



# Southwest Asia

## Pillars of Aid Eradication of Poverty is the Common Agenda

Southwest Asia has about half of the world's poor population (the poverty line is represented by an income of one dollar a day). Thus, eradication of poverty is the common agenda in the region.

It is important to formulate well-balanced cooperation combining activities for the improvement of basic living standards and 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 for economic development (such as the development of the agriculture, small and medium-scale enterprises and economic infrastructure\*).

In addition, because the region is densely

populated, which means that people's living situations 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.

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## Current State of Development

### ■ Alleviating Poverty

Southwest Asia consists of seven countries: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. It has a population of approximately 1.38 billion, or one-fifth of the global population. Five hundred and sixty million people in the region are classified as poor—around half of the world's poor.

For the past several years, the economic growth of Southwest Asia, excluding certain countries, has been progressing at about 5% annually, which seems comparatively good, but poverty still persists. In the region, factors such as ethnicity, religion, language, and climate are complexly related to politics and society, contributing to social and cultural diversity and depth as well as instability.

In Southwest Asia, which is in need of aid, cooperation is mainly provided in basic living fields such as health and medical care, agricultural and rural development, and primary education aimed at poverty alleviation; in upgrading the infrastructure to stimulate economic and social activities; and in environmental conservation corresponding to population growth and economic development. Special consideration needs to be given to gender\* disparities that are apparent in the

literacy rates and aid corresponding to the high death rate related to pregnancy and childbirth. It is also necessary to make sure that the cooperation results reach the socially vulnerable, such as women and at the grass-roots levels, through joint projects with NGOs.

### ■ Support for Regional Peace and Stability

The terrorist attacks that occurred in the United States on September 11, 2001, had a large impact on this region. As the international community has acknowledged that poverty is a root cause of terrorism, the urgency and importance of poverty alleviation in southwestern Asian countries, which generate many socially stable factors such as conflict due to ethnic and religious differences, became clearer.

JICA plans to provide cooperation for regional stability, such as support for Pakistan, whose economy and society were seriously damaged by the terrorist attacks in the United States, and post-conflict reconstruction for Sri Lanka, where peace negotiations are underway between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) following the cease-fire agreement of February 2002.

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## Addressing Priority Issues in JICA Programs

### ■ Aid Reaching the Community Level—Bangladesh

Bangladesh, one of the most impoverished countries in Southwest Asia, has severe conditions, such as frequent flood damage owing to its low-lying geography.

In 2000, Japan formulated the Country-Specific Aid Program, specifying priority areas for aid: (1) agriculture and rural development; (2) improvement of social sectors (basic living, health and medical care); (3) investment encouragement and export promotion; and (4) disaster control. It has been confirmed that these four areas will continue to be a priority between Japan and the current regime.

Locally, close collaboration among the Japanese Embassy, the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC)\*, and the JICA Office has been built. Rural development, health care, education, arsenic contamination control, and electric power have been selected as the five most important sectors. Working groups, including dispatched JICA experts, have

been formed in each sector. In this way, we try to share and systematically accumulate the knowledge and experiences of people in each sector so that a comprehensive Japanese cooperation program can be formulated.

JICA is also promoting collaboration with other donors. For example, in the education field JICA participates in a primary education development program that was planned with a sector-wide approach, together with other donors\*. Under the aforementioned cooperation program, various joint projects have been carried out jointly with Shapla Neer (Citizens' Committee in Japan for Overseas Support), the Japanese Organization for International Cooperation in Family Planning (JOICFP), and the Asia Arsenic Network, in active collaborations with NGOs.

### ■ Development for Gross National Happiness—Bhutan

Bhutan is a kingdom with a population of 680,000, located

on steep mountains in the eastern part of the Himalayan mountain range. Under a unique development principle declared by the King, Gross National Happiness (GNH), the development plan that will coexist with Bhutan's traditional culture and natural environmental conservation, has been promoted alongside economic growth measured by GNP.

Taking this policy of the Bhutan government into consideration, JICA has been implementing cooperation in the major fields of agricultural development and economic infrastructure upgrading (roads, communication, and electricity). Agricultural development is especially important, because agriculture is the major industry in this country, with 80% of the citizens engaged in farming. Japan, with experience in leading successful agricultural development in the western region of Bhutan in the past enjoys a great deal of trust. Currently, Japan has been providing cooperation mainly for rice farming technologies and agricultural road construction in the eastern region, where living conditions are harsh and where most of the poor reside.

