

Central America and the Caribbean

Pillars of Aid Increasing Mutual Cooperation in the Region

JICA continuously contributes to human resources and socioeconomic development in the countries of Central America and the Caribbean, taking into account the following prioritized issues and self-help efforts on the part of the recipient countries.

1. Promotion of regional cooperation utilizing South-South cooperation

In this region, relatively developed countries and those in difficult situations are bonded by common languages such as Spanish and English. Many have called for greater mutual cooperation in the region and the need to improve the efficiency of aid is intensifying. JICA's continuing support for South-South cooperation* in this region is thus an important priority.

In addition, in the countries of the region that share many common issues, JICA will pro-

mote effective and efficient regional cooperation projects that can be adapted and utilized by several countries. Areas such as disaster prevention, infectious disease control, the environment, and fisheries are considered to be promising.

2. Disaster prevention measures

In the past, this region was struck by hurricanes, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions that caused enormous damage. JICA will support the enhancement of disaster prevention capacities in this region, the countries of which suffer from the high frequency of natural disasters.

3. Environment

In this region, modernization and the development of industry and economy have been accompanied by serious environmental problems involving air and water pollution, the

generation of harmful waste products, and an over-concentration of population in metropolitan districts. Dealing with these problems has become an urgent issue. The region is endowed with forest areas of great biological diversity* and bountiful oceans. Their preservation leads to the safeguarding of natural assets for humankind.

4. Development after civil war

The civil war that racked Central America for several decades severely damaged the region's social and economic infrastructure*. Sectors that are particularly affected and in need of support include water supply, health and medical care, basic education, agricultural development, construction of roads and bridges, democratization, and internal security improvement.

Current State of Development

■ Small Countries with Many Similarities

Central America and the Caribbean comprise 21 countries, eight in Central America and 13 in the Caribbean. It occupies an area of 2.96 million km², or 2.2% of the world's surface, and is home to 164 million people, or 3% of the world's population. The region has many small countries, of which eight have land areas of less than 10,000km² and nine have populations of less than one million people.

The economies of most of the countries in this region are based on agriculture and are reliant on exports of primary products. Although tourism is thriving in many countries, manufacturing and other industries remain relatively underdeveloped in the region as a whole. Even though their economies have improved in recent years, helped by the long economic boom in the United States, they are still burdened with accumulated debts and are subject to the impact of the international situation and the international financial market.

■ Regional Alliance for a Peaceful and Safe Society

Decades of civil war in Central America since the late 1970s destroyed these countries' societies and economies.



An expert conducts piscatology training in the Dominican Republic

Neighboring countries felt repercussions in the form of influx of refugees and arms. Peace-making proceeded in the early 1990s and, following the signing of the Guatemalan peace accords in December 1996, all the countries of the region with the exception of Cuba now have democratically elected governments. However, the damage that was inflicted on the social and economic infrastructure of these countries is still being felt today: many countries have inadequate water supply facilities and are yet to attain adequate health and medical care and basic education. Assistance from developed countries is essential to solve these problems.

In addition, in fall 1998, hurricanes hit Central America and the Caribbean region and caused damage on an unprecedented scale. Furthermore, in January and February 2001, devastating earthquakes struck El Salvador, which resulted in massive damage. This region is highly prone to natural disasters, and cooperation for disaster prevention and reconstruction is also needed to overcome the threats posed by such disasters.

Independent countries recognize the advantage of having the same languages and pressing issues even though they are small. They are striving for regional alliances and tight, integrated relationships. Since 1991, the Central American Integration System (SICA) has attempted to coordinate various activities in various fields. President Vicente Fox of Mexico, who was inaugurated in December 2000, proposed the 'Puebla Panama Plan' which promotes an alliance with Central America in 2001 through economic development by several means such as integration infrastructure from the southern region of Mexico to Panama. This plan has further increased momentum toward an alliance. In the Caribbean, an alliance has advanced since the establishment of the Caribbean Community in 1973. In 1995, Belize joined the Community and made its activities more vital.

Addressing Priority Issues in JICA Programs

■ Active Regional Cooperation and Support for South-South Cooperation—Mexico

Mexico, the country with the largest land area and population in Central America, has made solid improvement in its

status within the international community through the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and its entry into the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 1994. However,

the southern part of Mexico is still seriously underdeveloped, and so the country has the important task of promoting economic development effectively with other neighboring countries in Central America. JICA is promoting South-South cooperation from Mexico that facilitates the regional development.

