

Chapter 5

Japan's Diplomacy Open to the Public

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Section 1

Japanese Society and People Deepening Their Ties with the World

1 Japan's Growth and Acceptance of Foreign Nationals

(1) Growth Strategy and Visa System

At the end of March 2016, the Government of Japan formulated the “Tourism Vision to Support the Future of Japan,” heading toward a new nation-building as an “advanced tourism nation.” It set new goals for the number of foreign visitors to 40 million in 2020 and 60 million in 2030. In the vision, it is stated that the Government will engage in strategic relaxation of visa requirements for the five countries whose nationals are currently required to obtain a visa to visit Japan (China, Russia, India, the Philippines and Viet Nam) out of 20 countries and regions that have big markets of potential tourists to Japan. Based on the above mentioned vision, MOFA had thus far been implementing a relaxation of visa requirements with these countries, including simplification of application forms and expansion of target persons for visa issuance from the perspective of promoting people-to-people exchanges, strengthening bilateral relations, etc. However, in 2020, the number of foreign nationals visiting Japan fell due to the impact of tighter border control measures mutually imposed by Japan and various foreign countries with the aim of halting the spread of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19), which subdued the total number of foreign visitors to

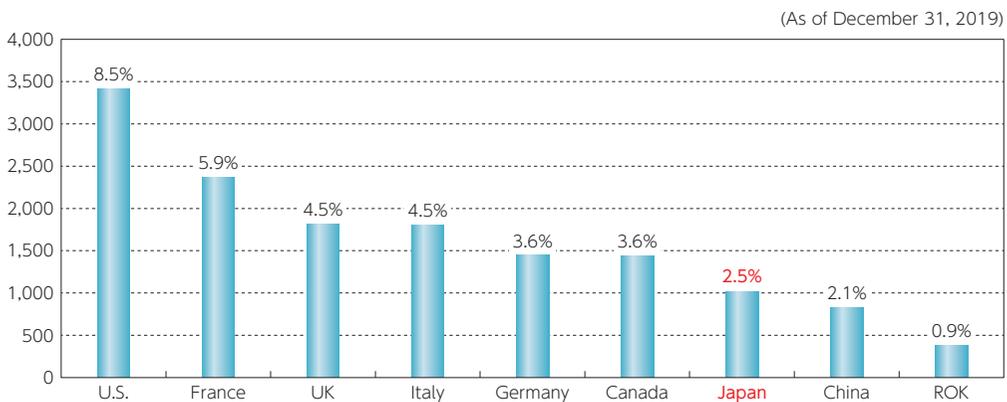
approximately 4.12 million. Relaxing visa requirements is effective to a certain extent for promoting people-to-people exchanges and Japan's economic growth. As such, the relaxation of visa requirements should be further promoted, while assessing the COVID-19 situation inside and outside Japan.

Meanwhile, intensifying visa control, as one part of border control measures designed to prevent the entry of criminals and foreign visitors planning to work illegally, as well as those who could become victims of human trafficking, is also an important challenge. MOFA will keep working on the relaxation of visa requirements in order to increase the number of foreign visitors to Japan while maintaining “Japan as the safest country in the world,” and to contribute to making Japan a tourism-oriented country both in quality and quantity through attracting the wealthy, repeating and younger visitors. MOFA intends to carry out this relaxation of visa requirements while taking into account bilateral relations, its diplomatic significance and other factors in a comprehensive manner, as well as considering their balance with border control measures.

(2) Hosting Foreign Human Resources and Their Social Integration

Since the financial crisis in 2008, the number of long-term foreign residents in Japan had kept decreasing until 2012 when the trend turned upward.

Number of Staff Members at UN-related Agencies by Nationality (professional or higher)



Note 1: This graph includes the number of professional staff members or higher with a term of one year or longer.
 Note 2: The percentage represents the ratio against the total number of employees (40,241).

Source: Created by MOFA from UN document (CEB/2020/HCLM/HR/12)

While the aging of the population continues with a low birth rate resulting in the decrease of the population, it is important for Japan to secure capable human resources, in Japan or from abroad, in order to further vitalize Japan's economy and improve its competitiveness. In December 2018, the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act was revised, and Japan started accepting foreign human resources by way of introducing the status of residence "Specified Skilled Worker" in April 2019. It is expected that the number of competent foreign nationals living in Japan will further increase in the future.

MOFA cooperates with the relevant ministries and agencies on the above-mentioned policies while also taking into account the circumstances surrounding COVID-19. As part of that exercise, it hosts the "International Forum on Acceptance of Foreign Nationals and Their Integration into Japan," aiming to encourage debate among the people by providing opportunities to discuss concrete challenges and measures. At the forum that MOFA co-hosted with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in February 2021 under the theme of "Disseminating Information to Foreign Residents in Japan: The Current Situation and Issues seen in the COVID-19 Pandemic," good practice and issues associated with the

dissemination of information to foreign nationals in Japan during the pandemic of COVID-19 were introduced, and a rigorous discussion took place.

