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Japanese Climate-Related Aid to South East Asia: Furthering “Weak”, “Medium” or “Strong” Sustainability?

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Summary

In the last 20 years, Japan has emerged as a significant donor of climate-related aid to countries in South East Asia through a number of channels such as environmental Official Development Assistance (ODA), the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), Fast-Start Finance (FSF), and the now rapidly developing Joint Credit Mechanism/Bilateral Offsetting Mechanism (JCM/BCOM). While furthering “sustainable development” is the declared intention behind these efforts, as used by the international community this concept is extremely vague. According to the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) model, sustainability can be broken down into economic, ecological, and social dimensions. This paper looks at the four mechanisms listed above, and asks how far the projects that Japan has funded through them in South East Asia really are conducive to the furthering of sustainability in specifically ecological and social terms. The results show that, with concern to Japan, it is very much still a mixed picture when it comes to climate-related aid. The country’s support of others vis-à-vis the environment includes donations to a number of large infrastructure projects having detrimental side effects, both environmental and social, as well as to many smaller projects that are indeed beneficial to both humans and the environment. In addition the analysis brings to light some of the difficulties posed by factors such as different reporting standards for different mechanisms, and the inconclusive project descriptions encountered when researching this subject. It also shows how the lack of a precise consensual definition for the term sustainable development leads to countries funding even environmentally and socially harmful projects in the name of addressing climate change under the United Nations’ climate protection process.

Keywords: Japan, climate change, South East Asia, official development assistance, sustainable development, Kyoto Protocol

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