



Inclusive and Dynamic Development

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JICA and MEKONG DELTA



TỪ PHÀ ĐẾN CẦU CẦN THƠ:

Giấc mơ
trăm năm

From Ferry to Can Tho Bridge: One hundred - year Dream

Source: Tuoi Tre Newspaper dated 25th April 2010

JICA's Assistance in Mekong Delta

I. Overall Policy on Mekong Delta

Accounting for 12% of the nation land area, the density populated Mekong Delta region with 18 million people (about 21% of the whole country population) is endowed with natural rich conditions favorable for agricultural development. The region produces about 45 percent of Vietnam's agricultural products on only 31 percent of the country's agricultural land. Known as the country's rice basket, it produces about half of Vietnam's rice and 80 percent of rice export, and additionally Vietnam's 70 per cent of farmed shrimp, another major export item.

During a less than decade from 1998 to 2006, the poverty rate in this region has been sharply dropped by more than two third (from 36.9% to 10.3% based on GSO/WB standard), in comparison with only by half for the whole country. This achievement attributes to the successful implementation of the government strategy for the Mekong Delta aiming at stimulating the growth in the region and reducing the urbanization pressure on Hochiminh City through various policies, focusing on economic and agricultural diversification, increasing value added production.

Despite of the vibrant economy, challenges remain for the region if it is to fully exploit its potentials. Mekong Delta is natural disaster prone area, expected to be the most affected region by climate change and sea level rise. At the same time, the infrastructure is under increasingly strain to meet the demand of socio-economic development.

Recognizing the position and challenges of the region, the current Country Assistance Policy for Vietnam identifies Mekong Delta as one of the priority regions for JICA assistance. Nevertheless, JICA activities in this regions also adheres to the overall assistance policy centering around four pillars, namely: (i) promoting the economic growth and strengthening the international competitiveness; (ii) improving the living standard and social conditions and correction of disparities; (iii) environmental conservation; and (iv) strengthening the governance.

Under the government institutional reform, since October 2008 the JICA has become a single institution responsible for Japan ODA by merging the ODA loan operations of

the Japan Bank for International Cooperation into JICA. The JICA has been providing a wide range of technical cooperation including macro-economic and sector development policy, improvement of health system and education, and human resource development in science and technology and so on. The new JICA, being responsible for both technical and financial cooperation (loans and grants) is expected to contribute to enhancing the development effects by more comprehensive and harmonized operations of all schemes of ODA.

II. JICA Co-operation in Mekong Delta

JICA activities in the region has concentrated on human resource development with special attention to agricultural sector through technical cooperation and infrastructure development, particularly transport and energy sectors, through ODA loan projects. Followings are examples of active operation in Mekong Delta illustrating how JICA cooperation reflecting the overall JICA policy toward the region in various schemes: (1) loan operation; (2) technical cooperation; (3) community development grant; and (4) Japanese Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV).

1. Loan Operations

(1) Can Tho Bridge Construction Project

National Highway No. 1 which runs from the northern border with China to Nam Can in the south is the backbone of the country's transport system. The crossing point between Can Tho City and Vinh Long Province, however, still relied on ferry service until April 2010. For many years, the people of southern Vietnam have dreamt of building a bridge over the Hau River because the absence of a bridge has always been a major barrier to the socio-economic development of the Mekong Delta region.

Responding to this bottleneck, JICA provided ODA loans for this Project totaling JPY 41,923 million under four loan agreements, signed two in 2001 and one in 2009 and 2010. The Feasibility Study and the Detail Design of the project was also implemented under JICA's Technical Cooperation.

Can Tho bridge, the longest cable-stayed bridge in Vietnam, stretches 2,750 meters long, spans 23.1 meters wide, and has four lanes for traffic and two for

pedestrians. The approach road at Vinh Long side is 5,410m long and that of Can Tho side is 7,690m. Construction works commenced in October 2004 and completed in the end of March 2010.



