

Chapter 1

Asia



5. Southwest Asia



Current State of Development

A Region Containing 50% of the World's Poor

Southwest Asia consists of seven nations: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. It has a population of approximately 1.3 billion, or one-fifth of the global population. With the exceptions of the Maldives and Sri Lanka, per capita gross domestic product (GDP) throughout the region is less than US\$500, with 560 million people in the region classified as poor—around half of the world's poor. Together with ethnic, cultural, religious, linguistic and climatic diversity, low economic and income levels are factors contributing to political and social instability in the region.

With the exception of the Maldives, where the main industries are tourism and fishing, the principal industry in the countries of Southwest Asia is agriculture, which is susceptible to the influence of climatic conditions. The trade structure thus involves the export of primary commodities such as agricultural produce and textiles and the import of machinery and other capital goods. This means that these countries' economies are easily affected by fluctuations in the international prices of



A JICA expert explaining an inspection method for dysentery bacillus toxin as part of the "Project for Prevention of Emerging Diarrheal Diseases" (India).

primary goods, and this situation has resulted in most of the countries running constant trade deficits.

Realizing a Free Trade Zone

Since independence, the countries of Southwest Asia have restricted imports to protect domestic industries and to become economically self-reliant. However, following the lead of Sri Lanka, which embarked on a path toward economic liberalization in 1977, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal have been moving toward economic liberalization while promoting deregulation policies and encouraging investment and exports. These economic policies have recently borne fruit: the economies of Southwest Asia are now growing largely due to the development of light industry, especially textiles, and the amazing development of the information technology (IT) industry in India. Nevertheless, Southwest Asia remains the poorest region of the world, with per capita gross national product (GNP) in the region amounting to only US\$160 to US\$900. The region also has the greatest development needs, as it includes four least among less developed countries* (LLDCs) (Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Maldives and Nepal).

Basic Principles of JICA Aid for Southwest Asia

In Southwest Asia, which has about half of the world's poor population (the poverty line is represented by an income of one US dollar per day), eradication of poverty is the common agenda of the region. It is important to formulate well-balanced cooperation combining activities for the improvement of basic living standards and those for the stable development of the economy, and to implement this cooperation taking into account the specific needs of each country in the region.

For this purpose, JICA is providing a wide range of assistance, in fields indispensable for daily living (such as health and medical care, education and ensuring the supply of safe water) and those for economic development (such as the development of the agriculture, small and medium-sized enterprises and economic infrastructure).

In addition, because the region is densely populated, which means that people's lives have a

great impact on the natural environment, JICA is providing cooperation that focuses on the preservation of the natural environment and urban environmental problems.

It is also necessary to consider approaches to structural issues by examining reasons why the region has so many poor people, and why the number of poor people does not decrease despite economic development.



Regional development through paper manufacturing with local residents' participation (Pakistan).

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation* (SAARC) began in December 1985 with the aim of building technical and cooperative relations among these seven nations irrespective of political considerations. SAARC has been providing a forum for active dialogue between the member nations that may in the future lead to the establishment of a free trade area. In 1996, India and Nepal concluded an agreement on the integrated development of the Mahakali River, and in

December of that year, India and Bangladesh concluded an agreement on the distribution of water from the Ganges River. Cooperation between countries in the region aimed at extending development over national borders was thus becoming increasingly common in the spheres of irrigation, flood control and electric power development. However, a SAARC Summit was postponed due to a coup d'etat in Pakistan in 1999, and this has affected the intra-regional economic exchanges.

In August 2000, then-Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori visited Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan, at which time he announced Japanese cooperation in the field of IT aimed at narrowing the digital divide* in Southwest Asia. Following this announcement, JICA has dispatched project formulation study* teams to the countries of the region and is considering future support measures.

Front Line

The Project for Construction of Primary School Under Basic and Primary Education Programme 2

Nepal

To Provide a Sufficient Learning Environment for Nepalese Children

Grant Aid

◆ Shortage of 13,000 Classrooms

In Nepal, elementary-level education has spread since the restoration of the monarchy in 1951. In particular, over the past 20 years the numbers of elementary school students, schools and teachers have increased 3.4, 2.4 and 3.3 times respectively. In order to meet the demand for classroom construction that has accompanied these increases, Japan has been working to procure necessary materials for the construction of 2,958 classrooms through the "Project for Providing Material and Equipment for the Construction of Primary Schools" (from 1994 to 1995) and the "Project for Providing Material and Equipment for the Construction of Primary Schools 2" (from 1996 to 1997). However, the number of classrooms is still insufficient, and construction of an additional 13,000 classrooms is expected to be necessary in coming years. This means that even today, many Nepalese children do not have an appropriate environment for learning, as they are forced to study in the open air or in temporary classrooms with thatched roofs.

