

JICA's WORLD

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JOCV

Half a Century of Civil Participation



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JICA's Japan Overseas Co-operation Volunteers (JOCV) program celebrates its fiftieth anniversary this year. Since the first JOCVs were dispatched to Laos in 1965, the program has continued to answer calls for assistance from governments of developing countries, training and sending eager young volunteers to share their skills and knowledge in local communities around the world. Participants, who



1960s - 1970s

1965

Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers program inaugurated.
Five volunteers sent to Laos.

1966

Kenya becomes the first African country to receive JOCVs.

1968

El Salvador receives JOCVs as the first Central American country to do so.

1972

Western Samoa is the first country in the Oceania region to receive JOCVs.

1978

The first JOCVs in South America go to Paraguay.

are between the ages of 20 and 39, provide assistance during two-year assignments in one of about 200 sectors, such as education, nursing, auto mechanics, IT, and sports.

JICA over the years has inaugurated several other similar volunteer programs. The Senior Volunteers program, which targets participants between 40 and 69, began in 1990, while the Youth and Senior Volunteers for Overseas

Japanese Communities began providing assistance to communities in the Americas home to people of Japanese descent in 1996.

JICA's volunteers live and work alongside local residents, carrying out their activities with an emphasis on fostering self-reliance. The programs aim to contribute to social and economic development through community-based efforts to address poverty, healthcare, ed-

ucation, and other issues faced by developing countries. To date, nearly 50,000 volunteers have been dispatched to 96 countries and regions. Participants' activities have served as "grassroots diplomacy" fostering mutual understanding between Japan and the partner countries. This issue of *JICA's World* looks back at 50 years of volunteer work and introduces the efforts of JICA volunteers around the world.



1980s - 2000s

1981

JOCVs are dispatched to Thailand, the **thirtieth nation** to receive volunteers.

1990

JOCV program reaches 10,000 volunteers dispatched;
JICA **Senior Volunteers program** initiated.

1992

Hungary becomes the **first Eastern European** JOCV recipient.

2000

JOCV program reaches **20,000 volunteers dispatched.**

2010

JICA volunteer programs reach
a **cumulative total of 40,000 volunteers** dispatched.



JOCV member Takahisa Arai watches as villagers in Laos separate kudzu fibers.

Toward the Future, Side by Side

For 50 years, JICA's Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCVs) have been providing technical support in developing countries for economic and social development, reconstruction, and other objectives. The first country to welcome JOCVs was Laos, in 1965. Since that time, the program has continued to dispatch passionate and motivated volunteers to partner countries to work closely with local people in building a brighter future.

A BRIDGE SPANNING A HALF CENTURY

Laos is known as one of Asia's most remote countries. Visitors today to the capital of Vientiane, however, are struck by a vastly different image: a bustling city of high-rise buildings and traffic jams, as well as corner cafes and restaurants that hark back to Laos's history as a French colony.

A mere hour's drive outside of the capital pro-

vides a strikingly different scene. Out in the Laotian countryside, fields set peacefully among the verdant hills and valleys and the friendly smiles of passersby hint at a slower, more pastoral way of life.

The first JOCVs, five Japanese youths, landed in Laos in 1965. In the 50 years since their arrival, successive volunteers have preserved the spirit of these pioneers in working closely with local residents, serving as a bridge linking Laos and Japan.

An hour north by plane from Vientiane, in the remote province of Oudomxay, is a productivity and marketing center run by the province's Department of Industry and Commerce. The region was once notorious for its production of opium poppies. Currently, programs are underway to reduce reliance on poppy farming by promoting the production of handicrafts as a means for residents to earn a living. The center plays an important role in this process, overseeing the sale and distribution of finished products.

JOCV member Takahisa Arai uses his sales knowledge to provide the center with ideas as well as other types of support. Inside the center, products like bags, pouches, and shawls made from cotton and other natural fibers are stacked neatly in rows. "Women's groups from eight different villages

make the handcrafts,” explains Arai. “They live in remote mountain villages, subsisting largely on agriculture. These products are an important source of cash income for them.”