Can Tho bridge is expected to significantly improve the smooth access between the Mekong Delta and the commercial and industrial center of Ho Chi Minh city, thus substantially promote the distribution of products and facilitate the industrial development of the Delta besides its traditional agricultural production. With the social and economic benefits that follow, the bridge will contribute to the overall development of the region and improve the living standards of the local people.

Can Tho Bridge, a white “dragon” overlooking the beautiful Mekong River, will be the symbol of the friendship and cooperation between Vietnam and Japan.

(2) The Third National Highway No.1 Bridges Rehabilitation Project

Extending the entire length of Vietnam from north to south, National Highway No. 1 is the longest road in the country and plays a vital role to the nation. Along its path, however, are many bridges which were ruined in bombardments during the Vietnam War. Although stopgap repairs have been made repeatedly, many of the bridges have exceeded their useful life. These worn and aging bridges have become a serious impediment to the safe and smooth road transportation along National Highway No. 1.

The Third National Highway No.1 Bridges Rehabilitation Project aims to improve the efficiency of road transport in the Mekong Delta region by repairing and rebuilding bridges on National Highway No. 1 between Can Tho and Ca Mau, contributing to the economic growth and international competitiveness of the region.

The project's first phase was funded by a Japanese ODA loan in March 2003 with the amount of JPY 5,013 million. In March 2009, the Japanese Government provided an additional loan of JPY 1,038 million to support necessary costs for the completion of project. The loan is to be allocated to the civil engineering work, procuring supplies and equipment, and consulting services required for repairs and replacement of the bridges.

The project is scheduled to be completed in February 2011 when the facilities go into service. Once completed, the project will greatly contribute to the socio-economic development of Mekong Delta region through enhancing the transport network, together with improvement of other highway bridges.

(3) Transport Sector Loan for National Road Network Improvement (TSL)

Following the effective implementation of the improvement of important national highways, the Government of Vietnam enters into the next step to complete the nationwide road networks through rehabilitating old and deteriorated bridges on the national highways and the provincial roads. In response to a request from the Government of Vietnam, the Japanese Government through JICA, has been funding the rehabilitation of the weak bridges since 2004 in the amount of JPY 9,534 million for Phase I over 6 years and JPY 17,918 million for Phase II over 8 years up to 2016. The bridges that be improved under the TSL were selected during a detailed screening process based on Ministry of Transport 's list of priority bridges for rehabilitation on the national and provincial roads nationwide.

The objectives of the Project are to (i) make the national road network more efficient to deal with the increasing volume of traffic and to maintain safety by rehabilitating the aging bridges, and (ii) strengthen the effective operation and management systems through improvement of maintenance database that covers bridges nationwide and expansion of the maintenance capabilities.

The Project consists of 2 components: Component A is to improve the efficiency of transport services by improvement of selected bridges on the national and provincial road network including replacement of temporary bridges and reconstruct deteriorated bridges with new one. Component B is to enhance bridge management capacity of Vietnam Road Administration (VRA) through development of bridge management

of Vietnam Road Administration (VRA) through development of bridge management system for the national roads and technical assistance for enhancing bridge inspection and maintenance programming.

Outputs from the project include (i) improvement of approximately 145 bridges nationwide to enhancing safe road transport connectivity, as reflected in reduced travel time and cost, and (ii) strengthening of VRA capacity for bridge management database for planning, budgeting, and monitoring.



Cái Mít Bridge, Dong Thap Province

In the Mekong Delta, there are total 53 bridges included in this scheme, among which 24 bridges have been re-constructed in the first phase of the project to date. The remaining 29 bridges have been ready for the construction in the later half of 2010 and subsequent years.

