The Importance of Supporting Countries with Weak Governance

Some developing countries face significant governance challenges, and in some cases struggle to fulfill the basic functions of statehood. Many of these countries lack sufficient resilience to deal with internal or external destabilizing factors such as conflicts and natural disasters. Furthermore, states without adequate legitimacy are more prone to crises such as armed conflict, dire poverty, terrorism and infectious diseases.

To prevent the outbreak or recurrence of conflicts, it is important to provide support for such countries from peacebuilding and human security perspectives, which encompass protecting citizens’ lives and livelihoods and maintaining individuals’ dignity.

In recent years, the international community has come to regard such countries as “fragile states,” and much debate has surrounded the adequacy of existing development aid systems and strategies. Against this backdrop, results-focused, selective aid policies that gained prominence in the 1990s made it particularly difficult for countries with weak governance to receive adequate and sustained assistance. Consequently, many such states were confronted with severe problems, including extreme poverty and frequent conflicts, making it all the more difficult to achieve the primary objectives of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

For those countries where it is difficult to obtain visible outcomes, the most important issue is state building. In addition, importance is given to the coherent action among political, security and development actors as well as aligning assistance behind government-led strategies or practical coordination between international actors.

JICA recognizes that to achieve such goals it is absolutely imperative to maintain coordination among donor countries.

The Japanese Government’s Commitment

Although the Japanese government does not designate certain countries as fragile states and provide special assistance on that basis, if a country is recognized as a fragile state by key international institutions and other donor countries, Japan takes into careful consideration such circumstances when formulating assistance priorities. Hence, Japan’s assistance policies vis-à-vis such countries often focus on such issues as governance and peacebuilding.

With the revision of Japan’s Official Development Assistance (ODA) Charter in 2003, peacebuilding was newly positioned as a priority issue, and ODA has been actively employed for the purposes of reducing poverty and wealth disparities and preventing conflict in developing regions. Furthermore, as a basic policy, Japan promotes human security and self-help efforts underpinned by good governance.

The Japanese government’s Medium-term Policy on ODA, announced in 2005, stipulates that peace and stability should be treated as prerequisites for development. Further, the policy defines the objectives of peace-
building as to prevent occurrence or recurrence of conflict as well as to mitigate the various hardships that people face during the conflict and in its immediate aftermath, and to attain durable development over the long term. In addition, one of the policy’s priorities is to provide developing countries with support for policy making and institution building.

At the Fourth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD IV) (see page 18 for more information), it was acknowledged that the continent has made tremendous progress in promoting conflict resolution and reconstruction in recent years, opening unparalleled opportunities to strengthen governance for consolidating peace. Based on this recognition, the Yokohama Action Plan was established with a five-year priority task of accelerating the achievement of sustainable peace and good governance. Furthermore, it was declared that Japan would redouble its ODA support for Africa.

Turning to examples in other countries, the Japanese government is providing support for democratization and governance in Afghanistan, along with reconstruction assistance, humanitarian aid and efforts to improve public security. In Pakistan, Japan has expressed its backing of anti-terrorism measures and economic reforms.

**JICA’s Initiatives**

In line with the approach of the Japanese government, JICA is not restricted in its activities by classifying or defining fragile states. Rather, JICA is engaged in cooperation with such countries as part of providing support for peacebuilding.

JICA is building on its achievements in providing capacity development support to the partner-country governments in countries affected by conflict, such as Cambodia, Timor-Leste, Afghanistan and a number of African states. JICA’s focus is in line with prioritization by the international community of the state-building.

In particular, JICA’s support for post-conflict nation building has the twin focus of state-building and meeting the needs and expectations of citizens and communities through renovating basic social infrastructure, such as water supply, health and education, and improving service delivery capacity.

JICA is not only engaged in countries in the aftermath of conflict, but also in nations where conflict is rooted in structural factors and those that are undergoing a transition from a ceasefire to peace. Although some donor countries and institutions often utilize NGOs for aid delivery that circumvents national administrations, the Japanese government and JICA adhere to the principle of partnership with the recipient country government. This enables JICA to provide ongoing, long-term assistance for countries striving to build national administrative institutions.

Furthermore, JICA recognizes that the restoration of state functions requires a comprehensive approach. In Cambodia, following the substantial restoration of security in 1999, JICA has assisted reforms in the security sector and improvements to the legal system. In Afghanistan, following the Bonn Agreement* efforts focused on improving public security and promoting democratization. In Nepal, following the signing of a comprehensive peace agreement in November 2006 to end the country’s civil war, JICA has been assisting in the formulation of a new constitution and the strengthening of the election system.

