

Chapter 3 Improving JICA's Evaluations and Projects (Recommendations)

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1 Overall Assessment

The Advisory Committee on Evaluation conducted secondary evaluations on terminal evaluations as it did in fiscal 2005, and also carried out field studies on the projects on which terminal evaluations had been performed. The following conclusions are drawn from the analysis results.

■ Improving the Quality of Evaluations and Evaluation Results

The secondary evaluation of this fiscal year confirmed that the quality of terminal evaluation reports improved from fiscal 2003 to fiscal 2004 and that the overall project evaluations derived from evaluation reports also improved. Furthermore, a tendency for improvement is observed from fiscal 2004 to fiscal 2005. As pointed out last year, the direct cause of such improvements is assumed to be the revision of Evaluation Guidelines. However, it also may be that a strong move towards improvements in evaluations, which had been the basic cause, supported the improvements.

■ Confirmation of Effectiveness of Secondary Evaluation by Field Studies

Secondary evaluations are conducted by reading the terminal

evaluation reports, or the primary evaluation. However, the question had always been a matter of great interest to the Advisory Committee ever since the Secondary Evaluation was launched three years ago as to whether it was possible to perform appropriate secondary evaluations without visiting the actual project sites. In response to such a question, four members of the Advisory Committee on Evaluation had an opportunity to undertake studies directly on the projects on which terminal evaluations were conducted, by visiting project sites in the Philippines, Laos, and Kenya. The aim was to identify where the difference lies by putting together results from terminal evaluations, secondary evaluations on terminal evaluations, and the field study. As a result, there is no huge difference in general, and the current methods of terminal and secondary evaluations were found to be appropriate. Nonetheless, some projects were evaluated to have insufficient description for terminal evaluations. Specifically, some part of the necessary description is omitted or biased. These issues, as described later, will be solved by improving terminal evaluations.

2 Major Evaluation Results

■ Items of Terminal Evaluation Report

Secondary evaluation is the evaluation that is conducted based on what is written in terminal evaluation reports; and therefore, no secondary evaluation is possible on what is not written in the report. It is theoretically feasible for secondary evaluators to perform secondary evaluations using various data, including those collected independently, but this is impractical. Considering the fact that the evaluation reports are read not only by secondary evaluators but also by vast numbers of readers who are not directly associated with projects, the evaluation reports should contain “confirmation of facts” as well as “judgment on the facts.”

If facts are properly described, the secondary evaluators are able to make judgments based on their own criteria and compare them with the judgments of terminal evaluators. If only judgments are available without a sufficient description of facts, the secondary evaluators do not have any other choice but to believe

or not to believe what is written without solid grounds, or take it with a grain of salt. Therefore, it is most important to provide a sufficient description of facts. If any facts are missing or biased, appropriate secondary evaluation cannot be performed. On the contrary, if facts are described appropriately, judgment can be secondarily corrected.

The confirmation of facts should not rely on a particular data source. It is important to devise ways to cross-check the data by collecting as many numerical data and qualitative data from many people, and to obtain information from both successful and unsuccessful cases.

According to on-site interviews during the field survey, some respondents identified the fact that important items had already been contained in previously published reports, such as ex-ante or mid-term evaluation reports, as the reason for not providing them in the terminal evaluation reports. Necessary items are not con-

tained in some terminal evaluation reports since the current style of secondary evaluation was not assumed initially where third party evaluators conduct evaluations by carefully reading terminal evaluation reports alone. However, readers have a practical difficulty when going through every report to find necessary items, which a writer may have written somewhere. In other words, terminal evaluation reports should contain what has been written previously, such as ex-ante evaluation tables, summary of mid-term evaluation reports and important items, though they may overlap. Terminal evaluation reports are essential to conclude all the project activities to maintain a system under which a third-party performs secondary evaluations by reading them.