◆ Construction Work with the Participation of Local Residents

JICA commenced this program in 1999 in order to respond to this situation. Through it, JICA expects to procure principal construction materials for 2,540 classrooms in three years. The program has the following three unique characteristics.

First, the construction of classrooms is carried out with the participation of local residents, as is the general case in Nepal. In other words, local residents carry the materials that Japan has provided to the construction site, procure local materials such as sand, provide unskilled labor, and implement construction work. At the same time, the country education office provides supervision as well as financial aid to cover transportation costs for the materials and for the hiring of skilled workers. Because of this, the key to securing the quality of construction work is to secure the cooperation of local residents.



Elementary school students attending classes in the temporary classroom.

Secondly, the project provides construction materials for toilets, whose availability helps to increase the school attendance rate of girls. The currently low rate is largely due to traditional Nepalese views regarding females, but the installation in schools of such necessary facilities as toilets is expected to remove an obstacle for girls' attendance.

Thirdly, this program is being implemented in the framework of the "Basic and Primary Education Programme 2", which is a sub-sector program that involves several aid organizations. Therefore, promotion of planning and implementation methods that follow policies and procedures agreed on by these aid organizations and Nepal is required.

Implementation of this program is expected to lead to an improved learning environment for children, better school attendance rates (especially for girls), and increased awareness on the part of local residents for school education. And this should comprehensively improve participation in elementary-level education.

(JICA Nepal Office)

Tackling Priority Issues in JICA Programs

Exploring Possibilities for Cooperation Projects that Cover a Wide Range of Fields

Bangladesh is one of the most impoverished countries in Southwest Asia and is affected almost yearly by floods, cyclones and other natural disasters. An annual consultative study mission on Technical Cooperation was sent to Bangladesh in March 1999, following which Japan expressed its intention of continuing to give priority to cooperation for health and medical care, education, the environment, human resources development, disaster relief measures, etc. Under the “Project of Human Resources Development in Reproductive Health*,” which started in 1999 as Project-type Technical Cooperation, training is provided for practitioners of maternal and child health care in connection with emergency obstetrical care for expectant and nursing mothers as part of an effort to improve health care and medical services for mothers and children. In addition, with regard to arsenic pollution of underground water, which is present throughout Bangladesh, JICA is engaged in the development of safe water resources and the removal of arsenic. At the same time, on the basis of linkage with the Japan Bank for International Cooperation* (JBIC), cooperation has been implemented for the development of agricultural villages and the improvement of electric power supply.

Amazing Development of IT-related Industries

India has been witnessing high levels of economic growth in recent years. However, the nation is confronting a number of problems that include population growth, environmental deterioration caused by overcrowding of cities, and the existence of an



Provision of training aimed at improving the quality of textile industries (Sri Lanka).

extremely large number of poor people, who account for as much as one-third of the population. A high-level mission on economic and technical cooperation sent to India in March 1995, identified three priority areas for cooperation, namely improvement in economic infrastructure, alleviation of poverty and conservation of the environment.

The development of IT-related industries is contributing to stable and continuous economic growth. Nevertheless, removal of the economic divide within the nation and development of other industries are still major problems. However, as India and Pakistan conducted underground nuclear tests in May 1998, the Japanese government responded by halting all new Grant Aid (excluding aid of an emergency or humanitarian nature and grant assistance for grassroots projects*) and new yen loans. A cautious approach to the provisions of funds to the two countries by financial institutions involved in international development was also instigated. However, in response to the earthquake that struck Gujarat in western India in January 2001, cooperation that included the dispatch of Japan Disaster Relief Teams and support for reconstruction was provided from emergency and humanitarian points of view.

