

- Poverty
- Network
- Water
- NAW

feature:

Reducing Poverty

Among Former
Poppy Growers

*JICA is supporting
Kokang efforts to
overcome their poverty
following the eradication
of poppy cultivation.*

Reducing Poverty Among Former Poppy Growers



A JICA expert uses illustrations to explain how the distributed seeds should be grown.

The Kokang Special Region in Shan State, northeastern Myanmar, was once a global center of poppy cultivation.

While the growing of opium poppies has come to an end after the Kokang ethnic minority reached a settlement with the central government, many villagers, who lost their chief source of cash income, have been driven into acute poverty.

To support the Kokang people's efforts to sever their reliance on opium production, JICA has introduced the cultivation of *soba* (buckwheat) as a substitute cash crop and is helping villagers to improve their living standards in many other ways.

Villagers saw their cash earnings shrink to just a tenth of their former levels.

Loss of Income

The large white poppy flowers that used to cover the hills of northeastern Myanmar have now been replaced by the dainty pale blossoms of buckwheat. "They may be smaller," smiles JICA expert Minoru Yoshida, who is helping local villagers cultivate *soba*, "but they're beautiful in their own way."

There are some 140,000 ethnic minorities living in the Kokang Special Region, which borders on China's Yunnan Province. Among them are the Kokang, who are ethnic Chinese, speak a Chinese dialect, and use the Chinese currency. Until a few years ago, the region formed part of the Golden Triangle for opium production, with 90% of farmers earning a living by growing opium poppies.

There are 135 ethnic minority groups in Myanmar, and the Kokang were a leading insurgent force in the country. In 1989, though, the Kokang became one of the first to negotiate a peace settlement, promising to eradicate the cultivation of opium poppies by 2003 in return for limited autonomy as a special administrative region. Joint efforts by the government and local villagers were launched to regulate poppy farming, and in 1999 a JICA project was launched to introduce *soba* as a substitute cash crop. Thanks to efforts like these, the goal of eradication was achieved by the 2003 target date.

Villagers, though, saw their cash earnings shrink to just a tenth of their former levels, as the poppy ban was enforced without measures to guarantee income. People could no longer afford the food and fertilizer

they had purchased in China, and they were also cut off from medical services and school education. Weakened by an insufficient diet, an increasing number of villagers fell sick and died. Some, burdened by huge debts, took their own lives. To make things worse, malaria began to spread, infecting more than 4,000 villagers and killing some 270.

The situation represented a serious threat to community survival. In response, JICA launched a fact-finding study, which showed that the Kokang were geographically, socially, and culturally isolated from the rest of Myanmar. Most villagers have not registered with the government, complicating entry to other regions of the country. Chronic poverty has been perpetuated by the lack of public services and the deterioration of the environment due to slash-and-burn farming techniques.

In April 2005 JICA launched a new project for poverty reduction in the Kokang Special Region. Its immediate aim is to alleviate life-threatening food shortages and reduce exposure to malaria, while longer-term goals include the elimination of chronic poverty resulting from various structural factors.

JICA's Assistance

As a short-term, humanitarian measure, JICA is distributing rice and corn seeds along with fertilizer to enhance the production of crops for the Kokang's own consumption. To fight malaria, meanwhile, it is distributing

In the first four months of the project, JICA distributed seeds and fertilizer to some 5,500 households as well as 17,000 mosquito nets, giving priority to the most needy.

"We're not out of danger yet," notes Yoshida. "But as of the end of August, there've been no new reported cases of malaria. A lot of people tell us that this is largely thanks to our mosquito nets. The rice and corn are growing steadily, and I think we should have our first harvest around October."

After the immediate threats to villagers' lives are reduced, JICA will turn its attention to the satisfaction of basic human needs and alleviation of chronic poverty by promoting improvements in agriculture, livelihood, health and medical care, and education.

Enhanced farming techniques will be introduced to help the Kokang better grow crops for their own consumption, and continued assistance will be provided for the cultivation of *soba* as a cash crop, with efforts also being made to expand the local sale of such *soba*-derived products as dried noodles, sweets, and distilled spirits.

Workshops will be held to disseminate knowledge about nutrition and hygiene, and a healthcare system will be established, including a program of systematic immunization. Improvements will be made to classrooms, textbooks, and teaching skills, and children who had been too poor to receive an education will start attending school.