Since July 2000, in particular, a team of JICA experts has assisted in the further development of the institutional capacities of the Mexican Institute for International Cooperation (IMEXCI). Two projects, a popular earthquake-resistant hous-

ing project in El Salvador and an agricultural pest control management project in Nicaragua, both identified and formulated based on a joint study implemented by JICA and IMEXCI, are scheduled to commence in fiscal 2003 as a collaborative cooperation project by Japan and Mexico. JICA has implemented five third-country training* programs in Mexico, among which are Appropriate Management of Solid and Hazardous Waste, and Integrated Wastewater Treatment and Reuse for Environmental Sustainability that commenced in 2002 to train each country's technicians in the region. In

Front Line

● Mexico Project for Assisting Small-scale Producers in the Soconusco Region in the State of Chiapas

Community-based Rural Development

Development Study, Dispatch of Technical Cooperation Experts, etc.

Model village for development

The state of Chiapas located in the south of Mexico shares a border with Guatemala and is one of the poorest areas of the country. Since the late 1990s, the decline in the price of farm products has driven many working-age males to the northern national borders and even to the United States as migrant workers. Under such circumstances, it is necessary to organize the remaining female residents, improve living conditions, and implement small-scale projects. It is expected that these activities will become a good model for community-based rural development in the area.

Gaining experience

JICA conducted a development study called the Study on Integrated Agriculture, Livestock and Rural Development Project in the Soconusco Region in 1998 and 1999. In response to the results of the study, the Project for Assisting Small-scale Producers in Soconusco Region in the state of Chiapas started in cooperation with the Rural Development Bureau of the

Chiapas government in March 2003.

Five villages were selected to be project sites based on natural conditions and types of produce as a prospective model for the region. This project emphasizes understanding of and gaining experience in processes such as objectives and methods of the project implementation, operation management, and follow-ups, not to mention the implementation of actual activities. By carrying out small projects such as producing vegetables and building improved cooking stoves under the initiatives of the community, we aim at reinforcing the organization, improving its capacity, and accumulating experience. These are skills required to carry out bigger and more difficult projects in the future.

Joint work with organizations

In order to develop a community-based project, cooperation from villages in support of the project, the Rural Development Bureau, and other relevant organizations is required. Also, reinforcement and improvement of the operation systems of such organizations are also needed. Thus, JICA always carries



A discussion with a residents' group in the State of Chiapas

out joint work involving villages and relevant organizations as well as residents groups. The problems that we are currently facing are underdevelopment of the system for rural communities and lack of status studies and follow-ups by the implementation body. There is also the issue of unawareness that projects should be community-based.

Through not only the dispatch of experts and provision of equipment, but also linking with volunteer programs, this project will be carried out in grass-roots cooperation. The Mexican side also plans to develop a community-based project involving local colleges, students, and NGOs.

(JICA Mexico Office)

addition, JICA has dispatched third-country experts* on as many as 22 occasions.

The prioritized aid fields for Mexico that were confirmed during policy consultations between the two governments in November 2001 include support for South-South cooperation, the reduction of disparities among regions and gaps between rich and poor, industrial and regional development, environmental management, and conservation of the natural environment.

■ Quick Response to Disasters—El Salvador

In January and February 2001, a series of disastrous earthquakes hit El Salvador. JICA immediately dispatched the Japan Disaster Relief (JDR) Teams to the affected regions followed by experts on Sand Arrestation and Landslide Control for fiscal year.

In accordance with the reconstruction of El Salvador, JICA dispatched the Project Confirmation Study Team to El Salvador to determine the prioritized fields and the specific needs for cooperation in August 2001: reactivation of the production sector, social development, the environment, and support for democratization.

In addition, the Study for Detailed Design is implemented for an ODA loan project to develop the La Union Port in order to stimulate economic activity in the eastern region of El Salvador and the neighboring countries.

El Salvador places great importance on regional cooperation with SICA, which is a prospective partner for effective cooperation. Taking this into account, JICA allocates an expert to the General Secretariat of SICA (SG-SICA).

■ Promoting Reconstruction of the Poorest Country in Central America—Nicaragua

Nicaragua has the lowest per capita income in Central America, with many people living under the poverty line. In 2001, Nicaragua completed the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP)*, as other heavily indebted countries did, with public participation in order to seek further cooperation from the international community.

The priority areas for cooperation agreed upon between Japan and Nicaragua are: agricultural and rural development, health and medical care, education, roads and transportation infrastructure, support for democratization, and disaster prevention. JICA provides technical cooperation aimed at strengthening the regional health care system and improving sanitation for the residents of Granada Province. Furthermore,

JICA examines possible cooperation on improving technologies in livestock farming and agriculture, which are potential means for greater economic vitality and sustainable development in Nicaragua.

