A facet of changes in Japanese local governments  
· Transformation of program making style in Arakawa City ·

Koichi KAWAI  
PhD Candidate, the Okuma School of Public Management, Waseda University  
Researcher, Research Institute for Local Government, Arakawa City

Introduction

Local governments in Japan went through a number of administrative reforms through the 1990s. Decentralization can be described as being one of the most important of such reforms. One of the objectives of decentralization was for local governments to provide administrative services in accordance with local needs rather than following nationwide standard as determined by the laws set by the central government. Under such principle, the Comprehensive Decentralization Lawi came into force in July 1999 which was followed by the Decentralization Reform Promotion Lawii in December 2006. Local governments today are therefore expected to execute local administration independently and comprehensively in accordance with self determination and self responsibility.

Most notable of all is that following enactment of the Comprehensive Decentralization Law, the System of Delegated Functions iii which uniquely characterized the Japanese local autonomy system was abolished, following which Local Autonomy Functions and Statutory Entrusted Functions were newly established. As a result, autonomy of Japanese local governments increased significantly. Under the System of Delegated Functions, heads of local governments were delegated by the State in accordance with law to process certain administrative matters as subordinate functions to the State. As a result of this system being abolished and reorganized into Local Autonomy Functions and Statutory Entrusted Functions, local governments are now able to enact their own ordinances for all administrative matters.

Local Autonomy Functions, in particular, covers a number of administrative matters local governments execute in order to enhance welfare for local residents and “the State needs to take special consideration to enable local public entities to execute Local Autonomy Functions in accordance with local characteristics” (The Local
Autonomy Law Article 2.13). As a result, local governments are now entitled with a larger and more diverse role\textsuperscript{iv}.

In addition, whilst delegation of authority from the State to local governments progressed as a result of abolishment of the System of Delegated Functions, this was not accompanied by sufficient transfer of funding from the State. Local governments, therefore, are required to provide higher quality administrative service with lower expense as they need to deal with financial and personnel resource constraints\textsuperscript{v}.

In other words, the role of local government has changed significantly from implementing nationwide administrative service as a subordinate function to the State in accordance with laws set by the State to identifying local needs and issues, coming up with plans to counter such issues and implementing plans effectively and efficiently under resource constraints.

What is then needed to identify local needs and issues, plan and implement counter measures effectively and efficiently under resource constraints? Environment surrounding respective regions vary and therefore factors creating problems are also diverse. Providing uniformly set service as in the past will not lead to solution that meets respective purposes. Solutions that suit respective regions’ environment will be needed going forward.

In other words, sufficient analysis of current issues as well as identification of appropriate solutions to such issues based upon professional understanding is required in order for local governments to implement policies to solve local issues. It should also be noted that the demographic change in Japan adds further complication to problems for Japanese local governments as declining birth rate and aging population affect policies in various ways. Issues as well as factors creating such issues differ amongst respective local governments.

Therefore, in order to analyze issues and identify solutions, knowledge of street-level bureaucracy that is in frequent contact with residents in addition to managerial staff should be effectively utilized so that precise analysis of factors can be made. To be more precise, knowledge base of street-level bureaucracy that plays an important role in analyzing local environment should be fully utilized so that one can grasp the big picture framework of local issues accurately and also clarify and analyze
factors constituting such issues using technical knowledge base of respective staffs. It is even more desirable if external intelligence and residents can be utilized in addition to internal staffs so that diverse knowledge base and viewpoint can be brought in to understand local issues.

Based upon the above mentioned agenda, this paper studies an example of local government that is making an effort to effectively utilize multiple internal divisions as well as external professional staffs in order to solve local issues effectively and efficiently with limited resources. To be specific, this paper will analyze Arakawa City where efforts are made to create a structure for collaboration between various internal staffs and external professionals in the area of child poverty. Arakawa City aims to provide administrative service that matches local needs by allowing diverse personnel and divisions to collaborate and create programs, which is different from traditional program making process of Japanese local governments.

Finally, this paper will end by summarizing issues and implications for Japanese local governments based upon analysis of this case study.

**Case study : Project collaboration in Arakawa City**

1. Creation of Special Project Team

Arakawa City is located in the north eastern part of Tokyo with population of approximately 200,000 and is classified as being a Special Ward. Under Mayor Taiichiro Nishikawa, appointed in November 2004, Arakawa City has developed an organizational structure whereby their internal project team can collaborate with external intelligence in order to solve issues.

The Project Team is fundamentally different from project teams used by Japanese local governments in the past. This paper will therefore hereinafter define this newly created Project Team of Arakawa City as “Special Project Team” ("SPT"). The key characteristics of SPT are as described below.

First of all, SPT is managed by “Research Institute for Local Government, Arakawa City (RILAC)” which is a local authority think tank created by Arakawa City
instead of a division of the Arakawa City head office. RILAC is a think tank created by Arakawa City as an independent agency in October 2009 in order to research and study issues within Arakawa City. Majority of Project Team created by Japanese local governments in the past was operated by certain division or the planning section within the City Office. In SPT’s case, operation is entrusted to a think tank that is an external organization to the City Office.

