

Sustainable development goals and Japan -- sustainability overshadows poverty reduction

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The Development Cooperation Charter of Japan, which took over the ODA (Official Development Assistance) Charter in February 2015, drives Japan's cooperation towards non-poor countries and non-poverty issues. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) put Japan forward in these directions. As a result, in Japan the focus on global poverty reduction is overshadowed by its national interests and sustainability under the concept of universality, which was a core principle of the SDGs as differentiated from the Millennium Development Goals.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals; ODA; ODA Charter; Development Cooperation Charter; Japan; universality

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Sustainable Development Goals and Japan: Sustainability Overshadows Poverty Reduction*

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Abstract

The Development Cooperation Charter of Japan, which took over the ODA (Official Development Assistance) Charter in February 2015, drives Japan's cooperation towards non-poor countries and non-poverty issues. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) put Japan forward in these directions. As a result, in Japan the focus on global poverty reduction is overshadowed by its national interests and sustainability under the concept of universality, which was a core principle of the SDGs as differentiated from the Millennium Development Goals.

* This author benefitted from discussion made at the second North-East Asia Development Cooperation Forum held at JICA Research Institute, Tokyo for October 31 - November 1, 2015. This article is an offspring of this author's presentation at the session in the Forum, entitled "Sustainable Development Goals – roles of development cooperation of North-East Asian countries", where this author represented Japan and three other delegates represented China, Korea and Russia. The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not represent the official positions of either author's affiliation or JASID.

1. Introduction

The year 2015 will be remembered as a critical point relative to Japan's stance towards international cooperation. In February the Cabinet approved Japan's new Development Cooperation Charter, which replaced the ODA (Official Development Assistance) Charter. The concept of "Development Cooperation" is supposed to cover a wider domain of cooperation than that put into the "ODA". A symbolic difference between the two concepts is that while the ODA highlights assistance to low income countries the scope of Development Cooperation explicitly includes middle and high income countries. There are other differences that are detailed in next section.

In September 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which replaced the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (UNGA 2015). As discussed in Section 3, the principle of universality incorporated into the SDGs also dilutes the poverty-focus among the seventeen goals. This attenuation of focus of the SDGs on poverty reduction reflects the switch from the ODA Charter to the Development Cooperation Charter of Japan. Thus, two transformations, i.e., one from MDGs to SDGs and the other from the ODA Charter to the Development Cooperation Charter, go hand in hand towards a relative distraction from poverty reduction in low income countries for Japan. The former transformation makes sustainability overshadow poverty reduction, while the latter transformation further weakens the attention to poverty in Japan. As shown in Section 3, the government of Japan advocated the principle of universality, which made the government of Japan act for the benefits of the Japanese nationals under the name of international cooperation. This is the main point this author will argue in this article.

The above argument is formulated by analyses of published information and resources given to the author when he served for the government of Japan as an external expert. The rest of this article is organized as follows. In Section 2 the contents of Japan's new Development Cooperation Charter are described. There are some distinctive features that were not included in the previous ODA Charter and are newly introduced into the Development Cooperation Charter. In Section 3 how Japan participated in the formation of the SDGs is discussed. After elaborating the open discussion process known as the Open Working Group, which was prepared for all national governments in 2014, an ad hoc consultation meeting conducted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for East Asian experts in March 2012 is introduced. A delegate representing the government of Japan presented the skeleton of Japan's proposal for post 2015 global goals, which indicated Japan's attitude on its post 2015 agenda. At the meeting a key principle of SDGs, namely universality, was advocated by Japan's delegate and most of the other East Asian participants. The final section concludes this article.

2. Establishment of Japan's Development Cooperation Charter

2.1. From ODA Charter to Development Cooperation Charter

The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) has been the ruling party in Japan for most of the time since the end of World War II. Meanwhile, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) led the government from 2009 through 2012. In June 2010 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) published a guiding principle toward international cooperation under the DPJ's administration in a report entitled "Enhancing Enlightened National Interest" (MOFA 2010). The title of the report shows that the DPJ-led government attempted to reconcile national interests and an openness of the Japanese society for global enlightenment.

