
Lessons of Development Aid Activities - from a NGO's perspective

SHIBATA Hisashi

Japan Volunteer Center

Introduction

The Japan volunteer center (JVC) is a Non Governmental Organization, which had been engaged in development aid activities in Somalia from 1985-1990. The Center now sends its members to a number of countries such as Thai, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, Palestine, Guatemala, South Africa, and Ethiopia. Their activities cover various fields of project like community development, environmental conservation, refugee relief, and human-rights watching.

In this small article, I would like to classify our fifteen years experiences focusing on the relationship between aid agency and beneficiary (local people as object of developmental project) and finally point out the problems and possibilities of our development aid activities.

Typology of Development Project

(1) Closed Type (self-completion type)

This type aims to fulfill the most basic human needs. The volunteers are expected to be engaged in saving life, providing basic foods and medicine, and respecting fundamental human rights. This project has a temporary character with particular goals. Therefore it does not pay much attention to local elements and normal daily life of the people receiving the services. The volunteers do not think much of the local culture, custom, social institutions, as well as local climate and ecology. Emergency food relief activities and relief work for refugee, are classified under this type of project. The majority of Japanese NGOs in Africa are of

this type. The JVC started its aid activities in Somalia and Ethiopia as this type of project.

The merits of closed type project are; securely saving human lives and easy collection of money from Japan due to the strong impact and big public concern. The demerits are: easy corruption of local social structure because of drastic in-flow of vast amount of goods and money (to a small area in a short period), making local people rely on aid from outside, and lowering the morale of the peasants. This is because the vast amount of food is distributed to the local people without money and some pours into the food-market, lowering the price of basic foods. This type of development project is a kind of symptomatic treatment and can not resolve substantial problems of a given society like poverty, hunger, and devastation of natural environment.

The merits of development agency are; easy making of great success, keeping high public concern, winning high reputation, and relatively low cost of pre-survey because there is enough knowledge on what people need (water, food, medicine, shelter etc.). The demerit are; difficulties in conducting basic activity (looking after staff safety, administrative procedures, management of aid goods, accumulation of information, maintenance of motor vehicles etc.) due to bad security and confusion between local government, and community.

(2) Open Type Project

The aim of the open type project is to exert effect on the local community and ordinary daily

life of the local people on a long-term basis. Though Emergency aids belong to the closed type project, most development aids are classified under this type, which seek to improve the general welfare conditions of a particular country or community in the long run. What is most important in this type is continuity and persistency of the activities, which are managed not only by the development agency but also local administration and sometimes community members themselves. In this sense, the project is evaluated after the development agency evacuates the area. This open type project can be classified into two models.

(2-1) Transfer of Modern Technology

The development project of this model pursues transfer of modern technology to Africa such as modern public health, modern agriculture and modern infrastructure. Generally speaking, most aid projects organized by the Japanese Government are grouped into this model.

In case of agricultural aid project, the priority is given to introduction of cash crop rather than improving self-sustaining crop production. Consequently soil turns out barren owing to monoculture farming and farmers are deeply in debt because they are forced to buy fertilizer, agricultural machines and chemicals which are very expensive. To make matter worse, the price of agricultural products is controlled and decided by international market, national governments and distributors.

The merit of the development project under this model to the local community is quick transfer of advanced technology. It can promote development of local industry and making a network of infrastructure. The demerit is; high cost of maintenance of advanced technology which becomes a burden to the local community. It gradually force the local society to rely on the foreign commodity such as machine, parts, and

various chemicals. The newly introduced technology needs much foreign money for maintenance, that is why many such plants and facilities collapse after the development agency evacuates the area.

The merits of the development organization, especially government agency in this model project are; enlargement of its economic market and secure materials so that the national interest can be promoted, and that agency staff directly introduce and make use of the Japanese-style high technology without respecting the indigenous technology of the local society. Rather they tend to regard the local technology as backward and are willing to destroy such knowledge and system.

