

JICA's WORLD

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Nutrition for Growth:
**Toward Better
Nutrition for All**

Toward Better Nutrition for All

Many people around the world are faced with serious nutritional problems of one kind or another. Various factors such as economic, cultural, and living conditions cause these problems, and solving them requires a multi-faceted approach. JICA is working to improve peoples' nutrition with a multisectoral approach that employs a variety of disciplines.

JICA's nutrition improvement initiative involves multiple programs conducted simultaneously in multiple fields to achieve a synergistic effect. In Mozambique, for example, JICA deployed a multisectoral program that involved agriculture, food, water, health, and sanitation in a specific pilot site. JICA Senior Advisor Nomura Marika said, "Our nutrition improvement efforts are promoted collaborations of multisectoral projects, covering not only health, agriculture and sanitation, but also education, community development, promotion of gender equality, disaster preparedness and recovery among others."

In 2016, at the Sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD VI),

JICA launched the Initiative for Food and Nutrition Security in Africa (IFNA). The initiative is intended to formulate strategies and promote and disseminate multisectoral practices to improve nutrition in Africa in the 10 years up to 2025.

In Rwanda, JICA provides a Japanese ODA loan to improve child nutrition by supporting the implementation of high-priority policies and plans through policy dialogues and budget support.

The Tokyo Nutrition for Growth Summit 2020 is planned for December 2020. The summit will conduct a midterm evaluation of the progress made toward achieving the World Health Organization's (WHO) Global Nutrition Targets, and highlight Japanese contributions to nutrition policy.

Diverse cooperation in a range of fields!

Health

- Improving maternal and child health
- Strengthening measures for non-communicable diseases (NCDs), etc.

Water/ Sanitation

- Providing safe drinking water
- Promoting hand washing, etc.

Food and Agriculture

- Increasing food production
- Developing foods with a high nutritional value, etc.

Education

- Providing school meals
- Providing nutrition education at schools, etc.

"National nutrition surveys have been conducted in Japan since the end of World War II," said Nomura. "Meals and nutrition education are provided at schools. At the community level, maternal and child health handbooks are used to provide growth monitoring and nutrition counseling when infants have health checkups. Also, personnel such as dietitians and local volunteers are trained. As a result, Japan has a longer life expectancy and a lower prevalence of obesity than many other developed

countries." She added, "JICA draws upon this wealth of Japanese experience when providing nutritional cooperation to recipient countries. In the future, we're going to intensify our multisectoral efforts."

To achieve the Global Nutrition Targets by 2025, it will be necessary to expand cooperation with relevant organizations in a wide variety of fields, and to ensure the proactive engagement of recipient countries and people. Nutrition improvement is a challenge that all people must face together.



In the suburbs of Kumasi, the second largest city in Ghana, JICA nutrition expert Kyoko Sakurai (second from right) stands together with instructors and trainees from the training course for nutrition counseling, which trains health workers to provide attentive and compassionate nutrition counseling services based on maternal and child health handbooks (see p.4).

Multisectoral Efforts

Health

Food and
Agriculture

From Children to Adults: Ensuring Health at All Ages

JICA is cooperating with Ghanaian health and agricultural institutions to improve nutrition at all stages of life. Specifically, nutrition counseling to improve conditions in the health sector, and promoting a technique to produce rice with high nutritional value in the agricultural sector.

In 1999, Ghana introduced the Community-based Health Planning and Services (CHPS), a national strategy to deliver essential community-based health services involving planning and service delivery within the communities. The implementation of CHPS is based on mobilizing outreach activity. For instance, community health workers visit communities and households to provide necessary health care, and raise health awareness in the whole community, especially among pregnant women,

mothers, and children. JICA provides support to CHPS in implementing this strategy at various levels.

Health and Nutrition Advice via Maternal and Child Health Handbooks

The maternal and child health handbook (also known as the MCH handbook) is a tool promoted by JICA. It originated in Japan and is now being used to protect the health of mothers and children worldwide. Ghana began to prepare maternal and child health

A training class in session. Trainees learn about nutrition by classifying foods into the four groups recommended for daily consumption.



MCH handbooks have been distributed in Ghana since 2018.



Practical training in nutrition counseling. Trainees learn the importance of listening to mothers and pregnant women with attentiveness and compassion.