In December 2012, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) came back to power after a general election. The attitude of the refreshed LDP-led government on incorporation of national interests into international cooperation was similar to that of the DPJ-led government. The most straightforward manifestation lies in the "Development Cooperation Charter", which was approved by the cabinet of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in February 2015. This charter renewed Japan's stance for international cooperation, and superseded the "ODA Charter", which was first stipulated in 1992 and revised in 2003. It is notable that the term "national interests", which did not appear in the ODA Charter, was introduced in the new charter.¹

The swap of "Development Cooperation" for "ODA" in the two charters coincides with a proposed switch of "Aid Effectiveness" for "Development Effectiveness" in the principle of OECD/DAC donors, which was presented by a tripartite research group² of Japan, Republic of Korea and the United States at the Fourth High Level Forum for Aid Effectiveness held in Busan, Korea, in 2011 (Kharas, Makino and Jung 2011, p. 30). While "Aid Effectiveness" has been a concept of effectiveness of the ODA to achieve goals on international development, the new concept of "Development Effectiveness" is for examining effectiveness of all possible resources, not only ODA but also private firms, philanthropists, civil society and so on, towards development. Thus, Development Effectiveness is a convenient substitute for Aid Effectiveness, which reduces burdens on OECD donors. In the switch from Aid Effectiveness to Development Effectiveness, the Japan

¹ Objectives referred to in Section 1 "Basic Philosophy" of 1992 ODA Charter were poverty, humanity, freedom, human rights, democracy, peace, prosperity, environmental conservation, good governance, basic human needs and friendly relations between Japan and all other countries. Meanwhile, the objectives of Japan's ODA appearing in Section 1 "Philosophy: Objectives, Policies, and Priorities" of 2003 ODA Charter are described as "to contribute to the peace and development of the international community, and thereby to help ensure Japan's own security and prosperity." Needless to say, the latter objectives contain national interests of the Japanese as indirect consequences from Japan's contribution to the peace and development of the international community.

² The three institutions are Brookings Institution, JICA Research Institute and Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA).

International Cooperation Agency (JICA) played a leading role on behalf of the government of Japan, as noted by Kharas, Makino and Jung (2011).

The new Development Cooperation Charter of Japan also shares the same orientation with the concept of Development Effectiveness in the sense that the new charter is also directed towards the alleviation of the burden on the central government. Another conspicuous feature of the charter is expansion of coverage of the charter's goals beyond poverty reduction.

The features of the new charter are summarized by MOFA in a four page "outline" of the Development Cooperation Charter posted at MOFA's web site (MOFA 2015). According to the outline the main points of the new charter are four-fold: 1) Philosophy of Japan's Development Cooperation [Non-military cooperation; and human security among others], 2) Development Cooperation in a New Era [inclusive and sustainable growth; and ODA to (possibly medium and high income) countries with special vulnerabilities, among others], 3) Development Cooperation as Catalyst³ [Partnership with private sectors, Japanese local governments and Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) / Civil Society Organization (CSO)], and 4) Participation of Diverse Actors in Development [Promotion of participation of women and other vulnerable groups of people].

2.2. Features of the New Charter

Replacement of the ODA Charter with the Development Cooperation Charter augments both the contributors and the recipients of Japan's cooperation. Figure 1 summarizes the changes in the domain of the ODA and the "development cooperation" that were incorporated into the Development Cooperation Charter. These changes are shown on the horizontal and vertical axes. Augmentation of the "affiliated agencies" is described as the diversification of contributors on the horizontal dimension. In the new charter the "affiliated agency" is counted as a contributor of development cooperation. The vertical dimension of Figure 1 exhibits a variety of recipients of Japan's development cooperation. In addition to developing countries, middle / high income countries and Japanese private firms are added as eligible recipients of development cooperation if certain conditions are met. In Subsection 2.2.1, the involvement of Japan's private sector into development cooperation is elaborated, while Subsection 2.2.2 discusses the diversification of recipients.

³ Note that the word of "catalyze" was used in the title of the Brookings Institution-JICA-KOICA book (Kharas, Makino and Jung 2011). This implies that the new charter was well coordinated with this book, which was published right before the Busan High Level Forum.

