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## Friendship with Passionate Latin America and the Caribbean

# Friendship with Passionate Latin America and the Caribbean

As 2024 marks the 30th anniversary of the start of the Japan-CARICOM (Caribbean Community) Consultations, this issue will focus on JICA's cooperation in the broader Latin American region. Though geographically distant, Japan and the region have deep historical ties. More than 60% of the world's 5 million Japanese emigrants and their descendants (*nikkei*) are in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). And the "nikkei communities<sup>\*1</sup>" that have taken root in the region have contributed greatly to links and economic ties between the two sides.

"One of the great attractive features of Latin America and the Caribbean is its diversity. There are 33 countries in a vast region that stretches from north to south and straddles the equator, with a rich variety of nature from tropical jungles to frozen glaciers," says Professor Hamaguchi Nobuaki, an expert on regional economics. He points out that the dynamic natural landscapes of the Amazon River and the Andes Mountains are famous. The varied terrain and climates are also a source of rich biodiversity.

While the diversity of people and cultures is attractive, Hamaguchi says that the image of "Latinos=cheerful and passionate" is not wrong. "There are academic studies showing that people in the region are more emotional than those in other regions. According to the studies, despite the challenges around security and economic conditions, the fact that people actively express positive emotions increases the level of happiness in society. This is also consistent with the development of cultural tools for expressing emotions, such as music and dance." Hamaguchi continues, "Perhaps the reason Japanese people feel happy when they visit there is



Photo: Getty Images  
Dancers in traditional costumes dance at carnival in Salvador, a port city in Brazil. The diversity of culture is another characteristic of Latin America and the Caribbean.

because they are freed from the repressive Confucian notion that not showing emotions is a virtue."

The relationship between Japan and LAC dates back to when Mexico was a Spanish colony, and Japan was one of the Asian hubs for the galleon trade between the Philippines and Mexico that began in the 16th century, exporting ceramics and other goods. In 1613, the Sendai clan under the rule of Date Masamune sent a diplomatic mission to Mexico.

Japan then plunged into a long period of *sakoku* (national isolation policy). However, when Japan was forced to sign unequal treaties with other powers in the middle of the 19th century, Mexico was the first country outside of Asia to conclude a treaty on equal terms. Japan then signed treaties of equality with other Latin American countries, and Japanese emigration began in response to the lack of labor in those countries. Later, this became Japanese national policy, and today there are approximately 3.1 million *nikkei* in the region. "The presence of Japanese emigrants who contributed to the development of agriculture in emigrant countries while struggling in a foreign land greatly fostered pro-Japanese

## Speaker

Professor at Kobe University

### Hamaguchi Nobuaki

Member of the Research Institute for Economics and Business Administration at Kobe University. His research focuses on Latin American and the Caribbean economies and comparisons with East Asia in terms of regional economic integration. His recent works include *Brazil—Japan Cooperation: From Complementarity to Shared Value*, co-edited with Danielly Ramos (Springer, 2022).

\*1 With the increase in the number of people with close ties to Japan, since people of non-Japanese descent are also contributing members of the *nikkei* community, the term "nikkei" is used to describe the community as a fellowship that includes non-Japanese descent and is not limited to blood relatives.



MEXICO AND  
CENTRAL AMERICA

CARIBBEAN

SOUTH AMERICA

## Latin America and the Caribbean Basics

The region consists of Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, and South America. These figures provide an overview of the region.

**659.31 million people**

Total population of Latin American and the Caribbean countries (2022\*<sup>3</sup>). This is approximately 5.7 times the population of Japan (125.12 million), larger than that of the EU nations (447.37 million) and Arab countries (464.68 million), and about the same size as that of ASEAN countries (679.46 million). The total GDP of these countries is \$6.82 trillion (in 2022\*<sup>3</sup>). Since many of these countries have relatively high incomes, their combined economies are approximately 1.88 times the size of ASEAN (\$3,623.2 billion), making them a very attractive market.

\*<sup>3</sup> The World Bank Open Data \*<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan  
\*<sup>5</sup> Japan Foreign Trade Council, Inc. "Foreign Trade 2022"

sentiment among the local people. That is why Latin American countries supported Japan's return to the international community after World War II, including the Treaty of Peace with Japan (also called the San Francisco Peace Treaty) and membership of the United Nations."

Japan and LAC, which have fostered friendly relations over the years, also have strong economic ties. The importance of this region, with its large local population, relatively high-income level, and large market size, was recognized early on, and since the 1960s Japanese companies have been expanding into the region, centered around the automobile industry. The region's exports to Japan mainly consist of natural resources and food, accounting for a large percentage of the imports of minerals such as copper and iron ore, as well as agricultural and livestock products such as soybeans, corn, and chicken meat. "There is a strong complementary relationship between Japan, which has few natural resources and a large population, and the region, which is rich in resources but has a small population in most individual countries. As for food, the opposite seasons also affect trade volumes."

**3.1 million people**

Estimated number of *nikkei* people living in Latin America and the Caribbean (2023\*<sup>4</sup>). More than 60% of the estimated 5 million *nikkei* people worldwide live in these countries. This is led by Brazil with 2.7 million, followed by Peru (200,000), Mexico (79,000), Argentina (65,000), Bolivia (13,000), Paraguay (10,000), and Chile (3,600). Cuba, with 1,000, has the largest number among the Caribbean nations (All numbers are approximate).

**6,706 billion yen**

Total annual trade volume between Japan and Latin American and the Caribbean countries (2021\*<sup>5</sup>). This is about 4% of Japan's total trade with the rest of the world. Mexico (38.5%), Panama (17.1%), and Brazil (14.9%) account for about 70% of the exports, and the main products are automobiles, ships, steel, and automobile parts. Brazil (30%), Chile (22.4%), and Mexico (17.5%) account for about 70% of imports, and the top commodities are copper and other nonferrous metal ores, iron ore, as well as meat and fish products.

