



Women sewing at the MY DREAM Factory in Bognayili village. The women find various ways to recycle fabrics and save on sourcing materials.

GRASSROOTS AMBASSADOR >>> Japanese Individuals Contributing Worldwide

Sustainable Businesses Replacing Foreign Assistance

The village of Bognayili is just two hours by plane and car from Accra, the capital city of the Republic of Ghana. In this village of roughly 2,000 people, a Japanese woman has been supporting the activities of the villagers under the slogan, “Go beyond aid and be self-sustainable by 2022,” 10 years after the launch of the projects.



Part of Proudly from Africa's fine selection of fashion items and cosmetics.

MY DREAM.org is a non-governmental organization (NGO) operated by members of the village of Bognayili in Ghana. The NGO's aim is to increase proceeds earned through local businesses and improve the environment in which children grow up and pursue their dreams without relying on donations. HARA Yukari is a joint representative director of the NGO, sharing the responsibility with

village resident and leader Zakaria Sayibu.

Hara previously worked for Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, during which time she undertook post-graduate studies in global health at a university in the United States. In 2012, while still a post-graduate student, Hara interned at an NGO in Bognayili. Despite her confidence that she “surely could contribute somehow,” it was rather she herself



who was helped by people in the village, as she could not speak their language, nor even make her own meals. Nevertheless, the villagers helped Hara by warmly welcoming her. Wishing to reciprocate their goodwill, Hara helped the village establish a kindergarten schoolhouse that had been long wished for. She created a website to explain the project and collect donations, and consequently the schoolhouse was built. It was from that endeavor that MY DREAM.org originated.

Since then, the villagers of Bognayili have undertaken more

projects to improve the village's health, sanitation and education environments. Hara, who was posted to the Japanese Embassy in Ghana following her studies, also applied her knowledge and experiences to assist those projects, visiting the village one weekend each month. For the first two years, the funding for these projects was entirely sourced from donations, but the villagers argued, “If we rely on donations, we can't continue the activities.” Then, in 2014, the NGO commenced Income-Generation Activities, a project aimed at creating funding through local businesses. Hara proposed to add values to and selling the shea butter which had been traditionally produced in the village, and provided guidance to the village women on improving their sewing skills to create garments and bags from African Print. By selling products with true appeal and quality rather than charity items, the mindset of Bognayili villagers has gradually changed.

In 2015, Hara left the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in 2018 founded SKYAH Co., Ltd., a company that operates the shopping site “Proudly from Africa.” Exclusively showcasing the highest quality merchandise carefully selected by Hara and curators across Africa, the site provides the Bognayili women with the aim to someday have their own products of their original brands showcased at Proudly from Africa. “Recently, even the children in Bognayili are getting inspired by the women's enthusiasm and declaring



HARA Yukari

Founder & CEO of SKYAH Co., Ltd., and joint representative director of MY DREAM.org, a Ghanaian NGO. She joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2009. In 2012, she started activities in Bognayili Village, Republic of Ghana, and founded MY DREAM.org. After leaving the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2015, she continued NGO activities while working in the Johannesburg Branch Office of Mitsui & Co., Ltd. She became an independent entrepreneur in 2018.

their own dream: ‘I want to be a seamstress too!’ One of the objectives of MY DREAM.org is to create an environment in which the village children can discover and live their dreams. It is therefore important that they find people around them whom they can admire as role models. You could say that Proudly from Africa is one of the exit strategies for MY DREAM,” Hara explains.

If the local children are encouraged to study with dreams in their hearts, further sustainable businesses might sprout up in the village in the future. Hara says that the frequency of her visits to Bognayili is gradually decreasing, and her goal is for one day to be told by the residents of Bognayili, “We can now manage without you coming to the village.” When that day arrives, we can certainly treat it as the achievement of one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). ✨



The board members of MY DREAM.org. From left, Cecilia Dei-Anang, Zakaria Sayibu and HARA Yukari



MY DREAM School began holding lessons before it even had desks. Today the children learn at desks as they chase their dreams.