

March 5, 2009

Proposal by the Expert Committee for PALM 5

Introduction

1. Pacific island countries are neighbor countries that share the Pacific Ocean and historical bonds with Japan. While Japan attaches strategic importance to the region, especially in terms of marine resources and sea lanes, most countries in this region have a small land area and are geographically dispersed and thus not easily accessible from Japan, resulting in a low level of interest among Japanese people. It is also a concern that as the generation with historical bonds with Japan ages, the relations between Japan and those countries are also eroding.
2. In light of the situations above, Japan took the initiative to hold the 1st Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM) in 1997 (then called 'Japan-SPF Summit'). Three PALMs have since been held by Japan's Prime Minister in the past ten years, basically every three years. The PALM process has indeed strengthened the ties between Japan and the Pacific island region, and it can certainly be said that it is a good practice in Japan's diplomacy.
3. However, the past PALMs and their outcomes are not well known among the general public in Japan. In this sense, there is room for PALM to improve to attract more attention to the Pacific island region. In addition, other countries with vested interest in this region, such as the United States, France, and China, have held similar meetings with the Pacific island countries in recent years, thus lowering Japan's presence in this region.
4. The reason for the low level of awareness toward PALM among Japanese citizens is not only the low level of public interest mentioned above, but also the limited amount of preparation time for PALMs.

Three additional factors contributing to this situation are:

- (1) Lack of vision/strategy in Japan's diplomacy towards this region
- (2) Overly comprehensive assistance approach that obscures key areas of assistance; monitoring process for assistance implementation also vague to the eyes of the general public
- (3) Decreased amount / capped ratio of assistance for this region with Japan's overall ODA being reduced

Purposes of the Proposal

With the above points in mind, the Expert Committee held six meetings from November 2008 through March 2009 to discuss the following agenda:

1. Strategy / vision the Japanese government should have when it conducts diplomacy towards Pacific island countries.
2. Improvement of the PALM process to achieve diplomatic goals.
3. Agenda including pillars of Japanese assistance / cooperation to be discussed at PALM 5.

The committee discussed the above three points and made the following proposal.

Contents of the Proposal

1. Relations between Japan and Pacific Island countries

(1) Engagement as equal partners in the Pacific community

To achieve peace and development in the Pacific island region, Japan should work with Pacific island countries as equal partners sharing the Pacific Ocean on common regional issues, such as the environment and marine resources, which are common assets for both Japan and the Pacific island countries. The equal partnership goes beyond the “donor-recipient” relationship and encourages Pacific island countries to address common regional issues as independent, responsible stakeholders.

In the area of the environment in particular, Japan should establish its own vision to take the lead in addressing environmental issues while enhancing donor coordination in this regard.

(2) Assistance for promoting regional cooperation

Japan has been tackling Pacific regional issues both bilaterally and multilaterally, but now requires a mechanism that allows for sustainable and flexible programs in consideration of the needs on the PIF side. This effort includes establishing funds for specific purposes, such as the environment.

(3) Cooperation that complements ODA and stimulates private sector

ODA has played a pivotal role as a tool for cooperation towards this region. The Japanese government should continue to make the most of this cooperation tool, inspecting its procedures and contents. It is also necessary for Japan to promote private-sector activities in order to complement ODA for the development of the

Pacific island countries. Such activities include the promotion of trade, investment, civil aviation, cultural and sports exchange, tourism, and fishery.

In particular, air access to Pacific island countries, which is the most important infrastructure to enhance relations between Japan and this region, is difficult due to the underdevelopment of a civil-aviation network in the region. The issue is not simply about whether commercial airlines can establish and maintain routes; it involves the creation of a lifeline for the self-supporting development of Pacific island countries and promotion of people-to-people exchange in this region.

With this understanding, the Japanese government should promote cooperation in those areas where ODA cannot be fully utilized as a cooperation tool and work to create a favorable environment for enhanced private-sector activities.

(4) Comprehensive human-resource development plan for long-term relations

In addition to cooperating with nation building in Pacific island countries, human-resource development involves creating multifold bridges between Japan and Pacific island countries by fostering bonds through such things as individual cooperation activities and student exchanges. In building a human development plan for scarcely populated Pacific island countries where the generation with historical bonds with Japan is ageing, the Japanese government needs to keep in mind the aforementioned two perspectives, giving strategic thought in particular to the long-term development of a pro-Japanese populace.