LAC is also a key region for decarbonization trend, with great potential for renewable energy, including wind and solar power generation. Meanwhile, Chile and Argentina have about half of the world's lithium reserves (in 2023\*<sup>2</sup>), which is essential for electric vehicle batteries. "It will be vital for Japanese companies to develop renewable energy-related businesses in the region in the years ahead." Hamaguchi points out that the long-standing friendship between Japan and the region is a great asset in terms of both diplomacy and business. "Japan and Latin American and the Caribbean countries share the same values of not being hegemonic powers, but wanting to strengthen their presence through soft power. If we can further deepen our cooperation as equal partners, we can contribute to maintaining a stable international society. On the economic front, I believe it will be increasingly important to work together to address common social issues such as disaster prevention and advancing digital transformation, to increase business-to-business transactions, and to collaborate effectively using official development assistance (ODA) through the public and private sectors."

\*<sup>2</sup> United States Geological Survey "Mineral Commodity Summaries 2024"

# Three decades of Japan-CARICOM cooperation

Looking back at 30 years of cooperative relations to mark Japan-CARICOM Friendship Year 2024, the anniversary of the launch of official consultations.

The Caribbean evokes images of boundless skies, emerald green waters, dazzling white sandy beaches, and cruise ships touring the islands—a region overflowing with openness. The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) was established in 1973 to economically integrate the island nations and continental coastal countries scattered across this beautiful sea.

Currently, CARICOM consists of 14 nations and one region. Some may be surprised to learn that many are former British colonies and 12 are English-speaking countries.

“Many countries make the most of their landscapes, and tourism is a core industry. The small island states are close to each other, so it is possible to island-hop by plane or boat,” says Morita Tatsuya, the JICA-CARICOM advisor.

Akiyama Shintaro of JICA’s Latin America and the Caribbean Department adds, “The regional culture is influenced by the people’s temperament, as expressed through their music. Carnival in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, birthplace of the steelpan (steel drums), is a spectacular event considered one of the world’s three great carnivals.”

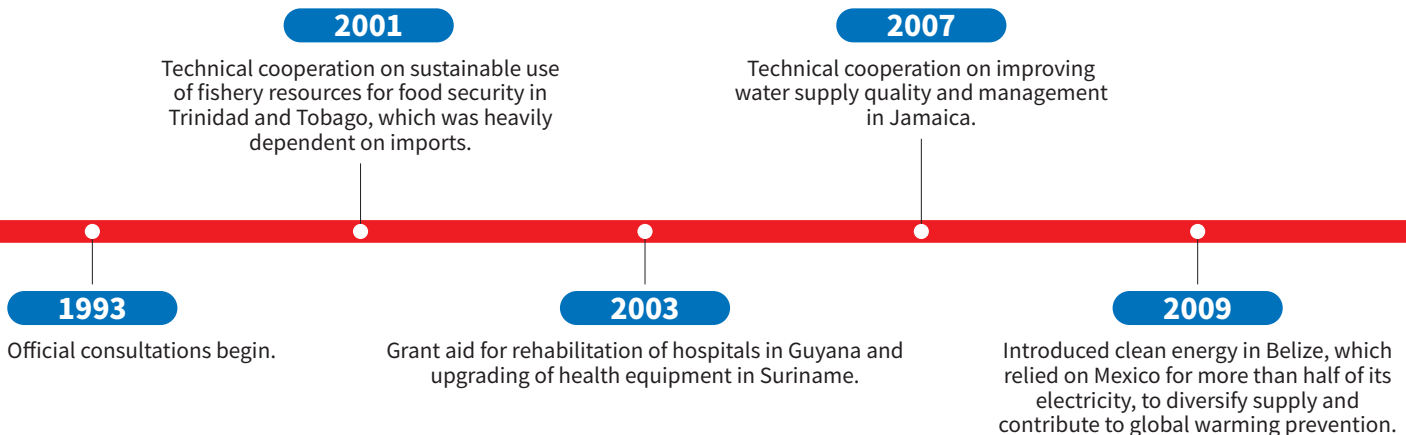
While rich in attractions, CARICOM countries also face challenges. “Small island states are vulnerable to natural disasters, and can be devastated by a major hurricane. In

addition, the small size and population of Eastern Caribbean nations in particular hamper economic development because their individual markets are too small,” notes Morita.

Japan and JICA have cooperated on these challenges for more than half a century. Morita says that as an island nation, Japan has made special collaboration efforts in the areas of disaster risk reduction, where its expertise can be utilized, and fisheries, where it seeks to promote industries other than tourism in the CARICOM region.

“In the area of disaster risk reduction, since 2009, we have hosted trainees from the region in Japan and sent experts to the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency in Barbados on numerous occasions to train personnel,” says Morita. “We have also provided technical cooperation in areas such as hazard mapping and community-based disaster risk reduction.” In recent years, Jamaica has been actively involved in efforts to build a tourism industry that is resilient to disasters, and Japan is expected to make further contributions in expanding these measures throughout the Caribbean.

Fisheries cooperation is also important in assisting Caribbean countries become less dependent on food imports. While further utilizing the fish markets, fishing boats, and



## 30 years of trust-building cooperation

Highlights of JICA’s efforts in CARICOM.

