Access to Information Across the Water

—ICT Assistance for Oceania —

At the Pacific ICT Ministerial Forum HRH Princess Pilolevu Tuita of the Kingdom of Tonga (center), Mr. Murakami (furthest right) with USP counterparts (Photo: Mr. Murakami)

Many islands are scattered in the South Pacific Ocean like a star-filled night sky. The Oceanian island countries have a diverse mix of traditional cultures which have been passed down year after year. At the same time, they incorporate techniques from outside the region and form their own uniquely distinct societies. The University of the South Pacific (USP (*1)) provides higher education for those various countries across the ocean. Its main campus is in Fiji. USP also has campuses and learning centers in the member countries and region (*2), and its satellite communication system offers distance learning.

In the member countries and region of USP, it is difficult to gain access to information because, for instance, information sources are limited to radio in some countries such as the remote islands of Tuvalu and Kiribati. Japan, since 1998, has provided assistance for education and development of related facilities, among others, which utilize information communication technology (ICT), the communication tool of USP. In addition, The Japan-Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) Summit Meeting (PALM), held in Okinawa in 2003, proposed that USP should be a center for ICT.

Mr. Shinya Murakami is actively involved in this ICT technical cooperation project (*3) as a JICA junior expert. When he was a university student, Mr. Murakami volunteered in Angola in Africa, and after he started working, he went to the Federated States of Micronesia as a Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteer (JOCV). Being interested in international cooperation, he has been engaged in this line of work.

Based on his professional experience in an ICT company, Mr. Murakami provides support as a network expert, and also helps to ensure that the ICT experts dispatched from Japan and USP members can smoothly carry the project forward. Regarding the USP project, he said, "ICT holds a huge potential for overcoming the geographical conditions which are specific to the Oceania region. Even within the same Oceania region, there are large digital divides between economically large and small countries, and even within the respective countries, between the mainland and remote islands. The ultimate goal is to contribute to closing these divides through technology transfers and human resources development." Thanks to the great efforts made by members including late Mr. Makino, International Cooperation Specialist of JICA, Buildings A and B of the Japan-Pacific ICT Centre were completed in July 2010. Coupled with the various technical cooperation programs, it is expected that the centre will develop into a center for ICT education and ICT development in the region. Vice-Chancellor of USP, Professor Rajesh Chandra, said, "In order to further improve the livelihoods of Oceanian people, USP will draw on everything it has — its knowledge, human resources, and infrastructure. I am very grateful to have this opportunity given by the Government and people of Japan."

Mr. Murakami senses that the project is running steadily and that ICT is spreading in the region. "ICT is used in various ways by the region and culture. I hope USP will turn out talented ICT personnel who will take the lead in exchanging ideas, in order to overcome the geographical vacuum in the Oceanian region. I believe the role of this project is to support establishment of a foundation for this." Mr. Murakami has high expectations for potential in ICT to develop at Oceania.

Information is being shared across the blue sky and emerald blue ocean. The South Pacific is creating societies diverse like a painter's palette, where tradition is mixed with cutting edge techniques.

Fiji

Project center, Japan-Pacific ICT Centre (USP Fiji Laucala Campus) (Photo: Mr. Murakami)

*1   The University of the South Pacific. An international university whose members are the 12 countries and region of the Pacific Ocean region.
*2   The member countries are, beginning with Fiji, Vanuatu, Samoa, Tonga, Kiribati, Solomon Islands, Marshall Islands, Tuvalu, Nauru, Niue, Tokelau, and Cook Islands.
*3   USP ICT capacity development project