

A Diamond Jubilee Celebration of Japan's Volunteer Programme in Kenya

The atmosphere at the Nairobi Serena Hotel was both festive and reflective on February 10, 2026, as JICA marked a historic Diamond Jubilee: The 60th Anniversary of the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV) programme in Kenya.

What began in March 1966 with the arrival of just three young volunteers has blossomed into a monumental legacy, with nearly 1,800 Japanese citizens serving across the country to date. The celebration of this milestone united dignitaries and generations of volunteers to honour a “Heart-to-Heart” partnership that remains the

cornerstone of Kenya-Japan relations.

JOCV is one of Japan's technical cooperation schemes operated as part of its Official Development Assistance (ODA). The programme dispatches eager Japanese citizens who wish to participate in assisting developing countries and have the calls for assistance from their governments. The programme aims to cooperate in the economic and social development, deepen mutual understanding and coexistence in cross-cultural societies, and give back the volunteer experience to society. Since its first dispatch in 1965, approximately 58,000 Vol-

unteers have worked alongside local communities in 99 countries and regions.

As summarised by the phrase “together with the local community”, the volunteers live and work at the grassroots level, speaking the same language as the local communities and carrying out activities with an emphasis on fostering self-reliance for sustainable change. Volunteers are generally dispatched for two years, in various fields from education, nursing to auto mechanics, IT and sports.

JOCV is one of the oldest volunteer programmes in the world. This is the

category for those with a strong commitment to utilising their own skills and knowledge for people in developing countries, by selecting the job type.

At the 60th Anniversary Ceremony held in Nairobi on February 10, 145 people including volunteers, staff of recipient agencies, and ex-volunteers who currently live in Kenya, among others, presented themselves at the venue to celebrate the moment.

At the ceremony, both Kenyan and Japanese high protocols, namely, Japan's Ambassador to Kenya H.E. MATSUURA Hiroshi, Kenya's Principal Sec-

retary for Industry Dr Juma Mukhwana, Inspector General of Police Douglas Kanja, and JICA Executive Senior Vice-President Ms MIYAZAKI Katsura, delivered congratulatory remarks.

Dr Mukhwana, on behalf of Prime Cabinet Secretary and Cabinet Secretary for Foreign and Diaspora Affairs H.E. Musalia Mudavadi, added that this shared technical expertise has bolstered local industries and fostered self-reliance, envisioning even greater achievements as the two nations journey toward a more resilient and inclusive world.

JICA Volunteer Programme has Strengthened the Friendship between Kenya and Japan

ous challenges.

The work of JICA Volunteers is not simply technical cooperation; it is an endeavour that fosters mutual understanding and coexistence. Cherishing these “people-to-people connections”, I sincerely hope that Kenya and Japan will continue to open new paths to a shared future.

The theme for the 60th anniversary of the JICA Volunteer Programme is “*The Power of JICA – Change the World, Change Japan.*”

Under this theme, we will further develop our cooperation with Kenya and strengthen our commitment to co-creation as we work together to address shared challenges.

I am confident that the JICA Volunteer Programme in Kenya, and across Africa, will continue to play an essential role as a “force for change” shaping the future of Africa and Japan.

The JICA Volunteer Programme truly embodies JICA's vision of “Leading the world with trust”. I hope that together, we can reflect on the 60-year journey of the Volunteer Programme in Kenya and consider the future role it can play in this country as we work together to strengthen the friendship between Kenya and Japan.

two countries. But another equally important reason is that the people of Kenya have warmly welcomed each Volunteer who has come from Japan. We must not forget that this accumulation of goodwill is what has enabled such a rich history of collaboration.

The personal bonds built between Kenyans and JICA Volunteers have steadily cultivated and deepened mutual trust throughout the country.

This is my third visit to Kenya, and I am convinced once again that the trusting relationships fostered over the past 60 years have contributed to the close diplomatic and friendly relations that Kenya and Japan enjoy today.

The Volunteers dispatched to Kenya have worked hand in hand with their host organisations and local communities – standing by their side, working together, sharing joy, and sometimes even tears – while contributing to regional development. Yet Volunteers do far more than contribute to development. Many returnees say that they learnt more from the people of Kenya than they were able to teach. They gain invaluable insights from Kenyan communities. I therefore take this opportunity to express deep gratitude to Kenyans.

Many returned Volunteers continue to contribute to the deepening friendship between Japan and Kenya through various activities. For example, some former Volunteers have started social enterprises in Nairobi, inspired by their experience in Kenya, successfully producing and marketing traditional handicrafts. Others have pursued careers in international cooperation or diplomacy, while still others apply their experience to regional development or education in Japan. In this way, many have built on the experiences and connections nurtured in Kenya to take on new challenges.

There are also long-standing bridges between our two countries, such as Mr TAMURA Yoshio, who was first dispatched as a karate Volunteer in 1971 and has continued to teach karate in Kenya for 55 years.

