



## Stories from the Field

### **“Freedom Bridge,” a Symbol of Freedom and Peace**

—The First Large-Scale Infrastructure Construction Project in South Sudan—



South Sudan, which gained independence from Sudan in July 2011 after many years of conflict, faces a serious lack of social and economic infrastructure. As a landlocked country, South Sudan relies on land transportation for logistics, but the lack of road and bridge development is a hindrance to the country's economic development. The Nile River, which divides the country into east and west, runs through the capital city Juba, but there was only one old bridge over the river that was built in 1972. This bridge was only able to allow one-way traffic for repairs, which significantly disrupted traffic and logistics.

In response to the situation, in 2013, Japan commenced the construction of the second bridge over the Nile River, which would form part of the international transportation corridor that connects to Uganda and to Kenya, under the grant aid “Project for Construction of Nile River Bridge.”

The original plan was to complete the construction by the end of 2016, but soon after the construction began in December 2013, it was suspended due to a conflict between the presidential faction and the vice-presidential faction. Although the construction resumed in February 2015, another conflict occurred in July 2016, and the construction was once again forced to be suspended. The construction subsequently resumed in May 2019, but in April 2020, due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, it had to be suspended until March 2021.

Mr. UMEDA Norio of CTI Engineering International Co., Ltd., who served as a consultant for the construction, describes the situation at that time as follows. “While the period of the construction itself was three years and 10 months, the period of suspension of the construction totaled four years and 11 months. I learned from the reports from our South Sudanese staff, who looked after the construction site while the Japanese staff had evacuated abroad, that South Sudanese government officials often visited the site to inspect

it and showed attentiveness for it. I felt that the country had high hopes for the bridge that we were building.”

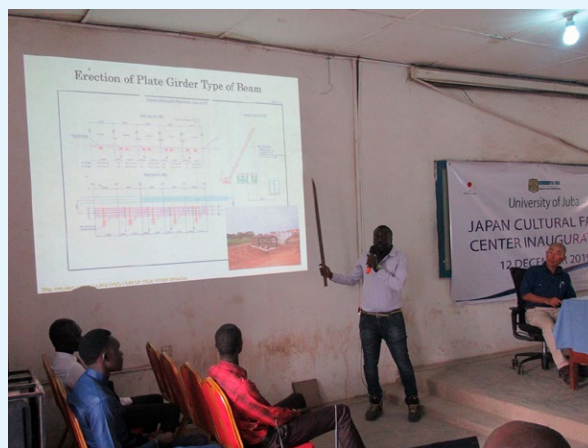
After construction resumed in March 2021, it progressed smoothly with the cooperation of the South Sudanese workers. Mr. Umeda says, “They adapted well to the work that they experienced for the first time. Through their daily work, they learned many things besides techniques, such as being punctual, observing discipline, and striving to keep the work site in good order. Thanks to them, we were also able to work pleasantly.”

Furthermore, Mr. Umeda says, “South Sudan has never had such a large-scale civil engineering project. We saw the construction site as a place of learning for university students who major in civil engineering, so we invited them there to experience civil engineering work as the construction progressed and tried to transfer technology to these young people who would lead the future of the country. In addition, under the philosophy that ‘to teach is to learn twice,’ when we gave a lecture on bridge construction at a local university, I instructed South Sudanese engineers to present the project themselves.”

After three suspensions, the 560 meter long bridge was completed in May 2022, eight years and nine months after the construction began. The bridge shortened the time required to cross the Nile River and enabled large vehicles to pass safely. Through this, it is expected to facilitate international logistics, which is important for the economic development of South Sudan, the landlocked country. At the opening ceremony, President Salva Kiir and First Vice President Riek Machar also attended. The President expressed his gratitude to Japan and his hopes for recovery and peace. This bridge is called the “Freedom Bridge” and has become a symbol of peace and freedom. Japan's cooperation leads to the recovery and development of South Sudan.



Completed Freedom Bridge. It is expected to contribute to smoother logistics and economic development. (Photo: Dai Nippon Construction)



Mr. Umeda and a South Sudanese engineer delivering a lecture to the students at the University of Juba (Photo: CTI Engineering International Co., Ltd.)