The peacebuilding assistance, provided to fragile or conflict-affected situations, does not differ substantially from the development aid provided to other countries in the sense that both aim to contribute to development. However, aid provided in fragile situations runs the risk of negatively affecting conflict factors even when it is not intended. To minimize such risks, JICA carries out a Peacebuilding Needs and Impact Assessment (PNA) through project planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation stages. JICA adopts the following comprehensive approach to conflict prevention at both country and project level:

1) Conduct an analysis of the country’s political, administrative, economic and social conditions. Analyze the background and factors underlying the conflict and its recurrence. Incorporate a conflict prevention “lens” into JICA’s project implementation plan and other assistance policies related to the country.

2) Ensure that individual projects do not aggravate factors underlying the conflict. Design and implement projects to avoid antagonism and discrimination among ethnic, religious or political groups.

3) As much as possible, proactively adopt project elements that will help eliminate conflict causes. Adopt an approach that promotes reconciliation and peaceful coexistence.

In addition, in conflict-affected countries, it is vital to ensure that delivery of assistance is timed to take advantage of progress in the political process. Consequently, JICA strives to initiate support at an early stage during political and social progress. Recent examples of such support include the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan and Liberia.

* Bonn Agreement: Officially, the Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Re-establishment of Permanent Government Institutions. In December 2001, a number of prominent Afghans met under UN auspices in Bonn, Germany, to decide on a plan for governing the country.
Afghanistan
Extending Support to Strengthen Communities

JICA conducted an investigative report to determine the level of security in northeastern Afghanistan. Released in April 2009, the report contains the following observation: “As the United Nations aircraft flew from Kabul to the northeastern province of Kunduz, the occupants were astonished to see a wide expanse of green winter wheat on one side of the Kunduz River basin—a stark contrast to the familiar sight of desert land surrounding Kabul.”

Kunduz Province is an agricultural region that, along with neighboring Takhar Province and Baghlan Province, produces a sizable portion of the country’s wheat and rice. The three provinces comprise a region known as “the bread basket of Afghanistan,” and together with Nangarhar Province in the east and Laghman Province, the five altogether account for 70% of land used for domestic rice production.

About 80% of the Afghan population lives in rural areas, and most people are engaged in agriculture. However, because of a long period of war, agricultural land and irrigation systems have fallen into disrepair and the ability to deal with natural disasters such as floods or drought is severely lacking.

In northeastern Afghanistan, JICA initiated a project for improving rice production through national agricultural experiment stations in Nangarhar Province, which borders Pakistan, in September 2007. Some 20 months after commencing the project, research trials in laboratories showed improved results and technology for raising rice yields was successfully demonstrated in experimental fields. These results were not only demonstrated in Nangarhar Province, but also in the provinces of Baghlan, Kunduz and Takhar after training activities were implemented. From the outset of the investigative report, JICA members who have visited the sites have been impressed with the lush green fields, and have documented the high expectations for the potential of rice production in these areas.

The International Conference on Afghanistan was held in The Hague, Netherlands, in March 2009. In speaking on Japan’s support for Afghanistan, then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hiroyumi Nakasone, noted that assistance would be most effective if countries contributed in areas of their respective expertise. He also emphasized the importance of undertaking efforts not only in Afghanistan but also in neighboring countries, treating the region as a whole. In this context, JICA’s project in Nangarhar Province illustrates how Japan has been able to apply its particular expertise—in this case rice cultivation technology—to achieve tangible results. JICA projects in neighboring countries include support for the construction of new railway lines in Uzbekistan and road upgrades in Tajikistan. These efforts will contribute to future improvements in infrastructure in Afghanistan, which will in turn help drive positive economic flow-on effects.

One of Japan’s key assistance policies in Afghanistan focuses on improving the urban environment in Kabul, which has deteriorated in recent years owing to population growth. Kabul’s infrastructure has been ravaged by more than 20 years of civil war, with problems such as air pollution and water shortages becoming more acute as the population swells. The city’s population is currently estimated at four million. Migrants coming from regions where available land is scarce have illegally set up dwellings on hillsides, generating new problems related to land and sanitation. In 2006, JICA helped the government of Afghanistan formulate a new urban development concept for Kabul, and from March 2008, has been backing a master plan for the Kabul Metropolitan Area, comprising both existing and new parts of the city.

While conducting projects with their Afghan counterparts on a daily basis, JICA personnel working in the field have raised concerns that the public security situation is not making progress. To build a foundation for trust among the Afghan people working with JICA, we have, until now, regularly dispatched between 20 and 60 experts despite the difficult public security situation. We believe that by working side by side with local partners on effective projects, we have been able to build a significant amount of trust. Our Afghan partners’ common hope is to someday see peace in their country. Rather than living in fear of what tomorrow will bring, they want to be able to talk about a bright future. JICA shares this hope, and strives in earnest to contribute to Afghanistan’s reconstruction and security.