

The song of “Akatombo” heard in Djibouti

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What’s this melody!?

Djibouti is located in East Africa and is said to be one of the hottest countries in the world. In this country, which has a population of around one million and a land of approximately 1.3 times the size of Shikoku, the melody of the well know Japanese song “Akatombo” can be heard every day.

Why would it be heard in a land so far away from Japan? The source of the melody, in fact, is the orange garbage trucks that circulate around the city. These trucks make their daily rounds in the capital of Djibouti and collect the residents’ garbage. On the garbage trucks, you will find the Djiboutian flag drawn alongside with the Japanese flag - believe it or not, these trucks were provided through Japan’s ODA grant aid in 2014.

“Akatombo” is the signal

The amount of garbage increased alongside the rapid population growth in Djibouti City, and the deterioration of the old garbage processing trucks made the situation even more complicated, leading to an increase of uncollected garbage in the city. Moreover, many of this garbage were illegally landfilled or burned, causing serious environmental problems such as bad odors, release of harmful substances, fires, or even soil pollution. To improve this situation, ODA was introduced to provide cleaning materials, such as garbage trucks and sprinkler trucks.

The garbage trucks arrived in Djibouti in 2014. Since then, orange garbage trucks with the Japanese flag painted can be seen throughout the city. When the “Akatombo” melody plays, the households bring their garbage outside. These garbage trucks collect household garbage. This newly introduced practice has helped optimize the garbage collection work.

Making Japan more familiar

The representative of the Djibouti cleaning bureau, which is in charge of the management garbage trucks, is very satisfied with receiving Japan's support, saying that the city "has become 1,000 times cleaner." The amount of garbage collected each day is now more than twice of what it was before. Today, everyone in the City knows that the "Akatombo" melody came from Japan.

When we visited the warehouse where the garbage trucks are maintained, staffs showed us how they carefully treat the garbage trucks from Japan - in the warehouse you can find a very well-organized storage of spare parts which were provided along with the trucks, as well as a thoroughly managed operation record for each of the operating trucks.

When we recently took a photograph of a garbage truck in the city, a resident spotted us and asked, "Japan?" When we nodded "Yes", they pointed at the garbage truck and said, "Good!" This incident teaches us indeed that our ODA being designed to approach the everyday life of the local population makes Japan seem much more closer to them.