Stories from the Field 1

Public nomination

Supporting the Prosperous Living in Rural Laos through Coffee Cultivation Technology and Nutrition Guidance

– Initiative through Collaboration among the Government of Japan, International Organizations, and the Private Sector –

Laos has achieved steady economic development in recent years, but income levels remain low. Particularly in rural areas, there are villages where the cash economy is not fully penetrated, making low income a challenge. Against this backdrop of low income and delayed development, infants, their mothers, and pregnant women suffer from malnutrition.

To improve this situation, the World Food Programme (WFP), with support from the Government of Japan, launched the "Coffee Japan Project," targeting approximately 300 households in eight rural villages in northern Laos. This project is implemented in collaboration with Saka no Tochu Co., Ltd., a Japanese company that has been engaged in forest conservation and the improvement of farmers' incomes in coffee-producing regions in Laos since 2016.

WFP primarily focuses on nutrition improvement initiatives, while coordinating with governmental bodies and overseeing the overall project. Through lectures on balanced diets and cooking classes for local women, WFP contributes to deepening their understanding of nutrition. Additionally, since many residents cannot consume meat regularly and particularly lack protein, WFP provides cash for them to purchase livestock, which they can raise for food. Drawing from his previous experiences as a Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteer in Africa, Mr. TASAI Ryoya of the WFP Laos Country Office, who is in charge of this project, explains about the trial-and-error process, which places emphasis on voices from the field and the actual situation. "In the target areas, there are traditional customs among ethnic minorities, such as prohibiting pregnant women from eating meat. We are making efforts to communicate the importance of nutrition while respecting their values. For example, we want to create a situation where 'model households' emerge as successful examples, motivating other residents to voluntarily improve their nutrition." Results are beginning to show. "Many farmers have started raising chickens and fish. When we see eggs and other foods appearing on their dining tables, we can really feel the change," he says, expressing his sense of achievement.

Coffee cultivation support is provided by Saka no Tochu Co., Ltd. and their local partner, Saffron Coffee. Their efforts include developing seedlings suited to the local land and providing training and technical guidance on cultivation and production. Ms. MIYAZAKI Saya, who is in charge of this project, says, "Many farmers are enthusiastic, so I have high expectations for the future. I've heard that some farmers previously received coffee trees from other donors but have given up before the harvest. It's important to maintain their motivation until they can monetize their harvest, which may take a few years." Ms. Miyazaki also has experience as a Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteer, working with coffee farmers in Rwanda to improve quality. Reflecting on this experience, she says, "Not only the technology and knowledge of coffee cultivation but also how to communicate with local people—all of those activities from that time are still relevant today."

Ms. Miyazaki (third from left in the back row) with villagers from the target area planting coffee seedlings (Photo: Saka no Tochu Co., Ltd.)

Mr. Tasai (second from left in the front row) with women from the target areas of the nutrition improvement project (Photo: WFP Lao PDR)

Saka no Tochu Co., Ltd. places importance on environmentally sustainable coffee cultivation. In the project's target area, where deforestation is serious even within Laos, they are working with Saffron Coffee to grow coffee using agroforestry,*1 an agricultural method that protects forests while growing crops. By allowing coffee to slowly ripen under moderate shade in the forest, they aim to produce high-quality coffee while protecting the forest and stabilizing farmers' incomes. During the project period, a coffee processing facility is planned to be built in the village, and they expect to continue their relationship with the local community even after the project ends. Mr. Tasai says, "One benefit of cooperating with the private sector is that activities can continue beyond the project term. We are committed to further advancing the initiative."

As coffee cultivation gains momentum and livelihoods improve, it is expected that the nutritional habits that have been enhanced through the WFP program will become further established, leading to a more prosperous life for all villagers, including infants and pregnant women who are suffering from malnutrition.

*1 See 19 on page 102.

Stories from the Field 2

Saving Lives in Mongolia with Drone Technology

– Building a Drone-Based Blood Delivery Network through Japan-Mongolia Cooperation –

In Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia's capital and home to nearly half of the country's total population, social infrastructure has not kept pace with its rapid population expansion and the number of vehicles has also increased dramatically with economic growth. The chronic traffic congestion has seriously disrupted healthcare services, with emergency vehicles and blood deliveries frequently getting stuck in traffic jams. Additionally, in Mongolia, nurses are required to accompany blood deliveries in ambulances, which further limits the time they can dedicate to essential medical services.

