

Volunteer Programs

“Work to Change the World, and Yourself” International Cooperation Led by Citizens

JICA's volunteer programs support activities by citizens who wish to cooperate in the economic and social development as well as the reconstruction of developing countries. Through these cooperation activities, participating volunteers can not only contribute to the development of partner countries but also gain valuable experience in terms of international goodwill, mutual understanding and an expansion in their international perspectives.

Widely recognized as a representative Japanese international cooperation program, volunteer activities have not only earned high acclaim from partner countries but are also receiving increased praise in Japan, where expectations for these programs are also rising.

Types of Volunteer Programs

Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCVs)

Recruitment campaigns target people between the ages of 20 and 39, with the areas of cooperation spanning eight sectors and a diverse range of about 120 sub-sectors, including agriculture, forestry and fisheries, fabrication, repair operations, civil engineering, sanitation, education and culture, sports as well as planning and administration. In fiscal 2009, a total of 1,708 people were sent overseas, with a cumulative total of 34,956 people dispatched to 87 countries since the program was inaugurated in 1965.

In principle, JOCVs are assigned to developing countries for a period of two years*. As summarized by the phrase “together with the local community,” JOCVs live and work together with the communities in the country to which they were sent, speak the same language of the community and carry out activities with an emphasis on raising self-reliant efforts while fostering mutual understanding.

* In addition to the regular volunteer dispatch period of two years (long-term volunteers), short-term volunteers can be recruited and dispatched for periods of less than one year in response to local requests.



Ms. Suzuki works as a volunteer teaching elementary school children in Brazil. More than half of the children are third- or fourth-generation Japanese descendants and each has a different level of Japanese-language capabilities.

Senior Volunteers

Recruitment targets people between the ages of 40 and 69 who have a strong desire to participate in cooperative activities in developing countries utilizing their solid experiences, including specialized knowledge and technologies, cultivated over long years.

Areas of cooperation span nine different sectors, including agriculture, forestry and fisheries, energy, health and medical care, and human resources (education, culture, sports, etc.). This program started in fiscal 1990 as the Senior Cooperation Specialist Program and its name was changed to Senior Volunteers in 1996. In fiscal 2009, the number of people sent overseas grew to 445 people, and a total of 4,462 people have been dispatched to 64 countries.

The average age of Senior Volunteers is 58. In recent years, there has been an increase in applicants from retirees seeking to spend their “second life” in a meaningful way.

Youth and Senior Volunteers for *Nikkei* Communities

The *Nikkei* (Japanese Descendant) Communities Volunteer Program, consisting of the Youth and Senior Volunteers for *Nikkei* Communities, sends volunteers to cooperate in the development of *Nikkei* communities in Latin American countries that accepted many immigrants from Japan. Since the start of the program in 1985, a total of 1,053 people have been dispatched overseas as Youth Volunteers and 391 people as Senior Volunteers for *Nikkei* communities.

The Special Program for school teachers**, which was previously opened only to JOCVs, has been opened to Youth Volunteers for *Nikkei* Communities since fiscal 2009. Volunteers who have returned to Japan following the completion of their activities are thus now expected to be able to participate in an expanding range of activities that contribute to both Latin America and Japan. These activities include participation in multicultural activities targeted at children living in Japan who are descendants of persons of Japanese ancestry.

** A system whereby teachers at national and public schools can participate while maintaining their positions. The Special Program for school teachers recruits people who are currently serving as teachers in public schools and schools affiliated with national universities to participate in JICA's volunteer program and study local culture and language while retaining their current employment status.

Volunteer Recruitment, Selection, Training and Support for Returned Volunteers

Volunteer Recruitment and Selection

Volunteer recruitment takes place twice a year in spring and autumn (Volunteers for *Nikkei* communities are recruited only once a year in autumn). Recruitment information is provided on JICA's website as well as at explanatory recruitment meetings held throughout Japan. Selection criteria include technical and linguistic skills and health determined by document submissions, a written exam and personal

interviews.