These efforts will not be easy due to longstanding friction between the Myanmar government and the Kokang. As JICA expert Masaru Imamura, whose job is to serve as a liaison between the villagers and authorities, points out, "There've been cases where lack of an adequate means of communication has bred misunderstanding. But building on the trust that JICA has built up with both sides over the years, I believe we can play a mediating role in advancing this project."

It entails an intersectoral, human-centered approach and represents a new challenge for JICA. Hopefully, it will reduce poverty among the Kokang and become a model for other former opium-growing areas as well.



noru Yoshida, right, explains *soba*-cultivation techniques

insecticide-treated mosquito nets; residents are receiving medical care on a roving basis and are being encouraged to take preventive medication. And unpaved sections of major roads are being repaired to facilitate these activities.

Human Security | Bolivia

"Water Is Vital" Project

Water supply and wastewater facilities in Bolivia are among the least developed in Latin America and the Caribbean. This is especially pronounced in rural communities, where two in five people do not have ready access to safe drinking water.

Recognizing the need for urgent action, the Bolivian government drafted a development plan incorporating human security as a basic principle.

Japan has been providing grant aid for the sinking of wells in 337 locations in Chuquisaca, Santa Cruz, Oruro, and Tarija since 1998. This has secured water supply for 260,000 people, but some of these wells have not been effectively utilized.

In collaboration with local NGOs, JICA in 2003 began a project to construct water-supply facilities, organize water-management committees, strengthen fee-collection systems, and train operators in well management. JICA has also supported action to enable villagers to pay charges without undue difficulty.

As a consequence, the operation of the wells has become more organized, and delays in fee payment have been reduced. People have been buying replacement parts by themselves, moreover, thanks to increased cash income.

In fiscal 2005 JICA is launching a technical cooperation project that applies this experience to other regions.

This project strongly reflects the perspective of human security as it promotes community empowerment and provides access to safe drinking water in cooperation with community groups, the government, NGOs, and volunteers.



A photograph used in an NGO poster about the "Water Is Vital" project.

Human Security | Chad

Community Development Around Sudanese Refugee Camps in Chad

The Ouaddaï and Wadi-Fira regions in eastern Chad suffer from severe poverty, with average accessibility rates for safe drinking water ranging between just 1.4% and 3.0%. The harsh living conditions were further exacerbated when some 200,000 refugees came flooding in from the neighboring Darfur region of Sudan due to the suppression and slaughter of the non-Arab population.

The refugees' need of grazing land for their livestock and wood for cooking fuel has led to friction with local host communities. Also, while the refugees benefit from international assistance, Chadians receive little to no aid, and this disparity has fueled dissatisfaction among local residents.

In September 2004 Japan pledged \$21 million to the United Nations and other organizations to fund relief efforts in both Sudan and Chad. JICA also dispatched experts in February 2005 to the city of Abéché, where a field office was established in April 2005.

Since October 2005, JICA has been implementing a project with two focuses. The first is to reduce poverty in villages near the refugee camps with short-term measures to mitigate the disparity in living standards. The second is to develop a mid-to-long-term plan to address the poverty that had existed in Ouaddaï and Wadi-Fira even before the influx of refugees.

This project does not merely attempt to ease tensions between refugees and residents and ensure short-term coexistence but also helps provide for long-term stability and self-sustainability—a dual aim that strongly reflects the perspective of human security.



A camp for Sudanese refugees in Chad.

BILINGUAL REPORTER SPREADS WORD ABOUT JICA

A journalist for the *Guardian* based in Dar es Salaam, Sharon Sauwa covers Tanzanian news in both Swahili and English. She is currently in Japan as a participant in JICA's Press Tour for Overseas Journalists program, learning more about the country and interviewing JICA trainees from Tanzania in preparation for a series of articles she will write about Japan and JICA.

Can you describe what type of work you do in Tanzania?

I write articles for Swahili publications, namely, the *Nipashe* and *Lasiri* daily newspapers, and I also report on Tanzanian news in English for the *Guardian*. I don't really have a specialization, though. I cover a wide range of topics in my reporting, but I would say that I enjoy writing about politics the most. That is one difference I've noticed between Japanese and Tanzanian journalism. It seems that Japanese journalists focus only on a certain field, but in Tanzania we don't tend to specialize in that way.



