Overview of Issue
The ultimate goal of gender mainstreaming is to achieve “gender equality”*1 in all fields of society. It is a process to identify men’s and women’s development issues and needs, as well as the impact on men and women of development policies, programs and projects, at every stage of implementation, monitoring and evaluation, on the premise that all development policies, programs and projects impact men and women differently.

Gender is often unconsciously constructed based on the mentality, culture, traditions and customs of a country. It also affects various policies, systems and organizations, while people may not even be aware of its influences. Consequently, it is essential to support national machinery such as the Ministry of Women’s Affairs to ensure that the policies and systems in partner countries adopt a gender-based perspective.

In most cases, however, statistics, data and indices are not tabulated according to gender. If a philosophy of gender is introduced without fully comprehending the society in a target region, it may in fact produce negative results such as exacerbating gender disparity. It is critical to collect and comprehensively analyze fundamental data needed for plans and projects by gender, age, ethnicity and religious affiliation, and to develop human resources who have this perspective.

Although it is important to promote women’s empowerment as part of efforts to advance gender mainstreaming, focusing solely on women may not achieve the desired results. This also requires changing the consciousness of men, decision-makers and socially influential people such as administrative officials, educators, politicians and religious leaders. In other words, it is necessary to reform the social structure and systems surrounding women.

It is essential to review areas and projects that at first glance may appear not to require a gender perspective and provide support based on the different roles of men and women. For example, one form of support would be developing agricultural equipment that is easy for women to use since they are responsible for the majority of agricultural work. Another example would be encouraging the participation of women in water quality control organizations.

JICA Activities
For many years, JICA has considered the importance of gender issues and developed a basic strategy for implementing gender-responsive projects. JICA has also established an organizational framework for gender mainstreaming.

Actual assistance includes strengthening organizational capacity and creating policies and systems for gender equality in Afghanistan, Cambodia and Nepal by supporting national machinery such as the Ministry of Women’s Affairs. To promote the empowerment of women, JICA provides support in wide-ranging areas. JICA works to invigorate women’s centers in Nigeria, nurture entrepreneurs, particularly women, in poverty-stricken areas of Mexico and Honduras, and improve education for women in Yemen. Rather than focus solely on women, JICA conducts activities that will take root in society such as encouraging more women to go to women’s centers by advertising on the radio in order to gain the understanding of husbands and other family members, and getting religious leaders to convey the importance of education for females to their fathers.

In this way, instead of projects in which women are the sole beneficiaries, efforts are made to ensure that the perspective of women is reflected in results and actions. In the forestry industry in India, in addition to simply employing women, additional support was provided to generate income so that they don’t have to cut young trees to get wood; they can purchase alternative fuel instead. A plan to develop tourism in El Salvador is being formulated that will benefit both men and women by identifying their differing roles.

In recent years, there has been increasing recognition of the need to address new issues in gender and development, such as trafficking in persons and other forms of gender-based violence. Trafficking in persons is a serious crime and a grave violation of
There are over 500 Women Development Centers (WDCs) in Nigeria. However, most of the WDCs are not being run effectively due in main to a lack of funding. JICA has assisted with the formulation of guidelines for activating WDCs based on experiences through training and providing materials and equipment at six centers in Kano State from January 2007.

A Place of Learning that Enhances the Lives of Poor Women

The proportion of people living under the poverty line on less than US$1 a day is extremely high in Nigeria at 70%. The impact of a traditional patriarchal society has exacerbated gender disparity in the adult literacy rate and income.

More than 500 WDCs have been established throughout Nigeria since the latter half of the 1980s for the purpose of empowering women at the grassroots level through vocational training and basic literacy education. The National Centre for Women Development, affiliated with the Nigerian Ministry of Women’s Affairs, conducted a nationwide study on WDCs from 2001 and found that although the centers improve the lives of poor women, they are not functioning effectively. The study recognized that needs are not being met mainly due to a lack of funding.

JICA started a three-year project in January 2007 to establish a model for the appropriate management of WDCs to ensure their continued utilization as places of learning and empowerment that contribute to enhancing the lives of poor women. The project activated six WDCs in Kano State through training and by providing equipment and materials, and based on this experience, JICA supported the formulation of guidelines for activating WDCs throughout Nigeria.

As a result, an increasing number of women in the community who previously found it difficult to go out have started using the WDCs of their own accord. Husbands even support their wives going to the centers. The project has also deepened understanding of the WDCs in the community, including religious leaders and village elders. Sewing and knitting machines are provided to WDC graduates via soft loans. In the future, it is expected that the effects of the projects will spread to other states as the guidelines are implemented.