

Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers, Bringing Vitality back to Japan~Those Who Revitalize the World, Can Revitalize Japan!~

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Today, overseas volunteer programs are expected to provide young business people with opportunities to cultivate crucial business skills, such as broad horizons, high-level communication skills, and adaptability to other cultures, so that their experiences in developing nations benefit their corporations. Securing talent with cosmopolitan perspectives and sensibilities is a major challenge facing corporations that are growing ever more global in scope.

The people who participated in the JICA Overseas Cooperation Volunteer program hoping to “bring vitality to developing countries” are now back in Kansai, contributing their talents to “bring vitality to regional Japan.” For this issue, we asked them about the growing need for global talent.

【Mr. Kenichi Takabayashi, Business Marketing Department, West Japan Telephone and Telegraph Co., Osaka Branch】

(Sent to : Sri Lanka Position : Computer Technology)

Mr. Takabayashi taught IT courses at a technical college in Sri Lanka as part of the Employed Professionals Program.

After returning to Japan, he utilized his volunteer experience by working on prefectural urban development planning.

① How I Came to Participate

As a student backpacking through the developing world, seeing the poor infrastructure in many countries made me posit making a difference as one of my career goals. After entering NTT West Japan, a world-class infrastructure firm, I was inspired to join by the vitality of one of my new colleagues, who was full of stories about the countries and activities he had experienced as a Cooperation Volunteer. There was a call for infrastructure professionals in Sri Lanka, so I went to teach the IT course at the Junior College of Technology Galle, a vocational school. I held telecommunications technology courses for students and technical seminars for my colleagues there.

② Differences between Japan and Sri Lanka

Although life in Japan is more systematized, people in both countries value inter-personal relationships. There are striking differences in religious attitudes,



(Cheerful, energetic students !)

however. I was very surprised to see students greet monks by pressing their foreheads to the monks' feet.

③ Challenges

I felt acutely the gap between expectations and the reality on the ground. I struggled at first with the

national language, Sinhalese, but as I made friends I stopped having communication problems. I also gained the courage to admit when I don't understand something (lol).

④ How Are Your Experiences Reflected in Your Work?



(The Japanese-language students and I danced the Yosakoi at the village festival.)

On the ground, I was largely dependent on the locals, rather than being in charge. I

learned in Sri Lanka that involving the local people was an effective way to get results, a lesson I still use on the job.

⑤ What Is Global Talent?

I think people who are understanding and considerate toward others and are recognized as members of the global community are global talent. It is important to have an individual identity, but also to be able to find effective ways to communicate with other people.

⑥ Message to Those Considering Working Abroad or Becoming an Overseas Volunteer

Many societies are much more competitive than Japanese society, so it is necessary to speak up, be assertive, and be able to grow under pressure.



(In class)

[Mr. Kaoru Kitada, Business Marketing Department, West Japan Telephone and Telegraph Co., Osaka Branch]

(Sent to : Cambodia Position : System Engineer)

This is the colleague who inspired Mr. Takabayashi to become a volunteer!

Using the Employed Professionals Program, Mr. Kitada volunteered in Cambodia as a supervisor for the Ministry of Planning’s project to post statistical data online, and conducted distance learning classes through IP video conferencing between Cambodia and Japan.

After returning to Japan, he has been serving as an Educational Information Communication Technology (ICT) coordinator, building academic system networks .

① How I Came to Participate

Even before I became a volunteer, I was in charge of Educational ICT inside the company, and was interested in using the internet to connect schools in Japan and abroad for joint classes, which was then impossible. In particular, it was hard to work with



(Live Internet class at an orphanage)

schools in developing countries lacking infrastructure. Instead of unilaterally making donations to developing

countries, I think uniting students in

Japanese and foreign schools through the Internet allows for real-time communication, a sense of the conditions in the other country, and true interaction that leads to mutual support. I realized that I should live in a developing country myself to bring this about, and that JICA shared my vision.

② Differences between Japan and Cambodia

I think Cambodians form stronger interpersonal bonds, and they deeply respect authority figures, such as teachers.

③ Challenges

My counterparts at the Ministry of Planning were part-time workers without benefits, and seldom came to work. After a



(Teaching at the Ministry of Planning)

period of trial and error, I began teaching Web design classes for the employees. For my other tasks, establishing

infrastructure for live internet

classes, surveying Cambodian schools, and laying the groundwork for building websites to recruit Japanese schools for the project, I even worked on the weekends. With the help of my fellow volunteers, we enabled over 1000 children to experience live Internet classes over a two-year period.

④ How Are Your Experiences Reflected in Your Work?

Even after I returned to work in Japan, I was dispatched to Cambodia, where I am involved in international cooperation ventures in addition to my work, such as overseeing the transfer of ICT for bilateral exchange at the Japan Center in Cambodia, and, as a JICA Training Seminar Course Leader, planning and teaching “Training ICT Coordinators to Eradicate the Digital Divide.”

⑤ What Is Global Talent?

People who have their own ideas and a can-do spirit qualify. I sense a major shift in Japanese society these past six or seven years. I realize the lackluster economy and other factors are involved, but I think the children of the post-war baby-boom generation seem complacent, because they grew up with too many material goods.

⑥ Message to Those Considering Working Abroad or Becoming an Overseas Volunteer



(Post-Cambodia, in Rwanda for a JICA Training Seminar)

It is important to know about the people and society of the country. Then, find a need that you can fulfill.

Immersion in a multicultural, problem-solving

work and life environment every day in a foreign culture helps develop global talent.

[Reflections on the Interviews]

“The word ‘foreigner’ is only a term for comparing Japan to other countries. It’s not a big deal to me anymore!” Mr. Takabayashi has a truly global, borderless attitude. “It’s important to create an environment where students can imagine what they want to be, and motivate them to lower the hurdles for going abroad.” When Mr. Kitada talks thoughtfully about Japanese and Cambodian education, he reveals a classic Overseas Cooperation Volunteer outlook.

The invaluable experiences and cosmopolitan sensibilities that characterize Overseas Cooperation Volunteers are indispensable on the ground and in the workplace in our increasingly globalized society. It is my hope that their activities will contribute to a greater understanding of JICA’s Overseas Cooperation Volunteer projects.