Grace Billy Campitip Regional Instructor and Kwadaso Board of Health Director

I taught the health workers the knowledge and skills they need to be able to give advice considering each child's growth and home environment. It would give me great pleasure for Ghana to develop more by making the people healthier through my work in improving nutrition.



Rough rice (front) and milled par-boiled rice.



Parboiling is a method of processing rice in which rough rice is soaked in hot or cold water, steamed, dried (shown in photo), and then milled.

handbooks with JICA's support in 2016, and the completed handbooks have been distributed nationwide since 2018. JICA is cooperating with the Ministry of Health to train health workers from all over the country for the effective use of the handbooks. By November 2019, over 1,500 health workers had received training and completed the training course.

The health workers are trained how to evaluate a child's growth and nutritional status using the handbooks' growth monitoring chart, how to ask a mother about feeding and hygiene, and how to use this information to provide advice tailored to the child's individual status. During training, participants also learn the importance of promoting improved diets based on available local foods in a given season. In addition, they learn a method of nutrition counseling that takes into account the physical condition and symptoms, such as weight gain and anemia, during pregnancy.

The maternal and child health handbooks give advice about diets, and include illustrations of the food groups indicating balanced consumption for pregnant women, mothers, and children. To ensure incorporation of this information into daily diets, these healthcare workers are formed into groups and tasked with developing complementary foods for children of varying age groups.

The Government of Ghana prioritizes and works on the improvement of nutrition status during the first 1,000 days (the period from gestation until the age of two) since it has a significant impact on the entire life of a child.

Improving Nutrition and Promoting Health Over a Lifespan

With the support of JICA experts, CHPS has been implemented faster in the Upper West Region than in other regions. Since 2017, the region has seen the implementation of health services based on a person's life span*, which not only addresses maternal and child health, but also aims to prevent disease and promote



Measuring adults' blood pressure in a village square. Ghana does not yet have health checkups for adults.

health in every stage of life.

While child malnutrition remains a concern, similar to most developed countries, socioeconomic changes have led to increased obesity, hypertension, and diabetes. To combat these health problems, community-based comprehensive health services are planned and provided. These include provision of early diagnosis, promotion of health through improving nutrition and exercise, and prevention of disease.

More Nutritious Rice Makes Farmers Healthier

In the north of Ghana, rice was traditionally parboiled to reduce grain breakage, but the process has also gained attention for its capacity to reduce nutrient loss during milling. Trials are being conducted to see if this rice can be sold with higher added value.

"Upon analysis, we found that parboiling produced a nearly three-fold increase in the vitamin B content of milled rice. Localities where maize is a staple food are prone to Vitamin B deficiency. We expect that better nutrition outcomes will be achieved by promoting parboiled rice consumption in these areas," said Baba Abdulai, an agricultural officer who promotes its consumption and provides technical guidance.

The pursuit of better nutrition includes multisectoral projects, many people, and working in a wide range of fields. However, all involved are united in their efforts to realize the day when the people of Ghana pay attention to nutrition and eat appropriate food to grow in health, as did the Japanese when they gained healthy eating habits in the postwar period. If a population can live in good health throughout their lives, their country can also achieve sustainable development.

*A theoretical approach that attempts to explain diseases in adults by the various factors that influenced them over the course of their lives, including during gestation and infancy.

In preparation for an awareness campaign, JICA asks mothers about their diets, their knowledge of nutrition, and how they look after their children.



Multisectoral Efforts

Health

Food and Agriculture

Education

Sharing the Importance of Eating Habits



Eating a healthy diet every day is vital for better nutrition. In Madagascar, efforts are being made to reduce stunting in children and increase school attendance.

Creating Synergy for Better Nutrition

Malnutrition is an urgent problem in Madagascar, where 49.2 percent of children under 5 years old suffer from stunting—the fifth highest rate in the world. To tackle this problem, in March 2019, JICA commenced a project in the island’s central highlands, where about 80 percent of the population is engaged in agriculture. The project aims to help farmers to find ways to increase their incomes, to give them advice to spend extra income on foods with a high nutritional value, and to promote kitchen gardens so that people can help themselves to have a more balanced diet. As the first stage of the project, surveys are being conducted to quantify and analyze farmers’ incomes, nutrient intake, and the spread of kitchen gardens.

One unique aspect of this project is the large

number of cooperating institutions. In addition to Madagascar’s National Office of Nutrition, Ministry of Agriculture, and Ministry of Public Health, the project is collaborating with the World Bank, which is providing loans to improve nutrition. In the same regions where the World Bank supports volunteers to educate mothers on improving children’s diets and sanitation, JICA is working to increase farmers’



A discussion takes place with community representatives on how to change behaviors.



