

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.

The volunteer programs are widely recognized as representative programs of Japan's international cooperation and are highly praised by partner countries. Furthermore, upon their return to Japan, the volunteers, having developed a global perspective, are expected to be a valuable presence in Japanese society.

Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCVs)

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.

Recruitment campaigns target people between the ages of 20 and 39, with the areas of cooperation spanning eight sectors and



A JOCV, explaining to students about the valve mechanism of an engine (Philippines/automobile mechanics)



A Youth Volunteer for Nikkei Communities practicing at the auditorium with members of a Japanese taiko drum class (Brazil / elementary school teacher).

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 2010, a total of 1,459 people were sent overseas, with a cumulative total of 35,905 people dispatched to 88 countries since the program was inaugurated in 1965.

Senior Volunteers

Recruitment targets people between the ages of 40 and 69. In recent years, there has been an increase in applicants from retirees seeking to spend their “second life” in a more meaningful way. In recent years, there has been an increase in applicants from retirees seeking to spend their “second life” in a meaningful way.

Areas of cooperation span nine different sectors, including agriculture, forestry and fisheries, energy, health and medical care, and human resources (education, culture, sports, etc.). In fiscal 2010, 375 people were sent overseas. To date, a total of 4,628 people have been dispatched to 67 countries. (Youth and Senior Volunteers for Nikkei Communities, too, are dispatched to contribute to the development of Nikkei communities in Latin America.)

Support for Returned Volunteers

There are high expectations for JICA volunteers who return to Japan, as human resources who welcome diverse cultures and societies, who are open to dialogue, and who take action in a variety of settings, including community, government, educational and corporate activities in Japan. As of April 1, 2011, the number of local government authorities and boards of education that have special employment quotas for returned volunteers had risen to 37 (22 boards of education and 15 local government authorities).

Hence, JICA has support systems in place to allow volunteers to make use of their experiences in their assigned countries upon their return to Japanese society. Moreover, many of JICA's returned volunteers take initiatives to address various issues faced by Japanese society, including the implementation of child-rearing support and support for the revitalization of Japanese communities. JICA will be publicizing its volunteer programs as programs which not only contribute to the development of developing countries but as programs that also serve to “energize Japan.”

Globalized Personnel Sought by Companies

Young people in Japan are often said to have introspective tendencies, with over 30% of new company recruits expressing hesitancy to work overseas. Nevertheless, many companies seek human resources who can adapt to globalization. The following are companies' accounts of JOCVs as human resources.

Their aggressiveness and toughness make JOCVs attractive human resources

Mr. Toshiyuki Yoshino

General Manager of HR, Sumitomo Chemical Co., Ltd.

“Globalized personnel” are indispensable to us as a company with many overseas offices. We think of globalized personnel as those who not only have foreign language proficiency, but are also very cultured and enlightened. Whether they are working in a developing or developed country or overseas or in Japan, they strive to proactively forge trust with customers and colleagues while never losing sight of the “global” perspective.

JOCVs personally chose to go to developing countries and engaged in activities that forced them to use their imaginations. Their ability to actively interact with external partners, coupled with their toughness to survive in a competitive society, make them attractive human resources.

There is much meaning for our company, customers and society as a whole if these highly skilled people engage in work with a high level of professionalism. At Sumitomo Chemical, a number of former JOCVs are serving key roles in a variety of departments.

Mr. Kenichi Nakanishi

(Dispatched fiscal 1981/Kenya/Soils and Fertilisers)
Manager, Technical & Product Development Department
Vector Control Division, Sumitomo Chemical Co., Ltd.

I participated in the JOCV program shortly after graduating from university. Although there were numerous hardships I faced in the field, I recall the time when I contracted malaria and felt both physically and mentally weakened by my recurring high fever.

I joined Sumitomo Chemical after returning to Japan, and since 1992 have been in charge of our work in the Africa region. African countries are different from Japan in every way. Yet, it is indeed because of my experience as a JOCV that I am able to engage in my work not with uncertainty and resistance, but with a sense of familiarity.

Currently, I am involved in dispersing technologies for mosquito nets to prevent malaria infection as well as special projects. My own experience with malaria is driving my ambition to protect the African people from malaria. Every day I feel a sense of great reward knowing that the business I am involved in is directly linked to international cooperation.

JOCVs = Globalized personnel

Mr. Masahiro Fujita

Group Leader, Human Resources Group
Personnel & General Affairs Department, UNITIKA Ltd.

At UNITIKA, we believe human resources are our assets and many efforts are dedicated to the development of our young personnel.

Some personnel trainers note that although young employees in recent years steadily carry out their given tasks, the employees are apt to becoming passive. While we, the Personnel & General Affairs Department, commend the employees for their high level of basic skills and work ethic, we hope the young generation full of energy will demonstrate their ability to pave the way or push forward.

The former JOCVs working for us have sharpened the “four skills” we deem (1. passion, 2. ability to deliver, 3. forward-looking attitude and toughness, and 4. ability to hold dialogue) through their activities in developing countries, and have acquired a global perspective. Since returning to the workplace, these employees have drawn on these strengths and largely contribute to our daily operations and business expansion.

Ms. Kuniko Inoue

(Dispatched fiscal 2006/Burkina Faso/Rural Community Development)
Research & Development Center
Technology and Development Headquarters, UNITIKA Ltd.

Four years after joining the company, I took advantage of the volunteer leave of absence system, and as a JOCV, engaged in assistance work for improving the lives of women in the villages of Burkina Faso.

In order to earn the trust of the local people, it was imperative that I take initiative and take action. Setbacks were inevitable given the differences in language and culture. However, I believe this in turn made me a tougher person internally. Additionally, “dialogue” is absolutely critical for executing a single activity in tandem and in cooperation with others. While there are differences between working in developing countries and Japan, I believe the same can be said about any workplace.

As long as deep trust can be forged, one can expect positive outcomes at any workplace. Confidence is one of the things I gained through my activities as a JOCV.