

United Nations Triangular Partnership Project: Rapid Deployment of Enabling Capabilities (RDEC): The First Mobile Training in Uganda : @PKO Now! No.104

The thoughts and views expressed in this column belong solely to the author and do not represent those of the Secretariat and the Government of Japan.

Yuki Yoshida
Program Advisor
January 26, 2020

In UN peace operations, engineer units play an important role in facilitating mission's implementation of the mandate. Considering the complex operational environments surrounding recent UN peace operations, the need for engineer units has been increasing more than ever, though the lack of capable engineering personnel has been a serious challenge. Aiming to develop the capacity of engineer units of Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs), the UN launched the Triangular Partnership Project (TPP) in 2015, to which the Government of Japan has been extending financial and technical support. Under TPP, from August 26 to November 15, 2019, the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force (JGSDF) personnel conducted training on heavy equipment operation and maintenance to military engineers of the Uganda Peoples' Defense Force (UPDF) at the Uganda Rapid Deployment Capability Centre (URDCC) in Jinja, southeastern part of Uganda. This article discusses the background and accomplishments of the training.

The Roles of Engineer Units

Recent UN peace operation missions are often deployed in remote areas, which are difficult to access due to lack of basic infrastructure.¹ In commencing a mission in such an environment, there is an urgent need to establish the operating bases and shape conditions for effective operations by, for instance, constructing roads and runways, installing electricity and water at camps and UN facilities and securing a hygienic environment. TCCs'

engineer units have the primary responsibility for these important tasks by using heavy equipment.

UN engineer units also repair and maintain public infrastructure upon governments' request and assist aid agencies in their infrastructure projects. For the host governments and other entities, it is cost-saving to outsource infrastructure building works to the UN because UN engineer units cost roughly 40~45% cheaper than renting heavy equipment from local construction companies and hiring local engineers.²

As International Peace Cooperation Assignment, the Government of Japan has dispatched JGSDF engineer units to the following UN peace operations: UNTAC in Cambodia (1992-1993), UNMISSET in Timor-Leste (2002-2004), MINUSTAH in Haiti (2010-2013) and UNMISS in South Sudan (2012-2017).³

Japan's Support to TPP

Although engineer units of UN peace operation missions are required to promptly set up operating bases, capable personnel with matching skills to operate heavy equipment are often in short supply. To develop engineering capability of TCCs through training, the UN TPP was launched through collaboration between the UN Department of Operational Support (DOS), which plans and implements the project, and donor countries, which offer financial and technical assistance. Japan has been one of the leading donors for TPP.

Under TPP, following one trial training, JGSDF has conducted seven cycles of training on heavy equipment operation and maintenance to the engineer units from African TCCs at the International Peace Support Training Centre (IPSTC) in Nairobi, Kenya.⁴ The military engineers who participated in the trainings are expected to be deployed to UN peace operations, mainly in Africa, to contribute to enabling effective and efficient operations on the ground by utilizing the skills acquired.

From Kenya to Uganda

The training this time was conducted in Uganda, which was the first time for JGSDF to participate in a TPP training in an African country other than Kenya. Uganda is neither ranked top 20th among TCCs nor top 10th among African TCCs.⁵ However, Uganda has been dispatching UPDF personnel to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) since its establishment in 2007, and today more than 6,000 personnel are deployed to AMISOM, providing security mainly in Banadir region that encompasses Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia.⁶ The presence of UPDF has been indispensable for Somalia to maintain public order.

Uganda is expected not only to contribute its troops to AU-led missions, but also even more to UN peace operations in the near future. Hence, the UN selected Uganda as one of the target countries and trained UPDF military engineers whose capacities need to be developed further. Capacity building of TCC's military engineers like this case will surely enhance UN peace operation's readiness and effectiveness.

At URDCC, the US Marine Corps, under a different partnership program, has also been teaching UPDF personnel basic course for heavy equipment operation.⁷ In fact, most of UPDF military engineers who participated in the JGSDF-led training courses attended that basic course, so it is noteworthy that they can further improve their skills continuously thanks to synergetic effects of the two distinct training programs offered by the US and the UN.