Aeronext Inc., a Japanese company developing drone-based logistics services, is working to address these challenges. Focusing on aerial routes as a new form of logistics infrastructure network, the company provides drone delivery services in Japan's remote mountainous areas and during emergencies such as natural disasters. Since its founding, international expansion is one of their key strategies. As they explored global business opportunities, Aeronext identified Mongolia as a promising market. The company is now utilizing JICA's SDGs Business Supporting Surveys*1 to help build logistics infrastructure for the drone-based delivery of blood for transfusions, a service that demands both speed and quality.

Mr. KAWANOUE Kazufumi, General Manager in charge of overseas business development at Aeronext, explains, "One of the reasons we focused on Mongolia is that it's a country that is friendly to Japan. For many years, Japan supports Mongolia's infrastructure development through ODA, helping build hospitals, schools, and airports. Japan also collaborates in sectors such as agriculture and livestock farming, and environmental management, which has contributed to the strong sense of trust of Mongolia toward Japan."

In June 2023, the company launched a needs assessment survey and began iterative testing of drone operations and cold-weather adaptations, taking into account Mongolia's harsh winters and strong winds. In November, a successful demonstration flight was conducted, transporting blood over a 9.5 km round-trip between the National Center for Transfusion Medicine (hereinafter referred to as the "Transfusion Center") and the Mongolia-Japan Hospital, affiliated with the Mongolian National University of Medical Sciences and built with Japanese support (hereinafter referred to as the "Mongolia-Japan Hospital"). Unlike the company's previous experience in Japan, where drones were primarily deployed in remote areas with limited ground access, this achievement in a densely populated urban setting—where stringent safety standards are required—marked a significant breakthrough.

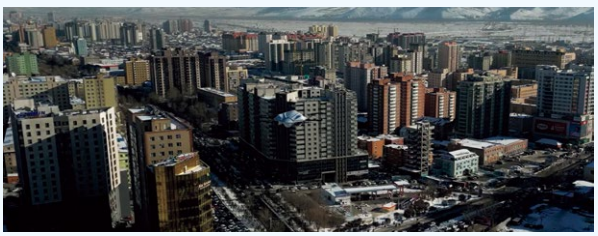
Mr. Kawanoue highlights the benefits of leveraging JICA's support, stating, "The demonstration project required the understanding and cooperation of various government agencies, including the Civil Aviation Authority of Mongolia, the National Agency for Meteorology and Environmental Monitoring, and the Administration of Land Affairs, Geodesy and Cartography. As our company had no prior experience in Mongolia, JICA's introductions were instrumental in helping us establish connections with relevant local authorities, which greatly contributed to the smooth progress of the project."

Nurses at the Mongolia-Japan Hospital inspecting blood packages for transfusion delivered by drone (Photo: Aeronext Inc.)

In May 2024, Aeronext initiated a pilot project to validate its business model, in partnership with Mongolian companies including NEWCOM Group and MSDD. Together, they worked on developing a business model and establishing a drone operation system, and in June, the company secured Mongolia's first commercial drone flight license. By August, operations were underway, with regular blood deliveries from the Transfusion Center to three hospitals across the city. The service also supports emergency situations: in September, following an urgent request, blood was delivered in approximately 13 minutes over a 4.75 km route to the Mongolia-Japan Hospital, where a patient with a rare blood type was admitted.

Dr. Adilsaikhan, Director of the Mongolia-Japan Hospital, remarked, "Japanese technology saved the lives of two patients who might not have survived due to traffic congestion. I am fully committed to continue supporting the development and expansion of this drone-based logistics system." Dr. Erdenebayar, Director of the Transfusion Center, expressed his deep appreciation for the project: "During the COVID-19 pandemic, I attempted to build a drone myself in the hope of realizing aerial transport, but I eventually had to abandon the effort. I am grateful for my encounter with Mr. Kawanoue and for the fact that this project has already helped to save lives."

