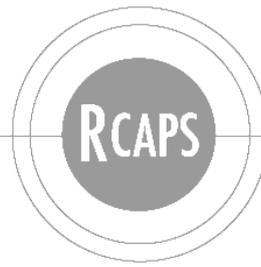


Ritsumeikan Center for Asia Pacific Studies



## RCAPS Working Paper Series

RWP-18001

Japan's Policy-level ODA Evaluation:  
Reflections by a Third-Party Academic Evaluator

January 7, 2019

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# Japan's Policy-level ODA Evaluation: Reflections by a Third-Party Academic Evaluator\*

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## Abstract

Japan's policy-level ODA (Official Development Assistance) evaluation has played a complementary role for project-level evaluation. Japan encountered policy-level challenges, mainly from OECD/DAC, beyond the level of project management. Some of policy recommendations derived from the policy-level evaluation exercises were useful, and seriously examined by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) of Japan for realization. However, there are limitations to conducting the evaluation under the current framework of the assignment, which are (1) low level of independence and (2) little resources. Frequent interactions between stakeholder-divisions of MOFA and the evaluation team, including comment-revision repetitions to finalize a review report, risk the independence of a review. Consequently, views of stakeholders may substantially influence the report. Second, resources in terms of money, time and personnel are minimal to do the job. This limitation in resources weakens the independence of evaluation further. Thus, these two aspects jointly result in a low level of authority and little publicity of the evaluation.

## Key words

ODA, evaluation, Japan

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\* This is a revised version of the paper presented at the North-East Asia Development Cooperation Forum 2018 "Evaluating development cooperation of North-East Asian countries for the achievement of SDG," Seoul, September 14-15, 2018, organized by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) and the Korea Association of International Development and Cooperation (KAIDEC). The author is the president of the Japan Society for International Development (JASID). 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. The author gratefully acknowledge two anonymous referees for comments to the first draft of this paper.

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## 1. Introduction

Japan conducts ODA (Official Development Assistance) evaluations at several levels. Its main ODA-implementing body, the Japan International Cooperation Agency<sup>1</sup> (JICA, for short) conducts project-level evaluations widely and continuously. At an upper level, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) organizes so-called “third party” evaluation exercises on the policies / principles of ODA. MOFA calls this exercise “policy-level evaluation.” Japan’s ODA projects and programs for a specific recipient country, and those on a specific priority issue, sector, or modality, are scrutinized in this form of policy-level evaluation. The issues / sectors / modalities include health, education, disaster relief, Structural Adjustment Lending (SAL), Women in Development (WID), South-South Cooperation and so on.

Policy-level ODA evaluation covers a broader range of policy issues than project-level evaluation. The former is supposed to draw comprehensive implications / policy recommendations that have a broader scope of applicability than the latter. This author served as a chief evaluator of policy-level ODA evaluation teams on behalf of MOFA eight times over eleven years from 2006 through 2016. Based on the experiences of the eight evaluation experiments, this is a discussion of the values and limitations of policy-level ODA evaluations of MOFA, Japan.

The main conclusion is that while MOFA’s policy-level ODA evaluation has the value of drawing general policy recommendations that are not available from project-level evaluation, a policy level evaluation faces great challenges relative to the independence of an evaluation and insufficient resources. Since the evaluation team is virtually obliged to meet all revision-requests submitted by country / project-related divisions of MOFA and JICA and the Japanese Embassy in a recipient country before completion of the final evaluation report, views of these stakeholder-parties influence the contents of the report. Limitation in resource for an evaluation exercise weakens the independence of the evaluation team further, as the team has small financial capacity to collect information which may persuade the stakeholder-parties. An evaluation team can produce good policy recommendation only if it overcomes the challenges relative to the independence and the small budget allocation.

This paper is organized as follows. Section 2 describes MOFA’s policy-level ODA evaluations. Subsection 2.1 overviews all evaluation exercises conducted on Japan’s ODA by various ministries and agencies. Among them, JICA and MOFA are main actors. Subsection 2.2 details a MOFA’s policy-level ODA evaluation. The history and trends in the number and composition of evaluation projects are discussed in subsections 2.2.1 and 2.2.2. Subsection 2.2.3 elaborates practices

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<sup>1</sup> JICA is an Incorporated Administrative Agency of Japan that implements Japan’s ODA predominantly over other ministries and governmental agencies. JICA handles all three forms of ODA: technical cooperation, loans and grants.

and conventions for conducting a MOFA's policy-level evaluation.

Section 3 is the main part of this paper. Values of and challenges to MOFA's policy-level ODA evaluations are discussed, based on the author's experience participating in eight evaluation exercises as the chief evaluator. The final section contains conclusions.

## **2. MOFA's Policy-Level ODA Evaluation**

### **2.1. A Variety of Japan's ODA Evaluation**

MOFA (2018) summarizes ODA evaluation exercises undertaken by the government of Japan in the fiscal year 2016 (April 2016-March 2017). The types of ODA evaluation exercises of the government of Japan are fourfold. Table 1 details the four types.

First, MOFA organizes policy-level evaluation exercises every year. The details of this will be introduced in the next subsection.

Second, several ministries and governmental agencies conduct evaluation exercises because parts of their budgets are under the title of ODA, which is independent of MOFA and the JICA. Those ministries and agencies evaluate their own ODA projects / programs / policies. Summaries of results of their evaluation exercises are compiled in the *Annual Report on Japan's ODA Evaluation* (see MOFA (2018) for those conducted in 2017). In 2017 the Financial Services Agency; Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications; Ministry of Justice; Ministry of Finance; Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology; Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare; Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries; Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry; Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism; and Ministry of the Environment, undertook ODA evaluations (MOFA 2018, 27-37).

Third, JICA conducts comprehensive and sequential evaluations on projects under its responsibility. JICA has a rule that all projects taking more than two million yen must be reviewed, while those amounting to more than one billion yen must be evaluated by external experts. In the fiscal year 2016, JICA sponsored 192 project-evaluations and 99 of them were undertaken by external experts (JICA 2018, 4). JICA's evaluations also have sequentially long time-horizons. JICA has a policy that requires following a feedback loop of evaluation and improvement, the "PDCA Cycle." PDCA is the abbreviation of Plan-Do-Check-Act (JICA 2018, 2-3; MOFA 2018, 38-39). "Plan" is a deep examination before implementing an ODA project, and this pre-project examination is referred to as "ex-ante evaluation." "Do" encompasses the implementation of a project. At this stage of the project cycle, frequent "monitoring" of the progress of the project is encouraged. "Check" is an "ex-post evaluation" of results of the ODA project. The final phase, "Act," is a

reflection on the ex-post evaluation and improvements that align with the recommendations associated with the ex-post evaluation.