(4) Sector Project Loans for Rural Infrastructure (road, electricity, irrigation, water supply) (SPL)

Japanese ODA has been responding to the Poverty Reduction Program of the Government of Vietnam through a series of Sector Program Loans for Rural Infrastructure. The main objective of the Project is directly contribute to improving the living standard and contributing to reduction of poverty through rehabilitation, upgrading and construction of basic rural infrastructure, namely road, electricity, water supply and irrigation. Subprojects implemented in SPLs were selected based on the priorities proposed by provinces and detail screening criteria agreed between Ministry of Planning and Investment and JICA. Since 1996 up to date, six Loan Agreements for

SPLs were concluded with total amount of ¥ 66.3 billion (approximately USD 700 mil.). Under the first three projects named “The Rural Infrastructure Development and Living Standard Improvement Projects –SPL I to III” the loans amount were distributed widely across the whole country. The latter three projects titled “Small-Scale Pro-Poor Infrastructure Development Projects- SPL IV to VI” signed from 2003 to 2009 focusing on poor provinces selected on the basis of poverty incidence. At present, the first four projects were completed, all subprojects under the SPL V will be completed by the end of 2010 and SPL VI has just started.

In Mekong Delta, total 153 subprojects have been implemented with total allocated loan amount of VND 963 billion, more than half of this amount (VND 522 billion) goes to 58 subprojects in road sector. Most of subprojects were completed except for 6 subprojects under SPL V to be completed by the end of 2010 and 10 subprojects under SPL VI that have been started recently.



Water Supply Project in Phu Loc, Soc Trang province under SPL V.

(5) Omon Thermal Power Plant and Mekong Delta Transmission Network Project-

O Mon Unit 2 Thermal Power Plant Construction Project

To secure reliable electricity supply for economic growth of the Mekong Delta, O Mon Thermal Power Plant and Mekong Delta Transmission Network Project has been selected by the Government of Vietnam as a priority project applying for Japanese ODA and the loan amount of JPY 53,183 million was provided.



The construction of the Unit 1 of 300 MW and the common facility of the O Mon Thermal Power Plant was commenced in January 2006 and with the great efforts and hard works of the contractors, consultants and EVN staff, the first unit of the biggest power complex in the Mekong Delta was completed in June 2009 to promptly respond to the power shortage in the southern Vietnam. Generating 1,902 GWh per year, O Mon 1 Power Plant is also an important project creating a stable and reliable source of electricity for the growth of Vietnam's economy as well as the development of provinces in Mekong Delta.

Following the successful completion of Unit 1, the procurement process for the construction of second 300 MW unit will soon be started and a loan with amount of JPY 27,547 million has been committed by JICA to finance this second stage.

2. Technical cooperation projects

(1) Capacity Building of Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology (HCMUT) to Strengthen University – Community Link.

The main objective of JICA's Technical Cooperation is to transfer Japanese know-how to developing countries for human resource development of the recipient countries. During the Phase 1 of the Project (Jan. 2006- Jan. 2009), an initial linkage between a leading university and the community in pilot provinces An Giang and Tien Giang in agriculture and rural development sector was set up gradually and firmly developed. The introduction of new method and equipment such as Catfish filleting machine, ponds water environment purification, cocoa fermentation technology, essential oil extraction from Tram tree, etc.. has greatly contributed to the government effort in quality enhancement and downstream diversification of agriculture in Mekong Delta.

Replicating this success, the Project continues the second phase for 3.5 years (from April 2009 – Sep. 2012) expanding to additional provinces surrounding HCMC such as Dong Nai, Lam Dong and Binh Duong province and including industrial development sector. Another important expected output of Phase 2 is the transforming the Master Course Program in HCMUT to Research Based Education as the basis for the development of research activities of HCMUT, and enhancing HCMUT's role in supporting the academic cooperation for the university - community linkage in southern part of Vietnam.

(2) Improvement of Extension System for Applying Better Farming System and Cultivation Techniques for Poor Farmers in the Mekong Delta.

Agricultural diversification from monoculture dominated by rice to fruit, vegetable is one of the government policies to support the growth strategy of Mekong Delta.

The farmers indeed have developed a wide area of fruit, in which a large part is citrus as the region has favorable climate and soil condition for this crop. However, lacking of knowledge and techniques, citrus farmers have to face various problems such as greening or yellow decline diseases, resulting in low income from their field.

