

Central America and the Caribbean

Pillars of Aid Poverty Reduction/Sustainable Economic Growth/Measures to Address Issues on a Regional Scale

Poverty reduction is the utmost priority issue common to most countries in Central America and the Caribbean in their development policies. Poverty reduction plays an important role in removing destabilizing factors, represented by the internal conflicts that Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador have experienced, and promoting peace building in the region. Additionally, in order to resolve poverty issues from a medium- and long-term perspective, sustainable economic growth to increase employment and improve the quality of people's lives is essential both in individual countries and the region. Considering the characteristics of the region, which consists of adjoining small countries, it is necessary to address issues, including environmental problems and infectious diseases control, on a regional scale across borders.

To help Central America and the Caribbean deal with these conditions, JICA actively supports self-help efforts of individual countries from the viewpoint of capacity building. JICA considers it essential also to extend cooperation from the perspective of human security focused on individuals in addition to a national- and regional-level perspective. To that end, it pays due consideration to the socially vulnerable such as women, children, and poverty-stricken indigenous peoples.

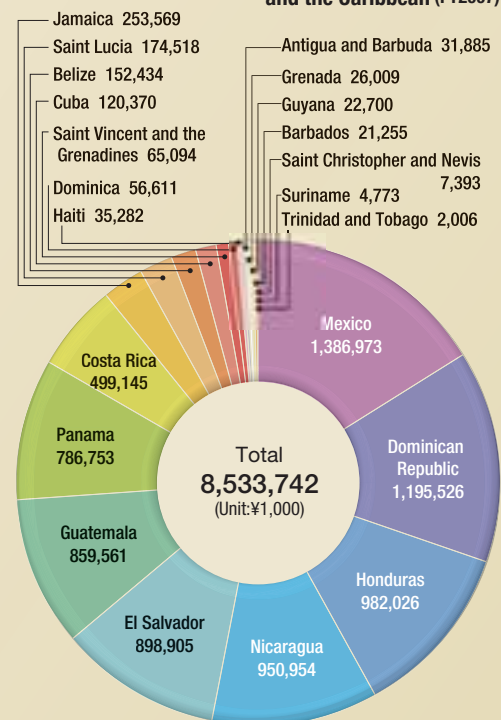
In order to address priority issues in development policy, JICA prioritizes cooperation in the areas given below and contributes to nation-building and human resources development in recipient countries.

As a method of cooperation, given that the region consists of adjoining small countries with common characteristics, region-wide cooperation targeting a set of countries is promoted to address similar development issues. JICA also supports South-South cooperation, in which countries in the same region provide cooperation to one another, and collaborates with organizations related to regional integration such as the System of Central American Integration (SICA) and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), and gives consideration to coordination with international organizations such as Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and other donor countries.

Priority areas:

- (1) Education
- (2) Health and sanitation
- (3) Agricultural and rural development
- (4) Industrial development and development of socioeconomic infrastructures
- (5) Environmental conservation
- (6) Disaster prevention
- (7) Public Safety

Cooperation results by country in Central America and the Caribbean (FY2007)



* This is the total amount of bilateral cooperation. The amount of cooperation provided to North and Latin America including cooperation that covers a group of countries is 17,637,605 thousand yen.

Current State of Development

Central America and the Caribbean region consists of 23 countries, of which eight countries are in Central America and 15 are in the Caribbean region, including Guyana and Surinam, which are located in the South American continent, and members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). The region has many small countries with land areas of less than 10,000 km²

and populations of less than 1 million people. Many countries in the region are dependent on the production and export of primary products. Though tourism is good in some countries, the manufacturing sector has yet to be developed except for in Mexico and Costa Rica.

When looking at the situation of the whole region,

peacemaking proceeded in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala in the 1990s, and individual countries have worked on democratization and economic reforms, resulting in political and economic stability throughout the region, except for a few countries. Relatively small countries adjoining this region except for Mexico often share not only histories, cultures, and languages, but also development issues. Thus, based on the common recognition that regional development requires collaboration and unity among countries, the movement has gained momentum towards regional integration and cooperation, represented by the System of Central American Integration (SICA) and CARICOM.

