

# **Japan's Philosophy of Self-Help Efforts in International Development Cooperation: Does It Work in Africa?**

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## **Abstract**

Japan has emerged as a leading actor in international assistance but has often been seen as peripheral to major debates about aid and development. This paper explores Japan's distinctive aid philosophy of supporting the self-help efforts of developing countries while respecting autonomous development and examines the distinct contribution Japan can make to these debates. In order to develop such an argument it is necessary to look into Japan's own recent history of development and the idea of self-help in Japanese society. It is also important to understand the Japanese tradition of perseverance, which differs from traditions of other aid-providing countries. Japanese aid modalities and practices have been supported by these cultural values. The Japanese challenge is to demonstrate the validity of self-help efforts and the possibility of self-reliant development in the most deprived areas.

## **Introduction**

Japan has become a significant donor country, especially since it dramatically expanded its official development assistance (ODA) in the 1980s and early 1990s in line with its steady economic growth and its growing role in the international community. In 1989, Japan superseded the United States as the world's largest donor country. Although the economic deterioration in Japan has recently caused Japan's ODA to shrink, Japan was the top donor country in terms of volume of ODA throughout the 1990s, when the country had a strong desire to become a 'leading' donor (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1995).

Arguments about Japan's aid philosophy were particularly common in the 1980s, when the country attempted to increase its ODA budget. The government of Japan and the Japanese people required proper and understandable reasons for providing ODA to developing countries. Such a situation may be different from that in many American and European countries, where people generally have had a Christian background and Western charitable values. Thus, the Japanese government needed to establish an official and approved aid philosophy and principles of giving. In 1992, the Cabinet formally endorsed the ODA Charter.

Supporting the self-help efforts of developing countries is widely recognized as one of the primary principles of Japanese aid, as described in the Charter. A number of studies have discussed the validity of these self-help ideas in the context of Japanese ODA policy (for example, Watanabe & Kusano 1991; Esyo 1994; Shimomura et al. 1999). However, these

studies target a Japanese audience and therefore, little attention has been given to what self-help efforts mean and how they work in the current policy discussions of the international aid community. Japan's aid policy and development knowledge in comparison to other major aid agencies were recently investigated systematically by King and McGrath (2004). The purpose of the present paper is to explore the prospects of Japan's aid philosophy of self-help efforts (*Jijyo Doryoku* in Japanese) in developing countries and African countries in particular, focusing on the tensions between Japanese and Western aid principles of self-help and ownership as well as on the origin of the Japanese self-help idea.

## **Japanese Philosophy of Development Cooperation**

Japan's ODA approach has often been criticized by the international aid community. The international community tends to focus on an earlier time when Japan generally utilized its ODA for export promotion and securing natural resources. Japan was blamed for its economically-oriented ODA and its poor capacity for implementing aid, and the international community remains critical about the impact and effectiveness of Japanese assistance in developing countries. In terms of aid policy, Japan tends to be peripheral to major debates. This is largely because Japan behaves somewhat differently in terms of the principles and modalities of its ODA.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is the policy-making organ of Japan's ODA, states:

This stance toward aid has been criticized as lacking a philosophical basis. Yet Japan has also been praised for its efforts to respect the autonomy and self-help efforts of recipient nations. Many see the Japanese way as the approach that most closely reflects the essential role of development assistance. All recipient nations place a high value on the fact that Japanese aid does not entail political or economic conditions. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1990, p.19)

It may be said that Japan's ODA is characterized by its non-political dimension, respecting the principle of nonintervention. This policy based on the principles of nonintervention and aid on a request basis is considered to have enhanced the self-reliance of developing countries and to have induced their self-help efforts. On the other hand, the policy is criticized because of the rapid increase in the ODA budget while its implementation system is somewhat neglected (Shimomura et al. 1999, p.63-64). Japan's ODA has a background of World War II reparations to Asian countries, when it was difficult for Japan to present an aid policy imposing economic and political conditions on recipients. A report by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs states: "This is partly because in the post war (sic) period Japan has tried to avoid exercising political influence in developing countries especially because of the unfortunate history of Japan's colonial management" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1989, p.21).

