

The New JICA Story 10 Years and Beyond

Leading the World with Trust

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Forging bonds with developing countries through the Japanese way of development cooperation

I visited three countries in southern Africa in August 2018. To one of them, Malawi, JICA has sent more than 1,800 volunteers cumulatively, the largest number among all countries in the world. I was struck with a deep impression when one volunteer told me, "It's tough being in a place with no running water or electricity, but I'm glad I came." It brought home to me the fact that when JICA volunteers work with locals, not only are they making themselves useful, but are also improving themselves.

In 2017, JICA set a new vision — "Leading the world with trust" — and laid down its dual mission of "human security" and "quality growth." The work and attitudes of JICA volunteers clearly display the truly Japanese approaches of "providing cooperation instead of assistance" and "respecting partner countries by putting ourselves in their shoes and thinking with them as equals." These are not just essential attitudes for JICA volunteers, but are inherent in all of the types of cooperation we implement.

My strong desire for JICA is to be an institution that leverages these Japanese characteristics and is trusted by the international community.

Two-way partnerships between developing countries and Japan

The United Nations Sustainable Development Summit adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, the year when I became JICA president. The SDGs' spirit of "No one will be left behind" has a strong affinity to JICA's mission of "human security." Some people say they don't know where to start on the 17 ambitious and wide-ranging goals. However, this broad scope can be an advantage, as it offers both JICA and its partners the chance to renew their efforts. Opportunities abound, especially for fostering our partnerships with the private sector, which is one of our priority areas over the past 10 years. We remain strongly committed to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in particular. One of our essential roles is linking the skills and knowledge offered by innovative SMEs in Japan with the needs of developing

countries. To move forward with this process, JICA is creating a support system to help SMEs expand overseas.

JICA's cooperation with developing countries through partnerships extends beyond private companies to also include local governments universities, research institutes, NGOs, NPOs, and the like. These partnerships directly contribute to local revitalization and invigoration within Japan itself.

The Japanese Government is now focusing on "quality infrastructure investment" as a pillar of its growth strategy. In order to incorporate such strategy into JICA's work, I have listed four principles, in order of importance, which should serve as reference points to evaluate the success of our activities:

1. It is useful for the development of that country.
2. It is helpful in strengthening the relationship between that country and Japan.
3. It is beneficial for Japan's economy and companies.
4. It does not place an excessive financial burden on JICA.

Building infrastructure in developing countries is important, and in keeping with the first principle, I want to achieve our mission of "quality growth" by carrying out projects that genuinely contribute to the development of partner countries.

Similarly, under the Japanese Government's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy, we are working in partnership with the Japan Coast Guard and the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies (GRIPS) to provide training to the Philippine Coast Guard and others, helping to ensure free and safe passage in the waters around the countries in the region.

Respecting each other and working together

The establishment of the new JICA in 2008 enabled us to implement technical cooperation, loans, and grants in a comprehensive manner for carrying out cooperation. However, more effort is necessary for us to be able to take full advantage of this opportunity. Many bewildering changes are taking place in the world, and some say that some African nations are ahead of Japan in the application of new technologies, for instance, information technology (IT) and artificial intelligence (AI). We must work with developing

countries to effectively implement cooperation in the application of such new technologies.

This fall, JICA has started a new initiative called JICA Development Studies Program (JICA-DSP) in collaboration with Japanese universities. We invite young people in developing countries with leadership potential to Japan and offer them knowledge and lessons related to Japan's modernization and its experiences as an ODA-providing country after World War II. When I visited South Sudan before becoming JICA president, I realized that knowledgeable and highly capable public officials are essential to building abundant and stable societies and livelihoods. I want to utilize Japan's experiences to contribute to the human resource development of partner countries.

One thing we must not forget when looking back on the past 10 years is the tragic terrorist attack that took place in Dhaka, Bangladesh in 2016. We have already taken various steps to enhance safety measures, and rather than looking for some miracle

fix, we will continue working steadily to the best of our ability.

At the beginning of this article, I mentioned the Japanese way of development cooperation. This refers to a form of development cooperation in which we respect our partner countries, communicate extensively, and come up with the most appropriate plan of action together. The world is positive toward Japan's stance of providing cooperation instead of assistance to developing countries. Moreover, public opinion surveys in Japan show stable high rates of support for development cooperation. Investors value JICA's bonds as social impact bonds, and I see the success of this funding system as proof that many people want to do something positive for the world. Maintaining an outlook of wanting to get close to and understand the partner country is the best way for Japan to lead the world in being a trusted name on the international stage. It would make me happy if you support us in these endeavors, so we can contribute in some way to making Japan a country that is even more trusted and respected throughout the world.