In addition, short-term volunteer recruitment and selection takes place four times each year.

Training and Study before Dispatch

Persons selected as volunteers take training and study courses in Japan before being dispatched overseas. These courses focus on language studies in the language of the host country and also include studies on the principles of international cooperation, on understanding different cultures, on the history and culture of the host country and on health management and safety measures.

Support for Returned Volunteers

Returned volunteers have experience in addressing issues faced by developing countries and have gained broad perspectives, abundant communication skills and problem-solving abilities. For this reason, high expectations have been placed on these volunteers by local communities, government, educational fields and corporations in Japan. For example, as of April 1, 2010, the number of local government authorities and boards of education that had introduced special employment quotas for returned

volunteers reached 31 (20 boards of education and 11 local government authorities).

Moreover, there is an increasing number of JICA's returned volunteers helping to address various problems faced by Japanese society, including child-rearing support and revitalization of Japanese communities. JICA volunteer programs thus not only contribute to developing countries but are also helping to "energize Japan."



Mr. Sugaya, who is assigned to the Rifuu rice cultivation testing area in Malawi, with worker, Mr. Maxwell, who is assisting with cultivation work in the field. Mr. Maxwell also served as interpreter of the local language during the observation tour of a class at an elementary school.

Case Study

An Expanding New World that Started from a Volunteer Program

From Systems Engineer to a Science and Mathematics Teacher

Mariko Oono teaches at a public junior high school in the city of Yokohama. Ms. Oono is a person who found a new goal in her life and took a big step toward reaching this goal utilizing her experience in the JOCV program as a stepping-stone.

When Ms. Oono was in junior high school, she loved science experiments. She majored in applied chemistry in college and after graduation worked as a systems engineer at a computer company. However, Ms. Oono's busy daily life developing software left her with far too little time to meet other people, causing her to feel dissatisfied. Around this time, she noticed a recruitment advertisement for the JOCV program and immediately sent for the application guidelines and decided to take the examination. From among the more than 120 job categories, she chose "mathematics and science teacher," a vocation she longed to pursue from a young age.

Taking on New Challenges in Uganda

Ms. Oono was assigned to a training school for elementary school teachers. Initially, she was completely flustered by everything, including the lack of any time-scheduling for classes and no separation of different classes despite

having several hundred students. Even with these difficulties, she tried everything in her power to deal with the situation. Nonetheless, before long she agonizingly asked herself, "With no knowledge of the education system in Uganda and given my current capabilities, is it really okay for me to teach Ugandans?" Ultimately, she used a vacation period at the school where she was assigned to study pedagogy at a graduate school in the capital.

Having completed the Uganda teacher-training course, Ms. Oono came to realize that "Perhaps my role should be to raise students' curiosity in the same way that I used to get so excited about science experiments when I was in junior high school." Subsequently, she began considering ways of undertaking experiments using close-by everyday objects to make students think "science is an interesting subject filled with numerous surprises."

With a sparkle in her eyes, Ms. Oono happily explains, "Although this was the first time I ever worked as a teacher, I was able to meet many people and everyday was a continuation of surprises and enjoyment. It was certainly not easy, but for that reason when I saw the students' smiling faces my happiness was even greater and I felt my work was truly meaningful."

Next, Teaching the Children Who Will Lead Japan's Future

After returning to Japan, Ms. Oono entered graduate school to obtain a Japanese teaching credential. She passed under the special employment quota for returned volunteers and realized her long-sought goal of becoming a teacher. In April 2009, she began teaching science at a public junior high school in the city of Yokohama. Thanks to her experience in Uganda, Ms. Oono was able to tap a latent capability, namely, an aptitude for teaching, she never realized she possessed. Ms. Oono says that her current objective is to "communicate to children the magnificence of acting with a sense of vision." While teaching, she strives to convey her experiences from Uganda to the children who will lead Japan's future as she interacts passionately with her students daily.



With her students in Uganda