

Partnerships between ODA and NGOs: for effective international cooperation (1)

Part 1: International organizations and NGOs

This year in Japan the song "The Three Odango Brothers" was a great hit. Given this, we have decided to call this year the year of ODANGO, and to commemorate this we are starting this new series on ODA and NGOs in the hope of achieving more effective international co-operation and better ODANGO relationships.

In recent years the importance of NGOs in international co-operation has been increasingly recognized, and NGOs are playing ever more important roles in the field of development assistance. Behind this trend is the necessity of providing more 'efficient aid'. The need for this is being fuelled by so-called 'development aid fatigue' and the financial difficulties experienced by developed countries. Also, there have been criticisms from local communities / people, who are supposed to be the beneficiaries of development aid, that ODA is not benefiting them at all. Additionally, in terms of the 'quality of assistance', especially in the cases of agricultural development and rural community development projects, the 'aid' cannot be finished when only the 'frame' infrastructure is completed, as in the case of projects specifically aiming at infrastructure building such as road construction. Agricultural and rural community development projects will not succeed unless local communities are involved in organization and implementation (or even in the planning stage) of the project. The same is true for maintenance and management activities after whatever 'frame' has been created.

On the other hand, NGOs, with some exceptions, are more involved in grassroots activities, as they operate very closely with local communities and people, and are capable of taking aboard the local peoples' viewpoints and placing priority on meeting local needs. Today the number of 'soft' projects (i.e. qualitative assistance which necessitates local community involvement) is increasing. In order for developed donor countries to effectively carry out their ODA projects, co-operation with local NGOs is becoming more and more crucial. In this context, keywords such as 'community participation', 'small-scale', 'gender', 'sustainable', 'environmentally friendly' etc. have emerged and become popularized recently in development assistance circles. International organizations and aid agencies of developed countries which are collaborating with local NGOs in their aid activities include UN (UNDP, UNEP etc.), World Bank, CIDA, USAID and GTZ. The following table is a summary of systems of NGO support and collaboration.

	UNDP	World Bank	CIDA	USAID
Co-operation with NGOs and its objectives	Direct financial assistance for local NGOs, Project undertaken by NGOs, Cooperation/collaboration with NGOs in project undertaking, Communication with NGOs.	The partnership relation in which NGOs participate in the planning and implementation stages of WB funded projects with emphasis on participatory development and local NGO	Work with Canadian NGOs which formulate and implement projects in cooperation with local partner NGOs in developing countries with emphasis on strengthening capacity of the local partners	Work with US NGOs as collaborative /co-funding partners Work with US NGOs as intermediary bodies in implementing/managing USAID programmes
Field of co-operation/assistance	Agriculture, water supply, environmental conservation, promotion of small-scale enterprises	Poverty alleviation, agriculture, education, population, health and welfare, nutrition, sewage	Environment, human rights, BHN, WID, infrastructure building, promotion of small-scale enterprises	Environmental conservation, promotion of small-scale enterprises, HIV/AIDS prevention
Budget scale per project	US\$10,000-65,000 per project	US\$10,000 ~ 15,000 per project	US\$15,000 ~ 218,000 per project	US\$150,000-900,000 per project
Criteria for evaluating NGOs	Evaluation based on the legal status, capacity and suitability for the project	Evaluation by check list for management capacity, experience and strategies	Evaluation on the capacity, influence, administration, programme management etc.	Evaluation on the past achievements, financial performance and management

All of the organizations shown above make much of the collaboration/cooperation with NGOs in their development aid activities. In the following issues of this new series we will introduce Japan and AAI's activities in relation with local NGOs.

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Part 2: Japan and NGOs

Japan's ODA has long adopted the approach of tied loans and other loan assistance, partly due to the post-war compensation. As a result, in developing countries ODA has been utilized mainly for building large-scale infrastructure such as dams, roads and bridges. However, with the growing criticisms of the negative impacts such as environmental degradation and the expansion of the rich/poor gap caused by such forms of ODA, recently the role of NGOs as developmental organizations has been drawing attention. In 1989, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) started the "Subsidy System for NGO Projects" and the "Grant Assistance for Grassroots Projects" and in 1999 ODA mid-term policy paper, support for and collaboration with NGOs are given importance. In 1995 JICA issued the "Research Report on Collaboration between JICA and NGOs in International Cooperation". JICA's "Community Empower Program" started in FY1998 and its "Partnership Program with NGOs" started in FY1999 also indicating the increasing expectations being held out for NGOs.

