



## Supporting a Brighter Future for Tanzania from Japan

**Fidea Kobayashi, a native of Tanzania who lives in Nagano Prefecture, supports women and orphans in Tanzania, in cooperation with her family and the company where she works.**

Fidea Kobayashi brings a smile to guests' faces at a wedding reception held in the restaurant where she works

Photo: Courtesy of St. Cousair Co., Ltd.

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### KUMIKO SATO

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**S**T. Cousair Co., Ltd. sells wines, jams and other products from its headquarters in Iizuna, a town in northern Nagano Prefecture. Its flagship store sits within the company's own winery, on a small hill overlooking a countryside landscape of apple orchards, for which the region has long been known. Wine and jams produced by the company are sold in the winery's store. Amidst numerous products in the store, displayed with ordinary, unassuming package designs, there are several varieties of jams with bright, colorful labels that stand out in one corner of the store. These "Fidea jams" are popular products, not only because of their labels featuring beautiful patterns inspired by *kanga*, a traditional Tanzanian cloth, but also because the jams clearly express the unique nuances of the fruits from which they are derived, including blueberries, strawberries and oranges. The recipes for these jams took inspiration from Fidea Kobayashi, who works in the winery restaurant, and is from Songea, a town in southern Tanzania, and

some of the proceeds from sales are donated to the support of Tanzanian orphans.

In Tanzania, Fidea met and married her husband, Kazushige Kobayashi, a Japanese man working for the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV). In 1996, she came to his home in Nagano, and she discovered for herself the life of a Japanese apple farmer. At first, Fidea helped with agricultural work, but soon began to work part-time in the St. Cousair factory in 1998 through the introduction of an acquaintance.

Fidea lived in comfort in Japan. Because of this comfort, she found herself gradually becoming more concerned about the women and children struggling in Tanzania.

Fidea says, "Because my mother supported widows for many years, I lived in Tanzania surrounded by their children. My mother protected and raised children abandoned at our front door. I remember every day those children crying, begging me not to forget them when I left for Japan."

Many children lose their parents to illnesses in Tanzania, and the issue of children who are abandoned due to poverty is also serious.

- 1 On a trip to Tanzania, Fidea Kobayashi teaches children a Japanese song
  - 2 Fidea visits an orphanage in Tanzania
  - 3 “Fidea jams” on display in the St. Cousair store
  - 4 Fidea with her husband Kazushige in the Nagano countryside
- Photos: Courtesy of St. Cousair Co., Ltd. (1, 2); Kumiko Sato (3, 4)

In 1999 Fidea had a discussion with her mother and elder sister and decided to establish the Songea Women and Children Care Organization (SWACCO), an NGO devoted to supporting the self-reliance of women struggling with poverty and to fostering orphans, with her home in Songea being the center of her activities. Fidea contributed some of her income and money from lectures and fund-raising campaigns to SWACCO, and supported its activities from Japan.

In order to better support orphans, SWACCO embarked on a plan to build an orphanage on a 12-hectare lot in 2005. “When the then president of my employer (currently the company’s chairman) learned of this, he said, ‘This is not something you should do by yourself,’ and said that his company would support my activity. I am still wholeheartedly grateful to him,” says Fidea.

Subsequently, Fidea became a full-time waitress in the restaurant and continued her activities, including lectures, supported by her coworkers. Collection boxes were placed in stores directly managed by St. Cousair all across Japan. In 2010, Fidea founded Mwangaza Foundation, an NPO, with her home at the center of her activities, to even more strongly support SWACCO’s activity for supporting orphans in Tanzania from Japan. The word *mwangaza* means “light” in Swahili, symbolizing her wish for Tanzanian children to live, keeping sight of the light of hope. Two wells and two residential buildings have been completed on the lands bought by SWACCO and currently, about eighty orphans live there. Fidea and her coworkers dream of expanding and building a clinic and a school within the site.

Fidea is now an employee her company cannot do without. When she appears in the hall of the restaurant, the place is filled with bright smiles. Many regular customers come all the way from distant places to see Fidea, who encourages them, saying, “Look to the future!” even when they are facing saddening situations.

Fidea’s own smile for all who see it in Japan suggests the future for Tanzania is bright. 

