

FRS TAIWAN PROGRAM ON SECURITY AND DIPLOMACY

“By sharing Taiwan’s experience in foreign aid, we hope to let the world know that Taiwan is willing to participate in international affairs actively”

A conversation with Timothy HSIANG, September 2022



Timothy T. Y. HSIANG is the Secretary General of the Taiwan International Cooperation and Development Fund (ICDF). A former Ambassador at the Department of Policy Planning of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he was Representative at the Taipei Commercial Representative Office in the State of Kuwait, Ambassador to the Republic of Nauru, Deputy Director General for Economic and Trade Affairs, and Convener of the WHO Task Unit. He graduated from the George Washington University.

Q1/ Like South Korea, Taiwan has transitioned from a recipient country to a donor country of development assistance. Taiwan’s rapid development led USAID to terminate development assistance programs in 1965, and Taiwan now spends several hundred million dollars on international cooperation. For a start, could you give us an overview of Taiwan’s official development assistance policy? What is the mandate of TaiwanICDF?

The TaiwanICDF was established to boost socio-economic development, enhance human resources, and promote economic relations in developing partner countries. To carry out our mission, we offer assistance that centers on four core operations: lending and investment, technical cooperation, humanitarian assistance, and international education and training.

Every new project from the TaiwanICDF proceeds according to a rigorous project cycle and is backed by mutual covenants signed in cooperation with relevant stakeholders. Our projects are designed to address the strategic development goals of each of our partner countries, pay due consideration to associated regional trends, and maximize results by employing the right combination of capital and technical cooperation.

Ultimately, our work is tailored to the local needs of each partner country. Our assistance covers development issues in six priority areas, namely environment, public health, agriculture, education, information and communications technology, and micro, small and medium enterprises.

Q2/ Total Official Development Assistance (ODA) for 2021 was equivalent to 0.33 percent of the combined gross national income (GNI) of OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) donors and remains below the UN target of 0.7 percent of GNI for ODA. Only six of the DAC countries – Sweden, Norway, Luxembourg, Germany, Denmark, and the United Kingdom – have met this target. Taiwan is below. Is there a strategy to further increase Taiwan’s contribution? What are your regional priorities?

Since the TaiwanICDF is the dedicated foreign aid organization representing the Republic of China (Taiwan), our aid strategy is coordinated with our diplomatic policy and focused on enhancing our relations with allied countries. Accordingly, most of our projects are implemented in Latin America, the Caribbean and Asia-Pacific, where most of our allied countries are located.



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Nevertheless, the TaiwanICDF implements around 80 projects in 30 countries every year on average, combining resources of the public sector, private sector and nongovernmental partners. For the projects concerning countries that are not diplomatic allies of Taiwan, the TaiwanICDF mainly adopts two approaches besides the dispatching of technical missions. One is through education. We offer scholarships for youth who would like to pursue higher education in Taiwan. And we also hold workshops on various themes every year for public and private sector participants from across the world. The other approach is through international organizations. We work closely with international development banks or NGOs in the fields of green energy, climate change and WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene), such as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), CARE International, Food for the Poor, World Vision, Mercy Corps and Action Against Hunger.

The issues the TaiwanICDF focus on vary by region. For example, in the Pacific region, most of the lands in small island states are atolls, which are not suitable for cultivating crops, thus we concentrate on enhancing food security for our partner countries. In central America, SMEs are the driving force of the economies, thus we focus on the development of SMEs. In the Caribbean, countries are more vulnerable when facing disasters caused by extreme weather, and consequently, we focus on increasing their climate resilience. In Africa, the mortality rate for pregnant women and newborn babies is particularly high, so there we focus on the health of pregnant women and infants.

The TaiwanICDF is flexible to respond to the actual development needs of partner countries. For example, the banana industry in St. Lucia has been threatened by banana leaf spot disease, which is deteriorating the whole country's economy. At their request, the TaiwanICDF brought Taiwan's experience and skills to the aid project to help the partner country solve its problems.

In Honduras, imported avocado accounted for over 80 percent of local market demand in 2016. Thus, to promote the domestic avocado industry, the Government of Honduras launched a National Avocado Plan (2018-2022) in August 2018. The objective is to expand production area per year to 1,000 hectares. To help Honduras achieve this ambitious goal, the TaiwanICDF launched several avocado related

projects, such as the "Expanding Avocado Seedling Production Project", which is currently ongoing.

