

Southwest Asia



Pillars of Aid Priority Placed on Cooperation for Poverty Reduction and Economic Development

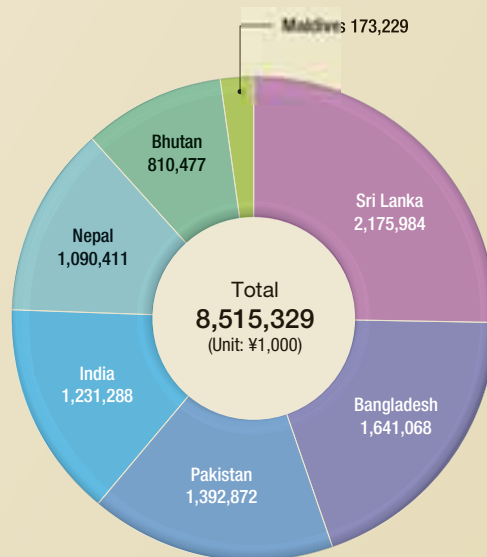
The region of Southwest Asia has a population of around 1.5 billion people, of which approximately 500 million belong to the poverty group, the second highest ratio in the world after sub-Saharan Africa. In Southwest Asia, development in health and education lags behind the rest of the world, and gender disparity continues to exist. The region is rich in ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity, but it is also politically and socially unstable and contains areas of conflict.

The tense relationship between India and Pakistan has eased since 2003, and economic activities in each country in the region have been enlivened. Economies in the region have been comparatively strong, as exemplified by India, which has achieved remarkable economic growth in recent years. While such positive economic developments are expected to contribute to the stabilization of the region, the region continues to suffer from political instability.

As such, JICA focuses on poverty reduction and economic growth as two pillars of aid for Southwest Asia. In the area of poverty reduction, emphasis will be placed on human security and gender consideration as JICA provides support toward the improvement of living conditions such as health/population, education, the supply of safe water, community development, and human resources development. To support economic development, JICA has been offering cooperation to develop economic infrastructure and promote investment and trade in the private sector. JICA is further strengthening coordination with financial assistance projects. Support for economic development is also effective in promoting economic partnerships between Japan and the region. It is also essential for moving ahead with poverty reduction.

In addition to the above, JICA is also providing support for peace-building efforts in Nepal and Sri Lanka, which continue to be affected by conflicts, and support for disaster prevention and reconstruction in Pakistan and Bangladesh, which suffer from natural disasters. Here is cooperation particular to this region.

● Cooperation results by country in Southwest Asia (FY2007)



* This is the total amount of bilateral cooperation. The amount of cooperation provided to Asia including cooperation that covers a group of countries is 45,121,925 thousand yen.

Current State of Development

Countries of Southwest Asia are moving forward with development policies aimed at reducing poverty. While certain degrees of improvement have been made respectively, the social development index for the areas of education and health remains at a low level, and therefore this is a region which holds the key in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In the region, various factors such as ethnicity, religion, language, and climate are complexly intertwined with politics and society. While this contributes to social and cultural diversity and depth, it is important to understand such context and offer assistance carefully and in accordance with each target area and situation.

For the past several years, the economic growth of Southwest Asia, with the exception of certain areas, has been relatively good, as it has progressed at a rate of over 5% annually. The recent economic development in India, which posted an average economic growth rate of 7.2% during the Tenth Five Year Plan period (March 2002 – July 2006), is outstanding, and an even greater acceleration than the 5.5% of the previous plan period (1997/98 – 2001/02). As a result of such economic development, the middle class has expanded and improvements have been seen in terms of the ratio of the poverty group. However, disparities between the capital and rural areas are actually on the rise.

Expansion of such disparities that accompany economic growth is an issue of concern in other countries as well. Moreover, as the key industry is agriculture for most countries, their economies are greatly influenced by natural conditions. Many of these countries are dependent on the export of specific goods such as clothing and agricultural products, and therefore, they have a

fragile economic structure.

To pursue solid economic growth, these countries must eradicate corruption, establish governance based on law, and ensure efficiency and transparency of administration. Improvement of governance is one of the issues common to all countries in the region.

Addressing Priority Issues in JICA Programs

Perspective of Human Security

In Southwest Asia, home to one-third of the world's poor, poverty control has been identified as a common priority issue, and projects are being formulated and implemented by proactively incorporating the perspective of human security.

For example, to people and areas that have no guarantee of basic living conditions, JICA provides support by offering services that reach them directly, including securing safe water, health, and sanitation. In Sri Lanka, a project that focuses on rehabilitation of basic infrastructure and empowerment of community groups is being implemented.

The poverty group is vulnerable to widespread infectious diseases and environmental contamination. Therefore, JICA is supporting tuberculosis control and the expanded program for immunization (EPI)/polio control in Pakistan, and infectious disease control targeting filaria and tuberculosis and measures against arsenic contamination of underground water in Bangladesh. Due to the arsenic pollution, the people of Bangladesh face the serious threat of the contamination of the drinking water that is essential for their lives. As such, through various forms of schemes including partnerships with NGOs, JICA provides comprehensive support that combines direct aid to the local people with support to enhance capabilities of the central and local governments.

Economic Development

In the area of economic development, infrastructure development and promotion of investment and trade are common issues among the countries in the region. Infrastructure supports economic growth of the country or region, and is a factor that induces investment in the private sector. In addition to economic infrastructure, improving governance will lead to the improvement of an investment environment, investment promotion, and improvement of productivity, and thus, economic growth.

The core of the development of economic infrastructure is the transportation and traffic sector. 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.