Mr. Kawanoue outlined his vision: "Medical professionals' recognition of the need for drones and their efforts to actively communicate their effectiveness have been a major driving force behind the project's progress. Looking ahead, we plan to work with the Mongolian University of Science and Technology on joint research to develop next-generation drones tailored to Mongolia's extreme natural conditions, while also investing in local human resource development. Our goal is to establish a system that can be operated independently by local communities." As social infrastructure continues to develop in response to local needs, the project is expected to help address issues – not only in Mongolia but also in neighboring countries also struggling with traffic congestion.



A drone flying over traffic-congested Ulaanbaatar (Photo: Aeronext Inc.)

*1 See the glossary on page 130.

Stories from the Field 3

Expanding Transportation Infrastructure by Supporting the Construction of the Cairo Metro

– Building a Transportation Network Leveraging Japan's Advanced Technology –

The Government of Egypt has been working to expand transportation means to alleviate traffic congestion that has resulted from population growth. In 1987, it opened the first subway on the African continent. However, despite the completion of three metro lines to date, the population has continued to grow rapidly, increasing by 20 million in just a decade since 2010. Approximately 20% of the total population is concentrated in the Greater Cairo Region, exacerbating traffic congestion. Within this context, the Cairo Metro Line No.4 is positioned as a particularly urgent project for expanding transportation options in the Greater Cairo Region under the national plan for transportation and urban development formulated by the Government of Egypt. Since 2012, Japan has been supporting the development of the approximately 19 km section of Line No.4 connecting central Cairo with the Giza Pyramid area through its financial assistance.

This project is the first yen loan project for Egypt to which Special Terms for Economic Partnership (STEP)*1 has been applied, and Japanese advanced railway products and technologies are planned to be utilized for the railroad vehicles and signaling systems. Once this line opens, travelers will be able to reach major tourist destinations such as the Pyramids in Giza and the Grand Egyptian Museum (GEM), which Japan supported through construction, cultural property restoration, and operational assistance, and which began its trial opening in October 2024, from central Cairo in just about 20 minutes. This is expected to contribute significantly to the development of Egypt's tourism industry.

Mr. NISHIKORI Atsushi, Deputy Director of the Railway Division at Oriental Consultants Global Co., Ltd., which is involved in the construction supervision of this project, highlights technology transfer as one of the strengths of Japanese infrastructure development. "For Line No.4 construction, we need to build a tunnel under the Nile River and construct multiple tunnels not horizontally but with vertical alignment, which is technically challenging. While this construction method is new for Egyptian engineers, many experienced experts in railway projects from Japan, Europe, and other regions are participating in this project. We believe it would be a good opportunity for them to acquire new technologies through collaboration."

Japanese company representatives and local engineers discussing at the construction site (Photo: Mitsubishi Corporation)

Japanese company representatives discussing with NAT (Photo: Oriental Consultants Global Co., Ltd.)

At the same time, Mr. Nishikori faced difficulties in securing local talent due to the strict qualification requirements set by the National Authority for Tunnels (NAT), the implementing agency under Egypt's Ministry of Transport. He notes that they are overcoming problems by building a relationship of trust with NAT. "Given that experienced Egyptian engineers tend to move to neighboring countries for higher salaries, we explained to NAT that easing qualification requirements would help the development of domestic human resources. Through close communication and persistent negotiation with NAT, we are gradually gaining a certain level of their understanding," he states.

Mr. Nishikori also mentions, "I am staying at an accommodation near tourist sites, and nearby hotels are thriving, partly due to the trial opening of the GEM. If the launch of the Line No.4 alleviates traffic congestion and improves access, Egypt's tourism industry is likely to become even more vibrant." He also explains the economic effects that will be brought about by the opening of Line 4. "Foreign companies are increasingly entering the Egyptian market. Recently, the manufacturing and sales of Oronamin C Drink, a vitamin drink made in Japan, has begun in Egypt. I hope that the development of the transportation network will attract investments from Japan, ultimately contributing to job creation for Egyptians."

In addition to the construction of Line No.4, the Government of Egypt is proceeding with the development of the New Administrative Capital, located approximately 45 km east of Cairo. In 2022, some government officials started operations in the New Administrative Capital, advancing large-scale urban development. Japan will continue to respond to the Government of Egypt's expectations for its excellent technology and expertise, contributing to Egypt's economic development by expanding transportation infrastructure and other means.

