

Sustainable Development Goals: The Conflict between Sustainability and Development

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Incubators donated as
Japan's ODA
(taken by the author in 2004,
Dhaka, Bangladesh)

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Structure

1. The origin of the conflict: Universality
2. Japan's shifts towards non-poor countries and non-poor issues
3. Final remarks: What academia of the North-East Asia should do

1. The origin of the conflict: *Universality*

2012 East Asian Regional Consultation by UNDP

- Consultation to leaders of development-related research institutes in East Asia concerning HDR 2012, 2013 and key concepts of SDGs.
- A focal issue on SDGs: Whether SDGs should be “universal” or “developmental” (UNDP 2012).
 - MDGs were “developmental” because **for the poor by the poor and the rich.**
 - The question was if SDGs can be “universal” in the sense that **for the poor and the rich.**
- The delegate from the government of Japan pushed “universality” so that the Japanese nationals may directly benefit from efforts towards SDGs.

The Conflict embedded into SDGs

- 17 SDGs are an integration of sustainability and development.
- Sustainability and development are not harmonious per se. This is the reason why we need “sustainable development” which makes the two concerted.
- There is a risk that some parties favor a part of 17 goals over the rest.
 - For the Japanese, sustainability-related goals sound more familiar than those of poverty reduction.
 - Responses by the Japanese to Syrian refugees to Europe.
 - Technological implication: Japan may argue that it has comparative advantage in handling sustainability more than poverty.

The Universality Principle is against Poverty Reduction

- The concept of universality looks beautiful unless this is placed at the other side of “development-focus (poverty reduction)”.
- Some efforts have been made to save the concept of universality (UNEP and UN OHCHR 2015).
- North-East Asia Development Cooperation Forum should watch whether donors weaken focus to poverty reduction (philosophy of MDGs).

2. Japan's shifts towards non-poor countries and non-poor issues

Japan's Emphasis on “National Interests”

- Japan's new Development Cooperation Charter, which took over ODA Charter in Feb. 2015, spells out “national interests” for the first time in charters on Japan's cooperation.
- What symbolize alteration in wording: From *ODA* to *Development Cooperation*
 - Allowing security-related cooperation.
 - Admitting cooperation to middle/high income countries (Japan becomes near-sighted in distance).
 - Facilitating participations beyond ODA-related agents: Business; philanthropy; NGOs; local governments; peace keeping operation
- **All dilute the focus of poverty reduction.**

3. Final Remarks: What academia of North-East Asia should do

- To remind governments and people of seriousness of ongoing poverty and human rights violations.
 - A consequence is that North-East Asian academia must pay attention to conflict, forced migration and climate changes, which accentuate poverty.
 - These challenges are likely to take place far away from North-East Asia, so that people tend to avert eyes and to run into sweeter aspects such as win-win cooperation and burden sharing which pushes workload to non-public sectors.

References

- UNDP (2012) “East Asian Regional Consultation on the Human Development Reports and Measurement of Progress,” presented at the meeting “East Asian Regional Consultation on Human Development Report and Measurement of Human Development Progress,” March 13, 2012, JICA Research Institute.
- [UNEP and UN OHCHR \(2015\) “Universality in the Post 2015 Sustainable Development Agenda,” UNEP Post 2015 Note #9.](#)