

The long rain season has ended in Japan, and the intense heat continues right after the rainy season ends. Kampala is in the dry season with maximum temperatures of 25 degrees and a pleasant breeze. There are times when it is impossible to fish in Lake Victoria due to strong winds in July.

In the book, “Diary of the Governor of the Central bank of Rwanda” published in 1972, by the late Masaya Hattori, a Japanese former Bank of Japan dispatched by the IMF in 1965 as the first Governor of the Central Bank of Rwanda, has the following description: “The biggest obstacle to the development of developing countries is the problem of people, but the biggest factor in their development is also people” (cited above, P.298, 13th expanded edition in 2021).

1. Ashinaga Foundation’s Initiatives in Uganda.

This month, I would like to introduce the efforts of Japan’s Ashinaga Scholarship Foundation, which is involved in human resource development in Uganda.

“Ashinaga Foundation” is an organization in Japan that provides support to orphans who have lost their parents to illness, disasters, or suicide. In 1995, the Great Hanshin-Awaji earthquake occurred, and support for those orphaned by the earthquake began. In return, these orphans used donations from around the world to advocate for support in Africa, which has the highest number of orphaned children around the world. Thus, in 2000, Ashinaga Scholarship Foundation entered Uganda, where there are many children orphaned by AIDS, and this was the beginning of the Foundation’s current activities.

Ashinaga Uganda Rainbow House is operated in Nansana, a suburb of the capital Kampala, and provides psychological care and education to children orphaned by AIDS. I also visited Rainbow House this month.

Rainbow House has registered approximately 1,000 orphans in Nansana area, and approximately 100 of these students study every day at the Terakoya, inside the Rainbow House. I could hear the cheerful voices even on the day I visited. What impressed me most about this facility was the care program. Even though the language and social background may differ, the need for emotional care for children, who have lost their parents at an early age, is the same all over the world. There is a common room with children’s works pasted on the walls, another with bright red walls and a punching bag hanging from the ceiling. This is where children feel relaxed and provided mental care for their future. It seems that children who receive the care program, can come back here at any time until they enter university. Some of Ashinaga Uganda’s orphans receive support until they reach higher education. So far, more than 60 orphans have entered Japanese Universities.



With Terakoya students



Visit Terakoya class

Another pillar of Ashinaga Uganda is the “100-year higher education support project for orphans in Africa”. Orphans who have lost their parents for some reason are selected from all over Africa, and spend about six months in the student dormitory called “Ashinaga Uganda Kokorojuku” to prepare for university entrance. Once they receive their acceptance letter from universities, they will spend some more months preparing for their trip abroad. This process takes place every year. Ashinaga Kokorojuku in Uganda supports young people aiming to enter higher education in English and Portuguese-speaking countries (Senegal for French-speaking countries).

This year, I was invited to the opening day where about 20 students from Sub-Saharan Africa gathered. Mr. Yoshiomi Tamai, the founder of the Ashinaga movement, also attended it online from Japan. Through this initiative, which began in 2014, 280 orphans from African countries have already entered universities in Japan and around the world.



The participants of the 100-year plan



The Kokorojuku students

As Mr. Masaya Hattori, whom I introduced at the beginning of this article explained with his insight, I believe that one of the decisive factors for the development of a country and society is “people”. Ashinaga has been running Rainbow House for over 20 years and has been working on Kokorojuku’s “100-year plan” for over 10 years. Reassuringly, the person in charge of the facility in Uganda is a Ugandan who grew up in Ashinaga. Many of Rainbow House and Kokorojuku staff members are also from Ashinaga. Additionally, Joseph Matovu, the mayor of Nansana, where Ashinaga’s facility is located, is surprisingly a former student of Ashinaga, who also studied abroad in Japan.

“Leaving no one behind” is the motto of the SDGs, but putting it into practice is not easy. Ashinaga Uganda’s efforts are one valuable example of this. The reality is that there are still many challenges, but I would like to strongly support such efforts.

2. Nippon Foundation Chairman Sasakawa and his party visited Uganda.

Nippon Foundation Chairman Yohei Sasakawa and his party visited Uganda from July 25th to 27th. This was a follow-on visit to Ethiopia, where he carried out activities related to the eradication of Hansen’s disease.

The Nippon Foundation established the Sasakawa Africa Association (SAA) in 1986. Since then, they have been providing agricultural support in Africa for a long time. It is said that millions of farmers in Sub-Saharan Africa have benefited from their activities. Currently, SAA operates mainly in four countries; Uganda, Ethiopia, Mali, and Nigeria. They carry out a wide range of support activities, not only to expand the production of agricultural products, but also to build so-called value chains for subsequent processing and sales, and even human resource development. SAA was one of the first to advocate environmentally regenerative agriculture. In the beginning, some people wondered if it would be possible to put this idea into practice in Africa, but it has now become mainstream of the agriculture sector.

During their visit, they paid a curtesy visit to the President Museveni and the Ministry of Agriculture, and then inspected the SAA’s project site. I also accompanied SAA Chairman Sasakawa on the project site tour together with SAA President, Amit Roy. We visited the Zirobwe Agali Awamu Agribusiness and Traders Association (ZAABTA) near Kampala, which is one of the 14 One Stop Centres (OSCA) in Uganda. SAA’s motto is “Walking with the Farmer”. Chairman Sasakawa’s behavioural philosophy in life is “There are problems and answers in the field”.

The chairman, who is 85 years old is a “young man” (he mentioned himself several times in front of Ugandans during this business trip), energetically visited various locations and exchanged opinions with many people involved in the field. A young man who used to be a boda boda rider (taxi motorcycle for carrying people) was introduced in one place. This person wanted to do a job that supported people’s lives more, and thought that agriculture was the way to go. With SAA’s support, he is now engaged in agriculture and is living a fulfilling life. There are many women who are in charge of one-stop centres.

It is said that 70-80% of Uganda’s population is involved in agriculture. Uganda is also blessed with a good climate and rich land, and agricultural development is almost synonymous with national development. From now on, Africa will become more important for Japan’s food security (maintaining not only supply areas but also domestic production capacity). Based on this visit, Chairman Sasakawa emphasized that the most

important area of African development assistance is agricultural sector. SAA has put these words into practice.

Next month, the TICAD (Tokyo International Conference on African Development) Ministerial Meeting will be held in Japan. I hope that there will be a lively discussion on food security as well.



Agricultural products of the training Association



At the cabbage field