Reform of Domestic Operations
—Promotion of Citizen Participation

Opening of JICA Global Plaza
Realizing Individual Citizens’ Desire to Participate in and Learn about International Cooperation

A Bridge Connecting Developing Countries and Japanese Citizens...

“How do people in the world live?” “Can I participate in international cooperation?” “I want to have more volunteer peers.” In order to support these wishes of Japanese citizens to participate in and learn about international cooperation, JICA Global Plaza was opened in Hiroo, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo on April 1, 2006.

Since its re-launch as an independent administrative institution in October 2003, JICA has been promoting organizational reforms. Following the enhancement of overseas fields in fiscal 2004, JICA promoted reform of domestic operations in fiscal 2005, the second year of the reforms. During the process, JICA reorganized JICA Hiroo and remodeled the facility to open the JICA Global Plaza, which serves as a base for JICA’s citizen participatory cooperation programs.

JICA Global Plaza is a comprehensive facility with multiple functions, such as providing information through various exhibitions and seminars and support for citizens’ interaction for the purpose of promoting citizens’ understanding of current situations in developing countries and global common issues, which will lead to their participation in international cooperation. The secretariat and training center of Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV) were established in Hiroo in 1968, and thus you can say that Hiroo is a place where JICA’s overseas volunteer programs originated. JICA Global Plaza was opened at the same place supporting the spirit of JOCV.

With the rise of interest in international cooperation at the citizen level throughout Japan, the circle of activities has been growing. A concern on how to connect such a growing circle of citizens’ activities with issues in developing countries and ODA fields led JICA to establish the center for international cooperation with citizen participation.

In order to promote citizen understanding of and participation in international cooperation, JICA previously implemented activities, including essay contests for junior and high school students and JICA Partnership Programs. When JICA became an independent administrative institution in October 2003, the JICA Law officially acknowledged citizen participatory cooperation programs (see p.105) to implement these activities more effectively.

JICA’s domestic offices are located throughout Japan, promoting partnership with citizens in international cooperation. JICA Global Plaza will also play a central role in expanding the domestic circle of international cooperation with citizen participation.

Enable Both Citizens and JICA to Offer Information

In addition to its convenient location, a one-minute walk from Tokyo Metro Hiroo station in central Tokyo, JICA Global Plaza provides spaces open to the public on all floors of the five-story building. The facility is full of devices that expose every visitor, from children to adults, to international cooperation.

In an exhibition and consultation space called Exhibition Hall on the first floor, visitors can understand how people in the world live and think as well as their problems by means of seeing, hearing, and touching experiences. Staff called concierges are stationed in a circle at the center of the space to discuss global issues with visitors or consult visitors who wish to take action.

JICA Global Plaza operates under a theme that changes every month...
throughout the whole building. For example, the April theme was “happiness and sorrow of the world (human security),” the June theme was “with the green Earth forever (environment),” and the August theme was “Africa.” Exhibitions in the Exhibition Hall change according to these monthly themes. Release of information about lives in developing countries and problems of the world are emphasized and the opinions from various layers of citizens are incorporated into the production of exhibitions and other events that are easily understood by general citizens.

An exhibit space by the main entrance of the facility, seminar rooms, and the Multi Purpose Hall are collectively called the Interchange Zone, where citizens or embassies in Tokyo can hold exhibitions, symposiums, and meetings related to international cooperation. This zone enhances the facility’s function of information release by citizens as well as to citizens.

Cafe Frontier, located in the facility premise, offers cuisine from around the world as well as cultures underlining the cuisines as part of the promotion of understanding of developing countries, thus enabling visitors to experience foreign food cultures while being in Japan. Lodging is also available, making the JICA Global Plaza a comprehensive facility with many functions.

Supporting International Cooperation with Citizen Participation

JICA Global Plaza carries out operations to open to the public as a center for international cooperation with citizen participation.

a. Support for development education

To support development education and education for international understanding, the JICA Global Plaza receives general visitors, delivers lectures, holds essay contests for junior high and high school students, offers training for development education instructors, organizes development education study tours for teachers, develops teaching materials in development education, etc. More than 310 thousand citizens participated in those activities in fiscal 2005 nationwide.

Among them, one citizen joined the JOCV after hearing the experiences of a former volunteer at a lecture. There was also a teacher who had requested a lecture and participated in a development education study tour for teachers to improve his development education teaching skills. After returning home he developed an original development education program through interaction with volunteers dispatched overseas.

b. Consultation on and help with participation in international cooperation

JICA’s support for development education stresses sharing knowledge about developing countries with Japanese society (sharing of knowledge) and providing opportunities to help citizens consider what they can do voluntarily (provision of opportunity).

c. Support for citizen groups and municipalities

JICA Global Plaza offers various kinds of training programs to support NGOs and municipalities.

