

International Cooperation in Response to the Aging Population in the Kingdom of Thailand

We asked Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) Senior Advisor Nakamura Shintaro about the Project on Seamless Health and Social Services Provision for Elderly Persons, an international cooperation project in response to the aging population in Thailand, and other efforts. (Text: Morohashi Kumiko)

In recent years, Thailand has become an aging society¹ with more than 10% of its total population aged 65 or over. In 2007, JICA formulated the Community Based Integrated Health Care and Social Welfare Services Model for Older Persons based on an analysis of the conditions of Thailand's healthcare and social welfare services for older adults, and began providing support for its utilization and popularization. Since 2013, JICA has cooperated toward the introduction of more institutionalized public services.

JICA dispatched care managers and other experts, trained volunteer personnel called "caregivers" and management personnel locally, and assisted in the preparation of policy recommendations to the Thai government on care for older adults.

In 2016, in parallel with JICA's initiatives, the Thai government started an initiative to provide long-term care and nursing-care services to persons requiring care. The care managers who were trained under this project played a major role. In addition, since 2018,



An expert conducts an interview for the purpose of preparing a care plan for an older person.



A Japanese expert assesses conditions of a care-dependent older person in community.



Cooperation is also provided for the development of rehabilitation services at hospitals.



A local health volunteer visits an older person in need of care.



A workshop to share each pilot site's activities

toward the realization of more comprehensive services for older people, it has continued to provide support for the strengthening of rehabilitation programs and other intermediate care for in-patients as well as follow-up services in the community to prevent care-dependency after discharge from hospitals.

While the central government is the institution that implements this kind of project while receiving JICA support, the people at the actual site where care is provided are local members of the community. Nakamura says that among the actual initiatives, there were many episodes that left a strong impression on him.

“When we had an expert from Japan come to visit the home of an older person in need of care, we encountered a situation where a family caregiver shed tears sharing the painful reality of the situation. This made me feel in my bones how vital these care services are, not only for the older adults in need of care but their family caregivers as well. Also, in 2017, when a trained local caregiver was presenting his experiences at an international conference, the sight of this person passionately describing how this project made them feel needed by those requiring care, giving them a sense of purpose. I felt that this project had become one that could resolve issues not only for the ones being cared for, but also for those who provide the care.”

Thailand has also made progress in its long-term care policy, its research into challenges to older adults by academic institution is advancing, and the country's care businesses for older persons are starting up. Nakamura adds that future support from Japan may also shift to a more multilayered structure of cooperative resources from industry, government, civil society, and academia.

“Japan is a ‘front runner in aging’ that experienced challenges of rapid aging earlier than other countries in Asia. It is also ahead in terms of its future direction

for the decentralization of health and welfare for the aged. Aging-related cooperation is also an opportunity for both sides to learn from one another, rather than one-way technical cooperation. We'd like to probe the potential for partnering on initiatives to work on the problems and share knowledge with other ASEAN nations.” **J**

1. Currently, the over-65 population is often referred to as the “older people,” while their proportion of the total population is called the “aging rate” (older population ratio). In addition, in United Nations reports, societies with aging rates over 7% have been referred to as “aging societies.”

Reference

Examples of JICA's International Cooperation Projects Concerning Response to Population Aging in Thailand

■ The Project on the Development of a Community Based Integrated Health Care and Social Welfare Services Model for Thai Older Persons

Term of cooperation: Nov. 2007 - Nov. 2011

Outline: According to population statistics, in Thailand the growth rate of older adults had surpassed that of the overall population. Under this cooperation, through the analysis of challenges facing older adults and the state of health care and social welfare services for them in four project sites, as well as through initiatives to respond to the challenges, support was provided toward the formulation of a “Community Based Integrated Health Care and Social Welfare Services Model for Older Persons,” and for its dissemination with the aim of utilization. This contributed to the nationwide use of the model.

■ Project on Long-term Care Service Development for the Frail Elderly and Other Vulnerable People

Term of cooperation: Jan. 2013 - Aug. 2017

Outline: Thailand was undergoing the most advanced aging among developing countries in the Southeast Asia region. There were concerns that care fatigue among family members would become a societal problem, and there was a need to introduce care services in the form of institutionalized public services. Under this cooperation, support was provided for the preparation of policy recommendations on care for older adults through the implementation of model care services, while utilizing community-based integrated services.

■ Project on Seamless Health and Social Services Provision for Elderly Persons

Term of cooperation: Nov. 2017 - Oct. 2022

Outline: In 2016, Thailand became an aging society with its population aged 65 or over accounting for about 10% of its total population. At the same time, patients hospitalized for stroke, etc., often become bedridden due to the lack of proper in-patient rehabilitation and follow-up after discharge. Therefore, it was necessary to strengthen rehabilitation services and provide seamless care. Under this cooperation, support was provided for strengthening rehabilitation and coordinating care to prevent older persons from slipping into care-dependency after discharge from hospitals.

Reference websites

- <https://www.jica.go.jp/oda/project/0613081/index.html>
- <https://www.jica.go.jp/oda/project/1202383/index.html>
- <https://www.jica.go.jp/oda/project/1700422/index.html>