

**Rural Skill Promotion in Conflict Affected Areas in
the Southern Afghanistan**

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Abstract

Smooth transition from humanitarian assistance to sustainable development is an enormous challenge in the post-conflict peacebuilding process. The United Nations and other donors have focused on reintegration of refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and ex-combatants as well as quick impact labour intensive reconstruction projects during the last decade. Securing sustainable livelihoods of war affected people through those activities seems to be significantly important to reduce fear for their future and uncertainty which otherwise could be a cause for recurrence of conflict. The reintegration process including basic skill training projects for income generation, however, tends to face difficulties to secure sustainability and to create benefit for communities beyond benefit of individuals who took training. Nevertheless, it is necessary for sustainable reintegration to improve well-being not only for particular groups such as returnees but also for other community members.

This paper discusses a method of increasing rural well-being through rural skill promotion in war-torn society using the case of conflict-affected areas in the Southern Afghanistan. JICA Support Programme for Reintegration and Community Development in Kandahar (JSPR) supported by Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) introduced a new approach for rural life improvement. The rural skill promotion project under JSPR is distinct from conventional basic skill training which mainly focuses on income generation for individuals. Instead, the project focuses to improve villager convenience and living conditions. This paper examines the efficacy of the approach based on the evaluation results of the project for hand pump repair. The study found that villagers received benefits from the project by savings in expenditure for repairing hand pump using the local trained technicians rather than hiring technicians from the city. The project has contributed to improving rural well-being at the target area, and enhanced community solidarity and its absorption capacity for reintegration of returnees. Lastly, this paper attempts to share lessons learned and implications for other Asian countries.

Rural Skill Promotion in Conflict Affected Areas in the Southern Afghanistan

1. Introduction

Smooth transition from humanitarian assistance to sustainable development is an enormous challenge in the post-conflict peacebuilding process. During the last decade, the United Nations and other donors have focused on reintegration of refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and ex-combatants as well as quick impact labour intensive reconstruction projects. Securing sustainable livelihoods of war affected people through those activities seems to be significantly important to reduce fear for their future and uncertainty which otherwise could be a cause for recurrence of conflict. The reintegration process including basic skill training projects for income generation, however, tend to face difficulties to recreate sustainable livelihoods and to produce benefit for entire communities beyond benefit of individuals who took training. It is necessary for sustainable reintegration to improve well-being and to mitigate poverty and vulnerability not only for particular groups in a community, such as returnees or ex-combatants but also for other community members.

This paper discusses a method of increasing rural well-being through rural skill promotion in war-torn society using the case of conflict-affected areas in the Southern Afghanistan. JICA Support Programme for Reintegration and Community Development in Kandahar (JSPR) supported by Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) introduced a new approach for rural life improvement. The rural skill promotion project under JSPR is distinct from conventional basic skill training which mainly focuses on the income generation for individuals.

Then, this paper also examines the efficacy of the approach for addressing human security, and evaluates the results of the project. Quality and credibility of the evaluation results, however, were imperfect due to the insufficient skills of local surveyors and the deterioration of security situation in the target area. In addition, some parts of the evaluation are still on-going. Thus, this paper attempts to share lessons learned from experience of the

project in the interim, and identifies implications for other Asian countries.

2. Approach of Rural Skill Promotion

The rural skill promotion project was conducted under JSPR as a programme of the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) of Afghanistan. JSPR introduced this new community-based approach for rural life improvement, for the purpose of empowering communities and increasing absorption capacity of communities for reintegration of returnees. The rural skill promotion project is distinct from conventional basic skill training, because it focuses on improving villager convenience and living conditions rather than income generation for individuals.

MRRD has implemented National Solidarity Programme (NSP) supported by the World Bank and other donors since 2003. Over 16,700 Community Development Councils (CDC) have been established throughout all 34 provinces under NSP for the purpose of strengthening grassroots level governance and implementing small-scale community-led development projects (MRRD, 2007). Regarding the target area of Dand district in Kandahar province, 126 CDCs were established under NSP. The area was affected by the prolonged war and drought. Many of residents in the area were displaced and became refugees or IDPs. Communities were fragmented. Traditional social capital such as *hashar* (collective works) declined. Those issues are serious obstacles to improve rural well-being which is needed to enhance self-reliance of villagers and absorption capacity of communities for promoting sustainable reintegration of displaced persons.

Although the district is close to urban Kandahar city, there is an insufficient number of technicians such as carpenters and mechanics so that the villagers have hired technicians from the city and paid expensive transportation cost. There is huge demand of technicians in the field of infrastructure and equipment repair works under the post-conflict reconstruction process. Hand pump repair, water pump repair, carpentry, and electricity were identified as high priority rural skills according to needs assessment surveys. Technicians in each skill field

are not needed in each village, but can be shared by several villages considering their accessibility and market needs. Therefore, the project selected and trained several villagers from each cluster of CDCs, and simultaneously by CDC's facilitation, established a system for utilising trained technicians. Figure 1 outlines the utilisation system in Dand district.

