

# JOICFP

SUPPORTING  
WOMEN'S HEALTH  
IN DEVELOPING  
COUNTRIES

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ACCORDING to the World Health Organization (WHO), approximately 800 women lose their lives through pregnancy or childbirth each day, 99 percent of them in developing countries. In many cases, these women don't have the freedom to make decisions about their pregnancies and childbirth. The Japanese Organization for International Cooperation in Family Planning (JOICFP) is an international cooperation NGO that works with women - particularly expectant or nursing mothers - in developing countries to protect their health and lives, aiming to improve the circumstances they face every day. JOICFP was established in 1968 to spread the family planning, maternal health and childcare know-how practiced in post-war Japan.

JOICFP's mission is to create choices for women all over the world, for them to receive the necessary information and services with

regard to their reproductive health and rights, as well as allow them to have the resources to decide whether or not to have a child, when they want to have one, and how many children they want to have.

Saving the lives of pregnant women in developing countries depends on eliminating what are known in this field as 'The Three Delays': (1) Delay in the determination of whether or not to receive medical attention (delay in decision making); (2) Delay in getting to hospitals or clinics that offer emergency obstetric care (transportation and access delay); (3) Delay in receiving adequate treatment (delay in medical treatment).

JOICFP's educational seminars cover topics that span safe motherhood strategies, adolescent sexual reproductive health, and the continued development of reproductive health programs. At the end of each workshop, participants form action plans to implement when they return to their home



Left: Training staff at a healthcare center in Tanzania

Below: Symposium sponsored by JOICFP, in concert with local and international NGOs, at the 2012 International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank Annual Meeting in Tokyo

countries. JOICFP has conducted these training sessions for over 5,600 personnel in 87 countries, all in order to promote sustainable sexual and reproductive health activities based on community needs.

“When we first started projects in Africa promoting family planning in the 1980s, even the expression ‘family planning’ had a negative connotation in many regions,” notes JOICFP Deputy General Manager Mayumi Katsube. “For example, it was taboo to speak of the matter in public.” In response to such constraints, JOICFP first worked on improving general health conditions within involved communities and providing nutritional counseling for children through collaboration with local health workers and volunteers. This formed relationships of trust with participating families and staff before moving onto the areas of women’s health and family planning.

Health volunteers trained in JOICFP initiatives constantly look for ways to work closely

with local communities. “Instead of working as donors and help seekers, we work as equal partners with our counterparts,” Katsube explains. For example, JOICFP worked in conjunction with their long-term partner, the Family Planning Association of Zambia (PPAZ), a member association of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), to launch the Community Safe Motherhood Project in 2011. The project centers on construction of maternity house facilities for expectant mothers and educating local communities about birth preparedness, seeking antenatal care and early transfer to a healthcare facility to receive specialized care during labor and delivery. Today, 140 community health volunteers from different villages have been selected and trained to become members of the Safe Motherhood Action Group (SMAG).

In addition to cultivating family planning initiatives, one of JOICFP’s significant roles lies in involving a diverse range of communities in the improvement

of maternal and child health. With this in mind, it’s expanding its network of international cooperation through accessible volunteering programs like the collection of used stamps for reuse and miswritten postcards for recycling, or the sale of charity merchandise.

JOICFP is working to spread its network within Japan as well. In 2012, it initiated the JOICFP Spot, where individual supporters can get together to share information.

Regardless, struggles still remain. “One of the challenges is in sustaining the skills and knowledge acquired through the projects,” Katsube says. “We want local counterparts, as well as government collaborators, to carry on the development process even after the initial projects have ended.” 



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