

In this column, we have introduced efforts to support Uganda in areas such as economic development such as infrastructure, refugee-related issues, agriculture, and human resource development. This time, I would like to introduce support for wildlife protection.

I think some may point out why animal protection is important given the challenges of poverty, basic education, and dealing with the continuing influx of refugees. Africa is also undergoing rapid urbanization and development, including development of National parks. The current situation is that as human activities increase, the habitats of wild animals become relatively smaller. However, the reality seems to be that as human habitation areas expand, wild animals are forced out of their homes into parks. From the perspective of realizing a sustainable environment, I believe that protecting wild animals is an urgent issue.

Uganda is also taking measures in line with this idea and has facilities for this purpose.

1. In Uganda, a facility called Entebbe Zoo was opened in 1952 during the colonial era. Initially, it was a facility for the protection of injured wild animals but in the 1960s, it was transformed into a so-called traditional zoo, a popular facility among the people. In 1994, a trust fund was established from the perspective of protecting animals from traditional zoos and educating the public, and the name was changed to the Uganda Wildlife Conservation and Education Center (hereinafter referred to as the Conservation Center). Furthermore, in recent years, similar facilities have been opened not only in Entebbe, which is close to the capital, but also in regional cities.

In Japan, when the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) was held in Yokohama in 2008, exchanges between the local Yokohama Zoo and Entebbe Zoo began. Currently, there are two people from Japan working at the protection center.

The first person is a zoologist from the JICA Overseas Cooperation Volunteers called Hiroko Mizuno. At conservation centers, there is an urgent need to improve breeding methods and breeding environments that are efficient and fit the purpose. Additionally, there is a shortage of human resources to support new facilities being built in rural areas. Team member Mizuno's term of office is from October 2023 to June of this year. She is also a veterinarian.

When I visited the conservation center, I was greeted with a trained eagle. This is an image of a Japanese falconer. Owls are also kept. In Africa, owls are considered unlucky birds and are widely believed to bring bad luck. For this reason, wild owls are often bullied by local residents. I don't think you can see many wild owls in Japan, but when you think of forest owls, there are many positive images of them being wise and watching over you at night. Ms. Mizuno teaches animal training techniques and nutritional management at the conservation center. Elementary and junior high school students from all over Uganda come to visit the conservation center. By showing these visitors the eagles in flight and touching the soft feathers of the owls, they are given a very cute image (which is true), and they are also shown that they are a blessing in disguise as they actually exterminate pests such as rats. Through these efforts, we are trying to spread the

awareness that general residents and wild animals can coexist and benefit from each other in the long run.



Ms. Mizuno holding an owl



Eagle flight training

The second person is Akemi Kamata, who comes from Chubu University as a coordinator for the JICA Grassroots Technical Cooperation Project. Uganda is home to many wild animals, and at the same time, many endangered species. It is said that more than half of the bird species that live in Africa can be found in Uganda. Although Uganda is a small country, it is rich in biodiversity.

Ms. Kamata is working on the conservation of gray parrots, which are an endangered species and a rare type.

Gray parrots are common birds found throughout Uganda, but they are a type of parrot with a distinctive red tail and are very popular as pets. Trade in gray parrots is prohibited under Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) as an endangered species, but there are no shortage of poachers. When Ms. Kamata arrived at the conservation center, more than 100 parrots had just been rescued from poachers. It was nice to suddenly be surrounded by so many parrots, but it is not easy to breed and release many of them back into the wild. Although she faced some challenges earlier on in her new position, she managed to overcome them by working with the staff at the protection center. An educational building for the protection and breeding of parrots has now been completed. The implementation period for Mr. Kamata's project is from March 2022 to May 2026.



Ms. Akemi Kamata with a parrot



Hospital facility

Uganda has identified several key industries for economic development, and tourism is one of them. For example, about half of the mountain gorillas in the world live in the border area with Rwanda, and it is well known that Uganda is home to them. Many tourists from Europe and America come to see the wild animals. It's called ecotourism. However, public awareness and training of contractors is necessary for sustainable development. Ms. Kamata is enthusiastically working on a long-term project like this in cooperation with the staff at the conservation center.

I was surprised to find that many of the Ugandan staff at the conservation center had conducted training at zoos across Japan. They had been to Asahikawa Zoo, Yokohama Zoo, Nagoya City Higashiyama Zoo and Botanical Garden, Toyama City Family Park, Toyohashi City Zoo and Botanical Garden, Yanbaru Wildlife Conservation Center in Kunigami Village, Okinawa Prefecture, and Hyogo Prefectural Stork Park. I think there are many famous zoos in Japan, and the experience of Africa can be useful for Japanese experts as well. In these fields, I believe that rather than Japan unilaterally supporting the other country, Japanese experts can also gain useful knowledge.

2. The activities of Japanese NGOs

When I started this column in June 2024, my first topic was my visit to Rhino Refugee Settlement in western Uganda on June 20th, World Refugee Day. This month, I visited the Kyangwali refugee settlement in Kikuube District, which is also in the western part of the country, near Lake Albert. This is an area where the Japanese NGO AAR Japan has been providing refugee support for five years. As part of that activity, the girls' dormitory at Kyangwali Secondary School was recently completed, and I attended its opening ceremony.

