

International Cooperation for Peacebuilding in the Kingdom of Cambodia and Republic of the Philippines

Japan has cooperated with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) for half a century for the peace, stability, and prosperity of the region. Meanwhile, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has bolstered activities aimed at peacebuilding since the 1990s. JICA has focused on activities aimed at creating resilient nations and societies that can prevent and avoid the re-emergence of violent conflicts, with the goal of fostering a peaceful and inclusive society. Here, we introduce the initiatives on landmine removal in the Kingdom of Cambodia (hereafter, “Cambodia”) and the peace efforts in Mindanao, Republic of the Philippines (hereafter, “the Philippines”).

(Text: Morohashi Kumiko)

In Cambodia, even over 30 years after the end of the civil war, landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) remain, concentrated in rural areas where 80% of the population lives. This situation not only poses a threat to the people but also hinders agricultural land development.

The clearance of landmines and UXO is primarily conducted by the Cambodian Mine Action Centre (commonly known as CMAC), a government agency. In addition to providing equipment for landmine and UXO clearance activity, JICA has been implementing technical cooperation projects for many years that support the introduction of equipment management systems and information management systems for clearance activity, and the enhancement of CMAC’s training capabilities and organizational functions. Hayashi Akihito, an expert assigned to CMAC, had the following to say.

“As a signatory of the Ottawa Treaty (the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention), Cambodia is obligated to complete the clearance of all anti-personnel mines



Supporting the independence of individuals handicapped by landmines

within the country by 2025, and it is expected to fulfill this obligation. I believe there is no other country that has been able to resolve the issue of landmines as smoothly, and the fact that Japan has been supporting this effort is of great significance internationally,” he explains.

In addition, CMAC, utilizing the knowledge it has



Left: An expert provides instruction on the maintenance of heavy machinery used in landmine clearance activities

Center: Ukrainian government personnel involved in mine action receive training at CMAC

Right: JICA staff member Ochiai Naoyuki is working to bridge the gap between soldiers of the national army and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front



Rice harvested through agricultural support in Mindanao, the Philippines

gained so far, is conducting training for countries such as Laos, Colombia, and Ukraine which are also affected by landmines and UXOs, under the cooperation of JICA. Hayashi believes it is a rare international success story where peacebuilding activities have spread through an aid recipient country.

“Currently, we are working on a project where we have asked curators from museums, including the Okinawa Peace Memorial Museum to help create exhibits at the Peace Museum of CMAC planned for construction in Siem Reap, a city in the northwest of Cambodia,” says Hayashi. “I believe this can become an example of cooperation between countries that share the same pain of having their homelands turn into battlefields.”

Among JICA's peacekeeping activities, the international cooperation contributing to the peace process in Mindanao, the Philippines, is particularly noteworthy. Mindanao Island is located at the southern end of the Philippine archipelago and is the second-largest island in the Philippines, with an area of about 94,600 square kilometers, following Luzon Island. In response to the ceasefire agreement reached in 2003 between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, an armed group seeking a high degree of autonomy from the Philippines, and the Philippine government, JICA began full-scale peace support efforts. Ochiai Naoyuki, a JICA staff member who has been involved in support for a long time, reflects on that time.



Experts provide agricultural guidance to decommissioned soldiers of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front as part of the Comprehensive Capacity Development Project for the Bangsamoro

“We maintained a strictly neutral position, providing peace mediation to the government side as well as the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and development support for conflict affected area in Mindanao. In Mindanao, deep-rooted poverty issues resulting from years of

conflict were addressed through agricultural support, medical and welfare assistance, and infrastructure development, all aimed at underpinning the peace negotiations with ongoing development efforts,” he explains. “In 2008, amidst deteriorating security conditions and the withdrawal of other countries from International Monitoring Team as peacekeeping forces, the continued presence of JICA strengthened trust in

Japan. As a result, in 2011, the first top-level meeting was realized between Philippine President Aquino and Chairman Murad of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.”

Afterward, a comprehensive peace agreement was signed, and the Bangsamoro Transitional Authority was established. Local efforts continue to focus on capacity-building initiatives and legal system support to promote the autonomy and operation of the autonomous government.

“The local community says that Japan is providing support that aligns with their perspectives,” says Ochiai. “I feel that the success of democratic conflict resolution is due to JICA's collaborative approach of working from the same viewpoint, identifying problems, and finding solutions, which has become the foundation of our relationship of trust.”



JICA President Tanaka visiting a local elementary school (the man in the center wearing a hat, slightly above the middle row)

Reference: 1

Examples of JICA's International Cooperation Projects Concerning Landmine Removal in Cambodia

- **The Project for Improvement of Equipment for Demining Activities (Phase 4)**
Term of cooperation: Since August 2004
Outline: Assisting in the enhancement of mine detectors and mine removal equipment has played a crucial role in safeguarding the lives of the local residents.
- **The Project for the Construction of Training Complex and Outreach Facility of Cambodian Mine Action Centre**
Term of cooperation: Since November 2022 (signing of grant agreement)
Outline: JICA supported the establishment of both an outreach facility and a research center focused on mine action technology, which is also responsible for providing training at the Cambodian Mine Action Centre. This support has led to the improvement of the educational training environment for mine action personnel and the promotion of awareness regarding landmine issues.

Reference websites

<https://www.jica.go.jp/oda/project/0409300/index.html>
<https://www.jica.go.jp/oda/project/2260460/>

Reference: 2

Examples of JICA's International Cooperation Project Concerning Mindanao Peace and Development Assistance in the Philippines

- **Comprehensive Capacity Development Project for the Bangsamoro**
Term of cooperation: July 2013 to July 2019
Outline: In Mindanao, Philippines, the framework agreement between the Philippine Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front was signed in 2012 and then the comprehensive peace agreement was also signed in 2014. The Bangsamoro Organic Law was passed in 2018. Bangsamoro Transition Authority was created based on those agreements and law. This cooperation project involves providing support for the training of personnel engaged in administering services for the new autonomous government, encompassing areas such as water supply, roads, and local industry promotion. Assistance also extended to the development of organizational structures and systems, along with the formulation of regional development plans. These efforts aimed to establish a solid foundation, enabling the new autonomous government to function effectively as an administrative entity.

Reference websites

<https://www.jica.go.jp/oda/project/1203122/index.html>