

New series: Re-examination of Development Study

Part 1: Development Study at a Turning Point

'Development Study' is defined as an activity to support development planning of various projects of a public nature, which are useful for the socio-economic development of developing countries. Japan's development study activities conducted in a number of developing countries have greatly contributed to the development of the respective countries. Most of the development projects focused on basic infrastructure, in other words so-called 'building-type' development aid. However, some cases of 'building' aid have not been very effective as the 'building' was left without sufficient management due to lack of manpower and funds. Meanwhile in Japan, the dragging recession has reduced tax revenue, and a more effective use of national budget is called for. Public opinion strongly desires a review and reform of the ODA policy. Also, as public interest in overseas development aid increases, a more effective use of the aid budget is being requested.

One of the results of this trend is the shift from the conventional 'hard' aid activities such as construction of irrigation facilities, dams, roads and ports, to 'softer' aid projects like the establishment of management systems and human capacity development to operate the constructed facilities. The 'soft' projects are based on the notion that, in order to ensure that the project runs effectively and sustainably, the scale of development should be that which is most appropriate to the local conditions and that a proper system and the correct manpower is needed to manage the development activities.

In this context the conventional type of 'development study' has also come to a turning point, as different approaches and focuses are in demand today. Consequently, though the main objective of development study remains rooted in development planning, various forms of research activities have started to appear recently. For instance, participatory research methods such as PRA are occasionally employed to reflect the 'real needs' of local people in the project, and verification studies are being introduced in order to ensure implementation of proposed future development plans. The important key phrases in this new development trend include 'local participation', 'sustainable development', 'NGO collaboration', and so forth. Attempts are being made to expand collaboration and communication with local people (local groups and NGOs) during the study activities, so as to establish and implement realistic development plans that are genuinely useful for local people. Moreover, the focus of project planning has also expanded from simple economic effects, and today great care is taken to consider the local resource circulation system and environmental conservation.

For today's development aid at this significant turning point, development study activities will continue playing an important role in forming good project plans. If development study is done effectively, the resulting projects can be confidently expected to contribute to development, poverty alleviation and lifestyle improvement etc. in developing countries. As AAI has been involved in various development studies of JICA (mainly master plan study and feasibility study), we have had good opportunities to see the field reality in respective developing countries. This new series will report on several such cases and discuss the role and challenges of development research activities that we became aware of along the way. We would also like to consider future prospects, the mission of development study within the framework of the current ODA paradigm, and the potential/possibility of its reform.



Irrigation channel construction (Brazil)



Meeting with a local people's group (Morocco)