

In the Field of Social Contribution

Success Story (7): “Making Dreams Come True”

by Mr. Edgar Morris / India

The Kerala AOTS Alumni Society started their activities in the mid 1960's and conducted seminars on Japanese management technique and cultural programs to introduce Japan. In 1979 a project to set up a full-scale educational institution named “Nippon Kerala Center (NKC)” was launched and the preparation took place. The largest challenge was lack of fund, but thanks to voluntary donations and contributions from the members, friends and well wishers it came into being in 1995, after having spent 17 years. High unemployment rate was a serious social problem in Kerala State in those days. On the other hand, with the arrival of IT boom there was a growing need for IT engineers and skilled workforce, however computer education was too expensive. NKC, then, planned to establish Nippon Kerala Institute for Training in

Office Automation (NiKITOA) to provide education on IT skills to women from economically backward families. Backed by financial assistance under Small Scale Grant Assistance scheme of the Japanese Government, NiKITOA was inaugurated in 1997. The 12-week training program of NiKITOA was designed to enhance the skills related to office secretary jobs including PC operation, documentation, presentation and computer applications. Tuition is free and many young aspiring women enroll to get a chance to work when they finish the program. Mr. Morris reviews the NiKITOA project and says “It was thanks to my AOTS training that I could recognize the meaning and importance of training and was motivated to launch a human resource development program for the financially underprivileged people.”

Mr. Edgar Morris

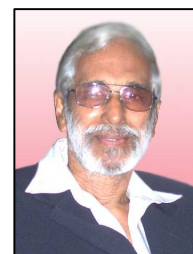
A resident of Cochin, Mr. Morris worked for the Madras state government, a machine tool manufacturer and then KAMCO (a cultivator manufacturer). He served as director at KAMCO and one of its affiliates, Kerala Agro Industries Corp. Mr. Morris served as president of the Alumni Society of AOTS, Kerala.

Past experience of AOTS training:

Technical Training in 1977 [provided at Kubota Corporation]

Management Training Course in 1981 [The Program for Cross-Cultural Management]

Technical Training in 1988 [provided at Danto Corporation]



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Story submitter: Mr. Edgar Morris
Country: India
Field of activities: Social Contribution



I have written this story because I was the President of the Alumni Society of AOTS, Kerala Regional Centre, during the relevant years.

Inspiring Impressions:

Alumni activities in Kerala State started in the mid 1960's. The activities consisted mostly of short seminars on Japanese management techniques, occasional cultural programs like Japanese film shows, Ikebana demonstrations, etc., besides an annual fellowship meeting of alumni. Soon it was realized that more worthwhile activities could be undertaken only if we had suitable physical space to operate from. So, in 1979 we launched a project to purchase some land and construct our own building on it. It was a very ambitious project because our bank balance at that time was the equivalent of less than 5,000 Japanese yen! Nippon Kerala Center (NKC), as the project was named, was planned as a unique Kerala-Japan joint venture of friendship, to be funded with voluntary donations and contributions from our members as well as our friends and well wishers in Kerala and Japan. After all, it took us over 17 long years to make it.

Over the years, as NKC gradually took shape, we could also take on more and more activities like seminars on Japanese management techniques with visiting faculty from Japan, teaching the Japanese language, transfer of technology through free technical consultancy to local small enterprises, etc. All these activities were based on the knowledge and skills we had gained through our training in Japan under AOTS. But what impressed some of us most during our training were (1) the concept of the scholarship scheme of AOTS by which technical training was given to less privileged persons totally free, with no strings attached, (2) the meticulous planning and execution of the training programs and (3) the dedicated service of AOTS staff. Inspired by these impressions, we wished to do something similar, for the benefit of the less privileged in our State.

A Dream Project:

Kerala has always been the most educated state in India, but paradoxically, it has also been industrially very backward. Consequently the most serious social problem of Kerala was

unemployment of the educated youth. The mid 1980's saw the advent of computers in India. Many new job opportunities were opening up and young men and women with computer skills were in great demand. But computer education was very expensive and beyond the reach of many, especially the economically backward sections of society. Therefore, the problem of educated unemployed youth in Kerala only continued to grow.