Training programs for NGOs include: (a) NGO-JICA joint seminar, (b) PCM training programs, and (c) workshop for preparing a proposal of JICA Partnership Program.

In the NGO-JICA joint seminar, staff members from various NGOs and JICA voluntarily participated to introduce their own projects, exchange opinions and deepen understanding of the other side’s projects for the purpose of promoting cooperation and collaboration. PCM training program is designed to promote understanding of the PCM method, a project management method. Workshop for preparing a proposal of JICA Partnership Program is training that is useful for applying for JICA Partnership Program.

Training programs for staff members of municipalities introduce JICA’s international cooperation activities and provide the knowledge and know-how necessary on the field to staff members of municipalities and international exchange associations that implement international cooperation projects, supporting international cooperation projects led by municipalities and the promotion of joint projects between municipalities and JICA.

d. Implementation of international cooperation with citizen participation

Delivery of a lecture for elementary school students
Various projects are implemented in the designated areas (Tochigi, Gunma, Saitama, Chiba, Tokyo, Niigata and Yamanashi). The actual results of fiscal 2005 are as follows.

Fifty-six projects were implemented in JICA Partnership Programs and recruitment sessions for the Volunteer Programs were held at 81 locations. In terms of support for development education, a total of 211 lecturers were sent to elementary, junior high, and high schools and delivered classes to a total of 20,493 students to promote their understanding of world problems and the necessity for international cooperation.

In addition, the implementation of Citizen Participatory Cooperation Programs, Youth Invitation Program, Nikkei Japan (Japanese emigrants and their descendants) technical training in Japan, and PR activities were coordinated to match citizens’ opinions and ideas to each project.

In the future, experience, knowledge and outcomes obtained from these activities will be analyzed to improve the environment to facilitate citizen participation in international cooperation.

e. Assistance with returned volunteers' reintegration to society

JICA Global Plaza is the first place where former overseas development youth volunteers visit when they return to Japan. Those volunteers who have just returned to Japan receive various programs. JICA Global Plaza assists them in exploring various career options through consultations as well as provision of specific job opening information. Career option support seminars are also provided every month in different business fields and themes, receiving positive feedback from participants.

Sharing volunteer experiences and knowledge with Japanese society is JICA’s new task. JICA is committed to support former volunteers so that they can proactively participate in support for development education such as delivery of lectures and internationalization of local communities.

**Potentials of JICA Global Plaza**

JICA opens its doors wide to citizens involved in international cooperation. We hope that the experience of cultural differences and the situations of the people in trouble in the world will lead to sympathy for these people and solidarity among humans, thus providing an opportunity for them to see a relevance between international cooperation and their lives.

Also, JICA Global Plaza aims to become a bridge connecting Japan and developing countries at the citizens level by completing the citizen participation cycle (increased interest → understanding promoted → action taken → participation in overseas activities → sharing cooperation experiences with society → increased interest...). JICA Global Plaza will pursue the following potentials: supporting citizens’ international cooperation activities will increase the number of participants in international cooperation; participation in international cooperation activities will enrich citizens’ spirits; and consequently Japan and the developing countries will be connected at the citizens level, leading to the vitalization of communities on both sides.

*1 Delivery of lectures: International Cooperation Lecture Delivery. This is a system in which JICA staff, experts, former JOCVs and training participants visiting Japan are dispatched as lecturers outside of JICA to promote understanding of actual situations in developing countries as well as the necessity for international cooperation.

*2 Assisted by the homecoming reception members of the Volunteers Team, excluding senior volunteers.

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**Figure 5 Roles of JICA Global Plaza**

Public citizens

Citizen groups, municipalities, etc.

Participate in international cooperation

Provide information

Volunteers

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Potentials of JICA Global Plaza

- Place to foster sympathy for and solidarity with people in developing countries
- Place to be used by citizen groups involved in international cooperation for information provision, interaction, and training

JICA Global Plaza Opening Ceremony

The opening ceremony of JICA Global Plaza was held on April 15, 2006. Approximately 230 people, including those from NGOs and universities, Diet members, ambassadors to Japan, and related persons from municipalities attended the ceremony.

In the opening speech, JICA President Sadako Ogata announced that JICA is committed to sharing field information in developing countries with public citizens in broader and more easily understandable ways, understand public interest and needs accurately, and connect citizens' international cooperation activities and JICA programs to meet those interests and needs. Following her opening speech, former Prime Minister Kaifu and other honorable guests expressed their expectations for JICA Global Plaza as a center for promoting citizen participatory international cooperation.