A specific idea to achieve the above-mentioned goal is to reorganize different exchange programs by age group and field to better network the former participants and expand the programs for all groups. A university or a research institute can also be a networking hub for academic programs and research.

In addition to expanding existing exchange programs, a creative new approach should be considered as a means to fostering the next generation of leaders who can serve as bridges between Japan and Pacific island countries. A long-term scholarship program, with such a name as the 'Japan/Pacific Leadership Fund', is one possibility.

(5) Promoting coordination among donors in the region, maintaining the uniqueness of Japan's ODA

Japan should make the best of the strong points of its ODA. On the other hand, this region should not be an 'aid battle zone,' but rather a donors' coordination area. For example, depending on the areas of cooperation, Japan can coordinate with

multilateral donors such as the UN and ADB. It is also necessary to keep in mind to coordinate with the major donors of the region, Australia and New Zealand, as well as to consider how to engage with new donors such as China and Taiwan.

2. PALM Process

(1) Overview: Formulate policy objectives based on long-term perspective and establish implementation cycle / mechanism

It seems that assistance packages launched at each PALM were formulated toward the timing of each PALM and were fairly comprehensive, but not necessarily emphasized policy formulation based on a long-term strategy/vision nor follow-up mechanism.

It is important, in this regard, for the Japan government to redefine the PALM process by formulating long-term policy objectives and considering specific assistance measures under such objectives. It is also important to establish a cycle on policy at both the working and political levels to steadily implement assistance measures launched at past PALMs, to monitor and evaluate implementation, and to utilize the results to modify the policies from the view point of reliable implementation of policies towards Pacific island countries.

(2) PALM venue

The first PALM is the only one that was held in Tokyo. It is preferable to hold PALMs in prefectures other than Tokyo so that the Japanese government can incorporate local perspectives in considering and implementing assistance measures. The local authorities can also assist PALM in PR activities.

The selection of the PALM venue should be strategic, taking into account of policy objectives based on long term perspectives, and should not be bound by security and budget concerns only. The relevance between venue and the long-term policy should also be considered as one element to decide the venue of PALM.

(3) When to decide PALM venue

The Expert Committee has been expressing concerns over the low level of interest among the Japanese public in PALM process, an important diplomatic asset of Japan. Holding PALM in a local area has certain advantages as indicated above. To maximize these advantages, it is therefore important to secure sufficient time for

relevant bodies, including local authorities, to prepare by deciding the venue as much in advance as possible.

For the past PALMs the venue was decided less than a year prior to the event, which did not give much time even for PR activities. One of the suggestions of the Expert Committee on this point is to decide and announce the venue for the next PALM at the end of the meeting in progress, or at a middle year between PALMs, so that both national and local governments can have sufficient preparation time.

(4) PALM frequency and the years between PALMs

It is important to continue discussing the frequency of PALM, including whether the current three-year cycle is appropriate or not, from the point of policy implementation based on a long-term perspective. Assuming to continue the present three-year cycle, it is necessary to hold meetings for mid-term review between PALMs to monitor and review PALM-related programs.

(5) Public Relations

As pointed out above in (3), the Expert Committee discussed ways to improve PALM itself as well as to raise PALM's profile in Japan. Though not all the recommendations below might be introduced into PALM 5, the Japanese Government should work hard, while discussing policy, to put into action some of the following to raise the profile of PALM and hence Japan's diplomacy towards the Pacific region.

- A catchphrase would be effective to raise public awareness. It is important to select a catchphrase at an early time and consistently use it thereafter in PR activities.
- It would also be useful to establish a 'Pacific Islands' Day' and hold PALM-related events at least once a year on that day even during years when PALM is not being held.
- It would be meaningful to hold an NGO forum back to back with PALM to attract more public attention.
- 'One Village, One Island Country' partnership program could be adopted at PALM as at Aichi Expo. This program will raise the level of interest in PALM participation, and exchange at the local governments and the grass-roots level.

3. Policy of Japan's Cooperation towards Pacific island countries at PALM 5

1. The Expert Committee suggests the following five improvement points to Japan's cooperation

(1) Assistance to achieve a greater impact

Assistance should not be overly comprehensive, but rather well-prioritized to achieve a greater impact and make people think that Japan's ODA has changed.