## Protecting the Life and Dignity of Displaced Syrian Refugees

—UNHCR Activities in Lebanon—



More than a decade has passed since the Syrian crisis began in 2011. While the international community's attention is shifting to humanitarian crises in other regions, many Syrian refugees are still unable to return home and are uncertain even about their lives for tomorrow. Among those, 90% of the Syrian refugees staying in the neighboring country of Lebanon\*<sup>1</sup> live in poverty and face many hardships.

One of the biggest challenges there is securing safe and comfortable shelters. Refugees, who live in apartments, houses, and rented spaces in shops and warehouses, face issues such as privacy, safety, and deterioration of the buildings. Refugees who rent shelters on their own with a contract may face a forced eviction if they are unable to pay the rent due to poverty. In addition, the winter in Lebanon is very harsh, with temperatures often dropping below zero. Therefore, improving the living conditions is a priority in order to protect the life and dignity of each refugee.

In response to the difficulties facing those Syrian refugees, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), with the support of the Government of Japan, distributes materials necessary for shelter reinforcement and repairs for waterproofing, wind proofing, and privacy enhancement, while also supporting infrastructure development such as drainage systems. UNHCR also distributes winterization items to protect the lives of refugees from the severe cold, such as high thermal blankets, waterproof sheets, sleeping bags, and warm clothes for winter.



Refugees in the snow carrying mats and blankets provided by UNHCR as winterization assistance (Photo: UNHCR)

Furthermore, as part of efforts to protect refugees, UNHCR provides support for the establishment and operation of community centers. These community centers, accessed by both refugees and the people from the host communities, provide various programs and services such as English and computer lessons, vocational training, and activities for security, and health and hygiene awareness. The community centers also accept individual consultations for problems that arise in daily life. Support is continuously given to people in need in order to ensure that all people in the community, including refugees, can live in peace and in harmony.

Over a decade on since the outbreak of the crisis, the needs for humanitarian assistance have diversified in Lebanon. Mr. ITO Ayaki, UNHCR representative in Lebanon, emphasizes that, "I sincerely hope that the international community will not forget this country facing various crises, and that safe and dignified lives for all communities are secured, including the people of Lebanon, refugees, and migrants. UNHCR is with people in Lebanon." UNHCR will continue to provide assistance to ensure the safety of refugees and protect their rights while maintaining close contact and cooperation with the Government of Lebanon, the Lebanese Armed Forces, police, media, NGOs, UN agencies, academia, and embassies in Lebanon.



Mr. Ito (center), UNHCR representative in Lebanon, visiting a refugee family's shelter and asking about their daily needs and difficulties (Photo: UNHCR)

\*1 Lebanon is one of the countries with the highest number of refugees per capita. Of the refugee population, the number of Syrian refugees is approximately 810,000 (as of December 2022), which together with Palestinian refugees is said to account for 25-30% of the Lebanese population.

## Establishing a University of Science and Technology in Egypt that Implements the Japanese Education System

—A Contribution toward the Development of the Middle East and Africa by Fostering and Producing Excellent Researchers—



In Egypt, the lack of experimental and practical equipment at universities due to the increase in the number of university students had an impact on the teaching methods employed. In particular, in the Faculty of Engineering, lecture-style education through classroom learning has been the norm, with only a limited number of universities offering practical education. In response to a request for support from the Government of Egypt to establish a new university based on the concept of “offering small class sizes, postgraduate and research-oriented, practical, and international standard of education,” which are the characteristics of Japanese-style engineering education, Japan launched the technical cooperation project “Egypt-Japan University of Science and Technology (E-JUST)” in 2008.

