

From Japan to the World ~ Helping to Enrich People's Lives ~

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Hello, everyone. Today, I'd like to talk to you about how my club activities help me achieve my goal to improve the status of women all over the world. There is a club unique to my college in Oita called the "Pedal Sewing Machine Volunteer Club", and I've been a member for five years. But what kinds of activity is it? We fix donated pedal powered sewing machines to developing regions overseas, such as parts of the Philippines, Malaysia and Thailand.

I joined this club because I had never heard of it before. I have been repairing these machines every Thursday after class. But, I do more than just that. I go to receive second-hand machines from people across Oita Prefecture, attend exchange meetings, do presentations about my club's activities, and even attend award ceremonies too.

So, what do we do once we get a donated machine? We start disassembling them entirely, piece by piece. Then, we can begin cleaning it, starting by finely brushing the smaller pieces, like nuts and bolts, before moving on to bigger parts. Next, we start pulling it back together, adding oil where necessary. Lastly, to finish it all off, we wax it until it shines like a brand-new machine. Mastering the entire process takes a few years, but once they are complete, they are ready to be donated to those in need.

The club members usually go once a year during our break in March to Asia-Pacific countries to donate dozens of machines, and I will tell you about my experience. When we arrive, we do not just donate to those in need. What happens if they don't know what to do with them? We provide technical support by explaining how to use them and simple repair techniques in English as well. We also fix previously donated machines if they have broken since our last visit. Sometimes it's difficult to get the message across, so we can get help from our teachers if necessary. These trips are an excellent chance to test our abilities and communication skills in the real world as future global engineers.

Some of you may think "why donate pedal sewing machines and not electric ones?" This is because we research in advance the needs of the people of the countries and regions to which we donate. In most of these communities, electricity can be rare, so electric machines are impractical, and sometimes even unusable. Because we repair and donate pedal-powered machines, electricity is not necessary. The people can use it to make clothing, carpets, and many other everyday necessities with them. Some of the local women sell their handmade goods to help cover living costs. I think that because of our club, we are helping empower and improve the status of women by creating jobs, rather than helping create better housing, donate used clothes, or improved shelter.

Like I mentioned before, my main goal in these activities is to 'improve the status of women'. One of the women who received a machine wrote back to us with a letter. She wrote "Please continue to help Thai women like you have helped me." She even named her machine 'Hanako' and cherishes it very much. When I read her letter, I was reminded that I didn't just fix an old sewing machine, but that my efforts helped with the quality of life for women in developing countries and made me want to continue my activities.

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Many people around the world live quite differently. I never had the chance to think about these things until I joined the pedal sewing machine volunteer club. Thanks to these past five years of experience, I was able to grow as a person, learn about different people and cultures, develop into a globally aware future engineer, and motivate myself to try and help change the world one step at a time.