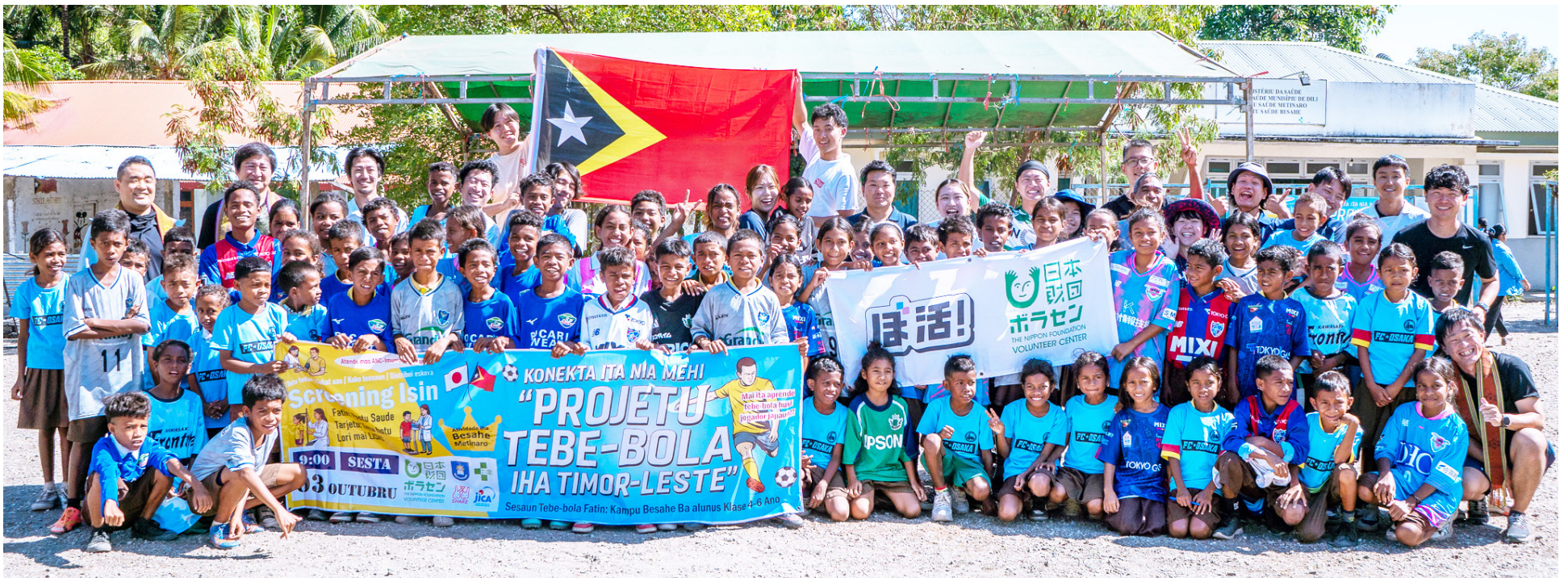


Connect Our Dream – Football & Education Project by Japanese Former Professional Soccer Players and University Student Volunteers



The Nippon Foundation Volunteer Center carried out its second volunteer mission in Timor-Leste this year, dispatching 12 Japanese student volunteers from September 28 to October 7. Together with a former professional player from Japan's pro football league, the J.League, they organized football training sessions for Timorese children and distributed a total of 762 football items—including balls, uniforms, and bibs—to schools and communities across the country.

The Nippon Foundation Volunteer Center, established in 2010 as a student volunteer organization in Japan, has supported student-led social contribution projects both domestically and internationally. Its activities include earthquake disaster relief in Japan, participation in events like the 2023 World Baseball Classic, and environmental conservation projects in Bali.

This “Connect Our Dream” project began after a 2024 meeting between the President of the Nippon Foundation and the President of Timor-Leste, José Ramos-Horta, who requested support for the development of children's football in Timor-Leste. Following that meeting, the annual volunteer program was launched, with this year marking its second edition.

During their 10-day stay, the students also engaged in educational activities such as art, crafts, science experiments, and cultural exchange lessons at local elementary schools.

At the free school located at the presidential palace, the volunteers had hands-on lessons—such as making observation tools from snack boxes to study the sun, teaching the traditional “Soran Bushi” dance, crafting musical instruments from everyday materials, and doing origami together.

The children's enthusiasm impressed the Japanese students, who commented: *“The kids welcomed us warmly and joined every activity with great energy. Their smiles gave us strength.”*

In Besahe, the Japanese volunteers also interacted with nursing students from the National University of Timor-Leste (UNTL), they stayed overnight at an elementary school and shared Japanese culture, cooked Japanese food together, and watched the documentary “Life Goes On” (produced by MONJO VIDEO WORKS), which depicts the lives of mountain coffee farmers in Timor-Leste. These experiences strengthened the friendship between the two nations.

One of the project's key goals was to provide Timorese children with opportunities to learn both “theory and practice.”

A football training session was led by Masao Kiba, a former professional player, with support from the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV). About 200 children from Besahe Elementary School, YMCA Dili, and Manleu participated.

The children listened attentively to the coaches' instructions and focused intently on their training. The parts of the session where they could touch and play with the ball brought smiles to their faces. During matches between the Japanese volunteers and the children, the children's goals were met with loud cheers across the football field, creating a lively and exciting atmosphere.

Mr. Kiba said: *“I wanted to teach the basics, like passing and trapping, because all skills develop from there. The children were highly motivated and full of energy. Even within just two hours, I could see their progress. What matters most is to keep practicing every day.”*

Octaviana Mendonça Soares, one of the participants, shared: *“We usually have to share one ball among everyone, so receiving so many balls made us really happy. I hope they come again next week!”*

Parents who observed the event commented: *“In my time, we couldn't play freely like this. I hope today's children can study and be active. The friendship between Japan and Timor-Leste is truly special.”*

Meanwhile, in Besahe, the student volunteers also collaborated with NGO SHARE and the local health post to provide health screening services, combining sports activities with community health support.



Credit: Monjo Video Works