

International Cooperation with a Human Face

Half a Century of JOCV Activities

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV) program, launched in 1965. To support the social and economic advancement of developing countries, in addition to providing financial assistance in such forms as grant aid and ODA (Official Development Assistance) loans, Japan has been extending technical cooperation, including the dispatch of experts to developing countries and the hosting of trainees in Japan. The JOCV program is one of the pillars of this international cooperation based on human interaction.

This program recruits, selects, and trains people between the ages of 20 and 39 with appropriate technical and other knowledge and experience who wish to use their capabilities for people in developing countries. It sends them on two-year assignments in response to requests from developing countries, where they have been providing assistance in over 100 capacities—for example, as schoolteachers, nurses, auto mechanics, IT engineers, and sports instructors.

JOCVs have become well known in other countries as Japan’s grass-roots diplomats. As of the end of April 2015, a total of 47,630 volunteers had been dispatched to 96 countries; these include the participants in the Senior Volunteers (ages 40–69) program that was launched in the 1990s and other related programs. Below we introduce two of these volunteers.

Ayaka Nitta went to Burkina Faso as a JOCV. One of the least developed countries, Burkina Faso had a chronic problem with trash littering its streets. Citizens’ attitudes lagged behind the need to deal with the problem, and action had been put off for years. Nitta undertook activities in the town of Koupela that combined trash reduction with the development and sale of recycled products. She reports, “Making recycled products contributed to dealing with environmental problems, and in this way I was also able to help increase people’s cash incomes.”

Atsushi Munakata went to Rwanda as a JOCV one year after graduating from university and worked in the eastern part of the country at maintenance and management of water supply facilities and prevention of waterborne diseases. People need safe water to live. Munakata notes that at first, “Even if we fixed a broken well, there was nobody—no organization or engineers—to look after it.” He worked with Rwandan colleagues and local residents to repair hand-pump wells and to transmit the know-how for taking care of them. These efforts resulted in a sustainable supply of safe water for some 7,000 residents.

The fruits of the activities of these two JOCVs are being carried on by local people. And their encounters with the cultures of Burkina Faso and Rwanda and experiences as volunteers have become major assets in their lives.

JOCVs share enthusiasm for the social and economic advancement of developing countries. Today, half a century after the program was launched, volunteers carry on with an approach to cooperation based on living and working together with local people, along with a passionate desire to do their utmost for the sake of developing countries and the rest of the world. Their efforts are always received with thanks by the host countries.



1. Ayaka Nitta joins children in making soccer balls out of plastic bags and other trash as part of her environmental education activities. 2. Atsushi Munakata repairs a well together with local residents. For two years he taught residents how to fix wells so that they could continue to have a supply of safe water even after he left.



3. JOCVs depart for the Philippines (1966). The flow of volunteers to developing countries has continued unabated for half a century. 4. Kichie Zuirin, one of the five JOCVs first dispatched to Laos in 1965, checks agricultural produce.



Safe water supply
in Rwanda

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HSTbl2XWMJc>