



Kimiko Date

Kids' Tennis in Mongolia

Kimiko Date, professional tennis player and JICA Official Supporter, visited Mongolia for the first time from September 3-9, 2007, to observe a JICA project and ran a tennis clinic for kids. Mongolia is the eighth country Ms. Date has visited to observe JICA's overseas activities, having previously visited Viet Nam, Bangladesh, Malawi, Jamaica, Honduras, Morocco, and Malaysia. In this feature, she gives her impressions of the children's first experience with tennis and JICA's project in Mongolia.

Class 1
Kids' Tennis
Ulaanbaatar



Class 2
Kids' Tennis
Darkhan City



Reflections on My Stay in Mongolia

In Mongolia, hardly any children have heard of tennis, let alone play it. For most of them, "tennis" meant table tennis. Given Mongolia's severe climate -- the first snows fall as early as the middle of September and temperatures drop to minus 30-40°C in mid-winter -- indoor sports, mainly basketball and table tennis, are more popular.

Nevertheless, some children, who were probably used to table tennis rackets, were able to hit the ball right away. What impressed me above all was their energetic and enthusiastic attitude. I used to imagine Mongolia as being one big grassy plain, but this idea was dispelled as soon as I arrived there. The capital is a big city, and women play active roles at the national level. If construction continues at the current pace, the country will certainly develop to an unimaginable extent in a few years. I don't mean buildings alone. With so many Mongolians proficient in several languages, many more will take active roles in the international community in the future.

As for proficiency in language, I was really surprised to hear all the local staff of the JICA Mongolia Office speak fluent Japanese. I could hardly tell who was Japanese and who was Mongolian from speech alone. During my stay, they all took turns interpreting for me and supported my stay there.

The JOCV members and senior volunteers meet every day with the local people, and I was moved by their positive approach to working together. The same is true for the JICA project. Even though it is a big project, I felt that its focus was on the individual people of Mongolia. Though what one person or one project can do may be small, I felt that each of them will surely become an asset to Mongolia as they accrue into one big effort.

I'd like to return to Mongolia for a vacation. I'll be eager to stay in a *ger* hut next time.