In 1992, the government enacted the ODA Charter in order to clarify and validate the objectives of providing ODA. According to the Charter, which outlines the philosophy and basic thinking in a comprehensive way, there are three points that form the fundamental philosophy of Japan's ODA: humanitarian considerations, recognition of interdependence in the international community and environmental conservation. In addition to these issues, the Charter strongly claims that "Japan attaches central importance to the support for the self-help efforts of developing countries towards economic take-off" (ODA Charter adopted in 1992, Section 1). Arguably, the fundamental stance of Japan's ODA is to support the self-help efforts of developing countries since making such efforts is considered to be a prerequisite for developing countries to have a sense of ownership. This Japanese aid philosophy of self-help efforts has been consistent and unchanged for many years (Shinozuka 2000, p.316).

More than ten years have passed since the first ODA Charter was endorsed. Since then, international thought on ODA as well as the Japanese social and economic environment has changed to a great extent. Consequently, the Japanese government revised the ODA Charter in 2003. The idea of self-help efforts has been more visibly highlighted in the new Charter, which clearly states:

The most important philosophy of Japan's ODA is to support the self-help efforts of developing countries based on good governance, by extending cooperation for their human resource development, institution building including development of legal systems, and economic and social infrastructure building, which constitute the basis for these countries' development. Accordingly, Japan respects the ownership of developing countries, and places priorities on their own development strategies. (Revised ODA Charter of 2003, Section 2(1))

It is now apparent that Japan's aid philosophy is chiefly characterized by self-help efforts. It is fair to say that the developing countries themselves are understood to be primarily responsible for their own development and, therefore, donors should be careful not to take actions which might intervene in their domestic affairs. Nevertheless, this Charter was originally written in Japanese and its prime audiences are Japanese. It is essential for Japan to internationalize and rationalize this idea of self-help efforts in a manner that presents it as not just a political announcement.

### **Origin of Japan's Aid Philosophy of Self-Help Efforts**

The philosophy of providing ODA can often be explained in light of the donor's historical experience and values. For the most part, the Japanese people believe that most other bilateral donors have a tradition of Christian beliefs or colonial experience. Japan's aid philosophy of self-help efforts stems from its own recent development experience. As Rix explains:

Japan's foreign aid experience reflects important historical and cultural characteristics. Japan is quick to remind others of its own rapid modernisation process from the Meiji period (1868-1912) onwards, based on deliberate adaptation and learning from the West, strong internal leadership and control, conscious policies to promote education and national awareness, and imperial expansion to support domestic economic growth. It was a successful formula, and as a result the principle of self-reliance among recipients has been entrenched in Japan's current aid policies. At the same time, a sense of charity towards the less fortunate is weak. (Rix 1993, p.15-16)

As Rix notes, the Japanese tend to think less about charity and more about the economic growth of the country. In this regard, an official report by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on ODA states the origin of the self-help idea:

Support of self-help efforts: This reflects the belief in Japan that true development, with economic independence, can be achieved only when a recipient country promotes development strategies through its own self-help efforts. This is a line of thinking derived from Japan's own development experience after World War II and from its experience in giving development assistance to East Asian countries, an idea Japan had advocated before Western donor countries. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1996, p.45)

Thus, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the bases of Japanese self-help efforts in development are two-fold: its own historical experience, and its experience of providing aid to East Asia. The latter would have been rather recently added to the former, given the rapid economic growth of this region. The majority of the Japanese have no direct experience of such development; however, most Japanese would favor this principle of providing aid.

There are two other Japanese aid principles which also reflect the Japanese stance of respecting the self-help efforts of developing countries: the policy of providing assistance only upon recipient request, and the obligation of the recipient country to bearing such local costs as may arise (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1989, p.21). The Ministry states, "When providing aid, whether in the form of ODA loans or grant aid, rather than accepting the entire burden itself, Japan assumes that the developing country will make self-help efforts, including payment of the necessary local cost portion or land allowances, and that each project will be implemented as a joint enterprise" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1991, p.23). Japan assumes that accepting the entire burden discourages self-help efforts and has an ultimately negative impact on sustainable development. Nevertheless, these principles have been evolving to a certain extent; the request basis principle is becoming more proactive through policy dialogue with developing countries, and Japan is also becoming more flexible with regard to local costs.