Figure 1. Domain of “Development Cooperation”

		Contributors	
		Government of Japan	Private Sector / Local Government / NGO
Recipients	Developing Countries	ODA	Development Cooperation
	Middle / High Income Countries	Development Cooperation	
	Japanese companies		

Note: The set of cells encircled by the broken line is the domain of development cooperation; the ODA limited the contribution of the central government of Japan to central governments of developing countries.

2.2.1. Burden Sharing to “Affiliated Agencies”

The review of the ODA Charter was announced by Fumio Kishida, Minister for Foreign Affairs, in March 2014. In the same month the review committee for the ODA Charter was formulated and its first meeting was held on March 31, 2014. When the first meeting was held, not only its opening but also its prospective conclusions were widely broadcast by TV stations and newspapers in Japan at the same time, even though the review was yet to start. The indicated main focuses of “conclusions” were: i) proactive contribution to the peace, and ii) public-private partnership. In other words, the review committee’s discussion did not start from scratch, and the directions of review were determined beforehand.

The point to be highlighted and explored deeply in this article is related to the second focus, i.e., the public-private partnership. More broadly, the direction of burden sharing in development efforts requested by the central government of Japan to all other parties including private sectors is a comprehensive feature of the new charter. It is stated in the charter that the government of Japan becomes a “catalyst” rather than a main driving force (Cabinet 2015). This direction is spelled out in the preamble of the new charter as:

‘(T)he term “development cooperation” refers to “international cooperation activities that are conducted by the government and its affiliated agencies for the main purpose of development in developing regions”’. (Cabinet 2015, preamble)

Thus, the charter covers cooperation activities conducted by not only the central government but also “its affiliated agencies”.

Several “affiliated agencies” are exemplified in the new charter. The private sector is the most frequently cited agency in the charter. To achieve “national interests” by promoting Japanese industries through international cooperation, (Japan’s) private sector is a natural counterpart to

“affiliate” for the central government. An advocating factor of this orientation is the Base of the Pyramid (BOP) argument, which claims that business with the lowest stratum of the population in terms of income may be profitable as well as poverty reducing (Prahalad 2005). Therefore, the BOP argument is used to justify the burden sharing of international cooperation with the private sector. JICA established the Office for Private Sector Partnership in 2008, which subsequently was expanded as the “Private Sector Partnership and Finance Department”. This department promotes mobilization of resources from the private sector (JICA 2010, p. 140). Since the establishment of the office JICA has financially supported Japanese firms with the ODA to conduct feasibility studies of BOP business under the title of “Preparatory Surveys for BOP Business Promotion” (JICA 2015, p. 109).

The second and third “affiliated agencies” are Japan’s local governments and NGOs/CSOs. JICA has had schemes to mobilize the human resources of local governments and NGOs/CSOs for years in order to utilize the skills and experiences accumulated into personnel in local governments and NGOs/CSOs (JICA 2014, pp. 112-113, among others). A highlight of recent Japan’s collaboration with philanthropic organizations is the polio eradication project initiated in 2011 in Pakistan together with Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (JICA 2012, p. 9). This project utilizes a loan conversion mechanism where in the Gates Foundation repays JICA’s loan on behalf of Pakistan if Pakistan achieves performance targets that are set in advance. This result-based project was successfully completed in 2014, and the same scheme was applied to Nigeria (JICA 2015, p. 56).

As mentioned before, the main “affiliated agency” with which the government of Japan expects collaboration is the Japanese private sector. Collaboration with the Japanese private sector is consistent with the newly introduced view point of “national interests” in the sense that an increase in ODA funded orders to Japanese firms vitalizes the Japanese economy in the following ways: 1) direct monetary flow to Japanese companies; 2) the enhancement of the presence and reputation of Japanese firms in developing countries.⁴

In the meantime, even long before the term “national interests” was written down in the Development Cooperation Charter, pursuit of the national interests of the Japanese through contracts of ODA projects with Japanese private firms was identified and criticized by scholars and other OECD donors. Arase (1995), Ensign (1992) Leheny and Warren (2010, pp. 4-8), and Orr (1990) pointed out the tendency of Japan’s ODA to be undertaken by Japanese firms and claimed that the Japanese firms were sought out not because of efficiency but favoritism.