(2-2) Respect for Indigenous Technology

This model takes into consideration the tradition, local custom, climate, and ecology peculiar to a particular area. It operates on the principle that basic initiatives of any development project must be taken up by the local people and that their indigenous knowledge, organization and institution should be made use of. The resources for development (money and materials) are, therefore, not brought from developed countries but supplied from the region itself. In this model, the development agency involves local people at the early stage of planning and they participate in the project as active subjects so that they can fulfill their earnest needs. It attaches importance to regional recycle system, conservation of local ecosystem and development of appropriate technology. In the field of agriculture, self-sustaining crop is given the first priority rather than cash crop and indigenous plant, are preferably utilized rather than exotic plants in afforestation.

Technology is in itself unique to a particular region. There is, therefore, no established method to teach or transfer "good technology" to local people. It is important in this model to seek key

persons and organizations which have enough knowledge and experience of appropriate local technology.

The merit of this model is; it directly reflect the needs of local people and makes the project sustainable owing to utilization of indigenous resources. Other merits are low cost (no need for expensive foreign equipment) and great affect on the local socio-economic structure. As a matter of course, there are difficulties. For example, this type of project requires all the community members to participate voluntarily and actively. If some of them do not have enough morale for the project, they may not be willing to provide money and labors and this causes trouble within the community and finally the project fails. The partner with whom the development agency can negotiate is not the administrative unit but all the community members and this leads to difficulties.

Another problem is that it is very much difficult to implement this kind of project. Certainly it has a theoretical advantage but there are in fact very few staff in the development agency/ organization who have enough skill to put it into practice. Furthermore fund raising activities for this type of project in Japan are not easy because there are no "miserable and shocking" pictures with it. As for the expert, it is necessary for him/her to have the philosophy of learning from the local society. This sometimes causes conflict between local knowledge and modern technology which he/she has been taught in Japan. He/she should develop intimate communication with the local community and have creativity and imagination in applied technology. This model needs much time and money before it is implemented.

From Emergency Aid to Development Aid

Most NGOs started their activities in Africa with emergency aid and refugee relief. The JVC was not an exception in Ethiopia and Somalia.

Later we tried to switch JVC to development/ rehabilitation aid activities. I think many of Japanese NGOs want to take the same course and to confront the same difficulty. Here we would like to examine the dilemma of NGO aid activity by looking into our own experience in Ethiopia and Somalia.

The Case of Ethiopia and Somalia

When JVC started volunteer work, we had a hope that the purpose of our activity is not to provide emergency aid to the hungry people but to help them build healthy society without starvation, and not to organize relief activity for the refugees in a short time-range but to help them lead self-help life without dependence on relief goods. We had a firm intention that the aid should be developed from emergency type to rehabilitation, and further to development type. But our intention was confronted with much difficulties. Which we would like to point out below.

(1) Trouble with Counter-Part Administration

When NGOs want to organize there projects such as emergency aid or refugee relief, they must be recognized and accepted by a Government body. This body is not an ordinary department but established for the particular purpose, which has close connection with UN agencies like UNHCR.

We had not a few problems with this kind of ambiguous organization in case of implementation of a community development project. RRC in Ethiopia and NRC in Somalia were our counter-parts in charge of emergency aid and relief for refugees. But when we planned to organize an agricultural-forestry project, we had to go around various ministries to get governmental approval, for example acquisition of land is with the Ministry of Agriculture, and public health campaign with the Ministry of Health. To make matter worse, these bodies impose different policies on us and there is

no coordinator at all. This situation negatively affects NGOs' activities.

Orientation of Self-help and Reality of Dependence

Once some NGO provided them with relief foods, the local people believe that NGO is just a free distributor and familiar with that situation. The NGO can tell them that they must have self-help mind and help each other after the NGO evacuates the area. But it is not possible, once the NGO and the local people have established an easy distribution system. In Ethiopia, JVC provided the refugees with free foods and goods in the first stage. Next, we adopted "Food for Work" project in the second stage, in which people who work can get food. Lastly, we did not provide foods, but instead helped them organize self-help activity in the final third stage. Unfortunately this three step policy could not be supported nor understood by the local people and we were forced to withdraw from the area.

