

Public-Private Cooperation for Former ODA Recipient Country —Automobile Technical Training in Saudi Arabia—



Saudi representatives at the WorldSkills Competition in Shizuoka (center, Mr. Othman; left, Mr. Kaito) (Photo: Mr. Kaito)

The city of Jeddah is an economic center located in southwestern Saudi Arabia. The city is home to a vocational and technical training school that is unique in the world: the Saudi-Japanese Automobile High Institute (SJAHI). The institute was established with the cooperation of the public and private sectors of Japan and Saudi Arabia^{(*)1}.

In Saudi Arabia, while its abundant natural resources including oil are driving the economic growth, the high unemployment rate of young people consisting of nearly half of the country's population has been a problem. To address this issue, the government has promoted to replace foreigners making up half of the workforce, with Saudis what is called Saudization (Saudi Arabian employment expansion policy). In this context, responding to a request from the Government of Saudi Arabia, Japan began to cooperate via ODA for automobile technical training in 2001 as the demand for automobile mechanics was expected to increase in the country, due to the high ratio of car ownership. When Saudi Arabia graduated from an ODA recipient in 2008, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry of Japan took over the program from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) in September 2009, and since then has continued to provide assistance through the Japan International Cooperation Center (JICE) and the Japan International Cooperation System (JICS)^{(*)2}.

At SJAHI, a two-year automobile mechanic curriculum is offered to develop human resources in the area of after sales services. Graduates are then employed at maintenance shops of Japanese automobile dealers across Saudi Arabia and carry out automobile inspection and maintenance as well as customer service work. In August 2010, approximately 1,300 people graduated from the seventh class of the automobile mechanic development program. Some of the accomplished students have become SJAHI instructors. There are now 12 instructors who are expected to independently lead the

management of SJAHI in the future.

Mr. Shigeru Kaito was dispatched to SJAHI as an expert. After joining Nissan Motor in 1970, Mr. Kaito received language training in Arabic in Syria and has been consistently involved in after sales services with the company. He recalled that when he arrived in Jeddah as an expert in 2006, he was glad to have the opportunity to give something back to the Arabic people.

Mr. Kaito also says that he initially had concerns when he arrived. In addition to giving guidance in a country with a different culture and customs from Japan, he was concerned if the companies of automobile industry compete each other within Japan and Saudi Arabia could collaborate to develop an assistance mechanism. When he actually stepped foot into the institute, however, he says he was "very much encouraged" to see the CEOs of Japanese automobile dealers, SJAHI management, and all the school staff pledging to overcome their respective corporate interests and work together towards their shared goal of Saudization. This gave Mr. Kaito a renewed resolution to fulfill his own mission.

In the WorldSkills Competition in 2007, then-SJAHI instructor Mr. Othman participated as a representative of Saudi Arabia and received high marks. He currently works at the Mazda dealership in Jeddah. Looking back on the competition, Mr. Othman says, "I sincerely thank Mr. Kaito who taught me everything kindly and intensely like a father."

Including Mr. Othman, the skills and attitudes of the SJAHI graduates towards the work are highly regarded by the Saudi Arabian Government and automobile industry. Mr. Kaito, who has newly introduced policy management to SJAHI and is working with an expert from a new, different carmaker to strengthen its leadership, said, "The next crucial task is to ensure make their management self-reliant. Training the young people of Saudi Arabia is well worth our efforts." Mr. Kaito places his hopes on the Saudi Arabian youths.



Teaching the instruction method for using the fault diagnosis equipment (Photo: Mr. Kaito)

^{(*)1} Japanese side: Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI); Japan Automobile Manufacturers Association, Inc. (JAMA)
Saudi Arabian side: General Organization for Technical Education and Vocational Training (GOTEVOT)

^{(*)2} Saudi-Japanese Automobile High Institute Project Phases 1 and 2 (Technical cooperation project), Phase 3 (September 2009 onwards, METI project)