Fourth, a Partner Country-led Evaluation is occasionally conducted at the initiative of MOFA, Japan. The client of this evaluation exercise is MOFA, and contractors are sought from the recipient country. All necessary costs for the exercise are owed by MOFA, Japan. For example, in the fiscal year 2017 only one “Partner Country-led Evaluation” project was organized, which was about Japan’s ODA to the economic and social infrastructure sector in Samoa (Government of Samoa 2018). It was a joint evaluation study between the Government of Samoa and the Government of Japan. KVAConsult Ltd., a Samoan private firm, was hired for technical support to compile the report. Also, a “Partner Country-led Evaluation” project was conducted in the fiscal year 2016. The topic of review was Japan’s ODA to the Uruguayan Forestry Sector (Montero and Font 2017). Two Uruguayan consultants were hired for this evaluation exercise.

## **2.2. How Does MOFA’s Policy-Level Evaluation Work?**

### **2.2.1. History**

MOFA’s policy-level ODA evaluation dates to 1999. General ODA policies related to Zambia and Cambodia were examined, and MOFA published reports of the two evaluation exercises in Japanese at its web site<sup>2</sup>. Their evaluation teams consist of academic scholars, an NGO officer and consultants. In 2000, MOFA consigned Mitsubishi Research Institute, Inc. to evaluate Japan’s ODA policies for China<sup>3</sup>.

Meanwhile, the Foreign Ministry formed a consultative board named the “Council on ODA Reforms for the 21st Century” that published a final report<sup>4</sup> in 1998. A recommendation of the report was the establishment of evaluation routines on ODA. To implement this recommendation, the Director-General of the Economic Cooperation Bureau of MOFA formulated an advisory body called “Enjo Hyoka Kento Bukai” (the Committee for Exploration of ODA Evaluation). This advisory body submitted the *Report on Reform of Japan’s ODA Evaluation System*<sup>5</sup> in 2000 (Muta 2005, 138-139). This report detailed how to do ODA evaluation exercises by specifying what (objects), when (period), who (external resource persons), why (aims) and how (DAC Criteria for Evaluating Development Assistance)<sup>6</sup>. In addition, the report suggested how the results of an evaluation would be published to the public and how they would be routinely incorporated for improvements in Japan’s ODA.

Reflecting recommendations in the report, MOFA’s policy-level evaluations were

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<sup>2</sup> See [https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/shiryo/hyouka/g\\_1999.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/shiryo/hyouka/g_1999.html).

<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/shiryo/hyouka/kunibetu/gai/china/koka/index.html>.

<sup>4</sup> See <https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/reform/report21.html>.

<sup>5</sup> See [http://www.mext.go.jp/a\\_menu/kokusai/kyouiku/09-01.HTM](http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/kokusai/kyouiku/09-01.HTM).

<sup>6</sup> See <http://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm>.

strengthened. In 2001 English versions of evaluation reports were published and posted at a web site of MOFA for the first time<sup>7</sup>. The number of policy-level evaluation exercises increased to six: (1) Nicaragua, (2) Bangladesh, (3) Vietnam, (4) ODA Implementation System of Tanzania, (5) Global Issues Initiative on Population and HIV/AIDS, and (6) Counter Global Warming-Related ODA.

In 2001 the Government Policy Evaluations Act was legislated in Japan (Sasaki 2005). This act facilitated evaluation of any government activities, including ODA. Thus, an atmosphere that emphasized the roles of evaluation grew at that time. In 2003 the “External Advisory Meeting on ODA Evaluation” was formulated on behalf of the Director-General of the Economic Cooperation Bureau of MOFA. From FY2004 through FY2009 this meeting has led MOFA’s policy-level ODA evaluation.

The External Advisory Meeting on ODA Evaluation terminated in 2010 (MOFA 2018, p. 61). There was a criticism of possible nepotism between the head of the Meeting and a contractor (Kusano 2010) and the termination followed the criticism<sup>8</sup>. In 2011 the duty of policy-level ODA evaluation was transferred from the International Cooperation Bureau (renamed from the “Economic Cooperation Bureau” in 2006) to the Minister’s Secretariat inside the ministry. The ODA Evaluation Division was relocated from the Bureau to the Secretariat as well. The intention behind the relocation was a claim that it would enhance the independence and neutrality of an evaluation (OECD 2014, 72). The International Cooperation Bureau directly handles the operation of Japan’s ODA, so the bureau is regarded as a stakeholder of Japan’s ODA. In the meantime, the Ministry’s Secretariat was the coordinating body of MOFA. From 2010 until now, the ODA evaluations have been conducted by an evaluation team consisting of a chief evaluator, an advisor, and consultants.

## **2.2.2. Trends of MOFA’s Policy-Level Evaluations**

### ***Trend in Number***

2004 was the beginning of Japan’s full-fledged ODA evaluations. The External Advisory Meeting (EAM) on ODA Evaluation started that year, and publicized its recommendations in the *Report on Reform of Japan’s ODA Evaluation System*. The categories of evaluation projects were also fixed as “Country Assistance Evaluation,” “Priority Issue Evaluation,” “Sector Program Evaluation,” “Aid Modality Evaluation,” and “Other Evaluation.”

Figure 1 displays the trend and structure of Japan’s policy-level ODA evaluation exercises since 2004. There were more than 10 evaluation projects annually in the first five years. Note that the External Advisory Meeting (EAM) on ODA Evaluation was in operation between 2004 and 2009. Let us call this “the first / EAM period.” For next half decade, 2010-2014, the number of evaluation projects was between 8 and 10 annually. Let us call this “the second / MDGs ending period.” MGDs

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<sup>7</sup> See <https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/evaluation/year/index.html#2001>.

<sup>8</sup> For details, see the Japanese versions of *The Asahi Shimbun* and *The Mainichi* on April 13, 2010.

are Millennium Development Goals. After the second period, the number of evaluation projects visibly declined. The average number for 2015-2017 was seven. The tentative number of evaluation projects for 2018 is only four. Let us call 2015-2018 “the third / SDGs period.” SDGs are Sustainable Development Goals.