### Local Development after Peacebuilding—Nepal

Nepal is one of the most impoverished countries in the world due to its social and cultural background related to ethnicity and caste, as well as because of its steep mountainous terrain, which hinders the effects of development. Therefore, JICA believes that improving poor people's living standards should be the primary objective of cooperation for Nepal, and places emphasis on health care service, primary education, socioeconomic infrastructure development, agriculture and rural development, and environmental conservation in the implementation of cooperation projects. In fiscal 2002, a Japan-US joint project formulation study was conducted in the health care field, proceeding with coordination between Japan and the United States regarding the health of mothers and children, and HIV/AIDS. In response to the severely deteriorating environment in the capital Katmandu, technical cooperation has also begun to transfer the waste treatment technologies and administrative management skills of the Japanese central and local governments.

## Front Line

### ● Bangladesh Flood Control and Support for Income Improvement

#### Participatory Rural Development Administrative Support

##### Dispatch of Technical Cooperation Experts

#### One third of the land flooded

In Bangladesh, which borders on India to the east, approximately 140 million people, almost the same numbers of people living in Japan, live in a land area only twice as large as that of Hokkaido. From the upper basin, which is approximately 12 times larger than the entire country and which includes the Himalaya Mountains, Nepal, and India, large amounts of water flow into the rivers during the rainy seasons, repeatedly bringing severe flood damage to the country. Bangladesh belongs to an estuary delta area where 20 to 33% of the land is inundated every year during the flood seasons.

A wide area of low flatlands (Haor) and a similarly wide area of river shoals (Char) cover the country. In Haor, vast rice paddies surrounding villages are flooded and look like lakes for three

months of the rainy season.

#### Protect lives during flood seasons

JICA helps the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) carry out activities in flood control and income improvement for residents simultaneously through participatory approaches. For residents of rural areas such as Haor and Char, flood prevention measures are implemented so that residents can remain in the area instead of evacuating during flood season. These countermeasures include village protection with wave prevention walls, improvement of well facilities to secure water for living, and building levees for evacuation areas. At the same time, regular vocational training is provided for residents so that they can secure an income during flood seasons by breeding freshwater fish, raising livestock, and vegetable garden-



Kishoreganj District suffering from floods

ing within the scope of this cooperation for rural development.

This approach is experimentally applied at Grai village in Nikli County of the Kishoreganj District, where residents are willing to participate. The key to future success is finding out what is effective flood control and establishing a cooperative system between residents and local administration so that the residents' motivation can be encouraged.

(JICA Bangladesh Office)

However, Nepal has seen an increase in Maoist antigovernment guerrillas in recent years, and public safety in rural areas is especially unstable. As most of the poor in Nepal are concentrated in rural areas, it has become increasingly difficult to implement cooperation for people who should benefit from JICA's cooperation. Since the beginning of 2003, there seems to be a greater chance for a cease-fire and peace negotiations between the guerrillas and the government; however, due attention to safety is still needed when providing cooperation.

### Alleviation of Economic and Regional Disparities and Poverty—Pakistan

In Pakistan, the Musharraf administration, which came to power through a bloodless coup in October 1999, has implemented various reforms to accomplish national reconstruc-

tion and democratization. The conservative party supported by President Musharraf and the army, known as Pakistan Muslim League, Quaid-Azam faction, became the government party in the general election of October 2002 and has followed these reform and development lines.

In November 2002, the third Pakistan Country-specific Aid Study Group was formed in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC). Based on the recognition that the alleviation of economic and regional disparities and poverty needs to be addressed, the study group has been examining the future direction of Japan's cooperation and the possibility of narrowing priority aid fields.

At present, technical cooperation is provided in the fields of good governance\* (improvement of local administration ser-

## Front Line

### ● Pakistan Literacy Cooperation in Pakistan

#### Strengthening Literacy Education Administration

##### Dispatch of Technical Cooperation Experts

#### Expand non-formal schools

In Pakistan, the literacy rate is 49% (36.8% for females) and the primary education enrollment rate is 66% (50% for females). Following the World Education Forum held in Dakar in 2000, Pakistan formed a national action plan to achieve 100% primary school enrollment rate (Education For All) by 2015. Improving the literacy rate for females in remote areas, including rural areas, has become a major goal.

In order to raise the literacy and school enrollment rates, the Pakistan government is constructing more classrooms, increasing the number of teachers, upgrading teacher training, and distributing teaching materials while providing primary education at non-formal schools. Non-formal schools allow children between the ages of five and 14, who have no access to public schools or who have dropped out of schools, to complete primary education in three-and-a-half years instead of the usual five years. Construction of 200,000 non-formal schools is scheduled to be complet-

ed by 2015. In addition, literacy classes for illiterate adults, especially women, are being expanded and training in skills such as sewing for income improvement and granting micro-credits is planned for the future.