Focus on Infrastructure Upgrade and Environmental Conservation

An annual consultative study mission on Technical Cooperation was sent to Nepal in September 1997. It confirmed that the focus of cooperation with Nepal needed to be on improving social infrastructure to alleviate poverty and on cooperation for environmental improvement, including measures to cope with natural disasters. In addition to complex cooperation aimed at

forest conservation and village development in western Nepal, wide-ranging cooperation is taking place aimed at basic medical care and prevention of tuberculosis. In addition, a Mini-project-type Technical Cooperation on the Sericulture Promotion (dispatch of an expert team) was started in fiscal 1999. Based on the Nepalese government's long-term sericulture development program, this project aims to improve techniques for the raising and conservation of silkworm breeds, develop farmers' sericulture management skills, and improve capacity to disseminate these techniques and skills in order to increase the income of poor farmers in mountainous areas.

Nepal has seen an increase in recent years in activity by Maoist communist guerrillas, mainly in the mountainous districts of the country. In the year 2000, police stations in the prefectural capital have been attacked, and security has deteriorated. Care is needed when providing cooperation through gathering of security information, etc.

Expansion of Technical Cooperation to the Social Sector

In fiscal 1995, JICA held the Country Study Committee for Development Assistance to Pakistan, which offered proposals on how aid should be provided to the social sectors in the future. Grant Aid has been provided in recent years for the construction of training facilities for women teachers and maternal and child health centers. A start was made in fiscal 1996 with the "Maternal and Child Health" project under the Project-type Technical Cooperation scheme, and experts on literacy improvement and women's education have been sent. Also, the Pakistan Development Forum in March 2001 confirmed the necessity to work on reconstruction of the economy and democratization, and JICA is providing cooperation to support democratization by accepting trainees for study in Japan of its administrative systems.

However, in response to its nuclear tests, the same

Front Line

Improvement of the Working Environment on Tea Estates

Sri Lanka

Dispatch of JOCV

Working to Improve the Lives of Workers

◆ Tamil People Constitute the Majority of Workers

Sri Lanka is a country founded on tea. At 500 large tea estates, some 550,000 workers produce 300,000 tons of tea every year, most of which is exported to earn 70 billion rupees worth of foreign currency.

Most of the workers at these estates and plantations are descendants of the Tamil people, who crossed the Palk Strait from southern Indian districts under British rule from the 1840s. They live in tenement houses called "lines" within the estates and speak the Tamil language. During weekdays the women go out to pick tea leaves while the men work in the estate, and during weekends and on holidays they make pilgrimages to temples enshrining Hindu gods.

◆ Frontier of JOCV Activities

The estates are important tourist sites for Sri Lanka, and annually 430,000 tourists visit the tea-growing area called the "upcountry" to take in the spectacular views from the estates and the cool air.

However, the standard of living for workers at these estates is considered to be one of the lowest in Sri Lanka. A member of JOCV has begun activities in the estates with a view to improving the facilities and services needed to fulfill such basic needs as housing, health and sanitation, and education. This is the first example of volunteers working in an estate, which was realized thanks to the past achievement of the JOCV activities in the country and the high evaluation they received.

The estates represent a kind of frontier for JOCV activities. The



A JOCV engaging in the education of Tamil children.

language the workers use is Tamil, which is not taught in Japan. And their customs differ from those of the Singhalese, who are the majority in Sri Lanka.

In consultation with the estate owners, JOCV volunteers working at the estates began activities to improve the lives of workers and their living environment in fiscal 2000. At the same time, they are engaged in discussions with those concerned on ways to further develop their activities. They hope to see the fruits of their efforts in five to ten years.

(JICA Sri Lanka Office)

measures that were applied to India have been in effect on Pakistan since May 1998.

Regional Development Contributing to the Dissolution of Religious and Ethnic Conflict

In Sri Lanka, Technical Cooperation can be provided with comparative ease owing to its high levels of income and education in comparison with other countries of Southwest Asia. Improvements in economic infrastructure involving loan assistance* have been proceeding smoothly in Sri Lanka, and we must continue to ensure that cooperation is effectively

linked to Technical Cooperation in such forms as Development Studies and the Dispatch of Technical Cooperation Experts. Examples of this include two projects carried out in fiscal 2000 that take the form of Development Studies combined with loan aid; namely the “Improvement Project for the Colombo City Waterworks” and “Improvement Project for the Bandaranaike International Airport of Colombo.”

However, due to civil conflict, cooperation cannot be provided in the northern districts in particular, and, in those areas where cooperation is being provided, care is needed in terms of security.