This 60th anniversary is an opportunity not only for Japan and Kenya but for the world to reaffirm the value of cooperation. Through TICAD and other international platforms, JICA has strengthened its partnership with Africa and promotes the Volunteer Programme as a symbol of “co-creation,” “innovation,” and “trust.” The bonds built here in Kenya serve as a foundation for the trust Japan enjoys in the international community.

I hope that many more Volunteers will continue to gain valuable experience in Kenya and go on to play active roles globally, tackling vari-



A MESSAGE FROM MS MIYAZAKI KATSURA, EXECUTIVE SENIOR VICE-PRESIDENT, JICA

It is a great honour to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the JICA Volunteer Programme in Kenya. The programme was initiated in 1965, and Kenya received the first Volunteers in March 1966. This makes 2026 a significant milestone – marking the 60th anniversary of the programme in Kenya.

To date, the JICA Volunteer Programme has dispatched approximately 58,000 Volunteers to 99 countries, with Kenya being one of the earliest partner countries. A total of about 1,800 Volunteers have served in Kenya across a wide range of fields, including agriculture, education, health and

medical care, and sports. This number ranks third in the world after Malawi and Paraguay. At one point, Kenya was among the countries receiving the highest number of JICA Volunteers. Although Volunteers had to temporarily evacuate Kenya at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, about 40 volunteers are currently active in Kenya.

On behalf of JICA, I extend my heartfelt appreciation to the Government and the people of Kenya for their long-standing understanding and support of the JICA Volunteer programme, and for warmly assisting each Volunteer over the years.

Why does JICA continue to send so many Volunteers to Kenya year after year?

One major reason is, of course, the close diplomatic ties between our



Karate demonstration by JICA Volunteer Mr HARAUMA Seiichiro during the JOCV 60th Anniversary celebrations in Nairobi on February 10.

Power to Change the World and Japan: The Past and Future of JICA Volunteers

A MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARIAT OF THE JAPAN OVERSEAS COOPERATION VOLUNTEERS

Since the first group of Japanese Volunteers arrived in Laos in 1965 under the “Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers” banner, more than 58,000 individuals have served across 99 countries, fuelled by their passion for development.

Throughout the tumultuous years spanning the end of the 20th century to the beginning of the 21st, this flagship Japanese Volunteer programme has evolved and expanded – changing its name while undergoing significant growth – to reach this 60th anniversary milestone.

The value of the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV) remains steadfast, regardless of the changing times. The essence of our cooperation – diving into diverse cultures, speaking the local language, living as the people live, and working side-by-side to solve challenges – has been passed down unchanged since our founding.

Through the dedicated, honest, and grassroots activities of every Volunteer sent into the field, mutual understanding has deepened



JICA Volunteer Mr OSAKI Shohei and Ms Wang'oma Charity, Director of Bondeni Football Club, during their presentation at the JOCV 60th Anniversary celebrations at Serena Hotel, Nairobi.

between local communities and the Japanese people, fostering powerful bonds. These “people-to-people connections” have contributed immensely to building relationships of trust between host nations and Japan.

Today, the world faces a “polycrisis” characterised by the interconnected effects of climate change, infectious diseases, natural disasters, economic downturns, and conflict. The divisions and confrontations emerging

globally pose a significant threat to “Human Security”, particularly for the most vulnerable populations in developing countries. Addressing these unprecedented crises requires a response based on connections between regions and people that transcend national borders. In this context, the role of international cooperation in creating these links is more critical than ever.

Throughout its history, the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers

programme has prioritised these “people-to-heart” connections. Every volunteer dispatched to a developing nation has engaged with local people at the grassroots level, deepening mutual understanding and acquiring the ability to coexist within diverse cultures, while contributing to economic and social development or reconstruction. Through their commitment to facing local challenges together, a deep-seated trust in the Japanese people has been nurtured across the developing world.

We often hear from volunteers that while they went intending to “teach”, they ended up “learning” so much more. The connections made in their host countries become a foundation for the rest of their lives. Even after completing their service, many former volunteers continue to give back to society – both in Japan and abroad – carrying a spirit of respect for others, regardless of nationality or culture, and maintaining a heart of empathy and compassion in their daily lives and work.

To confront the various crises surrounding our world, we must now reaffirm the value of this volunteer programme, which has served as a bridge between Japan and the international community for 60 years.

- The Secretariat of the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers
- Komagane Training Centre
- Nihonmatsu Training Centre
- Takuya Otsuka, 18th Director General, and all staff of the Secretariat and Training Centres

A Brief History of JOCV in Kenya

Kenya is one of Japan’s most important partner countries, being the first nation in Africa to receive Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV) in 1966. With a cumulative total of approximately 1,800 Volunteers, it remains one of the largest programmes in Africa and worldwide.

The history of these assignments has evolved from simple “assistance” into “co-creation”, moving in step with Kenya’s national development.

1. Late 1960s-1970s: Building National Foundations Post-Independence

During this period, Kenya, having just gained independence, required technical support to independently maintain and manage its national infrastructure. JOCVs provided expertise in fields such as construction machinery, electrical equipment, automobile maintenance, and communication technology.

