Southwest Asia has about 40% of the world’s poor population. Development in health and education lags behind the rest of the world, and gender disparities still exist. Also, the region, where ethnicity, religion, and language are mixed, is politically and socially unstable and has areas of conflict.

Given the fact that the tense relationship between India and Pakistan is gradually easing, it is expected that economic activities in each country in the region will be activated and contribute to political stability in the region. The economic growth has been comparatively good for the past several years but with a vulnerable economic framework the balance of payments and fiscal balances are chronically deficit in every country.

Considering these situations, JICA’s cooperation focuses on poverty reduction and economic growth as two pillars of aid for Southwest Asia. Specifically, underling the perspectives of human security and gender consideration in the area of poverty reduction, JICA provides support for the improvement of living conditions such as health/population, education and supply of safe water, community development, and human resources development. As poverty issues are closely associated with political and social stability, JICA promotes cooperation towards that end.

In terms of economy, JICA will provide cooperation to develop economic infrastructure and promote investment and trade in a private sector with the aim of stable growth of the economy. At the same time, JICA will further strengthen coordination with financial assistance projects to develop economic infrastructure. Support for economic development in Southwest Asia is effective for promoting economic ties between Japan and the region, which are getting stronger particularly with India, and is essential for facilitating reduction of the poor population of more than 400 million.

Support for peacebuilding and conflict prevention also continue, mainly for Sri Lanka. JICA will continue support for Sri Lanka and Maldives, which were damaged by the Great Sumatra Earthquake and Indian Ocean Tsunami Disaster in 2004, and provide medium- and long-term support for disaster prevention and reconstruction in response to the damage caused by the earthquakes that hit Pakistan in October 2005.
already made significant progress when JICA started cooperation. Thus, JICA set an aim to provide need-based cooperation by making use of JOCVs’ strength in understanding the social and cultural background and being able to communicate in the local language.

The project focused on the patients and their families. In view of in-hospital life and village life after discharge, not only medical therapy but also daily life-related support activities including shopping, cooking, and playing sports were carried out, bringing smiles to their faces. Even though some time has passed since the earthquake, the psychological wounds suffered by patients and families are deep. The rehabilitation offered was so fun that they can almost forget their painful memories. Hospital staff and patients’ families were always involved in these activities so that support for patients will continue to be provided even after the project terminates.

(JICA Pakistan Office)
In Sri Lanka, a civil conflict that continued for the past 20 years has caused a great number of deaths, and internally displaced persons and many other refugees. However, in March 2002, an indefinite truce agreement was reached between Sri Lanka’s government and the ethnic Tamil rebels called the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The Tokyo Conference on Reconstruction and Development of Sri Lanka was subsequently held and the international community demonstrated a uniform commitment to support the consolidation of peace in Sri Lanka.

Since the conflict was suspended, JICA has continued to support war-affected people and refugees. JICA makes the utmost efforts in these projects to empower communities in the areas affected by the conflict. Together with direct support for residents, JICA provides training for administrators who deal with residents’ groups to empower communities and municipalities so that they can resolve various problems and issues that they face through their own wisdom and power. Four years after the conflict was suspended, the peace talks between the government and the LTTE are in a static state; however, life in the people in the conflict-affected areas is steadily improving. Desires not to restart the war and to improve the standard of living are steadily growing in the hearts and minds of the people. Meeting face-to-face with the people, JICA will actively continue to implement its projects to empower communities.

Also in Nepal, a project related to peacebuilding continues to be formulated carefully.

**Economic Growth**

In terms of economic growth, infrastructure development and promotion of investment and trade are common issues in the region. Infrastructure supports economic growth of the country or region, as well as the business environment that induces investment in the private sector. In addition to economic infrastructure, improving governance, which is a prerequisite for sustainable development, will lead to the improvement of an investment environment, investment promotion, and improvement of productivity, and thus to economic growth.

In particular, the transportation and traffic sector is the core of the development of economic infrastructure. However, an underdeveloped road network constitutes the largest common concern in Southwest Asia. Thus, JICA promotes technical cooperation to develop roads, including bridges, in combination with yen loans and grant aid assistance.

For example, India, which is experiencing rapid economic growth, has vast land areas with regional disparities. Therefore, the priority issue is the promotion of economic and social activities by improving the efficiency of domestic distribution systems and JICA is supporting the development and enhancement of major freight railways.

Demand for development of economic infrastructure that will facilitate economic growth is expected to increase further in the future, and JICA will thereby promote cooperation in collaboration with yen loans.

In recent years, the trend for democratization is accelerating in this region as well, and delegation of authority from the central to local governments is in progress. In support for governance improvement, JICA is implementing the Decentralization Support Program with citizen participation in Pakistan and Bhutan for the purpose of capacity building in local governments.