2 Japanese Taking Active Roles in the International Community

(1) Japanese Taking Active Roles in International Organizations

International organizations are founded to serve the common interest of the international community. People of various nationalities join these international organizations, and draw on their skills and traits to create an environment where people of the world can live in peace and enjoy prosperity. There are many international organizations working to solve global issues that cannot be addressed by individual countries, such as conflict prevention/peacebuilding, sustainable development, food, energy, climate change, disaster prevention, health, education, labor, human rights/humanitarian issues and gender equality.

Talented individuals with specialized knowledge, passion and capabilities to contribute to the world's interests are needed so that international organizations can competently perform their duties and fulfill the roles expected of them. As a member country of these international

Column

**Voices of People Who Have Been Supporting the United Nations' Activities
Promoting Global Innovation Through the Spread of Intellectual Property Systems and Services
Takagi Yoshiyuki, former Assistant Director General, World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)**

In 1986 when I was a patent examiner at the Japan Patent Office, I applied for the Junior Professional Officer (JPO) Programme that deploys participants overseas, through which I had the opportunity to work at the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) in Geneva. As I had gone straight into working at an international organization without any prior experience of studying or working abroad, I went through a baptism of fire during the two-year program abroad. Through the JPO Program under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, participants are encouraged to take regular posts at international organizations. However, due to the fierce global competition, I was not employed formally immediately after the program, but returned to the Japan Patent Office instead. I then had the opportunity to participate in the negotiations team for the agreement on intellectual property of the GATT Uruguay Round. Through that, I was then seconded to the Permanent Mission of Japan to the International Organizations in Geneva, where I gained experience in international negotiations and successfully built up a network of personal relationships. In 1994, I was appointed as the Director of WIPO's Industrial Property Information Division.

In 2004, the Japanese Staff Association of International Organizations in Geneva (JSAG) was established as a cross-cutting, voluntary organization of Japanese staff working in international organizations in Geneva. I was involved in its establishment and, after that, have participated in its activities as its President, working in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Permanent Mission of Japan to the International Organizations in Geneva to enable outstanding Japanese to play more active roles in international organizations. While the pool of people has gradually expanded and some talented people have emerged and taken an executive post, there is still much room for growth.

My work in WIPO was to develop global innovation ecosystems* through the expansion of intellectual property systems and information services, and, through that, resolve global issues. During my time in office, I contributed to achievements in the following areas: management of strategic policy and formulation of budgets and activity plans; construction of new buildings at the WIPO Headquarters; opening of the WIPO Singapore and Tokyo Offices; development of the Industrial Property Automation System (IPAS) that connected 90 developing countries; establishment of the Master's Degree in Intellectual Property (MIP) program at Africa University; setting up of on-line intellectual property courses; building of global databases for intellectual property information; development and implementation of a state-of-the-art neural machine translation system for the translation of technical documents, as well as an AI-based image search tool for device trademarks; and launched a data-driven, global digital timestamping service for the management of innovation output.

In 2008, I stood as a candidate for the WIPO Director General election with the support of the Government of Japan. Although I did not make it to the final ballot, I left a good result. After that, I served as the Assistant Director General for two terms, during which I oversaw the digital transformation of WIPO.

The predecessor of Intellectual Property (BIRPI) established in 1893, and WIPO became a specialized agency of the UN in 1974. For half a century after that, WIPO's activities expanded as it surfed the waves of the globalization of the world economy and the growth of the knowledge economy brought about by technological innovation.

As a resource-poor country that had developed on the basis of its technologies and knowledge, Japan's strategies, policies and knowledge are invaluable to many countries. Japan has much to contribute to a world that faces the need to address global environmental issues, and a world that needs to transform into a more sustainable place that is supported by knowledge and rich culture.

I retired at the end of 2020 after working for 28 years in this international organization. Through this experience, I can say with conviction that it feels wonderfully rewarding to be able to fully apply your creativity and efforts, and play an active role at the leading edge of the world. I certainly hope that more Japanese people will take on active roles in international organizations.



WIPO Headquarters building during the COVID-19 lockdown (May)



The author addressing staff at the 2020 New Year celebration (February, WIPO Headquarters)

*Innovation ecosystems: Refers to environments in which various actors, such as administrative organizations, universities, research institutes, and companies, are mutually involved in the constant creation of technological innovation.

Column

**Voices of People Who Have Been Supporting the United Nations' Activities
Reflecting on 2020, the Year of the COVID-19 Pandemic****Noda Shoko, Resident Representative, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) India**

The novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) was spreading across the world including India when I was entering my second year as Resident Representative in UNDP India. My plans to travel to various project sites and to meet stakeholders on the ground had to be changed. Instead, I had to quickly introduce the new working-from-home modality to about 500 staff members in mid-March. A week later, the nation-wide lockdown started.

Immediately after the lockdown came into force, domestic and foreign media channels started to show images of highways crowded with migrant workers who had suddenly lost their jobs and were forced to walk for several hundreds of kilometres from large cities back to their native villages. In India, more than 80 percent of the work force is in the informal sector, such as street vendors and auto rickshaw drivers. With the staggered economic growth, there is a strong possibility that many such workers and their families will be falling back into poverty. It is truly heart-breaking.

