

The August entry features Marie Louise Towari, Chair of Japan-based NPO, Think About Education in Rwanda, who experienced many turbulences, in Rwanda and in Japan, and who is now devoted to volunteer and advocacy work for Rwandan children.



**Marie Louise Towari** (middle left) founded NPO “Think About Education in Rwanda” in 2000. As a dressmaking teacher at a technical college in Kigali, Rwanda, Marie first visited Japan for a dressmaking training program in Fukushima in 1993 and returned to Rwanda in February 1994. Just two months after her return, the Rwandan genocide broke out. With her three children, Marie fled to the neighboring country, Congo, and worked as an interpreter for a Japanese doctor at a refugee camp. With help from friends in Japan, she moved to Fukushima with her family. After founding the NPO, Marie has been advocating for education of Rwandan children. During the 2011 Northeastern Earthquake and Tsunami, Marie’s family was affected again and had to move to temporary housing. Despite all the hardships, Marie continues her volunteer and advocacy work.

Photo: Marie (middle left) with GLH co-founders, Tomoko Watanabe (left) and Nassrine Azimi (middle right), and ANT-Hiroshima Staff, Masami Yamamoto.

## Partners in Profile

### Umuco Mwiza School Kigali, Rwanda

Marie Louise Towari talks about her encounter with Hibaku Jumoku and Green Legacy Hiroshima and the winding journey of these seeds from Hiroshima to Kigali, Rwanda. The following narrative was originally in Japanese and was adopted to English by GLH secretariat team.



I have had many opportunities to visit Hiroshima for my NPO activities. I was very touched and moved after knowing about Hibaku Jumoku and Green Legacy Hiroshima’s campaign. In my motherland, Rwanda, civil war broke out 25 years ago and over a million people were tragically slaughtered in three months. I brought back the seeds of Hibaku Jumoku to Umuco Mwiza School, which I founded after the genocide. The students felt the strength of Hibaku Jumoku from taking care of the second-generation seeds and witnessing them grow into lush saplings. Under the trees, the students remember the preciousness of peace and wish such a tragedy will never happen again.

It was not an easy journey bringing the seeds back to Rwanda. In March 2013, I started the process of importing some Hibaku seeds into Rwanda, but with zero experience of this kind, I was unable to put together all the necessary documents. My second attempt was three years later, in March 2016. Finally, I could successfully gather all the paperwork and carry back the seeds of Hibaku persimmon, Kurogane Holly, and Gingko, the first step to realize my dream of connecting the Hiroshima experience to my homeland.

Upon arrival at the school, these seeds were put into a pot made from banana peels. Even though the students and staff members took great care of them, only one persimmon seed sprouted from the first shoot. In July 2017, again, I brought some seeds back for another attempt, but still only persimmons survived.

Now, the six persimmon saplings have been moved to the garden at the school. It has been three years since the seeds were planted, but unfortunately these trees are not 100% healthy. Rwanda is a country south to the equator, with abundant, strong sunlight, it creates a harsh environment for plants to grow. To protect the trees from the sunlight, we surrounded it with twigs as fences and built roofs with leaves also as protections from the chicken and goats that wander in the yard.

However, the trees still fell sick. As we had no experience in raising trees, we started getting anxious seeing their changes little by little. We took advice from GLH master gardener Mr. Horiguchi Chikara and attempted to nurture the saplings accordingly. Seeing the leaves fall off one by one and the sapling grew weaker day by day made us all sad. “But the trees are just like Rwanda, experiencing the up-and-downs, having leaves falling off, but eventually new sprouts will grow – this is the strength of life,” I thought.

This past spring break, fifth- and sixth-graders came together around the now healthily-growing persimmon saplings, listened to stories of the A-bomb and the Hibaku-Jumoku of Hiroshima, and learned about the winding journey of these seeds from Japan to Rwanda. “How were the seeds carried here?,” “what kind of fruits will they bear?,” “can we eat the fruits?”... The elementary school students had so many questions

and promised to take care of these trees with all their hearts.

In the end, I sincerely hope someday, under the grown persimmon trees here at Umuco Mwiza School, the Rwandan people can talk about peace with people from all over the world.

Please visit Kigali and meet the lovely children who are taking care of the second-generation Hibaku-Jumoku in Rwanda!