In this five-year Project starting July 2009, Japanese experts, researchers of Southern Fruit Research Institute (SOFRI) and officers of Departments of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARDs) of five provinces Ben Tre, Soc Trang, Tien Giang, Tra Vinh and Vinh Long will join hands in helping citrus farmers to overcome their difficulties through establishing model farms, providing technical and marketing training, promoting farmer's organization, etc.

The Project also aims at establishing a network of extension, including SOFRI, related governmental agencies, social organizations and enhancing their capacity to deliver extension services to farmers using more effective and participatory approach.

It is expected that the Project will contribute to improving living standard of farmers in the target area through increasing their income from fruit cultivation.

(3) Climate Change Adaptation in Mekong Delta

Vietnam is identified as one of the five countries that will be most affected by the global climate change and sea level rise. Due to its low elevation, Mekong Delta is among the most vulnerable regions in the country. As a strong advocate to the climate change, beside the Support Program to Response to Climate Change (SP-RCC) that assists Vietnam tackle the climate change issues at national level, JICA will soon start the Study Project for Climate Change Adaptation in Mekong Delta. Based on the impact analysis of climate change in the region, the Project expects to provide a range of adaptation options and development planning in priority provinces Ben Tre, Ca Mau, Can Tho and Tien Giang,

3. Community development grant

Empowerment to the Community Damaged by Forest Fire in Ca Mau Province

U Minh Ha is an area endowed with unfavorable natural conditions for farming due to the predominance of acid sulphate soil and the restrictions on land use for the forest conservation purpose (50% - 70% of the available land must be afforested). Together with insufficient development of infrastructure, U Minh Ha has become the poorest area of Ca Mau province.

The large –scale forest fire in March 2002, which destroyed 6,000 ha of forest and caused other damages to farmland, was a severe blow to the local economy worsening the livelihood of the residents. Responding to the situation, in July, 2002 the Government of Vietnam launched a rehabilitation programme to include the reforestation of the forest fire sites and improvement of the livelihoods for local residents. However, the smooth progress of this rehabilitation programme was hampered by the high level of the required reforestation techniques, the poverty of the target communities, among other reasons.

Under such circumstances, JICA conducted a technical cooperation project for rehabilitation of forest fire sites in U Minh Ha area for a period of three years from February, 2004. Although the usefulness of the agricultural, forestry and fisheries techniques introduced under the project were confirmed, these techniques have only partially spread to local farmers because of their impoverished economic situation.



Forest Land Improvement

In the spirit of spreading out the result of previous assistance, the Government of Japan implemented the “Project for Empowerment to the Community Damaged by Forest Fire in Ca Mau Province” under Japan’s community empowerment grant aid scheme, scheduled from March 2008 to July 2010. The Project aims at improving the living

standard of communities in the target area through establishment of a means of income increase for farmers and improvement of the basic social infrastructure.

4. Japanese Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV)

Since dispatching the first three volunteers to Hanoi in 1995, by May 2010 there have been 286 Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers dispatched to Vietnam working in various field of education, health, rural development, environment, sports, etc.

The objective of JOCV is outlined in JICA bylaws as “To promote and assist the overseas activities of the youths whose purposes are to cooperate in unity with the people of developing areas, in the economic and social development of those areas”. In other words, to aid developing nations by sending volunteers to live and work with the people directly engaged in developing their own countries.



*Rehabilitate patient – ISHIHARA Taichi JOCV – Tan Chau District General Hospital,
An Giang*

Currently there are 8 volunteers presenting in five provinces of Mekong Delta, namely Can Tho City, An Giang, Tien Giang, Soc Trang and Ca Mau province, mostly in health care and education sectors. These JOCVs have shared their knowledge, skills and experiences with counterparts to support the host-organizations in improving their capacity and performance. They also have conducted cultural exchange activities for promoting better understanding of Japanese culture among local residents.

JICA's On-going project map in Vietnam