Days were filled with pressure and anxiety at the start of this unprecedented situation. For instance, I had to launch a new COVID-19 response programme as quickly as possible, make relevant adjustments to the ongoing programmes, manage more than 500 staff members virtually, hold endless online meetings outside of regular working hours with the Bangkok Regional Hub as well as the New York Headquarters despite the significant time difference, and worry at the same time about my parents in Japan. I had worked in nine countries before India, and thought that I had experienced a wide range of crises including recovery after civil wars and natural disasters, climate change, and handling sensitive political dialogues. However, despite 22 years of these experiences in the UN, the COVID-19 pandemic called for a different level of crisis management skills altogether.

With the end of the pandemic nowhere in sight, it has been clearly challenging to implement the various programmes. UNDP staff are located in every state and union territory of India, and programs are run through these staff and in partnership with CSOs on the ground. As the safety of our staff is the first priority in implementing programmes, we make sure that they adhere to the COVID-19 safety measures. I, too, visit our programme sites together with my team. The other day I had an opportunity to visit a community and to hand over relief supplies to female waste collectors supported by our project for plastic waste management. We extended our heartfelt gratitude to those women, who were making a living cleaning unsafe waste including disposable masks.

The year 2020 was full of depressing news and heavy workloads. To express the appreciation of the senior management in the UNDP Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific for the hard work by all the staff, at the end of the year, I was requested to coordinate production of a fun video. The video featured short dance clips of all Resident Representatives in each country in Asia, plus the Regional Bureau Director and Deputy Regional Director, with the song "Can't Stop the Feeling!" by the popular US singer, Justin Timberlake. This unique video capturing the dances of 25 managers was well received by all the staff.

Is the UN making a meaningful contribution to India and the world to combat the pandemic? Am I living up to expectations? For the past one year, I kept asking myself these questions while doing my best every day. It is by no means easy to ensure that all my colleagues remain united, stay healthy and motivated, and remain productive at the level they used to be or even higher. In this unprecedented crisis, I strive to be an empathetic leader, who stands with the team.



"Tama," a feline companion, who offers solace through long working hours at home. In this photo, Tama is sitting on the author's lap and staring at the screen. (Photo: ©UNDP)



Presenting relief supplies and expressing appreciation to the waste collectors, who continue to work hard to keep our environment clean in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis. (Photo: ©UNDP)

organizations, Japan, in addition to policy contributions, makes assessed and voluntary contributions. Furthermore, it can be said that the activities and services of Japanese staff are, in a broad sense, also Japan's contributions.

Currently, Japanese nationals are serving in important posts at international organizations including the UN. In particular, Japanese nationals are actively performing leadership roles at the World Customs Organization (WCO), Asian Development Bank (ADB) and other organizations. In addition, for many years Japan has sent a succession of Japanese judges to international courts such as the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) and the International Criminal Court (ICC). In light of the importance of international organizations for addressing global challenges, securing important posts that contribute to strengthening ties between Japan and international organizations, including as the heads of international organizations, is an important challenge. On the other hand, important posts, including as heads of international organizations, are not something that can be secured overnight. It is necessary to make a finely-tuned response by adopting a long-term perspective while cultivating appropriate personnel.

Currently, over 900 Japanese nationals are working as professional-level or higher-level staff in UN-related agencies around the world, which is a record figure. With the aim of further increasing such Japanese personnel, the Government of Japan has set the objective of increasing the number of Japanese staff working at UN-related agencies to 1,000 by 2025. To this end, in collaboration with universities, related ministries and agencies, and organizations, MOFA is actively recruiting, training and supporting Japanese nationals who can play active roles and make a contribution on the global stage. As part of this effort, MOFA runs the Junior Professional Officer (JPO) Programme that sends young Japanese nationals to positions in international organizations for a term of two

years in principle with the aim of gaining regular staff positions in such organizations after the term. MOFA also runs a program to send mid-career and higher Japanese nationals who can be future managerial candidates. In addition to increasing the number of Japanese staff through these efforts, MOFA is also working to coordinate with international organizations and gather information for the employment and promotion of Japanese staff.

MOFA provides useful and timely information such as vacancy announcements to Japanese candidates seeking positions at international organizations through the website for MOFA's Recruitment Center for International Organizations, mailing lists, and social media such as Facebook and Twitter, and provides support related to application procedures for such positions. Public relations efforts include holding guidance seminars (including online) to enhance the attractiveness of working at international organizations and to deliver methods to apply for a job, and holding recruitment seminars when senior officials or human resource experts from international organizations visit Japan.

A larger number of talented Japanese people taking on active roles in international organizations will further enhance Japan's presence in the international community more visibly. Japanese staff are involved in various fields and duties at different locations, but they share the same goal of solving various issues facing the international community (see the Columns on pages 326 and 327).

Moreover, increasing the number of globally-minded human resources who have professional experience at international organizations and who can play an active role on the international stage will in turn lead to enrichment of the human resources of Japan, contributing to the development of Japan as a whole.

MOFA will continue to be even more active in undertaking measures that increase the number of Japanese nationals working in international organizations and support their promotion, so that

a larger number of competent Japanese nationals who have high aspirations and passion to contribute to solving global issues can take part in international organizations.