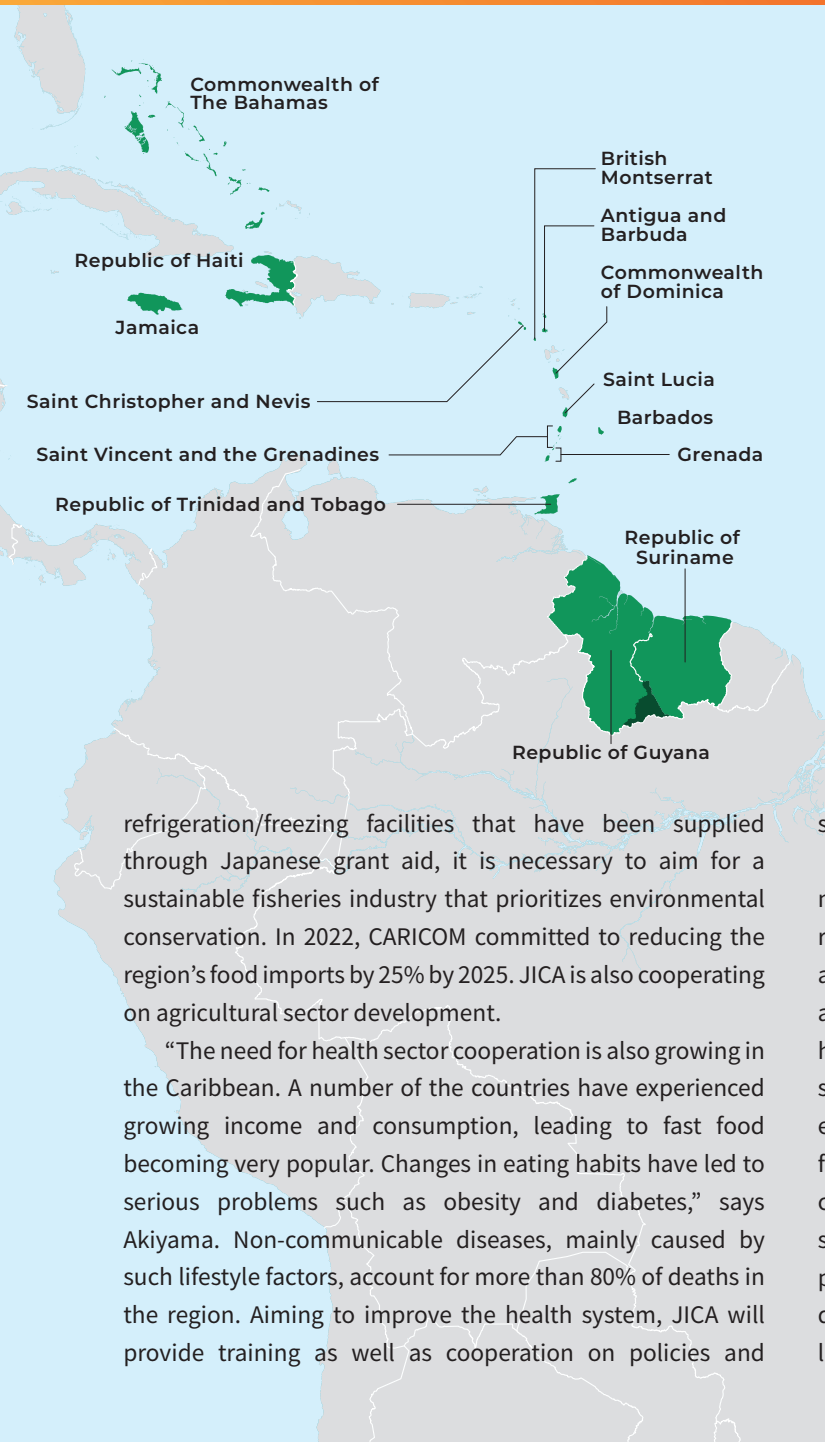


Photo: JICA



After the 2010 Haiti earthquake, JICA implemented the Urgent Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Support Project for Haiti from 2010 to 2011 to promote rapid livelihood recovery and socioeconomic revitalization.

refrigeration/freezing facilities that have been supplied through Japanese grant aid, it is necessary to aim for a sustainable fisheries industry that prioritizes environmental conservation. In 2022, CARICOM committed to reducing the region's food imports by 25% by 2025. JICA is also cooperating on agricultural sector development.

“The need for health sector cooperation is also growing in the Caribbean. A number of the countries have experienced growing income and consumption, leading to fast food becoming very popular. Changes in eating habits have led to serious problems such as obesity and diabetes,” says Akiyama. Non-communicable diseases, mainly caused by such lifestyle factors, account for more than 80% of deaths in the region. Aiming to improve the health system, JICA will provide training as well as cooperation on policies and

strategies.

“The CARICOM countries, most of which are small, have not been able to undertake large-scale projects, but human resources developed through training in Japan are a valuable asset. If we can build networks through them, they can be active cooperative partners in the region,” says Akiyama. He hopes that JICA will be a catalyst to deepen exchanges and share knowledge with the Pacific region, which has similar environments and challenges. “While the Caribbean may seem far away, I would like the Japanese private sector to take a closer look,” adds Akiyama. For example, large quantities of sargassum seaweed washing ashore have become a regional problem, and if Japanese technology can help solve this, it will deepen business ties. By strengthening public-private sector links, the Caribbean and Japan should become closer.

**2010**

Provided emergency aid, including the dispatch of Japan Disaster Relief Team, after the Haiti earthquake.

**2017**

Provided emergency relief supplies to Dominica, severely damaged by Hurricane Maria.

**2014**

Japan-CARICOM Summit held in Trinidad and Tobago, attended by then Prime Minister Abe Shinzo.  
Grant aid for the reconstruction of Haiti, including hospitals and water supply systems.

**2018**

Grant aid to Guyana for the introduction of renewable energy to improve electricity supply efficiency and mitigate climate change.

**2024**

Japan-CARICOM Friendship Year 2024



# Bringing smiles to Japan via links with CARICOM

Sparked by the Tokyo 2020 Olympics and Paralympic Games, local governments are building long-term bonds with CARICOM countries through the Host Town Initiative and other mutual exchange programs.