In the first period, OECD/DAC was active under the principle of aid coordination. The Paris Declaration incorporated directions for aid coordination such as ownership, alignment, harmonization, management for development results, and mutual accountability (OECD 2003). Active ODA evaluation during the first period was a response for Japan to show its seriousness towards ODA reform to OECD/DAC. As a member of EAM for 2006-2009, this author remembers that how to address the Paris Declaration was a central agenda item addressed in order to work out policy recommendations derived from evaluations. More explicitly, Japan’s participation in general budget support in Tanzania and Vietnam was evaluated in 2005 (See Table 5), and Japan’s implementation of the Paris Declaration<sup>9</sup> was reviewed in 2010 (Table 6). Meeting the principles of the Paris Declaration upheld the level of efforts required for an ODA evaluation and caused a relatively large number of ODA evaluation projects during the first / EAM period.

The fourth High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness held in Busan, Korea, in 2011, showed there was a relative decline in the presence of OECD/DAC donors compared to emerging donors. Kharas, Makino and Jung (2011) was published to lead a discussion at the forum, and it proposed a new concept of “Development Effectiveness” that would replace aid effectiveness. The new concept weakened the role of donors and promoted effective mobilization of all resources from both private and public bodies towards the goal of development. As a result, Japan became less keen to respond to requests from OECD/DAC in the second / MDGs ending period. This decay of influence of OECD/DAC and the termination of EAM in 2010 appear to have caused stagnation in the number of ODA evaluation projects in the second period (Figure 1). This declining tendency may be called an “evaluation fatigue” comparable to the “aid fatigue” that was spreading among OECD/DAC donors in the 1990s.

After the replacement of MDGs with SDGs in 2015, the number of ODA evaluation projects declined further (Figure 1). SDGs facilitate the private sector’s playing greater roles in international development. It is anticipated that the public sector, including the government of Japan, is more likely to lower its profile in international cooperation, arguing that governments should play the role of a catalyst, not an engine, of international development (Yamagata 2016). As a result, attention to ODA evaluations was weakened, which allowed fewer resources to be mobilized for ODA evaluations in the third SDGs period.

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<sup>9</sup> The Paris Declaration was a product of the second High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Paris in 2005. The third forum was held in Accra, Ghana, in 2008, which was followed by the fourth forum in Busan, Korea, in 2011.

## ***Composition***

MOFA's policy-level evaluations are categorized into five types: "Country Assistance Evaluation," "Priority Issue Evaluation," "Sector Program Evaluation," "Aid Modality Evaluation" and "Other Evaluation." Country Assistance Evaluation is an evaluation of Japan's ODA policy towards a specific recipient country. Priority Issue Evaluation focuses on a particular development issue. Sector Program Evaluation reviews Japan's assistance policies on a sector of a recipient country. Aid Modality Evaluation examines a specific aid plan of Japan. In particular, some grants, such as Grant Assistance for Grassroots Human Security, are handled by Japan's embassies in partner countries without the intermediation of JICA. That implies MOFA needs to evaluate the performances and processes of Grant Assistance for Grassroots Human Security. Other evaluations include syntheses of past evaluation results (Table 6).

Figure 1 shows the composition of MOFA's evaluation projects over time. Country Assistance Evaluation is counted as the foundation of the whole evaluation scheme. Priority Issue Evaluation, Sector Program Evaluation, Aid Modality Evaluation and Other Evaluation are augmented occasionally.

Table 2 shows when and which partner country was selected for a Country Assistance Evaluation. Some countries were reviewed several times, while others were reviewed only once. Bangladesh, Cambodia, Nicaragua, Sri Lanka, Tanzania and Vietnam were reviewed as many as three times. These countries were often selected for Sector Program Evaluation as well (Table 4). By contrast, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar and Nigeria are among those which have not been taken up for MOFA's evaluation, probably because the scale of Japan's ODA was small for a certain time period due to either security-related difficulties or polity issues.

Issues selected for Priority Issue Evaluation are divided into two categories. One includes fundamental high priority fields such as education, health, environment, and human security (Table 3). These fundamental issues also are reviewed for Sector Program Evaluation. The other fields for Priority Issue Evaluation are a set of timely issues. ODA associated with new concepts and initiatives are reviewed in this context. Examples are "The Initiative for Japan's ODA on Water and the Water and Sanitation Broad Partnership Initiative" (2008), and "Aid for Trade" (2011) (see Table 3).

Some Aid Modality Evaluation projects highlight Japan's new interests including grant aid for countries with relatively high income (2014) and grant aid for promotion of Japanese Standards (2016) (see Table 5). These are in line with Japan's new guideline for international cooperation, the *Development Cooperation Charter*, which replaced the *ODA Charter* in 2015. A critical difference compared to the *Development Cooperation Charter* from the *ODA Charter* is that national interests are explicitly mentioned in the former as an aim of cooperation.

### **2.2.3. How Does MOFA's Policy-Level Evaluation Work?**

As mentioned above, the author was engaged in MOFA's policy-level evaluation projects eight times as the chief evaluator. Based upon these experiences, this subsection describes the structure and mechanism of a MOFA evaluation exercise.

Table 7 contains a list of the eight evaluation projects on which the author served. An evaluation team consists of a chief evaluator, an advisor and a few employees of a contractor. During the FY2004-FY2009, when External Advisory Meeting (EAM) on ODA Evaluation was organized, a chief evaluator was selected from the members of EAM. Each member of EAM served an evaluation project for a year as its chief evaluator. After EAM was dissolved in 2010, a bidding consulting firm solicited an external expert for the chief evaluator and another for its advisor before tendering a bid for an evaluation project. Once the consulting firm wins a bid, the firm makes a contract with MOFA and hires the chief evaluator and the advisor.

The chief evaluator is assumed to be knowledgeable about international cooperation, ODA and evaluation. The advisor is an expert on the country / issue / sector which is the focus for the evaluation project. The chief evaluator is hired by both the contractor and MOFA; the costs for an evaluation trip abroad are directly incurred by MOFA, and other costs are owed by the contractor. The chief evaluator is requested to represent the evaluation team.

The contract price is around 15 million Japanese yen. By construction, a lower bid price is preferred by MOFA. The contract period is typically between June and March of the next year<sup>10</sup>. A business trip for evaluation with all team members to the recipient country for a few weeks is assumed. Arrangement for any necessary visits of relevant ministries of the recipient country and project sites are supposed to be made by the team in cooperation with MOFA and the embassy of Japan located in the country. Without consent of MOFA and the government of the partner country, the evaluation team is not entitled to visit anywhere.