The boxes below show the brief outlines of NGO support schemes of the MoFA and JICA. It can be seen that there are some difference with the schemes adopted by CIDA (Canada) and USAID (USA). In the case of CIDA and USAID, the relationship between these organizations and NGOs is meant to be as "partners", that is they are on equal terms in both the planning and implementation of projects. By dividing the funding responsibilities of projects the official development agencies and NGOs retain equal position, and NGOs can express their originality in their development activities. On the other hand, schemes adopted by agencies in Japan do not facilitate divided funding responsibilities in one project and it cannot be said that official development agencies and NGOs enjoy an equal relationship as partners. Also, unlike the case of Japan, CIDA and USAID allow NGOs of their own countries to work with local NGOs in host developing countries. This is an effective and meaningful way of doing it in that Canadian or US NGOs would ensure high level performance of project implementation as expected by the official agencies, and that people in Canada or the US would have opportunities to contact and work with people in developing countries. This leads to capacity building of domestic (Canadian / US) NGOs and of local NGOs in aid recipient countries.

Collaboration between Japan's ODA and NGOs has only recently started, and there are a number of things we can learn from abroad. However, it is a great step forward that new schemes involving both Japanese and local NGOs can directly participate in ODA activities, on top of the previously existing system of providing research and technology for the governments of developing nations. The implementation of such new schemes is not so easy and there will be a lot of difficulties encountered. However, if effective development activities can be achieved with ideal levels of collaboration between official aid agencies and NGOs, impact on the future aid activities for developing countries would be very significant. Given the mounting criticism of ODA, much effort has to be made in order to realize ideal aid activities.

MoFA

***Subsidy System for NGO Projects (FY1989-):**

Financial support for Japanese NGOs' development aid activities. Up to a half of development aid funds can be subsidized. Activity areas eligible for this scheme include rural development, human resource development, women's self-support, health and hygiene. JPY1.2 billion / FY1997 (supporting 116 NGOs, 224 projects) ***Grant Assistance for Grassroots Projects (FY1989-):** Direct financial support from Japanese embassies abroad for small-scale projects undertaken by local authorities, research and medical institutes or NGOs in developing countries. Japanese NGOs that are continuously working in developing countries can also be supported under this scheme. JPY 5 billion / FY1997

***Insurance and support scheme for international volunteers (FY1994-):** Insurance subsidy scheme for volunteers working abroad in case of natural disaster or accident. This in part acts as support for NGOs.

***NGO / MoFA Consultative Committee (FY 1996-):** A forum to discuss NGO support strategies, ODA basic policy, ODA reform etc. various ODA-related issues.

JICA

***Community Empowerment Program (FY1998-):** Aimed at improving welfare at the grassroots level. Model projects of community-oriented activities through local NGOs are implemented by JICA local offices. Activity areas are in the field of social development, including: community development; support for senior citizens, disabled citizens and children; health and hygiene improvement; promotion of women's self-support; improvement of living environment; human resource development; and promotion of local industries. JPY500 million for FY1998 (supporting 30 projects).

***Partnership Program with NGOs (FY1999-):** Part commission of project activities to NGOs, universities, local governments or think tanks. The project has to be more than one year in duration but no more than three, and applications are invited either through public advertisement or public announcements. Activity areas include: issues of social development as above; issues in the field of environmental support including plantation, pollution, environmental conservation; issues in the field of intellectual support including support in transitional economy, policy development, legal development, organizations & systems establishment, professional training. FY1999 budget JPY 200 million (supporting eight projects).

***NGO Staff Training Project (FY1983-):** Training for NGO staff and those who are working in the field of development at the grassroots level.

***Consultative Committee and Mutual Training Session between NGOs and JICA (FY1998-):** Regular meeting as a forum for promoting mutual understanding and learning development assistance strategies from each other.

