

# Central America and the Caribbean

## Strengthening Development Partnerships for Regional Integration and Intra-Regional Cooperation

In the Central America and Caribbean region, regional integration and cooperation movements such as the Central America Integration System (Sistema de la Integración Centroamericana (SICA)) and the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) are very active, and democracy and market economies are taking root and expanding steadily. At the same time, many countries in this region face serious development problems such as poverty and income disparities.

Under these circumstances, JICA is actively involved in development cooperation efforts including climate change measures, infrastructure development for sustainable growth and aid for the impoverished, and will continue to support the stable development of the region. JICA also prioritizes support in the area of natural disasters, as exemplified by its emergency aid and recovery assistance to Haiti in cooperation with the international community after the earthquake in January 2010.

### Key Aid Strategies

Facilitating Cooperation on Poverty Reduction, Sustainable Economic Growth, Environmental Conservation and Climate Change

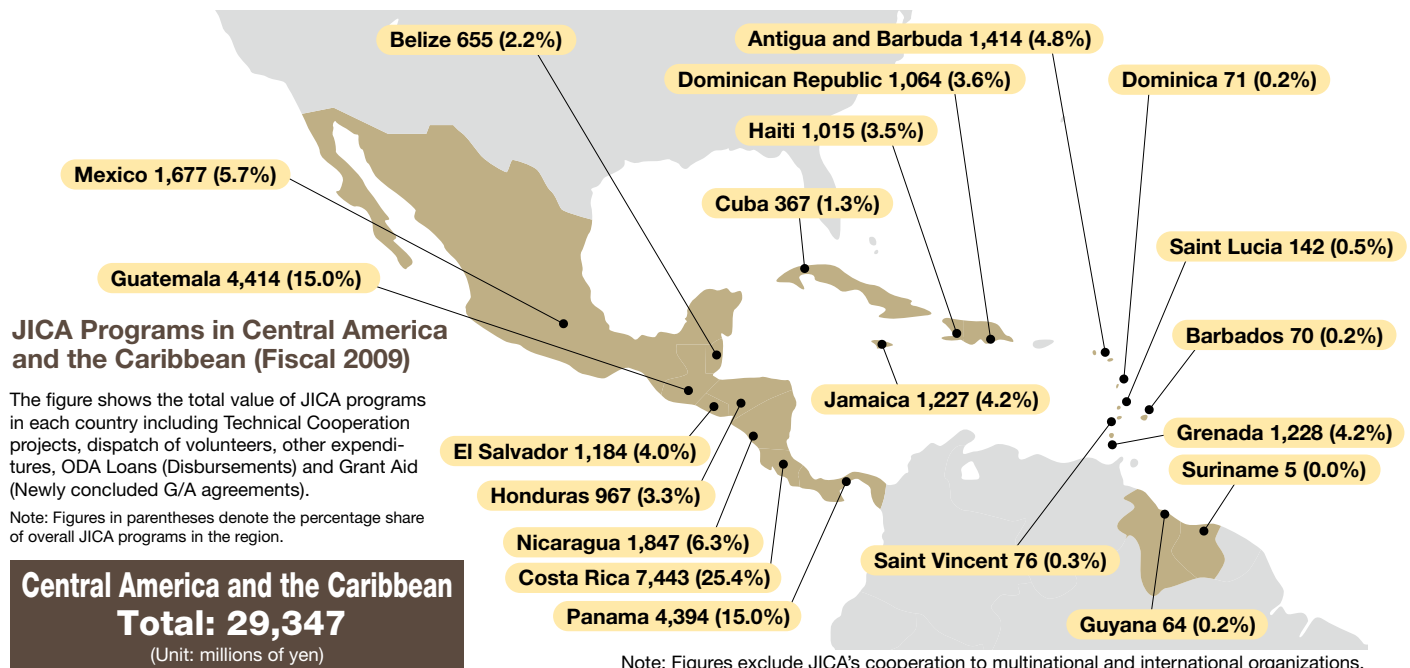
Although Mexico, Central America and the 15 Caribbean countries, including Guyana and Suriname share some common ground in terms of language and culture, they differ in size and condition, and cannot be considered homogenous. While Mexico is home to over 100 million people, the populations of SICA member countries (not including Belize), Cuba, Jamaica and Haiti range from a few million to over 10 million, and the region also includes smaller countries with populations of less than one million.

