



Japan and Thailand Confronting the Flooding through Public-Private Cooperation

– Disaster relief activities for the flood damage in Thailand

On November 5, 2011, a ship laden with 10 special vehicles left Yokohama Port bound for Laem Chabang Port in Thailand. These vehicles were the drain pump vehicles dispatched by the Japanese government as emergency assistance to Thailand which was suffering from flood damage. The ship arrived in Thailand two weeks later on November 18. The next day on the 19th, on entering the site, the Japan Disaster Relief (JDR) Expert Team (a drain pump vehicle team) commenced activities in Rojana Industrial Park, Ayutthaya Province, which is also home to many Japanese corporations. Water that had accumulated on the industrial park's premises was drained to adjacent canals around the clock. The dispatched drain pump vehicles belonged to the Regional Development Bureau of the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (MLIT) of Japan. In this manner, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), MLIT, and JICA as well as private construction companies and manufacturers participated in the activities, and a joint public-private team was assembled that consisted of a total of 51 members.

This drain pump vehicle was also used in the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake to drain seawater that had accumulated due to the tsunami. One of its characteristics is the achievement of a lightweight pump section. It weighs a mere 30kg. Conventional pumps weigh around 800kg, and at such a weight need to be transported by a crane. This is a Japanese manufactured lightweight pump of 30kg that can be carried by hand and is possible to use in disaster sites. The activities also saw the participation of the pump manufacturer's designer, Mr. Akihisa Mochizuki. This was Mr. Mochizuki's first time participating in overseas assistance, and he comments, "Having the opportunity to be involved with both the process of designing the drain pump and the activities in the disaster site, I was honored to directly receive words of thanks from the local people."

It was the people of Thailand who played an outstanding role in the drainage work on the site. Mr. Minoru Miyajima who participated from MLIT had learnt the importance of the local public's participation in disaster risk reduction from his own experiences in charge of a task force during domestic disasters. "The new work was performed by the Japanese and Thais together, but was handled by the Thais alone from the second time. The Thai workers soon understood with just a little instruction, after which they took a hands-on approach."

Mr. Niyom Sukhsawan was among the Thais who participated in drainage work using the pump. Mr. Niyom works at a construction company, and it was his first time working with Japanese people. Mr. Niyom is skilled in driving and operating vehicles used in civil engineering work, and he was responsible for operating the drain pump vehicles. He commented, "The Japanese brought with them a fantastic pump vehicle, and they taught us the skills and knowledge. The experts within the JDR followed procedures and taught us the job in a careful manner. This was useful to the Thai workers who were waiting for the industrial park to reopen."

The drain pump vehicle team within the JDR completed their work in the industrial park on November 27, eight days after starting operations. In some places, the water level dropped by over a meter, and roads that were only traversable by boat became passable for many vehicles and bikes. However, this was not the end of the work of the drain pump vehicle team within the Japan Disaster Relief Expert Team. Thereafter, the team carried out drainage work continuously at two industrial parks, three residential areas, and also within the Asian Institute of Technology. In the 32 days until their work ended on December 20, the team had drained approximately 8.1 million cubic meters of water - the approximate equivalent of 6.5 Tokyo domes.



Japanese experts explain how to use the drain pump to Thai personnel. (Photo: JICA)



Prime Minister Yingluck of Thailand has the flood countermeasures explained by Japanese experts. (Photo: Kyodo News)