Start and Development of the Program

Inception and Transformation

The Senior Volunteer Program was preceded by the Senior Cooperation Expert Dispatch Program, which commenced in 1990 as a scheme aimed specifically at middle-aged people who have a strong interest in technical cooperation activities in developing countries making use of their skills and experience. Under this program, volunteers with extensive skills and plentiful professional experience between the ages of 40 and 69 are recruited. The recruits are then dispatched to developing countries in accordance with requests received from the governments of those countries. The program might be described as a senior version of the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV) Program. In fiscal 1991 when the program got underway, 11 volunteers were sent to Malaysia, Paraguay, and Samoa.

There was subsequently a significant increase in the degree of interest shown in volunteer activities within Japan. Therefore, to clarify the status of this program as a support program involving volunteers, the name was changed to the Senior Volunteer Program in 1996.

In addition, since 1991, Japan’s ODA budget has been the largest in the world. As interest in assisting developing countries has increased, the public has come to realize the importance of providing participatory cooperation* with a clearly visible profile. Such was the context in which the Senior Volunteer Program came into being and developed.

A situation also arose in which the skills and knowledge needed by developing countries matched those that had supported Japan during its period of high economic growth. In the sense that this is a program capable of responding precisely to the needs of developing countries, the importance of the senior volunteers is constantly growing.

International Cooperation with Public Participation

Applicants for senior volunteers totaled 1,914 in fiscal 2003. This figure indicates how many citizens are interested in overseas volunteer activities and participating in them. Internationalization of regional communities, active exchange at a citizen’s level, and global awareness through information supplied by the media lie behind this rise of interest in international cooperation.

In view of this change, JICA has been attempting to expand the Senior Volunteer Program. Whereas 87 people were dispatched overseas under the program in fiscal 1999, the figure for fiscal 2000 quadrupled to 323, and increased to 463 in fiscal 2003. Senior volunteers are active in as many as 55 countries, a number that is likely to increase substantially in the future.

The activities of senior volunteers are closely connected to daily life in local communities of partner countries. Volunteers are assigned to hospitals, schools, companies, and NGOs rather than to the central government. These activities might be described as cooperation with public participation.

From Recruitment to Dispatch

1. Dispatch Record

As of the end of March 2004, 792 senior volunteers are active in 51 countries, which means that a total of 1,737 participants have been involved in the program since its inception.

2. Recruitment and Selection

To correspond to the rapid growth in the Senior Volunteer Program, revisions have been made in terms of the way the program is implemented. The method of recruitment was changed from preliminary registration to open recruitment. Recruitment explanatory sessions are held twice a year, in the spring and fall, in various parts of the country. During the 2003 spring recruitment campaign, explanatory sessions were held at 95 venues nationwide and were attended by 4,245 people, of whom 944 subsequently applied for volunteers. During the 2003 fall recruitment campaign, explanatory sessions were held at 96 venues nationwide and were attended by 4,416 people, of whom 970 applied to become volunteers.
The selection process involves primary and secondary screenings. In the primary screening, examination of written submissions and medical documents are carried out. In the secondary screening, a detailed medical checkup is performed in addition to a personal interview and a language test. In fiscal 2003, 408 applicants were recruited.

3. Pre-dispatch Training

Successful applicants undergo approximately 30 days of training prior to dispatch. The first 10 days are devoted to orientation in connection with basic knowledge of Japan’s ODA and JICA programs, in addition to the systems connected to the Senior Volunteer Program, health management, safety measures and travel preparations. The remaining 20 days are devoted to language training. The languages that are taught include English, Spanish, Indonesian, Thai, and other regional languages. Participation by accompanying family members is permitted, and many people take part in training with family members.

4. Health Control

As volunteers will be working in environments that are completely different from Japan’s, advisory doctors are on hand at the JICA Medical Support Center. In addition to lectures on health topics including tropical diseases provided as a part of the orientation prior to dispatch, medical checkups are administrated and health and medical advice are given during the period of assignment.

Addressing New Needs

Effecting Use of Human Resources

From the late 1980s to the early 1990s, with the end of the Cold War between the East and West, political and economic reforms started mainly in former socialist countries. They specifically resulted in the abolishment of national controls, the construction of democratic political systems, and the progress of market economies through the introduction of competition principles such as privatization of public corporations, which ODA has been supporting.

Under these conditions, needs for cooperation in the fields of

Front Line

Uruguay

Sakura Japanese Language Class

Exchanging Information on Japan in Japanese Language Classroom

Senior Volunteers

People who have a passion for Japan

Uruguay is a small country with an area about half that of Japan. It is located south of Brazil and east of Argentina. In response to a request from the Japan-Uruguay Cultural Association, a senior volunteer was dispatched for Japanese language instruction in June 2003.