After graduating from university, Arai worked at a financial institution, where he helped oversee loans to small and medium-sized businesses. Using experience gained in helping different Japanese enterprises improve their operations, Arai has been influential since coming to Oudomxay in providing a wide variety of plans and ideas. These have included designing displays and point of purchase advertising to explain about products, as well as the creation of promotional posters and leaflets.

MAKING PRODUCTS WITH A LOCAL TOUCH

Traditional raised-floor dwellings stand side by side in the village of Mang, a small community inhabited by the Khmu, one of Lao’s many ethnic groups. Life moves along traditional lines in this highland region, located an hour and a half by car from the center along winding mountain roads.

Arai notes that the village women have very impressive skills. In a display of this prowess, a woman deftly uses a knife to split kudzu vines and remove the inner fiber, which she quickly twists into a thin piece of twine. These light cords, which retain their strength even when wet, are woven into bags. Watching as the Khmu women apply traditional skills passed down over generations, Arai interjects: “This may look easy, but it is very difficult.”

Seang, the leader of one women’s group, smiles as she explains how it is fun making bags with Arai, whom she calls Taka. As she goes about her duties, Seang emanates an aura of warmth, community, and heartiness that remains prevalent in this region even as it seems to be fading in developed countries like Japan.

Arai is involved in helping the women of the community to utilize traditional skills in creating handcrafts to sell to tourists. Previously, Seang and the other women had been weaving kudzu into shoulder bags, but they proved unpopular with tourists because of their size. To address the issue, the women have begun weaving smaller bags and introducing new design aspects, such as creating striped patterns using dyed twine.

Mayphone Silivong, the manager of the center’s promotion and product development section, shares her Japanese colleague’s ambitions for the center. “We hope to create products that have a broad appeal to consumers,” explains Silivong. “Our ultimate goal is to begin exporting them.”

For the women in the village, starting new projects is not always an easy task. According to Arai, it is hard to adequately convey ideas through words alone. “The first thing I do is show an example of what I’m trying to explain,” he says. “After that, I leave it in the hands of the local residents at the center.” The result has been an ongoing effort to create new and original products.

LEARNING THROUGH SPORTS

Once every three years Oudomxay Province hosts a widely popular national sporting competition, featuring around 20 events, that brings together the top athletes from each province. In a remote region of neighboring Sainyabuli Province, two hours by car from the ancient city of Luang Prabang, JOCV members are hard at work helping prepare for the competition.

In the province’s central region, energetic cries can be heard in a gymnasium where the women’s provincial volleyball team practices passing, setting, and receiving during a training camp. The sharp sound of a whistle is followed by coaching

Stoles made from cotton grown in Oudomxay (left). Below, Arai smiles at product development section manager Mayphone Silivong while productivity and marketing center manager Ounkham Onphachanh looks on.



PHOTOS: KENSHIRO IMAMURA



JOCV member Yuiko Honma (in red) runs drills with fellow coach Thavone Khunthong.

instructions. The person directing the players is JOCV member Yuiko Honma. Having played volleyball from junior high school to university, Honma chose to participate in the volunteer program in the hope of sharing her volleyball experience with players overseas.

Honma's goal is to improve the skills and abilities of those playing volleyball inside the province. When she started, players during practice focused almost solely on spiking the ball. "The spike is ineffective as an offensive tool," she explains, "if players



Honma and players discuss different plays after reviewing a video of a practice match.

don't first work on basics skills like receiving the ball and training their muscles to allow them to jump higher." Using techniques from Japan as a base, Honma has introduced practice routines covering everything from basic skills to practice games and has also incorporated drills and exercises aimed at building strength and stamina.

