

## Reflections on the Twenty Years of MOFA ODA Evaluation Workshops <Summary>

### **Study Team**

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### **Background and Purpose**

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MOFA) has organized ODA Evaluation Workshops sixteen times since 2001 to facilitate understanding in the Asia-Pacific region about evaluation methods on national development policies and projects, and challenges concerning evaluation, as well as to enhance the evaluation capacities of developing countries in the region. On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the workshops, MOFA commissioned the expert and the consultant to look back on the past ODA Evaluation Workshops.

### **Overview**

#### **1 History of ODA Evaluation Workshops**

##### **(1) Domestic and Overseas Trends in ODA Evaluation**

In the field of international development cooperation, evaluation has been considered important since the early days, from the viewpoint of more efficient and effective Official Development Assistance (ODA). In the 1980s and 1990s, major developed countries carried out administrative reforms against the backdrop of severe economic and financial conditions. Since the late 1990s, the total amount of ODA has been unlikely to increase dramatically. Against such a background, the necessity of a shift from quantitative increase in the amount of ODA to qualitative improvement was pointed out. For more effective ODA, the role of evaluation attracted attention globally, and the necessity to spread an understanding about the importance of evaluation came to be recognized. The OECD-DAC's Working Party on Aid Evaluation (forerunner of the current Network on Development Evaluation (EvalNet)) started to discuss how to improve result-oriented management and the measurement of results. To use evaluation results effectively on the sides of both donors and recipients, enhancing the evaluation capacities of recipient countries became an issue. In Japan, evaluation methods changed from evaluation based on inputs to that based on results, from ex-post evaluation to seamless evaluation covering ex-ante to ex-post evaluations, and from evaluation of individual projects to that of higher level programs, policies, and strategies. The scope of evaluation also expanded.

##### **(2) The Beginning of the Workshops**

The OECD-DAC had been organizing workshops on ODA evaluation around the world, and MOFA, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), and Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) invited a workshop to be held in Japan, thus the OECD-DAC Tokyo Workshop on "Evaluation Feedback for Effective Learning and Accountability" was held in September 2000. Eighty participants from DAC member countries, development aid organizations, development banks, and Asian countries attended the workshop. The meeting was regarded as extremely meaningful, especially by parties from developing countries. The challenge of enhancing the evaluation capacities of recipient countries was highlighted in the meeting. In addition, it was proposed that Japan organize similar workshops on evaluation in the future, in a form that allows a larger number of participants from developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region to attend. This came from the fact that Japan's ODA plays an important role in the stabilization and development of developing countries in Asia, as well as the understanding that evaluation has become all the more important for ensuring more effective ODA.

In response to the proposal, the first Tokyo Workshop on ODA Evaluation was held in 2001,

consecutively the second one in 2002. The main target was Asia-Pacific countries where Japan's ODA had historically played an important role in the stabilization and development of the countries. Thereafter, Japan continued to host ODA Evaluation Workshops in response to the proposals made in the first and the second workshop held in 2001 and 2002.

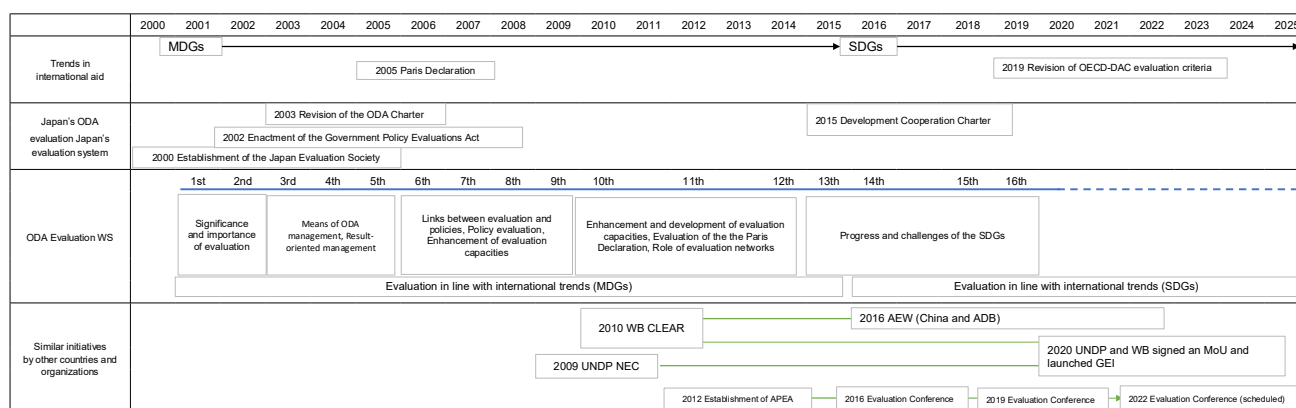
### **(3) Transition of the Workshop amid Changes in the Domestic and Overseas Environments Surrounding ODA Evaluation**