During Phase 1 of the project, from October 2008 to January 2014, assistance was provided mainly in the areas of developing curriculum and dispatching experts and professors, in cooperation with 12 Japanese universities including Kyushu University, Kyoto University, Tokyo Institute of Technology, and Waseda University. It led to the establishment of E-JUST in 2009 as a graduate university specializing in engineering-related fields. In Phase 2 of the project implemented from February 2014 to January 2019, the Faculty of Engineering as well as the Faculty of International Business and Humanities were established and began accepting undergraduate students. This made a solid foundation for E-JUST to become a top-class research university in Egypt that promotes human development and contributes to the development of Egyptian industry and society. In the earlier stages of the project, there was confusion among the Egyptian faculty members about the concept of the university. However, once the Japanese-style laboratory-based education began to show positive

results, the Egyptian faculty members’ commitment to implementing the new style and the learning attitude of the students showed positive changes.

Dr. OOKAWARA Shinichi, Specially Appointed Professor of the Tokyo Institute of Technology, talks about the achievement of the E-JUST project as follows: “As a result of continuous and consistent research supervision provided through the project, the Japanese-style educational method was highly evaluated, and the number of students has grown from 30 to 3,000 today. When I participated in a forum of Egyptian universities, the E-JUST booth was given a prominent location at the venue and the Egyptian Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research visited our booth, which made me realize that our efforts were highly appreciated.”

Dr. Ookawara has accepted doctoral students from E-JUST at his lab at the Tokyo Institute of Technology every year, and provides beneficial opportunities for E-JUST students to experience research life through cutting-edge research in Japan, as well as for Japanese students to acquire international perspectives.

Thereafter, several Egyptian universities were established modelled on E-JUST. This situation proves that the concept of E-JUST has been widely accepted in Egypt. Professor Emeritus SUZUKI Masaaki of the Tokyo Institute of Technology, who serves as the first vice president of E-JUST, talks about his prospects in the future as follows: “E-JUST has now developed into one of the top research universities in Egypt. In Phase 3 of the project (February 2019 – January 2025), we would like to contribute to the development of African countries by accepting more international students from Africa while taking advantage of the existing and newly created scholarship programs.”



Dr. Ookawara teaching an Egyptian student in his class



The entrance ceremony of E-JUST in October 2022 (Photo: E-JUST)



## A Platform for Increasing Rice Production in Africa

—CARD Activities that Connect African Countries with International Organizations—

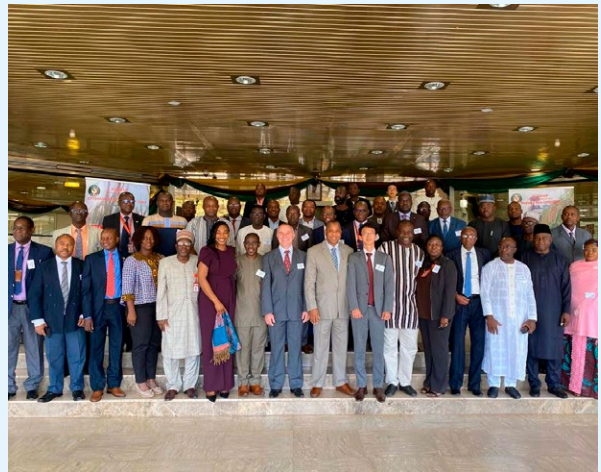


Since the 1990s, in Africa, where the economic growth has been remarkable, there has been a greater demand for rice production as rice consumption has increased along with Africa's rapid population growth and urbanization. In addition, agriculture is an important industry for Africa, accounting for more than 20% of GDP in as many as 30 African countries. Therefore, it is essential to support farmers and raise the level of food self-sufficiency for continued sustainable growth. In particular, under the current situation where food prices are rising due to global circumstances, leading to the food crisis in the continent, it is becoming increasingly important to improve food self-sufficiency in African countries.

At the Fourth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD IV) in 2008, JICA, in partnership with an international NGO, Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), launched an initiative called the "Coalition for African Rice Development (CARD)," aiming at doubling Africa's rice production. Currently, CARD involves 32 African member countries, with 14 international organizations and 5 African Regional Economic Communities (RECs) as supporting partners.

Dr. HANEISHI Yusuke, General Coordinator of the CARD Secretariat, explains CARD as follows: "Development partners, including JICA, support the formulation of the National Rice Development Strategy (NRDS) in each member country and provide assistance for increasing their rice production in line with the strategies. The CARD Secretariat monitors the implementation of the NRDS in each country."