■ Cooperation for National Reconciliation—Guatemala

In Guatemala, since the signing of the peace accords between the Guatemalan government and left-wing guerrillas in December 1996, efforts have been made for the recovery and development of democratic governance. There are many problems to address, including improvements in the harsh living environment in the mountainous areas, security, and the promotion of ethnic reconciliation. In March 2001, JICA implemented a project confirmation study that involves policy discussions, and confirmed five prioritized aid fields—education, health and sanitation, infrastructure improvement, public safety, and administration and judicial systems and also recognized the importance of the agricultural field.

In the field of education, JICA has supported the extension of elementary education to girls of indigenous descent, and in fiscal 2002 implemented an ex-ante evaluation study on a project which aims at improving school management with participation of local residents. In health care, JICA experts and JOCVs have been sent to promote measures for the elimination of Chagas disease, which is prevalent among impoverished families. The results of these activities have been encouraging. In fiscal 2003, JICA started preparation for the commencement of the project that will extend results of these measures to neighboring countries. Also in 2002, a basic health care study was implemented to look into possible cooperation in the field of regional health care.

■ For Effective Cooperation—Honduras

After Haiti and Nicaragua, Honduras is one of the least developed countries. Since the country has extensive development needs, partly due to massive damage caused by hurricanes, Japan provides assistance in a variety of fields. The prioritized fields include infrastructure improvement, improvement of basic living conditions, promotion of key industries such as agriculture and fishery, and human resources development. As a reflection on small improvements in economic indicators in spite of the relatively large support extended from various countries and international agencies so far, the execution of specific measures based on PRSP that was formulated with the initiative of Honduras in 2001 is a major task. Coordination among individual donors*

and international agencies involved in this task has become even more important.

In 2002, JICA launched the Project for the Improvement of Teaching Methods in Mathematics, which developed from past efforts in the field of elementary education. Also, in the agricultural sector, which is the country's key industry, long-term experts are dispatched in order to examine improvements in the circulation of products. As the importance of presenting successful cases in the development of impoverished regions has been pointed out, JICA takes active leadership in donor meetings to propose cooperation projects that integrate various activities in various fields.

■ Unique Efforts Leading the Region—Costa Rica

Costa Rica has relatively high educational standards and a well-organized social security system. It is recognized as one

of the most stable democratic countries in Central America.

The Technical Instructor and Personnel Training Center for Industrial Development of Central America, which was constructed with grant aid from Japan, first powered up its central function through a technical cooperation project and third country training. The Center then commenced the Project on Productivity Improvement for Enterprises in January 2001. For the purpose of maintaining the environment and proper use of living marine resources in the north Gulf of Nicoya, the Project on Sustainable Fisheries Management Plan for the Gulf of Nicoya started. In addition, by organizing programs such as third-country training courses on Effective Treatment Measures to Facilitate the Reinsertion of Inmates into the Society, Costa Rica is building on its unique status as a leading provider of cooperation in the region, as well as being a recipient of Japanese cooperation.

Front Line

● Honduras The Project for the Improvement of Teaching Methods in Mathematics

Increase the Completion Rate for Primary Education

Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers

Nationwide improvement of teachers' academic abilities

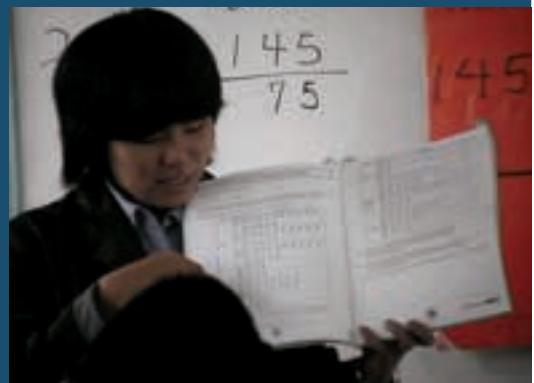
Total enrollment in primary education exceeds 90% in Honduras, however the completion rate is only a little over 60%. It has been pointed out that the decisive factor is the teachers' lack of academic ability and skills.

Under the Mathematics Project, which was mainly promoted by Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV), 58 volunteer teachers at elementary schools participated for 13 years until 2002. They provided retraining to a total of 20,000 local teachers. Japan's cooperation received praise from Honduras thanks to the accumulated experience of these activities, which lead to the launch of the Project for the Improvement of Teaching Methods in Mathematics.