⁴ This orientation is echoed by “Partnership for Quality Infrastructure” which was announced by Prime Minister Abe in May 2015. This Partnership is an initiative of the government of Japan in collaboration with the Asian Development Bank to commit 110 billion US dollar for high quality infrastructure investment in Asia for five years (MOFA, MOF, METI and MLIT 2015). This partnership covers infrastructure investments that are not financed by ODA. Emergence of China and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, which was inaugurated in January 2016 as influential donors in Asia are considered to motivate Japan’s policy changes reflected by the partnership.

A symbolic institutional setting associated Japan's ODA and Japanese companies is a "tied project", which requires that its main contractors are Japanese firms. This "tying" issue has been long regarded as a key problem to Japan internationalizing its government procurement procedures and making them more open to outsiders. Specifically, the ratio of untied aid to total ODA has been carefully examined by OECD/DAC. The 1996 report on an OECD peer review indicated that the ratio increased from 28 percent in 1972 to 84 percent in 1993 (OECD/DAC 1996a, p. 37). As far as ODA loans were concerned, the untied ratio reached almost 100 percent up to the end of the 1990s⁵ (OECD/DAC 1999, pp. 61-62). OECD/DAC was pleased that Japan became "one of the most prominent and vocal advocates of untied aid" (OECD/DAC 1999, p. 19).

Thus, close ties between Japan's ODA and its business sector were heavily imprinted in OECD members' minds, and a detachment of the Japanese business sector from Japan's ODA has been a main challenge for Japan to convince other OECD members that Japan is as good a donor as others. Previously, Japan made good progress in wiping out "tied aid" behavior. Now, however, the term "national interests" is explicitly installed, which reminds one of the hardly disentangled ties between ODA and business in Japan. Moreover, a new device to fasten the ties, which is named "Special Terms for Economic Partnership (STEP)" was invented in 2002 and has been applied mainly to infrastructure building⁶. STEP is a scheme of tied loans for "raising the visibility of Japanese ODA among citizens in both recipient countries and Japan through best use of advanced technologies and know-how of Japanese firms" (cited by a JICA's web site concerning STEP⁷).

Taking all of this into account, Japan appears to be regressing to how it was when it was an emerging donor in the 1960s-70s. Therefore, the public-private partnership introduced in the Development Cooperation Charter does not sound new to observers of Japan's aid.

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

In the previous subsection, expansion of the coverage of the new Development Cooperation Charter in terms of contributors was discussed. Specifically, the domain of development cooperation was enlarged by inputs. It is notable that the domain is extended in terms of outcomes as well, which is the main issue elaborated in this subsection.⁸

⁵ Japan's grants are more likely to be tied, while technical cooperation is almost solely conducted by the Japanese experts (OECD/DAC 1996a, pp. 37-38). Carol Lancaster posed a concern that even untied projects might be consigned to Japanese subsidiary companies registered in aid recipient countries (Lancaster 2010, pp. 39-40).

⁶ JICA (2013) was published as the latest update of the special terms.

⁷ Its URL is http://www.jica.go.jp/english/our_work/types_of_assistance/oda_loans/step/index.html.

⁸ Expanding the domain of cooperation helps inflate the amount of Japan's ODA. Japan faces difficulties to raise its ratio of ODA to Gross National Income (GNI) to the target of 0.70 percent which was agreed at OECD/DAC. Japan's ODA-GNI ratio in 2013 was 0.23. To close the gap between 0.70 and 0.23, the inflation of international cooperation in terms of inputs and outputs, which is indicated in Figure 1, may help.

First, “proactive contribution to the peace” is incorporated into the philosophy of the new charter (Cabinet 2015). The contribution is limited to “non-military purposes”. However, this is a drastic policy change from the viewpoint of Japan’s security policy. Inclusion of security-related cooperation into the concept of “development cooperation” is also new.

