

# JICA Research Institute: Aims, Approaches, & Themes

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## 1. Research Aims

As a research institute associated with an ODA implementing agency, JICA-RI naturally aims to conduct research that contributes to the field operations of the organization to which it belongs. It intends now also to strongly emphasize academic quality in its research. This new orientation reflects our conviction that any policy or development operation, or even discourse for that matter, should be based on robust empirical evidence, not on assertion, opinion or wishful thinking.

Investigative activities to meet routine operational needs – like project evaluations, for example -- are being carried out already by several departments in JICA. In the interests of efficient division of labor, our Research Institute will concentrate on exploring, from both mid- and long-term perspectives, practices that will best serve the basic purpose of international assistance. By this I mean the realization of long-lasting conditions in which people, wherever they live, are secure, free from threats to their lives and their integrity, and capable of making full use of their potential by their own initiatives. This task will be a complex and multidimensional one which needs deep knowledge about their society, economy, political institutions, history and cultural values. To analyze these factors, we will have to take comprehensive and multidisciplinary perspectives.

In short, the aim of our research institute is to conduct operations oriented, academically qualified research from the comprehensive perspectives on development.

There will be occasions in which a quick response is necessary, to cope with emergencies like what we face today. It is very regrettable that imprudent behavior can stir crises severe enough to threaten the fruits of years of effort to help people in developing countries. However, there is no time for lamentation. Aid-implementing organizations, both public and private, must extend emergency social safety nets to the most severely affected. At the same time, research institutes engaged with international cooperation should conduct deliberate and careful analyses of previous crises as well as the current one and the impact they

have had on people's lives. In this way, they will be able to offer responsible policy recommendations.

## **2. Research Approaches**

In order to conduct research that is both academically solid and operations oriented with mid- or long-term perspective, we intend to take advantage of our status as a research institute associated with JICA to take the following approaches:

(1) We will pursue collaboration between academics and practitioners to integrate analysis and implementation. By practitioners, I refer not only to JICA staff, but also to JICA senior advisors, as well as to experts, consultants, and volunteers who have field experience. We will also recruit academic researchers, both Japanese and non-Japanese, with strong commitment to international cooperation. These practitioners and academics will conduct joint research, each bringing their respective expertise.

(2) To sharpen their own research capabilities, JICA staff will be expected to shift back and forth between research and operations.

(3) In our research, we will use materials and experiences accumulated over the half century of JICA activities. Most of the materials have been left scattered around and underutilized. We need to start, therefore, by collecting and archiving them. The enormous quantity of these materials makes this a huge challenge, indeed. Initially we will compile data and gather material on a limited number of selected subjects directly related to our current research.

(4) We also will emphasize field research. I want our researchers always to be close to field operations. An example is a research project we are currently planning that will be implemented in tandem with actual development projects related to rice production in Africa.

## **3. Research Themes**

Research themes to be covered by our institute in the coming years will be grouped in four major areas: Peace and Development; Growth and Poverty Reduction; Environment and Climate Change; and Aid Strategies. With limited human and

financial resources, we cannot deal with every important issue. We will have to be selective, taking into consideration our researchers' capabilities and interests and the availability of materials. Here, I want to show you some of our research projects, some already in progress and others still in preparatory stages.

### **(1) Peace and Development**

Armed conflicts have declined in recent years, but as shown by renewed conflict in Sri Lanka and in the Democratic Republic of Congo, peace is extremely fragile in many parts of the world. Armed conflict and consequent political instability directly threaten human security and also hamper long-term economic development. Making peace sustainable and preventing the occurrence or recurrence of violent conflict are tasks of paramount importance to people, as well as to the international aid community.

With these things in mind, we have established two separate but related research teams. One team will focus on conflict prevention. It will analyze structural factors that precipitate armed conflict as well as the political and social processes that escalate political conflict into armed confrontation. Through this research, I hope that we can come up with effective measures so that human effort can overcome structural constraints.

The other team will conduct research on post-conflict state-building. In the immediate aftermath of a ceasefire and the establishment of a provisional government, political order is extremely fragile. For peace to be sustainable, state-building is necessary -- in both the physical and psychological sense. Physically, administrative structures and mechanisms to maintain security and to run the government must be established and their capacity must be improved. But new institutions will not become rooted in society unless they are accepted as legitimate by the people. People's livelihoods must be respected and their sense of fairness satisfied. I expect our research team to make intensive comparative studies of actual situations in Asia and Africa and uncover factors that will contribute to successful state-building.

We have also established a separate research team to examine transnational threats against human security such as contagious diseases, cross-border crimes and region-wide environmental problems.

## **(2) Growth and Poverty Reduction**

For peace and human security to be sustainable, economic growth and a fair distribution of its fruits are indispensable. The second group of research projects deals with this problem. It is subdivided into two broad areas:

One is an in-depth macro analysis of national economies. It will approach the subject from the political economy perspective, as national economic development is deeply affected by the nature of the political institutions and leadership, social organizations and values, and historical experiences of individual countries and regions. We will have two teams, one focusing on Asia and the other on Africa. With regard to Asia, the research will look at economic recovery from the 1997/98 crisis and concurrent changes in socio-political order.

The other area of research is micro- or meso-level analysis of certain sectors or geographic areas. Much of this research will be economics based, focusing on the impact of infrastructure projects on agricultural production, industrial development, and/or family incomes. We will also have a project that traces efforts to expand rice production in some African countries.

## **(3) Environment and Climate Change**

While engaging in the tasks of peace-building and economic development, we mustn't forget that human life is constrained by the environment. Climate change is an especially serious issue today. It threatens human security by causing natural disasters and by adversely affecting agricultural and other types of production. To tackle this problem, again we have two research teams. One will deal with the possible impact of climate change on mega cities in Asia; the other will focus on measures for climate change mitigation (or promotion of low-emission societies) and adaptation in developing countries.

In addition, we have a separate research team focusing on ordinary people's activities for resource management and their interactions with other stakeholders.

## **(4) Aid Strategies**

The final group of research projects is concerned with aid strategies. Here, in order to explore improved methods of international assistance, we will reevaluate current trends in international cooperation and look at new directions in the aid community.

Since one of the most prominent characteristics of JICA's operations has been an emphasis on ownership and co-creation in project implementation, we want to dig into some of the concrete aspects of field operations and examine how and why they did or did not contribute to the capacity development of people, public institutions, and social organizations in developing countries. We will pick up, for example, water supply projects in Africa and some infrastructure projects that affected institutional changes.

As for the new directions in the aid community, we will explore effective cooperation with new donors. One of our projects will focus on emerging donor countries in Asia while another will look at CSR (i.e., corporate social responsibility) by Japanese companies.

### **A Concluding Remark**

Since our research projects have just started, we can draw no conclusions today. We intend to make the utmost effort to do high quality research and contribute to improvement in the quality of international cooperation, not only by JICA but also by other international organizations, so that people can be free from insecurity and able to fully use their capabilities wherever they happen to be born.