Unfortunately, the number of refugees coming to Uganda has been on the rise since the end of last year. According to the Ugandan government and United Nations agencies, the number exceeded 1.76 million at the end of last year and is on the verge of reaching 1.8 million. The Kyangwali Refugee Settlement is home to over 140,000 refugees, primarily from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Japanese government continues to

provide support to the settlement, with the construction of classroom buildings for four schools in 2008 through Grant Assistance for Grassroots Human Security Projects, and the construction of a chemistry laboratory building at Kyangwali Secondary School in 2018.

Refugee settlements in Uganda are not separated by barbed wire rather, refugees coexist with locals, and the schools we visited accept both refugee and local students. This principal has been there for over 10 years. During this visit, they once again expressed their gratitude for the construction of the chemistry laboratory building. We are also happy to hear that a graduate who studied at this chemistry lab has graduated from Makerere University, the largest University in Uganda, and has returned as a teacher. I realized once again that long-term support is important.

AAR Japan is working on a project to improve the child protection environment in and around the Kyangwali settlement. In addition to the current school facility improvements, we are also working on developing community leaders, strengthening organizational capacity, and creating a system that can quickly detect and deal with problems faced by children.

There is something that particularly stuck with me about AAR Japan's activities. This is an activity of the Peer Support Club, where children, mainly middle and high school students, help each other. Children who leave their hometowns and come to refugee settlements in neighboring countries face very difficult circumstances like children who lost one or both of their parents, and children who experienced unbearable hardship while evacuating. Most do not want to talk about their experiences so their hearts remain closed. In an effort to improve this situation even a little, they discussed things with each other and supported the establishment of a group to voluntarily support each other in their daily activities. At the opening ceremony of the girls' dormitory, the students wore matching T-shirts and performed a welcome song and dance.

This is not the first time I have had the opportunity to give a speech at a refugee settlement as the Japanese ambassador. From my perspective, Japan wants to provide refugees with immediate safety and dignity as human beings. Most importantly, I would like to support people in finding hope for the future however, this is not easy. Everyone at AAR Japan is putting this into practice locally. Ms. Mitsue Hiromoto has decided to return to Japan, and Ms. Shunsuke Nagano from Tajikistan has been appointed as her replacement. Kosuke Akiyama is in his second year.



Peer Support Club



Opening ceremony

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce Japanese NGOs that are active in Uganda.

In addition to AAR Japan which we introduced this time, there are 13 other organizations that we are aware of as the Embassy. There are 14 active Japanese members (according to our research, as of February 1, 2025), including expatriates alone. Although some organizations have offices in Kampala, many have bases in rural areas and carry out support activities in cooperation with local residents. The Japan NGO Liaison Council was established on February 21st to further strengthen collaboration among these Japanese NGO activities and make them even more effective. I hope that we will have more opportunities to exchange information about the current status of each other's activities and discuss more effective approaches. The Japanese Embassy and JICA would like to work together with other NGOs to further enhance support.

**List of organizations participating in the Japan NGO Liaison Council
(In no particular order)**

Affiliated organization	Local activity history	Country business development plan
(Special activity) Road contractor	From 2019	Social infrastructure development field
(Public Corporation) Save the Children Japan	From 2010	Medical/health field Areas for strengthening resilience
(Tokukatsu) World Vision Japan	From 1960s	Refugee/host community support field
(Special activity) Peace Winds Japan	From 2016	Agriculture field
(Special activities) Association for helping refugees	From 2016	Refugee/host community support field
(Tokukatsu) Earth stage	From 2023	Refugee/host community support field
Sasakawa Africa Foundation	From 1996	Agriculture field
(Special activity) Terra Renaissance	From 2005	

(Special Activity) Malnutrition Countermeasure Action Network	From 2023	Agriculture field
(Tokukatsu) Global Bridge Network	From 2016	Other individual projects
(Tokukatsu) Hunger Free World	From 2001	
(Special Activity) Gojo Club	From 2001	
(Special activities) Nakayoshi Gakuen Project	From 2019	

3. Emperor's birthday reception

On February 20th, this year's Emperor's Birthday Reception was held at the Japanese Ambassador's official residence in Kampala. We had the participation of over 290 people, including Ugandans, Japanese residents, International organizations and diplomatic corps.

From the Ugandan side, Minister of State, Hon. Okello Oryem from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Uganda was present as guest of honour and received a congratulatory address.

At the reception, a model of the Kampala Flyover project, which will soon be completed, was displayed. Also, on the 14th of this month, a video was shown of the completed New Karuma Bridge, for which grant aid was provided, arousing great interest.

At the reception, we served Japanese food, which has become popular in Kampala in recent years. The audience enjoyed their sushi and yakitori cooking performances at the venue. They also enjoyed the tempura. When we offered sake, indicating its production area, there was considerable interest.

Thank you to everyone who came to visit us.



Photo with Guest of Honour



Ambassador's Speech



Scale Model of Kampala Flyover



Distinguished Guests at Reception

[End]