

Youth Invitation Program



A component group of Africans visits a Japanese language class for first-year elementary school students in Okayama Prefecture.

Outline of the Program

The Youth Invitation Program forms a part of JICA's support for personnel training. Young people from developing countries who will eventually hold important positions are invited to Japan for study in their fields of specialization and to meet Japanese people.

During their stay in Japan, the young people live together with young Japanese people who work in the same fields, or in ordinary Japanese homes. They also have the chance to take part in a wide variety of social activities. The Youth Invitation Program is intended to foster abilities in developing countries, to deepen mutual understanding and trust, and to build friendships.

Since the program was started in 1984, it has gradually spread to include Asia, Oceania, Africa, Latin America, Central Asia, Saudi Arabia and the Caucasus. At present around 1,700 young people from approximately 120 countries are taking part in the program, and more than 20,000 have visited Japan since its inception.

This program is implemented with the support of international exchange organizations throughout Japan, youth education groups, government ministries and departments, and local government as well as large numbers of Japanese volunteers.

Method of Invitation

Young people generally come to Japan for a period of 28 days. They are invited on the basis of prior classification in line with their specializations, such as education, economics, agriculture and social welfare. They are divided into either national or multinational groups. The standard content of the program is structured as shown in Figure 3-5. Participants are aged between 18 and 35 and should not have visited Japan before.

Features of the Program

Developing Human Resources Through International Exchange

The Youth Invitation Program aims not only to enable participants to increase knowledge of their fields of specialization but also to foster a better understanding of Japan and the Japanese people, including such aspects as culture and history. One of the main features of the program is the establishment of training through exchange. Among the ingredients of the program is a course of Japanese-language study in which Japanese volunteers show participants around the areas they are staying while teaching them practical Japanese, and "in-house seminars" at which participants and young Japanese spend a number of days together to engage in discussions and hold parties. The participants also have the chance to exchange opinions with employees at the various places that they visit. These features of the program are thought of highly by the young people involved. Another valuable aspect of the program is the chance it gives participants to stay in private homes and experience life in ordinary Japanese households.

Nationwide Linkage

The Youth Invitation Program was implemented in 45 Japanese prefectures in fiscal 2000. Study in various parts of the country gives participants the opportunity to see Japan as a whole and, at the same time, to come into contact with the distinctive culture and history of the area where they are staying. Through these activities, not only the invited participants but also the Japanese participants are able to experience international cooperation and exchange. This experience helps encourage development education and heighten international

awareness in the regions.

Today, as calls for linkage between Japan's international cooperation activities and its communities continue to increase, the Youth Invitation Program is playing a pioneering role.

Human Resources Development for the 21st Century

The invitation program is revised every few years following discussions with the governments of the countries concerned so as to ensure it is always in line with each country's development needs. For instance, in fiscal 2000, a fisheries industry group was invited for the first time from the four ASEAN countries of Thailand, the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia, where effective utilization of fishery resources is needed.

In line with the proposals made by the Friendship and Goodwill Mission for Caucasia, headed by Member of the House of Representatives Taro Nakayama during his visit to Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaidjan in October 1999, 15 people were newly invited from the three

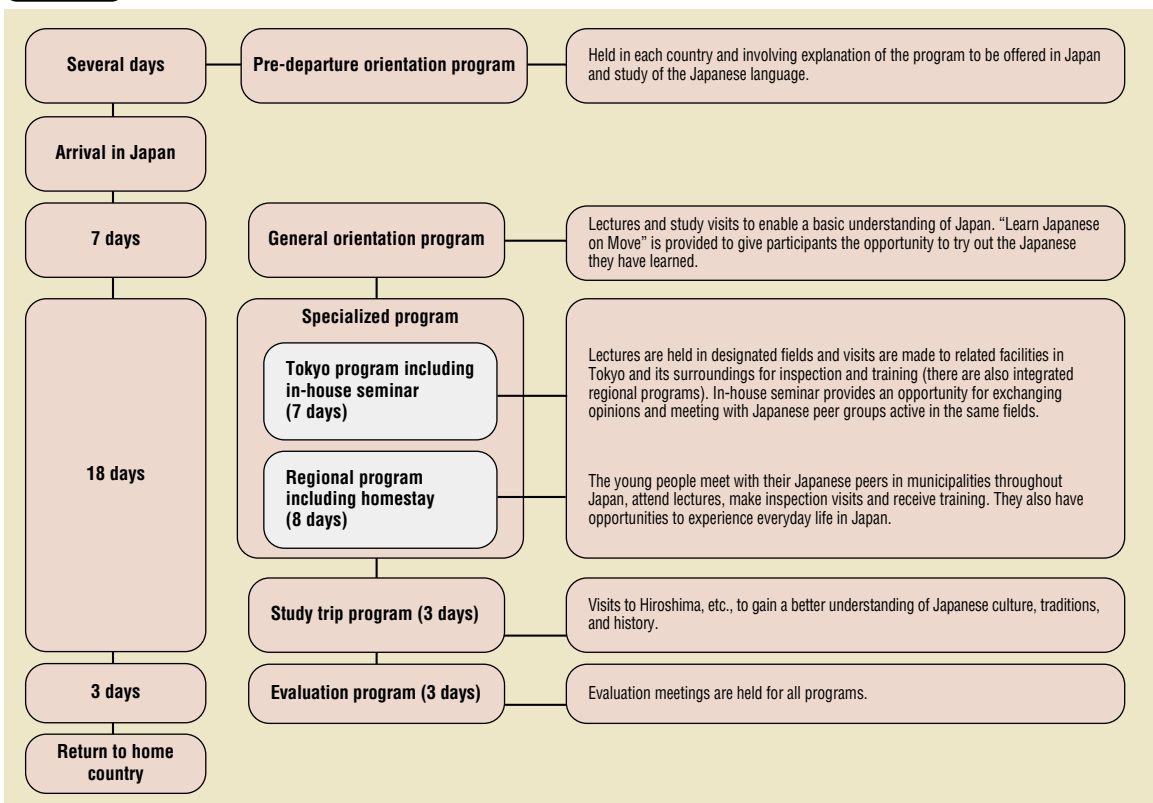
Caucasia nations in January 2001. In addition, two people were invited from East Timor as new members.

