entered Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) in 1989, and worked at their Kanazawa station before being transferred to the Broadcasting Room at their Tokyo station. Served as newscaster on “NHK Morning Wide” and as overall host on “Kohaku Utagassen,” to name a few assignments. For the past nine years, since October 1997, she has worked as anchor on TBS “NEWS 23”. She is the author of “Newscaster no Honne (What a Newscaster Really Has in Mind)”, a collection of essays.

Projects Visited by Ms. Kusano

Power Distribution and Efficiency Enhancement Project (ODA Loan)	The project aims at electrification of rural villages by developing power distribution networks through rural electrification associates. Ms. Kusano visited one of these associates located in Munshiganj to see facilities receiving benefits from electrification through this project, including a cold storage facility of agricultural products and a village firm that manufactures and sells textiles.
Greater Faridpur Rural Infrastructure Development Project (ODA Loan, JICA Technical Cooperation project)	The project aims at poverty reduction through the participatory rural infrastructure development in the Greater Faridpur area where many people live in poverty. Local community participation has been promoted through technical cooperation. Ms. Kusano visited rural roads, bridges, community markets, and road operation and maintenance work by local residents in Shariatpur. She also participated in the community council meeting.
Rural Development Credit Program (Grameen Bank) (ODA Loan)	The Grameen Bank has been providing micro credits without collateral to improve living standards of the landless poor and to elevate the social status of women. She visited a beneficiary of an education loan; a woman who, after divorcing, bought and raised cows, and eventually became a landowner; a bakery; a chicken farm, etc.
Jamuna Multi-Purpose Bridge Project (ODA Loan)	The project aims to bridge the economic disparity between east and west through the construction of the Jamuna Bridge, thereby contributing to economic growth. Ms. Kusano crossed the Jamuna Bridge and realized the importance of infrastructure development.

“Keep striving, and life will turn around!”
Women are awakening to new prospects.

---I’m sure you have visited a variety of countries in your business. Let us have your frank impressions of your visit to Bangladesh.

Kusano: What I felt first was I wanted to express my heart-felt respect to all the people who are working for development assistance operation in Bangladesh. Bangladesh was definitely the poorest country with the harshest conditions that I have ever visited. There are such a myriad of problems—poverty, frequent flooding, population increase and so on—multilayered and deeply rooted so that it is difficult to imagine which one to tackle first. Amid such a difficult situation, they have the perseverance to solve and overcome the problems step by step. I am truly humbled by their efforts. At the same time, meeting the Bangladeshi



Female workers doing maintenance work of a rural road in the Great Faridpur Infrastructure Development Project

people living their lives with such vigor in an environment far tougher than in Japan made me think about the meaning of happiness. It was me who received high energy from them.

---You said before the field tour that you wanted to meet with female beneficiaries and listen to their thoughts.

Kusano: Women living in the villages of the Great Faridpur, where rural infrastructure was developed with participation of the local community, told me that they used to be “scared” to go even outside the home. It’s understandable because women’s status was so low that they were expected to stay at home all day. But look at them now: they are taking part in the community meetings and making various requests such as “We want to have a toilet,” and “We want to have our livestock vaccinated.”



A crowded street in Dhaka



Ms. Kusano with a woman who has become a landowner by selling calves to buy land.



A bakery run by a farmer

And women are actually making that happen. They used to have to give up. They thought it was no use expressing their opinion, because nobody would do anything. But now, these women in the local communities are beginning to have a common hope—a hope that if they make their voices heard and keep striving, they could solve problems one by one and eventually turn their lives around by themselves. That was quite a moving experience.

---Soon after you came back to Japan, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Grameen Bank and Mr. Muhammad Yunus, its Managing Director. One of the places you visited during your field tour was where a Grameen Bank operation was underway funded by JBIC as an ODA loan project. What was your impression when you actually saw it?

Kusano: I suppose when it was founded, the very system of lending funds without collateral must have been unbelievable. I talked with a woman who, after divorce, borrowed 3,000 taka (approximately 3,500 JPY) from the Grameen Bank and had a few cows. She told me that those cows bore calves, and the sale of calves enabled her to buy a plot of land where she grew crops and increased her household income. I also met a farmer who was running a bakery in addition to doing farm work. I realized that through a series of borrowings and repayments, a sense of running one's own business was budding among the people, generating vitality. It has also brought home to me that women's status and position have been elevated as they have become signing parties to loan contracts as borrowers.

More publicity that matches actual contribution is in order

---What was your impression about ODA loan projects? And what do you think is necessary for successful assistance?

Kusano: I came to fully understand the significance of aid that combines assistance for hardware and technical

assistance such as empowerment of farmers. Above all, I felt the most important thing is the very process where people interact with each other, reach agreement one by one, and proceed step by step. After assessing the needs of those who receive aid, we should have them properly understand the spirit of Japanese assistance and thereby raise their motivation to go forward together. Sometimes, we may have to offer very strict oversight, while at other times encouraging them. It is only through such people's efforts that we can achieve development. Physical assistance alone will never solve their problems.

---What do you think Japanese official development assistance should be in the future?

Kusano: In any sense of the word, Japan should not give up or be negative on ODA. Some more publicity on how Japanese aid has been so helpful may be in need. To be vocal about it may go against modesty, which the Japanese cherish as virtue, or their aesthetic sense. But we might as well seek due appreciation for our actual contribution. If your attitude is: "Well, people with a good judgment are in the know," no one will come to appreciate the need of development assistance. In this respect, I want you to be more self-assertive, peddling skillfully but persistently to the point that some people may feel annoyed (laughter). For that purpose, in addition to the significance of projects and examples of success, I would also like you to tell of failures and hardships in the process of doing projects so that we can have a palpable sense of what aid work is like.

---Finally, will you send a message to the Japanese youth?

Kusano: I have concerns over decreasing interest among Japanese youth in what's happening overseas. One of the reasons is they are reluctant to leave Japan. It is hard to imagine for Japanese today what it is like to be without electricity. It is important to be able to imagine such living conditions, if the Japanese want to understand aid. It is also crucial to foster from childhood a mind-set about learning through a variety of cultures, values and lifestyles, and to understand other peoples. That's because it's really a blessing that we were born in Japan.