2. 1980s-1990s: Human Resource Development and Industrial Diversification

In response to rapid population growth, the focus shifted toward education and job creation for the youth. In addition to infrastructure, support for human resource development was strengthened. Key fields included Science and Mathematics education, vocational training (woodworking, welding, dress-making), nutrition, and horticulture. Notably, many Science and Mathematics teachers were dispatched to rural secondary schools lacking electricity and running water. Many of these volunteers later served as experts in JICA technical cooperation projects across Kenya and other African nations.

3. 2000s: Addressing the MDGs

As the global aid trend shifted toward the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), assignments increased in maternal and child health (nurses, midwives), HIV/AIDS awareness, primary education, and environmental education. Efforts were made to link volunteer activities with various JICA technical cooperation projects. Furthermore, as interest in international cooperation grew within Japan, the number of volunteers in fields such as youth activities, community development, and environmental education also rose.

4. 2010s-Present: Sustainable Development and Specialised Social Issues

As Kenya progressed toward becoming a “middle-income country” and embraced digitalisation, the expertise required of volunteers became more advanced and diverse. Following the decentralisation of the Kenyan government, host organisations shifted from field offices of central ministries to local governments (County Governments). Additionally, an increasing number of volunteers began incorporating techniques from JICA projects, such as OVOP (One Village One Product), SHEP (Smallholder Horticulture Empowerment and Promotion), and the promotion of NERICA rice, into their activities. While the dispatch of volunteers was temporarily suspended due to the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, it has since resumed. Furthermore, the JICA volunteer framework underwent a major change in the 2020s. The previous age limit of 40 for JOCVs was expanded, evolving into a unified “JICA Volunteer” system for individuals up to age 69. This allows a more diverse range of talent to contribute to Kenya’s development today.

Grassroots Development: JICA Volunteers in Action

Kenya’s vibrant spirit and strategic position in East Africa make it a vital partner in global development. JICA is partnering with Kenyan communities to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through the JOCV programme. Since 1966, nearly 1,800 volunteers have served across the country. These “grassroots ambassadors” demonstrate the impact of simple, innovative solutions while living among the people they serve.

Case 1: Turning farming into a business in Kiambu

In Karai District, Kiambu County, many farmers struggled with low-value crops and unpredictable markets. Ms Fuka Ariyasu, a JICA volunteer based at the Kenya Forestry Research Institute (KEFRI), recognised an opportunity to blend

environmental conservation with economic growth.

Utilising the SHEP (Smallholder Horticulture Empowerment and Promotion) methodology, Ms Ariyasu helped farmers shift their mind-set from ‘grow and sell’ to ‘grow for the market’. Through her mentorship, pilot farmers moved from traditional mangoes to high-value Hass avocados. By planting 200 seedlings together, Fuka and the farmers proved that ‘farming as a business’ could protect both the forest and the family’s income. Today, these farmers are not just growers; they are entrepreneurs protecting their ecosystem for profit and for the future.

Case 2: Revitalising healthcare through 5S-KAIZEN in Machakos

At Machakos Level-5 Hospital, chronic waste and disorganised workflows often hindered patient care. JICA volunteer, Ms Kaoruko Shimizu, introduced the Japanese philosophy of 5S-KAIZEN (Sort, Set, Shine, Standardise, Sustain). The beauty of this approach is that it requires no large budget, only a change in habit.

Ms Shimizu worked directly with hospital staff to tidy workspaces, label tools, and improve medical waste management. By revitalising “Work Improvement Teams”, she empowered the nurses and doctors to take charge of their own departments. Today, more than 15 departments proactively identify and solve their own problems.

This shift to staff-driven improvement has made the hospital safer and more efficient, proving that the

best medicine for a healthcare system is often a sense of ownership and order.

Case 3: Dignity through skill in social welfare

In Machakos and Kisumu, volunteers like Ms Yuko Hakata and Mr Hirofumi Osano, are breaking barriers for people with disabilities. At the Machakos Technical Institute for the Blind, Ms Hakata professionalised Shiatsu therapy, helping visually impaired youth earn independent livelihoods at major events like the Nairobi Marathon.

Meanwhile, in Kisumu, Mr Osano’s work with the deaf community has bridged the gap between hearing and non-hearing worlds through Kenyan Sign Language education.

Through these ‘Heart-to-Heart’ connections, JICA volunteers continue to ensure that no one is left behind in Kenya’s journey toward progress.



JICA Volunteer Ms ARIYASU Fuka empowers Kiambu farmers to transition to high-value Hass avocado farming, boosting local incomes while protecting the environment.



JICA Volunteer Ms SHIMIZU Kaoruko introduces the 5S-KAIZEN approach at a Level 5 Hospital, empowering staff to streamline workflows and improve patient care.



JICA Volunteer Ms HAKATA Yuko trains visually impaired youth in professional Shiatsu therapy, helping them secure independent livelihoods and employment.