Interviews during the business trip are the main inputs into the final report of an evaluation. The team is requested to complete a first draft of the report in January, two months before the end of contract. The draft is read carefully by relevant officers of the ODA Evaluation Division and respective divisions and bureaus of MOFA, the embassy of Japan in the respective recipient countries, relevant departments of JICA, and JICA's country office. All of them send detailed comments on the draft for revisions. The evaluation team has to address all comments thoroughly. That comments-responses exchange continues until both parties are satisfied. Meanwhile, the responsibility to meet the due date of submission of a final evaluation report lies with the evaluation team.

After the settlement of exchanges of comments and responses, the evaluation team is

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<sup>10</sup> Please note that the Japanese fiscal year runs from April through March.

requested to explain the draft in front of all responsible officers of MOFA and JICA in a final examination meeting. While EAM was in operation, all members of EAM attended the final examination meeting. All members of the EAM were supposed to be responsible for all reports regardless of its chief evaluator. After 2010, the evaluation team is obliged to solely defend the final draft in the final examination meeting.

With all parties' consents, the final draft is published in a book form and an electronic form. Its summary is translated into English and occasionally a local language<sup>11</sup>. Thus, the results of the evaluation are open to the public.

Finally, reactions by relevant divisions of MOFA and embassies to the recommendations made in review reports are requested within a couple of years. For example, Chapter 3 "Follow-up Efforts on FY2015 Evaluation Results" of *Annual Report on Japan's ODA Evaluation 2017* (MOFA 2018) contains the reactions of MOFA to 37 recommendations made in eight evaluation reports.

While EAM was in action between FY2004-FY2009, this "follow-up" process was implemented in a tighter and more precise manner. First, all recommendations were reported to the Director-General of the International Cooperation Bureau of MOFA. Then, the Director-General contacted directors of relevant divisions of the bureau to listen to their initial responses a couple of months after the release of review reports. One year later the same directors were requested to take concrete measures to respond to each recommendation. Thus, the directors were obliged to present their reactions to each recommendation to the Director-General twice. Moreover, that presentation was made during an EAM Meeting. That is, all nine members of EAM were ready to make comments on the reactions. As a result, recommendations made in review reports were taken seriously by the International Cooperation Bureau of MOFA. The final responding measures were published each year on the *Annual Report on Japan's ODA Evaluation*.

Since the termination of EAM in 2010, face-to-face examination of reactions to recommendations given by review reports has not been implemented. As mentioned above, publication of the reactions in the *Annual Report* are used to make good use of the recommendations.

### **3. Reflections by a Third Party Academic Evaluator**

#### **3.1. The Author's Involvements in the Policy-Level ODA Evaluation**

This author was a member of EAM for FY2006-FY2009. He undertook four evaluation exercises during that time. Then, he served on MOFA's policy-level evaluation exercises four additional times after 2010. Details of the eight evaluation exercises are displayed in Table 7.

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<sup>11</sup> See <https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/evaluation/year/index.html#2017>.

He was involved in five Country Assistance Evaluation exercises (Madagascar, Nicaragua, India, Vietnam and Paraguay), and three Priority Issue Evaluation exercises (Water; Aid for Trade; and MDGs in the Health Sector) with eight different advisors and five consulting firms (Table 7).

Based on these experiences on the eight evaluation exercises, the following discussion focuses on the values of and challenges to MOFA's policy-level ODA Evaluation.

## **3.2. Values of and Challenges to MOFA's Policy-level ODA Evaluation**

### **3.2.1. Values**

#### **Statistical Approach as a Reference**

In order to discuss the values of a MOFA's policy-level ODA evaluation, a statistical approach of impact evaluation is referred to for comparison. There are criticisms against non-statistical approaches to ODA evaluations (Banerjee 2007; Duflo and Kremer 2008, among others). The point of the criticisms is that non-statistical evaluation is likely to end up with a generic description of a successful project, wherein no comparison is made between a beneficiary entertaining an ODA project and the same beneficiary without the project. Though the latter does not exist in reality, its statistical analog may be created and called "counterfactual." Some methodologies to make appropriate comparisons between a group of beneficiaries with an intervention and a statistically (almost) equivalent group of beneficiaries without it, were developed and are now widely practiced in the society of project evaluation (see Gertler et al. 2011).

This statistical approach is known as a strong device to address any sample selection bias such that intrinsically advantageous beneficiaries are selected as awardees of a project. Then, the intrinsic advantage of the beneficiaries may work favorably irrespective of implementation of the project. An evaluator may be confused between an effect of the project and that of a beneficiary's intrinsic advantage. The statistical approach can address this sample selection bias effectively.

The greatest benefit of the statistical approach is that it returns an unbiased answer to the question of whether or not a project has a positive effect. This is the reason the statistical approach is recommended for impact evaluation.

In the meantime, there are some shortcomings to the statistical approach. First, details beyond success / failure are not available from the statistical approach. Suppose a difference between a group with an intervention and its control group turns out to be statistically insignificant. Then, the intervention is judged useless. However, why the intervention does not work is left unanswered. Even in the case of success, the mechanism of the success is in a black box.

Second, the validity of a result from the statistical test is limited to a specific case where the test is made. In other words, a judgement derived from a statistical test is applicable only to the exact situation where the test is conducted. There is no guarantee that the same result will occur if there are different conditions. This low degree of applicability is known as the "external validity

issue” (Rodrik 2009; Ravallion 2016, 304-310). For example, a result derived from a statistical test undertaken for a project of the World Bank might not be directly applicable to a similar project by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). Likewise, a result from a statistical test in a specific year might not be applicable to the same project in another year. To address the external validity issue, the same test has to be repeated in various locations at different times. Such repetition of the statistical test becomes extremely costly in terms of money and time.

This cost issue of repetition is crucial for policy-level evaluation, in the sense that some macroeconomic policies (e.g., tax, interest rate, tariff, and exchange rate) and great-scale infrastructure are not easily altered for an experiment purpose (Rodrik 2009).

### **Constructive Recommendation**

In this author’s interpretation, a main point of a MOFA’s policy-level ODA evaluation is to provide constructive recommendations to improve the effectiveness of results, appropriateness of implementation processes and relevance of its policies. As the coverage of this evaluation is broad, and as the resources and the time that are allowed are limited, the statistical approach is beyond the scope of the evaluation. Therefore, the strictness of evaluations of the effectiveness of results has to be compromised and the evaluation exercise lacks strength in the level of its quantitative analyses. Instead, more qualitative observations / recommendations must be the strength of MOFA’s policy-level evaluations.

The meaningfulness of detailed constructive recommendations is testified by concrete examples of recommendations and incorporation of them into policies which were introduced afterward as responses to the recommendations. The following two examples are recommendations this author made as the chief evaluator for Country Assistance Evaluation of Madagascar (2006-07) and Vietnam (2015-16).