In India, which maintains rapid economic growth, infrastructure development cannot keep up with the speed of economic development. Japan is supporting infrastructure development in the country mainly with yen loans. Support for development and enhancement of arterial freight railroads aims to contribute to the promotion of economic and social activities and development of an investment environment by improving the efficiency of the domestic distribution system. In more concrete terms, a development study has been implemented for a dedicated freight corridor

project on two routes, one between Delhi and Mumbai and the other between Delhi and Howrah (near Kolkata), which form the two northern sides of the "Golden Quadrilateral" connecting the four major cities (Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, and Chennai), which are the growing bases of the country. The Indian government is reviewing the implementation of the project based on the development study.

Peace building and Support for Democratization

In Nepal, a rebel conflict has continued for the past 10 years, which has not only caused internal displacement and destroyed facilities, but also loss of a great number of lives. In November 2006, however, a historic peace agreement was concluded between the antigovernment force and the government. In January 2007, the interim parliament was set up, and in April, an interim government was inaugurated. Although some difficulties have been faced, such as the postponement of the constituent assembly election date for determining the new shape of the country to April 2008, preparations for the election are underway. For people to build a new nation with hope and confidence, realization of a fair and free election is vital. JICA thus provided assistance required for the implementation of the constituent assembly election, such as strengthening the capacities of the Election Commission and support for voter education. With the aim of reducing disparities between urban and rural areas, which is considered to have been a structural factor in the conflict, JICA will provide assistance after the election specifically focusing on improving the livelihoods of the people in the area most affected by the conflict.

As far as conflicts in Sri Lanka are concerned, an indefinite cease-fire agreement was reached between Sri Lanka's government and the ethnic Tamil rebels called the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in February 2002. However, the peace talks between the government and the LTTE remained static, and in January 2008, the cease-fire agreement was abandoned.



"Democracy and Election in Nepal" Seminar



Nepalese trainees in Japan, learning the process of vote counting

Currently, conflict is intensifying in the northern region. Since the suspension of the conflict, JICA has continued to support war-affected people and refugees. By providing direct support for residents and training for administrators who deal with residents' groups, JICA helps to empower communities and municipalities so that they can address various problems and issues that they face through their own wisdom and power. Whether or not these cooperation efforts can be continued depends on the political and security situation in the country, and therefore future developments are a matter of concern.

In Pakistan and Bhutan, JICA is providing assistance in capacity building of local governments from the viewpoint of democratization. Since the trend for democratization is accelerating in Southwest Asia as well, delegation of authority from the central to local governments is in progress. At the same time, however, lack of human resources and experience at the local government level is causing confusion and stagnancy in their functional capabilities, and therefore there is a need for organizational and individual capacity building.

Post-disaster Reconstruction and Disaster Prevention

As Southwest Asia is a region that is susceptible to many types of natural disasters, emergency assistance at the time of disasters and post-disaster reconstruction assistance, as well as prevention measures, are of particular importance.

Sri Lanka and the Maldives continue to work on reconstruction after suffering damage from the tsunami disaster that occurred at the end of 2004, and Pakistan is rebuilding its northern region which was hit by a major earthquake in October 2005. The foremost issue faced by Bangladesh is reducing damage caused by recurrent cyclones and massive floods.

In Bangladesh, a cyclone hit in November 2007, affecting close to 9 million people and causing catastrophic damage, particularly to people's homes and to vital rural infrastructure. JICA first gave emergency assistance by supplying necessary goods, then promptly conducted a needs assessment survey to provide reconstruction assistance.

In conducting this survey, it was found that knowledge gained through past cooperation was being put to use. It was reported that the alarm system supported by radar microwaves for meteorological observation which was installed through grant aid assistance set off appropriately, and that around 70,000 residents evacuated to the 81 shelters that were built, again, through grant aid assistance.

JICA has received words of appreciation from the people of Pakistan for its uninterrupted support that began with emergency assistance and continued on to reconstruction efforts.

JICA will continue to provide post-disaster reconstruction and disaster prevention assistance in such areas as multilayered measures and enhancement of local residents' disaster response capabilities, which make use of the technological capacities of Japan, which is a leading country in disaster prevention.

Front Line

Bangladesh

Disaster Prevention Efforts

Never to repeat the tragedy...

Cyclone Sidr, which hit Bangladesh in November 2007, caused around 5,000 deaths and major damage to houses, livestock, and crops. After the cyclone disaster of 1991 that left 140,000 people dead, aid agencies and NGOs from Japan and other countries built cyclone shelters along the coast of the Bay of Bengal, most of which are used as elementary schools during times of calm. Although many residents used the shelters when Cyclone Sidr hit, many others still lost their lives, as some refused to leave their homes for fear of losing their houses or livestock, and others decided not to evacuate on the grounds that it was a false alarm, as nothing had happened when the alarm had gone off on previous occasions.

Following the Sidr disaster in Cox's Bazaar, a city on the coast of Bangladesh, Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV) have been distributing disaster prevention calendars that they created to elementary school teachers and local disaster prevention volunteers and offering disaster-prevention education using illustrations and picture-card shows mainly at elementary schools. At the same time, in cooperation with existing regional organizations (governments, NGOs, and volunteer groups organized by them), disaster prevention education is being offered

to residents of rural villages who often fail to receive information when disasters strike. To search for the best ways to protect people's lives and livelihoods from the damage of cyclones that pose a threat to the development of a sustainable society, education and partnership with the local residents are essential.

(JICA Bangladesh Office)



Constructed cyclone shelter