



Sasaki (third from left) holds a hearing with villagers about installation of a water supply point.

## Improving Côte d'Ivoire's Conflict-Scarred Public Services

After gaining independence from France in 1960, Côte d'Ivoire enjoyed consistent economic development and was considered an African success story. In the 1990s, though, the country was divided by a conflict over the presidency, after which the central and northern areas controlled by antigovernment forces did not receive education, healthcare, water supply, and other basic administrative services.

After the civil war ended in 2011 the country began walking the road to recovery, but public services remain inadequate even three years later. In the central and northern areas the primary school enrolment rate is 30%–50% and the completion rate 20%–30%, both below the national average, and education facilities damaged in the civil war have yet to be repaired. The lack of government services due to the war has also left 55% of water supply facilities in nonworking order.

### RISK OF FLARE-UPS REMAINS

“If people can't feel improvement in everyday life, they will be suspicious of the government,” says JICA expert Hideyuki Sasaki. “If things go on like this, conflict might flare up again.” Sasaki, with over 30 years of regional development planning experience

in Asia and Africa, handles a project to strengthen local administration via human-resource development in the most affected Ivorian areas.

Côte d'Ivoire held nationwide local elections in April 2013, forming governments at both regional and communal levels. However, as Sasaki explains, “The local governments that manage public services have no money and administrative officials do not know how they can do their jobs. In other words, decentralization is not working effectively.” Elements of the centralized system remain, but the central government cannot fully grasp what is happening in the regions. Meanwhile, local governments continue to rely on subsidies from the center and cannot stand on their own two feet.

Without enhancement of local governments' capacity to provide administrative services through help from the central authorities and regional offices, the benefits of recovery will not reach regional areas. JICA viewed the training of local administrative officials as a pressing task in the realization of a peaceful society for people who live in these areas.

### LIMITED POWER OF MUNICIPALITIES

“At first we found the country's regional administrative structure difficult to understand. We strugg-



Children study in simply constructed school buildings (left). A shared water supply point for residents. Many villagers use old equipment that requires continual repair.

led a lot,” recalls JICA expert Junko Okamoto, who oversees the project together with Sasaki.

In Japan, senior members of regional government are chosen by election. But in Côte d'Ivoire, although top politicians in communes are elected, leaders of regions and departments are appointed by the Ministry of Interior and Security. If the newly formed municipalities are not given sufficient power, then decentralization has not truly taken place.

In July 2014, administrative officials from the Ministry of Interior and Security, Ministry of Economic Infrastructure, and Ministry of National Education and Technical Education, as well as the governor of the region of Gbeke, the mayor of Bouaké, and other Côte d'Ivoire representatives, were invited to Japan to observe decentralized administrative structures in Japan first-hand.

### DECENTRALIZATION: THE JAPAN MODEL

Among the municipalities selected for visiting were the city of Higashimurayama within the Tokyo metropolitan area and the provincial towns of Nanbu and Chizu in Tottori Prefecture. As well as observing the study environments of elementary school children, visitors saw—and showed surprise at the

high quality of—municipal services like garbage collection and water and sewer management. At one point, Gbala Gnato Raphael of the Ivorian Ministry of Interior and Security asked: “Are there any people appointed by the central government in this area?”

“No,” was the reply. In Japan, municipal mayors elected by the people have a measure of executive power and, rather than simply relying on central funding, collect taxes locally to provide administrative services. This painted a clear picture of Japanese decentralization for the Ivorian visitors.

“By seeing real-life examples of decentralization of power in Japan and looking at their own country from outside, they changed their way of thinking,” Okamoto smiles. Konin Aka, the governor of the Gbeke region, speaks vigorously on the task ahead: “To improve people's lives, we need to pressure the central government to strengthen regional administration. That is our job.”

Construction and rehabilitation of new water supply points and schools will finally begin in the project areas in Côte d'Ivoire. Citizens in local communities will get involved by forming management committees for water supply and for schools. This will begin in the Gbeke region, with efforts to later spread to other areas.



Côte d'Ivoire officials observe a class at a Japanese elementary school (left). Gbeke governor Aka talking with children at lunchtime.