As pointed out at the outset of this proposal paper, the amount and ratio of ODA to the Pacific region has decreased over the years along with reductions in Japan's ODA overall. It is therefore necessary to secure the amount and ratio of ODA to the Pacific region so Japan can show the Pacific island countries that Japan does attach importance to the Pacific region in its diplomacy.

Japan's assistance through JOCVs and NGOs has a good reputation as highly visible assistance in the Pacific region. This style of ODA should be further promoted. It can also be pointed out that combining infrastructural aid and technical assistance would produce a greater impact and therefore should be enhanced.

(2) Speedy implementation of assistance

Japan's assistance is seen as reliable but slow in its implementation. As a result, it is sometimes the case that it does not always meet the expectations of Pacific island countries. Small-scale, but speedy assistance would be effective.

(3) Balance between country-specific assistance and assistance on region-wide issues

Japan's bilateral aid policies for Pacific island countries, compared to those for other regions of the world, have not been clear enough. It is essential, therefore, for Japan to work out specific aid policies for Pacific island countries in accordance with each country's development phase.

At the same time, special consideration has to be given to the common characteristics of Pacific island countries: remoteness, small land area, and geographic dispersal. In this regard, a region-wide aid approach to such issues as the environment and natural disasters could be effective and should be a pillar of Japan's assistance.

(4) Taking into account and coping with the Pacific islands' vulnerabilities

As globalization proceeds, Pacific island countries in general are becoming more vulnerable in terms of the environment and economy. Furthermore, there are

certain countries and peoples that are more vulnerable than others in the Pacific region. Granting aid based on vulnerability, in line with the ODA Charter and the Preamble to the Japanese Constitution, could be more understandable and persuasive to the people of Japan. Aid from Japan aimed at improving livelihood security would be easily accepted by the Pacific island countries.

(5) Increased cooperation between the public and private sectors as well as NGOs and NPOs.

Assistance to small island countries could be better implemented with coordination between public and private sectors, especially in the field of tourism and trade where cooperation through ODA cannot be a major assistance method. Detailed, attentive aid is important in coping with vulnerability and could be better implemented through the promotion of cooperation with NGOs / NPOs.

2. Pillars of Japan's cooperation at PALM 5

While noting the importance of comprehensively responding to the Pacific Plan, the Expert Committee suggests three pillars of cooperation to be discussed at PALM 5; namely, the environment as an urgent topic, human security that addresses vulnerability, and human-resource development from mid- to long-term perspectives. This prioritization does not mean to exclude other areas of assistance to be dealt with according to the needs of the Pacific island countries. It is also crucial that aid workers change their mindset.

(1) The Environment and Climate Change

The beautiful nature and rich marine resources of the Pacific Ocean are valuable, common global assets for both the Pacific island countries and Japan. As a matter of fact, Japan shares the environmental problems of the Pacific region as they directly affect it too. This region is also particularly vulnerable to climate change. While Japan promotes Cool Earth Partnership and implements both adaptation and mitigation measures, Japan should encourage Pacific island countries to make voluntary efforts on issues such as waste management and environmental education.

An effective approach would be to foster the idea of a Pacific community in which Pacific island countries and Japan address environmental and climate change issues as equal partners. Japan should take the initiative in this framework by hosting conferences and leading negotiation process and providing related

assistance. It is necessary to establish an accessible fund, as mentioned above, for the specific purpose of addressing environmental issues.

(2) Human Security

As many Pacific island countries have made limited progress in meeting the MDGs, it is essential for Japan to intensify assistance in this regard, particularly in the fields of water, subsistence agriculture, education, and health.

(3) Human-Resource Development

Human-resource development is essential for nation building. With small population, most countries in the Pacific region require human-resource development that pays attention to each and every individual. Although the importance of comprehensive human-resource development has been mentioned above, Japan's detailed, tailored assistance in the area of human-resource development also contributes to spreading Japanese tradition and culture. Japan's assistance through JOCVs, Senior Volunteers, and NGOs is the embodiment of the face-to-face, heart-to-heart education that is crucial to human-resource development. Human-resource development should also be consistent and continuous.

While Japan's human-resource development has been successful, the Expert Committee would like to make the following recommendations:

- Japan should make better use of JOCVs and Senior Volunteers.
- It is important to nurture experts in various fields, including environment and administration for nation building and policy making.

When discussing human-resource development for the Pacific region it is also important to give special consideration to the fact that remittances greatly support the economies of Pacific island countries.