Today’s lunch is cassava (a kind of tuber) soup. “I’m glad that there’s lunch,” students say. School meals can help to increase school attendance.

incomes, promote gardening, and raise awareness about the importance of eating nutritious foods. “The aim is to harmoniously combine different approaches to achieve a synergistic effect,” said Inada Yuji of the Rural Development Department.

Preparing School Meals Together

In Madagascar, as part of the “School for All” project, which aims to improve children’s education environments, JICA is contributing to better nutrition through school meals. The meals are being provided at the initiative of students’ parents and community members with the cooperation of schools and the government. Without school meals, children could lose concentration in classes due to hunger or go home for lunch and not return. Given this context, providing school meals is a good way to ensure children get nutritious food as well as learning opportunities.

JICA supports the project by creating a framework in which schools, the government, and local residents can cooperate. Firstly, each village establishes a catering committee organized by representatives and selected by villagers, then the committees discuss what contributions will be necessary to provide the meals. With the cooperation of schools and the



Ingredients for school meals are provided by local farmers or purchased with donations.

government, the committees procure ingredients, prepare cooking facilities and utensils, gather firewood, and hire cooks. At the committee debriefing sessions, which are held several times a year, committee members explain in detail the importance of school meals to locals, and secure ongoing support in the form of donations, rice, and other foodstuffs.

The school meal initiative, which began in 2017, is currently being implemented at 59 schools throughout the country. On average, it supplies about 30 days’ worth of meals every year.

At the Sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD VI) in 2016, JICA led the launch of the Initiative for Food and Nutrition Security in Africa (IFNA)* which continues to be implemented with the cooperation of various governments and organizations. Inada said, “Efforts are proceeding to construct systems to improve nutrition that apply in many different fields in Madagascar and other countries. We would like to further improve nutrition by being involved in projects that produce results, such as School for All.”



A catering committee reports to the community in a debriefing session.

*IFNA aims to strengthen ties between African governments and support organizations, set goals to improve nutrition, and work to achieve them.

Multisectoral Efforts

Health

Food and
AgricultureWater/
Sanitation

Water Projects Interlock with Health and Agriculture Efforts



JICA continues to cooperate to provide a stable supply of safe water in Mozambique's northern province of Niassa. Agriculture and health-related projects are also underway, and a comprehensive effort has begun to improve nutrition.

Sustainable Cooperation to Provide Safe Water

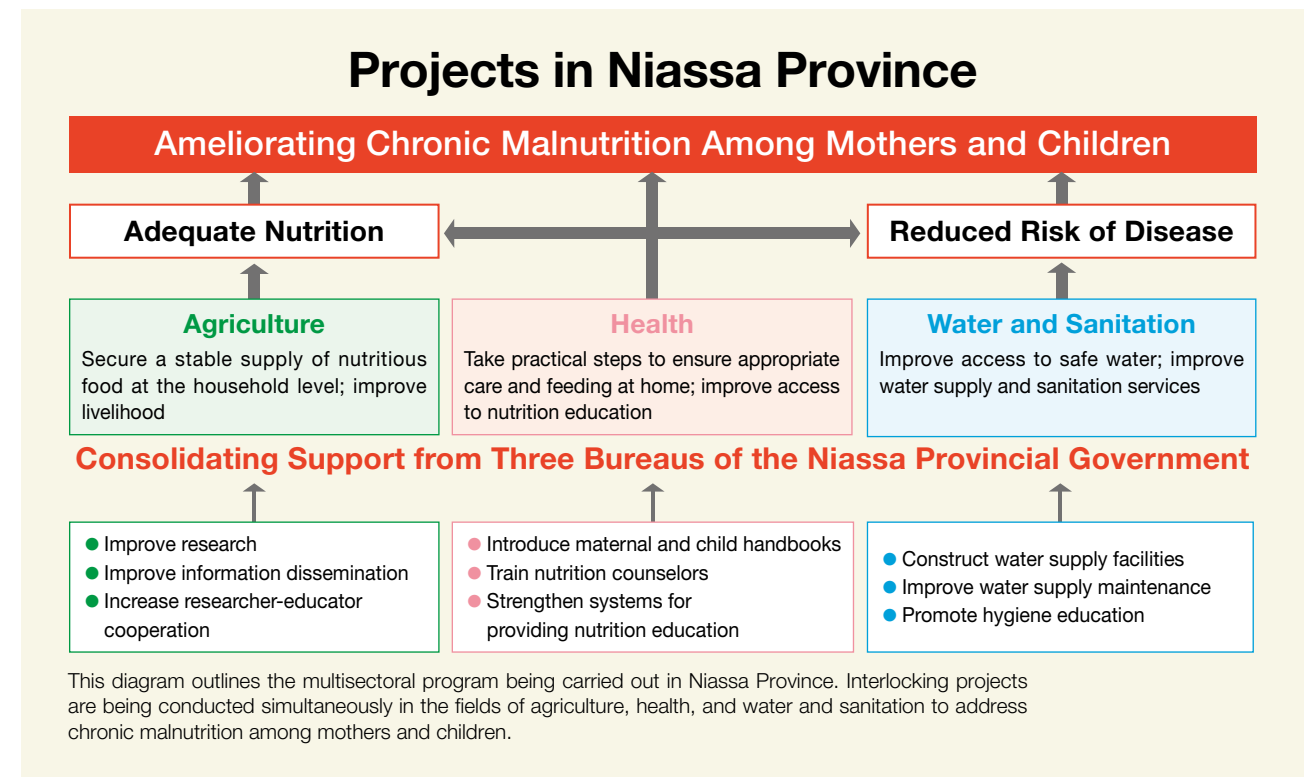
In 2010, the government of Mozambique formulated its National Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Program, which was intended to increase water supply coverage in the country to 70 percent by 2015. This figure proved unattainable, with rural coverage remaining at 42 percent, and with the northern province of Niassa still having the lowest coverage at 37 percent. The government developed another five-year plan in 2015, designating the province as a region of particular importance.