**Tottori Prefecture** ×  **Westmoreland Parish, Jamaica**

## More than 15 years of friendship through sports

The Host Town Initiative was undertaken by more than 500 local governments in Japan to promote exchange with Olympians and Paralympians, and mutual understanding with the counterpart countries. Tottori Prefecture and Tottori City became Jamaica's host town, and various projects were implemented. However, the exchange dates back to the 11th IAAF World Championships in Athletics\*, Osaka in 2007. The pre-event training camp for the Jamaican team was a success, leading to the prefecture also hosting their training camp for the 15th IAAF World Championships in Beijing in 2015. The following year, Tottori Prefecture became the first Japanese local government to establish a sister city relationship in the Caribbean, with Westmoreland Parish, Jamaica's westernmost region.

It was sports that built ties with Jamaica, a track and field powerhouse that has produced athletes such as Usain Bolt.

Reciprocal dispatch of athletes who have placed high in their respective annual marathons has solidified the bonds. When the Jamaican event was held with self-reported times (virtual race) due to COVID-19, a selected team from Tottori participated, deepening the friendship.

Kajitani Akio of Tottori Prefecture's Domestic and International Affairs Division, who was a JICA volunteer in Jamaica, is in charge of youth exchange projects. He says, "Even during the years when I was unable to travel to Jamaica due to COVID-19, high school students from Tottori Prefecture continued to have lively exchanges with Jamaican students, making videos of Japanese calligraphy performances and Japanese cooking using Jamaican seasonings." In recent years, seminars on specialty coffee products and cooking classes held jointly with the Jamaican Embassy in Japan have also been a success. "I believe the experience of different

cultures is helping to foster a sense of internationalism among the people of the prefecture. 2024 marks the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Jamaica. I hope that the deep bonds we have established over the years will be harnessed to promote mutual development in a variety of fields."



In 2019, runners from Tottori participated in the Reggae Marathon in Jamaica.

\* International Association of Athletics Federations renamed to World Athletics in 2019.

# Building bonds through art and music

Yokoshibahikari Town, Chiba Prefecture, has exchanges through the Host Town Initiative with Belize, which is home to a UNESCO World Heritage barrier reef. In 2019, before the Tokyo 2020 Olympics and Paralympic Games, a steelpan band (a group of percussion instruments unique to the Caribbean, steelpans are also known as steel drums), visited the town. “Encountering these instruments and sounds for the first time, and touched by the cheerful personalities of the band members, the minds of the town’s residents were opened,” says Hirayama Takayuki, then director of the Planning and Airport Division of the town. A cultural exchange was also held at Hikari Junior High School, where the band members were delighted to be dressed by the students in presents of *yukata* (summer kimono).

During COVID-19, the town initiated the “Mask Bank

Project” to support the well-being of Olympic athletes and sports federations in Belize. The student council of Yokoshiba Keiai High School actively campaigned for donations of masks, culminating in the presentation of 5,774 masks to athletes in the fall of 2020. The online exchange between athletes and elementary and junior high school students just before the Olympics was also a valuable opportunity, and “Feeling connected to the athletes they admired heightened their interest in the Games.” says Hirayama.

Interactions have continued since then, and in November 2022, when approximately 94,000 Belizean households were affected by Hurricane Lisa, the town donated 200,000 yen in aid to Belize. In addition, elementary and junior high schools in the town discussed the challenges of sustainable development goals with local partner schools and collaborated on mural painting projects. Tsukamoto Yumi, who was in charge of international exchanges, says, “We are planning a postcard project and a concert to commemorate the Japan-CARICOM Friendship Year 2024. Our aim is to further deepen our mutual ties.”



In 2022, Yokoshiba Elementary School in Japan worked with St. Peter’s Anglican School in Belize on a mural painting in the Artmile International Collaborative Learning project.

# Bridging the gap across the ocean

Nanyo City in Yamagata Prefecture has been fostering close ties with Barbados since registering as its host town. The city appointed Barbados’ Springer Dawn Aimee as its Coordinator for International Relations (CIR). For four years since 2018, she has visited schools and other facilities in the city to introduce Barbadian culture, and given lectures about the country. These steady efforts have served as an opportunity to raise the interest of citizens.

In February 2019, before the Olympics, a track and field athlete, a judo competitor and a steelpan player visited Japan. Various exchange events and symposiums were held, and an atmosphere of welcoming hospitality filled the city.

In August of that year, a delegation of 11 Nanyo citizens visited Barbados and was deeply moved, declaring, “Seeing is believing. It was a wonderful country and scenery,” according to a city official in charge of the exchange.

The pre-camp for athletes in the city was unfortunately canceled due to COVID-19. However, the exchange between the two sides continues, with Nanyo High School students

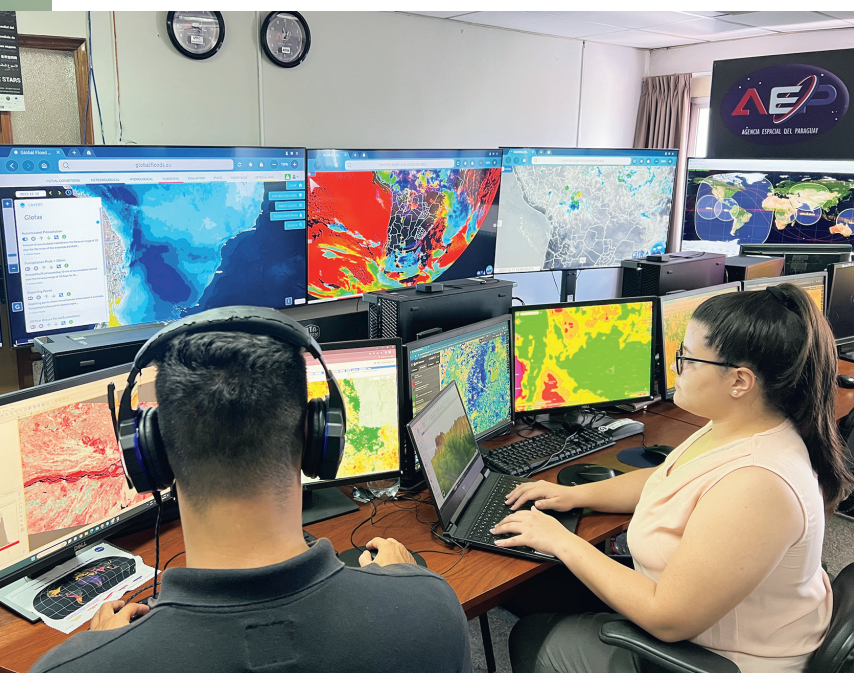
producing a Barbados brochure in class in March 2021 for distribution to schools and other institutions in the city, and a Nanyo City brochure in English for Barbados officials. The plan is to continue their exchanges with Barbados in the future, cultivating citizens with an international perspective, in turn helping the promotion of the city’s local products and economic and cultural exchanges.