However, despite these self-help efforts, disparities within and among countries are still very prominent. As a result, poverty, security, and environmental issues are becoming more critical in many countries. Since the region consists of a number of small adjoining countries, these issues have crossed borders and influenced neighboring countries; therefore, the region needs proactive support from the international community to solve the problems.

Mexico, the country with the largest land area and population in the region, is a so-called more developed country, which has relatively advanced economic development, although it still grapples with poverty. It is also one of the Latin American countries with close ties to Japan, as represented by the Economic Partnership Agreement that became effective in April 2005. Mexico has already implemented South-South cooperation for other Latin American countries and JICA actively supports this effort. However, the competitiveness of small- and medium-sized enterprises must be strengthened and environmental issues have yet to be overcome in the country.

All other countries in the region except Costa Rica, which enjoys relatively advanced socioeconomic development, are facing serious poverty issues. Aiming at peace building and achieving democracy after a peace agreement, Japan has actively supported nation-building and human resource development in

the region since the 1990s. In 1995, the Japan-Central America Forum for Dialogue and Cooperation was established between Japan and SICA member countries.

The year 2005 marked the 70th anniversary since the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and five Central American countries (Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica). At Expo 2005 (Aichi, Japan), these five countries sponsored the Central America Joint Pavilion as SICA members together with two neighboring countries, Belize and Panama. This led Japan and eight countries including the Dominican Republic (associate SICA member) to designate the year 2005 as the Japan-Central America year. The Tokyo Declaration and Action Plan adopted at the Japan-Central America Summit in August 2005 call for a strengthening of ties and clarify the priority areas and the direction of future economic and technical cooperation. On the basis of these agreements, JICA actively provides assistance in fields including education, health, sanitation, and disaster prevention. At the 11th Japan-Central America Forum held in El Salvador in April 2008, it was confirmed that the cooperative relationship between Japan and SICA member countries was moving forward favorably.

Though many Caribbean countries are small in size and population, and have gained independence only in recent years, their per capita income is relatively high and the scale of their economies is small. Accordingly, Japan does not have a strong record of cooperation in these countries. In the Caribbean, which consists of similar small island countries, it is effective to provide support by region in addressing development issues common to the region using regional organizations such as CARICOM. Based on the results of annual working level diplomatic meetings, namely the Japan-Caribbean Community Consultation, JICA carries out region-wide cooperation in such areas as disaster prevention, conservation of marine resources and environmental conservation, and tourism development.

Priority Areas for Cooperation

The following describes cooperation extended by JICA to the Central American and Caribbean region for addressing the priority issues involved in development policy. It also explains the direction of future cooperation.

1. Education

Giving the highest priority to cooperation in basic education, JICA is working to improve the quality of elementary education through technical cooperation projects, dispatch of volunteers, and training courses.

The Project for the Improvement of Teaching Method in Mathematics (PROMETAM) implemented in Honduras is a typical example of cooperation, resulting in the development of teachers' manuals and children's workbooks. These and other results of bilateral cooperation are being extended to other countries in the region including El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and the Dominican Republic.

2. Health and Sanitation

In the health and sanitation field, priority is given to the maternal and child health and reproductive health area (aimed at the reduction of infant mortality and improvement of the health of pregnant women), infectious disease control targeting the poor, the improvement of regional healthcare including the training of nurses,

support for persons with disabilities, and safe drinking water supply. As in the case of education, many experts and volunteers play active roles in this area.

The Chagas Disease Control Project implemented in countries including Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Panama is a typical example. Chagas disease is a serious disease common among the poor in rural areas. Once it progresses to the chronic stage, there is no effective cure. JICA's support for persistent



Examination and training for pregnant women (Region-wide Technical Cooperation Project, "The Project for Strengthening Nursing Education and In-Service Training in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic")

efforts aimed at eradicating the disease, such as the extermination of the vector of the disease (kissing bugs), improvement of the housing environment to prevent entry of bugs, and educational campaign activities run by school and health volunteers, has proved effective.

