Part 1   Projects and their evaluation

An evaluation of some sort is always required for any jobs done, and is not unique to the field of international cooperation.   Evaluation is to measure impacts of a project and the significance of the project implementation, communicate project results to a third party, and to look for indicators and guidance for the next step. In addition, when a project evaluation is done for several projects using the same evaluation items and methods, it can present objective comparisons between projects. For JICA implemented projects, five evaluation criteria – appropriateness, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability – are used.   These are the evaluation criteria of development cooperation projects which were advocated by the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 1991 in its attempt to decide the basis for evaluating projects.

Moreover, the JICA's project evaluation is classified into groups depending on evaluation objects and the different stages of evaluation.   For example, in the final evaluation of a project, an evaluation team is formed with several experts from different disciplines.   The team investigates and analyses both the achievements of the project and the process involved in reaching these achievements.   An evaluation team is required to start with an understanding of the contents of a project   (which is usually implemented over many years), and understand and analyse its achievements within a very short time period.

For instance, in the case of a human capacity building project that involves training activities, the effects of training activities sometimes are evaluated with numerical data such as number of training courses and the exam results of trainees.   It is also equally important to evaluate other aspects, for example how trainees changed and developed after the project.   This may be difficult for an evaluation team to assess quantitatively.   Furthermore, for the areas that are related to system improvement such as improvement of training or extension systems, a more accurate evaluation is possible if evaluators have a good understanding of the real issues such as the organisation and implementation structures of the project countries.   Therefore, it is necessary for the project implementation side to make an effort to explain these aspects to the third party in a clear fashion. At the same time, there needs to be a system that enables evaluators to cooperate with project implementers and be kept more regularly updated with project progress so that an evaluation can take place based on sufficient understanding of the processes of the project.

People often teasingly say that the environmental impact assessment aims to justify the environmental soundness of a development project.   In order to avoid project evaluation becoming merely "an evaluation for the sake of evaluation," projects must be evaluated properly and lessons must be documented for the next step and future planning.   In this mini-series, we would like to consider various evaluation methods and their application, in order to determine what are the keys for sound evaluations.   Moreover, we would also like to touch upon issues such as how to measure "enthusiasm and drive" and how to evaluate nurtured human resources, and what methods are appropriate for monitoring activities to understand change in behaviours and actions.

A scene from a project
evaluation field visit

The "hands" of evaluation

The long road towards improving
evaluation quality