Whilst employees of RILAC include staffs seconded from the City Office, half of the employees are researchers employed externally. Therefore, active participation by RILAC in projects enables maximum utilization of RILAC’s technical knowledge and capability from its research and studies across the entire City Office. As noted before, many issues local government face are driven from complicated factors. Technical knowledge and capability on research and studies plays an important role in analyzing such complex issues.

Employees of RILAC that have such knowledge and capability are also expected to integrate knowledge of street-level bureaucracy and data owned by respective divisions. RILAC’s role as operating entity of SPT enables analysis of issues and identification of solutions to be made more effectively and efficiently.

Secondly, SPT consists of employees collected across divisions that relate to the agenda. Moreover, street-level bureaucracy regardless of title participates in SPT. This is quite unique given that the norm of Japanese local governments is to allow only senior staffs to participate in key meetings. As for SPT, participants include street-level bureaucracy such as caseworker, public health nurse, teacher in public school and nursery teacher in public preschool (Table 1).

There were cases where the Project Team tried to incorporate in their discussions, knowledge and views of officers working in the field through interviews. SPT took this further by adding them to their members so that their knowledge can be utilized more actively. Constant utilization of knowledge and views of such members that are well informed of the local reality is critical in analyzing factors effectively and efficiently.

The Third characteristic of SPT is how they collaborate with external intelligence. Arakawa City established Advisory Committees for SPT for respective projects and thereby established a structure of collaboration by way of the Advisory Committee
giving advice to SPT's conclusion based upon their technical expertise (Table 2). This is done by way of SPT member participating in the Advisory Committee, presenting conclusions from SPT's discussion and seeking for views from external professionals.

Table 1  Members of SPT

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<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Members</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Children’s Problem of Poverty</td>
<td>Director, Research Institute for Local Government, Arakawa City</td>
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<td>Researcher, Research Institute for Local Government, Arakawa City</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Researcher, Research Institute for Local Government, Arakawa City</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Manager, General Affairs Department</td>
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<td>Senior Staff, General Affairs Department</td>
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<td>Senior Staff, Social Health &amp; Welfare Department</td>
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<td>Senior Staff, Child-raising Support Department</td>
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<td>Senior Staff, Educational Commission Secretariat</td>
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<td>Caseworker, Educational Center</td>
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<td>Public Health Nurse, Health Center</td>
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<td>Teacher, Public Elementary School</td>
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<td>Nursery Teacher, Public Preschool</td>
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Table 2  Members of Advisory Committee

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<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Adviser</th>
<th>Specialty</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Children’s Problem of Poverty</td>
<td>Professor, Waseda University</td>
<td>Social Security</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Researcher, National Institute of Population and Social Security Research</td>
<td>Social Security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>President of Kagawa Nutrition University</td>
<td>Dietetics</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Staff of Child Guidance Center in Tokyo Metropolice</td>
<td>Social Security</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Assistant Professor, Rikkyo University</td>
<td>Finance</td>
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<td>Professor, Waseda University</td>
<td>Economics</td>
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Whilst SPT endeavors to analyze issues and identify solutions based upon knowledge and experience of employees, technical knowledge as well as information on cases outside Arakawa City that external intelligence provide allows for an even more precise analysis of factors to be made and adds new perspective to SPT's conclusion.

Furthermore, there is also an expectation that discussions by external specialists will become more effective and efficient as a result of this Advisory Committee that directly links conclusions of SPT with technical knowledge of external intelligence.
II. Development of Special Project Team

Next, this paper will address how the SPT of Arakawa City has shown progress up to date. This paper will focus on SPT created for the project of solving child poverty.

Arakawa City has started making serious efforts to solve the issue of child poverty since 2009 ahead of other regions as Mayor Nishikawa placed improvement of welfare for city residents and education as top priority policy issues. However, child poverty is a complex problem comprising of multiple factors not limited to economic factor. It is therefore difficult to analyze issues and identify solutions sufficiently through traditionally taken procedures. Through strong leadership of the Mayor, SPT was newly established to solve the issue of child poverty in October 2009.

First of all, SPT studied data from Arakawa City, Tokyo Metropolis and the State that could indicate the level of child poverty such as percentage of household living on welfare, historical movement in percentage of household receiving school aid and amount paid out as child care benefit. In addition, analysis of issues for child poverty in Arakawa City was made by way of detailed survey based on interviews to nursery schools, kindergarten, elementary and junior high schools regarding 61 cases of child poverty.

Child poverty is a complicated issue as factors creating child poverty varies amongst regions. Even if driven by same factors, the weight of respective factors differs between different regions. Amongst SPT members, street-level bureaucracy that understand reality of the region played an important role in analyzing issues under such circumstances.

