

## VOICES FOR CHANGE STORY REPORT FORM

This form should accompany the stories of challenge / change that you collected from your partners, stakeholders, staff, community members and volunteers (one form for each story). The stories themselves can be written up or take the form of photos, short videos, drawings, poetry, etc.

**Name of the organisation and person collecting the story:**

The story was collected for SAVWA by Enock, who work to empower communities through volunteering, cultural exchange and sustainable development. I participated in After School Program.

**Who provided the story and in which form:**

This document describes the conditions in Soshanguve, Pretoria, South Africa, during the period that one volunteer by name of Toru from Japan volunteers for long term project.

**When and where did the challenges/changes illustrated in the story take place:**

Due to the advancement of Japan's highly sophisticated technology, Toru was raised in an environment characterized by extensive automation and exceptional convenience. Surrounded by systematic and mechanical efficiency, my daily life was defined by predictability and comfort. However, upon encountering a vastly different cultural setting—where daily routines, such as meals, laundry, and time management, differ significantly he realized the necessity of adapting to and opening his mind toward diverse values and lifestyles.

Prior to Toru's arrival in Africa, he held unconscious prejudices: a belief that most people were physically imposing, potentially intimidating, and perhaps exclusive toward Asians. These preconceived notions were swiftly dismantled through direct interaction with local individuals, revealing the importance of challenging and overcoming cultural stereotypes.

Many Japanese individuals, himself included, are influenced by a national tendency toward stability, introversion, risk aversion, and excessive consideration of others' perceptions. Consequently, there is a frequent reliance on collective opinion rather than personal conviction, leading to escapism through virtual spaces and a passive acceptance of tasks without questioning intrinsic desires or aspirations. While he had succeeded within the predetermined framework of compulsory education through persistent effort, adulthood brought with it an

entirely uncharted landscape devoid of definitive answers. This transition underscored the necessity of independently choosing one's path based on personal beliefs and ambitions, even in the face of uncertainty and adversity.

Living abroad for the first time, he was compelled to shift from self-oriented behaviour to a more culturally sensitive and respectful approach. He became acutely aware of his conduct, striving to avoid impoliteness while demonstrating gratitude and empathy in unfamiliar social contexts. However, linguistic barriers remain formidable. Although he intensively studied English for university entrance examinations—developing proficiency in reading complex texts and vocabulary he struggled with spontaneous verbal expression. The rapid pace of native speakers poses significant challenges for listening comprehension, and translating thoughts from Japanese to English often delays his responses, disrupting conversational flow. This hesitation, coupled with a lack of confidence, often silences his voice or reduces his message to oversimplified expressions, misrepresenting his true intentions.

Moreover, safety concerns in certain regions restrict my mobility, preventing him from exploring freely despite a strong desire to immerse himself in local environments. In after-school support programs, his presence as an Asian individual often draws the children's attention, inadvertently distracting them from their learning.

These experiences have heightened his awareness of the limitations imposed by cultural bias and language barriers. They have also deepened his appreciation for intercultural understanding and the value of humility in global engagement. Moving forward, he aspires to further develop the ability to communicate across cultural divides and embrace diversity with openness and respect.

Many older students exhibit a noticeable lack of enthusiasm toward their studies. When completing homework, they are often more engaged in conversations with friends than in the task itself.

It has been approximately one month since Tour began living in this community, and he has gradually adapted to the environment. Local residents and children have come to recognize him, and through daily interactions. He has been able to gain a deeper understanding of the community's culture and structure. The initial preconceptions he held have been entirely dispelled, replaced by direct experiences of the warmth, cheerfulness, and hospitality of the people. These interactions have highlighted the importance of human connection across cultural boundaries.

Unlike the limited perspective often experienced within Japan, his immersion in this environment has allowed him to encounter diverse values and cultures, enabling him to reflect critically on what he once took for granted. By living within the community, he has come to understand the real challenges it faces and have begun to cultivate the flexibility and openness necessary for meaningful intercultural engagement.

Toru strives to maintain a constant sense of respect and mindfulness to avoid any offense, while proactively engaging in sports with children, greeting locals, and observing the community from various perspectives.