*1 See Part V, 2(2) on page 146.

Stories from the Field 4

Mine Clearance Expertise from Cambodia Protecting the People of Ukraine

Cambodia is among the countries most affected by landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) as a consequence of the Vietnam War and the subsequent civil war. While the Government of Cambodia places landmine and UXO clearance as a national priority, the Cambodian Mine Action Centre (CMAC) plays a central role as the leading government agency in these demining efforts.

Since 1998, Japan has provided consistent support for Cambodia's mine action efforts, supplying equipment, training personnel, funding research and development, and offering technical assistance to strengthen institutional capacity. Having made steady progress in clearing mines within its own territory, Cambodia now holds the world's largest record of demined land area and is recognized as a global leader in mine action. Drawing on its experience and expertise, Cambodia has also contributed to mine action in countries such as Colombia, Laos, Angola, and Iraq through training and other initiatives.

Japan and CMAC are also working together to support mine action in Ukraine, where Russian aggression continues. Since 2023, they have conducted training for Ukrainian government officials on the use of demining equipment, offered capacity-building programs on mine risk education for local communities, and hosted site visits for senior government officials.

In July 2024, Japan provided two Anti-personnel Landmine Clearance Machines (so called demining machines) to the State Emergency Service of Ukraine. The machines were developed by Nikken Corporation, which had previously collaborated with CMAC in Cambodia to develop demining machines. President AMEMIYA Makoto recalls, "The former president of Nikken had a vision of creating a playground where Cambodian children could run around freely. Despite having no prior knowledge of landmines or explosives, the company embarked on the development of a demining machine and after five years, succeeded in creating the world's first and only shovel-type demining machine." The hydraulic excavator-type machine offers greater versatility than traditional bulldozer-type models. By changing the front attachments, it can carry out a wide range of operations for various purposes, even in environments with high risk of explosives. Furthermore, by switching to attachments designed for debris transport or infrastructure construction, it also supports reconstruction efforts even after mine clearance. Highly acclaimed internationally, these machines are now used in 12 countries, with specifications tailored to the unique conditions of each. Mr. Amemiya explains, "In Ukraine, we faced the challenge of not being able to inspect the site directly. However, we studied the conditions through photos and videos, and received direct feedback from the Ukrainian side. As a result, we added protective covers to prevent debris from scattering from the sides of the demining machine." Reports from the field indicate that "the latest demining machines have already been tested under actual conditions, with deminers effectively utilizing their capabilities." Japan continues to supply demining machines, and as of December 2024, all 12 planned units have been shipped.

Mr. Amemiya (far left) participating in the handover ceremony of demining machines in Ukraine, together with then Ambassador to Ukraine Matsuda, Mr. Ihor Klymenko, Minister of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, and Mr. Matsunaga, Director of JICA Ukraine Office (Photo: Nikken Corporation)

Mr. Rithisak from CMAC (front right) training personnel from Ukraine's State Emergency Service on landmine and UXO detection using a metal detector equipped with a Japanese radar system (Photo: JICA)

Mr. Srey Rithisak, a CMAC staff member with extensive experience in equipment development, operations, and management in collaboration with Japanese companies, is now contributing to mine action in Ukraine, a country where he previously studied. He emphasizes the importance of continuous efforts, stating, "Unlike standard metal detectors or construction machinery, mine clearance equipment requires delicate handling. In addition to initial training, repeated practice is essential." Mr. HAYASHI Akihito, a JICA expert in landmine and UXO currently dispatched to CMAC, looks ahead to future prospects of mine action: "Through Japan's ongoing technical cooperation in Cambodia, we help strengthen CMAC's organizational capacity, enabling it to draw on its own experience to contribute more actively to mine action efforts in other countries. We also share a common understanding of the need for continued cooperation for mine action in Ukraine." Reflecting on the initiative, Mr. Amemiya remarks: "Cambodia has been a trusted partner in mine action, with whom Japan has built a relationship over many years. It is a source of pride to work alongside them to support mine action in other countries. I hope Japan will continue to be a country that promotes peace through international cooperation."

