

2022 Kan'ichi Asakawa Award
Student Paper Contest for International Understanding and Exchange
Junior High School / Highest Award
Tackling global issues starts with small classroom talks

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Four thousand, seven hundred-thirty one. This is the number of Ukrainian civilians reportedly killed in the Russian invasion of Ukraine as of June 27, 2022. This is close to 4,913 citizens of Aizuwakamatsu City aged 10 to 14 (as of July 1, 2022). In the four-plus months since February 24, the horrific conflict has claimed almost the same number of lives of all the 5th graders of elementary to 3rd graders of junior high school in my town.

I thought of the number of casualties as mere growing statistics. However, I realized how cruel and horrific the number is by applying it to that of people in our town. I immediately told my family about it, wanting to share it with someone else.

“I hope that the conflict, which has claimed so many lives, will end soon”. “Parents were killed in the conflict and those children left behind are also victims”. I discussed the horror of the conflict with all of my family members. We talked about things we could do. I thought it would be difficult to save those children because, in reality, there was nothing I could do to stop the conflict. Then my father taught me the concept of “glocal”. The term was coined by combining the words “global” and “local”, and refers to the concept of “thinking global and acting local”.

When I learned about the idea of “glocal”, I felt a little closer to the conflict in Ukraine, which I thought was occurring far away from here. In other words, although the events in Ukraine are a global issue, I began to wonder if I could do something for this issue from a local perspectives.

I suddenly became able to see many different things after having this viewpoint. I realized that the things I had been passing by, such as the donation box next to cash registers at convenience stores and fund-raising drives at big supermarkets, were all related to Ukraine.

“I want to do something to help them”. I had always thought that there was nothing I could do. However, my soul was stirred when I learned about the concept of glocal and the people who were raising funds for the cause. I wasted no time in talking with my family on July 31 and gave myself the following assignment as well as put forward as many ideas of things I

could do as possible.

Assignment:

What kind of support can we provide to Ukrainian children 18 and under who lost their parents in the conflict until they can earn an income for themselves?

Things I can do:

(1) Make donations through Save the Children.

(Pros)

Fundraising with the specific purpose of usage can lead to the solution of the issue.

(Cons)

We need to owe the money to our parents not just by using our own pocket money.

(2) Purchase food and products made in Ukraine.

(Pros)

It is easy to implement because we can just switch them from ones made domestically or those from other countries.

(Cons)

While this will help support Ukraine, it is unclear whether it can lead to the solution of the issue.

(3) Become interested in the situation in Ukraine and talk about it with our friends.

(Pros)

We can continue to do that because there is no financial burden.

(Cons)

It is unclear whether it can lead to the solution of the issue.

I want to take these 3 actions, starting with those that can be implemented. I will carry out (1) and (2) during the summer break, as they can be put into action now. I also want to implement (3) when school resumes in the second semester.

I came up with (3) because I was thinking about Ukraine's recovery in the context of the current state of Fukushima, which is in the midst of revitalization after the Great East Japan Earthquake. I was 3 when the disaster hit, so I don't remember much about it. However, every year on March 11, as the day when the disaster occurred, there are a lot of stories featured on special TV programs and extensive coverage of the disaster in the newspapers. This day particularly draws attention from people within Japan and from around the world

and gathers momentum for the support for Fukushima's revitalization. I am also able to update my knowledge about the progress in revitalization and renew my awareness of challenges we face. However, for the remaining 364 days, many people, including myself, may be going about their daily lives without caring about the disaster. This is despite the fact that there are still people who live as evacuees, unable to return to their hometowns.

Reflecting on my thoughts and actions, I thought that if we pay attention to difficult situations and bring up the topic, it could lead to support. For example, if many people, including myself, continue to take an interest in the disaster, recovery efforts won't stop and it could even influence the government and speed up the recovery. If we apply this theory to my assignment, we can continue to work on (1) and (2) as long as we continue to work on (3). When I get financially independent a few years from now, I will be able to donate money and buy food from Ukraine using my own money. It could boost Ukraine's recovery, which will ultimately solve these issues.

Even if we start taking actions now with the concept of glocal, we will not see immediate results. However, if we share this idea with our friends and family and continue to work on these initiatives, I am sure that it will lead to results eventually. With this belief, I will continue to do what I can do.