Changes in the environment and needs surrounding ODA evaluation have been reflected in the agenda of and discussions at ODA Evaluation Workshops. At the beginning, the featured topics centered around the significance and importance of evaluation and the role of developing countries. In the third (November 2003) to the fifth (January 2006) workshops, the agenda and discussions focused mainly on the means of ODA management, as well as evaluation and monitoring for result-oriented management. From the sixth workshop (October 2006) onward, the focus shifted to the links between evaluation and policies, policy evaluation, and the enhancement of evaluation capacities. At the same time, presentations on experiences and case studies by participating countries were included in the program, taking into account the fact that enhancing the evaluation capacities of parties from developing countries is one of the purposes of the workshops. Agenda and discussions related to the enhancement and development of evaluation capacities; evaluation of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness endorsed in 2005 by the Second High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness held in Paris; and the role of evaluation networks were covered in the tenth (February 2011) to the twelfth (December 2014) workshops. From the thirteenth workshop (December 2015) onward, monitoring and evaluation concerning the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as the method thereof, became the main topic.

For the ODA Evaluation Workshops, focal departments/organizations in charge of aid cooperation initially served as the point of contact on the side of developing countries. As developing countries themselves made progress in putting evaluation into practice, some expectations had been raised to place emphasis on the evaluation of not only ODA projects but their national development policies and programs. Which department/organization takes charge of evaluation, as well as the understanding and method of evaluation and the level of evaluation capacities, have been diversified among aid recipient countries. Accordingly, the needs and expectations of participants have become diverse. In addition to a wide range of participants from developing countries, the OECD-DAC, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and other major donors and organizations participated in and cooperated with the workshops regularly. Offices of international organizations in co-hosting countries (of the 16 workshops, 10 were held in co-hosting countries in Southeast Asia) also sent participants. Meanwhile, the workshops experienced limited participation from the Pacific Island Countries.

In response to the spread of evaluation practices and the diversification of needs, evaluation-related seminars, workshops, meetings, etc. of a similar kind have been held by other countries and organizations since 2009, including the National Evaluation Capacities (NEC) Conference by the UNDP, the Centers for Learning on Evaluation and Results (CLEAR) Initiative by the World Bank, and the Asian Evaluation Week (AEW) by the China's Ministry of Finance and ADB.

## ODA Evaluation Workshops amid Domestic and Overseas Trends in ODA Evaluation



Source: Created by the consultant

## 2 Significance of the ODA Evaluation Workshops and Roles They Played

### (1) Pioneering Initiatives and Continuous Support to Build Evaluation Capacities of Developing Countries

While the NEC Conference by the UNDP started in 2009, the CLEAR Initiative by the World Bank in 2010, and the AEW by the China's Ministry of Finance and ADB in 2016, Japan organized the first ODA Evaluation Workshop in 2001. Japan has been giving importance to building evaluation systems in developing countries since the early days. The results of the post-workshop questionnaires for the most recent five ODA Evaluation Workshops and the questionnaire survey for participant countries conducted for this reflection study (hereinafter referred to as the "Questionnaires") indicated the usefulness of experience sharing and mutual learning during the workshops. Such responses suggest that the ODA Evaluation Workshops organized by Japan on a regular basis served as an evaluation-related platform mainly for government officials in charge of evaluation in Asia-Pacific countries who are the main target of the workshops.

Japan saw the necessity of building developing countries' evaluation capacities and pioneered the relevant initiatives, even if other countries and organizations did not yet have a strong interest in the topic. In addition, Japan made the international community aware of the importance of the enhancement of developing countries' evaluation capacities. These were the characteristics and great significance of Japan's ODA Evaluation Workshops. While building the evaluation capacities of developing countries is a theme for OECD-DAC EvalNet's activities, Japan is considered to be the only bilateral donor that regularly offered a platform to share the experience and knowledge of evaluation, rather than hosting a one-off international conference.