This region includes relatively stable economies such as Mexico and Costa Rica, which boast international competitiveness in the manufacturing industry and possess advanced industrial structures. Panama, Jamaica and the Caribbean's wealthier countries also have relatively stable economies, supported by finance, tourism and other service-oriented industries. On the other hand, many countries have fragile economic structures and are trying to shift

from a dependence on primary agricultural products to a diversified economy based on high added-value exports, but still depend on the export of primary agricultural products and remittances from the United States.

The civil wars which occurred in various countries devastated the region, ruining economies from the late-1970s to early-1990s. Neighboring countries were also affected by an inflow of refugees and weapons. Peace took hold in the 1990s, and with the exception of a few countries, political conditions and economies stabilized on the whole as countries worked to install democracy and make economic reforms. However, disparities within the region and countries remain pronounced, and many countries face serious poverty, public security and environmental issues. This makes the international community's support essential.

In providing assistance to these small countries in Central



America and the Caribbean, which share mutual development issues, it is important to coordinate with organizations involved in regional integration such as SICA and CARICOM, as well as with international organizations such as the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and other bilateral donors. Japan and Mexico have built a close relationship since their Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) came into effect in April 2005. The two countries are also jointly pursuing triangular cooperation for Central and South American countries.

At the Japan-Central America Summit in 2005, guidelines were laid out with the aim of strengthening relationships by, for example,

## Priority Issues and Efforts

### Supporting Poverty Reduction to Improve Regional Stability

In Central America and the Caribbean, there are many impoverished people who lack access to basic education, healthcare and medical services, and safe drinking water.

JICA focuses its aid on three fundamental issues facing Central America and the Caribbean: (1) regional and domestic disparities; (2) sustainable economic growth; and (3) negative impacts caused by environmental degradation and climate change (particularly natural disasters such as hurricanes and floods, urban environmental problems and the destruction of natural resources). While contributing to solutions to these issues, JICA strengthens its partnerships with countries in Central America and the Caribbean.

In implementing its programs, JICA actively supports the region and the countries' self-help efforts through capacity development, gives consideration to the most vulnerable groups, such as women, children and indigenous peoples living in poverty due to historical circumstances. In all this work, in addition to regional and national level perspectives, JICA takes into account the view of human security focused on the individual. JICA covers all of these perspectives in its support in the areas of education, healthcare and sanitation.

In the education sector, JICA places top priority on cooperation to help improve basic education and implements Technical Cooperation projects, dispatches volunteers and provides training programs to raise the quality of primary education. One example of JICA's efforts is the Project for the Improvement of Teaching Methods in Mathematics that started in Honduras in 2003, which has now grown to reach other countries of the region including Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic.

In the area of healthcare and sanitation, many experts and volunteers dispatched by JICA are working in priority areas such as reduction of infant mortality rates by focusing on mother-child health and reproductive health to improve the physical condition of expecting and nursing mothers, preventing infectious diseases among people living in poverty, improving rural healthcare and medical services by training nurses, supporting people with

enhancing dialogue, cooperating for the establishment of peace and democracy in Central American countries and cooperating in economic aspects, development overall, tourism and disaster prevention, as articulated in the Tokyo Declaration and the Action Plan that followed.

In the Caribbean, JICA cooperates in the areas of disaster prevention, sustainable marine resource management, tourism development and environmental conservation in consideration of the results of the Japan Caribbean Consultation, which is an official-level diplomatic dialogue held each year.

disabilities and supplying safe drinking water.

A good example is the Chagas Disease Control Project that has been implemented in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua. JICA's contributions to interruption of transmission in Guatemala were recognized by the World Health Organization (WHO) in November 2008.

The economies of many countries in the region rely on the manufacture and export of primary goods, mainly in the agricultural and fishing industries. However, a large proportion of the population in these industries still lives in poverty. JICA is therefore working on poverty reduction through cooperation aimed at the development and dissemination of production technologies for income improvement and the promotion of rural development using a participatory rural appraisal.

### Supporting Sustainable Economic Growth

Historically, the long-running civil wars in the region delayed basic infrastructure development, impeding economic growth and standing in the way of reconstruction. JICA provides financial cooperation (loans and grants) in cooperation with the IDB and other donors to target the construction and restoration of necessary roads and bridges that are so essential to sustainable economic growth.

The global financial and economic crises that started in late 2008 affected this region, which has close economic ties with the United States. The decline in foreign direct investment and remittances has also slowed economic growth. In this situation, it is even more important to develop infrastructure that can revitalize economic activity in the entire region.