**Example 1.** For Madagascar, France is the greatest contributor of bilateral ODA. Japan contributed less than France in many important sectors. One of the sectors to be developed in 2006 was rice farming where France had already made good progresses while Japan was getting ready to start a project. Then, the evaluation team recommended that the Embassy of Japan and JICA collaborate with French counterparts for implementation as well as publicity-raising activities in the context of aid coordination, so that Japan could entertain latecomer benefits. This recommendation was adopted by the Embassy of Japan in Madagascar after two years (MOFA 2008, 109).

**Example 2.** Vietnam is a model recipient country for Japan’s ODA. Some of Japan’s strategic modalities such as Special Terms for Economic Partnership (STEP)<sup>12</sup> and budget support are

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<sup>12</sup> STEP aid is a Japan-tied loan featuring Japan's high-tech. This was introduced in 2002 under the OECD rules. The main contractors of STEP aid must be Japanese or from its joint venture. More

provided to the country. Meanwhile, there were two fraud and corruption incidents related to ODA in Vietnam in 2003 and 2014, respectively. After the first incident, anti-corruption measures were determined and implemented (Japan-Vietnam Joint Committee for Preventing Japanese ODA related Corruption 2009). However, the second incidence took place in 2014. Subsequently, the preventive measures were strengthened further (JICA 2014). When the evaluation team visited the ODA-related ministries of Vietnam, some of interviewees representing a ministry were not so attentive to the strengthened preventive measures. The evaluation team recommended continuous efforts for anti ODA-related corruption measures (KPMG AZSA LLC 2016).

This author believes that the above qualitative recommendations derived from observations and educated guesses brought some benefits for practitioners of Japan's ODA. These detailed recommendations cannot be derived from the statistical approach.

### **3.2.2. Challenges**

This author understands that there are challenges to MOFA's policy-level ODA evaluations. They are the low level of independence and insufficient resources. Furthermore, the latter factor adversely affects the former factor.

#### **3.2.2.1. Independence**

Most of MOFA's policy-level ODA evaluation exercises are conducted by a "third party." The rest are (1) a joint evaluation with other donors, a recipient country or NGOs, and (2) recipient government or agencies (MOFA 2018, pp. 56-61). Thus, two main stakeholders, MOFA and JICA, are not supposed to be directly involved into this evaluation exercise as an evaluator. This non-involvement of the main stakeholders on donor's side may be counted as a factor to justify the impartiality and independence of evaluation according to a principle recommended by OECD.<sup>13</sup> In fact, DAC's peer review conducted in 2010 pointed out an independence issue, which was related only to the structural hierarchy such that the Office for Evaluation<sup>14</sup> was placed under the International Cooperation Bureau inside MOFA (OECD 2010, 61). The review expressed concern that the International Cooperation Bureau was a strong stakeholder of ODA, and that this hierarchy might risk the independence of the evaluation. Once the Office of ODA Evaluation<sup>15</sup> was transferred to the Minister's Secretariat of MOFA, OECD's peer review conducted in 2014 concluded "more

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than 30 percent of total contract price must be used to purchase goods made in Japan. For details, see JICA (2013).

<sup>13</sup> More concretely, this principle is spelled out as follows: "(t)he evaluation process should be impartial and independent in its function from the process concerned with the policy-making, the delivery, and the management of development assistance." (OECD 1998, 42-46)

<sup>14</sup> The exact name of the office was the "Office for Evaluation and Public Relations."

<sup>15</sup> The present name of the office is "ODA Evaluation Division."

independence has been injected into MOFA's evaluation system" (OECD 2014, 72-73).

This author, however, still finds that there are some issues of independence, which were not indicated in OECD peer reviews (OECD 2010; OECD 2014).

### **(1) "De-Facto" Requirements of Approval of Evaluation Report by Stakeholders**

As indicated in subsection 2.2.3, each evaluation team is requested to convince related divisions of MOFA, related embassies of Japan, and related departments of JICA of the relevance of the evaluation methods throughout the evaluation operation. This occurs on three occasions: at an initial meeting, a pre-review-trip meeting, and a final meeting at approximately nine months into the operation. The final meeting is where the final draft of evaluation report is discussed and is given "de-facto approval" by participants. For example, in the case of Country Assistance Evaluation of Vietnam, officers in charge of Vietnam in the First Southeast Asia Division, Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau, MOFA, those in charge of Vietnam in the Country Assistance Planning Division I, International Cooperation Bureau of MOFA, and those in charge of Vietnam in the Southeast Asia Division 3, Southeast Asia and Pacific Department of JICA, were invited to the three meetings. At the meetings they were ready to be consulted by the evaluation team. At the same time, they gave comments to the evaluation framework and a final draft at will. Without the consents of all these officers, an evaluation team cannot proceed to the evaluation trip and submission of the final report.

The evaluation team is requested to submit a final evaluation report by the end of a fiscal year (March 31) of Japan. Ahead of that, a first draft must be distributed to the above officers and relevant Japan's diplomatic missions abroad (in the case of Vietnam, the Embassy of Japan in Hanoi and the Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City) in early January. The officers of the relevant divisions of MOFA, diplomatic missions abroad and JICA send back line-by-line comments. Some of comments are about facts, while some are about value judgements. The exchanges of comments and revisions are repeated before the final meeting is held in March. The ODA Evaluation Division (formerly known as the Office of ODA Evaluation) under Minister's Secretary also adds independent comments to the revisions. The division does not stand at the side of the evaluation team. Rather, the division acts to facilitate incorporation of views of the related divisions of MOFA and JICA into the final report. Thus, the evaluation team alone is obliged to address all requests for revisions by different divisions of MOFA, the diplomatic missions and JICA. An easy way of reconciliation is just to swallow all comments. Indeed, the competitiveness of an evaluation team is tested in this process.

Thus, direct stakeholders, namely relevant divisions of MOFA, diplomatic missions and JICA have opportunities to influence the content of the review. The evaluation team, above all members employed by the consulting firm, takes time constraints seriously. A failure to meet the due date for submission of the report by March 31st might be counted as a fault of the consulting firm,

and might affect the results of future bidding on MOFA's tenders.

The bottom line is that the term of "third party evaluation" of policy-level ODA evaluation cannot be taken as it is meant. The information on ODA is asymmetrically granted between stakeholders and the evaluation team and unless a third party outsider has a high degree of competence, it cannot counter the well-informed stakeholders.

