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Material

Japan's Official Development Assistance: Promoting Sustainable Development

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Abstract

Official Development Assistance (ODA) is a technical term defined by the OECD. One of the main categories of Japan ODA is bilateral grants which facilitate transfer of technology, skills and knowledge. These transfers, though complex, are a necessary requirement of the technology transfer cycle necessitated by social challenges brought about by new technology. Therefore, it is essential for provision of new technology to be associated with continued professional interaction and training. Developing countries continue to rely on ODA due to various country specific social and developmental setbacks. Therefore, the technology transfer process should be country specific, not based on any preset models or ideologies, and should have support from all the relevant stakeholders. The author is currently undergoing technical or counterpart training facilitated by the Japan International Co-operation Agency (JICA) and Kawasaki University of Medical Welfare. This paper was written to highlight the importance of capacity strengthening to both institutions and individuals. The case for Kenya Medical Research Institute (KEMRI) is to provide encouragement to general public and support to its staff for this kind of successful form of ODA towards sustainable development.

Introduction

Official Development Assistance (ODA) is a technical term defined by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as “grants or loans to countries and territories on Part 1 of the Development Assistance (DAC) list of aid recipients” [1]. Japan, being one of the donor countries, classifies its ODA into 3 main categories: 1) bilateral grants, 2) bilateral loans, and 3) financial subscriptions and contributions to international organizations. Bilateral grants include transfer of Japanese technology, skills and knowledge to developing countries in order to train the human resources that will play a leading role in the social and economic development of their nations [2].

Currently, Japan, being a member of OECD, implements its ODA through several agencies. In the fiscal year 2000, Japan's total ODA amounted to \$13.06 billion, a decline of 14.7% from the previous year. However, Japan remained the world's largest donor among the DAC countries, followed by the United States with contributions of \$9.58 billion and Germany, \$5.03 billion. In the same fiscal year, Japan's contribution to the United Nations (UN) amounted to 20% of the total UN budget. It is amazing that Japan was able to do all this despite its declining economic growth [2, 3].

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At the Johannesburg Summit 2002 on sustainable development, European leaders renewed their commitment to increased aid to developing countries. Country ministers cited the importance of providing resources and technical assistance needed to embark on action programs. The Prime Minister of Japan, Mr. Junichiro Koizumi, attributed Japan's growth to its commitment to education as a basis for development. The Prime Minister also pledged an additional 250 billion Yen (\$2 billion) over a five year period, from the Japanese government and non-governmental organizations, for education assistance [4].

Example of capacity strengthening

The last decade has seen a resurgence of several infectious and parasitic diseases which were previously controlled. Many attempts to control are failing due to drug resistance and socio-economic and climatic changes in the world today [5].

Consequently, at the G8 Birmingham Summit in May 1998, the Japanese government through JICA spearheaded the conceptualization of a global parasitic disease control program called "The Hashimoto Initiative" after the initiator, Mr. Ryutaro Hashimoto, former Prime Minister of Japan [6]. Currently, the initiative is being implemented in Thailand (Mahidol University), Ghana (Noguchi Institute) and Kenya (Kenya Medical Research Institute, KEMRI). Human networking is envisioned as an important part of the initiative. The network would ideally form a foundation for parasitic disease control and other areas of interest in the future. An immediate benefit is that health managers, researchers and the general public would be adequately informed of timely implementation policy and prevention measures emanating from enhanced information collection and analysis previously lacking in the region. Before project implementation, it is thus crucial for participants to receive training and professional interaction to enhance and broaden already acquired skills. This in itself would further strengthen institutions in terms of manpower and technological development, as well as countries as a whole through research works accomplished through these institutions.

Discussion

Until recently, ODA was generally focused on project loans for economic and social infrastructure. Current political shifts emphasize tackling global issues, particularly intellectual support for human resource development, policy making and institution development [7]. Human resource development is therefore a key element for sustaining a nation's development projects.

It is believed that social and personal development go hand in hand with a country's physical and infrastructure development. Developing countries will continue to rely on ODA as long as they are unable to assess, select, import, develop and adapt appropriate technologies [7]. Developed nations would assist in this process through sharing of lessons learned from their own past experiences. Using the knowledge gained, developing countries would thus map out a clearer and more efficient path for their development.

Increased ODA does not immediately increase development, technology flow, and sustainability of development projects in recipient countries. Technology becomes obsolete after a few years necessitating continued reliance on ODA. Therefore, increased intellectual support and transfer of knowledge and information would surely catalyze social and economic development.

Capacity building, although slow, is an essential component of technology transfer and is needed at all stages of this process [7]. Current technological trends require individuals and institutions to continually adapt to new circumstances and acquire new skills. However, for this to be beneficial and effective, it is necessary to provide initial technology support.

Therefore, the need for and provision of technology should be linked with intellectual support and continued information sharing. Country specific needs and barriers to development must be identified and prioritized. Also, implementing agencies should ensure the commitment of all relevant stakeholders throughout the whole process. It should also be clear that enforcing models furthering the ideals of the donor countries will not be effective due to differences in cultures, needs, expertise levels, etc.

Conclusion

Despite its huge size, Japan ODA has not been greatly appreciated or discussed, even by the Japanese people. Donor countries need to appreciate the value of providing ODA, and not just in terms of promoting set ideals and practices. The progression of ODA towards human connectivity, information sharing and knowledge exchange with professionals is foreseen to go much further toward promoting self sustaining development in developing countries. Since developing countries understand their needs better, they can identify and initiate more efficient development projects. The new thrust of ODA toward education, as declared by Japan, will facilitate such development. There should be more awareness of the value of Japan ODA in this new light.

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The three papers above were presented for Japan's 1st nation-wide conference on promotion of co-ordination among the industry, academia and government, Kyoto, 15-16th June 2002. Full text of three papers is available on the university homepage:

<http://www.kawasaki-m.ac.jp/mw/who-02/>