Many of the players are still in high school, and much as their counterparts in Japan, they put on a different face after practice, busily fidgeting with their smartphone screens as they stroll back to their dorm rooms. Back at the dormitory, however, the players stare intently as they review a video of an earlier practice match.

"You're in the wrong place in this formation," points out one player. "You need to spike the ball here, where the court is open," interjects another. The video is stopped at each notable play, with players candidly sharing their thoughts. During the session, a single voice calls to the group, saying, "Let's all buckle down and try not to make mistakes."

The players have made a tremendous amount of progress compared to when Honma first began coaching the team. In the beginning it was not unusual for players to arrive late for practice or to complain about being tired during drills. Now, players take the initiative, such as by preparing drinking water and checking that balls are properly inflated prior to beginning practice.

Honma's tenure as coach will soon come to an end. The team has enjoyed success under her watch, winning the national student championship. She gives a satisfied smile as she reflects on her time in Laos: "The Laotians supported me at every turn; even during difficult times. The experience taught me the importance of relying on others."

"To date, over 800 JOCVs have come to Laos," notes Saymonekham Mangnomek, vice-director at the Planning and Investment Ministry's Department of International Cooperation. "And we hope they will continue coming to provide their expertise." Since the beginning, JOCV participants have worked side by side with local residents. The spirit of mutual cooperation that has formed the base of the program will continue to support it as it moves forward.



Team members gather during practice for a motivating cheer.

Pioneering JOCV Participant **Masako Hoshino**



When I went to Laos as a volunteer in 1965, Japan was still undergoing a period of rapid economic growth. It was rare for people to travel overseas and those around me had never heard of the JOCV program.

My father, who had emigrated to Hawaii, understood the broader world outside of Japan's borders. Growing up in this environment, I was one of only a few women students to attend university, where I learned English and French. Some time later, I saw a JOCV ad while working as a Japanese teacher and decided to apply.

Learning While Teaching

Although I went to Laos to teach Japanese, I didn't have a classroom when I arrived and wasn't able to get any students to join. This was disconcerting, but instead of letting it get me down I decided I would try and learn how to speak Lao. The marks and accolades I had earned in Japan had no value in Laos, so I had to dig down and apply myself as much as possible to get by each day. To be successful, it was essential for me to become involved in the day-to-day life of local residents.

I'm an optimist by nature and was convinced that the project would be a success. This helped to motivate me. After six months of work I was finally able to get my Japanese class up and running.

Laotians use their hearts, not money and materialistic values, to weigh the worth of things. Living and working among them made me feel that I wasn't there to teach, but to learn.



Hoshino conducting her Japanese class in a room she borrowed at a technical college.



JOCV participant Yoko Togashi sits with villagers during a religious ceremony.

Including Local Values in Volunteer Efforts

Yoko Togashi was just a student in junior high school when a television program about the volunteer efforts of a Japanese nurse in Africa first sparked her interest in overseas assistance. Togashi, inspired by the nurse's plea that more medical volunteers in the field would mean more lives being saved, also hoped one day to do volunteer work of her own in Africa.

For some time even after becoming a nurse, though, she kept her dream to herself. It was not until she became involved in a program providing medical care to communities on Japan's many remote islands that she again began thinking about traveling to Africa. She discovered while spending time in parts of Okinawa and Kagoshima Prefectures that all places have their own unique and pleasant aspects. Certain that this held true with Africa as well, she decided to travel to the continent and see how locals lived.

VILLAGE ASPIRATIONS

Togashi came to Benin with the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV) program in December 2013. She was stationed at the Dogbo Health Center in Kouffo County, where after one month observing activities at the center's various departments, such as those handling obstetrics and HIV/AIDS, she began working in the vaccination unit. Her duties consisted chiefly of managing and updating patients' records and weighing babies and children prior to their inoculation.

From the beginning of her dispatch, Togashi was curious about the situation at other centers. After talking with the head nurse, she obtained permission to visit the six other health centers in the county.