For example, even for a case where child poverty was driven by financial difficulty, by utilizing knowledge of the caseworker that had been in close contact with residents, SPT discovered that non financial factors such as mental instability of the guardian had caused financial difficulty resulting in child poverty. As a result of SPT's analysis of issues, non financial factor had big influence on creation of poverty in as much as 56 cases out of the researched 61 cases. This result implies that non financial factors have bigger relation to creation of child poverty issue in Arakawa City than financial factors.
Notwithstanding the above situation, programs put in place by Arakawa City in the past had focused mainly on financial support in order to solve child poverty issues. One could argue that this mismatch between reality and program was a result of program creation in the past being driven by the thought that simply providing nationwide uniform administrative service in accordance with the law determined by the State was sufficient instead of carefully analyzing the environment of Arakawa City.

Advisory Committee received report of the above conclusion of issue analysis from SPT and advised that SPT carry out an even more rigid issue analysis to further clarify which of the non financial factors had big influence on child poverty issues. Advisory Committee pointed out there should be a “determinant factor” for creation of child poverty amongst non financial factors.

Based upon this advice, SPT collected further 57 cases where non financial factors had affected child poverty in addition to the previous 56 cases and carried out a statistical analysis. As a result, they discovered that “deficiency in guardian’s ability to raise children” and “social isolation of household” were the determinant factors for child poverty issue in Arakawa City.

Based on this result, SPT concluded that it was necessary to further strengthen inter-personal service to care for children and their guardians in order to solve child poverty issue in Arakawa City and submitted and reported to the Mayor and the congress an “interim report” that summarized their proposal for solution in March 2010. Specifically they proposed that specialists be put in place to regularly patrol respective households. The aim is to identify and support household with child poverty by having specialist with technical knowledge of education and welfare patrol the field.

In the end, this proposal to allocate specialists was approved by the congress and as a test case, specialists were put in place at public schools.

SPT was able to achieve such outcome by effectively utilizing external specialists in addition to various personnel within the City. Utilization of knowledge base of street-level bureaucracy enabled effective analysis of factors and research capability of RILAC employees contributed to carrying out statistical analysis. In addition, advice from external intelligence led to more efficient identification of solution.
III. Challenges for Special Project Team

SPT of Arakawa City is a very unique case and has achieved certain results but also faces few challenges.

First of all, there are views expressed by certain SPT members that preparation for debate with external specialist at the Advisory Committee is not sufficient. SPT members that are employees of the City head office do not have sufficient time to lean technical knowledge outside of their work as they are busy with day to day work. Some SPT members, therefore, are concerned that they are not sufficiently understanding the knowledge base provided by external specialists.

Secondly, SPT member do not include resident citizens. Participation by citizens with different values may delay the process of reaching an agreement but their views should play an important role in understanding the situation of the region. Given resource constraints, it is also necessary for local government to collaborate with resident citizens to solve local issues effectively and efficiently.

Implication

This paper introduced and studied new attempts by Japanese local government in solving local issues based on the case of Arakawa City. Whilst it is not possible to measure its outcome thoroughly as it is a pioneer case, the Arakawa City case provides a good reference for other local governments if they were to solve local issues by way of creating intra personal as well as intra divisional collaboration.

How such intra personal and intra divisional collaboration are created should vary in accordance with size of respective regions. For example, local governments smaller than Arakawa City may be able to solve issues more effectively by way of collaborating with other neighboring local governments that face similar environment.

The traditional style of program making needs to change its style in order for Japanese local governments to independently provide service that matches the characteristic of its region. Challenges made by Arakawa City are in line with the principle of decentralization and meet the expectation of its resident citizens.
The Comprehensive Decentralization Law consists of 475 related bills that deals with specific areas including Local Autonomy Law.

Decentralization Reform Promotion Law covers principles for promoting decentralization as well as organizational structure to promote decentralization.

The System of Delegated Functions was stipulated under Article 150 of the Local Autonomy Law prior to amendment. Under this provision, local governments were not able to even enact local ordinances.

As for Statutory Entrusted Functions, Article 2.9 of Local Autonomy Law stipulates that they are “administration that should be executed by the State (Prefectures)” but is entrusted to municipalities. However, it is pointed out that local government should not uncritically follow interpretation by the State and should spontaneously interpret and administer in order to meet its responsibility towards its citizens (Katagi 2005).

Article 2.14 of Local Autonomy Law stipulates that local public entities must seek for maximum effect with minimum expense in processing administration.

Special Ward is almost similar in its function to municipalities that is foundations of local government but are not able to handle certain services independently such as water supply, sewage and firefighting that are handled by Metropolis of Tokyo. This is in order to secure administrative integrity and unity within highly populated metropolis.

SPT was established together with RILAC simultaneously. SPT has held 25 meetings by its members on Table 1 and 10 Advisory Committee meetings up to date.

SPT defines child poverty broadly to include “household poverty” where child care by guardians are insufficient as well as “cultural poverty” where education is insufficient, not only limited to financial poverty.

SPT defines financial difficulty as financial factor and other factors such as guardian disorder or lack of child care as non financial factors.

References


