

Re-examination of Development Study

Part 5: Importance of the Preliminary Survey

A preliminary survey on development study entails various important activities such as (i) verification of the background conditions and contents of the project requested/proposed by the local government, discussion on the method of the target study, and confirmation of logistical matters (capacity) for hosting the project, (ii) collection and analysis of relevant references and information, plus field visits and (iii) negotiation over the scope of work (S/W) of the target study and signing of the project contract. This means that the nature of the target study will be determined during the preliminary survey period, and any confusion or misunderstanding/mistakes during the preliminary survey will affect the entire project afterwards. In other words, the preliminary survey has to be conducted with great care and consideration.

In the past, AAI has been involved in the preliminary survey for the study on pumped storage hydroelectric power development in Maharashtra, India, and more recently for the study on the management of forest reserves in the province of Comoe, Burkina Faso, and for a pilot study on community vitalization and afforestation in the Middle Shire, Malawi. The latter two recent cases, as reported in AAINews Vol.38 and Vol.40, are projects aiming at sustainable management of resources in a participatory manner. In Burkina Faso, the lack of funding and manpower had stagnated such efforts, while there was no specific/detailed forest management plan for better conservation and utilization of resources. In this context a request came for a development study on the establishment of a forest management plan, and a preliminary survey was conducted to verify the background and contents of the requested project and to determine the scope of the development study. In the case of Malawi, a management plan of natural resources in rural areas had already been set up by a development study conducted earlier. A pilot project was required in order to carry out this management plan, and technical support was requested for this pilot project, for which the preliminary survey team was dispatched.

Having taken part in these preliminary surveys as a member of the survey team, I was able to feel their importance on the ground. Negotiation over the S/W of the target study is a crucial part of a preliminary survey. Also, the signing event of the agreement on the upcoming project takes the form of a formal ceremony, with certain high-ranking people attending from the host counterpart side. Therefore, much effort is required for its preparation and prior informal consultation with the signing parties. Also, although in some cases consultants in the survey team are given some time set aside for their field visit/investigation, normally during surveys quite a few activities are packed into a short period of time. As a result, the survey team members have to complete their job in such a hurry that often they end up neglecting thorough discussions with their project counterparts over the important framework of the target study. Moreover, it is possible that such time constraints facing preliminary surveys may lead to a situation where the project ends up lacking the flexibility to incorporate potential changes in the requirements from the counterparts at a later stage.

Therefore, considering the importance of a preliminary study, I feel that much more time should be allocated to it. When I took part in a project formation study in Latvia I also felt that in the entire process of development activities, i.e. in the flow from project formation study – preliminary survey – target study to the project execution – communication and interaction with the project counterpart at an early stage (such as during the project formation study or the preliminary survey) is extremely important. In order to foster the sense of ownership of the project on the side of the counterparts, thorough and in-depth discussions and exchanges of opinions with them should be initiated as early as possible. Moreover, the current rules prohibit individuals and organizations who took part in the preliminary survey from participating in the target study phase. This system should also be reconsidered since the project can be executed more effectively when those who are well informed of, and know very well about the contents and nature of the project, are involved. While it is understandable that such a regulation is considered necessary for the sake of securing transparency and accountability for the project, more improvement and reconsideration seems to be necessary with regard to the development study system, including the very meaning of the preliminary surveys.



Meeting with a local association (Burkina Faso)



Meeting with the project counterparts (Malawi)