In November 2023, Minister Hon Kirk Humphrey, Barbados’ Ministry of People Empowerment & Elder Affairs, visited the service facilities for elderly people in Nanyo City, sharing knowledge and experiences on common challenges.

# Enhancing disaster management and agricultural production via satellite

In South America, home to many relatively high-income countries, multiple development cooperation projects in advanced fields are underway. One example is the space sector. A project utilizing satellite data to boost disaster prevention and agricultural productivity has begun in Paraguay.



Left: Staff of AEP analyzing satellite data. Bottom: JICA, JAXA, and AEP announced the signing of memorandums of cooperation in May 2024 at the Japan-Paraguay Business Forum. Photo from left are Paraguayan President Santiago Peña, AEP President Osvaldo Almirón Riveros, JICA President Tanaka Akihiko, JAXA President Yamakawa Hiroshi, and Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio.



Photo: Prime Minister's Office of Japan

Satellites watch over the Earth from space, sending back data that is utilized in a variety of ways. For many years, JICA has been using satellite data to solve development challenges in partner countries. In October 2023, it began a technical cooperation initiative with the Paraguayan space agency AEP\*1 entitled Project for Management of Space Programs Applied to Socioeconomic Development.

Paraguay established AEP in 2014 to leverage space technology. Research and development had been proceeding with limited staff and budget, but “the major flooding that occurred in the country in 2019 was a turning point,” says Ogawa Tomohiro of the Office for Science, Technology and Innovation, and Digital Transformation, Governance and Peacebuilding Department of JICA. “Although satellite data was obtained from other countries immediately after the disaster to assess the damage, AEP alone could not analyze it properly. This crisis created a sense of urgency among the

staff around responding more effectively to emergencies.”

Subsequently, JICA began accepting long-term trainees from AEP. In 2021, JICA trainees from the agency studying at Kyushu Institute of Technology (Kyutech) collaborated with Japan’s space agency JAXA\*2 on the successful launch of Paraguay’s first satellite, the fruit of long-term cooperation with AEP.

JICA has been actively promoting the effective use of satellite data in cooperation with industry, government, and academia in the space field. Examples include setting up a flood early warning system in Viet Nam and creation of a master plan using aerial photography for urban development. JAXA and JICA accelerated their collaboration with a partnership agreement in 2014. The joint JICA-JAXA Forest Early Warning System in the Tropics in 2016 developed a program to detect forest depletion early. By providing the data to 78 countries around the world, the program has helped protect forests



# Studying small satellite development at Japanese graduate school

An international graduate student is participating in JICA's long-term training program at the Kyushu Institute of Technology (Kyutech) and aiming to contribute to his country's space sector through satellite development.

JICA's "SDGs Global Leader" program supports outstanding officials and young researchers from around the world in acquiring degrees in Japan to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs. Through this program, an AEP researcher Eladio Javier Ferrer Torres is currently on a master's course at Kyutech. He was in charge of setting up the ground station when the first Paraguayan satellite, GuaraniSat-1, was launched in 2021 with the cooperation of Kyutech.

"Since October 2022, I have been studying the master's Space Engineering International Course. The institute has been conducting joint satellite projects involving Japanese and international students since 2013, and I am participating in the latest initiative, the 'BIRDS-X' project, in parallel with my studies," he says. The project will develop a small satellite called a CubeSat, about the size of a 2-liter plastic bottle. Amateur radio frequencies will be used to communicate with

the ground. "I believe that studying in Japan is very valuable, as it gives us the opportunity to develop capabilities to improve our own satellite technology, as well as to use the amateur radio communication system to support communications during emergencies and disasters."

## Eladio Javier Ferrer Torres

He holds a degree in Electromechanical Engineering from the Faculty of Engineering of the National University of Asunción, and has been working at AEP since 2018.



from illegal logging and contributed to biodiversity conservation and climate change measures. Ogawa says, "Cooperating with national space agencies like JAXA to help partner countries is rare. This is one of Japan's strengths."

Paraguay's long-term strategy is for space technology to drive national development. The first major goal of this technical cooperation project is to improve the country's ability to use satellite data. "The most important areas are disaster prevention and farming," says Ogawa. Paraguay is a landlocked country in the heart of South America with vast forests. Forest fires have caused severe damage, necessitating

urgent strengthening of natural disaster prevention and response capacity. Agriculture and livestock are the core industries, with Paraguay being one of the world's largest exporters of soybeans.

"Satellite data can be used to analyze soil and pastureland to facilitate efficient soybean planting and grazing land management. In addition, weather forecasts can aid crop growth and productivity improvement," says Ogawa.

The most urgent issue is human resource development. Training on data utilization methods is planned primarily in collaboration with the Japanese Cabinet Office and the National Research Institute for Earth Science and Disaster Resilience. The project also includes support for satellite development, with training scheduled at the Kyutech. After the training programs, participants will conduct a series of demonstration experiments to enhance the accuracy of their learning.

Paraguay is one of the most pro-Japanese countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, with a history of immigration from Japan that began in 1936. "This project came about because of the relationship of trust that we have built up over the years," says Ogawa. The new cooperation in the cutting-edge space field will contribute to the strengthening and further development of Paraguay.