The experience gained during their stay influences the young people who come to Japan on this program in various ways. The Youth Invitation Program is contributing significantly to human resources development by training teachers who apply the teaching methods they have seen being used in Japanese schools in their own countries as well as administrators who are able to come up with ideas for administrative reform after observing the Japanese administrative system.

Expanding Renewed Exchange

Alumni associations consisting of young people who have participated in this program have been formed in all of the original ASEAN countries. These associations arrange exchange meetings between one another and are implementing their own projects with Japan as well as projects that contribute to their own societies. There are also plans at present to create alumni associations in several other countries. In fiscal

Figure 3-5 Structure of the Youth Invitation Program



2000, alumni associations were founded in Viet Nam and Cambodia.

Young Japanese people, host families, and members of related organizations who established personal relationships with the visitors during their stay in Japan are sent by JICA to the participants' countries as members of aftercare* teams to renew their friendships.

JICA is actively supporting these activities so that the results of the Youth Invitation Program are directly tied to the future and encourage the formation of yet closer relationships between Japan and the countries involved.

There has also been a conspicuous increase in cases



A group of Thai school teachers visits a Japanese elementary school.

of organizations and municipalities taking advantage of the opportunities presented by this program to further their own exchange activities with the participants' countries. In 1998, a cooperative organization that invites young people to Japan set up the Cooperative Activity Council for the Friendship Program for the 21st Century, called CAC for 21. As well as providing

Front Line

Chinese Industrial Development Group

Tokyo

Finding a Kindred Spirit at the In-house Seminar, Japanese and Chinese Youths Launch an Environmental Network

◆ An Opportunity for Participants to Exchange Information in Their Native Languages

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 "Although the Internet is an excellent forum for discussing global issues, more than 80% of the information it provides is in English."

"It would be great if the Chinese and Japanese had a network they could use to discuss environmental issues using their own languages and share information."

The Chinese youths came to Japan on the Youth Invitation Program as an industrial development group. At an in-house seminar, they and Japanese youths held discussions on environmental issues, agreeing to create an on-line environmental information exchange forum.

One of the Japanese participants appealed for the participation in the network of Korean non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with which he had previously conducted exchanges during his membership in an environmental NGO. The Korean side replied that it would like to participate.

In this way, the Chinese and Japanese youths played the leading role in creating a site on the Internet through which they could exchange environmental information in their respective languages. This resulted in the establishment of the East Asia Environmental Information Express Messenger (provisional title).

This communication center aims to build a new environmental information network for Japan, China and Korea that transcends existing frameworks and is conducive to resolving issues unique to each country as well as environmental issues that face all of East Asia.

Volunteer translators were recruited in an effort to establish on the Internet a forum where written dispatches from Japan, China and Korea concerning environmental issues would be translated into the two other languages for discussion in all three languages, as well as a site that would permit trilingual dispatches concerning the environment.

In the foreseeable future, the plan is to start by dispatching information to relevant NGO personnel in the three countries and then gradually to enrich the content of this information so that it may also be provided to the general public.

The center plans to include the following on the site:

- (1) An introduction to citizen's organizations in Japan, China and Korea;
- (2) The latest information on environmental issues in East Asia;
- (3) A glossary on environmental issues;
- (4) "Methods to save the world" that can be carried out by anyone;
- (5) Environment-related legal systems;
- (6) Environmental case studies.

◆ The Establishment of a Sense of Environmental Community in East Asia

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 Related personnel on the Chinese side made the following comments:
 "Even in China, NGOs are actively engaged in environmental issues. Although exchanges between Chinese and Japanese NGOs are still at a modest level, I believe that environmental conservation is borderless."

"The website will serve as a forum for learning of other countries' experiences, and this will help teachers who are enthusiastic about environmental education."

The main members of the Japanese side made these comments:
 "The experiences of Japan and Korea in conquering pollution, and information exchange on approaches at various levels (civil society, NGOs, industry and government), will enable the provision of information beneficial to sustainable development" to China, which is grappling with severe environmental problems resulting from rapid economic growth."

"If active and lateral discussions that go beyond the civil, industrial, and governmental levels are held at the forum, it should help build a sense of environmental community in countries of East Asia such as Japan, China and Korea, and stimulate human resources development of the sort that will support this community spirit in each of these countries."

Capitalizing on the discussions at the JICA Youth Invitation in-house seminar, young people from Japan, China and Korea played the central role in initiating activities to tackle East Asia's environmental problems. I hope to see further development in this area.

(JICA Domestic Partnership and Training Department)

support for JICA, the organization began to serve as a focal point for renewing exchanges with participants in the Youth Invitation Program after their return to their home countries. CAC for 21 was the focal point of a gathering entitled Commemorative Forum 2000, which was held in April 2000. The symposium reviewed Youth Invitation Program projects to date and deliberated on the program's future.

The Youth Invitation Program is thus establishing links between Japan and the rest of the world as well as contributing significantly to the formation of personal networks for the new age. The program also harbors the potential to open up new forms of international cooperation and exchange in which ordinary citizens play the central role.