(2) Activities of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

A Development Cooperation

In the interest of leveraging the capabilities of organizations outside of the Government of Japan to conduct all-Japan diplomacy, the role that NGOs play in development cooperation is expanding significantly, as organizations that provide support to various nations, including developing countries.

Through NGOs, MOFA actively provides Official Development Assistance (ODA) via financial cooperation in the form of grant assistance for economic and social development projects implemented by Japanese NGOs in developing countries and regions (Grant Assistance for Japanese NGO Projects). The projects cover a wide range of assistance, including health, medical and hygienic care (maternal and child health, countermeasures for tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS, water/hygiene, etc.), rural development (environmental development/technological improvement for agriculture), support for people with disabilities (vocational training/job seeking assistance, provision of wheelchairs for children, etc.), education (building schools, etc.), disaster risk reduction, and the clearance of landmines and unexploded ordnances (UXO). In 2020, 62 Japanese NGOs

implemented 104 projects in 31 countries and regions including Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Central and South America under the Grant Assistance for Japanese NGO Projects (see the Column on page 330). Moreover, subsidies are provided with the objective of supporting activities that will enhance the project execution capabilities and expertise of Japanese NGOs (NGO Project Subsidies).

Additionally, Japan Platform (JPF) was established in 2000 with the aim of conducting emergency humanitarian assistance more effectively and promptly through cooperation and partnerships among the Government, NGOs, and business communities at the time of large-scale natural disasters or conflicts.

As of the end of December 2020, 44 NGOs are members of JPF. In 2020, JPF launched Emergency Response to Locust Crisis in South Asia and Africa, Emergency Response to the Taal Volcanic Eruption Disaster in the Philippines, Emergency Response to Cyclone Amphan in Bangladesh, Coronavirus (COVID-19) Emergency Response, and emergency response to the explosion in Beirut, Lebanon, as well as implemented response programs for humanitarian crises in Bangladesh, South Sudan and their neighboring countries, and Uganda, Venezuela, Iraq, Syria and their neighboring countries.

In this way, NGOs assume important roles in the area of development cooperation and humanitarian assistance. Identifying such NGOs as partners in international cooperation, MOFA and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) provide indirect support for NGO activities through various policy measures with the aim of enhancing their capacity and expertise as well as developing human resources so that NGOs can strengthen the foundation for their activities and perform further tasks. In 2020, MOFA implemented four programs - namely, the “NGO Consultant Scheme,” “NGO Study Program,” “NGO Intern Program” and “NGO Study Group.”

The usual schedule for the general meeting of



Children who have received a food basket at a refugee camp in Lebanon (© PARCIC (PARC Interpeoples' Cooperation))

Column

Toward Sustainable School Library Administration

Action with Lao Children (ALC) (Non-profit organization)

While all schools have libraries (or reading rooms) in Japan, only 100 secondary schools out of 1,500 secondary schools are equipped with a library in Laos. Hence, reading environments are not adequately developed despite the importance that the Lao government attaches to them. Even in Vientiane, the capital of Laos, there are only several bookstores. We naturally come to realize, through interactions with local people, that they may need more skills in reading comprehension, expressing themselves in writing, and information processing. Access to books and libraries is of vital importance in a child's development.

Hence, in the regions with inadequate educational environments, Action with Lao Children (ALC) aims to demonstrate the potential for improving education by establishing libraries and improving the learning environment. To that end, through the Grant Assistance for Japanese NGO Project titled "Reading Promotion Project through setting up school libraries at secondary schools in Vientiane Province," we have provided three secondary schools (benefitting about 140 teachers and 2,900 students) in Phonhong District and Hinherb District of Vientiane Province with 3,000 books per school. Furthermore, under the guidance of professional Japanese architects, we have built a 120 m² library with reading and learning spaces.

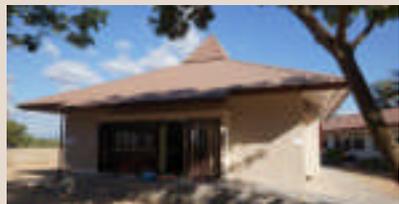
In this project, we have put particular effort into creating a system for the sustainable management of libraries. As we felt that there was a need to move from the previous management system relying solely on school teachers, to a system in which school libraries are supported by the whole region, we decided to develop a system where a library is managed through cooperation between the school and the village educational development committee, and supervised by the education bureau of the district. The participation rate in the training program was very high among members of the district education bureau and the village education development committee. In the course of training, there was a strong sense that the respective organizations recognized their roles and developed a sense of ownership that they should be responsible for protecting their own libraries.

With regard to daily library operations, the teachers in charge and the volunteer student librarians were given training on how to maintain library visitor records and book registers, and how to carry out borrowing and returning procedures on their own. Going forward, further progressive initiatives will be in the pipeline. These include taking turns reading, recitation and book-based play for teachers to make more active use of libraries for their lessons, while setting up library signboards and holding book fairs. Efforts will also be made to create mutually supportive networks among school libraries, including through using Facebook and other social media to exchange or disseminate information on respective school library activities.