## **(2) Selection of Countries, Priority Issues and Sectors to Evaluate**

The country / issue / sector to be selected for evaluation is determined inside MOFA. Even when the External Advisory Meeting on ODA Evaluation was in operation, the meeting team was not consulted on choice of countries / issues / sectors<sup>16</sup>. As discussed in subsection 2.2.2, countries for evaluation are not randomly selected. Some countries such as Bangladesh, Cambodia, Nicaragua, Sri Lanka, Tanzania and Vietnam were reviewed three times during two decades. Without the consent of related the divisions of MOFA and embassies, the ODA Evaluation Division cannot choose the countries for ODA evaluation. The ODA Evaluation Division cannot force a recipient country / issue / sector to receive evaluation.

Around the time when the OECD peer review process started for Japan in 2010, the name of the evaluation division was the "Office for Evaluation and Public Relations" (OECD 2010, 61). This implies that MOFA wanted to use the ODA evaluation for the purpose of PR for Japan's ODA. MOFA assumed that an ODA evaluation would be read favorably by the Japanese. The peer review in 2010 also pointed out that "visibility of Japanese ODA both to recipients and domestically" was added as a criterion to OECD/DAC's (OECD 2010, 61). Thus, at that time, the score for an evaluation of Japan's ODA was higher if a project increased the visibility of Japan's contribution.

This arbitrary nature is also found in the selection of topics for Aid Modality Evaluation in recent years. "Grant Aid for Countries with Relatively High Income" was reviewed in 2014 (Table 5). This selection foresaw an emphasis added to the new *Development Cooperation Charter* which replaced *ODA Charter* in February 2015. The new concept of "development cooperation" includes assistance to "ODA graduated countries with special vulnerabilities." Examples of "special vulnerabilities" raised in the new charter are those related to the "middle income trap" and climate change. Rich countries in the Middle East are in the domain of this group of nations since a challenge to water supply is considered to be a "special vulnerability" caused by climate change.

Another strategic choice in the topics for review for Aid Modality Evaluation is defined in the 2016 "Grant Aid for Promotion of Japanese Standards." This aid is designed to promote Japan's national interests in exporting products made in Japan. The stress on national interests as an aim of assistance was a feature of the *Development Cooperation Charter* as well (Yamagata 2016).

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<sup>16</sup> The head of the meeting team might be consulted, though any formal consultation was not made to the meeting team.

Promotion of Japanese standards is a new agenda to raise the welfare of the Japanese through the industrial development of Japan. This explicit spelling-out of pursuits for national interests is quite novel in the realm of international cooperation and irrelevant to people in developing countries. Thus, these two topics, the “Grant Aid for Countries with Relatively High Income” and “Grant Aid for Promotion of Japanese Standards,” are unlikely to be random choices made by the ODA Evaluation Division, and look more likely to be suggested by the International Cooperation Bureau, which is a direct stakeholder of Japan’s ODA.

### **(3) Selection of projects to visit**

Even in the processes for an evaluation operation, an evaluation team greatly depends on judgements made by stakeholders. When the team visits the designated country for evaluation, the team’s movements inside the country are under the total control of the embassy of Japan in the country. If the evaluation team wants to visit any sites Japan’s ODA provided, the team needs to obtain permissions for the visit from relevant ministries of the recipient country supervising the project and the embassy of Japan. If they are not sure about whether a positive evaluation will be made by the evaluation team, they can discourage the team from the visit or refrain from providing cooperation that will facilitate the team’s obtaining permission for the visit from related ministries. The bottom line is: the evaluation team conducting a MOFA’s policy-level ODA evaluation is not granted strong authority to enforce information disclosure.

#### **3.2.2.2. Resources**

In monetary terms, the scale of an evaluation exercise is around 15 million Japanese yen (roughly 130,000 USD as of August 2018) as indicated in subsection 2.2.3. Two experts (a chief evaluator and an advisor) and three consultants are hired for months for the exercise. A DAC Peer Review in 2014 expressed concerns about the small budget and staff constraints of a MOFA’s policy-level evaluation (OECD 2014, 72).

In recent years, the budget has been shrunk further. The budget cuts are reflected in the length of the evaluation trip to a country for review and the number of evaluation projects. The length of the trip is set by the ODA Evaluation Division and stipulated in the contract. Generally speaking, the current length of the trip is shorter than in the first decade of this century. When this author participated in the evaluation trip to Nicaragua in 2007, the evaluation trip took three weeks. Meanwhile, MOFA allowed only one week for the same trip to Paraguay in 2016. A decline in the number of evaluation projects in these years is evident in Figure 1. Only four projects are planned in 2018.

Such resource constraint increases the dependence of the evaluation team on Japan’s diplomatic missions to the country of the review to arrange interviews and visits during an

evaluation trip. It lowers the level of independence of the evaluation, and consequently it weakens the impacts and presence of MOFA's policy-level ODA evaluations in Japan.

#### **4. Concluding Remarks**

Japan's policy-level ODA evaluations have played a complementary role to project-level evaluations. Japan has encountered policy-level challenges, mainly from OECD/DAC, beyond the level of project management. How can Japan's ODA be improved in terms of aid effectiveness? How can Japan's ODA be more coordinated with other donors? How is a gender equality viewpoint incorporated effectively into a Country Assistance Strategy? How can priority areas for Japan's ODA be sharpened and highlighted? Which types of recipient countries should be graduated from Japan's ODA? MOFA's policy-level ODA evaluations attempted to address these thematic questions, taking each evaluation exercise as a case study. Some of policy recommendations derived from the exercises were useful and seriously examined by MOFA and JICA for realization.

In the meantime, there are challenges to MOFA's policy-level ODA evaluations. They have a low level of independence and insufficient resources. A fundamental cause of the low level of independence is that the evaluation team is nothing but a contractor of MOFA. The ODA Evaluation Division of MOFA stands at the side of stakeholder-divisions and diplomatic missions of MOFA. Hence, interactions between them and the evaluation team in the process of drafting the review report affects the contents of the report significantly. Secondly, resources in terms of money, time and personnel available to complete a report in Japanese and its summaries in English are minimal<sup>17</sup>. The contractor nature of the evaluation team and the allocation of few resources result in a low level of authority and little publicity of the evaluation. In this author's view, the drastic decline in the number of this policy-level evaluation projects over the last five years symbolizes MOFA's low expectation of this evaluation exercise.

