

## From assistance to business—from support to collaboration <Part 6>

In the last 5 parts of the series, we attempted to review overseas aid from the viewpoint of utilizing business methods for solving various social problems, citing several examples. Important key words in the discussion included “mission” and “social contributions” – business that is not solely pursuing profits; business that makes profits (or receives capital) to sustain activities for the social good. Rather than only seeking profits the idea is that business should pursue “values”. Based on this thinking, the significance of the business lies in the existence of business and services towards resolving social problems. Profits are made for social contributions, which is close to the way people think about non-profit organizations (NPOs).

On the other hand, many companies have started activities focusing on social contributions in the form of CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility), instead of just profit seeking. An example of such activities is food production companies, making production more environmentally friendly or working on environmental and conservation activities. However, some CSR activities are based on the negative perception of having to bear duties and responsibilities of contributing to society. Wouldn't it be possible to take an approach whereby companies will have a positive attitude towards contributing to society, using income from the business as part of the company's operation? In other words, companies seeking both economic and social returns from their operations. In this way, corporations can make a profit, at the same time it can be expected that the region (or the society) where they operate will also see development. For this to happen, how corporations maintain the link with the region (the society) and how the link will be maintained are very important points.

This kind of thinking will lead to more effective aid and sustainable and independent activities, achieving the shift from “assistance” to “collaboration”.

The table below summarizes various cases introduced in this series, for their societal challenges, response to challenges and AAI's involvement. The size and contents of the challenges varies, however, what is common is the fact that the relationship with target areas and people is the critical factor for successful projects.

In order to concretize the efforts for solving these challenges, it is necessary to investigate the beneficiaries, market size and profitability of the businesses. Then we need to clarify how AAI can be best involved in the businesses. For this, it becomes also important to determine who will pay for what and how much they would pay.

“Collaboration” means those who are concerned join hands to achieve common goals. The idea is with the shift from “assistance” to “collaboration”, activities and projects will cease to be a one-way support/assistance paradigm. Instead, they will become more spontaneous and employment generating social businesses, securing the independent and sustainable nature of the activities. One of the important elements for this to work is human resources. In particular for collaborative business, human resource development and appropriate management of businesses, and innovation for operational structure and arrangements become extremely important.

Furthermore, it is critical for business profit to accrue to local people. In this collaborative model, the business method is used as a “self-help tool” for local people to work to build their own livelihoods. We, the collaborators, walk with them towards our common objectives. AAI wishes to continue to explore the collaborative approach, putting emphasis on the importance of relationships and utilizing AAI's own specialties and technologies.

Table: Summary of various cases introduced in this series

Case	Social Challenge	Response to the Challenges	AAI's Involvement
Environmental Issues of the Gulf States	Water resource depletion (lowering of ground water table and increase in salt concentration in water) Oceanic pollution due to water front development	Promotion of water saving agriculture Environmental education program that is appropriate for the situations on the ground	Support for development and extension of locally appropriate horticulture system Support for environmental education program implemented by local NGOs
Irrigation equipment shop in Syria	Low capacity of irrigation specialists and technicians for design and construction of water saving irrigation facilities	Promotion of capacity development for technicians at site level Practical modernization of irrigation facilities	Identification of local irrigation equipment shops and provision of technical support to the shops Support for participation of local technicians in training courses in Japan
Collaboration with Japan's agricultural sector	Aging farming population Lack of successors Increase in abandoned farm lands	Formation of farmers' groups Nurturing of human resources for diversification of farmers' business	Formation of farmers' groups and support for their activities Planning of training program for nurturing farming successors and the program implementation
Cooperation with ex-participants	Low and unstable incomes of farmers	Ground support for extension activities by Ex-participants Contributions to farmers livelihood improvements	Support for farmers' project plan development such as seed bank project Provision of information, funds and technologies in support of the above activities