3. Agriculture and Rural Development

The economies of many of the countries in this region depend on the production and export of primary commodities mainly from agriculture. However, many in the rural and fishing villages are poor. Therefore, JICA focuses primarily on poverty reduction through projects aimed at development and dissemination of production techniques for better livelihood and the promotion of rural development through community participation.

4. Industrial Development and Development of Socioeconomic Infrastructure

Medium- and long-term regional development requires socioeconomic infrastructure such as roads, bridges, ports, schools and hospitals. Therefore, JICA actively provides technical cooperation in these areas, while organically collaborating with ongoing grant aid and loan assistance.

Recently, the countries in the region have been concluding free trade agreements (FTA) with the US, one after the other. Amid advancing economic globalization, JICA is assisting more in the development of small- and medium-sized enterprises, promotion of trade and investment, tourism development, and other areas of the economy.

5. Environmental Conservation

In countries with growing economies, as population and industries concentrate in urban areas, waste disposal treatment and water contamination are becoming acute, requiring an urgent response. Also critical is the protection of the rich natural environment, which is a valuable tourism resource.

JICA is working proactively in these areas as well as in efforts to combat global environmental problems such as climate change.

6. Disaster Prevention

Hurricane Mitch, which struck Central America in 1998, caused serious damage to the region. Countermeasures against natural disasters, such as earthquakes and floods caused by



Evacuation training (Region-wide Technical Cooperation Project, "Project on Capacity Development for Disaster Risk Management in Central America 'BOSAI'")

torrential rain, are important issues for all the countries in the region.

JICA extends cooperation to promote disaster prevention at the administrative and community level in this region by utilizing Japan's experiences with natural disaster control. JICA cooperates with organizations such as the Center for Coordination for the Prevention of Natural Disasters in Central America (secretariat in Guatemala), which is affiliated with SICA, the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency (in Barbados), which is affiliated with CARICOM, and Mexico's National Center for Disaster Prevention. In the future, these organizations are expected to become the bases for region-wide disaster prevention activities.

7. Public Safety

The improvement of public safety is an issue shared by the countries in the region in terms of fostering stable and healthy economies and societies within the region.

JICA has cooperated with the Central American Institute of Advanced Police Studies (in El Salvador), which is affiliated with SICA, and the United Nations Latin American Institute for the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders (in Costa Rica). In addition, JICA has conducted a training course intended for police personnel in the region to introduce the Japanese police system.

Front Line

Honduras

An Entertaining Approach to Learning about the Prevention of Chagas Disease

Chagas Disease Awareness Introduced through Drama by JOCV

Chagas disease infects many of the poor in Latin America. The vector of this disease is the kissing bug, which lives in thatched roofs and mud walls. Chagas disease has a long incubation period of dozens of years, and causes heart disease and other illness.

For several years, JICA has provided assistance in Central America aimed at eradicating this disease. In Honduras, the Chagas Disease Control Project has operated since 2003. There, JICA has been distributing insecticides and helping residents monitor re-infestation of the vector on a community-level basis.

These efforts have succeeded in substantially reducing the rate of infection of Chagas disease in the province targeted by the project. In order to sustain these results, however, residents must correctly understand what is necessary to prevent the disease and take action themselves. To this end, Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOVC) collaborating on this project have produced a drama for Chagas disease education since April 2007. Since the habitat of most kissing bugs is poor regions with no electricity or water and few places for recreation, JOCV

members came up with the idea of informing residents about the disease in an entertaining format.

The publicity, script, performance, and supplementary explanations have become easier to understand and more enjoyable with each performance. Questionnaire surveys given to visitors and residents at the conclusion of the drama indicated that their understanding of the kissing bug improved. The submission of kissing bugs by residents to the health center has also increased.

(Honduras JICA Office)



Children listening attentively to the Chagas disease educational drama