Furthermore, domestic experts said, "The ODA Evaluation Workshops have served as a learning platform for the Japanese participants (MOFA, JICA, members of the Japan Evaluation Society (JES), etc.) as well. The workshops also contributed to the improvement of the ODA evaluations (third-party evaluations) that have been conducted by MOFA, hence to Japan's overall ODA policy and ODA for thematic and regional policies."

### (2) Developing Countries' Readiness for Evaluation, Enhancement of Evaluation Capacities, and Spread of Evaluation Practices

Regular ODA Evaluation Workshops significantly changed developing countries' readiness for ODA project evaluations and enhanced their evaluation capacities. JICA, which is the Japan's ODA implementation institution, responded, "The ODA Evaluation Workshops were meaningful in that they made it easier to gain understanding and cooperation from counterpart countries and organizations for smooth ex-post evaluation of aid projects," and "The opportunities for national staff at JICA's overseas office in co-hosting countries to speak as presenters in the ODA Evaluation Workshops led to the empowerment and increased motivation of human resources in counterpart countries."

The results of the Questionnaires indicated that the workshops responded to the interests and needs of developing countries, which had been diversified and expanded in line with international trends and challenges, and contributed to the strengthening of evaluation systems and structures, advancement and establishment of evaluation practices, and enhancement of the capacities of the staff in charge of evaluation at practical level.

While similar initiative by other countries and organizations cover themes and contents that respond to common international trends and challenges, as well as needs, the participants are often practitioners, academics, and consultants who specialize in evaluation. On the other hand, the majority of the participants in the ODA Evaluation Workshops are government officials, who are expected to work on the improvement of policies, measures, and projects through evaluations but are not necessarily evaluation specialists. The workshops are characterized by programs that aim to enhance government officials' evaluation literacy and develop human resources for evaluation, in accordance with the participants' needs. Another characteristic of the ODA Evaluation Workshops is that they are for the Asia-Pacific region, where many countries are at the similar stage of their development and have shares the development challenges. It has been pointed out that case studies in the workshops are practical, applicable to participating countries, and useful in facilitating mutual understanding of the challenges that each country faced. These characteristics are also considered to have contributed to the strengthening of evaluation systems and structures, as well as the advancement and establishment of evaluation practices. In addition, building such evaluation systems and structures is said to have contributed in promoting effective use of ODA and ensuring accountability to the citizens of both donor and partner countries.

### **(3) Establishment of APEA and Support for Its Activities**

One of the significant contributions of the ODA Evaluation Workshops is indirect support for the establishment of the Asia-Pacific Evaluation Association (APEA) in September 2012. Compared to other regions in the world, the Asia-Pacific region was somewhat slow in building an evaluation network. MOFA and JES insiders suggested in the interviews conducted during this reflection study that the role and potential of an evaluation network were intensively discussed during the workshops, and that major stakeholders discussed the APEA initiative, taking the opportunity of the ODA Evaluation Workshops. These long years of discussion and preparation preceded the establishment of the APEA, which can be regarded as an impact of the ODA Evaluation Workshops.

The difference from similar but relatively new initiative by other countries and organizations is that Japan paid attention to the role of evaluation networks in the development of evaluation capacities, supported the 2012 establishment of the APEA and indirectly supported APEA's activities, and that Japan helped deepen the role and importance of evaluation and spread evaluation practices especially in Asia-Pacific countries, through the discussions on evaluation networks during the ODA Evaluation Workshops and contribution to the founding of the APEA. The 13th ODA Evaluation Workshop (2015) was held in Tokyo, with the cooperation of JICA and APEA, and the 14th Workshop (2016) took place in Vietnam as part of the first APEA's International Evaluation Conference attended by 32 countries, including African countries. Such a track record of activities, which are part of international initiatives, are also characteristics of Japan's ODA Evaluation Workshops.