In Uruguay there are three educational institutes for Japanese language learning: a Japanese association operated by ethnic Japanese, Republic University, and Sakura Japanese language class. In March of every year, about 100 Uruguayans (13 to 75 years old), including 40 new students, start coming to Sakura Japanese language class, which the senior volunteer works for, in order to study Japanese twice a week after school or work. The classes are divided into three levels: beginner, intermediate, and advanced. In the advanced class there is a student who has studied in the class for 15 years and it seems that Japanese language is a part of his life work. Their knowledge of Japanese culture is deep and their interests vary widely, from animation and martial arts like karate and judo to tea ceremony, flower arrangement, and Japanese cooking. Among the students there is a 26-year-old karate master who is enchanted by the mental discipline of karate and loves to read Musashi’s "Five Rings."

Letter exchange started in amigo project

Based on his desire to introduce people interested in Japan and the Japanese language to Japan, the senior volunteer first conducted a questionnaire survey to find out the students’ desired achievement level and study style. He also issued the “Sakura Newsletter” so that students would know about other students in different classes. Introducing essays in Japanese and illustrations by students in the newsletter stimulated their motivation for Japanese study so greatly that the amigo project began.

The amigo project involves exchanging letters with amigos (friends) in Japan. The volunteer chose their pen pals according to age and interest and gave the names and addresses of amigos to them. With cooperation from Japanese friends of the senior volunteer and the regional international exchange association he used to belong to, many Japanese people participated in the project. In the classroom, the students show their letters full of Japanese mood to one another with big smiles, and exchange information on Japan while learning the Japanese language. As they have no chance to speak Japanese outside the classroom, the project gives them a great opportunity to use the language and make friends in Japan, thus further motivating their studies.

Recently, stimulated by the enthusiasm of their students, teachers have become motivated to reform lessons to make them attractive and easy to understand.

(Uruguay Coordinator Office)
modernization of factories and corporations, production controls, business management and quality control are increasing in addition to the existing assistance needs for health and medical care, agriculture and education. Many developing countries admire Japan’s post-war reconstruction and are eager to learn about the related know-how. Accordingly, requests for the dispatch of senior volunteers in these fields have been increasing recently, and are expected to further increase in the future.

JICA has been implementing new strategies in order to effectively link the diversifying needs of developing countries with domestic human resources. For example, in fiscal 2000, it introduced new programs that include the Qualified Applicants Program, in which applicants who fulfill certain criteria are registered as being qualified and then offered for service to developing countries. There is also the Group Dispatch Program, in which a number of volunteers from the registering bodies in Japan are dispatched to the same destination, thus increasing the effectiveness of the cooperation.

In addition, for the purpose of promoting international cooperation by local governments and building friendship with overseas cities, the Sister City Senior Volunteer Program was introduced in fiscal 2001, further enhancing the use of domestic human resources.

### Significance of Senior Volunteers

**Activities Supported by the Public**

Senior volunteers make contributions directly to the development of human resources in developing countries in order to assist the process of national development, while experiencing international exchange through daily interactions.

Moreover, it is particularly significant that it is people from among the Japanese general public who are engaged in these activities. Since most of the participants are engaged in volunteer activities in foreign countries with which they have no prior experience, there is obviously no guarantee that their efforts will result in success. But the true significance of JICA volunteer programs, including the Senior Volunteer Program, lies not merely in the results but also in the opportunity these programs provide for voluntary participation from members of the community at large.

We have been hearing about the “borderless society” for many years. In the sense that this program supports international exchange and activities, especially at the citizen’s level, the necessity and the very existence of the Senior Volunteer Program are sure to grow in importance.

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### Fukui

#### Volunteer Activities in Argentina

**Backup through Proceeds Donation from Citizens of Fukui Prefecture**

**Fukui Bridge in Argentina**

A senior volunteer who had been dispatched to the Municipal Ecological Park of La Plata in Argentina and worked in the field of natural park management returned to Japan in April 2004. Regarding the backup support from the citizens in Fukui prefecture, she said at the report meeting, “I appreciate the logistics support for my activities for the year as an volunteer.”

Puente Fukui (Fukui Bridge) in the Municipal Ecological Park of La Plata is where the volunteer was dispatched. The bridge was built with proceeds from a charity auction at the Fukui International Festival held in Fukui prefecture in Autumn 2003. The auction, which was held with the participation of many citizens, former JICA volunteers and the Hokuriku international Center, played a role in the construction of the Fukui Bridge.

**Conveying the sentiments of people in the prefecture**

The Fukui prefectural government has appointed overseas volunteers from Fukui as Fukui International Cooperation Ambassadors since 2001. This scheme allows ambassadors to request materials necessary for activities from the prefecture and receive materials provided by the citizens in the prefecture.

When the senior volunteer was encouraging children to participate in the UN International Competition on Paintings by Children on the Environment as part of environmental education activities during her time in Argentina, she had a hard time collecting works from children due to the shortage of painting materials. She asked Fukui prefecture for support with materials as an ambassador. Materials in six mandarin boxes weighing about 120 kg were delivered to Argentina from the people in the prefecture. Thanks to the support, the number of art works submitted to the contest was 5.3 times more than those submitted in the previous year.

Through the activity of one senior volunteer, support with a visible profile of the people of Fukui was carried out, conveying the sentiments of the prefecture to Argentina.

(Hokuriku Branch Office)