It is important to examine why Japan and the Japanese are so dedicated to the idea of

self-help efforts. This issue is closely associated with Japanese education and values. Let us consider this self-help principle with reference to how Western researchers perceive education in Japan. Duke explores a clue to Japanese economic growth from various educational angles:

One of the major motivating spirits that has buoyed this society through adversity in its tenacious pursuit of postwar national regeneration can best be illustrated by the exclamation, “Gambare!” “Persevere!” “Endure!” “Don’t give up!” Throughout the lifetime of the Japanese they are surrounded, encouraged, and motivated by the spirit of gambare. It begins at home. The school takes it up from the first day the child enters classroom. It continues through graduation. The company then thrives on it. It engulfs every facet of society. It is employed in work, study, and even at play and leisure. Gambare is integral to being Japanese. (Duke 1986, p.122)

In more recent study, Singleton also comments on the Japanese culture of persistence: “I have been specifically impressed by a Japanese emphasis on gambaru (persistence) in explaining and organizing education. This contrasts with an American emphasis on ability (that is, IQ, intelligence, talent) and is an underlying assumption of a Japanese cultural theory of learning” (Singleton 1995, p.8). In Japanese schools, the children’s academic performance is considered to depend not on their ability but on the intensity of their perseverance. It is assumed that all children have equal ability and that every child can perform well if he/she does his/her best. Likewise, in the context of development, the Japanese tend to think that every developing country can develop well if people make the necessary effort and devote themselves to the development process.

The culture of perseverance is widespread in Japan and is reflected in current development assistance policies. This attitude toward perseverance leads the Japanese to value self-reliance: “The goal of Japanese self-reliance is, finally, a capacity for self-motivated effort” (White 1987, p.113). It is noteworthy that the Japanese have a high regard for ‘self-’ and for the capacity of the individual to work efficiently in a team; this is quite different from Western individualism. Perseverance is a foundation in various activities conducted in Japanese society and is believed to create and develop self-reliant attitudes. Making self-help efforts is therefore seen as the basis of self-reliance.

### **Japanese ‘Self-Help Efforts’ and Western ‘Ownership’**

It is recognized that the New Development Strategy of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development’s Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC) is characterized by the key concepts of ownership and partnerships. With regard to the idea of self-help efforts, the DAC states: “The record of the last 50 years, from Marshall Plan aid to the network of development partnerships now evolving, shows that *the efforts of countries and societies to help themselves* have been the main ingredients in their success” (italics mine; DAC 1996, p.1). The Japanese government was satisfied with this Strategy because

the concept of self-help efforts by developing countries, which Japan had emphasized for many years in development assistance, was thereby acknowledged in the international community. Although it was not common for Japan to take the initiative in international policy-making, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1998, p.17) recognized that “Japan played a key role in the preparation of this documentation....”

The international aid community has agreed to respect the ownership of developing countries; however, the question remains as to how the Western or international sense of ‘ownership’ is related to the Japanese idea of ‘self-help efforts’. Recent debates in international development assistance seem to indicate that a sense of ownership originates with the donors, and hence it is given externally to the recipient country. Ownership may be partly a reflection of the structural adjustment policy which was imposed on recipient policy in the 1980s. On the other hand, the idea of self-help efforts is more endogenous and participatory. It could be said that ownership is likely to be based on a top-down approach, while self-help efforts are more bottom-up and process-oriented. Ownership is generally given to those who have at least minimum capacity since ownership without such capacity results in failure. Thus, it may be that self-help efforts are a necessary condition for ownership.

The self-help efforts of developing countries have often been interpreted as ownership in Japan. However, as we have seen, ownership appears to be different from self-help efforts in fundamental ways. Because of this difference, the international community has not yet arrived at a precise understanding of the Japanese sense of self-help efforts. Additionally, the definition of ownership is very vague and there is no consensus on ways of strengthening and monitoring it (Makino 2003, p.26). In practice, the governments of developing countries tend to place a higher priority on accountability to donors than on accountability to their own people and ownership of developing countries thus appears to be admitted on condition that accountability to donors is secured (Ibid.).

In addition to the above gap between Japan and the West, there appears to be a more crucial difference between the two parties in their philosophies of development assistance. Ellerman presents the conflict between help and self-reliance:

The assumed goal is transformation towards autonomous development on the part of the doers, with the doers helping themselves. The problem is how can the helpers supply help that actually furthers rather than overrides or undercuts the goal of the doers helping themselves? ...And if the doers are to become autonomous, then what is the role of the external helpers? This paradox of supplying help to self-help, “assisted self-reliance” or assisted autonomy, is the fundamental conundrum of development assistance. Over the years, the debate about aid, assistance and capacity-building keep circling around and around this basic conundrum. (Ellerman 2002, p.1)

