Spin-offs from Technical Cooperation Projects

Beyond Predetermined Outcomes: “Call and Response” in Action

Introduction

Technical cooperation projects are generally designed using a logical framework known as the Project Design Matrix (PDM). By organizing activities, outputs, project purposes, and overall goals together with their indicators, the PDM provides a common framework for implementation and evaluation. In JICA technical cooperation projects, it also serves as an important “blueprint” for strengthening the institutions, organizations, and human resources of partner countries.

Through planned cooperation such as technology transfer and institutional development, projects seek to strengthen the capacity of partner countries to address their own challenges. In this sense, the PDM shows the logic and direction of cooperation and can also be regarded as the basic “skeleton” of a project.

In the field, however, things do not always develop exactly as planned in the PDM. As experts work with local counterparts, extension officers, farmers, and rural women, unexpected interactions and responses often emerge. Ideas and technologies introduced by a project are interpreted through people’s own experience and circumstances, and may be reconsidered, adapted, and reshaped through these exchanges.

One way of understanding this dynamic is through the idea of “Call and Response.” A “Call” refers to an initiative or proposition introduced by project experts: a new cultivation technique, an extension approach, an organizational framework, or a concept such as rural women’s empowerment. These “calls invite responses from local counterparts, extension officers, farmers, rural women, and others involved in the project.

The “Response” takes different forms according to local circumstances. A technology may be adapted to available resources, reinterpreted through existing knowledge, or applied in unexpected ways. These responses can, in turn, influence how experts think and act. Repeated “Call and Response” thus turns project implementation from a one way transfer of knowledge and technology into a more interactive and creative process.

Knowledge and technologies are therefore no longer simply things “introduced” from outside. They become embedded in everyday practices and acquire new meanings in the local context. In other words, they are internalized, and then locally reproduced and adapted by being combined with local resources, knowledge, and ways of doing things.

As cooperation deepens, developments may emerge that cannot be fully captured by the original activities or indicators. These are what we call “spin-offs.” A spin-off is a new activity or practice that emerges from the ideas and actions of participants themselves, either during a project or through its medium- to long-term development.

Although not specified in the PDM, such developments grow out of the knowledge, experience, relationships, and opportunities created through the project. Spin-offs are therefore not simply unplanned “by-products.” Rather, they suggest that what was introduced through cooperation has taken root locally and become a source of new ideas and actions.

Spin-offs can thus be seen as another dimension of the results of technical cooperation. They show how local actors take what they have learned or experienced, give it new meaning, and develop it further on their own initiative. What emerges may differ from what was originally envisioned, yet still reflect—and sometimes deepen—the value of the cooperation.

The value of technical cooperation should therefore not be assessed solely through PDM indicators or project progress. Attention to spontaneous developments from the field allows us to see forms of change that conventional project frameworks may not fully capture, and whether cooperation has truly become rooted in local practice.

This series examines the processes through which spin-offs have emerged in several technical cooperation projects in which we have been involved. What these cases share are changes that emerged through “Call and Response,” followed by new interpretations and voluntary actions by the people involved. By looking closely at these processes, we hope to explore another kind of achievement that emerges beyond predetermined outcomes, and the lasting value that technical cooperation can leave behind.