One factor holding back better coverage is the lack of ability to operate and maintain facilities. To solve

this, JICA has been supporting the construction, management, and maintenance of hand-pumped wells in villages in Niassa Province since 2013.

Yokogi Shoichi from Nihon Techno Eng Co., Ltd., leader of the project team, explained the situation.

“Our survey revealed that many facilities had broken hand pumps and villagers would have to spend a whole day to buy spare parts in the provincial capital, Lichinga. So we made spare parts available to villagers locally, trained repair technicians, and strengthened the government officers’ monitoring system. We also built improved toilet facilities in primary schools, and lectured to both teachers and students on the correct way to use these facilities to



improve water and sanitation.”

The new grant aid project plans to install new water pipeline systems in the urban areas of four districts, and 25 hand pumps in villages in each district. “We would like to make safe water accessible to more people,” said Yokogi, who is also preparing for the new project.

A Three-pronged Approach to End Malnutrition

To address chronic malnutrition among mothers and children in Niassa Province, JICA is not only implementing this water and sanitation project but also undertaking technical cooperation projects in the fields of agriculture and health.

“In the Initiative for Food and Nutrition Security in Africa (IFNA), JICA emphasizes the importance of collaborative work in different fields in a given region simultaneously. This project in Niassa Province is one good example of this new approach,” said Matsunoshita Minoru, who works for JICA’s Rural Development Department.

A survey was carried out jointly in 2019 by these projects, and practical efforts are being solidified in various fields, as outlined in the diagram above. In several villages where hand pumps had been installed through the water project, new activities will be conducted in conjunction with other health and agriculture projects.

Yokogi is expecting a positive effect from this

collaboration for the water project. “If the donor-built hand pump facilities break down, there is a risk that people will go and draw water from unsanitary sources like rivers. But if we can work on this kind of issue from three different fields at the same time, then we can get the villagers to understand that safe water contributes to children’s nutrition. They’ll be more inclined to repair the wells, and this should enable the facilities to be used sustainably.”

Matsunoshita is keen to face the new challenge. “This kind of cooperation is where JICA’s strengths really shine. JICA has knowledge and a network gained from working on projects in many different fields. If we can cooperate in three different fields, then we should be able to make a significant impact. Since September 2019, we have been dispatching experts who emphasize multisectoral approach to promote better nutrition in the villages, and we are planning to improve projects in each field. The real progress is from here on.”



Awareness campaigns for sanitation and hygiene were conducted in villages.



Before

A girl drawing water at the old village well.



After

A deep well with a hand pump, built thanks to technical cooperation. Now the villagers have easy access to safe water.