After the ceremony, attendees observed the Exhibition Hall, which presents development issues in the world in an easy-to-understand manner. Many attendees who saw the exhibition themed “Happiness and Sorrows of the World” with explanations by concierge (Exhibition Hall staff) commented that they understood the connections between their lives and the world, and that they would like to bring their family there next time and think about the world together.
JICA expects that partnerships with universities are effective for improving the quality of its projects, developing human resources in aid, and activating the development of project initiated by JICA domestic offices and universities. Because universities are repositories of knowledge, JICA aims to further utilize the knowledge accumulated there for JICA’s international cooperation activities.

JICA has worked with universities in various schemes of international cooperation, such as dispatch of experts, acceptance of technical training participants, technical cooperation projects, JICA Partnership Program, and joint lectures. However, those relationships tended to be limited to individual professors, and the organizational relationships were not always strong enough. To address the situation, JICA introduced a comprehensive partnership framework (Comprehensive Collaboration Agreement and Minutes of Understanding) with selected universities, mainly those whose partnerships with JICA domestic offices (international centers) are expected to be stronger. The introduction of such a framework is intended to establish the organizational cooperative relationships with universities and multiply the effects of each project.

JICA has concluded six agreements and minutes with 10 universities so far.

**Discussions and Information Exchange Activated**

The introduction of Comprehensive Collaboration Agreement and Minutes of Understanding encouraged universities and JICA to keep communication with the aim of promoting the partnerships, thus activating discussion and information exchange regarding partnerships. It also contributed to the development of new projects and increasing synergy effects among projects to a certain level, and made universities’ cooperation system more organizational.

Hokkaido University and JICA Sapporo

Based on the Agreement between JICA Sapporo and Hokkaido University, regular meetings of the Collaboration Agreement Council started to discuss specific contents of cooperation. As a result, JICA-Hokkaido University Partnership International Cooperation Seminars are held regularly (six times per year) and the university offers joint courses within its curriculum (Introduction to International Cooperation and Volunteerism starting in fiscal 2006). Also, a specific discussion has started on how JICA can assist the Initiative for Sustainable Development that Hokkaido University has been promoting utilizing the Strategic Fund for Establishing the International HQs of Universities by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology.

Obihiro University of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine

JICA Obihiro and Obihiro University of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine set up an operation committee based on the Agreement to embody partnership activities through monthly meetings of the communication council. In addition to projects implemented before the conclusion of the Agreement (such as training and joint courses), human development projects and international cooperation projects mainly in JICA Volunteer Programs are carried out. In fiscal 2005, utilizing the short-term dispatch of volunteers, one student from Obihiro University of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine was dispatched to Thailand and 14 students to the Dairy Development Enhancement Program in the Philippines, assisting the activities of JOCVs assigned to those sites. Dispatch of six students is planned for fiscal 2006. As a result of such activities, students who had participated in the short-term dispatch of volunteers organized a club back home, and a page dedicated to the project support started up on the university website, providing students with opportunities to share information and exchange opinions with volunteers working in the Philippines and project related staff. The university plans to actively provide technical support to JOCVs and counterparts as a domestic support organization of the project, and the Philippines side welcomes such moves.

Furthermore, Obihiro University of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine introduced a special international cooperation selection system for master’s programs in agriculture and veterinary medicine for former long-term overseas volunteers in fiscal 2005. In this system, eligible students who are granted loans for tuition enjoy preferential treatment and are exempt from paying back the loans if they are engaged in activities related to international cooperation for a certain period of time.

Also, for students aspiring to engage in international cooperation, a major course called international cooperation unit has been established in fiscal 2006, thus strengthening human resources development in international cooperation.

**Future Direction**

Conclusion of the Agreement and Minutes is one of the options to consider in strategic partnership with universities. JICA continues to explore better partnership means with universities as well as examining the existing partnership. On the other hand, JICA wishes to utilize the knowledge of even those universities that choose not to establish frameworks such as the Agreement and Minutes in various projects in international cooperation (such as dispatch of experts, acceptance of technical training participants, technical cooperation projects, JICA Partnership Program, joint lectures).

### Table f  Summaries of Comprehensive Collaboration Agreement and Minutes of Understanding and the Results

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* Ehime University, Kyushu University, Kogakuin University, Okayama University, Obihiro University, University of Tokushima, Kagawa University, and Naruto University of Education.