Second, development cooperation covers assistance to not only developing countries but also middle and high income countries. The following sentences in the charter spell out the wider coverage of countries to be assisted under the new charter:

‘Japan will extend necessary cooperation to countries based on their actual development needs and affordability. These include countries that despite progress in development, are laden with challenges that hamper sustained economic growth, notably the so-called "middle income trap," as well as with development challenges including global challenges such as exposure to natural disasters, infectious diseases, and environmental issues and climate change; small island countries and others that are faced with special vulnerabilities despite having attained a certain level of per capita income.’ (Subsection II (2) Priority policy issues by region of the Development Cooperation Charter)

Now, “despite having attained a certain level of per capita income”, Japan’s cooperation may be granted to middle and high income countries. Thus, substantially developed countries may receive “development cooperation” from Japan.

This diversion of the domain of “development cooperation” is combined with the emphasis on the national interests of Japan. A plausible consequence of this combination is an increase in assistance to non-poor countries for non-development purposes. The “development cooperation” defined in the new Development Cooperation Charter is expanded beyond the concept of “development” that has been maintained by the international community⁹.

Lastly, Japanese companies, in particular small and medium enterprises (SMEs), are counted as partners of the central government for development cooperation (Cabinet 2015). As a result Japanese SMEs have been treated as recipients of Japan’s ODA more openly. Even before the new charter was established, ODA has been granted to Japanese companies as long as the activities of the Japanese companies are conducive to international development, for example in the context of BOP business promotion. Upon the replacement of the ODA Charter with the Development Cooperation Charter, this portion of ODA, which is delivered to Japan’s SMEs, is highlighted more in newspapers and broadcasting.

⁹ For example, a relevant goal from the view point of “development” of the United Nations is incorporated into Preamble of the UN Charter is written as “to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom”.

As a result, expected recipients of development cooperation under the new charter are expanded as described in the vertical axis of Figure 1. In addition to developing countries, “ODA graduated countries” are also covered as recipients of development cooperation if they have “special vulnerabilities”. Examples of the “special vulnerabilities” are the middle income trap and climate change. On top of that, Japanese private firms became entitled to be recipients of development cooperation if their business activities are considered to contribute to international development. In conclusion, the domain of development cooperation is enlarged in terms of both contributors (agents for inputs) and recipients (agents for outcomes).

3. Sustainable Development Goals and Japan

3.1. Formation of SDGs

Millennium Development Goals, which have been a focus of international cooperation of the world since the beginning of this millennium, were taken over by the Sustainable Development Goals according to the resolution adopted at the United Nations General Assembly on 25 September 2015 (UNGA 2015). The SDGs consist of seventeen goals that are classified into the following five categories: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership. The seventeen goals are briefly summarized by the United Nations as follows: (1) No poverty; (2) Zero hunger; (3) Good health and well-being; (4) Quality education; (5) Gender equality; (6) Clean water and sanitation; (7) Affordable and clean energy; (8) Decent work and economic growth; (9) Industry, innovation and infrastructure; (10) Reduced inequality; (11) Sustainable cities and communities; (12) Responsible consumption and production; (13) Climate action; (14) Life below water; (15) Life on land; (16) Peace, justice and strong institutions; and (17) Partnerships for the goals.

There was criticism of the process of formation of the MDGs; it was claimed that the formation procedure was not open and transparent, particularly to people in the developing world¹⁰. The origin of the MDGs was the International Development Goals (IDGs) proposed by the OECD/DAC in 1996 (OECD/DAC 1996b, pp. 8-11). The basic structure of the IDGs was followed by the MDGs. Therefore, examination of the MDGs was undertaken by high officials of developed countries; however, people in developing countries did not have any opportunities to participate in the formation process.

Addressing this weakness, the formulation of the post MDGs framework was designed to give opportunities to everyone in the world to respond. Around 2011 discussion on the post 2015 framework became active. However, as early as June 2012, the basic concept of the new goals was

¹⁰ This weakness was admitted by the United Nations. See United Nations System Task Team on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (2012), pp. 46-47.

determined as “Sustainable Development Goals” at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, which is known as Rio+20. Three levels of consultation were conducted after Rio+20. The three levels are (1) eminent persons, (2) general public and (3) business sector. The high-level consultation was assigned to the “High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda” which was co-chaired by President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono of Indonesia, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia, and Prime Minister David Cameron of the United Kingdom, in July 2012. The report of the panel was released in May 2013 (High Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda 2013). The consultation for the general public was done through an online platform named “The World We Want”, and in face-to-face consultations taking place in various countries including developing nations. Consultations with the business sector were made through the United Nations Global Compact with which thousands of companies and organizations are affiliated from all over the world.