The CARD initiative achieved the goal of doubling rice production in Africa (from 14 million tons to 28 million tons) and completed its first phase in 2018. In the second phase, which commenced in 2019, CARD aims at further increasing production toward 2030 as well as promoting a strategy



A consultative meeting for the formulation of the "Rice Offensive," a regional rice strategy for the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), in Abuja, Nigeria. Director-general level officials from the agricultural ministries of 14 countries participated alongside representatives from various international organizations to finalize the formulation process of the ECOWAS version of rice development strategy. (Seventh from the right: Dr. Haneishi) (Photo: CARD Secretariat)

based on four perspectives called "RICE," which stands for "Resilience," "Industrialization," "Competitiveness," and "Empowerment." In order to improve rice "productivity" and "quality," which were revealed as challenges in the first phase, CARD has begun efforts to increase the yield per unit area<sup>\*1</sup> by focusing on new research and development of seeds and farming methods, as well as strengthening the capacity of rice millers to raise the competitiveness of domestic rice.

"The CARD initiative, led by Japan for more than 10 years, is now recognized by international organizations and donor countries as an established platform for rice. Even without support from the CARD Secretariat and JICA, African countries themselves reach out to CARD member donors for assistance in implementing their NRDS. In addition, the number of offers of assistance from non-member donors has also increased, and each member country obtains assistance based on their NRDS and puts it into practice for promoting the rice sector development. This is a great achievement for CARD, as it has supported the ownership of African countries," says Dr. Haneishi.

In this way, CARD has not only achieved increased rice production successfully in African countries, but also demonstrated a strong presence as a platform that connects member countries with development partners. Through the CARD initiative, JICA will continue to provide assistance for food security in Africa with various partners.



Rice fields in Fogera Plain in Amhara Region, Ethiopia. Farmers start cattle plowing for the next crop immediately after harvesting. (Photo: CARD Secretariat)

<sup>\*1</sup> Numerical value that indicates how much of a crop is harvested per unit area. It is calculated by dividing the total amount of crops harvested by the unit area.

## Constructing an International Convention Center as a Hub for Cultural and Human Exchange in a Holy City of India



An aerial view of the International Cooperation and Convention Center in Varanasi (Photo: JICA)

India has many attractive tourist spots that draw people from all over the world, and tourism is one of the industries driving the country's economic growth. Varanasi City in the State of Uttar Pradesh has a history of approximately 3,000 years and receives approximately 7 million visitors a year from India and abroad for both pilgrimages and tourism. The city holds many tourism and cultural events, but it was a challenge that there were no facilities that could accommodate a large number of people.

In response to the expectation expressed by Prime Minister Modi at the Japan-India Summit Meeting in 2015 for the development of a convention center in Varanasi City, Japan decided to implement the "Project for Construction of the International Cooperation and Convention Center in Varanasi (VCC)" through grant aid.

The construction work, which started in 2018, faced unique local challenges. "People in India have a different sense of time compared with ours. They would not start preparations and arrangements for the next process before the current ones were complete. Therefore, there was room to improve work efficiency. We had to constantly monitor and take the initiative to start making arrangements for the next process," said Mr. TABATA Mitsugu of Fujita Corporation, who oversaw the construction site, talking about the situation at the time. The spread of COVID-19 also had a major impact on the construction. "One day, suddenly the whole city was locked down. We had no idea when the lockdown would be lifted, and we could not even get close to the project site for a long time."

While overcoming these various challenges, the VCC was successfully completed in 2021. The completed VCC has a Main Hall with a seating capacity of 1,200 people and the latest stage and sound equipment, as well as conference rooms and dressing rooms. The design incorporates beautiful curves inspired by Hindu symbols, and it has become an unprecedented symbolic building that is unique and embodies Indian culture. "I think that we made the most of Japan's high technical capabilities in this highly difficult construction of a building with many curves," said Mr. OTA Masataka of Fujita Corporation. The project also provided management know-how in general, including how to operate stage equipment and how to plan cultural events.