Photo: JAXA/NASA



The Japanese Experiment Module Kibo, which is part of the International Space Station. The image on the left shows small satellites released from Kibo, including Paraguay's first satellite, GuaraniSat-1, photographed in March 2021.

# Solving social issues with innovative start-up tech

JICA's Japanese start-up collaboration program, TSUBASA, was launched in 2021. The program encourages Japanese companies to enter the Latin American and Caribbean region by utilizing their innovative technologies to solve development challenges in the region, and to achieve the sustainable development goals (SDGs).

Although the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region continues to develop economically, it still faces many challenges and requires cooperation to achieve the SDGs. In recent years, the challenges have become more advanced and complex, with the pandemic and climate change causing disasters of unprecedented scale. TSUBASA, a support program of JICA and the IDB Lab of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) Group, was launched to address these challenges by leveraging the capabilities of Japanese start-ups.

"We expect that through the speedy deployment of start-ups' innovative technologies, products, and services as businesses, we will have a greater impact on development issues in the LAC region," says Yoshimaru Yusuke of JICA's Latin America and the Caribbean Department, who is involved in running TSUBASA. "Japanese companies may not be

familiar with the region, but it has a large economy and many countries with a common cultural foundation, providing a solid base for business expansion in the region." Another strength of the program is its collaboration with the IDB Lab, which has been working in the region for more than 30 years to promote innovation-driven solutions to development challenges through private-sector-led innovation. "In addition to partnerships with more than 1,500 innovative businesses mainly in the private sector, the IDB Lab possesses co-creation know-how and access to a variety of funding options. By combining this strength with JICA's network of government agencies, we can provide strong support."

TSUBASA looks for companies with business ideas for the LAC region in priority areas identified by the IDB Group and JICA, such as agriculture, infrastructure services, education, health, climate change, and diversity. Selected companies

## TSUBASA program launches innovative ventures

### Melody International (Kagawa Prefecture) × Brazil Online checkups for

iCTG is a mobile fetal monitor by Melody International that enables online checkups for pregnant women. The product was developed for use in medically underserved areas, ambulances, and disaster areas. The company had started looking at Brazil, where the neonatal mortality rate is about eight times higher than that of Japan, and the maternal mortality rate about 18 times higher. "By monitoring fetal conditions, we can reduce fetal, neonatal, and maternal mortality rates. Because the device can be used via Wi-Fi or

mobile networks, we were convinced that our system would be effective in Brazil, which is vast and has wide medical disparities," says the company's representative Hasegawa Nobuko.

Melody International already had a track record in Japan and other countries, but had just begun its attempt to enter Brazil. "Finding a local partner is usually the hardest part, but TSUBASA saved us the time and effort by introducing us to the University of São Paulo Faculty of Medicine Clinics Hospital,

receive six months of mentoring to get their venture started and study business concepts through online meetings with local business partner candidates introduced by JICA and IDB Lab. After completion of the program, if there is business development potential, the start-up and its business partner may have access to IDB Lab's funding scheme. There is also the possibility of collaboration on ODA projects by JICA and support for viability studies in collaboration with the partner country's government.

In fiscal 2023, two new courses were established: the Business Course for business-to-business transactions and individual business models, and the Government Course for start-ups with specific technologies and solutions to address development issues that JICA is working on. "In the Government Course, we sought companies with the technologies needed for JICA's water resource management projects in Bolivia. For example, technologies for public participation in environmental monitoring, low-cost pollution control of water sources, and water-saving agriculture," says Yoshimaru. As a result, a company with a technology that



At the kick-off event for companies considering applying to TSUBASA 2023, four companies selected the previous year talked about their businesses and passion for their projects in a roundtable discussion.

allows citizens to monitor water quality while studying local species using a smartphone app was selected for the project.

"Through the operation of TSUBASA, I have been impressed by the speed of decision-making and business operations of start-ups, as well as the passion of their founders. Working with these companies is a learning experience for JICA. We want to refine the content of the program and promote it more effectively so that the benefits of collaborating with JICA are clearer," says Yoshimaru, who envisions a future in which TSUBASA will produce success stories in abundance.

Companies selected for the TSUBASA program share specific initiatives undertaken in the project, their thoughts and the appeal of TSUBASA.

## safe childbirth

one of the largest hospitals in South America. The program also helped us with everything from meetings to local coordination, right up until the decision to launch the pilot project."

The company is currently working to commercialize the device in Brazil. "We would like to make people in Brazil aware that the risks of pregnancy and childbirth can be reduced with iCTG, and then spread the use of the device to hospitals in other Latin American countries," says Hasegawa.



**1** Product demonstration at the University of São Paulo Faculty of Medicine Clinics Hospital.

**2** With staff members of the hospital who worked on project. Hasegawa is second from the left.

# Working with Latin American and Caribbean communities in Japan

Through the “nikkei supporter<sup>\*</sup>” program that *nikkei* (descendants of Japanese emigrants) and others work to solve the challenges faced by Latin American and Caribbean people who live in Japan. These young supporters act as bridges between Japan and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC).

Japanese overseas emigration dates back to a group of about 150 Japanese leaving for Hawaii in 1868. Today, there are estimated to be more than 5 million people worldwide with ancestral ties to Japan. LAC is home to the largest *nikkei* diaspora, approximately 3.1 million people. They are an important bridge between Japan and the region.

Following legal reforms in 1990 that provided visas for up to the third generation of *nikkei*, the number of immigrant workers from LAC grew, with 270,000 *nikkei* currently residing in Japan. However, they have faced struggles in their daily lives, particularly with the language barrier, which has also impacted their children’s progress in school.