Healthy Village Promoters living in the village explain the characteristics of ingredients and how to eat a balanced diet.

Multisectoral Efforts

Health

“The Healthy Village Approach” to Preventing Non-communicable Diseases

Social and lifestyle changes have caused a drastic increase in the incidence of non-communicable diseases in the Solomon Islands. JICA is supporting the country's efforts to raise health awareness and to change behaviors and environments by training village-based health promoters.



Healthy Village Promoters are trained by employees of the local health service of the Ministry of Health and Medical Services.



Training Health Promoters to Change Lifestyles in Villages

Once upon a time, when the people used to eat fresh agricultural produce and had a traditional well-balanced nutritious diet, life expectancy was high in the Solomon Islands.

Since the 1980s, the country increasingly imported foreign ingredients and processed foods, such as rice, wheat, sugar, salt, instant noodles, and fried snacks. These foods began to occupy most of the people's diet. As a result, 59 percent of the population became overweight or obese, and about 60 percent of deaths are now caused by non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as cardiovascular diseases and diabetes. In addition, the unbalanced diet brought



Vegetables such as spring onions, choy sum (also used in Chinese medicine), and aibika (locally known as slippery cabbage) are grown in kitchen gardens to facilitate the intake of a more balanced diet.



A modern meal prepared with imported ingredients



A healthy meal based on ancestral tradition

about undernutrition such as stunting in children and anemia in mothers. Along with malaria, the Solomon Islands government recognizes NCDs as a top priority health issue. However, with about 80 percent of the population living in rural areas, access and delivery of public health services prove to be challenging.

To this end, JICA and the Solomon Islands Ministry of Health and Medical Services implemented the Health Promoting Village Project in 15 villages in the provinces of Guadalcanal and Makira-Ulawa. The aim is to prevent diseases and promote health at the village level by training community health volunteers, known as Healthy Village Promoters, who would provide health education and lead health promotion activities.

“We managed to educate people in our village based on what we learned during the training” enthused Densia Matei, a Healthy Village Promoter in Hulavu in Guadalcanal Province. “People used to eat an unbalanced diet before, but now they've come to consume a proper balance of carbohydrates, protein, and vitamins. In fact, the blood sugar level of several villagers has gone down.” Kitchen gardening is also recommended as a way to regularly add vegetables in their daily meals.

Densia explained, “People grow agricultural crops in fields far from the village, and it takes a few hours to walk there and back. Kitchen gardens gave us easy access to fruits and vegetables.”

Each village has two to five Healthy Village Promoters, who are each entrusted with the care of 20



JICA Chief Advisor Hashimoto Ken talking with Densia.

to 30 households in their area. The Promoters lead clean-up efforts and establishment of village rules such as setting waste disposal areas and keeping pigs in pens. Maintaining clean surroundings helps to keep away diarrhea and malaria infection, as well as to prevent malnutrition caused by infectious diseases.

Better Environments in Schools and Markets

To realize the Healthy Islands vision, the government of the Solomon Islands takes a holistic approach in health promotion, called Healthy Settings. This effort encompasses not only Healthy Villages, but also Healthy Schools, Healthy Markets, and Healthy Workplaces.

For example, schools provide meals made with locally produced nutritious foods instead of processed foods, as well as toilet and hand-washing facilities. In food markets, the sale of tobacco products is prohibited, and fruit and vegetable stalls are kept separate from raw fish stalls.

JICA Chief Advisor Hashimoto Ken emphasizes that efforts should be made in a variety of settings. “In addition to working in villages, it's important to improve the environment at schools, marketplaces, and other places where people gather. We realized that such social changes would go beyond the authority of the Ministry of Health and Medical Services. So, we formed a national committee composed of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, Labour and Immigration, and the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs.”

He added, “We want to implement activities holistically to improve lifestyles and environments, so that people can enjoy a healthy life wherever they are.”

Cooperating with the Private Sector and Citizen Participation

JICA utilizes a wide range of approaches to work with private organizations and citizens for nutrition improvement.



Cambodia Health Better Prenatal Nutrition

Preah Vihear Province in Cambodia has the nation's worst nutrition indicators: 30.7 percent of underweight children, 44.3 percent of growth stunting, and undernutrition is rampant. The parents of these children often do not recognize that their child is underweight; moreover, the mothers lack knowledge about complementary feeding and feed them nothing but white rice gruel. To tackle this situation, this child health and nutrition improvement project is directly addressing the most important period in a child's life, the first 1000 days which develops the foundation for their future health.