### Supporting Environmental Conservation and Climate Change Measures

In countries whose economies are expanding, addressing the waste disposal and water pollution resulting from the concentration of the population and industry in urban areas is an urgent issue. At the same time, the rich natural environment that makes the region

unique must be preserved as a valuable tourist attraction.

JICA helps countries address climate change with support for mitigation measures such as encouraging the use of renewable energy and teaching energy conservation, as well as adaptation measures such as improving water-supply systems in rural areas. For example, in 2009, JICA started a Grant Aid project for the introduction of a solar power generation system in Belize. In 2007, JICA signed an ODA Loan agreement for the Panama City and Panama Bay Sanitation Project, co-financed by the IDB, to help improve living conditions and the public health environment in the metropolitan area of Panama.

### Supporting Recovery from Natural Disasters

The massive earthquake in Haiti in January 2010 killed more than 220,000 people and left approximately 3.7 million injured. JICA dispatched the Japan Disaster Relief Team right after the earthquake to take steps to prevent the outbreak of infectious diseases. Subsequently, JICA participated in the Post Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) with the United Nations, the World Bank, the IDB and the Haitian government, and in May, JICA launched the Urgent Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Support Project for Haiti to provide support for the formulation of recovery plans for the damaged areas and the restoration of basic infrastructure.

#### Case Study

### Protecting the Natural Environment and Biodiversity

#### Mexico

#### Coastal Wetland Conservation in Yucatan Peninsula

**The Yucatan Peninsula, which is covered by coastal wetlands, preserves a rich natural environment and ecosystem. However, the negative impacts of economic and tourist development have been pronounced in recent years.**

**JICA has continued to provide Technical Cooperation to preserve, restore and ensure the sustainable and appropriate use of the wetlands since 2003.**

#### Living Together, Caring for the Ecosystem

In the Ria Celestún Biosphere Reserve, which runs from the state of Yucatan to Campeche, dense mangrove forests cover the coast and approximately 600 species of animals, including flamingoes, live in this paradise. In 2004, the reserve was designated as a Wetlands of International Importance in accordance with the Ramsar Convention.

However, in recent years an alarming number of mangrove forests in the reserve have been drying out, and a survey indicates that this problem affects 4,000ha. The likely causes are a diversion of groundwater caused by the construction of roads and bridges and an increase in the soil's salinity as a result of storm surges triggered by hurricanes. The construction of roads for tourists wanting to experience nature has, ironically, helped to precipitate this crisis.

In addition, garbage thrown out by residents

is causing environmental pollution, and overfishing has provoked a decline in fisheries resources and a crisis in the aquatic ecology.

Accordingly, Mexico's National Commission of Natural Protected Areas and JICA established the Coastal Wetland Conservation in Yucatan Peninsula Project in 2003 with the participation of the Ria Celestún Biosphere Reserve Office, local governments, local NGOs, residents and fishermen. This project is intended to preserve and restore the wetlands, restore the mangrove forests, collect and dispose of waste and provide local environmental education.

#### Fishermen Launch Ecotourism

One of the focuses of the project is ecotourism conducted by fishermen. The restrictions placed on fishing to protect the aquatic ecosystem have been problematic for the fishermen, and three groups of fishermen receive support from and are involved in this project.

In 2003, a group of 10 fishermen launched "Laguna de Cinitún." One member explained that they had decided to seek stable revenue because fish catches had been declining every year, and they had to go further out to sea for fish, which pushed up fuel costs and also increased the risk of sudden changes in weather. Members that received training in the English language and knowledge of nature to become guides now conduct boat tours in the mangrove forests. Other groups such as "Alamo"

and "Isla Pájaro" also conduct tours to observe the vegetation growing in springs called *peten* and night tours to see jaguars and spider monkeys.

The tour leaders state that they had never thought about the environment as a resource before and that once the project started, they learned how important nature is and realized they could help to protect it. They had assumed that they would not be able to talk to the tourists, but their training had given them confidence and all of the members did their best to become good guides and satisfy their visitors. This group of fishermen also led initiatives to build boardwalks, restore mangrove trees and collect garbage.

#### A Grassroots View

**Jose de la Gala Mendez**

**Director, Ria Celestún Biosphere Reserve Office**  
Receiving technical training and working together with JICA experts—who always possess a strong sense of responsibility—not only raised staff members' awareness and improved their skills, but also enabled them to achieve impressive personal growth. JICA's assistance has provided the backbone to all of their activities and has led to marvelous results.

#### A Grassroots View

**Madoka Nakagawa**

Fishermen who had previously harmed the environment with illegal fishing now engage in conservation activities, with a passion to leave the environment unharmed to their children and proudly guide tourists to see the restored mangrove trees. The development of our counterparts in Mexico has been the greatest outcome of this project.



