

Chapter 2 Improving JICA's Evaluations and Projects (Recommendations)

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Effectiveness of Secondary Evaluation

[Fiscal 2005 Secondary Evaluation Results]

The evaluation results of the quality of 45 terminal evaluations in fiscal 2003 and fiscal 2004 showed that the terminal evaluations were above “average” level in all the evaluation criteria. In particular, the average scores were high for “data collection,” “assessment of performance” in analysis, “method of analysis,” and “five evaluation criteria.”

According to the chronological analysis, the quality of terminal evaluation exhibits over-the-year improvement. The difference is particularly large between evaluations of fiscal 2003 and fiscal 2004. The improvement can be greatly attributed to the fact that the Evaluation Guidelines were drastically revised in February 2004 and the evaluations were performed in line with the new guidelines, thus improving the quality of primary evaluations. With progress in field based management in aid, JICA increasingly decentralizes the implementation of evaluations to overseas offices. It is now encouraging to learn that the introduction of new evaluation guidelines may have improved the quality of primary evaluation.

The project evaluations that were conducted based on the evaluation reports by the secondary evaluators were rated as generally good on the whole. Despite the constraint of extracting evaluation data from reports, the secondary evaluation is an attempt to assess projects on the secondary basis from the external perspective. The secondary evaluation thus has significance in itself because it is the basis for the assessment of projects by the general public. As for the chronological changes, an improvement in projects was demonstrated between projects evaluated in fiscal 2003 and those in fiscal 2004, as in the case of the quality of evaluations. There is a certain correlation between the results of project evaluation based on evaluation reports by the secondary evaluators and the quality of primary evaluations, and a thorough analysis is required to probe the causal relationships.

[Combination of Internal and External Evaluations]

Evaluations of individual projects are conducted as part of JICA's operation management, and regarded as internal evaluations for which JICA is responsible. In reality, many project evaluations involve consultants in a relevant field and intellectuals, such as a small number of national committee members, to ensure specialty in evaluation and technology. Nonetheless, what is important to carry out useful and convincing evaluations with high credibility and feed the evaluation results back to decision-making in the future, regardless of whether it is internal or external.

Internal evaluators generally have expertise about the details and regions in relation to a project and also have clear understanding about various project activities. Under the current framework, in line with the explicit guidelines, internal evaluators appropriately conduct quantitative and qualitative analysis by means of five evaluation criteria and others and describe the results in a clear, understandable manner to readers. At the same time, a third party with no vested interest in the project conducts secondary evaluation (evaluation of evaluations) in order to increase transparency and neutrality of evaluations. This framework has combined the advantages of internal evaluations and external evaluations: the former having deep understanding of projects and the latter having high objectivity and transparency.

[Feedback of Secondary Evaluation]

As already mentioned, it is assumed that the introduction of new evaluation guidelines has improved the quality of primary evaluations, which demonstrates that the feedback of the results of the secondary evaluation has been effective in improving the quality of primary evaluations. It is therefore important to make use of the secondary evaluation results in an effort toward reinforcement of evaluation management and development and improvement of evaluation methods, including impact and efficiency.

There is an opinion within JICA that the secondary evaluation exerts a favorable pressure on the implementation of high quality evaluations, as being a by-product. More terminal evaluations are currently carried out in a manner to proactively address and analyze issues and scrutinize improvements. Although some projects are found to be insufficient in outcome as a result of project

evaluations by the secondary evaluators, many of the primary evaluations have been properly performed. Regardless of the quality of the project, there is an intention to learn lessons, while ensuring accountability to the people through proper evaluations, which indicates a favorable prospect.

Toward Further Improvements

In order to consolidate better quality in evaluations, it is essential to improve evaluation methods, further develop implementation tools such as guidelines, and raise awareness of increasingly competent JICA staff about evaluations. The following are issues that require further improvements as a result of the analysis of this year's evaluation.