During her visits she not only observed situations at different medical centers but also paid visits to nearby villages. There, she used an interpreter to talk with local residents, who mainly spoke the local Aja language, to learn how they viewed the centers and ask them what services they wanted the facilities to provide. It was in this way that she learned that malaria was the most common malady affecting patients at all the medical centers.



Togashi conducts a malaria prevention survey in a village (left) and asks questions during a visit to a health center in Kouffo County.

265 HOUSEHOLDS IN 53 VILLAGES

After her return to the Dogbo Health Center, Togashi continued working in the vaccination unit. One change she implemented there was the installation of a hand-washing space. The facility lacked a sink and other equipment where staff could wash their hands, so she set up an area with a bucket and soap. Thanks to her efforts, workers began to scrub their hands regularly. She also began working with another nurse to deliver malaria medication free of charge to villages in Dogbo. It was through these efforts that she became interested in learning more about how residents in the surrounding villages lived.

Togashi again expressed her feelings to the head nurse, who in 2014 allowed her to travel to different villages to conduct a month-long survey on malaria prevention methods.

“I wanted to find out why the disease was so rampant,” explains Togashi. “I focused on mothers with children up to five years old. I visited five households in each of the 53 villages in Dogbo for a total of 265 homes. Questions were formed to provide a quick and concise impression of the day-to-day lives of the women. For example, the mosquito responsible for transmitting malaria is active after dusk, so I would ask the women what time they usually prepared dinner. I’d have them show me their living space while asking them how they

stored water and whether they had mosquito nets. I came to understand how important it was for prevention efforts be carried out with consideration for the lifestyle of village residents.”

UNDERSTANDING THE LOCAL VIEWPOINT

Volunteer efforts at medical facilities were suspended in September 2014 following the outbreak of Ebola hemorrhagic fever in West Africa. Togashi had the option of ending her term of dispatch early, but she chose to carry on her efforts. Since then, she has been involved in helping look after the health and wellbeing of residents in villages where traditional Voodoo practices form the base of medical care, as well as working with villagers to ascertain the core needs of communities.

According to Togashi, there are few areas where she provides advice as a medical specialist. “For the most part, I don’t interact with people from a nursing standpoint. It’s easy from a position of authority to tell people not to do something, but you may end up offending their lifestyle, traditions, and way of thinking. I don’t want to remain someone who has simply come to provide assistance. My goal is to carry out my work from the viewpoint of the residents themselves, understanding what it is they really want and considering how they feel and perceive their surroundings.”



To better understand the lives of residents, Togashi shares a meal with village children and helps collect water from a communal well.



Senior Volunteers participant Shoichi Morita watches carefully as students make plastic tubing.

Bringing Lifelong Experience as Senior Volunteers

JICA's Senior Volunteers program targets participants aged 40–69 who have a strong desire to utilize the specialized knowledge and skills cultivated during their careers in cooperative activities in developing countries. Volunteers are dispatched for two years to provide direct assistance, as well as to serve as advisers in a wide array of areas, through efforts including hands-on training and classroom-based instruction.

BRINGING WORK SKILLS TO COLOMBIAN YOUTHS

Senior Volunteers participant Shoichi Morita provides instruction in plastic molding techniques to students at a job-training center in Colombia. After a long career developing components for Nissan Motor and Fuji Xerox, Morita applied to the Senior Volunteers program following his retirement. Like

many volunteers, he was motivated by a desire to put his years of experience to use in cooperative efforts overseas.

The job-training center is part of a national network of schools run by the Colombian government aimed at providing individuals who have graduated from high school, but are unable to afford college, with the knowledge and training they need to find employment. Students receive 1–2 years of training free of charge in such fields as manufacturing, business and commerce, culinary arts, and nursing. There are around 1 million students enrolled in the program, gaining skills and knowledge that will be valuable in the Colombian economy.