### **(4) Meaningful Cooperation with Relevant Organizations and Countries**

The effective collaboration with relevant organizations which have a wealth of experiences in evaluation practices, such as JICA's Evaluation Department, the JES, the OECD-DAC, the UNDP and the ADB etc., have contributed to setting workshop themes and agenda that well take into account international trends, interests and the needs of participating countries, and that include effective evaluation methods and practices applicable to participating countries. Relevant parties in developing countries do not necessarily have sufficient access to information about international discussions and the latest trends in evaluation. For them, effective collaboration with such organizations has been especially meaningful. In addition, adopting the form of co-hosting the workshops with developing countries is noteworthy. Co-hosting countries are to be involved from the preparation of the workshop, serve as co-chairs, contribute to the themes and agenda setting, ensure the participation of high-level government officials as representatives of co-hosts, and contribute as presenters. This is considered to have helped enhance the ownership, understanding, and awareness of evaluation on the side of developing countries and strengthen their incentives.

## **(5) Diplomatic Role**

The ODA Evaluation Workshops have had an impact on participating countries' evaluation structures and systems, which is a diplomatic effect in itself and helped to boost Japan's diplomatic leadership in the region.

Furthermore, responses to the Questionnaires indicated that Japan is highly regarded for contributing significantly to the building of Asia-Pacific countries' evaluation cultures and structures through organizing the workshops on a regular basis. It has also been pointed out that Japan can render a significant and meaningful diplomatic effect by explaining the importance of and leading the fostering of an evaluation culture as the only Asian country that has a legal framework on policy evaluation, namely the Government Policy Evaluation Act. This can be considered as evidence of the significance of regular ODA Evaluation Workshops, which explicitly showed recipient countries and the international community the Japanese government's stance of taking evaluation seriously and supporting the strengthening of recipient countries' evaluation capacities, as well as ensuring responsible engagement and cooperation that goes beyond mere offering of ODA.

As a result of the two-decade series of ODA Evaluation Workshops, some workshop participants have assumed senior executive positions in their organizations. These examples are considered as Japan's diplomatic assets and are contributing to the strengthening of relations with Asia-Pacific countries. Other factors that are considered to have brought a positive impact on bilateral relations between Japan and the participating countries include that the workshops are participated more by the senior officials such as director-level central government officials of partner countries, the director-general level officials of co-hosting countries, who are likely to have a certain influence on policy decisions, instead of working-level practitioners.

The OECD-DAC also recognizes Japan's active efforts to develop evaluation capacities through the ODA Evaluation Workshops and other initiatives. This can be said to be evidence that Japan has secured an international presence by contributing to building evaluation systems in developing countries through starting the ODA Evaluation Workshops as a pioneer, and organizing the workshops on a regular basis.

As discussed above, the Asia-Pacific region was somewhat slow in building an evaluation network compared to other regions in the world, and one of the significant contributions of the ODA Evaluation Workshops is indirect support to the establishment and activities of the APEA. The establishment and activities of the APEA are highly regarded by not only evaluation experts and government officials in the Asia-Pacific region but also the wider international community. The fact can be considered as an example of the diplomatic impacts of the ODA Evaluation Workshops.

## **3 Conclusion**

Participants of the ODA Evaluation Workshops have regarded the themes and contents as in line with international trends and challenges, their countries' needs, as well as being practical and applicable for them, and useful in facilitating mutual understanding among participating countries. The developing countries, donors and other organizations that participated in the workshops highly regard the workshops' contribution to the building of evaluation cultures and systems in the Asia-Pacific region. The fact that the workshops have been organized on a regular basis for 20 years is also highly significant. They are recognized as an evaluation platform in the Asia-Pacific region; contributed to the development of evaluation systems and structures, human resources development, and fostering of evaluation cultures in each country; and offered indirect support to the establishment of the APEA. The significance of their existence and the results produced are highly regarded by domestic and overseas stakeholders and have led to diplomatic impacts for Japan.

An overview of each workshop, its program, chairs' summary, and presentations are published on the MOFA website in a comprehensive manner. This is highly appreciated in terms of transparency and accountability. Nevertheless, information dissemination and public relations remain a challenge. There is still room for making the information on Japan's workshop initiatives more accessible and appealing to the general public, such as by making effective use of pictures in reports and utilizing international evaluation networks and social media. In addition, Pacific Island Countries have had limited participation to, and have never co-hosted the workshops. This should be tackled if Japan would continue to play a role in the enhancement of evaluation capacities in the Asia-Pacific region. The significance and the roles of the ODA Evaluation Workshops highlighted in this reflection can be regarded as future potential for Japan to play its

roles. Therefore, it is hoped that the initiatives will be continued and further strengthened.

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