Flamingoes flock to the Ria Celestun Biosphere Reserve.



On an eco tour

## Case Study

**Warning Siren Saved Residents****El Salvador: Project on Capacity Development for Disaster Risk Management in Central America—"Bosai"**

**In November 2009, El Salvador was hit by a hurricane, causing a massive disaster involving flooding and avalanches of rocks and earth that killed more than 300 people. Residents of a village in which JICA had installed a disaster warning system were able to evacuate quickly, resulting in no loss of life.**

**Addressing the Ten-Year Plan for Disaster Prevention in Central America**

Much of Central America has volcanic, brittle and precipitous geographical traits, making the region vulnerable to natural disasters such as damage from wind and floods, landslides, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. This has inhibited development, including efforts to reduce poverty.

Accordingly, six Central American countries established the Center of Coordination for the Prevention of Natural Disaster in Central America (CEPREDENAC) in 1988 with the aim of creating a disaster-resilient society. Under the Central American Five-Year Regional Disaster Reduction Plan (PRRD: 2000-2004) and the Ten-Year PRRD (2006 - 2015) established by CEPREDENAC, the countries worked to set up disaster prevention systems, train human resources in the disaster prevention sector and strengthen the local capacity to prevent disasters. In this process, the Japanese government was asked to provide Technical Cooperation to raise disaster prevention capacity at the community and rural level.

In response, JICA carried out a project formation study in the six Central American countries in 2006, and started the Project on Capacity Development for Disaster Risk Management in Central America—"Bosai"—in May 2007, aimed at providing five years of Technical Cooperation. Several communities in each country were chosen for the pilot program, and experts started to give advice on community disaster prevention and devised

plans, instruction in participatory workshops on measures to combat flooding, earthquakes, landslides, volcanoes and tsunamis. Disaster warning systems and vehicles were also donated.

**Prompt Evacuation Thanks to Alarms and Training**

On November 7, 2009, while these initiatives were underway, El Salvador was hit by torrential rain from Hurricane Ida, with as much as 350mm of rain recorded in a single day. This major disaster, which caused flooding and landslides, resulted in more than 300 deaths and missing persons nationwide.

However, in Las Hojas, one of the villages chosen for the pilot program, irregularities upstream were reported to the village's disaster prevention committee through the wireless system that JICA had donated, and the early flood warning alarm installed in nine places in the village warned residents at the right moment. This enabled imperiled residents to evacuate quickly, and as a result the village saw no deaths. A subsequent investigation demonstrated that 50% of residents had heard the siren and, using what they had learned in workshops, cooperated with their neighbors to evacuate smoothly. Based on this outcome, JICA will make further efforts to improve the effectiveness of the project.

In response to Hurricane Ida, the government of El Salvador declared a national emergency, and the Japanese government and JICA also responded with emergency aid.

**Supporting Construction of Earthquake-Resistant Dwellings**

El Salvador also suffers grave damages from earthquakes. About 12% of the dwellings nationwide were destroyed in 2001, and 60% of those were the dwellings of the poor.

Over the five years from 2003, JICA pursued a project to construct and improve technology for seismic resistant dwellings.

JICA supported the construction of seismic resistant dwellings and their popularization by building laboratories for the study of seismic resistant construction technologies, donating equipment, training researchers and proposing ways to improve construction technology standards for dwellings.

In the three-year project (Phase II) that started in 2009, JICA has been reinforcing its past outcomes with a focus on strengthening building administration.

**A Grassroots View**

**Francisco Orellana**  
Community leader, Community Disaster Prevention Committee

The early warning system functions very effectively, and enabled 120 families to evacuate to safety. There was physical damage to dwellings and other buildings, but the most important thing is that there were no deaths. I am very grateful to God, who gave us this opportunity, and to JICA's "Bosai" project, which gave us the knowledge about the early warning system.

**A Grassroots View**

**Eiji Kawahigashi**  
Community Disaster Prevention Expert

Of course no one wants natural disasters to occur in the first place, but I think that this early warning system played an extremely important role under the harsh circumstances. The residents are directly hurt by natural disasters, and there is not much that government can do at the instant that a disaster occurs, so I believe that self-initiated preparation and strengthening capacity to respond to disasters is very important.



Installing an early warning system. The early warning siren for floods prevented loss of human life in this village.



Laboratories for the study of earthquake-resistant construction technologies and training in building techniques



Technology transfer workshop