Training Details at URDCC

The JGSDF training at URDCC spanned 12 weeks, comprising two identical 6-week training courses. The JGSDF personnel trained a total of 31 UPDF engineering personnel on basic operation and maintenance of heavy equipment. Week 1 was filled with classroom sessions, giving the trainees theoretical background. From Week 2 to Week 5, actual operation training on five types of heavy equipment (road roller, bucket loader, bulldozer, grader and hydraulic excavator) was conducted, and the trainees practiced all five of these equipment

in rotation. The final evaluation exam took place in the last week of the training. The JGSDF team, headed by Lieutenant Colonel Koji Todo, consisted of 22 members (two of whom were female) that included officers, operation personnel, interpreters and one Program Liaison and Coordination Officer from the Secretariat of the International Peace Cooperation Headquarters, Cabinet Office.

Accomplishments of the Training

As a result of tireless effort and dedication of operation instructors, interpreters and the trainees, all UPDF trainees dramatically improved their skills and passed the final evaluation exams, despite the short period of practice. In the operation training, JGSDF instructors first showed the trainees basic operations for each equipment, and interpreters communicated to the trainees instructors' guidance as well as the subtle nuances thereof. When the trainees finished their exercises, JGSDF instructors gave each trainee a tailored feedback on his/her performance. Throughout the training, JGSDF personnel always strove to ensure that the training was "trainee-centric" by sincerely answering questions and addressing individual needs and concerns.

The trainees perceived the training positively. One of the trainees stated, "The way JGSDF personnel taught was very polite and clear, and they interacted with us with sincerity and love." The UN TPP project team appreciated the continuous commitment of the Government of Japan as well. Through this training, Japan not only contributed to strengthening TPP as the UN envisions, but also to deepening ties between JGSDF and UPDF through enhancing mutual understanding, respect and friendship. This is indeed another big accomplishment of the training.

Annex: Pictures of the Training



Lecture by JGSDF instructors (left) and a JGSDF interpreter assisting the trainees during classroom sessions (right)



Teaching trainees how to compact the soil with road roller



Practice of unloading soil from bucket loader to dump truck



Interpreter translating operation instructor's advice to the trainees.



Excavating the soil by hydraulic excavator



Practicing how to create ditch by grader



Using bulldozer to practice digging and moving the soil



Training on maintenance



The final day: JGSDF and UPDF personnel celebrated the completion of the training

End Notes

¹ Boutellis, Arthur and Smith, Adam C. 2014. "Engineering Peace: The Critical Role of Engineers in UN Peacekeeping." New York: International Peace Institute.

² Ibid. On the other hand, it can also be argued that contracting local construction companies and hiring local people is a considerate way from the local ownership point of view, as it would create job opportunities and contribute to stimulating local economy.

³ Secretariat of the International Peace Cooperation Headquarters, Cabinet Office. 2019. Search by Chronology (https://www.cao.go.jp/pko_e/result/years.html)

⁴ The 1st TPP training conducted in 2016 is summarized in @PKO Now! No.93 and No.95.

⁵ United Nations. 2019. Troop and Police Contributors (<https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors>). Accessed 11 Oct 2019.

⁶ African Union Mission in Somalia. 2019. Uganda-UPDF (<http://amisom-au.org/uganda-updf/>). Accessed 11 Oct 2019.

⁷ The training by the US Marine Corps at URDCC was part of the African Peacekeeping Rapid Response Partnership (APRRP), which aims to improve enabling capabilities of African states' military, initiated by the US Government. The training targets African states including Ethiopia, Ghana, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania and Uganda. Training subjects include, but are not limited to engineering, medical, logistics, communication, information system, all of which have been pointed out as gaps in recent UN peace operations. The training thus focuses capacity building on those areas. More information about APRRP is available at US Peacekeeping Capacity Building Assistance (<https://www.state.gov/u-s-peacekeeping-capacity-building-assistance>).