

Africa Japan Forum  
African Kids Club Present



☀️ Summer Camp 2016



On a sunny day, July 30<sup>th</sup>, children who have African ethnicity and their mothers gathered at Kawai camp site in Okutama, Tokyo. There were about 50 participants in total. The event was a huge success not only the summery weather and blue sky, but also the number of participants. 13 university-student youth supporters including a South African mixed boy and a Nigeria-Congo mixed girl, and management staffs organized this event.

While the supporters and management staffs were carrying and setting up the tents, cheerful kids and mothers arrived one after another. Some seemed so excited, the others hid themselves behind their mothers. It was the first time for the youth supporters to join this camp. Feeling a bit nervous, we introduced each other.

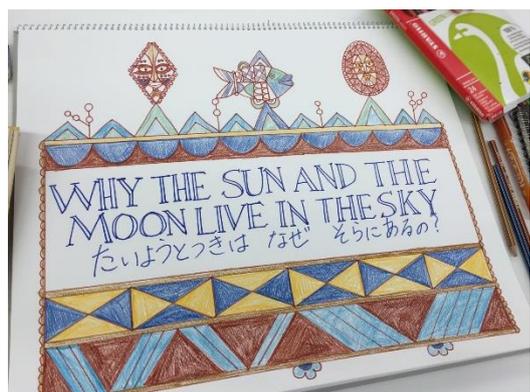
“Do your things by yourself” is the essence of camping. Even some inconvenience mean a lot. At this time, the participants carried their own futon, of course the kids, too. The older ones helped the younger ones. They must felt independence, “I did it without mom!” After that, we changed into the swimwear to get ready for swimming in the river. By this time, kids opened up to each other and enjoy talking with the supporters.



Finally it's time for playing in the river. The sun beat down intensely on us, but the water

was comfortably chill. Male supporters supervised both upstream and downstream for safety, so that the kids could enjoy without any danger.

After running around, screaming and swimming in the river, management staffs and supporters prepared for dinner. Grilling meat and vegetables, and making Yakisoba for all the participants took about 3 hours. The highlight of the dinner was of course, the Nigerian tomato stew. Two staffs, who also have Nigerian husband, made amazingly delicious stew. It actually tasted better than my mother's handmade. Allured by the pleasant smell of the meal, the kids gradually gathered around. We all enjoyed having dinner over conversation.



Japanese summer night would never be completed without firework (Hanabi). Red, blue, green, yellow... colourful Hanabi brightened up the campsite. Before we went bed, the supporters from Takushoku University had a story time. They made a wonderful picture-story about "WHY THE MOON AND THE SUN LIVE IN THE SKY?", which is a famous African folk-tail. Everyone focused on and enjoy the story.

On the next chilly fresh morning, we made tomato soup using the leftover stew, which was also delicious. After having breakfast, we went to the river again. It was colder and the kids were a little bit tired from yesterday's activities, so the time passed calmly compared to the day before. We did another typical Japanese summer activity, the watermelon hitting (Suika-wari). The watermelon was so refreshing and tasty.

Although it was just 2-day event, the kids seemed embraced this African Kids Club community so much. For kids, it is hard to find someone who has same background as them. They feel like they won't fit into their school. Some are even bullied badly. Some tried to hide their African side of themselves, like straightening their hair. I, as Nigerian-Japanese, can understand their feeling of searching their own identity. I can feel their anxiety of never fitting into any community. However, this 2-day camp was a great opportunity for them to realize that they are not alone. One boy said, "This was the best

camp I've ever been! When can we meet next time? Halloween? Christmas?" It is actually cool to have multi background. I wish they realized that ever single feature of them, from



skin complexion to their hair, is precious.

Not only for the kids, but also for the mothers, this was a rare opportunity. The mothers also suffer from parenting; their kids are experiencing a whole different things from the mothers. Nothing is harder for them to see their kids being bullied because of their appearance. There was a mother of a 10-year-old boy, who tended to act aggressively when he being said something about his background. She wept tears of joy, because she never saw her boy being so happy and proud of himself as mixed kid.

This event was a huge momentum for African Kids Club and myself. We all reconfirm that there are many African kids and their parents who need this place. I can't wait to see them again on next event.

Word: Irene Evbade-dan