Sharon Sauwa

A journalist for the *Guardian*, based in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and other publications.

Can you tell me about what you've done since coming to Japan?

I visited a JICA training center in the city of Nihonmatsu in Fukushima Prefecture. There, I met the director general, learned about the center and its functions, and then interviewed a Japanese JICA volunteer who is preparing to go to Tanzania. I also observed a Swahili language class and interviewed

the instructor. The Japanese students surprised me with their progress in the language! Before that, I was in Osaka and Yamanashi Prefectures, where I took some lectures on Japanese language and culture and interviewed JICA trainees from Tanzania.

Upon returning to Tanzania you will be writing a series of articles about Japan. Have any ideas taken shape for those articles?

I will focus on writing about interesting aspects of Japanese culture and society, as well as JICA's activities in Tanzania and other African countries. I have observed many differences in the behavior of the Japanese. For example, Japanese people are very punctual. In Tanzania, people don't regard punctuality as being important, but I think it is necessary for the development of our society and economy. The Japanese also pay attention to things like their diet by choosing to eat healthy foods and to cleanliness. Many people in Tanzania think that keeping their city or environment clean is the responsibility of the government. I think I'd like to present these ideas to Tanzanians and see if we can change some of our society's attitudes.

What type of assistance from JICA do you believe would be most beneficial to Tanzania at this time?

I believe it is important to continue the exchange of people and skills by having more JICA volunteers come to Tanzania and also by having more Tanzanians come for special education or training in Japan. Also, it is important that proper facilities and equipment are made available in Tanzania so that once the trainees return home they will be able to put to use the valuable knowledge and skills they acquired in Japan.

JICA Alumni Society of Malaysia

A Valued Partner in Southeast Asia

Established in August 1988, the JICA Alumni Society of Malaysia (myJICA) has grown over the years to 1,080 members. In addition to regular activities, such as the holding of general meetings and directors' meetings, it also organizes parties for members and undertakes philanthropic activities, such as blood donation drives and assistance for tsunami victims.

It also promotes participation in the JICA-Net digital communications network that enables simultaneous multilateral conferences and distance training and is actively involved in development education. It also operates its own website (<http://www.myjica.net/modules/news/>), which introduces new members, provides a forum for the exchange of opinions, and offers frequent updates on current news and topics.

In 2005 new activities were launched by myJICA, including efforts to promote the independence of people with physical disabilities by reinforcing massage and sign language training in collaboration with physically disabled alumni.

On September 20, 10 members of the alumni association, led by President Abdul Kadir Taib, visited JICA Headquarters in Tokyo to make a report of its activities. Dr. Kadir described myJICA's efforts to contribute actively to JICA projects and expressed a desire for further collaboration between JICA and the alumni association. JICA, too, hopes to enhance coordination with myJICA in the coming years and to work with alumni members as project partners.

It is hoped that myJICA will expand its contact with other alumni associations and serve as a model for good practices not only in ASEAN but other regions as well.



Members of a course on traditional ethnic dress organized by myJICA.

Sep. 14-16, 2005

A Review of the MDGs' First Five Years

The Millennium Development Goals were adopted in 2000 as concrete poverty-reduction targets to be achieved by 2015. One-third of the 15-year period for their achievement has now passed, and a special summit attracting approximately 170 leaders from countries around the world was held during the United Nations General Assembly to undertake a fundamental review of the progress made during the first five years. JICA is making every effort to contribute to the achievement of the MDGs by implementing projects based on the concept of "human security."

Oct. 9-
Nov. 21, 2005

Dispatch of Japan Disaster Relief, Needs Assessment Teams to Pakistan

In response to the massive earthquake that occurred in Kashmir, JICA has dispatched a Japan Disaster Relief (JDR) rescue team and JDR medical teams to assist with relief efforts in Pakistan. The teams have been carrying out rescue and medical operations in areas seriously affected by the devastating quake. In addition, JICA has dispatched a needs assessment team to ascertain emergency development requirements, including the restoration of major roads, and to explore local needs for such technical cooperation projects as the designing of earthquake-resistant buildings.