

## ***Mini Series: – Visiting a project of a Former Colleague***

### **Part 3 – Community revitalization through the Nature School Terakoya and international cooperation**

As introduced on page 3, we have visited the Nature School Terakoya that has been engaged in activities to revitalize communities in Kanra Tomioka Area in Gunma Prefecture, incorporating international cooperation aspects. During our visit, we had a chance to hear from the staff about the details of the school's activities.

The Nature School is already engaged with various activities including the supplementary training courses for JOCV volunteers and reception of JICA trainees. The Nature School deals with a wide range of services, from providing suggestions to JICA on practical training activities, negotiations with JICA regarding training activities, coordination with hosting farmers, to organization of study meetings and reporting meetings. The School also plans and conducts the “Fieldwork Practical Course.” In this course through lectures and practical work, they teach the wisdom and art of learned by the farming villages, which are immediately useful in developing countries, and methods to improve living that have been used by life improvement extension officers. This course also offers an opportunity to learn about the processes and issues that need attention when organizing a workshop in developing countries, as well as facilitation skills. A 3-4 day course is organized targeting university and graduate students majoring in development studies, JOCV volunteers to be dispatched on assignment, and NGO staff. Moreover, the School organizes the “International Terakoya”, targeting students of different nationalities from junior high schools and high schools in Gunma Prefecture. The two-night International Terakoya has been organized once a year for the last five years (since 2003).

This activity is unique in that its achievement is not only the support for promotion of international cooperation, but also its contribution to the revitalization of farming villages. During our visit, we could observe a practical session on food processing for trainees from Panama and visit a direct sales outlet for local produce run by a local producer group. The training for Panamanian trainees was conducted at a Kanra Town facility called “Lala Kanra.” At this establishment there are various facilities such as an audiovisual room and a kitchen for cooking lessons. The Nature School rents these facilities from JPN Yen 750 – 2000 for a half-day to conduct lectures and practical sessions. The teachers were mothers from the area. We could see them teaching how to make traditional sweets rooted in the area, and hearing about sweets in Panama from the trainees. Rather than simply offering food-processing lessons, there was genuine interaction between people. We strongly felt the value of the local residents' involvement in international cooperation activities.

Another place we visited was the “Health Village – Ainoda Farm Product Direct Sales Centre.” It is open daily from 13:00 until the evening, except for the New Year break period. Their specialty is a *namaimo konnyaku* which is made from the plant called devil's tongue grown locally with reduced amounts of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. The shop also displayed a variety of seasonal vegetables and side dishes. The producers bring their produce to the centre before 13:00, and the turnover is distributed back to each producer using simple sales slips. Shop keeping duties are rotated among the members. People have shop-keeping duty on average three times a month. When we visited the shop, the farmer on duty told us his recollection of days with a trainee he accepted recently. Here, we also could find interaction between people. Moreover, if trainees who experienced the food processing and sales system here could make use of the know-how in their home countries and countries of their assignments, the ripple effects will be enormous.



**Scenery of Tomioka area in Kanra Town**



**Practical cooking session at Lala Kanra**



**Health Village - Ainoda Farm Product Direct Sales Centre**