Japanese self-help debates must examine and resolve this conundrum of development assistance. In Ellerman’s criticism of much development aid, we find his overturning the common assumption that the helpers have correct knowledge while the doers do not. There

does not often seem to be a spirit of equality between the helpers and the doers. This is in direct contrast with Japanese thought, in which it is believed that learning should also happen on the helper side: "The concept of Japan's development cooperation is characterised by knowledge sharing in order to create local knowledge. The concept of inter-learning is probably linked with the Japanese tradition of knowledge development" (Sawamura 2002, p.343). A counterpart person for a Japan-assisted project in Ghana states that "We must learn from each other and help to develop our education" (Benneh 2001, p.40).

On the other hand, many Western countries tend to have confidence in their knowledge and to apply what they believe developing countries need. According to Orr, "Western nations have for generations promoted Christianity in developing countries and are therefore quite used to 'selling' an idea in the poorer regions of the world" (Orr 1990, p.139). In her critical review of aid projects in Africa, Lancaster (1999, p.224) states that "The challenge confronting the donors is finding the right balance between control and diffidence." Will we still need to 'control' developing countries in an era of partnerships in international cooperation? Given the present international environment in which many aid agencies are increasingly confident about their own views, King (1999, p.27) discusses new challenges to development assistance and suggests that the Japanese philosophy be taken into consideration: "the Japanese model of development assistance -- with its strong emphasis on local self-reliance -- should be looked at more closely by other aid providers."

## **Japan's Growing Confidence in Its ODA**

In the past, Japan may have been eagerly attempting to catch up with other, more experienced donor countries, yet these countries have offered more criticism than praise of Japan's ODA. This criticism seems to have been based primarily on the aid modalities and approaches. For example, Japan expanded its ODA volume without strengthening the capacity of aid personnel. The judgment of other donor countries is useful if we take it into account in attempting to improve Japanese international assistance. But what is more critical is that Japan does not have its roots in Western civilization and therefore has its own unique ideas about development, which may not be fully understood by Western donors. With its growing confidence in providing ODA, Japan has sometimes been frustrated when working with other donors. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs states:

Japan, as the only non-Western developed country having had a period of developing after World War II, has built a rich stock of experiences during its own economic development process and can make them available for developing countries through aid, with (sic) respecting recipient's own values and needs. Indeed, this is Japan's unique contribution to the international community as well as its major responsibility. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1991a, p.80-81)

This kind of confidence has its origins in the dramatic economic development achieved

in East Asia and the subsequent publication of *The East Asian Miracle* by the World Bank (1993). The prosperous Japanese economy in the late 1980s and early 1990s further supported this confidence. The new Japanese confidence can be seen in the following:

The Japanese way of extending aid is a little different from that of other donor countries like the United States and France which tend to try to influence the domestic economies and administrative policies of the recipient countries by sending their government officials to the departments concerned in the recipient countries in charge of development. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1989, p.21)

Japan itself is particularly critical of the United States and France, which frequently impose their own preferences and values on the recipient country. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs distinguishes the Japanese position from that of the United States and France:

Japan's approach differs considerably from that of the United States, which regards freedom and democracy as universal values and has made the promotion of these ideas a basic component of its aid activities. There is also a sharp contrast between Japan's position and the emphasis that France places on the promotion of the French language and culture through its aid. As much as possible, Japan strives to avoid the imposition of its own political values or attitudes toward economic development on its aid activities. Instead it has sought to discover, through a process of dialogue based on requests from recipient countries, the best approach to development for each individual country. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1991b, p.19)

Arguments against Western aid modalities were often made in the early 1990s when Japan was prosperous and confident about its own economy. In 1993, when 'aid fatigue' was common in developed nations, Japan hosted the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) in order to raise international awareness of development in Africa. The Tokyo Declaration, adopted at the conference, called for ownership and partnership towards self-reliant development in Africa. In 1998 and 2003, TICAD II and III were held and Japan tried to take the initiative in African development. Now, the question is whether the Japanese stance of supporting the self-help efforts of developing countries will function in African nations.

### **Validity of Self-Help Efforts in Africa**

Japan's aid philosophy of self-help efforts is rooted in its own experience in which it achieved rapid economic growth after World War II through its own efforts while receiving international assistance. The economic growth achieved by East Asian countries further validated Japan's position with respect to self-help efforts in development cooperation. Japan explicitly places a strong emphasis on the self-help efforts of developing countries. Generally,



developing countries prefer to act on their own initiatives and therefore prefer Japan's recipient-friendly policy. However, many African countries lack administrative capacity and as a result, Japan's policy toward their initiatives and self-help efforts cannot necessarily be straightforward.