For the opening ceremony held in July 2021, Prime Minister Modi and the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh attended from the Indian side, while then Prime Minister Suga provided a video message from the Japanese side. With the hope that the completed VCC would become a symbol of Indian wisdom, Prime Minister Modi gave the center the nickname "Rudraksh" (meaning bodhi fruits).

India assumes the G20 Presidency in 2023, and various meetings are scheduled nationwide. In addition to holding such international conferences, the VCC can also host large-scale events for cultural and citizen exchanges. As a result, the number of visitors with purposes other than conventional tourism will increase, and it is expected that this will contribute to the development of the city through international exchanges and further tourism promotion.



Indian Prime Minister Modi (third from the right) attending the opening ceremony and then Prime Minister Suga delivering a video message (Photo: JICA)



## Measures for Supporting the Aging Society through “Mutual Learning” between Thailand and Japan

—Multi-Organizational Collaboration Helps Spread Community-Led Care for the Elderly: Initiative of Yugawara Town and NOGEZAKA-GLOCAL (NGO)—



In Thailand, the aging of the population is progressing rapidly as indicated by the proportion of elderly people, which jumped from just over 10% in 2015 to over 14% in 2022. To respond adequately to this situation, it is important to revitalize elderly care initiatives at the community and local government levels, as it is not sufficient to only respond through improving national-level systems such as pension and elderly care insurance.

Yugawara Town in Kanagawa Prefecture is a town with many “healthy elderly people”: while the town has the highest aging rate in the prefecture, the needs for long-term care are relatively low. In 2019, Yugawara Town, which is actively engaged in international exchanges, signed a “Memorandum of Understanding on Mutual Cooperation” in the areas of elderly welfare and tourism with the Municipality of Bueng Yitho, Thailand. In partnership with NOGEZAKA-GLOCAL, a Japanese NGO that has supported Thailand for many years in the field of welfare for the elderly, Yugawara Town assists Bueng Yitho Municipality in its efforts to revitalize elderly care that is rooted in the characteristics and needs of each community through mutual visits and online seminars.

Specifically, the Municipality of Bueng Yitho, in cooperation with Yugawara Town, NOGEZAKA-GLOCAL, Thammasat University in Thailand, and others, strives to provide comprehensive elderly care by developing daycare centers for the elderly, as well as by coordinating with home-based nursing care and private residential nursing care facilities. Whereas Yugawara Town provides advice based on its own welfare policies and the insight of relevant service providers in Yugawara Town on elderly care, NOGEZAKA-GLOCAL, making the most of its experience in supporting Thailand, promotes collaboration as an intermediary between local governments and universities in Japan and Thailand, based on its human networks and comprehension of the issues faced by Thai local governments. In this way, they provide assistance that maximizes their respective strengths as a local government and an NGO. In addition, through this



The signing ceremony for a network to promote comprehensive elderly care in Bueng Yitho. Nine local governments from Thailand including Bueng Yitho took part, along with Yugawara Town and others. (Photo: NOGEZAKA-GLOCAL)

project, various domestic and foreign organizations visit for studying and workshops at the municipal training center, established in Bueng Yitho for mutual learning about welfare for the elderly. This demonstrates that the center serves not only as a venue for mutual learning beyond national borders but also for exchange and learning among local residents in Thailand. Under the Asia Health and Wellbeing Initiative promoted by the Government of Japan, these initiatives won the Healthy Aging Prize for Asian Innovation (HAPI) Grand Prize\*1 established by the Japan Center for International Exchange (JCIE) and the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA).

Mr. NAITO Yoshifumi, Executive Director of Yugawara Town, places an emphasis on cooperation among local governments, and says, “It is not that Yugawara Town teaches other local governments. Rather, we try to learn from each other in a flexible manner. Learning from one another about initiatives at the local government level also leads to building trust between us.” Based on the cooperative relationship built through these efforts, Yugawara Town has welcomed two Thai staff members, fluent in both Japanese and English, into the town’s tourist information center. These staff members, who are ready to serve foreign tourists, are expected to further promote international exchange in Yugawara Town and thus contribute to the continued development of the town’s tourism industry.

