

9. Considerations for Assistance Strategy

9.1. Environmental Assistance in Country Specific Assistance Plan

In 1997, the government of Japan announced a policy to vigorously engage in Silk Road diplomacy with Central Asian countries. Since then the Japanese government has cooperated with Central Asian countries centering on the following four areas: (1) support for the adoption of market economy, (2) development of the social and economic infrastructures, (3) cooperation in social sectors including healthcare and education, and (4) environmental protection. When Japan's foreign minister visited Central Asian countries in August 2004, she suggested intraregional cooperation be adopted in addition to the existing bilateral relationships and advocated the Central Asia plus Japan dialogue. In addition to the cooperation to date, it is believed that the intraregional cooperation in the framework of the "Central Asia + Japan" dialogue will be promoted on regional issues of common concern such as terrorism, narcotic drugs, transportation, water and energy resources, and trade and environmental protection.

A taskforce under Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs is now examining cooperation programs for Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Its interim report also says the priority areas in cooperation should be (1) development of systems and cultivation of human resources toward sustainable economic growth, (2) development of social and economic infrastructures including operation and management structures, (3) rural development and healthcare support for environmental protection and redressing of disparities between urban and local areas, and (4) promotion of intraregional cooperation.

Accordingly, assistance in the environmental area for Kazakhstan is positioned as a key cooperation area of not only bilateral assistance but also regional cooperation.

9.2. Considerations for Assistance Policy of Environmental Issues

Kazakhstan's economy has grown dramatically since 2000, thanks to the increased oil production and the recent oil price hikes. However, noticeable improvements have not been seen in the environmental status since the beginning of the 1990s despite the efforts of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and the Division of Environmental Protection in each oblast. Instead, along with the adverse legacy of the former Soviet era, it is of concern that business people who obtained new markets due to systemic transformation engender environmental pollution through their economic activities. Furthermore, a new environmental problem is arising because local residents left behind in the economic development are flowing into cities looking for employment.

The shrinking of the Aral Sea is a typical environmental problem in Central Asia. Although a variety of assistances through international aid agencies and bilateral cooperation have been provided to solve this problem since the 1990s, the Aral Sea continues to shrink. The problem is caused by both the energy situations of the countries in the upper river basin and the water intakes for the irrigation farming of the countries in lower river basin, and there seems to be no solution. The Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation, which hosted the International Aral Sea Basin Water Resources Conference, quoted "In the present circumstances, it is essential to provide an opportunity for the Aral Sea Basin Countries to sit down at the conference table."

The vice minister of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and the director of Kazhydromet came to Japan in January 2005 and exchanged views with JICA. They expressed their expectations for technical assistance from Japan in the field of environment since Kazakhstan faces the need to improve environmental administration capacities to prevent future environmental problems arising from the oil resources development in the shelf of the Caspian Sea and the construction of oil transmission pipelines, etc. Based on such requests made for Japanese technical cooperation in the field of environment, the following strategies for assistance are recommended.

(1) Support for policymaking system

- Support for decentralization

The role-sharing in environmental administration between the central government and local governments is not clarified. Also, the central government is planning to go ahead with decentralization and transfer its authority to the local governments in an understaffed situation. Therefore, the establishment of an environmental administration system should be supported to effectively deal with the endemic environmental problems while maintaining consistency through the whole country.

- Support for strengthening the environmental impact assessment system

Along with the review of the existing environmental impact assessment system, which has lost substance, it should be supported that the construction of a system suitable for the present Ministry of Environmental Protection, which has weakness regarding its technical aspects and human resources.

- Support for environmental management system

It should be supported that the introduction to businesses of a self-control system, like the pollution control supervisor system in Japan, instead of the current environmental management through on-site inspections and crackdowns on the violation of emission management. Also, it should be supported that the examination and introduction of an environmental protection facilities financing program through a fund based on the environmental charge as well as the preferential taxation system.

(2) Technical support

- Support for environmental monitoring

It should be developed that the support for environmental monitoring, conducted by JICA specialists from 2000 to 2004, in the Central Asian region, and also support the enhancement of efforts to conserve the water quality of international rivers flowing in Central Asia.