

Symposium: “Pediatric Research Around the World: Sustained Activities at Research Hubs”

“Evidence-Based Nutrition Improvement Projects: Past Achievements and Future Directions”

Motoi ADACHI¹⁾

1)Department of International Cooperation St Mary's hospital

[Abstract]

St. Mary's Hospital (Kurume City, Fukuoka) began its international medical cooperation in 1982 by accepting nurses from Cairo Children's Hospital. Guided by Christian principles, the hospital has since continued to engage in both emergency and development-oriented international health activities.

In 2004, the hospital established the NGO ISAPH (International Support And Partnership for Health). ISAPH identified that the high child mortality in central Laos was caused by pediatric beriberi due to vitamin B₁ deficiency. Following nutrition-improvement interventions, deaths among infants attributable to vitamin B₁ deficiency have nearly disappeared. In recent years, the organization has turned its attention to Laos' traditional entomophagy culture. In collaboration with the Japan Society of Edible Insects, ISAPH aims to enable communities to raise and consume edible insects as a sustainable means of securing essential nutrients throughout the year.

In Malawi, a landlocked country in sub-Saharan Africa, approximately 40% of children are stunted relative to their age, a condition attributed largely to poor dietary diversity. Beginning in 2013, ISAPH implemented a JICA Grassroots Technical Cooperation Project in a village on the western edge of Mzimba District in the northern region. A second project followed in neighboring Manyamula in 2018. Working with staff from the district hospital and local health posts, the team promoted the cultivation of nutrient-rich crops such as carrots (agricultural intervention) and conducted cooking demonstrations in which community members brought preferred ingredients, learned new recipes, prepared meals together, and shared the food. As a result, the prevalence of stunting among children under five in the target areas decreased from 37.5% to 27.5%, accompanied by an increase in dietary diversity.

Even during periods without external funding, these activities were sustained. In 2025, ISAPH was awarded a third phase of the JICA Grassroots Technical Cooperation Project. The new phase aims to package these interventions and disseminate community-driven nutrition-improvement approaches to surrounding areas.

ISAPH has objectively assessed children's nutritional status and dietary diversity before and after interventions, presenting the evidence of impact to JICA and the Government of Malawi, which has earned the organization significant recognition. Such methodologies are indispensable for intervention research intended for social implementation. At the same time, placing research at the core of international cooperation activities is expected to serve as a strong incentive for St. Mary's Hospital as it continues to expand its programs.