JICA is working with Services for the Health in Asian and African Regions (SHARE), an organization that has worked for the past 10 years to improve the nutrition of children in Cambodia. Their rich experience is being applied to the project area and, together with the HC staff and VHSG^{*1}, they are conducting Integrated Growth Monitoring Services (IGMS)^{*2}. Together with the Women and Child Committee members, SHARE has developed the Cambodian complementary food recipe book which uses local food resources. "One of the problems was that many mothers had no concept of "complementary food," and their children dislike eating because the food is not appropriate for a baby. That is why mothers need to gain proper knowledge on complementary feeding at the class," said SHARE's Sei Morgan Mieko.

In order to secure the funding, which is vital for sustaining their activities, SHARE conducts workshops for Women and Child committee members using the funding made available by local government to increase their role and responsibilities. People in regional communities have begun to use their own initiative, and this

workshop has contributed to gaining community funding for Just One Time Cooking^{*3} activities in every single village where SHARE works. In the future, SHARE plans to cooperate with the various counterparts, from the provincial level to village level, and will continue working to bring smiles to mothers and children.

^{*1} Village Health Supporting Groups: village based volunteer and a part of health system in Cambodia

^{*2} IGMS: promotion and prevention of child health services as a part of health center's community outreach program

^{*3} Just One Time Cooking: SHARE's innovative complementary food cooking process



Training of the health center staff and VHSG who are provide Integrated Growth Monitoring Services.



A baby food class in session.

Infant health checkups are conducted by health center staff and Health Volunteers.



Vietnam Health Fostering Vietnam's First Dietitians

Vietnam has seen rapid economic growth in recent years. But while the country continues to grow more prosperous, obesity and other problems caused by overnutrition and an unbalanced diet are beginning to appear. "There were no nutrition specialists—no dietitians—in Vietnam, and there was no system in place to educate people about nutrition," said Kuriwaki Kei, who formerly worked at Ajinomoto's CSR^{*} Department.

Ajinomoto's research station decided to confront the problem, and in 2011 launched the Vietnam Nutrition System Establishment Project (VINEP) together with Vietnam's National Institute of Nutrition (NIN). The project bore fruit in September 2013, when Vietnam's first four-year bachelor in nutrition course was opened at Hanoi Medical University. The course trains dietitians in Vietnam, with the support of the Japan Dietetic Association, Jomonji University, and the Kanagawa University of Human Services.

In furtherance of JICA's role, since 2014 students of the dietitian course have been in-

cluded to Japan for training. Specialists from universities, hospitals, and government institutions in Vietnam visited Japan and learnt about the environments where dietetics is being applied. "We thought it was important for them to see first-hand situations where dietitians' expertise is being applied, and apply what they learnt in Vietnam." A symposium on nutrition was also held in Vietnam, helping people to recognize the importance of having a national nutrition policy and dietary management. Thanks to such efforts, dietetics was legally recognized as a civil service profession in 2015, laying the groundwork for a system to further foster the discipline.

Activities continue through the Ajinomoto Foundation. The number of universities training dietitians has grown to ten, and further expansion with improved curricula is planned. The aim is not only to train more dietitians, but to help them to be more effective in society.

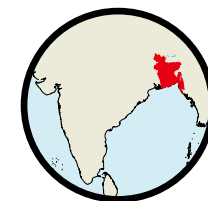
^{*}Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)



Vietnam's first dietitians graduate from the four-year bachelor in nutrition course Hanoi Medical University.



The first batch of students at Hanoi Medical University visiting Japan for training.



Bangladesh Food and Agriculture Euglena Cookies to Save Children

Bangladesh, where over half of the population—84 million people—live on less than USD 150 a month. In Dhaka, the capital, underdevelopment and low body weights are significant problems among children of low-income families living in slums, who are most likely to suffer from undernutrition.

Taking up the challenge is euglena Co., a company operating in Bangladesh. The company aspires to use the abundant nutrients in Euglena (a type of protist) to address the nutrition problem. Since 2014, the company has been delivering nutrient-rich Euglena cookies to schools mainly attended by the countries' poorest children. As of September 2019, this project, called the Euglena Genki Program, has supplied a total of 8.5 million cookies to school children.

