

Consideration on remote operation <Part 1>

Introduction

Due to the worldwide spread of the novel coronavirus infection (COVID-19), travel has been severely restricted in every country from around March 2020. What is happening now is a once in a 100 year global pandemic, and we, who are engaged in JICA's technical cooperation project, are now forced to operate remotely after our emergency return to Japan. We had been in the field in developing countries, talking politely and sincerely with the local people, and thinking about the development of their country/ region together, but this is no longer possible. We just hope that this current situation will be resolved as soon as possible, and we are spending our days waiting for our physical return to the field.



When the COVID-19 disaster struck, it suddenly became impossible to enter any project sites no matter where they were located. Everything happened all at once. Projects were suddenly interrupted. Remote control became the only option. This, actually, has happened many times in the past. To take one example, an emergency evacuation was unavoidable during the unrest caused by escalating anti-government protests in Syria in 2011. To take another example, local travel was suspended for a period of time due to a political coup d'etat in Sudan in 2019. Both events were sudden, caused by social and political changes in the countries of our work focus and precipitated emergency evacuation or suspension of travel. In terms of unforeseen situations like these, the COVID-19 disaster has many similarities. Not least the interruption of activities which often results in a prolonged suspension of travel without any prospect of resuming the project due to an inability to read the subsequent trends. The only alternative to being on the ground is remote operation work and, in the case of Syria and Sudan, this is what happened at the end of the project activity period. Training of national staff (NS) and a trusting relationship between counterparts (CP) had been built by that time. Fortunately, in collaboration with NS and CP, it seems that



remotework was carried out smoothly.

On the other hand, remote project management is not limited to the above-mentioned forced



situations, but also includes the originally planned form of remote management. This sort of project is designed to strengthen the capacity of agricultural extension workers in the states of Khyber Pakhtunha (KP) and Balochistan, Pakistan, where it was difficult for Japanese experts to enter the project area for security reasons. This consideration made remote operation directed from the capital Islamabad part of the planning from the very start of project formulation. Because the project was, from the first, based on the assumption of remote implementation, rather than simply training at the training center, we actively incorporated ingenuity such as fieldwork and follow-up work at the site after the training, then prepared to put it out into the field. We systematically worked on a method that can be expected to have the maximum effect even in situations where Japanese experts cannot physically enter.



It is certain that restrictions and limitations will inevitably be added to remote project management in the future. And it might not be arguable to say whether non-remote management is required or not.

Remote operations come in many types. Some adaptations are forced by circumstance and some are originally part of the plan. In this AAI news series, we



would like to discuss the remote management of projects by comparing the experiences of our past projects and delving into the activities related to remote management to highlight various characteristics. And we would like to review and consolidate useful information for remote management of future projects.