



Assistance for Ethnic Minorities in Myanmar through ODA

■ Surrounding ethnic minorities issues

Myanmar is said to be home to 135 different ethnic groups. Of these, the Bamar occupy about 70% of the population, living mainly in the central plains region. The ethnic minorities that account for the remaining 30% primarily live in the mountainous regions near national borders. These minorities are broadly divided into seven major national races, which are: Kachin, Kayah (Karenni), Karen (Kayin), Chin, Mon, Shan, and Rakhine (Arakan). The races are further broken down into 134 ethnic groups.

The issues surrounding ethnic minorities in Myanmar are deeply rooted and were caused by the “divide and rule” administration during British colonial period. Even after gaining independence in 1948, conflict between the national military and ethnic armed groups continued for 60 years in some regions. As a result of the long conflict, many people caught amid the ravages of the conflict were forced to leave their homes, becoming either internally displaced persons, or refugees upon fleeing to neighboring countries. In particular, more than 400,000 people were internally displaced in Karen State, with over 100,000 living in Thai refugee camps. At the same time, ethnic minority regions were left behind in terms of development, and rural villages fell into desolation. Economic distress has triggered problems such as involvement in drug production and dealing. Also, in some regions, it is said that numerous landmines were buried during the conflict by both the government and ethnic minority sides.

■ Efforts of the current administration and future issues

The Thein Sein administration established in 2011 declared that it would promote democratization and economic reforms in Myanmar, while at the same time bringing peace to the country through reconciliation with ethnic minority groups as early as possible. As the government has been proactively tackling these issues, most of the ethnic groups have reached basic ceasefire agreements, with the exception of the Kachin people. However, there are still many issues left unresolved. In the future, it will be necessary to build a trustworthy relationship between the government and ethnic minority to advance the peace process. Together with this, communities must be developed in the devastated minority residential areas, and industry such as agriculture must be promoted. The return of internally displaced people and refugees cannot progress without communities to accept them and means of livelihood. In order to achieve these goals, assistance from the international community is indispensable.

■ Assistance of Japan

Japan highly welcomes the recent efforts in Myanmar

towards national reconciliation, including the peace process with ethnic minorities. Promoting regional development and the consolidation of peace, Japan will proactively implement assistance in ethnic minorities’ areas in order to contribute to the stable and sustainable growth of Myanmar.

Japan has thus far implemented assistance for ethnic minority regions based on the issues and needs of each state, focusing its support in the area of agriculture, which is their primary industry.

To name a few, rural development assistance (technical cooperation) has been provided in the northern area of Shan State for the dissemination and distribution of drug crop alternatives. In the southern part of Shan State, production and distribution assistance in the development of sustainable circular agriculture was provided by working with NPO Terra People Association on a technical cooperation. In Chin State, assistance in disseminating cultivation technology for high value-added plants (medicinal plants, etc.) was implemented as a technical cooperation with the Makino Memorial Foundation of Kochi Prefecture.

In other sectors such as health, assistance was provided to improve maternal and child health in the Kokang Self-Administered Zone of Shan State (Grant Assistance for Japanese NGO Projects used by AMDA Multisectoral and Integrated Development Services). Food aid was provided in six states including Rakhine and Shan (¥814 million of Grant Aid in collaboration with the UN World Food Programme (WFP)), and assistance for internally displaced people (¥200 million) was implemented through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Also, for refugees who fled to Thailand, Grant Assistance for Grass-Roots Human Security Projects was used to provide fireproof facilities and disaster risk reduction training (¥9.8 million), as well as to build vocational training centers (¥14 million) at 9 refugee camps in Thailand.

Furthermore, Japan appointed Mr. Yohei Sasakawa, Chairman of the Nippon Foundation as “Special Envoy of the Government of Japan for National Reconciliation in Myanmar” in February 2013 in order to embody and contribute to the progress of national reconciliation in Myanmar.

By allowing residents to feel the dividends of peace, the peace process will continue to progress in the future. Since the process has been developed well in Karen State and Mon State, these areas are used as models for providing assistance in formulating development plans for the repatriation and resettlement of refugees. Additionally providing support for the development of roads and community infrastructure, as well as improving livelihoods, Japan aims to further extend the implementation of projects to all states across the country. Japan will also continue to work with international organizations and NGOs to proactively provide humanitarian assistance and other assistance to meet the needs of each state.

Myanmar



Market in Kongyan, Shan State



People going to the market