In response, JICA established the “nikkei supporter” course in 2020 aimed at promoting multicultural coexistence and collaboration with *nikkei* while supporting their compatriots who are facing challenges in Japan. Through the course, JICA invites *nikkei* and others from LAC who want to become, or are already working as, Japanese language

teachers, nurses, teachers from kindergarten to high school, social workers, and employees of multicultural NGOs. The goal is to enhance their own expertise by studying in Japan. After receiving training in related institutions and local governments, they provide support for people from LAC living in Japan. In addition to upskilling, the program will contribute to further developing *nikkei* communities and human resources in LAC countries.

Odani Tomoyuki, who came up with the idea for the course and is chief representative of JICA Nicaragua Office, explains its background: “One of JICA’s predecessors, the Japan Emigration Service (JEMIS), was involved in the emigration of some 73,000 Japanese to LAC countries. Although their descendants are now here in Japan and supporting the Japanese economy, they face many problems such as not being able to access public services and not fitting in at school due to language barriers. I wanted to support these people.”

Nikkei supporters from 12 countries in the LAC region, including Brazil and Peru, are involved in a wide variety of activities, and one of their major roles is to provide educational support.

“In addition to assisting children from other countries to learn Japanese, communicating with them in their native language helps them to maintain that. The young supporters are new role models for the children, and they provide insight into the perspectives of foreign students for the Japanese teachers. The supporters can also serve in a wide variety of roles, such as companion for elderly people who are isolated because of their lack of Japanese language skills.”

Having contributed to multiculturalism and deepened their understanding of Japan, there are hopes that *nikkei* supporters will serve as cross-border links after they return to their countries.



Mundo de Alegria, an international school in Hamamatsu City, one of the training sites for *nikkei* supporters.

## Understanding students and connecting with them



 **PERU** | **María Fernanda Villa Vargas**

During my six-month training period, I learned how to teach Japanese at Mundo de Alegria School in Hamamatsu City, Shizuoka Prefecture. I was impressed by their unique teaching methods, such as incorporating games and songs to make Japanese less daunting, and creating their own innovative teaching materials. I also had the

opportunity to attend classes as a Japanese language learner myself, and I was able to understand the children's feelings and the hurdles they faced in learning the language. When I return to Peru, I would like to use the teaching methods I learned and contribute to Japanese language education for children.

## Understanding local government and supporting foreign residents



 **BRAZIL** | **Philipe Yoshio Tomaz Yoshizane**

I participated in a 10-month training program at the Kani International Exchange Association, Gifu Prefecture. I mainly learned about multicultural social work and Japanese language education, and supported administrative procedures and daily life counseling for *nikkei* residents, as well as assisting their children's

education and schooling. I also worked to promote mutual cultural understanding in the local community by introducing Brazilian culture and hosting multicultural festivals. I would like to continue to support emigrants of Japanese descent by making use of my experience in Japan and my network in Brazil.

## Value your roots and contribute to a multicultural society



 **ARGENTINA** | **Karen Tamae**

I was involved in many activities, such as supporting Japanese language classes for junior high school students preparing for high school entrance exams and learning the theory and practice of becoming a Japanese language teacher at an international school. I felt it was important not only for children to learn Japanese, but also to keep

their native language and maintain their roots. I studied at Hokkaido University until March 2024, where I conducted research related to multicultural coexistence. In the future, I would like to contribute to a diverse society in Argentina where people respect each other and live in harmony.

## Using my experience as a Japanese teacher for children's future



 **PERU** | **Melissa Naomi Guillén Vidal**

When I was a Japanese language teacher in Peru, I learned about the *nikkei* supporter program and applied. I participated in training at a non-profit organization in Kobe City, Hyogo Prefecture, which provides learning support for children whose native language is not Japanese. I interacted with children in a Spanish language class and created

classes that take into consideration the fact that children are easily influenced by their environment. Eventually, I hope to provide classes where students can experience the joy of language learning through Japanese culture and history, and I hope to be a catalyst for students to utilize their abilities to become active on the global stage.

## JICA President visits Brazil, Paraguay, and Panama

JICA President Tanaka Akihiko visited Latin America from May 2 to 8, accompanying Prime Minister Kishida Fumio on an economic mission to Brazil and Paraguay, where he signed Memorandum of Cooperations (MoCs), while holding separate meetings in Panama. He met with government officials and local *nikkei* (people of Japanese descent) organizations to bolster ties between Japan and the three countries.

### BRAZIL

On May 3, Prime Minister Kishida and President Lula da Silva of Brazil launched the Brazil-Japan Partnership Initiative on Environment, Climate, Sustainable Development and Resilient Economies (Japan-Brazil Green Partnership Initiative) and announced an MoC for the promotion of the National Program for the Conversion of Degraded Pastures into Sustainable Agricultural and Forestry Production Systems (PNCPP). The MoC was signed between JICA President Tanaka, Carlos Henrique Baqueta Fávaro and Luiz Paulo Teixeira, ministers of agriculture,

livestock and food supply, and agrarian development and family farming, respectively, and Silvia Maria Fonseca S. Massruhá, president of the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation.

On May 4, President Tanaka attended several government events in São Paulo with Prime Minister Kishida, reaffirming the importance of the Japan-Brazil partnership. In a policy speech at the University of São Paulo, Prime Minister Kishida announced a plan to implement exchange programs involving around 1,000 people over the next three years. The initiative aligns with JICA's recently-launched Unidos pelo Futuro (United for the Future) program to foster interpersonal exchange with Brazilian *nikkei* organizations. Later, President Tanaka attended the Japan-Brazil Business Forum with the economic mission members, confirming initiatives to strengthen private-sector economic cooperation.

### PARAGUAY

On the afternoon of May 3, President Tanaka visited the Paraguayan capital Asunción to sign an MoC between space

agencies JAXA and AEP (see pp. 8–9) to promote space exploration through the Japan-Paraguay Space Cooperation Program. It was then announced at the business forum by Prime Minister Kishida and President Peña Palacios. President Tanaka, accompanied by JICA's JOCV members and experts, attended a meeting with *nikkei* people organized by the Japanese government.