■ Timing of Terminal Evaluation and Follow-up of Recommendations

It is important to conduct terminal evaluations when the outcome is observed as much as possible. On the other hand, it is essential to start terminal evaluations at around six months before the termination of the project in order to create a space for efforts to complete the initial plan within the remaining timeframe of the project. Even so, with regard to the recommendations for project team and counterpart government to be completed by the time of the completion of the project, if the outcomes at the time of the completion are reported and are contained in the terminal evaluation report, a third party will be able to understand how the recommendations were executed by the time of the completion. It is a matter of course that this will serve as an important reference when conducting secondary evaluation.

Thus, in order to make the secondary evaluation more effective, it is necessary to secure ways to gain certain understanding from project formulation to onset of outcomes when a terminal evaluation report is read by, for example, providing a quotation or a summary of a passage, even if it is written for other purposes.

3 Toward Further Improvements

The following are the specific items suggested for improvement in this year's analysis.

(1) Improvements in Terminal Evaluation

■ Relevance

Traditionally, relevance determines whether evaluations are in line with the aid policy of Japan or the development plan of the partner country. The secondary evaluation revealed that "suitability as a means" (a viewpoint of whether the implementation of the project was relevant to the achievement of goals) shows the highest correlation with other evaluation criteria. This supports the common sense idea that a practical project with a solid plan will succeed.

Considering the various unstable conditions in developing countries, it is predicted that a project may not attain its anticipated goals due to accidental factors. Nevertheless, it is still

■ Evaluation of Projects Managed by Overseas Offices

A characteristic of the fiscal 2006 analysis is lower secondary evaluation results for the project evaluations conducted by overseas offices than those for conventional evaluations. This is attributed to the method of evaluations and reporting style since there is little difference in the quality of projects but rather in the quality of evaluations. The secondary evaluation basically gives high marks to the quality of evaluation if it is conducted in line with the Evaluation Guidelines, and thus it is assumed that overseas offices did not thoroughly follow the Evaluation Guidelines.

Since the number of projects managed by overseas offices is expected to increase in the future, activities are needed to maintain and improve the quality of evaluation by, for example, providing more training opportunities in evaluation for overseas offices.

■ Role of Ex-ante Evaluation

The basis for high quality evaluation is to carry out consistent evaluations from ex-ante to mid-term, terminal, and ex-post evaluations. To set specific objectives and indicators in ex-ante evaluation and to continue monitoring towards achieving objectives are effective for compiling high quality evaluation reports, and would ensure bringing about the success of the project itself. Analysis results of this fiscal year cannot conclude that the evaluation results of the projects on which ex-ante evaluations were performed are higher than those on which ex-ante evaluations were not carried out. However, the variations among the evaluation results (the standard deviation) were surely smaller. Ex-ante evaluations were conducted on several projects that were the targets of the fiscal 2006 analysis, but they were still at an incipient stage and the method of ex-ante evaluation made some changes afterwards. Thus detailed analysis is needed in fiscal 2007 and onwards.

important to plan a realistic and feasible project. It is also necessary to continue to consider the items under relevance.

■ Efficiency

Efficiency is rated lower than other evaluation criteria every year. Cost must be clarified to evaluate efficiency. However, it is not always easy to specify the necessary cost of a project. In the case where equipment is provided and construction work is carried out, efficiency can be discussed by expressing the cost in market value or by comparing the cost actually incurred with the market value since similar goods and services can be procured in the market. However, in the case of technical cooperation, it is difficult to convert the transferred technology into cost and it is not easy to measure the achievement in terms of monetary value.

That being said, no comparison with other similar projects is possible if it is not known how much resources have been invest-

ed in the project. Thus, it is necessary to start with a complete description of expenses in all projects by specifically stipulating the basic method of presentation; for example, the purchase of goods and services should be expressed in monetary terms and expenses associated with allowances for experts are measured on a man-months basis.