In another Central American country, Guatemala, we learned that the country's biggest challenge for improving maternal and child health is the lack of comprehensive maternal and infant health care services, which also makes it difficult to detect high-risk pregnancies and to then provide appropriate care. To assist Guatemala in overcoming this predicament, we launched the "Project for Promotion of Medical Technology for Improvement of Maternal-Neonatal Health" to improve the country's institutional capacity in maternal and infant health care based on Taiwan's professional experience and technology in this field.

The Kingdom of Eswatini, a landlocked country in southern Africa, has successfully developed the production of sugar cane, pineapple, citrus and other cash crops; however, the convergence in production of similar types of crops also puts farmers' incomes at a greater risk. Thus, the government is trying to diversify the production and marketing of fruits. In response, the TaiwanICDF introduced the concept of "industry chain development" and achieved the stated goal of increasing income per hectare by 40 percent (as compared with sugar cane) among farmers' organizations receiving the project's guidance. Following the success of the project, we are now implementing the second phase of "Fruit Tree Production and Marketing Project".

Q3/ The Chinese strategy to isolate Taiwan on the international scene in all areas, including preventing it from participating in international organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO) or the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), has considerable impact for your country. How do you take this constraint into account? Are you aware of any countries that have refused Taiwan's aid because of Chinese pressure?

Even though we are not able to participate in many international events under the name "Taiwan" due to certain unfortunate realities, the TaiwanICDF has recently cooperated with international governmental and non-governmental organizations to hold parallel events during international conferences. By sharing Taiwan's experience in foreign aid, we hope to let the world know that Taiwan is willing to participate actively in world affairs as a member of the international

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community, which, thanks to these projects and participation, becomes aware that Taiwan is capable of offering aid to countries in need and fulfilling its responsibility as a global citizen.

Taiwan's position in the international community is tough, and we are forced to count on our allied and friendly countries to speak up for us to manifest the fact that Taiwan is a political entity. With the promotion of TaiwanICDF projects, our allied and friendly countries are increasingly aware of Taiwan's kindness and contributions to the international community, and as such, they are willing to support and speak up for us in international events.

Every aid project executed by the TaiwanICDF is designed according to the actual economic development needs of the recipient country. The projects are not only a driving force for development in recipient countries, but they also genuinely benefit local people. For our diplomatic allies, pressure from China is less likely. However, because of this pressure, some friendly partner countries who are not diplomatic allies of Taiwan are more concerned about disclosing the details of bilateral agreements and projects being implemented by our Taiwan Technical Mission.

Q4/ With the Covid-19 pandemic, Taiwan has become a global model in health crisis management. In 2020, we interviewed Minister Audrey Tang about this, with a focus on the unique use of modern information and communication media. Internationally, the government has put forward the slogan "Taiwan Can Help, and Taiwan is Helping". Could you please give us feedback on all the aid measures implemented by Taiwan to help other countries to cope with the pandemic?

The TaiwanICDF has integrated its project resources and cooperated with partner hospitals in Taiwan to support allied and friendly countries in the fight against Covid-19.

In the area of exchanging experience in Covid-19 prevention and control for further improvements, from 2020 to 2022, we have co-hosted webinars with organizations such as the Swiss NGO Terre des hommes (Tdh), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and other partners on topics such as "ICT Deployment in Tackling Covid-19", "Strengthening the Public Health System for Maintaining Essential Health Services during the Covid-19 Pandemic" and "Management of Covid-19 Patients with Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) in the Pacific Islands". Through these webinars, we have discussed the global challenges that health and care

workers are facing and other important issues that need to be addressed during a pandemic.

In terms of exporting Taiwan's successful experience in combating Covid-19, we translated videos about Covid-19 prevention and control published on YouTube by the Taiwan Centers for Disease Control to allow more global health personnel to understand Taiwan's clinical treatment and infection control for Covid-19 and further strengthen their capacity. Also, we worked with our partner hospitals in Taiwan such as the Far Eastern Memorial Hospital, Cathy General Hospital, National Taiwan University Hospital, etc. to provide consultancy on medication and diagnosis of Covid-19.