JSPR conducted the rural skill promotion project in two stages in cooperation with local NGOs in the field of hand pump repair, carpentry, electricity, and water pump repair. The trainees were selected from different areas in the district based on criteria which included motivation and commitment of candidates and their vulnerability in addition to geographical priority. In 2007, JSPR conducted an ex-post evaluation survey on hand pump repair skills one year after the completion of first stage training. As the pilot project, 36 villagers were trained as technicians for hand pump repair, because there were a number of broken shallow well hand pumps that had been installed during the drought period and after the collapse of Taliban regime. The project selected three trainees from each of 12 CDC cluster. The three persons were expected to provide their skills for their cluster area which consisted of around 10 CDCs. According to the survey, 672 hand pumps were repaired by the technicians over the entire district during one year after the completion of training (JSPR, 2007).

Villager satisfaction for the hand pump repair project was extremely high. All of the interviewed villagers knew about the project and the people who received the training. As a result of the project, the villagers no longer hire technicians from the city, but instead ask local technicians to repair hand pumps in villages. Table 1 compares repair costs between the trained technicians and technicians from the city (JSPR, 2007).

There is more than 400 percent difference between them in the weighted average. Transportation cost from city to villages seems to be the main cause of the difference since cost tends to be higher in the remote areas than the areas near city according to the survey results. The villagers are satisfied with the local technicians because of cheap cost, quicker response time, and their sufficient skills. Most of the villagers think that work quality of local

technicians is better than technicians from the city.

In addition, much of the hand pump repair work was done free of charge. Two thirds of the local technicians performed hand pump repair work as voluntary works for their communities. This means that they worked free of charge, because they tended to hesitate to ask poor villagers for a fee for their work. Also, the villagers expected that the trainees should work for the community free, because they had been selected as the trainees for the hand pump project. One third of them charged a fee to the villagers, and some of them worked for the community free of charge only sometimes. Fee for hand pump repairing depended on the severity of the broken hand pump problem. According to the trained technicians, the weighted average was Af.243. This is almost equivalent to wages for one day's work in general in Kandahar or the cost for one washer in the hand pump. Income from hand pump repair work seemed to be insufficient for some technicians and for many of them it was zero. In fact, there is no local technician who is working full-time for hand pump repairing. They all have another work as a main income source. Many of them are farmers and earn Af.2000 to Af.3000 in a month. Some of them earn more than Af.5000 per month through other jobs such as shopkeeper or working for a travel agency. Their average monthly income excluding hand pump repairing is Af.3670 (JSPR, 2007). Thus, hand pump repair work can be said to be part-time or voluntary work for their community. Compared with villager satisfaction, the aspect of income generation for local technicians is limited.

The approach is different from conventional type of skills development as technical and vocational education and training (TVET), although both TVET and the rural skill promotion project result in skill training. In Afghanistan, a number of skill training projects have been implemented since the collapse of Taliban regime. For instance, a number of carpenters were trained under the DDR (Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration) process, although job opportunity was limited especially in the rural areas. Afghanistan New Beginning Programme (ANBP) is a famous and large-scale project which included skill

training for demobilised ex-combatants. According to the interviews with the ANBP implementing partners, however, employment ratio and incomes of trained ex-combatants were unclear and they did not seem to have a positive effect to their villages. According to the UNDP evaluation report, in addition, effectiveness of skill training under ANBP is inarticulate, although the programme achieved the objective of disarmament and demobilisation of ex-combatants (UNDP, 2006b). In short-term, the conventional projects seem to be effective to secure livelihoods of particular groups such as ex-combatants by providing skills and some daily allowance. It is meaningful to mitigate fears of people in the critical stage of post-conflict peacebuilding. In the long-term, however, it has limitation for both effectiveness and sustainability. Generally, preferential treatment of particular groups such as ex-combatants can lead to jealousies and tensions within the community (Goovaerts, P., Gasser, M., and Inbal, A.B., 2005). This is a serious obstacle to long-term sustainable reintegration. Thus, the skills development as part of the community-based approach is needed to secure sustainability of training effects and communal harmony, especially in a war-torn society.

The rural skill promotion project, on the other hand, seems to contribute steadily improving rural well-being beyond the trained persons because of the establishment of utilisation system together with CDCs as a community-based organisation.

3. Efficacy of the Approach on Human Security

Recovering from violent conflict involves the important issue of human security. The recovery should include not only quick impacts to people but also building foundations for long-term development. The process needs to empower the people and community struggling to reach sustainable community development by comprehensively addressing both “freedom from want/deprivation” and “freedom from fear”.

