

Re-examination of Development Study

Part 3: Development Study with pilot studies

One of the recent major trends in development aid is the emphasis of the 'community participation' method in rural development. The challenge is how effectively stakeholders, such as local communities, local authorities and NGOs, can be involved in rural development program for the purpose not only of poverty alleviation but also the establishment food security, social development, education, health and medical services, and environmental attention for sustainable development. In order to cope with such challenges and to demonstrate implementation models, in recent years there have been quite a few instances of 'pilot studies' being employed as part of the development study.

The concept of the pilot study has been around for some time but in recent years the frequency of its application has greatly increased. AAI has taken part in some pilot projects using this approach. These include 'Pilot Project of Agricultural Development in Senegal'; 'Agricultural Development Project in Nejid Region in Oman'; 'Project of the Development of Oasis in Mauritania', etc. In Senegal the pilot study was conducted for the purpose of establishing a model farm applicable to the semi-arid region along the Senegal River. Crops such as vegetables and rice were cultivated in a pilot farm constructed by grant aid, in order to study mainly the water management and cultivation. In Oman the cultivation of pastures and training was conducted from 1995 as a pilot study in a newly constructed 50-ha pilot farm. In Mauritania a pilot study has been on-going since 2001 at some selected oasis in order to draw up a comprehensive rural development plan which aims at establishing a system of sustainable land use and livelihood for oasis communities. The specific fields for pilot studies include vegetable cultivation, cyclic use of regional resources, storage and processing of the harvested vegetables, improved health conditions of the local community through increased vegetable consumption, and so forth.

When previous pilot studies and recent ones are compared, some changes can be observed in their contents. In the previous pilot studies, 'hard' facilities (e.g. pilot farms) would be provided from the Japanese (donor) side and then experimental cultivation and extension of know-how had been conducted. On the other hand, recent pilot studies, aiming at achieving sustainable development, are increasingly based on the target community's needs and locally available resources (manpower, materials, organisations, technologies, information etc.). On the other hand, there are some distorted cases of pilot studies in which the 'hard' aid approach is forcibly applied where it is not necessarily required. Earlier pilot studies often led to the provision of 'hard' aid such as the construction of various facilities with loaned or granted funds following the survey, but as development needs shift towards more 'soft' matters such 'hard' provisions have become unnecessary. Moreover, 'soft' project plans are harder to be understood and authorised by host governments solely through written reports as there are a number of elements which need to be demonstrated in practice. Therefore, pilot studies are employed more frequently for such projects.

The recent style of pilot study has problems and challenges including the following points:

- 1) Since the content needs to be determined at an early stage of the pilot study, it is uncertain to what extent the opinions of target local communities are reflected;
- 2) Due to limited time availability, the survey content tends to consist only of short-term items which are expected to bear quick results;
- 3) It is not studied and proved well enough how the results of pilot studies can be reflected in development survey.

The content of a pilot study - what needs to be implemented and proved, how and by whom etc. - should be planned and determined based on the local conditions and needs. Enough time should be spared for this process and this time should be additional to the time allocated for the actual pilot study (activity). At present this does not seem to be happening, and there is a need for more refinement and improvement to make full use of the results of pilot studies. One way of doing so may be to see pilot studies not as complementary to development studies only but as a preparation phase of the following activities (such as collaboration with local NGOs, grassroots grant schemes, dispatch of experts and JOCV volunteers, project type technical cooperation etc.). In that way, pilot studies could be treated as complementary to the entire development project itself, and designed with this consideration in mind without having to be completed in a hurry within the limited survey period.



Pasture yield survey in Oman



Draw well in Mauritania



Vegetable farming by a women's association in Mauritania