In terms of strengthening the capacity of health personnel in coping with the Covid-19 pandemic, to allow health personnel to better understand the Covid-19 pandemic and protect themselves while providing medical services or health education, the TaiwanICDF's projects introduced information on the prevention and control of Covid-19 and how to manage the high-risk groups who have diabetes, hypertension or CKD, and provided health personnel with personal protective equipment (PPE) and hand sanitizers.

In terms of applying information systems to improve Covid-19 pandemic prevention mechanisms, through our Health Information Project in Paraguay, we have developed a patient tracking function under the current health information system, allowing health personnel to proactively follow and monitor Covid-19 high-risk groups and our Digital Health Innovation for Covid-19 Response in India project helps healthcare workers from 80 primary healthcare facilities in the Ranchi district, the capital city of the Indian state of Jharkhand, apply digital technology to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic.

TaiwanICDF projects utilize radio, local newspapers, hygiene education leaflets and other tools to promote Covid-19 self-prevention and management and to raise awareness.

In terms of applying cash assistance to help vulnerable pregnant women during the pandemic, the TaiwanICDF established the 2021 TaiwanICDF Humanitarian Fund for Cash Transfer Project to reduce the impact of Covid-19 on the livelihoods of vulnerable households that are beneficiaries of TaiwanICDF projects. This means the households could continue to join in with project activities, and ensure the results of the TaiwanICDF projects. The sub-cash assistance project of the Maternal and Infant Health Care Improvement Project in the Kingdom of Eswatini is an example.

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Q5/ The Taiwanese civil society is very active. In 1991, the Tzu Chi Buddhist Foundation, the largest relief organization based in Taiwan with offices in 47 countries, was the first Taiwanese NGO to provide overseas emergency aid to victims of a cyclone in Bangladesh. Do you support humanitarian or cooperation projects from civil society, and how do you coordinate these public/private projects? What is the role played by the Taiwan AID (Taiwan Alliance in International Development) created in the early 2000s?

The role of the TaiwanICDF is different from that of an NGO since we are a specialized development assistance agency. We help to carry out the government's official development assistance (ODA); whereas Taiwan AID is an NGO platform for Taiwan-based NGOs involved in international humanitarian aid. Fundamentally, the TaiwanICDF and the Taiwan AID have their respective statuses and visions in terms of participating in international development and humanitarian assistance.

Since the TaiwanICDF is an executing agency, we are not in a position to coordinate all the humanitarian efforts in civil society. On the other hand, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Taiwan plays a very important role in coordinating the Taiwan-based NGOs' international participation. It also allocates funding for NGOs to apply for implementing humanitarian projects overseas, attending or hosting international conferences, etc.

Our humanitarian interventions mainly focus on the post-disaster recovery and rehabilitation phases, as we do not have on-hand emergency materials or equipment, plus we consider the government and NGOs have sufficient resources and capacity to engage in emergency relief. Because the TaiwanICDF is experienced in development projects, we apply this experience to disaster recovery and rehabilitation. We establish partnerships with NGOs which have not only active consultative status with the UN, but also a local presence and experience in project countries. This model ensures that we effectively connect with the international humanitarian assistance system while harmonizing our work with the local government and other organizations on the ground.

Over the decades, we have collaborated with NGOs such as Action Against Hunger, World Vision, Mercy Corps, CARE, Terre des hommes, and Catholic Relief

Services, to respond to major humanitarian crises, e. g. the 2011 earthquake in Haiti, the Syrian refugee crisis, the 2018 earthquake in Indonesia, the 2021 Typhoon Rai in the Philippines, etc. For the TaiwanICDF and partner NGOs, joint implementation and integration of resources generate a greater, more positive impact.

Q6/ Taiwan's marine biodiversity is one of the richest in the world, due in part to the island's geographical position at the northern end of the "Coral Triangle", at the intersection of three major marine ecosystems (East China Sea, South China Sea and Philippine Sea). There are 3,200 species of fish in the Taiwan area, one-tenth of the world's fish species, of which 322 are endemic species unique to Taiwan. Last April, a delegation led by Chang Tzi-chin, the Minister of Environmental Protection, and including TaiwanICDF, participated in the seventh Our Ocean Conference (OOC) organized by Palau and the United States in Palau. What are Taiwan's initiatives in the field of marine conservation? Are there any maritime dialogues with Indopacific countries to promote an ambitious agenda and conduct marine biodiversity initiatives?

