

Young leaders from LAC Region hone skills for SME development at grassroots level

The end of summer 2019 marked the beginning of a new chapter in the professional careers of fourteen young leaders from eight Latin American and Caribbean countries.¹ From September 11 to September 28, they participated in an insightful [Knowledge Co-Creation Program](#) in Japan aimed at expanding their knowledge and skills to promote SME development in their own communities.

Co-organized by JICA Tokyo and Global Agriculture Crossroad TERRAKOYA, a grassroots-oriented agricultural development organization led by former Japanese Overseas Cooperation Volunteers ([JOCVs](#)), the course offered participants a battery of enriching, hands-on learning opportunities to better understand the Japanese experience in promoting community-based SMEs. Among other activities, participants held fruitful discussions with Japanese SME entrepreneurs from Gunma and Shizuoka prefectures; visited municipal and prefectural government offices in Gunma to learn more about public sector support for SME development in Japan; and exchanged views with representatives of cooperative regional financial institutions (known as “Shinkin” banks) that actively support SME ventures.



Course participants, instructors and organizers
Photo Credit: Global Agriculture Crossroad TERRAKOYA

Seeking to co-create solutions to the challenges facing their communities, participants enthusiastically exchanged views not only with Japanese counterparts but also among themselves. This helped them visualize ways in which they could adapt relevant aspects of the “Japanese experience” of promoting local SMEs to harness community development back home.



Course participants and organizers visiting a Japanese SME
Photo Credit: Global Agriculture Crossroad TERRAKOYA

As they witnessed how young Japanese entrepreneurs attempt to revitalize rural communities in Japan with support from private and public sector actors, course participants felt encouraged to envision innovative ways to promote SME development in their own countries. In this vein, armed with the new skills acquired through this learning exercise, they drafted individual action plans to put all the experiences gained in Japan to work strengthening SME development in their communities.

In today’s world, young professional are increasingly embracing leadership roles to create wellbeing and prosperity at the grassroots level and beyond. Against this backdrop, JICA will continue to be a steadfast partner in the promotion of SME development efforts planned by the leaders of tomorrow.

¹ Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Panama, and Paraguay were represented. Marvin Fernández of the JICA USA office also took part in the course as an observer, and he would like to extend his gratitude to colleagues from JICA Tokyo Center and TERRAKOYA, JICA’s implementing partner, for the opportunity.