

Policy Brief - BEGIN: Basic Education for Growth Initiative

Policy Summary

In 2002, ahead of the annual G8 Summit, Japan devised a policy, which would dictate how the country would provide aid for education to developing countries. The policy “BEGIN: Basic Education for Growth Initiative,” is a guiding principle in why aid will be distributed to countries in order to achieve education for all. Through thoughtful ideas emphasizing the ownership of local governments, the recognition of cultural diversity and the promotion of community involvement, Japan aims to be a guiding force in educational aid. The main areas of priority for Japan are:

1. Assistance for ensuring access to education
2. Assistance for improving quality of education
3. Improvement of management of education

Factors and Influences

As a member of the G8 since its inception, Japan has long sought to provide assistance to developing countries. With the G8, Japan participated in three very important landmark conferences at the turn of the century that led to a “call-for-action,” which greatly influenced Japan’s policy. In 2000, the Dakar Framework for Action, which called for specific strategies in order to achieve education for all, was established. Also in 2000, the UN adopted the Millennium Development Goals, which included the need for universal primary education by 2015. Lastly, in 2002, the UN held a special session for children which sought to “building a world fit for children” which also focused on the need for quality education. As a country with a strong educational foundation, which in the 2000 PISA results scored well above the OECD averages for mathematical and scientific literacy, Japan wants to be a leading actor in educational aid for developing countries. This policy further reflects many of the goals set forth in an August 1999 Japanese policy entitled, “Medium-Term Policy on Official Development Assistance,” which specifies basic education as a high priority issue for Japan’s assistance.

Critical Analysis

In the 1980’s, Japan grew to be one of the largest donors of international aid, second only to the USA, however much of the aid dollars were directed at countries within the Asian region. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Asian countries received 60.7% of Japan’s aid in 2002 exactly when this policy was introduced. This number is contrasted with 8.7% that African countries received in the same year. Considering the placement of this policy on MOFA’s website in the *African Regional Affairs* section that seems to be an interesting statistic. Not until 2005 did an African country make the top five list of recipients for Japan’s foreign aid. This further supports an idea that the ultimate reason for Japan’s aid giving is to further their own economic interests (Hook and Chang 2009). Hook and Chang further state that Japan directs the majority of its funds to countries with whom they have a strong trade relationship. Considering the current lack of trade relations between Japan and the African continent, perhaps this explains the eagerness of this policy. While the policy seems to set out theoretical guidelines for aid giving, it does not address the particulars of how this aid will be distributed. Perhaps Japan is relying too heavily on international organizations such as UNICEF to facilitate their aid giving. It also fails to address how Japan will measure the impact of its aid. While the policy begins with the quote, “spirit of the one hundred sacks of rice” as a metaphor to lead this policy, like the story itself, the policy fails to address the “how” of such investments.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

- Focus on education for all
- Includes an ideal of cultural sensitivity
- Desires to work with international partners
- Draws on Japan's own educational experiences
- Follows previous Japanese policy

Weaknesses

- Does not address implementation practices
- Does not address how to measure the effect of aid
- Does not address stake in the movement
- Does not address Japan's role beyond aid giving
- Does not address actual finances
- Seems to limit itself to Africa region
- Higher education is not addressed

Opportunities

- Expand Japan's traditional country relationships
- Build Japan's soft power image
- Aid dollars could help countries obtain Dakar & Millennium Development goals
- Allow developing countries to obtain stronger financial independence
- Potential to raise Africa's status

Threats

- Is aid the best course of action?
- Are the cultural differences between Japan & Africa too large to overcome
- Perpetuating the G8's negative image
- Exacerbate developing countries need for continued aid relief
- Further corruption tied of aid dollars

Reference List:

Hook, S. W. and Zhang, G., 1998. Japan's aid policy since the Cold War: Rhetoric and reality'. *Asian Survey*, 38, 1051-66.