Japan will continue to contribute to mine action around the world through its ongoing cooperation with Cambodia.

Stories from the Field 5

Trainees Returning from Japan Advancing National Development and Japan-Nepal Relations

– The Network and Contributions of JICA Alumni in Nepal –

Nepal, a traditionally pro-Japan country, has the lowest income level in Southwest Asia. Its main industry, agriculture, struggles with low productivity. The country also faces a number of challenges, including its landlocked geography, natural disasters, underdeveloped social infrastructure, and governance issues.

Japan has long accepted many government officials and engineers from Nepal through JICA's training programs, supporting them in acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary to address national challenges. The JICA Alumni Association of Nepal (JAAN), whose members include former JICA trainees who have returned after completing their training or studies in Japan, not only applies what they have learnt in Japan in developing their home country, but also contributes to strengthening bilateral relations between Japan and Nepal.

JAAN was established in 1973 and currently has nearly 1,100 members. Many members hold key positions in the government as well as in major public and private institutions, forming an extensive network. While working to strengthen connections among alumni, members leverage their experiences in Japan to support Nepal's development in a wide range of areas from various positions.

For example, in the energy sector, under the leadership of Mr. Kul Man Ghising, now Managing Director of Nepal Electricity Authority, the country has achieved a stable electricity supply for its citizens, resolving the long-standing issue of scheduled power outages. In the field of education, Ms. Biva Kalika Malla Shrestha, who serves as vice-principal at a Nepali high school, is making notable contributions.

"I visited Japan in 1996 and 2018. Having received an education centered on blackboard-based, one-way instruction, I was impressed by Japan's primary education methods, which emphasize learning through practice. It made me realize that education drives national development. As an educator, I'm working to integrate Japanese teaching methods in Nepal, working with relevant institutions to enhance children's learning," she says with enthusiasm.

JAAN executive committee members paying a courtesy call on President Paudel of Nepal (Ms. Shrestha, fourth from the left; Dr. Bhusal, seventh from the left) (Photo: JAAN)

JAAN providing food assistance in areas affected by flooding that occurred in September 2024 (Dr. Bhusal at the center) (Photo: JAAN)

The current president of JAAN, Dr. Ram Chandra Bhusal, came to Japan in 1997 as a JICA trainee, where he received training in agriculture. As his desire to continue learning in Japan grew following his training, he made his way back, and over the course of seven years, earned his doctoral degree from the United Graduate School of Agricultural Sciences at Ehime University. After returning to Nepal, he made full use of the expertise he gained in Japan by working on agricultural research and development projects at international NGOs and major donor agencies. He is dedicated to improving the lives of the poor by increasing farmers' income through new agricultural technologies and production of high-value crops. Dr. Bhusal reflects on his experience and says, "I learned the importance of considering human health and plant health as one, and that management, not just agricultural technology, is crucial."

One of the characteristics of JAAN's activities, Dr. Bhusal explains, is that "JAAN always carries out its work flexibly, adapting to the needs and circumstances of the times." For example, in 2024, JAAN redirected funds typically allocated for their annual event during Nepal's traditional "Dashain" festival to provide relief supplies to flood victims, contributing to the country's recovery. In recent years, JAAN has also expanded its network beyond national borders, organizing international seminars with participation from South Asian countries, in addition to hosting domestic seminars focused on human resource development.

Furthermore, JAAN contributes to the development of friendly bilateral relations between Japan and Nepal by strengthening cooperation and fellowship with the Embassy of Japan in Nepal, JICA Nepal Office, JICA experts dispatched from Japan, and Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers, as well as by regularly engaging in discussions. A relationship of mutual cooperation has been established, with the Government of Nepal and JAAN offering support to Japan during the Great East Japan Earthquake, and the Government of Japan and JICA providing aid to Nepal following the major earthquake in 2015.

JAAN is expected to continue playing a vital role in Nepal's development while serving as a bridge between Nepal, Japan, and other countries.