Generally speaking, emergency aid is expected to be distributed to as many as there are suffering people and it therefore needs vast amount of money and materials. It is usually implemented in the area where there is little employment opportunity. The aid organization employs a number of workers from the local people for effective activity. It is regarded as a big factory full of job chances. If the organization withdraws, it would cause serious unemployment problems. It make the local people depend on not only free food distribution but also wage earning. That is why it is so difficult to switch from emergency aid to development aid of self-help style. The dependence on the aid organization is deep economically and psychologically.

Now we have drawn some important lessons. These are;

- * it is impossible in reality to phase out a project from emergent aid to rehabilitation aid, and further to development aid.
- * In case of development aid, the NGO as well as its counter-part body must establish a completely different approach from that of emergent/refugee relief activities.
- * It is fundamentally important to share the purpose of the project with local people as well as counter bodies.

Possibilities of Development Aid

We have classified aid activities into three types above. Now I personally think that most expected NGO projects are of (2-2) type, that is, Respect for Indiginous Technology model and that they should be organized not in urban centers but in rural areas because:

- * Rural population is the vast majority and in the most urgent living condition today. In spite of this fact, aid money from the developed countries is concentrated in the urban centers.
- * Rapid environmental degradation mainly takes place in the rural areas in Africa.
- * Drastic rural-urban migration continues and rural labor forces tend to diminish.
- * Urban problems (population expansion, unemployment, worst security, poverty etc.) are also very serious but they are too structural and outside of reach of NGOs activity, which lacks in money, political authority and man power.
- * Compared with Governmental aids like ODA, NGO is poorly organized and funded, but it has unique characteristics, that is, adaptability. It can adapt quickly to new circumstances, so it can effectively tackle the problem in a different approach and different fields from ODA.
- * Its activities are relatively independent from the national level political and economic situation. Namely, it has the possibility of direct contact with "local needs".

Conclusion

Before making conclusive proposals, the relationship between Africa and Japan will now be considered. As you know, Japan has a strong link with Asian countries. To the contrary, Japan has a weak relation (historically, politically, economically and socio-culturally) with Sub-Saharan African countries. For example, Japan sends a great number of tourists, more than ten million in a year, but only four thousand tourists visit Africa (South of Sahara).

As for NGO, those which dispatch volunteers to African countries are still very few and only ten groups are engaged in the project of Respect for Indigenous Technology Type. Taking into consideration such negative elements as severe natural environment, social conditions, low public concern, activities of Japanese NGO can not be expected to grow up boldly in the near future. Africa is far from Japan in every sense. Lastly I would consider the NGO's future strategy in Japan for further development of and commitment to African societies.

- (1) I realize keenly that NGOs should discard the old concept of aid and development and should widen the relationship with Africa. The organizations have to try to take as many Japanese young people as possible to Africa so that they can exchange with their African counter-parts instead of providing them with relief goods. What is more important is not to aid but to know each other.
- (2) In order to implement the project of Respect for Indigenous Technology Model, Japanese NGOs should cooperate with the local NGOs as an equal partners and help them with funding, information and some of Japanese advanced technology. Fortunately local NGOs have appeared since late 1980's owing to political

democratization. The Japanese NGO staff should go to the area to learn how the local NGOs organize their projects and what they need from them. They do not have to work as a privileged director or coordinator any more.

- (3) The Japanese NGOs are expected to provide the local NGOs from Asian and African countries with the forum for exchange and interchange of their own local knowledge and experience so that they can work with them effectively.
- (4) It is necessary for the members of Japanese NGOs to work in closer cooperation with researcher or expert of African cultures and societies, who should be involved in whole process of the project from the initial stage to final evaluation. Though the volunteers have enough dedicated mind to work in Africa, it is not sufficient. They must learn history, culture, and life information of the area before they depart for Africa.
- (5) The NGOs are to keep a close watch on the Japanese Government policies of development aid and to make an active and constructive proposal.
- (6) The Japanese NGOs are expected to play a role of coordinator between the local NGOs and Japanese Government so that ODA fund could be used more effectively.

As I mentioned before, what the NGOs can achieve in the field of development aid is very much limited because development includes a wide range of social dynamism like international relations, politics, cultural tradition, and way of life or mode of thought. Therefore development aid must be reexamined more deeply and radically. I personally think that though it takes a long time to fulfill the goal, the above mentioned methods can open a fruitful way for development of the area in the long run.