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AAI and NGOs - our challenges

Till today AAI has been engaged in technical assistance and development study commissioned by Japan's ODA. Since its early days AAI has been aware of the importance of collaboration between ODA's development activities and NGOs, and we have tried working together with NGOs on various occasions, as detailed below:

Development of appropriate technologies (1986 -) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	AAI assisted development projects in arid and semi-arid regions by helping to introduce appropriate technologies such as the Japanese traditional well digging technology of "Kazusabori", water pumping techniques using wind power (zephaturbin), water hammer pump etc. AAI conducted well-boring training in cooperation with NGOs such as 'Kaze no gakkoh' (School of the Wind) and 'Sahel no kai' (Association SAHEL). <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Assistance to JVC: Japan Volunteer Centre (1987 -) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	AAI provided back-up support for JVC's activities in Somalia and Ethiopia. Within Japan AAI also helped JVC's efforts to cultivate manpower for their field projects by securing a training farm in Togane City (Chiba Prefecture) for hands-on farming practice. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Assistance to Association SAHEL (1989 -) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	AAI has been working with the registered Non-Profit Organization, Association SAHEL, since its inception, and we have directly participated in their activities both within and outside Japan. Especially in the field of tree plantation in arid land, AAI has assisted in such areas as the selection of appropriate tree species, seed supply, technology development for seedling production, and tree planting. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Environmental monitoring in Tana Delta, Kenya (1990 -) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	AAI conducted environmental monitoring for an irrigation development project in the Tana Delta, Kenya. AAI took part in organizing a team of local NGO staff to carry out periodical monitoring. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Research into the activities of nature conservation NGOs (1995 -) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	AAI conducted research on the overseas activities of Japanese nature conservation NGOs, government agencies and research institutions concerned with biodiversity conservation, in order to understand their current activities and thus to classify them by activity type and region. Also AAI studied the current activities of major international organizations including NGOs, in order to analyze international trends in development aid activities. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
AAI's own investigation into the possibility of project formulation in Zimbabwe (1997 -) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	In Zimbabwe AAI is planning a development project which embraces the key focal concepts of community participation, appropriate technologies, 'small-scale'(or "appropriate scale") approach and sustainability. This is expected to be implemented under the initiative of local NGOs. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Development of a database on funding agencies (1999 -) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	AAI is developing a database on funding bodies in Japan which fund NGOs working in the fields of agriculture and the environment. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Application for the 'Partnership Program with NGOs / Local Governments / Institutes' (1999 - 2000) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	AAI has submitted a proposal for a community-based river basin management project in Pakistan, for consideration by JICA's 'Partnership Program with NGOs / Local Governments / Institutes.' <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

We will discuss in more detail about the above project in Zimbabwe, which AAI has initiated on its own (i.e. independent from ODA), and for which AAI has carried out three field trips already since 1997 as part of preliminary research and preparation. From now on, in cooperation with local NGOs, AAI is planning to implement a development project which would meet the local community's needs as much as possible. In this process we hope to make sure that the project is sustainable and participatory (community-based), taking into consideration the importance of environmental conservation, appropriate scale and appropriate technologies. In the future we hope that this kind of project will be implemented by ODA as well. Through this project we also aim to reflect upon, and try to improve, the current system and working of ODA, while studying further and actually implementing assistance for grassroots local communities. Therefore, we see it as a good sign that Japan's development aid agencies have started schemes which involve grassroots NGOs/NPOs. These include the 'Grant Assistance for Grassroots Projects' and 'Subsidiary System for NGO Projects' of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and 'Community Empowerment Program' and 'Partnership Program with NGOs / Local Governments / Institutes'.

AAI has extensively networked with Japanese NGOs as well, while at the same time we have a fairly good amount of information on NGOs operating in aid-recipient countries. Therefore, AAI hopes to actively take part in JICA projects involving NGOs such as the above 'Partnership Program'. Our ideal form of development aid is to work in collaboration not only with JICA but also with local NGOs, however small they may appear, in order to ensure that our aid activities are genuinely serving the interests of local communities

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Part 4: AAI and NGOs - Our project in Zimbabwe

It was in 1997 that we initiated preliminary research to prepare for our independent project in Zimbabwe. We started it off in Japan with information gathering on various NGO activities in English speaking countries in Africa. This was followed by two field visits in 1998 to select, among the ones identified during the preliminary research, those with whom we would like to work together in the future. During these field visits we applied the following criteria to the selection of a few local NGOs as potential partners.