Since FY2022, Yugawara Town has been entrusted with a project under the JICA Partnership Program, and is working to spread the comprehensive elderly care implemented in the Municipality of Bueng Yitho to other local governments in Thailand. The addition of Yugawara Town to the local government network in Thailand has expanded the mutual learning network among municipalities in Thailand. With the continued cooperation of multiple organizations in Thailand and Japan, community-led elderly care is expected to spread even more widely throughout Thailand.



NOGEZAKA-GLOCAL staff conducting rehabilitation training in Thailand with Japanese experts connected online (Photo: NOGEZAKA-GLOCAL)

\*1 Awarded to recognize innovative efforts (programs, services, products, and policies) that address the challenges facing aging societies in 14 Asian countries and regions, including Japan.



## Stories from the Field

### Voices of Japanese Personnel Working in International Organizations

—Supporting Socially Vulnerable People in Viet Nam—

“I want to work across different countries” and “I want to study abroad.” Those were my vague thoughts when I was a junior high school student who was raised being told that “women do not need to go to university,” in a rural Japanese town where traditional ideas persisted.

With the understanding and support of my parents for advancing to higher education, I entered Yokohama City University and majored in International Relations. While there was opposition to my plan, with people saying “What will you do after studying abroad?” I was determined to go, and graduated from the Department of Political Science at Indiana University in the United States. Afterwards, I received a scholarship from the Institute of Developing Economies Advanced School (IDEAS) in Japan and obtained an MSc in Demography from the London School of Economics. Later, I also obtained an MBA from the University of Warwick in the United Kingdom to further improve my skills.

My career at the UN started as the Junior Professional Officer (JPO)\*<sup>1</sup> at the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Zambia. At that time, I was still young at 26 years old. During the JPO interview, I was asked, “What can you offer to the UN without work experience?” I remember that I responded, “Inexperience and freshness are my value.” I now regret that I was young enough to have a smart mouth. After that, I was employed as a regular staff member of UNFPA and worked at the Headquarters in New York. After serving as the Deputy Representative in South Africa, and as the Representative in Mongolia, I am currently the UNFPA Representative in Viet Nam. My career and experience include secondment to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Mozambique and UNDP Malawi as Deputy Resident Representative, and being in charge of peacebuilding and the Democratic Republic of the Congo at JICA.

Working in Viet Nam is nothing but happiness for me. Under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the UN and with the slogan “Leave No One Behind” as our



The author holding a baby at an obstetrics and gynecology clinic supported by UNFPA in an ethnic minority area

motto, my job is to protect socially vulnerable people who tend to be left behind in the process of national growth. For example, there are many cases in Viet Nam where pregnant women who live in minority ethnic areas end up dying from childbirth at home without having pre-natal checkups and appropriate medical care due to a lack of access to hospitals. Furthermore, domestic violence against women is a serious issue in Viet Nam, where the male-dominated society is deeply rooted. Elderly people are also vulnerable and often live in poverty because of weak social protection systems. We listen to the views of such vulnerable people and provide financial and technical support, while receiving funding from the Government of Japan in recent years. Furthermore, utilizing the neutral position of the UN, we propose policy recommendations based on international perspectives and evidence, and are closely involved in national decision-making processes to assist the Government of Viet Nam in adopting the appropriate policies.

The UN has many highly qualified and experienced professionals. I am who I am today thanks to the support of my seniors and other colleagues. In addition, the UN offers a good welfare program and understands and promotes pursuing one's career while parenting, so that the staff can achieve a good work-life balance.

Under the recent unstable state of the world, I feel that the expectations from international society for Japan as a developed country in Asia are increasing day by day. Now that we have an easy access to the world, I sincerely hope that the younger generation of Japan will take an interest in foreign countries and venture out into the world.

**KITAHARA Naomi**  
UNFPA Representative, Viet Nam



Public announcement of the opening of a domestic violence victim hotline supported by the Government of Japan set up in front of the UN building in Viet Nam

\*1 See page 150 for details on JPOs.