In April, the whole of Laos entered lockdown due to the COVID-19. As a result, all schools were closed temporarily from the end of March till the end of May. Although this meant that the libraries built in this project had to be shut temporarily, school administrators put in place preventive measures such as increasing the number of handwashing facilities in the schools. Consequently, the libraries could be opened once again from September. In the activities carried out by our organization, movement across provincial borders was also restricted during the lockdown, which made it still impossible to dispatch experts even now. However, through using social media to connect experts with the locals online and facilitate their exchanges through Japanese expatriates, we aim to continue our activities, while remaining flexible and responsive as the situation demands.



Students enjoying reading in the completed library



Completed school library



Staff receiving online training from experts



The first meeting of the Partnership Promotion Committee of the NGO-MOFA Regular Consultation Meeting (November 24, Tokyo)

the NGO-MOFA Regular Consultation Meeting, the purpose of which is to promote dialogue and coordination with NGOs, was amended due to the impact of the spread of COVID-19, and the first meeting of the Partnership Promotion Committee to discuss support and cooperation measures for NGOs was held in November. In addition, MOFA has been working on initiatives to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) while exchanging views with various stakeholders, including NGOs, through the SDGs Promotion Roundtable and other fora. Furthermore, NGOs also participated in the Peer Review of Japan that was carried out by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)'s Development Assistance Committee (DAC) from 2019 to 2020, where they exchanged views with the DAC's review panel.

Moreover, from October 6 the EARTH CAMP online campaign was co-hosted by MOFA, JICA and the Japan NGO Center for International Cooperation (JANIC), as a substitute for Global Festa JAPAN, which was cancelled due to the impact of COVID-19.

B Partnership in Other Major Diplomatic Areas

The Government of Japan has also initiated dialogues with civil society including NGO representatives and experts on matters related to government reports to be submitted based on various conventions on human rights, third country resettlement projects, and the National Action

Plan on Women, Peace and Security based on the UN Security Council (UNSC) resolution 1325 and related resolutions.

In the area of conventional weapons, MOFA works in cooperation with NGOs in implementing clearance of mines and UXOs, and mine risk education projects, in countries affected by mines and UXOs.

Furthermore, in the area of nuclear disarmament, MOFA has been conducting dialogues with various NGOs and experts. The Government supports the activities of NGOs and others to convey atomic bomb survivors' testimonies regarding the realities of the devastation caused by the use of nuclear weapons to the international community, through the commissioned projects known as the "Special Communicator for a World without Nuclear Weapons" and the "Youth Communicator for a World without Nuclear Weapons." As of December 2020, a total of 299 Special Communicators on 101 occasions and a total of 405 Youth Communicators on 35 occasions have been dispatched to the world through these commission programs.

In regard to measures to combat transnational organized crime, coordination with civil society, such as NGOs, is essential, especially in the area of trafficking in persons. With this in mind, the Government actively exchanges opinions with NGOs and other stakeholders to identify recent victimization trends of trafficking in persons and to consult on appropriate measures to tackle it.

(3) Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers, Experts and Others

The Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV, JICA Volunteer Program) is JICA's program aimed at cooperation and assistance for the socio-economic development of the communities of developing countries, whereby Japanese nationals from 20 to 69 years of age with skills, knowledge, and experience live and work together with local people in these countries while fostering mutual understanding with these people. As of

Column

Toward the Widespread Adoption of Organic Farming in Rural Areas in Nepal

Ishikawa Hidetaka, Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteer (JOCV)
(Specialty: Vegetable Growing), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)

About 70% of the citizens follow the plow in Nepal, home to the world's highest mountain, Mount Everest. There is a significant elevation difference between the flatlands at an elevation of 200 m, and the Himalayas reaching up to 8,000 m high in the Gorkha district where my activities were based. While a wide variety of vegetables such as cabbages and tomatoes are cultivated, the rugged terrain and weak transportation infrastructure there hinder their distribution. Hence, most of the farmers operate on a small scale, living self-sufficiently and focusing mainly on local consumption. In recent years, the local road networks have improved gradually and enhanced access to major consumer areas such as Kathmandu and Pokhara. As a result, among local farmers in the Gorkha district, hopes of improvement to their income through the sale of agricultural produce to residents in the cities are growing.

JICA and Takushoku University launched a collaborative project, "Joint rural development project on agriculture in Nepal by JICA and Takushoku university" against this backdrop. I was dispatched to Nepal for this project, as a JOCV (Specialty: Vegetable Growing), to engage in activities such as improving and promoting organic farming techniques, expanding sales channels, and uncovering business needs, so as to respond to the expansion of the market and the diversification of consumer needs. I first began with activities aimed at promoting and branding organic farming. There was strong interest in organic farming in the local region, and many farmers were actively engaged in it. However, there was no way to certify agricultural produce by organic farming as legal systems of organic farming were not developed in Nepal. Therefore, I discussed the matter with the staff at the Agriculture Service Center that I had been assigned to, and it was decided to establish standards within the Gorkha district that are in line with the laws and regulations of countries such as Japan and the West. We aimed to sell vegetables certified with the "Organic Gorkha Mark" to various parts of Nepal, and visited farmers in the Gorkha district to promote organic farming. We began by teaching them the concepts of organic farming and explained its merits and demerits to them. Consequently, the number of farmers joining in our initiative increased. We also taught better and more suitable farming methods to the farmers who had already started organic farming. I surprisingly found out, through these activities, that many people are illiterate. We faced a challenge of how to pass skills to people who cannot read memos and manuals. We decided to make videos that can be watched repeatedly, in light of that. We first made videos summarizing organic farming methods and how to spray pesticides safely, and distributed them to the local community. We obtained a large and good response to the videos from the community.

However, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, I had no choice but to return to Japan. After returning to Japan, I started to grow vegetables in my own fields, using methods that can also be applied in Nepal, and to make videos for Nepal. Using social media, I contact people in the local community and continue to teach them remotely. Though I had to return home before achieving my goals, I will continue to provide support to them remotely from Japan.



Visiting farmers and explaining nature-derived organic pesticides and how to use goggles, gloves and jumpers when spraying these pesticides (the author on the left)



Teaching farmers agricultural methods (the author is fourth from the left)



With farmers who studied agricultural methods (the author is in the front row, fourth from the left)

the end of March 2020, 54,418 JOCVs have been dispatched to 98 countries in total since the program's launch in 1965. The dispatched volunteers have been engaged in about 190 types of work in nine sectors: planning/administration, commerce/tourism, public utility works, human resources, agriculture/forestry/fishery, health/medical care, mining, social welfare and energy.

Ex-volunteers have been contributing to Japanese society through initiatives such as sharing their experiences in educational, regional and business activities. These unique participatory initiatives by Japan have been highly appreciated and expected both within and outside of Japan, including recipient countries.

JOCVs who had been working in recipient countries sequentially returned to Japan on a temporary basis from mid-March in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The deployment of JOCVs scheduled to be carried out from April was also postponed. From the end of November 2020, these JOCVs sequentially went back and were deployed to Viet Nam and other recipient countries that satisfied certain conditions.

JICA experts with specialized knowledge, insights, skills, and experience are dispatched to governmental agencies and other sites in developing countries. The experts provide high-level policy advice and transfer necessary skills and knowledge to government officials and engineers. Furthermore, they work together with their counterparts to develop, promote and disseminate technologies and systems that are suitable to each country's context. The experts aim to enhance comprehensively the capacity of developing countries so that people in these countries can tackle their development challenges by themselves. The experts engage in their activities while considering elements of each developing country such as its regional characteristics, its historical background and its language.

8,012 experts were newly dispatched to 105 countries and regions in FY2019. The experts actively engage in a wide range of sectors, including

those addressing basic human needs such as health/medical care and water/sanitation, and those of socio-economic development such as legal system development and urban planning. The experts contribute to the social and economic development of developing countries and to fostering mutual trust between Japan and developing countries through their activities.

A large number of JICA experts also had to temporarily return to Japan due to the COVID-19 pandemic. They had been carrying out their duties by staying in touch with their counterparts remotely while being on standby in Japan. These experts sequentially went back to recipient countries from June 2020, based on conditions such as the circumstances of these countries.

3 Cooperation with Local Governments

Regional revitalization is one of the priority issues of the Cabinet. MOFA actively works on the issue and strives to deploy measures that strengthen comprehensive diplomatic capabilities through collaboration with regions.

In Japan, as part of efforts to support regional revitalization, the Foreign Minister and respective prefectural governors invite members of diplomatic corps, foreign chambers of commerce and industry, and tourism-related parties in Japan to the Iikura Guest House, co-hosting receptions and setting up booths as means of broadly promoting the various attractive qualities of regions to audiences both in Japan and abroad. In 2020, the Foreign Minister co-hosted a reception with Iwate Prefecture. The reception was successful with approximately 250 attendees. In addition to publicizing Iwate Prefecture's tourism, food ingredients, and traditional arts and crafts, the reception also served as an opportunity to broadly convey the prefecture's diverse appeal and initiatives, including showing the course of its recovery from the Great East Japan Earthquake up to now, introducing the Rugby World Cup 2019 matches, which were held at Kamaishi, outlining the Host



Foreign Minister Motegi presenting a greeting at a reception co-hosted with the Governor of Iwate Prefecture (February 7, Iikura Guest House, MOFA, Tokyo)



Lacquering experience by attendees (February 7, Iikura Guest House, MOFA, Tokyo)

Town Initiative in the run-up to the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020, and presenting dance performances of Morioka Sansa Odori. It provided an opportunity to promote further exchange and collaboration between the co-hosting local governments and attendees, which included members of the diplomatic corps, foreign chambers of commerce and industry in Japan and company representatives.

In addition, MOFA cooperated with multiple local governments to host Regional Promotion Seminars in Tokyo, which have been held 26 times since 2008. Conducted for members of diplomatic corps, foreign chambers of commerce and industry, tourism-related companies and other organizations, these seminars highlight the characteristics, advantages and attractions of regions for industry, tourism, investment and business promotion. These events have been well received by attendees as valuable opportunities to directly experience the attractiveness of regional Japan



Diplomatic corps visiting the Karako Kagi Remains History Park, Tawaramoto Town, Nara Prefecture on Diplomats' Study Tour (November 18)

while being in Tokyo. The seminars also promote networking among local governments and foreign organization members, including diplomatic corps. A seminar that had been scheduled for September was cancelled due to the impact of COVID-19.