Finalization of the goals and targets of the SDGs was made by the “Open Working Group Meeting on Sustainable Development Goals” (OWG-SDGs, hereafter), which was an intergovernmental meeting among United Nations’ member and observer states. The OWG-SDGs was endorsed by a resolution of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA 2012). The first session of the OWG-SDGs was held in May 2013, and thirteen sessions were organized by July 2014.¹¹ Its outcome document was released in August 2014 (OWG-SDGs 2014b). The OWG-SDGs adopted a unique consensus-building method in that member countries were encouraged to form a group of nations composed of one to four countries voluntarily, and each group of nations was supposed to submit proposals on goals and targets of the SDGs to the OWG-SDGs. In the end thirty groups were formulated. Japan formed a group with Iran and Nepal.

All proposals submitted by the thirty groups and some other eligible participants up to the 10th session of OWG-SDGs (31 March - 4 April 2014) are compiled in a report entitled *Encyclopedia Groupinica* (OWG-SDGs 2014a). Those proposals were narrowed down into the final report of the OWG-SDGs, which was released right before a United Nations General Assembly session taking place in September 2014 (OWG-SDGs 2014b). The seventeen goals proposed in the OWG-SDGs (2014b) were adopted exactly and were the same as those of the final version of the SDGs, while expressions of some of the 169 targets were revised. Thus, the OWG-SDGs (2014b) can be taken as the “almost final” version of the SDGs.

3.2. Japan’s Approaches to the Formation of SDGs

3.2.1. Japan’s Inputs to Open Working Group

¹¹ In addition to officers of MOFA, those from JICA were also mobilized in Japan’s team participating in OWG-SDGs.

The OWG-SDGs was the final and transparent opportunity for national governments to put views and opinions into the SDGs. As a matter of fact, the number of “focus areas” in *Encyclopedia Groupinica*, which were narrowed down to the “goals” of the SDGs were nineteen in number rather than seventeen. The number of proposed targets was around 2000, which were refined to 169 in the end. Thus, most countries took the OWG-SDGs as the final and important opportunity to affect the substance of the SDGs.

However, Japan proposed only three draft targets (OWG-SDGs 2014a). This contribution was extremely small in comparison to the total number (around 2000) of draft targets. In the end, the Iran / Japan / Nepal group did not submit any joint proposals of targets. Apart from that group, Iran proposed thirteen targets. Nepal did not propose any targets by itself. However, Nepal belongs to Group of 77¹² and Least Developed Countries, and these groups collectively submitted many proposals.

Thus, Japan’s explicit and open contribution to the draft SDGs looks very limited and all three targets submitted by Japan were related to universal health coverage¹³.

3.2.2. Post 2015 to be Development Focused or Universal?

Needless to say, the OWG-SDGs was not the only device available for understanding the views of national governments. As mentioned above, MDGs’ replacement by SDGs had already been determined at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in June 2012. Consultations by the UNDP on Post-2015 global goals were conducted even before Rio+20.

One of such consultation meeting was undertaken by the UNDP in March 2012 in Japan where East Asian experts including ex-ministers were invited. Though the title of the meeting was the “East Asian Regional Consultation on the Human Development Reports and Measurement of Progress”, a focal issue was on how the post-2015 global goals should take shape (UNDP 2012). This author also participated in this meeting.

A critical question raised by the UNDP was whether the new goals should be “development-focused” as the MDGs were, or “universal”. According to the UNDP (2012), some stakeholders saw the MDGs as being less “universal”, and that the new goals should satisfy “universality”.

The concept of universality implies that the new goals should be for the sake of everybody on the globe, while the MDGs were for the sake of only the poor people in the world. It is notable that Goal 8 of the MDGs “Develop a global partnership for development” was assumed to be mainly pursued by developed countries. Therefore, borrowing Abraham Lincoln’s statement, MDGs were

¹² Group of 77 was established among developing countries in 1964 to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

¹³ Japan advocates universal health coverage. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe contributed twice to *The Lancet*, a reputed medical journal, to promote this concept (Abe 2013, 2015).

pursued “for the poor people by all (poor and rich) people”. People advocating universality requested new goals to be “for all people by all people”.

