

Sivasundaram Suharnan
Photo: Toshio Matsubara



SIVASUNDARAM
SUHARNAN

Introducing Dr. Cars

Sri Lanka-born scientist and entrepreneur Sivasundaram Suharnan is driving advanced Japanese medical technologies to needy destinations around the world.

TOSHIO MATUBARA

with limited access to health services and resident physicians. In more recent years, the company has been active in promoting project activities aimed at introducing the Dr. Car more widely into developing nations.

Sivasundaram's decision to launch the Dr. Car project was inspired by his friend, a university professor. He told Sivasundaram that many people in the Republic of the Sudan with limited access to resident physicians were in need of medical services. Sivasundaram subsequently visited Sudan and witnessed people who were in desperate need of basic medical services. This experience led him to decide to introduce Dr. Cars there.

With support from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Axiohelix developed a total of seven Dr. Cars and provided them to Sudan from 2013 to 2015. In this three-year project, the company provided Sudan with 4WD off-road medical vehicles equipped with a remote diagnosis telecommunication system and a simple electronic medical record system developed by Axiohelix, along with ultrasonography and electrocardiograph systems jointly developed with a local start-up company in Okinawa.

"When we made our medical equipment for the people in Sudan, we were extra careful to ensure that the products could be used by the local people without the need for an operation manual," says Sivasundaram. "We also tried to keep our production costs as

SIVASUNDARAM Suharnan came to Japan under the scholarship program of Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in 1990. He studied robotics and computer science at the National Institute of Technology, Sasebo College and the University of Yamanashi, and established Axiohelix Co. in 2001. In the initial years following its establishment, his company was primarily engaged in support of basic genome research. In recent years, the company has shifted its major business area to the provision of IT solution services and support of genome medical research that enables diagnostic treatment to be offered in a more effective and efficient manner, based on its DNA research experience.

Furthermore, following the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011, Axiohelix developed the Dr. Car, a medical vehicle, or mobile clinic, equipped to support medical services for victims in disaster areas

- 1 Dr. Cars in Sudan
- 2 Sudanese medical staff use an ultrasonography system in a Dr. Car.
- 3 A blood pressure check in a Dr. Car

Photos: Courtesy of Axiohelix Co.

low as possible.” He continues, “Selling Dr. Cars is not a lucrative business in itself, but the medical equipment loaded in the vehicles will serve as a trigger for further business opportunities as they gradually increase in popularity among the local communities. It is more important than anything else to make the best use of the clinical data on as many as 70,000 local citizens living there that have been gathered during the project in pursuit of the further development of local healthcare services.”

In fact, the medical equipment loaded in the Dr. Cars in Sudan has attracted a lot of attention from medical enterprises around the world. For example, ultrasonography systems have been sold to corporations in Nigeria, Tanzania, Kenya, Ethiopia and India. Business talks are currently underway with prospective customers regarding the LED lighting systems and solar panels used for the Dr. Cars in Sudan.

In Sri Lanka, which is Sivasundaram’s home country, Axiohelix is in discussions with the national government to launch a research project in collaboration with Harvard University. In this country, there are a large number of blast victims who have lost legs in the explosion of countless mines and blind shells left in the ground since the end of the civil war, which lasted over twenty years.

Under the collaborative project in Sri Lanka, efforts are underway to provide blast victims with prosthetic limbs by using Dr. Cars. How will the common use of artificial limbs among the victims enhance their job/employment situation? How will it change Sri Lanka’s local economy? These are the questions that must be analyzed and answered by the research project.

Furthermore, Sivasundaram is looking to raise money through crowdfunding in order to launch a project aimed at expanding medical/health check-up services at schools in developing countries using Dr. Cars. He plans to implement this project primarily in Asian countries, including Indonesia, Cambodia, Myanmar and Sri Lanka.

“We have been in active contact with people in



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need through the Dr. Car project,” says Sivasundaram. “This experience has made me realize that we must explore and create business for the benefit of these people, and that is what we have to strive for. I am strongly convinced that it is my mission to serve as a bridge between Japan and developing countries.” 