As the result of project, the villagers received benefits from the project as savings for repairing hand pumps using the trained local technicians rather than hiring technicians from

the city. In addition, villagers could increase their access to safe drinking water. It can be said that this approach is working for poverty reduction and improvement of sustainable livelihoods for villagers in the areas. Concerning the impact to the technicians, however, the financial benefit of the skill of hand pump repair was limited. For other skills such as carpentry in the second stage of the project, although the ex-post evaluation is progress, it is expected that the trained technicians will be able to have sufficient income not only from public users, but also from private customers. In addition, the process of project execution has enhanced the capacity of CDCs through enforcement of the utilisation system, although the level of facilitation and support by CDCs have been insufficient so far.

Concerning the aspect of “freedom from fear”, on the other hand, the result contributed to promoting reintegration of displaced persons through the improvement of rural well-being. Improved condition of communities was positive for increasing absorption capacity of communities for promoting reintegration of returnees and IDPs. In addition, the local technicians who are mostly returnees felt that they became part of community through their work. The process and practice of the project seems to have enhanced community solidarity and absorption capacity.

The approach focused not only on training of technicians from vulnerable groups such as returnees, but also on villagers who are neighbours and a beneficiaries of rural skill promotion. Therefore, it was relevant and effective for improving the condition of human security, especially in the context of rural development in conflict affected areas.

4. Lessons Learned and Implications for Asian Countries

The case of rural skill promotion in Southern Afghanistan seems to be unique and unlike that in other Asian countries, especially in South East Asia, in terms of culture, climate and structure of livelihood. Nevertheless, there are implications for Asian countries, especially for post-conflict areas such as Aceh, Mindanao, and Sri Lanka. Important lessons learned include use of community-based approach, staying within the existing culture of society, and

use of appropriate techniques.

Firstly, communities facilitated villagers to utilise the local technician. The project involved CDCs at the beginning and established a system which included introduction of trained local technicians to villagers, so that villagers could locate local technicians easily. Thus, the role of CDCs as a community-based organisation was crucial to the process. Rural skill promotion should be designed and implemented with community-based approach including social capital building and networking rather than just conducting skill training for particular groups such as returnees or ex-combatants. Especially in a society fragmented due to violent conflicts, it seems to be necessary for both trainees and community members to add a reconciliation component to the project. In addition, communities tend to be disrupted in post-conflict areas. JSPR worked with CDCs which are communities rebuilt through the process of NSP. For areas without an existing community-based organisation, it seems to be necessary to establish one and develop its capacity through the intervention process.

Secondly, voluntary work is part of Pashton society in the Southern Afghanistan. Most of people in the target area are Pashton, although the ethnic group can be divided hundreds of small tribes. The local technicians tend to be willing to work for their community free of charge rather than as an obligation to community. Utilising traditional social capital and culture is a key for success to establish sustainable systems. During project design, it is necessary to identify such positive human and social capital through participatory researches.

Lastly, the contents of the skill training courses allowed acquisition of the necessary skills in the field. The training course included both classroom training and practical training in the field. For hand pump repair skill, for instance, the 36 trainees actually repaired 82 broken hand pumps in the target area in addition to having classroom training. In addition, some public facilities in villages such as furniture of schools were repaired by trainees during the second stage practical trainings. Trainees acquired practical repair skills and developed their relationship with villagers through the process. Techniques for repair works met needs

required in the field, because the project hired a local trainer who had sufficient field experience and appropriate knowledge of repair techniques. Considering the reconstruction needs, repairing facility and equipment seems to be as important as construction and installation of new ones. Training techniques in the field of plumbing and masonry as well as skills for the project could be applicable in other conflict affected areas in Asia. Concerning skills for women, JSPR could not apply the approach to women in Kandahar due to cultural restriction on female movement. However, there are countries in Asia where women can work the same as men. In those countries, the approach can be applicable for women in addition to conventional skills areas for women such as tailoring, soup making, and poultry farming.

5. Conclusion

This paper examined efficacy of the approach of rural skill promotion using the case in Afghanistan. The approach seemed to be effective to mitigate fear and deprivation through the improvement of rural well-being in conflict affected areas. Some of lessons learned from the case including utilisation of locally available resources can be applied to other conflict affected areas in Asia. However, the evaluation result implied that it may be difficult for local technicians to work with communities continuously without any charge, because they need to purchase spare parts of equipment and consumable goods. A cost recovery system may have to be considered to secure long-term sustainability, especially in use of skills for public facilities. For other Asian countries, use of cost recovery system seems to be more crucial for securing sustainability than Afghanistan.

Further research will be conducted concerning the second stage of project which consists of more profitable skills. Simultaneously, JSPR is continuously supporting to build capacity of CDCs in some of villages in the target area. It is expected that the research and intervention process will produce further lessons learned concerning rural skill promotion not only for developing an effective system but also for the aspect of income generation.

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Figure 1

Image of Utilisation System of Technicians



Table 1**Repair Cost Comparison for a Hand Pump**

	Technician from City		Trained technicians	
	Particular Case	Weighted Average	Particular Case	Weighted Average
Highest Case	1500	1032	500	320
Lowest Case	300	584	0	80
Average	-	805	-	180

Note. Unit price is Afghani. 49 Afghani = 1 U.S. Dollar (as of August 2007)