

Japanese NGOs' 10 Recommendations for Revision of Japan's ODA Charter

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WE, JAPANESE NGOS, as civil society organizations that promote international cooperation, are keenly interested in Japan's Official Development Assistance Charter (hereafter ODA Charter) that defines the principles and the basic policies of international development cooperation carried out by the Government of Japan. Since the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) started the revision process of the ODA Charter this March, we have been actively providing our feedback and advocating for changes in the contents as well as the process of the revision based on our principles, knowledge, and experiences.

The revision process is coming to the most crucial juncture as MoFA is currently drafting a text of the revised ODA Charter, taking into account the discussion paper submitted by the Advisory Committee of Experts on ODA Charter Review (The Advisory Committee) last June. Before the policy is finalized, we Japanese NGOs hereby present 10 recommendations that should be reflected in the revised ODA Charter.

Objectives

1. The ODA Charter should clearly define the alleviation of poverty, the reduction of inequalities, and the realization of equitable society as the primary objectives of Japan's ODA.
2. The ODA Charter should clearly define the people of developing countries as the primary beneficiaries of Japan's ODA.

Principles

3. 'The Four principles of ODA' (for further details, see the 'Details' section) stipulated in the present ODA Charter should be maintained and presented clearly as a package in the revised ODA Charter as well.

4. The principle of non-militarism should be maintained in the revised ODA Charter so that ODA and military activities are clearly separated.

- Major foci

5. Japan's ODA should strengthen assistance that ensures fundamental human rights and human security, such as universal access to primary education and basic healthcare.
6. Japan's ODA should contribute to the reduction of inequalities within respective developing countries by empowering marginalized people that tend to be left out of national economic growth processes and by enhancing income redistribution systems.
7. Japan's ODA should strive for environmental sustainability and reduced inequalities between countries in the pursuit of development and lead the effort for realizing a sustainable world.

- Governance

8. Japan's ODA should involve NGOs from the policy planning phases to project implementation phases and to promote citizens' participation, information disclosure, and development education. As a result of diversification of its implementing partners, Japan's ODA should be channeled through the NGO sector, similar to other DAC countries.
9. Equitable and transparent governance of Japan's ODA should be ensured. Its budget allocation by sectors and regions should be clearly disclosed to the public, and its development effectiveness should be improved.
10. Japan's ODA expenditure should aim to reach the target of 0.7% of GNI set by the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) without any compromise to quality. The International Development Cooperation Act should be enacted incorporating our above-mentioned recommendations 1-9. A Ministry of International Development Cooperation should be established so that Japan's ODA will be planned and implemented with consistency, and thus ensure effective development strategies.

Objectives

1. The ODA Charter should clearly define the alleviation of poverty, the reduction of inequalities, and the realization of equitable society as the primary objectives of Japan's ODA.

Economic growth alone cannot solve the problems of the world's poor. It may be a necessary condition for poverty alleviation, but certainly NOT a sufficient condition. In order to realize genuinely inclusive, equitable, sustainable, and resilient societies, we need equitable redistribution of wealth and strong public sector that provides social services required for human dignities, on top of 'inclusive, sustainable, resilient growth'. Environmental conservation is an imperative, particularly for the poor people of developing countries whose livelihoods are heavily dependent on nature. ODA can and should be an effective tool for environmental conservation, thus this aspect should be expressly included as one of the major objectives in the revised ODA Charter.

2. The ODA Charter should clearly define the people of developing countries as the primary beneficiaries of Japan's ODA.

The primary objective of Japan's ODA must be poverty alleviation through sustainable and equitable development of developing countries. As secondary benefits only, economic returns and diplomatic benefits to Japan may be sought in the mid- to long-term. 'Simultaneously realizing economic growth both in developing countries and in Japan', an expression that appears in the discussion paper of the Advisory Committee of Experts on ODA Charter Review (The Advisory Committee), is misleading. It could give a higher priority to short-term economic gains for Japanese corporates advancing in developing countries than to autonomous development and poverty/inequality reduction of developing countries.

Principles

3. 'The Four Principles of ODA' stipulated in the present ODA Charter should be maintained and presented clearly as a package in the revised ODA Charter as well.

The present ODA Charter defines its Four Principles as follows:

1. Environmental conservation and development should be pursued in tandem.
2. Any use of ODA for military purposes or for aggravation of international conflicts should be avoided.
3. Full attention should be paid to trends in recipient countries' military expenditures, their development and production of weapons of mass destruction and missiles, their export and import of arms, etc., so as to maintain and strengthen international peace and stability, including the prevention of terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and from the viewpoint that developing countries should place appropriate priorities in the allocation of their resources on their own economic and social development.
4. Full attention should be paid to efforts for promoting democratization and the introduction of a market-oriented economy, and the situation regarding the protection of basic human rights and freedoms in the recipient country.

The Four Principles are still very relevant to avoid human rights violations and environmental destructions through the entire process of Japan's ODA from the planning to the implementation phases. Thus the principles should be maintained and presented clearly as a package in the revised ODA Charter as well.

4. The principle of non-militarism should be maintained in the revised ODA Charter so that ODA and military activities are clearly separated.

Deployment of militaries in conflict or disaster affected areas, even if it were for 'non-military purposes,' could further destabilize the power balance of the localities and cause new conflicts. If such military deployment were carried out in any relations with ODA, the local people would doubt the peaceful and humanitarian objectives of ODA and eventually lose their trust in Japan. In order to avoid such situations, the principle of non-militarism should be maintained in the new ODA Charter as firmly as the Four Principles of the present ODA Charter and clearly presented as 'principles' or 'standards' binding the entire ODA. Non-militarism should be the supreme norm and the guiding principle that the entire ODA must obey.

