

Towards Stronger Japan-UK Research Linkages on International Development

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Executive Summary

Introduction and Background

The aim of this initiative is to increase the interaction between researchers from Japan and the United Kingdom who work on development issues. Current interaction between researchers is surprisingly limited and further collaboration would be beneficial as both countries are major donors and have different comparative advantages. Increased interaction fits well with current moves to increase information sharing and enhancing aid effectiveness.

Based on a range of approaches – including web searches, desk reviews, interviews and visits – the purpose of the initial phase was to assess: current interactions between researchers; interest in the initiative; demand for different products; and how the initiative might be coordinated and funded.

UK Context: The context for development research has changed significantly due to reforms within DFID and in the funding of research in the UK. New initiatives have also simplified communication of research (Eldis and id21) and information on research institutes (UK Development Studies Association). These issues make coordination of the initiative from the UK side much more straightforward.

UK Researcher Views: The vast majority of UK researchers see research from Japan as potentially relevant as Japan is a major player with considerable experience, particularly in Asia. However they are mostly unaware of who is doing what and where, and are unsure whether it is any good. Little Japanese research makes it into UK-read journals; websites of Japanese development research organisations often do not have much substantive content in English; and researchers are not sure how to engage with Japanese colleagues. UK researchers are interested in having a window on Japan's development research community (i.e. a website that provides information on, and links to, the main institutes in the country); a selective who's who; summaries of good quality research papers; and information on funding opportunities.

Japan Context: The growth of development studies in Japan and the narrowing gap between research and policy is clearly noticeable. These provide a positive context for this initiative. Challenges include reduced public funding and the related increasingly competitive environment.

Japan Researcher Views: Many researchers in Japan are aware of UK development research and institutes. Japanese researchers are extremely interested in increasing their international exposure – and this initiative is seen as one potential avenue for this. In the short term, there is great demand to access UK development research, researchers and publication opportunities more easily (i.e. a website with institutions, outputs, individuals and publishers). In the longer term, there is specific interest in policy discussions, publication opportunities, joint projects or meetings and news bulletins.

Findings on Key Questions

- The nature of **current interactions** between development researchers in Japan and the UK is generally rather limited, informal and ad hoc.
- There is **interest in** this initiative from both sides – but demand is certainly stronger from Japan (and this is a concern for some). There is perceived value in greater interaction between development researchers in Japan and the UK, and there are a number of simple initiatives that could be carried out relatively easily and cheaply.
- The main (interlinked) **barriers** relate to issues of language, lopsided demand and funding.

- Issues of longer term *coordination and funding* are still to be fully resolved. From the UK side, ODI and the Development Studies Association are probably best placed. From the Japanese side, this will depend on issues of legitimacy and willingness.

Conclusions

It would help both communities if they had chances to interact more – both virtually and face-to-face – on pressing issues of development policy. Any network will need to proceed in a stepwise and organic manner. It should pick ‘low hanging fruit’ and take opportunities where they appear, with an eye to building towards something more ambitious.

It would certainly help UK researchers if:

- The major development research organisations in Japan placed more of their material on the web in English.
- More key reports in Japanese were translated.
- There was a single clearing house of the most useful development reports in English produced in Japan – and more information on the key organisations and people.
- A research reporting service was set up – providing short digests of key documents.

It would certainly help development researchers in Japan if:

- A research reporting service of UK research (on topical issues) was available in English or Japanese (this exists, but is not well known – and not focused enough).
- Information on UK researchers, organisations and publications outlets was more easily accessible.
- Their work was publicised more outside Japan.

Specific Recommendations

1. ODI should continue to host the initiative from the UK side. This should include: (i) developing the website to provide useful windows on development research in the two countries; (ii) fielding inquiries; (iii) coordinating e-discussions or putting together a research reporting service; and (iv) fundraising in the UK for developing the project further.
2. The website should have two windows – one for each research community with information on institutions and research outputs. In the longer term, the website would meet the different needs, but should include individual profiles and discussion topics.
3. UK DSA should be asked to be a partner in the initiative from the UK side. This should include; (i) providing a note to DSA members on the initiative; (ii) mirroring the UK website; and (iii) contacting experts in specific areas to find out who might be willing to field specific inquiries.
4. It will be necessary to agree on the most appropriate counterparts for the initiative on the Japanese side. The institution or consortium needs to have legitimacy, a strong network and a desire to contribute. The main functions in terms of this initiative would be similar to the roles of ODI and DSA from the UK side – namely the website, fielding inquiries, coordinating and fundraising.
5. The next UK DSA annual meeting is being organised by ODI on the topic of Bridging Research and Policy (6 November 2004). DSA should invite Japanese partners in this initiative / anyone else interested to attend, although DSA could not cover costs.

6. The networks should try to identify two to three topics of interest to the aid ministries, and then set up task forces to produce joint reports.
7. A strategic consideration: The Government of Japan may want to consider supporting a Japanese research reporting service and web portal on development issues similar to id21 and Eldis. This is probably an idea that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is best placed to consider.