Leaving aside the question of capacity, it must be recognized that, even if the African people make efforts, such efforts do not induce corresponding government efforts in many African nations. In these countries, self-help efforts do not generate self-reliant attitudes to development and do not bring the country's ownership. With few incentives or results, the people will eventually stop making self-help efforts on their own, creating a situation of aid-dependency. For this reason, capacity-building and good governance are becoming more and more essential in Africa.

As part of its aid programs to Africa, and based on its experience in providing ODA in Asia, Japan is making significant attempts to disseminate this self-help idea to Africa:

On a per capita basis, Africa receives 5.9 times the assistance for people in the developing countries of Asia. There are various reasons for the differences in results achieved from assistance. Nevertheless, the philosophy of ownership, or self-help efforts on the part of a developing country, stands out as a very significant factor. Asian countries have actively been trying to promote self-development. Japan has provided assistance to those countries, while respecting their own efforts. This approach is increasingly being recognized as an important guideline in discussing the future development of Africa. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1998, p.90)

Takahashi (1998) showed that Japanese assistance supporting self-help efforts has not been effective in the least among less developed countries (LLDCs). His argument concludes that technical cooperation is becoming more critical because of the importance of capacity-building and a foundation of good governance. It is necessary to try to find opportunities for self-help efforts by the African people and to encourage their participation and cost-sharing (Ibid.). The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), which demonstrated African ownership and commitments, promotes new development initiatives in Africa. This initiative was strongly supported by the members of G8 in Kananaskis Summit (2002), and Japan further committed itself to supporting NEPAD in TICAD III (2003).

Arguably, many African communities traditionally have a philosophy of self-help, such as *Harambee* (literally means self-help or working together) in Swahili, and self-help efforts can therefore be a foundation for development despite the issue of administrative capacity. The self-help effort as it is understood in the context of Japanese aid is the commitment of the people to their country's economic development or the government's commitment endorsed by their people's resolution (Kohama 2000, p.287). The question under consideration is whether supporting self-help efforts works in the present situation of African development, in which self-help efforts at the grassroots level do not necessarily guarantee their ownership or development by the government.

The Japanese government is confident of this self-help idea even in Africa, and states that “To support the development of the African countries toward realizing the targets of the New Development Strategy (halving the number of people in extreme poverty by 2015, universal primary education by 2015, etc.), it will be vital that the African countries exploit their own potential, and that the self-help efforts of these countries (ownership) are respected, boosting their ability to form and implement their own development visions” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1999, p.20). Japan’s philosophy of self-help is not merely a question of aid policy or principle, but of tradition and culture deeply embedded in the Japanese mind.

Nevertheless, making self-help efforts is not an equivalent of having ownership, but a prerequisite for it. Is it possible for African countries to have real ownership in the present system of development cooperation? In general, donors tend to control aid, leaving recipient governments without a sense of ownership over their development efforts (Carlsson et al. 1997). Van de Walle and Johnston (1996, p.55) assessed the impact of aid in Africa and point out that “Donors still tend to dominate the project cycle and pay inadequate attention to the preferences of the government or project beneficiaries.” It is easy to say that the recipient country ‘owns’ the aid project, but many developing countries lack the capacity to claim their priorities or approaches in negotiating with donors; in practice, they feel that the project is externally driven. The World Bank (2000, p.5) also remarks that “It remains to be seen how well partnerships can resolve the tensions between the objectives of recipients and individual donors, and how far the behavior of donors will change to facilitate African ownership of its development agenda.”

Van de Walle and Johnston provide an example of nominal ownership in international assistance:

In Ghana, for instance, a British-sponsored five-year civil service reform program was implemented without the full support of senior civil servants. British consultants and a small team of Ghanaians dominated the design and implementation of the project. Although the project reached many of its short-term targets, its long-term sustainability was in doubt, because key officials perceived it as externally driven. A government review of the project found that it was tied to the donor’s timetable, sequencing, and conditionalities rather than the government’s plans. (Van de Walle & Johnston 1996, p.58-59)

It is critical to note here that the project achieved its short-term goals, but its long-term sustainability was questionable. Many donors are increasingly worried about the monitoring and evaluation of the projects they support. If after only a couple of years they are required to show positive results, they may in reality tend to pay less attention to long-term objectives and their sustainability.