So far comprehensive reviews of Japan's ODA-evaluation have been made only by OECD as a peer review (OECD 2010, OECD 2014). OECD peer review teams visit Japan for weeks to write a review as a neutral outsider. By contrast this paper is written by an insider of MOFA's policy-level evaluation who participated in eight evaluation exercises as a chief evaluator of evaluation teams. Thus, this paper contains more detailed information on ground-level evaluation exercises than OECD's peer review reports. Moreover, as long as the author notices, no other persons who were deeply involved in any of the evaluation exercises have ever written a comprehensive report on how Japan's policy-level ODA evaluation works in the past decade. Therefore, the author argues that this article contains unique observations which are exposed for the first time.

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<sup>17</sup> OECD Peer Review 2014 also pointed out this resource issue (OECD 2014, p. 72).

Finally, for improvements of Japan's policy-level ODA evaluation, both MOFA and external experts face challenges. As discussed above, MOFA had better enhance the level of independence of ODA evaluation. Contrary to the peer review report made by OECD (2014), the transfer of the Office of ODA Evaluation from the International Cooperation Bureau to the Minister's Secretariat did not heighten the level of independence, because ODA evaluation is only one of a huge number issues of which the head of the Minister's Secretariat takes charge, while the Director-General of the International Cooperation Bureau concerns about ODA evaluation more. What are lacking in an evaluation team to raise the level of independence are resources and power to enforce disclosure of information.

External experts have to be equipped with deep knowledge in international development and wide experiences on international cooperation. High expertise in terms of knowledge and experiences is necessary to work out meaningful and feasible recommendations. Enhanced independence must be associated with great competence of external experts in ODA evaluation.

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Table 1. ODA Evaluation Exercises Organized by the Government of Japan

	Name	What to be evaluated	Evaluator	Organizer
1	MOFA's Policy-level Evaluation	Japan's ODA policies	External experts	MOFA
2	Evaluations by Other Ministries and Agencies	Policy/Program/Project conducted by a particular ministry / agency	The ministry / the agency	The ministry / the agency
3	Operations Evaluations by JICA	Program/Project conducted by JICA	External experts or JICA's officers*	JICA
4	Partner Country-led Evaluation	Japan's ODA programs/projects conducted for a particular recipient country	Experts from the recipient country	MOFA (Japan)

Note: The typology of this table is based on Section 2 of MOFA (2018). \*: Projects with one billion Japanese yen or more are obliged to be evaluated by external experts, while those below the threshold are reviewed internally, in principle (see JICA 2018, 4).

Table 2. List of Country/Regional Assistance Reviewed for MOFA's Policy-level ODA Evaluation

Year	Country/Region for Evaluation					
1999	Zambia	Cambodia				
2000	China					
2001	Nicaragua	Bangladesh	Vietnam	Tanzania		
2002	Sri Lanka	Thailand				
2003	Indonesia	India	Pakistan	Jordan		
2004	Lao PDR	Uzbekistan/ Kazakhstan	Bangladesh	Ethiopia		
2005	Cambodia	Tanzania	Senegal	Kenya		
2006	Vietnam	Bhutan	Morocco	Zambia	Madagascar	
2007	Indonesia	Sri Lanka	China	Mongolia	Nicaragua	Tunisia
2008	Mozambique	Ecuador	Pacific Island Countries	Romania/ Bulgaria	Turkey	
2009	Bangladesh	Ethiopia	India	Brazil	Ghana	
2010	Philippines	Malaysia	Egypt	Bolivia	Uganda	
2011	Thailand	Peru	Kazakhstan/ Kyrgyz/ Uzbekistan			
2012	Nepal	Cuba	Palestinian Territories	Malawi		
2013	Lao PDR	Sri Lanka	Colombia			
2014	Mekong Region	Pakistan	Kenya			
2015	Vietnam	Pacific Island Countries	South Caucasus	Morocco		
2016	Tanzania	Paraguay				
2017	India	Uganda	Cambodia			
2018	Indonesia	Costa Rica and Nicaragua	Angola			

Source: MOFA (2018) and <https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/evaluation/year/index.html#2017>.

Table 3. List of Priority Issues Reviewed for MOFA's Policy-level ODA Evaluation

Year	Priority Issue for Evaluation		
2004	Achievement of the MDGs in the Area of Education	Achievement of the MDGs in the Area of Health	Anti-Personnel Mine Action Assistance Policy
2005	Poverty Reduction	Peacebuilding Assistance Policy	
2006	Agriculture and Rural Development	Forest Conservation	Regional Cooperation: Central America
2007	Educational Cooperation Policy	Assistance to Africa through TICAD Process	
2008	Response to Tsunami Disaster	Health Sector	"Initiative for Japan's ODA on Water" and "Water and Sanitation Broad Partnership Initiative"
2009			
2010	Peace Building (Timor-Leste)		
2011	Aid for Trade		
2012	Policies and Institutions that Promote Gender Equality	Triangular Cooperation	
2013	Initiative for Disaster Reduction through ODA		
2014	Legal and Judicial Reform	Humanitarian Assistance in Case of Emergency	Achievement of the MDGs in the Area of Health Sector
2015	Achievement of the MDGs in the Area of Environmental Sector	Education Cooperation Policy 2011-2015	
2016	Pollution Control		
2017	ODA to Africa through the TICAD Process for the Past 10 Years	JICA Volunteer Program	
2018			

Source: The same as Table 2.

Table 4. List of Sector Programs Reviewed for MOFA's Policy-level ODA Evaluation

Year	Sector Program for Evaluation			
2004	Morocco-UNICEF Country Program	Bridge Construction Program for Tegucigalpa and on Main Highways in Honduras		
2005	LGED (Local Government Engineering Dept.) Related Sectors (Bangladesh)	"To Construct General Education School Building" Project and Program "Grant Assistance for Grassroots Human Security Projects" (Mongolia)	Education Sector in the Philippines	Transport Infrastructure Development in the Red River Delta Area of Vietnam
2006	Health Sector in Thailand	Education Sector in Samoa	Road and Bridge Sector in Sri Lanka	
2007	US-Japan Partnership for Global Health	Malaysia Projects	Consolidation of Peace and Security in Africa in Relation to TICAD IV	El Salvador's Eastern Region
2008	Education Sector in Laos	"Japan's ODA for Improvement of Management Capacity of Operation and Maintenance Regarding Water Supply in Egypt" and "Japan's ODA for Water Supply Development in Egypt"		Health Sector
2009	Education Sector in Afghanistan		Guatemala's Health and Water Sectors	
2010	Bangladesh's Transport Sector		Senegal's Water Sector	
2011	Education (Vocational Training) Sector in Senegal		Education Sector in Mozambique	
2012	Health Sector in Cambodia			
2013	Urban Transportation Sector in Viet Nam		Health Sector in Viet Nam	
2014	Rural and Agriculture Sector in Thailand			
2015	Disaster Risk Reduction Management Sector in the Philippines			
2016	Industrial Human Resources Development Sector in Thailand		Uruguayan Forestry Sector	
2017	Connectivity in the Mekong Region with a Focus on the Southern Economic Corridor			
2018				

Source: The same as Table 2.