However, a sustainable business model is necessary if the project to be sustained. JICA is cooperating with euglena Co. to study the viability of a system in which Euglena foods are

sold to upper and middle-class Bangladeshis, and the profits are used to subsidize Euglena cookies for the most poverty-stricken children. As part of the project, blood tests and body measurements were taken by a local medical survey organization to determine the extent to which the cookies improved the children's nutrition. "Although the results didn't show a huge improvement, we were able to discover that intestinal parasites might be preventing nutrient absorption," said euglena Co.'s Ebana Tomoyasu.

In a hygiene awareness survey carried out at schools participating in the Euglena Genki Program, it was also discovered that only 21 percent of children knew how to wash their hands correctly. The company is currently not only providing cookies, but is also working to improve hygiene standards, such as teaching correct hand-washing techniques.



Two boys delighted to get Euglena cookies.



Top: The blood tests primarily measure for anemia.
Bottom: Children learn how to wash their hands correctly.

Trends

Bangsamoro Transition Authority Representatives Visit Japan



(L-R) JICA President Kitaoka, BTA Interim Chief Minister Ebrahim, Philippine Ambassador to Japan Laurel

On February 4, JICA President Kitaoka Shinichi met with the Hon. Ahod “Al-Haj Murad” Ebrahim, Interim Chief Minister (ICM) of the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA) at the JICA headquar-

ters. After welcoming ICM Ebrahim to Japan, President Kitaoka congratulated him on the first anniversary of the establishment of the BTA and explained JICA’s initiatives in Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). In response, ICM Ebrahim expressed his appreciation for JICA’s wide-ranging cooperation to date. In addition, the two leaders discussed future cooperation relating to governance and other matters in connection with the establishment of an autonomous government within Mindanao scheduled for 2022. H.E. Jose Castillo Laurel V, Ambassador of the Republic of the Philippines to Japan, also attended the meeting and expressed his gratitude for JICA’s cooperation in Mindanao.

The meeting with ICM Ebrahim was held during the BTA’s ministerial excursion to Japan, which was the first overseas trip of BTA officials since the establishment of BTA. The purpose of the visit was to deepen their understanding of the administrative management and urban planning efforts of the national and local governments in Japan, and to gain tips for the development of BARMM. Hiroshima was chosen as their local destination because of the city’s universally known status as a symbol of peace; the opportunity to learn about the city’s post-war reconstruction experience; and the fact that Hiroshima City has a topographical profile which is similar to Mindanao. The BTA officials have broadened their horizons based on the information obtained from their visit while imagining how this knowledge may be applied to the current state of BARMM.

JICA Cooperates to Build a Digital Ecosystem



The seminar held on February 10

In recent years, with the wider use of mobile phones and advanced technology such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), digital technologies are now being put to use to overcome the myriad challenges in developing countries. As evidenced by the recent announcement of “Society 5.0 for SDGs,” an initiative proposed by the Japan Business Federation (Keidan-

ren), Japanese industry is fully committed to building a sustainable society using digital technologies and methodologies. The Republic of Estonia, an acknowledged global digital leader, is now providing support and advice on e-government to the rest of the world based on their pioneering experience. In order to marshal expertise and experience in these areas, on February 10, the Government of Estonia and JICA co-hosted “Estonia - JICA Networking Seminar on Digital Ecosystem Building for International Development: Extending ‘Society 5.0 for SDGs’ Beyond Borders.” The seminar aimed to strengthen the partnerships between the private and public stakeholders in Estonia and Japan in order to enhance digital transformation in developing countries through international cooperation.

Headlined by dignitaries from both countries, including H.E. Jüri Ratass, Prime Minister of the Republic of Estonia, the first part of the seminar saw a fruitful exchange of goals and achievements by senior figures. These remarks were followed by presentations from 15 Estonian digital-related companies that introduced their respective technologies and activities in the field of e-government and digitalization of social services such as education, health, smart cities, etc., before having discussions with participants from 23 Japanese companies. Estonia’s transformation into a fully digitalized society sparked much discussion. By way of conclusion, participants shared the view that in order to promote digitalization of administrative procedures and social services in developing countries and elsewhere, both the public and private sectors need to work together to co-create a “Digital Ecosystem” that meets the needs of citizens and increases overall efficiency.

