

Experiencing International Life —Learning How to Study, Work and Live Together—

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One of the main purposes of studying, working, and living abroad is to learn about the customs and culture of the host country in order to further international understanding. It is in part the responsibility of the institutions concerned to provide foreigners with a variety of opportunities to experience new ways of life. On the other hand, foreigners also should be determined to use such chances to become a part of the new society. It will be of no worth if a foreigner's life is limited to the campus and working area and he or she goes back home without having entered a Japanese house or experienced the Japanese life style.

Needless to say, it is not right to expect everything to be supplied by the hosts. Foreigners themselves should make an effort to create such opportunities through their direct individual or group contact with the surrounding communities. We should utilize all possibilities to communicate with each other, share our experiences, care about and come to know each other. Finally, this should be used as an opportunity to break down barriers, leading us toward a more peaceful life based on mutual respect and understanding.

Key words: Globalization, Mutual understanding, Creating opportunities, Have a voice, Contribution

Introduction

As you are well aware, the period of virulent propaganda and subversive political activities between the former Soviet Union and the West after World War II is known as the Cold War. During this period, the concept of internationalization was widely used as a process through which people living behind the Iron Curtain were pressed to open culturally and economically to the outside world. This practice was not limited to the former Soviet Union, but also became a powerful social force throughout much of the world, including Japan. Schools, local communities and organizations here were actively involved in one way or another in organizing activities to help people open up to foreign countries.

However, with the collapse of the Soviet empire at the beginning of the 1990s following the people of Afghanistan's intense struggle against Red Power, the concept of internationalization was replaced by

the term "globalization." This new concept is compelling people all over the world to open themselves from within to the outside world and understand other people and cultures

It was in October 1977, during the period of internationalization and the years Tsukuba was preparing for Expo '85, that I came to the University of Tsukuba. When I was asked to speak at this seminar, I thought it would be better to talk to you of the opportunities I had and used and those I made with the help and support I received from concerned groups and individuals.

Making and Using Opportunities

1. Tsukuba International Student Association (TISA) and My Role

TISA was organized in 1980 to promote better communication between foreign students, Japanese students and the local community. It was a time when Tsukuba University was still under construction and there were limited opportunities in the sur-

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rounding area for shopping or recreation and few chances to communicate with local people. Therefore, there was an increasing need for foreign students to experience Japanese life and culture. Through this organization we (I, first as a founding member and then as the president from 1983–1985) could promote joint international programs with existing community organizations such as Rotary Clubs, the Lions Club, JC, UNESCO, Rainbow and other organizations to provide foreign students with chances to experience Japanese life.

Our main activities included:

1. Visiting schools and introducing foreign cultures. (Tsuchiura UNESCO)
2. Arranging home-visits and/or home-stays. (Rotary, Lions, and JC)
3. Participating in cultural events and festivals.
4. Holding parties.
5. Introducing ethnic food. (Tsuchiura JC)
6. Holding discussion meetings. (On campuses)
7. Holding bazaars for foreign students. (Rainbow Club)
8. Publishing newsletters.

2. Japan International Friendship and Welfare (JIFF) and Our Contribution

JIFF, a Japanese NGO led by Dr. Tada of Josai Hospital in Yuki city, Ibaraki, (<http://www.josai-hp.com/jiff/hist06e.htm>) first started its medical service for Indo-Chinese refugees in 1982 and Ethiopian refugees in 1984.

In 1987, during the years Afghans were fighting against Soviets, JIFF began its activities for Afghans. JIFF was the first Japanese NGO which offered to give treatment in Japan to wounded Afghans who could not be treated in the local hospitals. My four brothers (three of them medical doctors), joined this effort one after another. As a result, a total number of 56 patients received treatment in Japan. Meanwhile, JIFF opened its Physiotherapy Center in Peshawar, Pakistan, in 1991, and soon expanded its activity as a free medical center for internal medicine and pediatrics as well (treating 150 patients per day). In 2002, it was transferred to Kabul as a clinic for mothers and children. In 2005, Mito Lions Club offered funds for the construction of a new facility and Japan UNESCO has been providing the clinic (with treats over 200 patients per day) with medical supplies.

3. MEDI Educational Support Association in Afghanistan (MESAA)

During the more than two decades of war, three to four hundred thousand children died. A child was blown up every three hours or so as a result of more than ten million landmines planted all over Afghanistan. One-third of Afghanistan's land mine victims are estimated to be children. Those children who survived the trauma of land mine injuries are a burden on their families and require extensive medical care, rehabilitation and, most importantly, economic support through out their lives.