A project for improving the quality of secondary science and mathematics education through systematizing in-service teacher training in Kenya is proving to be a unique example of Japanese aid in Africa with respect to ownership and sustainability. Njuguna and Sugiyama

(2003, p.15), both key participants in the project, explain that “Financial sustainability, which is a major concern, was successfully established through cost-sharing and accountability among stakeholders. At the same time a sense of ownership of the project was deeply cultivated through frequent sensitization activities.” It is interesting that the cost-sharing, which was said to have discouraged participation in the era of structural adjustment, has been found to promote ownership in this project. This demonstrates that people do not always view costs negatively, and that it is more important how donor countries or outsiders approach recipient countries and their people, that is, whether they can create true partnerships.

Not all assistance supporting self-help efforts is equally successful. It is likely that, in many Asian countries where the idea of supporting self-help efforts functions well due to long tradition and cultural attitudes, the people are willing to make such efforts because they have experienced tangible positive results of their efforts. However, much international assistance to African countries has been given in ways that disregard the dignity of the African people and discourage their self-help. Consider the following quotation: “‘If you have come to help me, you can go home again. But if you see my struggle as a part of your survival, then perhaps we can work together.’ This was an Australian Aboriginal woman who said this, but it could well have been an African” (Brown 1997, p.8). The tradition of working together along with self-help, known as *Tirisano* in South Africa, is commonly found in many African countries. In order to achieve the best outcome for Japanese aid in Africa, we need to focus on the long term and allow the African nations the freedom and time they need to exploit their own potential and possibilities.

## Conclusions

Japan's philosophy of aid is characterized by a strong respect for autonomous development and the encouragement of self-help efforts of developing countries. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs describes this idea as having originated in Japan's own development experience in its recent history and in its experience in providing assistance to East Asian countries. In addition to these reasons, there is a Japanese tradition of respecting self-help efforts which has grown out of education in Japan. Respecting self-help is strongly related to having a high regard for self-reliant attitudes. This does not mean that people do not help each other; rather, the efforts of the individual are required to work together to achieve certain goals. What should be emphasized is the equal relationship between donor and recipient: a genuine partnership. Because of this idea of equality, Japan has preferred to use the word ‘cooperation’ rather than assistance or aid. In a characteristic statement, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1997, p.18) declares, “The donor country must address the problem with the developing nation as a partner in a joint effort.” It is certain that each recipient nation acknowledges the Japanese way of respecting autonomous development, however there is some question about its effectiveness in LLDCs like those in Africa.

Ownership of developing countries is of central importance to international development cooperation. The idea of ownership is frequently interpreted as the self-help efforts of the

recipient countries, according to annual reports on ODA in Japan. However, the Western idea of ownership differs from the Japanese idea of self-help efforts. In current development debates, ownership seems to be externally given and has not necessarily been purchased by developing nations. The Japanese view of self-help efforts has grown out of Japanese society and tradition; however, the validity of self-help efforts in African nations which lack administrative capacity is questionable. It is doubtful whether a country which lacks the capacity for planning and implementation can really take initiatives and own its development in the current aid environment. In fact, Japanese cooperation for supporting self-help efforts of African countries rarely does well (Takahashi 1998), and it remains debatable whether such an idea will work in Africa in the short term. However, in order to promote and realize long-term sustainability and autonomous development, the self-help efforts of African countries and their people are a prerequisite to development cooperation, even though clearly these efforts are not sufficient in and of themselves. It is crucial to establish fresh conditions under which self-help efforts work and people can be motivated to take part in these efforts. International assistance should always be supplementary. Development is time-consuming work and requires perseverance both on the part of the recipient and on the part of the donor. The present outcomes-based and knowledge-based aid may have hindered this perseverance.

The Japanese challenge is to demonstrate the validity of self-help efforts and the possibility of self-reliant development in Africa, where the countries are very weak in terms of both human and financial resources. Can Japan facilitate the self-help efforts of African countries and encourage their ownership? Other donor countries and international organizations have different ideas about development assistance and will not necessarily support Japanese ideas. Therefore, Japan must first persuade other donor agencies about the validity and value of self-help efforts and ownership, and must take responsibility for developing new strategies which ensure autonomous and sustainable development in African countries.

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