#### From teaching materials production to policy support

JICA has dispatched long-term experts to the Pakistan Ministry of Education since 1997, supporting the curriculum development of literacy education and teaching material production. Since 2001, JICA has been providing policy support for overall literacy education, including organizing a Seminar on Literacy and Basic Education after Decentralization. Following the UN principle of the Decade for Human Rights Education starting in 2003, we also support the formulation of specific national plans in the literacy field in cooperation with UNESCO.

Furthermore, JICA supports the promotion of adult literacy education programs by organizing workshops for liter-



Education support provided at non-formal schools

acy education instructors in the region on project cycle management\* methods, including planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

In the future, several districts in Punjab Province will be selected as model areas and a three-year technical cooperation project will be implemented to improve the quality of primary education at non-formal schools. Together with the administrative cooperation provided at the federal level, our future tasks include strengthening literacy education administration through model projects at the province and district levels.

(JICA Pakistan Office)

vices and support for police reforms), health and medical care, education, environment, economic infrastructure, and agriculture. For the future, in combination with grant aid and loan assistance\*, Japan will assist the Pakistan government in addressing poverty alleviation, economic recovery, the realization of good governance, and the promotion of devolution to local administration.

### ■ Cooperation for Achieving Peace—Sri Lanka

Technical cooperation is easy to provide in Sri Lanka owing to its high levels of income and education compared to other countries of Southwest Asia. In Sri Lanka, development of the economic infrastructure has been smooth with Japan's loan assistance. Cooperation in effective combination of

development study and technical cooperation through dispatch of experts will be further implemented.

In February 2002, the 19-year civil conflict was suspended indefinitely and peace negotiations between the parties concerned are underway. The civil conflict created more than 800,000 internally displaced persons, who have started to repatriate since the cease-fire. Following the cease-fire, JICA added "support for the peace process" and "post-conflict reconstruction" to its major tasks, and conducted a study on the needs of the affected areas. In the future, support for the resettlement of displaced persons and humanitarian and development support will be implemented in areas devastated by the conflict before peace is achieved, in order to help people in the affected areas actually feel the impact of peace, and thus, support the achievement of peace.

## Front Line

### ● Sri Lanka Support for Welfare for Persons with Disabilities

#### Better Education and Nursing Care for More Children

##### Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers

#### A country of devout Buddhists

Sri Lanka is called the teardrop of India. Singhalese and Tamils live in this drop-shaped land. Since peace negotiations to stop the civil conflict have been promoted with the mediation of other countries, there has been an unprecedented amount of hope for peace among the citizens. The literacy rate of Sri Lanka is approximately 90%, and basic medical services are free; there are many aspects of this country that are far more developed than in other Asian developing countries. Japan has been providing human resources and financial aid in the fields of health and medical care, education, regional development, and sports.

Buddhist beliefs, which are held by 70% of the population, affect various aspects of the people's thoughts and lifestyles. One of the beliefs is reincarnation, which is held by most people in this country. This belief can be observed in the field of welfare for persons with disabilities. There seems to be a strong belief that physical disability in this life is imposed as retribution for bad behavior in a previous life; in other words, people should acquire enough virtue while they

are living this life.

Such belief hinders proper understanding of disabilities, even among the families of persons with disabilities and welfare related personnel. Although welfare programs tend to be overlooked, the dispatch of Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV) for the last 10 years has gradually been improving the situation in this field.

#### Results of steady activities

JOCVs dispatched in the early days of cooperation were mostly engaged in policy-making for persons with hearing difficulties. In cooperation with the National Institute of Education in Sri Lanka, they supported the establishment of teacher training programs and the production of textbooks. Later, the dispatch of JOCVs was extended to NGO-operated facilities for children with physical and mental disabilities. In February 2003, the National Center for Children was opened, and marked the first huge step forward in Sri Lankan welfare policies, which had been held back. The assistance of JOCVs is indispensable here, as well.



A JOCV and children with disabilities

Current activities of the National Center for Children include the promotion of health examinations for babies and infants for the purpose of early discovery and treatment of disabilities, the production of pamphlets to introduce information about children's development to mothers, the implementation of teacher training programs to deal with children with many different kinds of disabilities in addition to hearing impairment, and counseling tours of schools.

Steady cooperation involving local people will continue and it is expected that local people themselves will be able to provide better education and treatment for children in the future.

(JICA Sri Lanka Office)