Project activities include the development of guidelines for teachers and workbooks for students, and then train-

ing teacher using these materials. Experts, senior volunteers, and JOCVs are involved in the development of teaching materials and spent a total of 5,000 hours on trial production for each grade in working with related staff from Honduras. Training is in the form of lectures at colleges covering materials for grades one to six over 440 hours in four years, and 26 credits are accredited by the college. Participants in this training course may be able to obtain a college degree if they complete a certain program that includes other courses.

These activities started last year even before the technical cooperation project started. The Ministry of Education and the University of Education, the main implementation arms of the project, expect significant results based on the previous training monitoring, as well as the results of academic and teaching achievement



A JOCV teaching in the Project for the Improvement of Teaching Skills in Mathematics

tests taken by teachers. We are planning to spread the teaching materials and methodology of the projects throughout the country using new teachers training courses and retraining schemes for new teachers. 38,000 teachers and 1.2 million students across the country will benefit from these activities.

(JICA Honduras office)

Wide-ranging Development Centered on the Canal

—Panama

The year 1999 was a momentous one for Panama, with a change in regime and the return of the Panama Canal by the United States. In 2000, the reduction of disparities between poor and rich and among regions, sustainable development* of the economy, environmental conservation, and support for the canal and its surrounding areas were confirmed as priority fields for cooperation.

In Panama, environmental conservation that leads to the preservation of the water sources of the canal is an important issue, and in response the Panama Canal Watershed Conservation Project (technical cooperation project) was commenced in 2000. In addition, focusing on growth in the service industry and taking advantage of its unique status in marine transportation in the world and the development of impoverished rural villages, JICA provides cooperation by dispatching individual experts in the following fields: economic development policy, management and administration of harbors, and enhancement of institutional capacities of farmers' organization.

Moreover, as a base for the enhancement of disaster prevention systems in Central America the Coordination Center for the Prevention of Natural Disasters in Central America is in Panama, which set up the Academy. As demonstrated in the dispatch of a long-term expert to the Center in fiscal 2002, JICA plans to extend active cooperation in the disaster prevention field, a common issue for the countries in Central America.

Countries with Similarities and Diversities

—The Caribbean

The countries of the Caribbean are mostly small in size and population, and many have gained their independence in recent years. Because of their relatively high per capita income and the small scale of their economies, Japan does not have a strong record of cooperation in these countries.

It is effective to assist the Caribbean region, which has many small nations that are similar, on a regional basis in connection with common development issues, employing the resources of regional organizations such as the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM). Because hurricanes are always a problem, the issue of flooding needs to be addressed. In order to expand cooperation for the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency (CDERA), which is located in Barbados, JICA started the Caribbean

Disaster Management Plan, a technical cooperation project aimed at disseminating and drawing up flood control maps in 16 CDERA member countries such as Jamaica, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago. In Japan, region-specific training courses were carried out to improve regional health care systems and marine resources management for this region.

In addition to country-specific support, cooperation forms that could broadly benefit the region have been examined. A good example is a cooperation project called Promotion of Sustainable Marine Fisheries Resource Utilization, which JICA commenced in September 2001 to support 10 countries including Jamaica based on the Caribbean Fisheries Training and Development Institute (CFTDI) in Trinidad and Tobago. In fiscal 2002, training participants from the target countries gathered at CFTDI to learn about small-scale fixed netting operations and aquatic food processing techniques and a project expert visited Barbados to provide technical guidance.

Jamaica has the largest population of the English-speaking Caribbean countries, and the relationship between Japan and Jamaica grows closer every year. Cooperation for Jamaica focuses on the dispatch of volunteers and technical cooperation. JICA is focusing its efforts on the Project for Strengthening Health Care in the Southern Region and the dispatch of JOCVs.

There are many immigrants from Japan in the Dominican Republic. In an effort to realize wide-ranging development with the active participation of Japanese immigrants and descendants, JICA is providing cooperation, particularly in the fields of agriculture, education, and health and medical care. The prioritized aid fields include infrastructure improvement, health and medical care, agriculture, livestock, fishery, education, and the environment. JICA conducted a project confirmation study to identify suitable directions for medium-term cooperation, such as development issues to be tackled, in line with the prioritized aid fields. In the field of agriculture, on which JICA has focused, the Study on the Integrated Rural Development of Former Sugarcane Plantation Area (development study) and the Technology Improvement Project for Irrigated Agriculture (technical cooperation project) have been implemented. In the environmental field, JICA's cooperation is expanding, as seen in the Master Plan Study on Watershed Management in the Upper Area of the Sabana Yegua Dam and the Improvement of Sewage System and Environment in the City of Santiago (development study).