Major foci

5. Japan's ODA should strengthen assistance that ensures fundamental human rights and human security, such as universal access to primary education and basic healthcare.

In the present world, 850 million people are still suffering from hunger, 57 million children are out of school, and 6.9 million children are dying under 5 years old due to poor health or nutrition every year.

Further, 20 percent of the poor population in the world is with disabilities.¹ In view of this context, Japan's ODA should prioritize fundamental human rights including health, education, and eradication of hunger and poverties. A recent national survey also indicates that the people of Japan think that those rights should be prioritized in ODA. Nevertheless, only one percent and two percent of the bilateral ODA of Japan are used for basic education and basic health respectively, while as much as 40 percent is allocated towards infrastructural development. In order for Japan's ODA to receive the supports of its own people too, fundamental human rights should be prioritized.

6. Japan's ODA should contribute to the reduction of inequalities within respective developing countries by empowering marginalized people that tend to be left out of national economic growth processes and by enhancing income redistribution systems.

The rapid economic growth in many developing countries including in Africa is also causing extreme income inequalities. Such economic inequalities also exacerbate social inequalities in terms of ethnicity, gender, disability, and geography. In the mid- and long-term, this could result in social division, political destabilization, and economic stagnation. As private investment tends to be concentrated on export-oriented industries with limited job creation, the benefit of economic growth is unlikely to 'trickle down' to the populations living in poverty. The combination of high-volume private sector investment and rapid economic growth makes it all the more important that Japan's ODA, as a form of public development finance, serves public interests by addressing the failures and limitations of the market. More specifically, priority must be given to strengthening progressive national taxation systems, essential social services, and social protection systems.

7. Japan's ODA should strive for environmental sustainability and reduced inequalities between countries in the pursuit of development and lead the effort for realizing a sustainable world.

Japan's ODA should not only minimize the environmental impacts but also mitigate even the residual impacts, as well as contribute to nature conservation, with the understanding that the natural environment is the fundamental basis for human well-being and growth of the society. Japan should take the lead in rule making and its effective implementation on global and cross-border issues, including climate change, the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and marine resources, and the impact of population growth on the environment. It should also take the lead in reduction of inequalities between countries, recognizing that the sustainable world cannot be realized without closing the gap between advanced countries and developing countries.

Governance

- 8. Japan's ODA should involve NGOs from the policy planning phases to project implementation phases and to promote citizens' participation, information disclosure, and development education. As a result of diversification of its implementing partners, Japan's ODA should be channeled through the NGO sector, similar to other DAC countries.**

For Japan's ODA to effectively eradicate poverty and inequalities based on the principles of 'sustainable development,' 'non-militarism,' and 'fundamental human rights,' there must be proactive disclosure of information on as well as citizens' participation in ODA. Therefore, the revised ODA Charter must clearly mention that it will encourage citizens' participation and information disclosure. Likewise, the revised ODA Charter should clearly mention that ODA will strengthen development education to promote Japanese people's understanding about the relations between their lives and developing countries. Japan's ODA, for its delivery, should strengthen its partnership with NGOs that are directly reaching the poor people of developing countries and are familiar with the social environment in those countries. As a mid-term bench mark, the rate of Japan's ODA channeled through NGOs (2 percent as of FY 2009) should be increased up to the level of other DAC countries (16.7 percent as of FY 2009).

- 9. Equitable and transparent governance of Japan's ODA should be ensured. Its budget allocation by sectors and regions should be clearly disclosed to the public, and its development effectiveness should be improved.**

Information disclosure, transparent decision making, and participation of people of beneficiary countries should be ensured when the policies of Japan's ODA—regardless of its terms, regional scopes, and thematic subjects—are formulated. The policies of Japan's ODA, from its highest level to lowest level, should be consistent throughout the process of

planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. The application of Guidelines for Confirmation of Environmental and Social Consideration should be further strengthened. Complaint mechanisms for the people of beneficiary countries who may suffer the negative effects of Japan's ODA should be introduced and these cases should be treated fairly, appropriately, and quickly to rescue victims by suspending or reexamining projects. The budget allocation of Japan's ODA by geographies and thematic subjects should be disclosed from its planning stage to improve its transparency as well as strategic effectiveness.

10. Japan's ODA expenditure should aim to reach the target of 0.7 percent of GNI set by the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) without any compromise to quality. The International Development Cooperation Act should be enacted incorporating our above-mentioned recommendations 1-9. A Ministry of International Development Cooperation should be established so that Japan's ODA will be planned and implemented with consistency, and thus ensure effective development strategies.

As Other Official Flows (OOF) and private funding are often criticized because of its negative effects on the people of developing countries, at least similar restrictive guidelines as the one for ODA should be applied for confirmation of environmental and social consideration. We, Japanese NGOs, also argue that it is inappropriate for good governance to define such wide-ranged activities of the national government by a cabinet document only. International Development Act should be enacted incorporating our above-mentioned recommendations 1-9 to define the overall policy framework of Japan's development cooperation. The Ministry of International Development Cooperation should be established to implement the Act.

ODA or international development cooperation should not be regarded just as a means to serve diplomatic and economic benefits of Japan. It

should have an internationally shared common goal to support the self-reliance of the people of developing countries. Japan's ODA should enhance its strategic edge by highlighting its peaceful and humanitarian principles.

In parallel with the above-mentioned efforts to improve its quality, Japan's ODA should also aim at reaching the internationally agreed quantitative target of 0.7 percent of GNI to fulfill its international responsibilities.

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Note

¹ *World Report on Disability* (WHO and World Bank, 2011)

(These ten recommendations were published by the Japan NGO Center for International Cooperation (JANIC). <http://www.janic.org/MT/pdf/Japan-oda.pdf>. It has been reprinted here with very minor changes—Eds.)