In retrospect, his past achievements in academics and extracurricular activities were often driven by a desire for external validation and pride in being recognized as “exceptional.” However, he has come to realize that none of these accomplishments would have been possible without the support of those around him. Moreover, through solo travels to various countries, he has encountered individuals who, due to socioeconomic constraints, are unable to pursue their dreams despite possessing a strong sense of purpose. These experiences have made him deeply aware of how privileged his upbringing was.

This awareness has instilled in him a strong sense of gratitude and a desire to give back. He now aspires to support children who, despite being born into difficult circumstances, possess a burning passion and the capacity for sustained effort, yet lack the necessary opportunities. He seeks a life surrounded by people who truly value him, grounded in mutual respect and appreciation.

Currently, Toru is living as a member of an organization dedicated to addressing such issues in a foreign country. By immersing himself in both the ideals and practical operations of the organization, he is reconstructing the foundational values that will shape his future.

At the same time, a profound challenge has emerged: the striking lack of motivation toward learning among the children. During his previous experience supporting children in impoverished areas of Cambodia, he was inspired by their strong sense of purpose—they studied diligently despite harsh conditions, driven by the belief that education was a gateway to a better future.

In contrast, the children in my current environment demonstrate little passion for learning. This appears to stem from a broader structural issue—a widespread lack of educational awareness among their parents. As a result, there is no familial foundation that values or encourages education, making it exceedingly difficult for children to develop intrinsic motivation for study.

While the specific content of school education may not always have direct practical applications, its process nurtures essential skills such as logical reasoning and perseverance. The social value of academic credentials lies in their association with these capacities. Those who have undergone structured education are statistically more likely to possess habits of rational analysis and self-discipline.

However, fostering this understanding among young children—particularly within families where education is not prioritized—is extraordinarily difficult. Changing such deeply embedded cultural perceptions is not feasible within a short timeframe; rather, it requires intergenerational efforts and sustained intervention.

He initially came here to explore ways to support children who, like himself, possess the drive to learn and succeed. Yet, he now find himself confronting a much deeper issue: the fundamental absence of motivation toward learning among the very children he had hoped to support. This reality compels him to reconsider how best to use his limited time and energy, prompting a profound reevaluation of his future path.

What kind of projects were implemented by your organisation in the place the story refers to :

After-school support for children involves assistance with homework, engagement in physical activities such as sports and various games to promote physical health, and the provision of nutritious and well-balanced meals. To prevent boredom and maintain a continuous attitude of learning, different activities are scheduled each day. Participation in sports fosters mutual respect, teamwork, discipline, perseverance, and leadership skills among children. Through the integration of nutritious meals, academic support, and physical activities, a safe and structured environment is provided to support the holistic development of children.

What does the storyteller believe is the significance of the events described in the story?

In developing countries, poverty has a profound impact on children's access to education. For instance, although school in Japan is typically scheduled to end at 4:00 p.m., classes here often conclude at 1:00 p.m. that is why many children return to homes where both parents work far away, leaving them without food or academic support. Due to economic hardship, they lack essential study materials such as notebooks and pens. Stationery is distributed by schools only once a year, and once these supplies are exhausted, students are left with no means to continue their studies.

Moreover, because many parents have not received an education themselves, they are often unaware of the long-term significance of learning. Consequently, children are not encouraged to study, perpetuating a generational cycle of poverty. Educational disparities are further exacerbated by stark regional economic differences, resulting in significant variations in school quality and academic standards.

In addition, classes are often taught in English, which presents a considerable barrier for younger students who have not yet developed adequate language proficiency. Compounding these challenges, classrooms frequently contain over 50 students, making it nearly impossible for a single teacher to provide individualized instruction. As a result, lessons proceed without ensuring comprehension, and many students fall irreversibly behind.

Amid such circumstances, children attempt to sustain their learning environments by sharing limited supplies such as pencils and erasers and gathering with students from other schools to teach one another. Furthermore, since many families cannot afford toys or sports equipment, these resources are also shared. This collective approach helps to create a safe and engaging space for children during hours when parental supervision is unavailable, fostering both well-being and informal education.

## PHOTOGALLERY