There is a concern that the principle of universality weakens the “development-focus” in the SDGs. UNEP and OHCHR (2015), which was written to advocate the principle of universality, admits there are people who “have expressed a concern that universality could potentially undermine the focus on the poorest”.

The question of whether the new goals should be universal or development-focused was posed at the above-mentioned East Asian regional consultation meeting organized by the UNDP in March 2012. The dominating views expressed at the meeting were affirmative for universality. This response is understandable, taking into account the fact that most of the East Asian countries made good progress in poverty reduction and that many of them had become middle income countries.

A delegate from the government of Japan to the meeting, who also agreed with the universality principle, presented Japan’s proposal of post 2015 global goals. It was entitled “Pact for Global Well-being”. Not only environmental sustainability but also disaster risk management, economic growth and equity were incorporated into the concept of “well-being”. Human security, which has been a central feature of Japan’s international cooperation since the then Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi used this term in his speech and established “Trust Fund for Human Security” for the United Nations in December 1998¹⁴, was embedded in the proposal. Food security, special treatments for fragile states, green growth, inclusive growth, shared growth, knowledge-based growth, employment, and infrastructure were proposed as parts of key concepts.

There are interesting proximities and differences between Japan’s proposal and the final form of the SDGs. The most visible difference is the overarching concept of new global goals, namely sustainable development and well-being. It is impressive that the delegate of Japan proposed the concept of well-being for the new global goals just three months before the goal was finalized as the SDGs in June 2012 at Rio+20. It is probable that the delegate of Japan was not informed that the UN’s discussion inclined towards sustainable development. In the meantime, there are many items in common between Japan’s proposal and the SDGs. Sustainability set aside, equity, economic growth, employment and even infrastructure and energy were taken up in some goals of the SDGs. Disaster risk management is incorporated in some targets under some goals, too. Thus, parts of Japan’s intentions on post 2015 global goals were reflected by the final version of the SDGs.

Above all, it is noticeable that the feature of universality is in common between Japan’s proposal and the SDGs. It is clear that the intention of Japan is that the new global goals are for the sake of a part of the Japanese, which was not fulfilled by the MDGs.

¹⁴ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan has a web site which summarizes activities of Japan on human security: http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/human_secu/chronology.html.

4. Conclusion

The concept of universality underlying the SDGs is defended by its interpretation as “no one left behind”. The Japanese interpret this as even the Japanese are not left behind. As a result, the SDGs are the latest and greatest global goals endorsed by the government of Japan to pursue the welfare of the Japanese. This endorsement by the external factor was harmonious with the explicit introduction of national interests into Japan’s Development Cooperation Charter.

It is common that Japan’s foreign policy is analyzed by momenta stemming internally and externally (Lancaster 2010 among others). There are terms in Japanese standing for the internal and foreign pressures, which are *naiatsu* and *gaiatsu*, respectively. A typical *gaiatsu* comes from the United States, which intends to use Japan’s international cooperation as a complement to US foreign policy (Lancaster 2010). As for replacement of the ODA Charter with the Development Cooperation Charter, a *gaiatsu* (an external factor), which is the establishment of the SDGs at this time, went in unison with a *naiatsu*, the pursuit of national interests.

The Millennium Development Goals were a *raison d’être* for Japan to contribute to poverty reduction in the world. Replacing MDGs, the SDGs let Japan design a more self-oriented international cooperation policy. The new Development Cooperation Charter has a wider scope designed to serve non-poor countries and address non-poverty issues by incorporating profit seeking actors. The motivation of national interests is openly spelled out in the new charter. In the shadow of rising tides of sustainability and public-private partnership, the prior orientation towards poverty reduction is diluted. Japan’s drive towards national interests is facilitated by the SDGs’ principle of universality, which looks seemingly non-controversial under the slogan “no one left behind”. The problem is that this slogan covers up the dilution of focus on poverty reduction with the SDGs and makes it difficult for global citizens to notice the common orientation of the SDGs and Japan’s Development Cooperation Charter, which newly and openly publicizes Japan’s pursuit of national interests through “development cooperation”.

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