Morita was dispatched to a school in Colombia's third largest city of Santiago de Cali that provides training in resin application and metalwork. He instructs students in the production of films and tubes, working alongside other teachers at the school to teach four classes of around 25 students each.

One aspect of training that receives especially close attention from Morita is bettering the practical aptitude of his students. When a question comes up in class, he notes, students have a strong tendency to be satisfied with merely knowing the correct response. This can be problematic to their development, however, as it is focusing on the processes

behind an answer that leads to broader understanding and true problem-solving skills.

To address this issue, Morita has gradually increased the time students spend in practical training. He feels confident that the experience they gain by applying their hands and minds toward finding solutions will serve them well as they move forward.

Practical training includes instruction in the 5S system, a mindset that for decades has sustained the outstanding safety and efficiency of Japan's manufacturing industry. Representing the five Japanese words *seiri* (sort), *seiton* (set), *seiso* (shine), *seiketsu* (standardize), and *shitsuke* (sustain), the system is intended to instill a high level of professionalism to complement practical skills. In Morita's view, there is no substitute for applied learning when getting students to understand an idea like *shitsuke*.

TRAINING FUTURE CHEFS IN FIJI

Tourism is a vital industry for Fiji, a South Pacific country consisting of over 300 coral atolls. Kitchen and service staff busily go about their duties at Fiji's many luxury resort hotels. Meeting the culinary needs of guests is a challenge that requires kitchen staff capable of producing an array of cuisine, including Japanese, French, and other ethnic dishes. Helping Fiji to meet these needs is Senior Volunteers participant Yukihiro Yamashita.

Yamashita instructs second- and third-year students in Japanese and French culinary arts at the School of Hospitality and Tourism Studies, a three-year institute attached to the Fiji National University. In his work he focuses on training students to prepare dishes that integrate locally grown ingredients.

Yamashita worked part of his career as the head cook on a cruise liner. During that time he ran a kitchen with close to 40 cooking staff consisting mainly of young men and women from developing countries. "I relied on them immensely in my work,"



explains Yamashita. "After stepping down from my position I began to feel that I wanted to help these young people out." This eventually led him to become involved in the Senior Volunteers program.

Arriving in Fiji, Yamashita quickly found areas that needed work. "Students lacked in the basics," he explains. "For one, they weren't punctual. When it came to cooking, the way that students didn't wash their hands or sat on the floor while they prepared dishes showed that they had not received instruction in basic sanitary techniques. They also hadn't been shown how to use a knife or control the cooking flame. I felt they would not last very long at a hotel, or any other job they found, without the appropriate skills. It was up to me to teach them."

In the beginning, Yamashita struggled to bridge cultural gaps. For example, some students were unable to cook with beef or pork due to religious reasons. Through regular and persistent dialogue with college administration, though, he was able to get his ideas across. His efforts have been instrumental in changing how instructors at the college view punctuality and sanitation.

Yamashita smiles as he tells about what it means to him to be a volunteer: "I'm always glad I came to Fiji when I see graduates of the school working at a hotel. It's a pleasure to teach students and watch them grow each step of the way."

Morita constantly checks the students' reaction to make sure they understand what is being covered.



Senior Volunteers participant Yukihiro Yamashita talks to students during a culinary class.