In 1995, when our NKC was fully constructed, we prepared a plan for setting up a training center within it for giving training in the use of computers and other modern office equipment to educated unemployed women of economically backward families, in order to increase their skills, thus making them more competitive in the highly competitive job market. We also prepared a scholarship scheme for this purpose, somewhat on the lines of AOTS scholarships for technical training. Of course, just like AOTS, we needed external financial assistance in order to execute the plan and the scheme.

We prepared a Project Report and submitted it to the Japanese Government with an application for financial assistance under its Small Scale Grant Assistance scheme. Obviously appreciating our track record as an alumni society of AOTS and our future plans for women development, the Japanese Government approved our application and granted us approximately US\$85,000 in 1996. With this amount we set up Nippon Kerala Institute for Training in Office Automation (NiKITOA) in our own building NKC in 1997. It was equipped with an array of the latest PCs available at that time and a host of other modern office equipment. It was a "you name it, we have it" kind of set up.

Training Program:

The training program, spread over a period of 12 weeks, was designed to enhance the skills of the trainees in four specific areas related to the job of an office secretary, viz.

- Communications: Operation of EPABX, Pager, Cell Phone, Fax, E-mail
- Documentation: Operation of Electronic Typewriter, Photocopier, Laminator, Binder
- Presentation: Operation of Slide Projector, Document Projector, LCD Projector
- Computer Applications: Microsoft Word & Excel

Such a comprehensive and multi-faceted training, all under one roof, was not available anywhere else, at any price and we offered it totally free. Unemployed women with high school education and family income not exceeding Rs.10,000 (about US\$300 at that time) per month were eligible for the training. Emulating the training system of AOTS, detailed daily schedule of training for the entire course of 12 weeks was prepared. Mid-course and end-course review and evaluation, with feed back from trainees, were done and modifications, wherever necessary, were made. Periodical and final tests were given before awarding certificates to the trainees. Two of our own members (including myself) managed the training center and also served as part of the faculty team. After all over 300 young women were trained during a period of 3 years. Most of them were from utterly poor families, some of them living in shacks. None of them could have otherwise afforded such training.



A trainee of NiKITOA was receiving a certificate

Dream Results:

One day, about six months after this training scheme was launched, one of the ex-trainees who had completed the course came to see me in my office. When I looked up I saw that she was sobbing and tears were rolling down her eyes. Shocked at such a sight I asked her what the problem was. Haltingly she blurted out “Sir, I got a job! I used to dream a lot about getting a job but never expected my dreams to come true. This is better than my wildest dream!” and from a bag she was holding she took a candy and gave it to me, which is a traditional gesture of thanks in this part of the world. It was one of the most gratifying moments in my life. Most of the other ex-trainees also informed us of their successes in getting good jobs as a result of the training they received at NiKITOA.

At the ceremony for awarding certificates to the first batch of 20 trainees, the chief guest, Justice Mrs. K.K. Usha of the High Court of State of Kerala, said “What I appreciate most about this organization is that the people behind it stay behind; they are not doing these things for personal glory.”

Inspired Service

The training we received in Japan not only enhanced our knowledge and skills in the respective fields of training which helped us to serve our respective companies/enterprises better, but also inspired us to help the less privileged among the people of our State, to enhance their knowledge and skills, so that they could improve their lots in life. We could do this by adopting the training methods of AOTS and emulating the dedicated service of AOTS staff. Our project, starting from creating a building of our own to operate from, to setting up a training center and executing the training program with memorable results, could be undertaken only because all of us could team up as the

alumni of AOTS under the banner of an alumni society of AOTS and thereby earn the credibility for recognition by the Japanese Government by way of assistance for this project.

Network to Serve:

The AOTS Alumni Societies constitute a unique network of engineers, executives and entrepreneurs, with a wealth of knowledge and skills in varied fields, gained through training in Japan under AOTS. If the immense potential of this one-of-a-kind worldwide network is harnessed to serve the underprivileged of the world, with friendly cooperation - which a few AOTS alumni societies are already doing - the world can be made a better place to live in, with peace and harmony.

Edgar Morris

Alumni Society of AOTS, Kerala Regional Centre