

8 April 2011

“Government must Co-Advance Japan’s Post-Disaster Reconstruction and Fight against Global Poverty” Ugoku/Ugokasu Requests DPJ to Withdraw 20% Aid Cut Plan

Michiya Kumaoka, Chair, Ugoku/Ugokasu
Masaki Inaba, Executive Director, Ugoku/Ugokasu

Summary

Press reports that on April 6, the ruling Democratic Party of Japan and its “Tohoku Pacific Seismic Disaster Restoration and Reconstruction Committee” requested to the Cabinet that the foreign aid budget for the fiscal year 2011 be cut by 20% to help finance the post-disaster reconstruction efforts in Japan’s Tohoku and Kanto regions. Ugoku/Ugokasu requests that the Committee withdraw this request, and that the aid budget at least be kept as originally planned, for the reasons outlined below.

1. **Aid cut does not help adequately finance the reconstruction efforts.** Twenty percent of this fiscal year’s ODA budget amounts only to 114.5 billion yen, a tiny amount compared to the reconstruction demands. The amount of ODA has already been declining for 13 consecutive years since 1998, and the negative impacts of a further 20% cut would be enormous.
2. **Global poverty subjects people to similar sufferings as the recent disasters.** Global poverty is often referred to as “silent tsunami”, which Japanese ODA has been contributing to overcoming. Bartering domestic reconstruction against overseas aid is the wrong approach for a post-disaster Japan to take: it must do both.
3. **Over 130 countries have extended aid to disaster-stricken Japan,** many of which as a show of solidarity to Japan’s past assistance. The cycle of compassion and gratitude must not be lost in this ever-more interdependent world. A reiteration of overseas aid commitment despite the recent tragedy, on the other hand, will award Japan great admiration and trust globally.

On April 7, numerous press reports suggested that the ruling Democratic Party of Japan and its “Tohoku Pacific Seismic Disaster Restoration and Response Committee” requested to the Cabinet that its foreign aid budget for this fiscal year be cut by 20%, to help finance 114.5 billion yen for the post-disaster reconstruction efforts.

If these reports are true, Ugoku/Ugokasu, a network of Japanese NGOs working towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and the eradication of global poverty, strongly demands to the Committee that this request be withdrawn, that the aid budget remain and that both the domestic reconstruction and the overseas aid be given political commitments, not one over the other. The reasons underlying this demand are as follow:

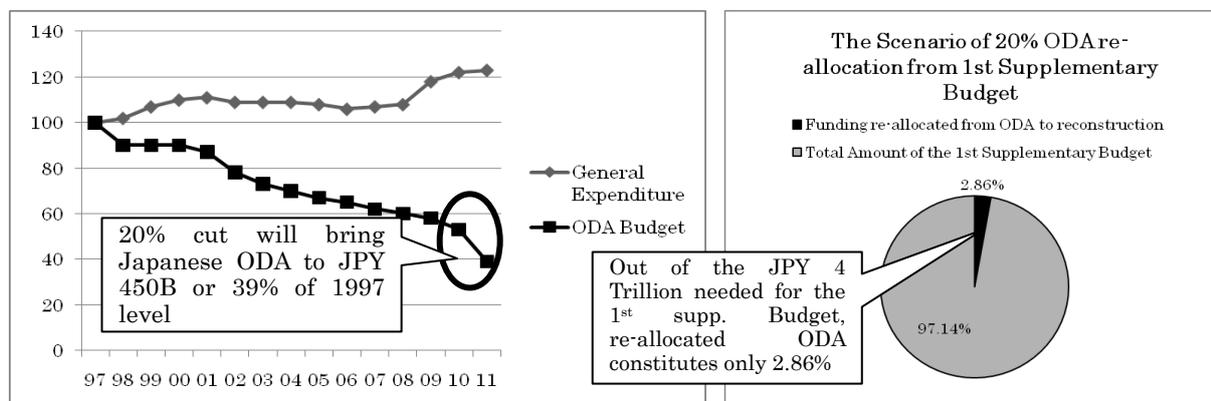
1. The proposed cut in aid does not help adequately finance the reconstruction efforts. Twenty percent of the current ODA budget for FY2011 only amounts to 114.5 billion yen, a mere 2.86% of the 4-trillion-yen first supplementary budget needed for the reconstruction efforts. On the other hand, the amount of Japanese ODA has been in decline for 13 consecutive years, and the budget for FY2011 (572.7 billion yen) would already have amounted to just around half (49%) the level of 1997 – a worrying trend that had significantly

dragged Japan behind most other industrialized nations' increasing aid levels since 2000. Another 20% cut would put Japan's ODA at just 458.1 billion yen, hitting the lowest level in 30 years and 39% of the 1997 level. Targeting overseas aid, among numerous expenditures, and after more than a decade of constant reduction, seems hardly fair or effective in mobilizing the desperately-needed reconstruction finance.

2. Japanese citizens must stand by, and share the hardships with, those directly affected by this Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami. On the other hand, billions of people around the world continue to face similar hardships, if less visible due to the chronic nature of their situations – extreme poverty and hunger, and a lack of access to basic education and healthcare services. It is indeed no coincidence that global poverty has often been referred to as “silent tsunami”. Japan has been greatly contributing to overcoming this “silent tsunami”. It is in recognition of the scale and severity of the challenges before us, that Ugoku/Ugokasu believe we must refrain from bartering domestic reconstruction efforts against overseas aid and instead advance on both fronts.

3. The various forms of assistance extended from over 130 countries have been of great support to us all living in Japan, morally and physically. Especially remarkable has been the fact that a number of developing country governments and their citizens, many of whom face daily problems of poverty at home, have donated cash, sent emergency provisions, and dispatched rescue missions. Many have expressed their desire to show gratitude to the past assistance they have received from Japan. Mutual cooperation among nations will only become more important in today's ever-more interdependent world, and the virtuous cycle of compassion and gratitude must not be broken. Japan on the other hand stands to gain great international acclaim and trust if it resisted the temptation to turn inwards and maintained (and strengthened) its level of international cooperation.

Japan's humanitarian and development NGOs, many of whom members of Ugoku/Ugokasu, were among the very first to enter the affected-areas and have since been working with the people and communities. It is because of our own resolve to stay present to the pains and sufferings of, and the struggles to overcome the hardships fought by, the tens of thousands of people in Miyagi, Fukushima, Iwate and other affected areas, that we NGOs demand not a bartering but a co-advancement of international cooperation and domestic reconstruction efforts. We believe that at least maintaining the level of ODA despite the disasters at home, especially that of aid aimed at the eradication of poverty and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, will be a best tool there is for Japan to use, in its endeavour to revive the nation into one that enjoys the international community's trust as a true partner.



Ugoku/Ugokasu is a network of NGOs working towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and the eradication of work poverty, with 61 member NGOs.

Contact Person: Masaki Inaba

Address: 2nd Fl., 1-20-6 Higashi-Ueno, Taito-Ku, Tokyo 110-0015 JAPAN

Phone: +81-3-3834-6902, URL: <http://www.ugokuugokasu.jp>, E-mail: office@ugokuugokasu.jp