

Preface

Let us assume that a rural household must host a funeral. Because a funeral requires a considerable amount of resources, people in rural societies commonly organize collective actions to assist the host household. In a Japanese village, a neighborhood group (*kumi*) comprised of approximately 10–20 households assists with all activities related to the funeral. Every household in the *kumi* is required to participate in this collective action, regardless of personal ties with the host family. In the case of a Thai village, the host family's relatives and friends would volunteer to help with the funeral. The personal ties that relatives and friends maintain with the host family serve to connect them with collective actions related to the funeral. In Thailand, no clear-cut criteria for membership or geographical scope appear to exist among those individuals who assist with the funeral. The two contrasting cases clearly demonstrate that, even though the purposes or needs of these collective actions are the same, the forms and the methods employed to organize people differ substantially based on each local society. Thus, local societies have developed their own mechanisms which they can use to create organizations.

Organizing people is an indispensable part of participatory rural development, because local people are expected to tackle their problems collectively. Designers and practitioners of rural development who attempt to apply this approach should become familiar with the mechanisms local people use to organize themselves in their communities. However, the search for these types of mechanisms has rarely been the focus of scholarly studies. Rather, studies have frequently provided discussions of outside agents' roles, and examinations of policy arrangements that might facilitate participatory development.

We do not claim that traditional institutions, such as those involved in funerals, would be applicable to current development needs without the addition of some changes. Nevertheless, rules of conduct should be shared by local people when they attempt to organize themselves. In order to approach local communities, we must know which mechanisms exist in the local community and how they work in the process of creating organizations. If development projects lack adequate knowledge of local mechanisms, those projects may fail to induce participation. Some organizations

might not survive once assistance is withdrawn. Even a successful pilot project might not be able to expand to wider areas.

This volume is the product of a joint research project entitled “A Comparative Study on the Organizational Capabilities of Asian Rural Societies.” The project was conducted by the Institute of Developing Economies over a two-year period that extended between April 2011 and March 2013. This research project sheds light on local societies. It attempts to identify local mechanisms that might be used to develop organizational activities and to develop methodologies that might be used to locate these local mechanisms. Figuratively speaking, we intend to present maps or a method to draw maps that rural researchers and frontline workers can rely on to uncover self-organizing capabilities of local societies.

The participants in this research project include scholars who possess significant experience in conducting research in rural societies in their personal field countries. In addition to the authors of this volume, when Keiko Sato was a graduate student at Kyoto University she also participated in the project during its first year and contributed to the interim report.

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