Furthermore, MOFA and Japanese local governments co-organized "Diplomats' Study Tours" for the diplomatic corps in Japan, with the goal of enabling them to directly experience the attractions of each region by actually visiting them. Nine individuals from diplomatic corps in Japan participated in a tour to Tawaramoto Town in Nara Prefecture in November. The diplomatic corps, including ambassadors, visited historical and cultural facilities in the community, which offered them a deeper insight into the community's industries and the local government's initiatives, and allowed them to experience the region's abundant attractions. Thus far, as a result of the tours, some local governments have started exchanges and collaborations with participating countries, while others have aimed to increase the number of visitors to such communities by utilizing connections with participating diplomatic corps.

Moreover, MOFA actively provides local governments with explanations of Japan's current diplomatic policies and opportunities to exchange views. As a part of such activities, MOFA held the "Local Partnership Cooperation Forum" in January. Part one of the Forum was the foreign policy briefing session, which consisted of a presentation by MOFA staff titled "Japan-Mekong



Local Partnership Cooperation Forum Participants interacting at an opinion exchange (January 22, Tokyo)

Cooperation.” In part two of the forum, which featured sectional meetings, participants exchanged views on the themes of “The Environment and Climate Change: Circular Economies and What Local Governments Can Do,” “Regional Internationalization through MICE,¹” and “Entrenching the Momentum of the Olympics and Paralympics: Continuing Exchanges and Regional Development.” Additionally, at a following discussion session hosted by Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Nakatani Shinichi, diplomatic corps members and other participants had a lively discussion with members of local governments.

With regard to projects overseas as a way to dispel international reputational damage stemming from the Great East Japan Earthquake, together with efforts to eliminate and ease import restrictions, MOFA conducted the comprehensive PR program called “Project to Support Overseas Presentations to Promote the Attractiveness of Regions” in China in December mainly in online formats. This programme shared the attractiveness of regions, promoted exports of prefectural products, and supported tourism for regional revitalization. To allow Chinese consumers to better experience the charms of Japan’s local regions, including tourism, culture and cuisine during the program, short movies shot in the various Japanese locations by the 50 participating local



Live broadcast event held as a part of the Project to Support Overseas Presentations to Promote the Attractiveness of Regions (December 19, Beijing, China)

governments were posted on the account of the Embassy of Japan in China with Chinese social media platform Weibo. Live-streamed events were also held in Beijing, and were delivered on the Weibo account of Sina Weibo (a Chinese Internet distribution platform provider). Chinese Key Opinion Leaders (influencers) introduced ways of enjoying Japanese regions, including cuisine, crafts and tourism, and close to 1.7 million viewers took part in the live broadcasting, which linked Hokkaido Prefecture, Miyagi Prefecture, Shizuoka Prefecture and Kochi Prefecture. In addition, during the event, a lot of collaboration events were conducted such as sales activities related to Japanese cuisine and specialties promoted by retailers, e-commerce companies and Japanese restaurants based in China.

“Regional Promotion Projects” were also conducted on a total of two occasions in Asia and North America as measures to support local governments in promoting the development of local industries and regional economies through the attractiveness of each region by making use of Japan’s diplomatic facilities overseas.

In addition, on the occasion of the receptions for celebrating the birthday of His Majesty the Emperor, which are held at diplomatic missions overseas every year, Japanese attractions such as local productions and events are presented. In

¹ MICE — A term coined from Meeting (corporate and other meetings), Incentive Travel (reward or training travels undertaken by companies and others), Convention (held by international institutions, groups, academic societies and so on) and Exhibition/Event (exhibitions, trade shows and events), which is used as a general term for all such business events.

2019, a total of 50 local governments attended these occasions in 107 diplomatic facilities to offer information on their attractiveness.

Furthermore, MOFA supports international exchanges between both Japanese and foreign local governments through various initiatives such as sister-city exchanges between Japanese local governments and their counterparts overseas and the Host Town Initiative for the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020, which were postponed until the following year. Specifically, in order to support the international activities of local governments and municipal communities, Japanese diplomats visit sister cities of Japanese municipalities in their assigned countries or regions and share opinions with officials responsible for international and economic affairs. The heads of Japanese diplomatic missions also visit local municipalities in Japan to have dialogues on the activities related to the sister city or the Host Town Initiative or deliver lectures prior to their departure for new posts or when they temporarily return to Japan. In cases where any foreign local governmental bodies wish to newly establish sister-city relationships with any Japanese municipal communities, MOFA supports them by posting the related information on the website of “Local Partnership Cooperation” (named “Glocal (global and local) Diplomatic Network”) on MOFA’s website.

MOFA utilizes Twitter to introduce various information such as the charms and attractions of Japanese local governments, from a unique perspective. Besides the presentation of the above-mentioned activities, MOFA posts various information such as “Local Cuisine,” which showcases foods rich in regional flavor, “#HostTown,”

which presents the activities and exchanges between Japanese local governments and foreign teams related to the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020, and “Local Quiz Trip,” which introduces information concerning local governments in connection with sister cities and Host-Towns.²

Additionally, as part of the overseas promotion activities for Japanese alcoholic beverages (Japanese sake, wine, shochu, awamori, etc.) produced in various parts of Japan, the diplomatic missions are actively engaged in promoting their charms, by offering tasting occasions at official dinners/lunches with government leaders of the assigned countries or foreign diplomatic corps, and by using Japanese sake on the occasion of making toasts at grand events such as the receptions for celebrating the birthday of His Majesty the Emperor.