### PANAMA

Continuing on to Panama, President Tanaka visited the capital, Panama City, on May 6 to inspect the Japanese ODA loan-funded Panama City Urban Transportation Line-3 (Panama Metro Line-3), and the Panama Canal, which has been hit by water shortages. He also met with Héctor Alexander, minister of economy and finance and Yill del Carmen Otero Guevara, vice minister of multilateral affairs and international cooperation at the ministry of foreign affairs.



MoC signing ceremony for the PNCPP. On the far left is JICA President Tanaka Akihiko and second from left is Prime Minister Kishida Fumio.



Visiting the rolling stock yard of Panama Metro Line-3.



Meeting with Vice Minister Yill del Carmen Otero Guevara (third from left) and Minister Héctor Alexander (second from right).

Photo: Prime Minister's Office of Japan

## Championing progress and change in Belize

As a program officer at JICA Belize, Marvia Corina Dubon is a crucial bridge between JICA, the Belizean government, and local communities through projects in fields such as agriculture, biodiversity, and inclusive education.

“My main goal is to serve my country in whatever capacity I can. Knowing that JICA has been the platform for me to make a difference in people’s lives is one of my greatest joys.”

During the COVID-19 pandemic, agriculture and food security became a top priority, and JICA’s work in reducing post-harvest losses was vital. Dubon explains that the Agricultural Value Chain Improvement project served “not only to increase revenues for small farmers but also to enhance food security for the country, as it focused on three crops: pitahaya (dragon fruit), coconut, and potatoes. In addition to reducing food imports, these products are being used in promoting tourism, a vital pillar of the economy.”

A follow-up project in 2021 with Belize’s Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security, and Enterprise provided cold/warm facilities for produce storage to small-scale farmers. Dubon notes that “The project was successful in improving Belize’s agricultural value chain,” and that the ministry is now looking at other ways to assist farmers.

The Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities was adapted from JICA’s Knowledge Co-Creation Program

to invite staff to Japan from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology in Belize, where the concept is relatively new. Dubon is a passionate advocate for shifting mindsets and building a future where “students with and without disabilities will learn and grow together” in a nurturing environment.

Though yet in its infancy, the project has already started to bear fruit. One course participant has already launched an Education Upliftment Pilot project, making use of the practices and lessons from Japan’s training program, the value of which have been greatly appreciated by Belize’s Special Education Unit. Dubon says, “Being a part of this project gives a sense of fulfillment and hope that my support, though it may be but a grain of sand, it will one day bring forth change in our society.”

In addition to her work at JICA, she is also a mentor and counselor to women who have suffered domestic violence. This unwavering commitment and multifaceted contributions to her community, including her roles as a wife and mother to three daughters, saw Dubon recognized as one of the Top 100 Women of Worth Belize 2022.

“My daily goal is to be a role model not only to my daughters but to all women trying to improve their lives. I know I cannot save the world but if I can make a difference by making a woman safe, safe from violence, safe from even death, then I will know that the work I do representing JICA and privately in the communities I walk into was worth it.”

Presenting a coconut tree to a farmer as part of the “agriculture value chain.”



A meeting with counterparts for the “Project for Capacity Development on Integrated Management and Conservation of Biodiversity at Regional Level in SICA Region” discussions.



Program Officer  
JICA Belize

**Marvia Corina  
Dubon**

# Building bonds, livelihoods, and resilience

Enrique O’Farrill Julien

Executive Director of the Chilean International Cooperation Agency for Development (AGCID)



This year marks a significant milestone in our strategic alliance with JICA: 25 years since the signing of the Japan-Chile Partnership Programme (JCPP). Launched jointly in 1999 between the governments of Chile and Japan, the JCPP aims to extend technical assistance for the economic and social development of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). Furthermore, we take pride in having been the first partnership program in our region.

The updated JCPP2030 agreement, signed in 2018, has provided us with a new framework to scale our trilateral cooperation strategy, with a strong commitment to facilitating innovative mechanisms to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

Over the past 25 years, we have strengthened our alliance to create projects in areas such as disaster prevention, environment, agriculture, aquaculture, fishery, and health, benefiting more than 30 LAC countries.

One standout initiative under this framework is the regional KIZUNA Project. Recognizing the extreme vulnerability of our region to disasters and the impact that has on development, our agencies have strived in recent years to build resilience against those threats through initiatives including South-South Cooperation and Triangular Cooperation.

As two nations that have acquired knowledge and learned lessons through the painful experiences of frequent natural disasters, Chile and Japan are natural partners in this area. Against this background, the creation of the Disaster Risk Reduction Training Program for Latin America and the Caribbean (KIZUNA Project) was agreed upon in 2014 by Chile and Japan. The goal is to share our combined

know-how and experience with other countries of the region. Between 2015 and 2020, more than 5,000 people participated in the program, of whom 800 received training in Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR). Involving urban planning, human resource training, and development to minimize damage and reduce disaster risks, DRR is a focus for AGCID and JICA.

The success of the initial program sparked plans for a second phase called KIZUNA II, Building Resilient and Sustainable Societies in the Face of Disasters in Latin America and the Caribbean, further strengthening our networks and cooperation within LAC.

For our agencies, KIZUNA is a “bond.” Through the program and our collaboration, its logo and concept have become recognized as symbols of the fruits of our alliance and position Chile and Japan as standard bearers for Triangular Cooperation initiatives.

A quarter of a century is a significant milestone, and we hope that this cooperation will continue and strengthen. We are firmly committed to fostering knowledge exchange that directly benefits our peoples and keeping our two nations at the forefront of future cooperation alliances.

## PROFILE

A 30-year seasoned veteran of development cooperation who has led technical negotiations for partnerships across four continents and multiple leading international organizations. Since January 2023, he has served as the Executive Director of the Chilean International Cooperation Agency for Development (AGCID).



The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) is one of the world’s largest bilateral aid agencies, supporting socioeconomic development in developing countries in different regions of the world.

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