[Evaluation Framework]

Along with the reinforcement of JICA's field-oriented approach, more evaluations are supervised and carried out by overseas offices as to technical cooperation projects. However, evaluations used to be, in principle, carried out by the study team dispatched from Japan. Thus, due partly to limitation of costs, the study periods are mostly the same length for any project, and sometimes they seem too short when judged by the report alone. However, since data are collected through project monitoring at a preliminary stage of the study, it is necessary to conduct the secondary evaluation with due consideration given to preliminary data collection. It is thus essential to fully describe related matters in the primary evaluation reports. In doing so, instead of what kind of data has been collected in advance, it is important to render how data have been collected through project monitoring. As the secondary evaluation concludes, data collection through daily monitoring activities will lead to high quality primary evaluations. Furthermore, availability of preliminary data would naturally facilitate efficient evaluations.

As for the composition of study teams, it is necessary to create some kind of profile of individual team members as information sources, or to verify objectivity and specialty by describing their relationships with the project. The breakdown of the composite members alone would lead to a discussion confined to only whether they are stakeholders of the project or not. Regardless of whether they are stakeholders or not, what matters is that the appropriate persons are participating to perform high quality evaluations. The credibility of internal evaluation matters less than the necessity to describe in the report what specialty the evaluators represent and where they stand on evaluations, in order to achieve accountability to the public.

It is also necessary to pay attention to the participation of developing countries, which is the main cause for lower scores for "evaluation framework." JICA's project evaluation is in principle a joint evaluation, and agreement on evaluation results is to be concluded with partner countries. However, as far as participation of developing countries in evaluations is concerned, it is necessary to involve the developing countries in the evaluation process at the stage of evaluation design, instead of participation only at the final stage of compilation of evaluation results. In recent years, the number of projects managed by overseas offices has increased, and the participation of developing countries in the evaluation process is in progress. On the other hand, the degree or participation of the developing countries is not necessarily explicit in the reports. The specific participation of developing countries in the evaluation process should be clearly mentioned. Furthermore, the evaluations reflecting the opinions of beneficiaries should be further encouraged, although such cases are on the increase.

[Efficiency]

Efficiency requires two viewpoints: a viewpoint of cost-saving and a viewpoint of cost-efficiency that is to measure if the cost matches up with the outcome. Some projects are individually evaluated from the viewpoint of economy (savings). However, the viewpoint of cost-efficiency or comparison with the cost of other projects that would bring about similar outcomes is not necessarily fully reflected in the evaluations. In the first place, it is difficult to convert outcomes into monetary values unanimously in JICA's Technical Cooperation Projects. For example, the value of a commodity is calculable, but when outcomes are transferred technology, enthusiasm, social framework, etc., it is not easy to measure the outcomes and examine whether the outcomes are worth the costs. Nonetheless, it is not that technical cooperation can spend as much as it takes. Attempts should be made to apply various methods to evaluate efficiency, accumulate information involved in each field, and issue and incorporate the viewpoint of comparison. In some areas where JICA has accumulated a certain level of cooperation experiences, it should be possible to compare

similar activities of similar projects. As a first step forward, it is necessary to grasp the unit cost of input and to stipulate in the guidelines that cost aspects should be described in the reports.

[Sustainability]

This year's study investigated sustainability of projects from the aspects of organization, technology, and finance. Financial sustainability was generally rated low, and the framework for ensuring sustainability was weakly incorporated into the design of a project. The assessment of sustainability is on the basis of prospects at the time of terminal evaluation, and many of them are under optimistic assumptions, resulting in insufficient evaluations.

Sustainability is not something that appears naturally, out of nowhere, after termination of cooperation, but should be established intentionally by integrating it into the project purpose, and should be given due consideration not only at terminal evaluation in the final stage of a project but also at the stage of planning and implementation. Upon doing so, it is necessary to carry out evaluations with consideration given to the viewpoint of whether a framework is created before the termination of the project to maintain outcomes in pursuit of ensuring sustainability.

[Impact of Evaluation and External Conditions]

Though each project sets its own purpose, the project purpose is not the ultimate target. The attainment of project purposes is normally positioned in the process of achieving overall goals. From the perspective of result-oriented approach, overall goals should be achieved, not to mention project purposes. It is also important to improve external conditions to achieve these goals.