- * That the nature of their project and targeted regions correspond with those of our potential project, and that the NGO is willing to get involved in a collaborative project with AAI;
- * That the NGO's field of focus is agricultural and rural development;
- * That its activities are field-based with a focus on sustainability, environmental conservation and community participation;
- * That it is a Community-Based Organization (CBO), undertaking grassroots operations in the rural communities.

These criteria can be summarized with a few keywords, such as "community participation", "appropriate technology", "small (or appropriate) scale", and "sustainability". In 1999, in order to understand their projects and intentions in more detail, we conducted another field visit and accompanied a few of the identified NGOs' staffers to see their daily activities.

The NGOs we selected are mainly ones working on agroforestry and/or rural development. Let us introduce one of them:

[Zvishavane Water Project (ZWP)]

We selected this NGO as we found it has a small-scale set-up and was willing to collaborate. In addition, based on our previous experience, we highly appreciated the fact that ZWP is working on water harvesting (a method of collecting and utilizing rain water efficiently, developed in traditional agriculture in arid and semi-arid regions) as part of their project, and that their operation range is in semi-arid regions (belonging to Natural Region IV-V).

Aiming at the improvement of the living standards of the local communities in Zvishavane and Chivi regions in the south-central part of the country, ZWP is carrying out participatory activities for water harvesting and soil conservation in the area. The actual activities are undertaken by some ten staff members, and include the construction of small- or middle-size dams, support for community group gardens, small-scale irrigation, collection and utilization of rain water, fish farming, livestock rearing, and water and soil conservation. While trying to make the local community agricultural activities sustainable with the help of a rain water collection & utilization scheme and soil conservation, they are also interested in the traditional agricultural techniques developed and practiced in this semi-arid region over many years.

Established in 1987, ZWP has a solid base of activities initiated by progressive, hard-working farmers. In Zimbabwe there are many such farmers who have adopted innovative farming techniques since before independence. The group started making wells and dams within the region before developing to assume the present form of NGO. Partly because its operation range is not so large, the staff has constant and direct contact with local communities. It is a very interesting, but typical, genuinely community-based organization.



Installing a water pump for irrigation in a community vegetable garden



Constructing a dam by local people



Rainwater collection facility using the rock surface (with a primary school building in the background)

In the next issue we will introduce other NGOs we have identified for collaboration.

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Part 5: AAI and NGOs - Our project in Zimbabwe (contd.)

In the previous issue we reported on one of the NGOs AAI hopes to collaborate with in the future for our original development projects in Zimbabwe. This time we would like to introduce another.

[Zimbabwe Women's Bureau (ZWB)]

The reason for selecting ZWB as our partner NGO was that its organization is fairly large and stable, it stresses the importance of community participation in its projects, and ZWB showed sufficient willingness to work with AAI. This organization is large compared to ZWP, which we reported about in the previous issue. ZWB has 13 project sites, which is not only rural area in arid and semi-arid area but also sub-urban, across the country. This fact which is acting extensive was particularly appealing.

ZWB aims to improve the social basis of local communities and achieve sustainable local development. It is carrying out training, information dissemination, financial support etc. for women and their families in both rural and urban areas. As more specific themes, it is working on the issues of basic education, gender, women's rights, health and hygiene, HIV/AIDS, land acquisition and utilization, poverty alleviation, efficient utilization of natural resources, and training and loan schemes for business management which aims at enabling people to create opportunities to gain profit on their own.

ZWB was established in 1978 as a result of the movement to improve the status of women and was initiated by students and teachers in urban areas. Compared to other NGOs born and developed in rural areas, the urban-born ZWB takes extra care in maintaining a good relationship with local communities. Women working as ZWB's field workers in charge of activities in each project site are not sent from cities but are chosen from local communities, who are far more familiar with local matters. They are working as a bridge between ZWB's headquarters and local communities. Since their field activities are shaped according to local realities and needs, their projects are accepted by local communities without difficulty.