JICA Volunteers

Europe

JOCVs: **606**
Senior Volunteers: **78**

Middle East

JOCVs: **2,696**
Senior Volunteers: **662**

Africa

JOCVs: **13,042**
Senior Volunteers: **306**



Fifty Years of Volunteers

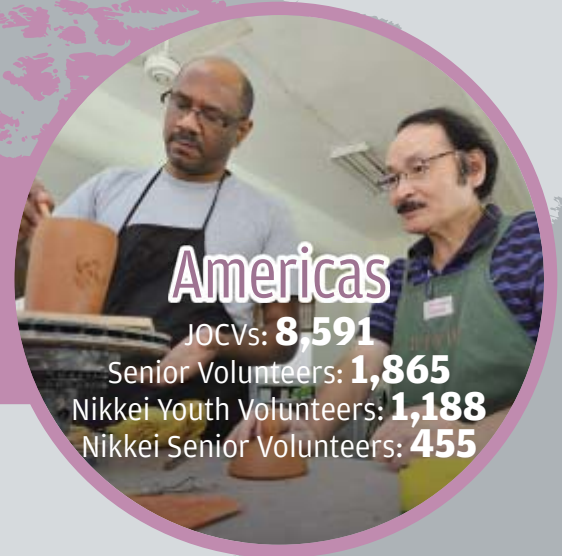
Total **47,288** (26,924 men/20,364 women)



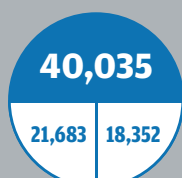
PHOTOS: KENSHIRO IMAMURA, SHINICHI KUNO, AND KOJI SATO.

Over the Last 50 Years

In the 50 years since the first five Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCVs) were dispatched to Laos, JICA has expanded its volunteer programs to include Senior Volunteers and Youth and Senior Volunteers for Overseas Japanese (Nikkei) Communities. To date, more than 47,000 volunteers have been dispatched to 96 countries and regions.



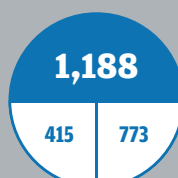
JOCVs



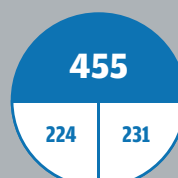
Senior
Volunteers



Nikkei
Youth
Volunteers



Nikkei
Senior
Volunteers



Total



Note: Volunteers dispatched to 96 countries and regions during the 50 years through January 2015.

The JOCV Experience: Sharing Opportunities for Growth

Alfred Serem

Lecturer, Department of Agricultural Economics, Moi University

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 (JOVCV) 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 JOVCV 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 JOVCV 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 JOVCV 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 JOVCV 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 JOVCV. 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.



Sriyantha Goonetilleke

Volunteer Program Chief Project Specialist, JICA Sri Lanka Office



Sriyantha Goonetilleke first learned of JICA's developmental efforts in his native Sri Lanka when he began working for a Japanese trading company in 1984. "I was very grateful for the contributions JICA and other organizations were making," he explains. He says one thing that drew him to begin working with the JOCV program was its "bottom up," grassroots approach.

Over the fourteen years he has been at JICA, Goonetilleke has witnessed the benefits volunteers' efforts have had for individuals and communities. In 2004, JOCV participants assisted Sri Lankans in tsunami-ravaged areas to reintegrate into society and regain their livelihoods. According to Goonetilleke, the impact of these efforts are still felt today. "Many youths who joined a JOCV vocational skills class are still making a living through what they learned." Recent projects have seen JICA volunteers provide assistance at a solid waste management support center by building environmental awareness at household, school, and institutional levels. Goonetilleke finds great satisfaction in seeing volunteers build strong and lasting friendships with local people. "The program is run at a heart-to-heart level," he says.

Goonetilleke is quick to point out that opportunities for JICA volunteers in Sri Lanka are still great. Diabetes affects a significant percentage of the population and many more are at risk from other noncommunicable diseases. This has made the need for NCD prevention a top priority. Support for elderly care is also a growing issue as the populace ages. Goonetilleke is hopeful that the lasting bonds forged between residents and JOCV participants will continue supporting the creation of shared solutions to these and other issues. "It is a 'win-win' situation."

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Cover: A Japan Overseas
Cooperation Volunteer
joins local youths pulling
a net ashore in Ada Foah,
Ghana. (Photo: Takeshi
Kuno)
Photos on pages 2-3:
Kenshiro Imamura,
Shinichi Kuno, Kazuyoshi
Nomachi, and Yasuhiko
Okuno



The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) is the world's largest bilateral development organization, operating in some 150 countries to help some of the globe's most vulnerable people.