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Voices from the Field

Life in Rural Madagascar Improves with SEIKATSU KAIZEN

Andry Randriantsoa joined the JICA Madagascar Office in 2012 as a Technical Advisor. Starting in the field of rural development for rice and aquaculture, his work soon gave him an appreciation of JICA’s approach to helping farmers to become autonomous. Andry puts it simply, “Using a range of technical support, we encourage ordinary farmers to become ‘thinking farmers’ who are responsible for their own development.” He highlights the Life Improvement Approach (Seikatsu Kaizen) implemented in four regions of Madagascar for achieving good results, changing behaviors, and helping farmers to become autonomous when dealing with daily problems. Since 2016, Andry’s involvement has extended to the field of nutrition. After some initial difficulties, he has helped linking dietary diversification and technical improvement with nutrition enhancement and behavioral changes in local communities. This experience has been highly rewarding, motivating him to learn even more about the field of nutrition.

In fiscal year 2019, the Madagascar office implemented a small-scale pilot program introducing the Seikatsu Kaizen approach into school canteens. Its overall goal was set to introduce a model of sustainably operating school canteens that are managed by the school and the students’ parents. The project simultaneously involves the education, agriculture, and nutrition sectors, and increases cohesion between



Discussing with farmers and advising them on how to access technical support for improving their small-scale farming.

different sectors. Moreover, it is a holistic scheme for nation-wide rural development. Andry is proud of the achievements thus far, and hopes that in the near future the approach will be adopted by the private sector and other international development agencies so that it can be expanded to other public schools.

In the longer term, Andry has high hopes for the rural development sector, and great confidence in the range of support being disseminated. “I hope the government of Madagascar will be aware of the efficiency of these initiatives and introduce them nation-wide so marginalized farmers can have access to existing support.” He is confident that combining rural and social development will lead to tangible improvements in the nutritional status of all children in Madagascar.



Showing how a Kamado (improved stove) is made to government officers during a training session.

Andry RANDRIANTSOA
Program Officer,
JICA Madagascar Office



Successful Early Childhood Development Requires a Holistic Approach

Dr. Anita Asimwe

Coordinator of the National Early Childhood Development Program, Rwanda

Early childhood development is key to Rwanda's future. Committed to becoming a knowledge-based economy by 2050, the Rwandan government established the National Early Childhood Development Program (NECDP) in 2017 to ensure that the children being born in Rwanda today have all the nutritional, nurturing and early educational advantages possible to become central actors in this ambitious national goal. The Government of Rwanda understands that to get better results in early childhood development it needs to be done in a holistic manner. To this end, the NECDP was created as an umbrella organization coordinating government, private industry, development partners, religious-based organizations and civil society, with a mission to pool resources, put them into coordinated action, and confirm appropriate delivery of services.

The NECDP coordinates interventions that have anything to do with the development of children in their earliest years. This is encapsulated in the Six Pillars of the national early childhood development policy, covering health, nutrition, hygiene, brain stimulation and early learning, and child protection. These combined form the basis of the program's positive parenting advocacy. The NECDP has been tasked by the government to coordinate all these efforts into an integrated context that allows parents to understand the child development process, and the actions required to give their child the best start possible in life.

Improved early childhood nutrition is fundamental to achieving NECDP's mission. While there have been some improvements in key areas, such as reducing childhood stunting



from 51% in 2005 down to 35% in 2018, this figure is far from acceptable, and requires much hard work from the government, all its instruments, and the cooperation of all stake holders, including development partners, to achieve the goal of 19% by 2024. Currently, the NECDP is working with JICA on Nutrition Improvement through Agricultural Transformation, a three-year project that aims to improve nutrition-sensitive agriculture through multi-sectoral coordination. This broad-sweeping program coordinates an array of existing initiatives, including increasing nutrition content, commodity selection and delivery, and age-appropriate nutrition education.

As any parent knows, raising a child is a multi-faceted and highly integrated process, and while the scale is different, the process is the same when dealt with at a national level.

The ability of JICA to work across multiple sectors for coordination and implementation is highly complementary with the NECDP's core mission, and I am optimistic about getting good results in fighting undernutrition and further reducing childhood stunting. To be honest, we simply must succeed, as the children who are yet to be born, or are in their earliest years now, will be at the center of the new vision for Rwanda. It is essential that their potential is maximized by acting now to ensure they have the best start in life possible..

Profile:

Anita Asimwe is a specialist in public health strategies, with extensive experience in tackling the HIV/AIDS epidemic and other health conditions. A medical doctor by profession, she also holds a Master's degree in Public Health from the University of Dundee in UK.