If a seamless line of cause-effect, output-outcome (project purpose)-impact (overall goal), can be presumed and if a project is implemented with clear goals and a sound implementation framework, it would bring about outcomes and evaluations would be easy to perform. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to whether overall goals are reasonably set, the selection of project purposes is appropriate, and whether external conditions are well organized and explained.

In specific terms, overall goals should not just be added on top of project purposes. Project purposes should be set as an approach to achieving overall goals. Attainment of project purposes is essential to achieve overall goals; however, achieving overall goals itself will be difficult unless appropriate project purposes are selected since there are generally several approaches to achieving overall goals.

Moreover, overall goals are usually associated with a combination of several other projects, not just one project. Thus, from the time of ex-ante evaluation, it is necessary to identify the relation between and the position of the relevant project and other

projects using a development objectives chart in order to examine whether expected outcomes and project purposes are appropriately set. At the time of terminal evaluation, it is important to carry out evaluations with due consideration given to various aspects from the viewpoint of program evaluation, while confirming the progress of other assistance, in addition to collecting data pertaining to the relevant project.

Furthermore, it is necessary to improve the assessment of situations concerning the items listed in the section of external conditions. When analyzing the effectiveness of projects, it is insufficient just to confirm the achievement of purposes. In order to verify how much the project itself contributes to achieving the purpose, it is essential to understand the external and internal factors that can greatly affect the project outcomes.

When evaluating impact, it should be limited to the estimation of how much impact is possible in most cases due to the timing of implementation of terminal evaluations. Even in that case, it is still necessary to detect an incipient impact, present a basis for the expected impact, and make the estimation more convincing.

[Lessons Learned]

Since terminal evaluations require signed agreement of both parties, some point out that recommendations and lessons learned tend to be laid out in the interest of partner countries and it is at times difficult to be candid about what should be done. Some reports contain important points in the statement of the evaluation team leader, instead of in the lesson section. Currently, evaluation team leaders' statements are in essence treated as secondary documents, but they may contain valuable suggestions. Since it is important to share recommendations and lessons of terminal evaluation with the partner countries, based on the notion that the project will be handed over to them, it is desirable to include arguments of both sides when an agreement on evaluation results is not reached between both parties. A separate presentation of the points of argument perhaps in the form of the evaluation team leader's statement would be a good way to highlight what the issues are for the sake of future references.

Lessons learned should be generalized in nature, but the problem is how to generalize the lessons, which are too vague. Thus, in order to generalize lessons learned, it may be better to compile guidelines on what basis lessons are to be extracted. However, in the end, unless evaluators do not understand the project management and the cooperation field well, they cannot draw out any effective and sufficient lessons, based on the judgment of what is important for similar projects in the future, from the analysis of conditions of individual projects. In a sense, this item challenges the ability of evaluators more than any other item. For this reason, it is persistently difficult to make improvements. Therefore, it is important, more than anything else, for evaluators

to have substantial knowledge about the projects and relevant fields, when extracting appropriate lessons. Consequently, it is vital to select appropriate evaluators.

Whatever the case may be, it is time to improve the lessons learned. It is effective to database lessons learned every year for promotion of utilization of evaluation results and select truly practical and useful lessons from evaluation results. JICA is

already in the process of databasing lessons as part of efforts in knowledge management. Further systematization and sharing of lessons within the organization will enable the utilization for review and evaluation in formulating and implementing future plans, which will make a great contribution to policy development, project formulation and creation of project implementation plans.

Closing

Evaluation is a mechanism for assuring quality of projects and evaluation of evaluations (secondary evaluation) can be a mechanism for improving the quality of evaluations. Improvement in quality of evaluations has been documented in this report. What is worth noting is the fact that many JICA staff members have been engaged in the evaluation activities. Evaluation activities play, in a sense, a training role. In addition to

a change in awareness, accurate evaluation viewpoints and skills are consolidated through evaluation activities. Accurate evaluation viewpoints are important in terms of formulating and supervising a project. It is delightful to see signs of further improvement in operations through increasing experience with evaluations within the organization and successfully fostered culture of evaluation among staff members.