Table 5. List of Aid Modalities Reviewed for MOFA's Policy-level ODA Evaluation

Year	Aid Modality for Evaluation			
2004	Adjustment Lending: SAL and Sector Adjustment Loans	Grant Assistance for Japanese NGO Projects Modality	Grassroots Human Security Grant Aid for Bolivia	Program Assistance: Timor-Leste
2005	Grant Assistance for Grassroots Human Security	General Budget Support: Tanzania and Vietnam	Non-Project Grant Aid Program in Zambia	
2006	Japan's Development Studies	Grant Assistance for Grassroots Human Security Projects (Afghanistan)		
2007				
2008				
2009				
2010	Grant Assistance for Japanese NGO Projects			
2011	Training and Dialogue Program	Grant Assistance for the Food Aid Project	Grant Aid for Fisheries	
2012	Japan Disaster Relief Team			
2013	Grant Aid for Poverty Reduction Strategy			
2014	Grant Aid for Countries with Relatively High Income			
2015	Debt Cancellation			
2016	Grant Aid for Promotion of Japanese Standards			
2017	Individual Project under Grand Aid			
2018	Individual Project under Grand Aid			

Source: The same as Table 2.

Table 6. List of Other MOFA's Policy-level ODA Evaluation

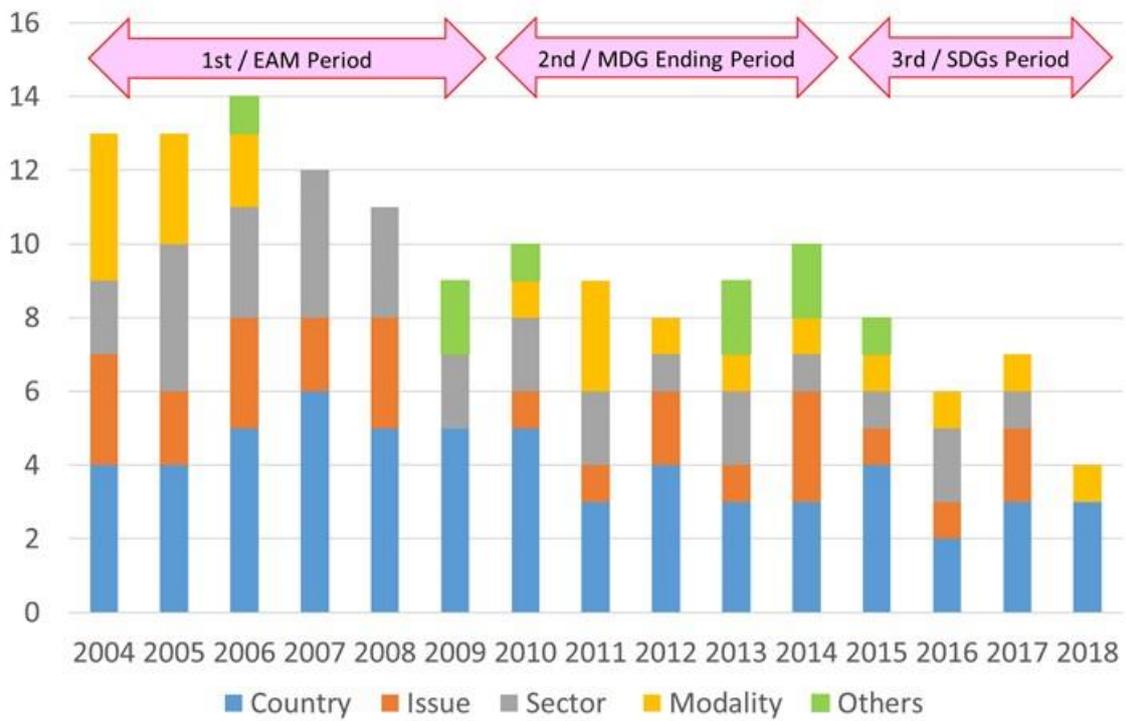
Year	Topic for Evaluation	
2006	Fact-Finding Survey on Evaluation Capacity Development in Partner Countries (Collaboration with DAC)	
2009	Multilateral ODA: UN Trust Fund for Human Security	Review of Japan's ODA Evaluation between FY2000-2007
2010	Implementation of Paris Declaration: Case Study of Japan	
2013	African Millennium Villages Initiative	"Human Resource Development in the Area of Development" and "Supporting Development Education"
2014	JICA Partnership Program	Review of Japan's ODA Evaluation from FY2003-2013
2015	Feedback Mechanism of Japan's ODA	

Source: The same as Table 2.

Table 7. Policy-Level ODA Evaluation Projects for Which the Author Served as Chief Evaluator

Fiscal Year	Country / Issue	Contractor	Advisor
2006-07	Madagascar	KRI International Corp.	Takumi Moriyama (University of Tokyo)
2007-08	Nicaragua	International Development Center of Japan	Takashi Tanaka (Chubu University)
2008-09	“Initiative for Japan’s ODA on Water” and “Water and Sanitation Broad Partnership Initiative (WASABI)”	Mizuho Information & Research Institute, Inc.	Yukio Tanaka (University of Tokyo)
2009-10	India	Mitsubishi Research Institute, Inc.	Fumiko Oshikawa (Kyoto University)
2011-12	Aid for Trade	Mizuho Information & Research Institute, Inc.	Atsushi Ohno (Ritsumeikan University)
2014-15	Japan’s Contribution to the Achievement of the MDGs in the Health Sector	Mizuho Information & Research Institute, Inc.	Etsuko Kita (Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation)
2015-16	Vietnam	KPMG AZSA L.L.C.	Kenta Goto (Kansai University)
2016-17	Paraguay	KPMG AZSA L.L.C.	Yoko Fujikake (Yokohama National University)

Figure 1. Number of MOFA's Policy-Level ODA Evaluation Projects



Source: MOFA (2018) and <http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/evaluation/year/index.html#2017>.

Note: The term of “Country” stands for Country Assistance Evaluation, while “Issue,” “Sector” and “Modality” signify Priority Issue, Sector Program and Aid Modality, respectively.