MOFA is also working to respond to the growing demands for issues such as water treatment, waste disposal, urban transportation and anti-pollution measures caused as a result of rapid economic development in developing countries. These efforts involve making use of ODA and leveraging Japanese local governments’ experience and expertise, as well as conducting development cooperation using outstanding technologies and products from local SMEs. Through these efforts, MOFA provides support for matching these countries’ development needs with companies’ products and technologies. These efforts not only contribute to the global outreach of Japanese local companies and the development of globally competent human resources, but also to vitalizing regional economies and the Japanese economy as a whole.

² Local partnership MOFA JAPAN Twitter
<https://twitter.com/localmofa>



Column

Sending Hearts across the Seas, and Building Bonds beyond 2020: The Dawning of a New Era in Host Town Exchanges - The Paths and Miracles Woven Online

"We feel the same as you do. Let's overcome this difficult time together!"

As COVID-19 swept across the world in mid-March, the Boccia national team of Thailand sent an encouraging video message via social media to the people of Odate City and Akita Prefecture. Odate City, which has been designated as a "Leading Host Town of a Harmonious and Inclusive Society,"* hosted the Thai team in 2019 for its pre-Games training camp, and at the same time, held exchanges between the athletes and the local citizens. This message of support had been sent from Thailand, a long distance away, at the start of 2020, in the midst of widespread fear over the spread of COVID-19 around the world and concern among governments about the spread of the disease within their own countries. After receiving this video message, Odate citizens of all ages and genders, from the Mayor to elementary school students, conveyed their expressions of support and gratitude also via social media to the people of Thailand in a video message that incorporated the Thai language and music.

Sending messages expressing concern for people in a country far away across the seas—the expression of such warm relationships, conveyed through social media before the start of the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020 (Tokyo 2020) scheduled to be held in 2021, is not only a sign of the deepening bonds developed through the Host Town exchanges, but can also be regarded as proof that such ties can also be developed without physical visits between countries as a result of the immediacy of social media. Amidst the increasing difficulty of physical socializing between people around the world and the renewed search for ways of interacting, this was an event that brought us new hope.

Triggered by this, the sight of Host Towns and sister cities sending messages of encouragement and support to one another such as "Let's overcome the COVID-19 pandemic!" has become a common sight on social media. Support is actually shown in various ways. Fujieda City in Shizuoka Prefecture showed its support for its Host Town partner, Italy, by lighting up a bridge in the colors of the Italian national flag. Zermatt in Switzerland illuminated the Matterhorn with the national flag of Japan as a dynamic way of showing its support to its sister cities of Myoko City in Niigata Prefecture and Fujikawaguchiko Town in Yamanashi Prefecture.

Exchanges taking place during the COVID-19 pandemic are not limited to such exchanges of support. Tsuruoka City of Yamagata Prefecture held an online friendly match, "Japan-Moldova Remote Archery Match KAKEHASHI 2020," with its partner country Moldova across a six-hour time difference. Undaunted by the physical distance of 8,400 km, a heated match was held for about two hours in real time. This exchange through a competition highlighted the great future potential of the online medium.

To begin with, Japan is a country that is surrounded by oceans, and is physically separated from its partner countries and regions by some distance. However, a new form of exchange that takes place online has emerged, overcoming this physical distance in an instant. Information and communications technology (ICT) is making remarkable advancements



Show of support from Thailand
Show of support from Odate City, Akita Prefecture
(March 13, Photo: Odate City, Akita Prefecture)



Archery friendly match between Chişinău, Moldova and Tsuruoka City, Yamagata Prefecture
(September 12, Photo: Tsuruoka City, Yamagata Prefecture)

today. It is likely that Host Towns across Japan will carve out a new era of exchanges further ahead in the future with their desire to overcome distances and other barriers.

We are finally approaching the date for the opening day of Tokyo 2020. Many "bridges" of bonds built through the Host Town exchanges have sprung up across the overflowing rivers of emotion and inspiration. There are also new "bridges" of bonds that will be built now through Tokyo 2020, connecting Japan with countries and regions as the legacy of Tokyo 2020. We hope that these will become thicker and stronger, and look forward to a future of "hybrid" international exchanges that combine online and real-life exchanges even after the COVID-19 pandemic has ended.

**Host Towns of a Harmonious and Inclusive Society" refer to Host Towns that have implemented initiatives such as a barrier-free mindset and urban planning based on universal design, with the aim of realizing a harmonious and inclusive society through exchanges with Paralympians, and will continue with these initiatives as a legacy of the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020. Odate City is a Leading Host Town of a Harmonious and Inclusive Society that comprehensively implements leading and advanced initiatives related to a barrier-free mindset and urban planning based on universal design. For example, it has set up a Boccia court at the station in cooperation with a private company, and become the first municipality in Akita Prefecture to enforce an ordinance on sign language.