In the Afghanistan post-conflict period, the Education for Development Foundation (EDF) and Minsai Center Japan (MSCJ, <http://www.minsai.org>) jointly extended their support for children and people with disabilities. With the help offered by JIFF, an office under the name of Medi Education Support Association in Afghanistan (MESAA) was set up in 2003 to provide wheelchairs and scholarships to disadvantaged and disabled pupils who were victims of war. A Japanese NGO, Wheelchair and Friendship Center of Asia (WAFCA), and a Japanese NPO, Collaborative Music Workshop (CMW), took an active part in fundraising. As a result of this joint cooperation, we sent and distributed 100 wheelchairs made in Thailand in 2003, 70 wheelchairs and 30 tri-wheelchairs in 2004 and another 70 wheelchairs in 2006. The screening and the distribution of these wheelchairs to the most needy children and school staff was carried out by JIFF together with MESAA local staff. A MESAA staff member was dispatched to Thailand for training in maintenance and repair. Unfortunately, due to a shortage of funds, presently the activities have been limited to the maintenance and repair of distributed wheelchairs.

4. Facilitating the Introduction of Afghan Participants in Tsukuba Asian Seminar on Agricultural Education (TASAE)

When the last term of TASAE on the problems of water resources started in 2002, the executive committee kindly decided to allow the special participation of Afghan specialists. It was a time when the transitional government of Afghanistan, based on the Bonn agreement, had been just formed and government offices, communication systems, transportation, and so on were not yet functioning well.

I was asked by the organizing committee to help introduce qualified participants for this seminar. Indeed, it was an ideal chance for my country to take part in this seminar. Therefore, with the help of my brothers, who were working for JIFF hospital in Kabul, we successfully arranged the participation of two Afghans in the first year and the following years until 2007.

5. Participating in the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology Study Team on the Reconstruction Project for Afghanistan

In December 2001, after the collapse of the Taliban, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology appointed a study team for the “Education Support Program for the Reconstruction of Afghanistan” and I had the opportunity to take part in it. The main purpose of the team was to discuss ways to help the reconstruction of education in Afghanistan and provide a foundation for future development. The urgent need to revive education was discussed from different points of view and some suggestions were formulated for Japan’s contribution.

6. Committee Member on the Training Program for Afghan Women Educators

During the long period of war followed by the strict Taliban policy on women’s education, it was recommended that a program be set up to provide women educators in Afghanistan with a chance to visit Japan for professional training, school observation and to experience Japanese family life. After two months, this committee, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, drafted a plan called “The Consortium of Five Japanese Women Universities” and included the Women’s Universities of Ochanomizu, Tsuda College, Tokyo, Nara and Japan. Based on this plan, a group of 20 Afghan educators have visited Japan every year since 2003 for a period of one month.

Concluding Remarks

One of the important roles of education in the 21st century, as recommended by UNESCO, emphasizes the need to educate our people on “learning to live together” as a key factor to achieve a more peaceful and more prosperous life (Delors, 1996). The rapid development of information technology

has made the world smaller and provided people with new opportunities to widen their horizons. However, “learning to live together” cannot be achieved unless people all over the world are provided with opportunities to learn together. When learning together, it is the responsibility of advanced societies to open more schools and other educational institutions to young people from developing countries. There is a need for advanced societies to provide opportunities to bring people from different corners of the world into direct contact with each other to exchange ideas, thoughts and experiences (as is the case in this seminar). It is obvious that we need to better understand one another to create a better world based on mutual respect.

The second critical factor is “working together.” It is not only necessary to acquire knowledge and technology, but to create opportunities for people to work together as well. Our experiences clearly show that offering only financial support cannot solve the problem. There are many cases around the world where money alone has failed to achieve basic goals. However, personnel contribution together with involvement from local people working as a team to achieve a common goal will have a positive impact on the outcomes of developmental programs. In the case of reconstruction programs in Afghanistan, some of the main donor countries have included Afghan professional and educated individuals in their working teams, while a few have, unfortunately, denied the role of local people.

Working together requires the involvement and contribution of some local people, especially those that are trained and educated in certain fields in developed countries. This involvement should not be limited to a decorative role in such teams, but the members should be accepted as true partners who have voices in the team. This will build a firm relation based on mutual understanding, respect and cooperation.

Japan has played a major role as one of the top donor countries in the reconstruction programs in Afghanistan. It has been active in a variety of localities, particularly in the construction of school buildings, infrastructure, the training of professionals and so on. Japan’s humanitarian support for Afghanistan did not start from the reconstruction period after 2002, but long before that by helping refugees in neighboring countries, specifically Paki-

stan in the 1980s. Our people will not forget Japan's humanitarian aid in this respect. However, in comparison with other donor countries involved in the process of reconstruction, we can see a big difference in the involvement of local educated and professionals in the process. In the case of the U.S.A. and European countries, we find local people who have been educated in those countries deeply involved. Unfortunately, even though a number of Afghan people received higher education in this country, they have not been given sufficient opportunities to work together as a team. Basically, it has not gone beyond translation work. In other words, the limited number of Afghans who received higher education in different fields in Japan has not

been given appropriate opportunities to use their knowledge, ability and experiences to fully contribute to a team along with Japanese professionals. I hope this will be considered as an important factor to achieve the goal of "living together" in the future.

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