External Factors and Sustainability

Evaluation results of sustainability of projects are found to be closely related to some macro variables. Sustainability maintains the achievement of artificial intervention, or namely, the project. To that end, there must be social capacity in many senses. Lack of social capacity (a certain level of affluence or governance) makes it difficult to attain sustainability. Of course, it depends on the type of project, but generally speaking, when sustainability is difficult, it is even more important to strengthen the efforts towards future sustainability during the project activities.

With respect to sustainability by sector, the scores for agricultural development, and forestry and natural environment are lower than other sectors. It is necessary to investigate whether it is due to the characteristic of the sectors that some time is required until sufficient achievements are observed or it is affected by the region or country where the project is implemented. A continuation of secondary evaluations helps accumulation of data from various aspects of projects, but a continuation of factor analysis is still required to determine what is important to ensure project achievement.

Checklist for Description

A good evaluation report, in principle, is written in line with the Evaluation Handbook. First, in order to collect necessary data at the time of terminal evaluation, it is necessary to compile a checklist of the information to be contained in the terminal evaluation report and assess the evaluation report in accordance with the checklist. When an officer in charge confirms whether necessary data are listed or reasons are given for not listing (not necessary or unavailable information, etc.), and then the evaluation report submitted to the JICA headquarters is re-examined from the same perspective, we can at least avoid the situation where necessary items are not described without a good reason.

Understandable Descriptions

Understandable descriptions with tables and figures are still insufficient. The readers of terminal evaluation reports are not limited to JICA insiders. Reports will be more understandable when consideration is given to the general public as readers.

Integrated Evaluation

When cooperation is continuously carried out by a single implementing organization over several phases, it is difficult to make judgments about the outcomes of cooperation unique to each phase. In some cases, it is not known if any outcomes generated in one project are caused by sustainability of the project or

the implementation of the subsequent project. When technical cooperation is implemented in combination with grant aid or yen loan, it is difficult to measure the outcomes of technical cooperation alone. Moreover, some reports did not sufficiently mention related projects. It is necessary to discuss the methodology of how to evaluate these elements. Though it depends on the cases, consideration should also be given to evaluating a series of related projects in an integrated manner.

(2) Improvements in Secondary Evaluation

Presentation of Examples of Evaluation Scale

Secondary evaluation is an evaluation conducted by several experts based on a five-point rating scale for individual viewpoints and scores. The evaluation tendency of individual evaluators must be cancelled out by gathering many secondary evaluations. In reality, however, it is natural to have a certain degree of bias depending on the group of evaluators.

It is thus necessary to devise a way to reduce the difference in scores among secondary evaluators. If an evaluator feels it is difficult to make judgments for secondary evaluation just by reading reports, it means that scoring is difficult due to lack of information. If evaluation is conducted based on scoring standards, the conclusions are easy to come by. Since judgment is easy to make if references are clearly stated, it is necessary to devise ways to present examples of evaluation judgment for each of the five-level scores: for instance; a score of five is given to this case and four to this case, etc. In particular, with respect to an "evaluation framework" for which secondary evaluation scores were low, it is easier to evaluate if there are clear standards in terms of composition of the evaluation team, and the level of participation of the partner country.

Utilization of Field Follow-up Study

The field studies for this year concluded that it is not necessary to conduct terminal evaluations in conjunction with field studies, but this is not to say that field studies are useless. Evaluation from different viewpoints would surely create a new discovery. The question now is whether the discovery is worth the extra work. It certainly carries little meaning if it is only the confirmation of evaluation results. However, if it is conducted to explore factors that contribute to best practices or worst practices, a field follow-up study is significant. It seems difficult, in some cases, to understand in what specific respects a project excels and the background that made it possible from reading terminal evaluation reports alone, in addition to general remarks on whether the project is going well. In that case, it is certainly significant to consult with terminal evaluators or to conduct a field follow-up study, however short it may be, focusing on the viewpoints to be re-evaluated. Furthermore, in the case where drastic changes are made to external factors, such as a regime change, a field follow-up study is meaningful in considering responses in accordance with the current conditions.