

Volunteer Programs

“There is always something you can offer” 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, the programs are expected to act as a means to develop human resources with global perspectives that are valuable to Japanese society.

● JICA’s Volunteer Programs

Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCVs) were dispatched to the first five nations, namely Laos, the Philippines, Cambodia, Malaysia, and Kenya, in fiscal 1965. The JOCVs celebrate their 50th anniversary in 2015. Along with big changes in the environment surrounding volunteer programs over 50 years since their establishment, JICA’s volunteer programs have grown.

For JOCVs, recruitment targets people between the ages of 20 and 39. An approximate total of 41,000 people have been dispatched to 88 countries as of the end of fiscal 2015. For Senior Volunteers, recruitment targets people between the ages of 40 and 69. Volunteers for Japanese Communities Overseas and Senior Volunteers for Japanese Communities Overseas, too, are dispatched to contribute to the development of *Nikkei* communities in Latin America. As well as long-term volunteers, short-term volunteers are dispatched for periods of less than one year. To date, a total of around 49,000 people have joined these

JICA volunteer programs as of the end of fiscal 2015.

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. This style of cooperation has been carefully handed over to the new generation for 50 years.

● Development of Human Resources with Global Perspectives

Lately, JICA’s volunteer programs are highly regarded by local governments, private sector, universities, etc. as opportunities to develop capabilities in solving problems, communication, dealing with diverse cultures, etc., through volunteer activities and experiences living with local people in developing countries. The number of job offers to volunteers who have returned home increased from 304 in 2009 to 1,939 in 2015. Furthermore, to make use of technologies and knowledge of domestic partners, including local governments, private sector, and universities, in solving development challenges in developing countries, JICA cooperates with such entities to dispatch volunteers in the form of cooperation agreements with nine local governments, 101 private companies, and 21 universities. Such initiatives are expected to promote the usage of rich human resources and knowledge of each entity or company for the benefit of developing countries, which in return will lead to high evaluation of the cooperation by

Case Study Nicaragua: Senior Volunteer Support for Persons with Disabilities

International Cooperation Leveraging the Abilities of Persons with Disabilities

A senior volunteer was engaged in developing acupuncture and massage therapists in the only Eastern medicine educational institution in Central America, and contributed to the self-reliance of persons with disabilities and education for the handicapped.

Guidance in Techniques and Development of Professionals

In September 2015, Mr. Akira Tsunakawa returned to Japan after completing his four-year Senior Volunteer activities at the Institute for Higher Education of Oriental Medicine in Nicaragua, Central America.

While Eastern medicine, including acupuncture and moxibustion therapy, became popular in the country around the 1980s, the knowledge of Eastern medicine that professors and students had at that time was based only on textbooks. At first, since they did not even understand the accurate positions of the 361 acupuncture points on the human body, which is the basis of Eastern medicine, it was not easy for them to conduct actual treatments. In such

a situation, Mr. Tsunakawa worked enthusiastically to improve the educational curriculum.

Subsequently, he showed himself at his best in teaching students with visual impairment. Mr. Tsunakawa, who is a visually impaired person and spent many years in education for the disabled, fully understood the abilities of individual students and provided guidance suitable for each of them. In addition to guidance in techniques for students with visual impairment, he also worked hard to develop professionals. He finally produced six instructors, two of them are visually impaired, and 59 graduates.

Toward Realizing the Dream of Making Persons with Disabilities Self-Reliant

Four graduates who were taught by Mr.



Senior Volunteer Mr. Tsunakawa, second from left, teaching college students the techniques of Shiatsu (finger-pressure therapy)

Tsunakawa jointly established a Shiatsu (finger-pressure therapy) clinic, which was highly publicized throughout the town. While it is difficult for persons with disabilities to acquire technical knowledge in this country, Mr. Tsunakawa gave big dreams to students and graduates of the school who want to start their own businesses. He successfully demonstrated that even disabled people can contribute to society, or that their disabilities can be advantageous in making social contributions, which also helps achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Mr. Tsunakawa received a JICA President Award in October 2015.

the subject countries. At the same time, the experience of international cooperation is expected to provide opportunities to develop human resources to deal with the globalization of Japan.

● **Strengthening Ties with Japanese Society and Contributions to Japanese Society**

The JICA volunteers who have completed their missions in developing countries and returned to Japan are expected to contribute to overcoming challenges in Japanese society, such as multicultural coexistence and revitalization of local communities, as human resources with experiences in welcoming diverse cultures and societies, being open to dialogue, and taking actions in a variety of settings.

Many returned volunteers take initiatives to address various issues faced by Japanese society, including the implementation of child-rearing support, earthquake disaster reconstruction, and the revitalization of Japanese communities. Volunteer programs became known as programs which not only contribute to the development of developing countries but also serve to “energize Japan.”

Based on information that has been confirmed as of 2015, the number of local government authorities and boards of education that have special employment quotas or preferential treatment for returned volunteers has increased to 97 local governments/educational boards.

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.



A Volunteer for Japanese Communities Overseas providing a baseball class for private-school children in Brazil (Photo by Atsushi Shibuya)

● **Efforts to Implement Volunteer Programs with a Focus on Quality**

JICA volunteers work on improving the effects of cooperation on diversifying development challenges by working together with JICA’s other projects, volunteer organizations of other countries, and international institutions, in accordance with the development cooperation policy of Japan.

Efforts have been made in recent years to improve the quality of the programs to maximize the effects of cooperation by flexibly dealing with diversifying development challenges, such as fighting international problems that include epidemic diseases and environmental issues, initiatives to develop local industries and small and medium-size enterprises, and development activities through culture and sports.

Case Study

Hosting the Conference of International Volunteer Cooperation Organizations (IVCO 2015)

Passing the Experience of 50-Year Volunteer Programs to the Future of the World

Having marked its 50th anniversary of volunteer programs, JICA introduced its accumulated experience at the international conference and received a high evaluation.

Volunteers’ Contributions to the SDGs

In October 2015, JICA hosted the conference of the International Volunteer Cooperation Organizations (IVCO), the annual conference of Forum, the International Forum for Volunteering in Development. IVCO 2015 attracted 132 participants from international organizations, volunteer-involving organizations, NGOs, academia, and businesses in 31 countries.

Participants discussed how volunteering can contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In the three-day session, they shared information on international trends in volunteer programs and new tools and frameworks that support volunteering in development. The conference adopted the Tokyo Call to Action, which stipulates the guidelines for future actions.

“Our volunteers are conscious of respecting local practices and value systems, and they carry out innovative, creative activities in close collaboration with local community members. Over the 50 years of engagement, volunteer activities have facilitated behavior change and improved community members’ skills,” said JICA president Shinichi Kitaoka in his keynote speech.

In the side events, JICA Research Institute introduced the political origins of the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCVs). They also reported survey and research results, including the fact that the volunteers’ fundamental work competencies change during their overseas service, analysis of their motivations to apply to be JOCV, and other findings. The research results were



Vigorous discussions were held by about 130 participants from all over the world.

highly evaluated by the participants for being innovative and useful [→ see the Case Study on page 121].

JICA’s volunteer programs will continue to contribute to the growth of developing countries and achieving the SDGs by strengthening cooperation with various domestic and international partners.