Their field activities at over ten projects sites across the country include exchanges between farmers and the inspection of successful farms, distribution of solar cookers and so-called homestead development. This entails household-level activities such as rain water harvesting, kitchen gardening, and small livestock husbandry for the purpose of improving livelihood, health and hygienic conditions within each household. At the same time ZWB helps with construction of local activity centers, which serve as a base for the group members of each project site to carry out various activities such as bee keeping, handicrafts, pottery, plantation, production of cooking oil, rice farming, organic farming, etc, and the supply of equipment and materials. It also provides technical assistance. When it comes to actual activities, ZWB basically leaves the initiative to the local members.



“Homestead Development”
Contour ridges are built to harvest water, and water melons etc. are planted to prevent soil erosion.



“Indigenous fruit tree”
It is used to produce liquor from the fruit and nuts from the seed.



“Bee keeping boxes”
The harvested honey is shipped to market.



“Seedling plot at a project site”
Seedlings of mainly indigenous tree species are produced, to be distributed or marketed later.

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Final part : For better ODANGO; Who are we helping, after all?

Very often those working in the field of international co-operation for development (for example JICA experts and JOCV volunteers) when reflecting upon their experiences in the field, say that they were there on a mission of technical assistance and supposed to be teaching or conveying something to the people of the beneficiary country, but in reality they learned more than they taught. As this kind of sentiment shows very clearly, development aid or international co-operation is not a one-way street only involving input from developed to developing countries. In the case of rural development, so-called rural villages certainly have a great number of problems. It is true that they need some support from the outside in order to tackle said problems. However, the problems can hardly be solved by imposing foreign ways of thinking and foreign methods imported from developed donor countries.

For example, take the farming system. Over the years, many rural villages learned to use the natural resources available to them in their particular area, and have developed their own natural systems of agriculture such as "complex farming" and "resource-circulation farming." The farming system in Laos as reported in AAINews Vol.22 is one such example. However, as a result of "modern" rural development activities initiated by developed countries, more productive species and popular commercial crops were introduced to increase the agricultural productivity and income for farmers. At the same time new fertilizer, pesticides and machines started to be used. In many cases this has led to the collapse of local resource-circulation systems, and has resulted in heavy debts for farmers who have bought modern farming materials and expensive farming machines.

So as not to repeat such failures, and in order to aim at community-based sustainable development, today it is seen as increasingly important to work in a very close relationship with local communities. In this context, the role of NGOs nowadays has been re-evaluated and is now seen as crucial. However, NGOs alone cannot solve all the problems, and thus the collaboration between ODA and NGOs is a very important theme in the field of development aid today. In pursuing this, however, ODA workers should not employ NGOs simply as useful instruments, but instead establish a genuine collaborative relationship with NGOs, in which they can freely exchange their opinions, learn from each other and grow together. In addition, it would be problematic to see this partnership with NGOs only in terms of the efficiency of aid work, as if the idea of efficiency derives only from the convenient wishful thinking of the donor.

Lastly, it should be noted that NGOs, and certainly not ODA, aren't the main actors in development aid activities. The local communities as beneficiaries should realize that they are the main players, and only when they start thinking of their own way of development and start acting according to their ideas, can real changes take place. We should never forget the very basic fact that the role of both ODA and NGOs is that of catalyst, to provide stand-by support for the local communities' own development activities. What we sometimes feel, seeing NGOs from other developed countries is that they are more like business, or profit-seeking companies rather than good-willed volunteer organizations as are the case with most Japanese NGOs. Those overseas NGOs have talented staff who joined because working for such NGOs is better-paid compared to working for government agencies or private companies. Furthermore the work is more rewarding. However, it is also a fact that such organizations have become rigid in order to ensure their own survival which is possible only by carrying out development projects of their own. It also cannot be denied that in a way, their international development co-operation is also a means of fund-raising for themselves. What is and should be the ultimate goal for those engaged in development aid? For how long should we go on with our aid activities? Needless to say, aid activities should serve the interests of local communities, and yet, at the same time, development aid workers should always keep in mind that eventually they have to let local people stand on their own feet, for their own good.



Small-scale water weir built by a traditional method



Large-scale dam and power generation facility built by modern engineering work