

Voices

F R O M T H E F I E L D

Sriyantha Goonetilleke

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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."

JICA^{WORLD}
is published by **JICA**

Publisher:
Yasuko Nishino
Office of Media and
Public Relations

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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:
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