Stories from the Field 6

Voices of Japanese Personnel Working in International Organizations

– Tackling the Challenges of Forced Displacement –

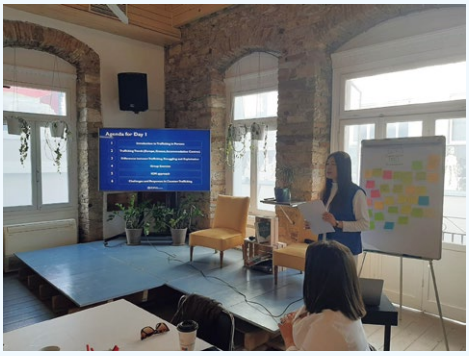
In 2024, Japan celebrates the 50th anniversary of the start of its Junior Professional Officer (JPO) Programme.*1 More than 2,000 young Japanese professionals have been dispatched to international organizations through this programme, and as of the end of 2023, approximately half of the 960 Japanese staff (at professional level or above) working in UN-related organizations are former JPOs. Thus, the JPO Programme plays a significant role as the first step for Japanese nationals pursuing careers in international cooperation as staff members of international organizations. The author of this column, Ms. SHINOZAKI Tomomi, is among those who have benefited from the programme and is set to assume a regular staff position as of January 2025.

Refugee Camp Visit Leading to a Career in International Cooperation

After visiting Hiroshima on an elementary school field trip and hearing testimonies from atomic bomb survivors, I began to think, "I want to contribute to global peace through meaningful roles in international cooperation." To identify the fields I aspired to work in, I actively took part in internships both in Japan and overseas as well as study abroad programs during my student years. While studying Post-war Recovery Studies in graduate school, I traveled to Uganda to conduct research for my master's thesis. Engaging directly with refugees and hearing their stories firsthand shaped my desire to pursue a career at the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Witnessing the struggles of people forced to flee and rebuild their lives in countries with different languages and cultures, I became determined to support displaced individuals and address the root causes of forced migration.

After completing graduate school, I joined a Japanese NGO and provided assistance to displaced persons in South Sudan and Uganda. I then served as a UN Volunteer at IOM Nigeria through the "Program for Global Human Resource Development for Peacebuilding and Development"*2 before being appointed as a JPO at IOM Greece in January 2022, where I supported efforts to combat trafficking in persons.*3 Since April 2023, I have been working on IOM Somalia's peacebuilding programme from its Kenya-based Sub-Office. Initially, I was primarily responsible for project formulation and reporting on ongoing projects. Over time, I was entrusted with managing projects that I had developed myself. I am currently tasked with a broad scope of work, including coordination with the Somali government, donors, and other international organizations, as well as the recruitment of local staff, selection of local NGOs as implementing partners, budget management, and monitoring activities.

Refugee women working in a market within a refugee settlement in Uganda to make a living (Photo: SHINOZAKI Tomomi)



The author conducting training on counter-trafficking in persons for IOM Greece staff (Photo: SHINOZAKI Tomomi)

Addressing the Root Causes of Forced Displacement

In Somalia, the activities of violent extremist groups, notably Al-Shabaab, have been a significant cause of forced migration and human suffering. Therefore, the Government of Somalia aims to dismantle these groups by encouraging voluntary defections and providing rehabilitation and reintegration support for "low-risk" defectors. Many women who have left these groups, such as the wives of the combatants, face serious challenges including discrimination and alienation from local communities and the risk of retaliation from the groups, despite not being directly involved in killings or acts of violence. Many are also victims of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). The project I am currently managing provides psychosocial care, vocational training, and other support to low-risk defectors from violent extremist groups, including such women, as well as marginalized young people who are at high risk of being recruited by these groups. The project aims to promote their socio-economic reintegration and meaningful participation in society. At IOM Somalia, I am based in the Nairobi Support Office in the Kenyan capital. I regularly communicate with local staff via phone, social media, email, and online meetings. While it is difficult to visit project sites in person, I find great fulfillment in delivering much-needed assistance in hard-to-reach areas through cooperation with local staff and partner NGOs who share the same aspirations. I am committed to continuing my work on addressing the issues that cause forced displacement and supporting those affected by it.

SHINOZAKI Tomomi
International Organization for Migration (IOM)
Somalia Office

*1 Established by a 1961 resolution of the United Nations Economic and Social Council, this program allows international organizations to accept young professionals on the condition that their costs are covered by their respective governments.

*2 See 40 on page 50.
*3 See 51 on page 56.