At the core of the "Our Ocean Conference" are voluntary commitments to take meaningful action towards restoring a healthy ocean. The Ocean Affairs Council, responsible for coordinating commitments among maritime agencies and offices in Taiwan, announced 14 commitments, worth nearly US\$384 million across the six areas of action: climate change, sustainable fisheries, sustainable blue economies, marine protected areas, maritime security, and marine pollution. These commitments are all closely related to marine conservation and they can not only help protect and restore species, populations, and habitats, but also mitigate human activities such as overfishing, habitat destruction, pollution, and so on.

Take Taiwan's call for action in the area of marine pollution as an example. Taiwan focuses on the two most effective solutions to marine debris issues: source management and source reduction. Taiwan has a dedicated series of initiatives and policies for source reduction, limiting the use of disposable plastic, recycling and processing waste properly, launching the gillnet real-time registration system and prohibiting the use of Styrofoam buoys. Meanwhile, the government shares information to inform the public, conserves the territorial waters and addresses the marine debris issue through inter-ministerial collaboration and measures.

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The TaiwanICDF contributes to these commitments by investing in our partner countries to advance small-scale fisheries and aquaculture, reduce ocean pollution, promote and establish sustainable climate-resilient communities in the Pacific and Caribbean Island countries and provide blue stimulus packages. We share our technologies and long-term accumulated experience to respond to our partner countries' most urgent needs.

We assist Palau through aquaculture production of edible fish and partner with USAID to develop coastal fishery resource management to better achieve the sustainable management of marine resources.

In the Marshall Islands, we help to preserve marine biodiversity by tackling marine pollution. The project is designed to bring different elements together to become a one-stop solution for marine debris. Accumulated plastic waste will no longer be shipped out of the islands for recycling and reuse, which will lead to greater waste disposal efficiency and lower carbon-dioxide emissions.

In PICs such as Nauru, Tuvalu, the Marshall Islands and Palau, we support the promotion of sustainable climate-resilient farming and further dietary and nutrition extension programs to establish resilient communities.

The TaiwanICDF works closely with our partner countries in the Indo-Pacific and sees international participation as a good opportunity to expand cooperation with like-minded countries and organizations to promote more ambitious agendas together and enlarge our impact. In terms of our participation at the OOC, we held two exhibits: "Taiwan Ocean Action Exhibit – Blue Ocean, Green Future", which demonstrated advanced technologies that turn marine debris into consumer products, such as pens, shirts, sunglasses and shoes. The "Towards a Zero Emission and Zero Waste Future – How can small island developing states transform to the circular economy?" exhibit presented solutions for small island developing states (SIDS) in the fields of marine protected areas, marine debris reuse, and combating Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing.

In addition, the TaiwanICDF also co-hosted two side-events with USAID and the Austronesian Forum respectively. In these side-events, dialogues covered diverse topics from marine ecosystem conservation to tackling marine pollution and indigenous knowledge

adaptation. Through such dialogues, we have acquired the awareness that one-size-fits-all solutions do not exist. The ecosystems of SIDS face many challenges, so we need to leverage our resources, adapt local solutions and incorporate invaluable indigenous knowledge into our international cooperation and development work. Such practices could be considered nature-based solutions; they can adapt to the local environmental conditions and build stronger resilience for SIDS so they are more capable of meeting the challenges of climate change.

Q7/ The island of Taiwan, located at the convergence of the Philippine Sea Plate and the Eurasian Plate, is prone to numerous earthquakes. The Taiwanese government and society have developed unique experience and expertise in terms of preparedness and recovery and seek to share it. In July 2022, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Taiwan Foundation for Disaster Relief (TFDR) signed a memorandum of understanding on a cooperative project to improve food security and livelihoods for people in southwestern Haiti after an earthquake hit that country. What are the various cooperation and experience sharing initiatives taken by Taiwan in earthquake preparedness and recovery around the world?

Taiwan is indeed located in a place where earthquakes and typhoons occur frequently, so we do have plenty of disaster prevention and recovery experience to share with the international community, and not just limited to earthquakes. As with the example you mentioned, after a 7.2-magnitude earthquake struck southwestern Haiti on Aug. 14, 2021, a few days later, the country was hit by Tropical Storm Grace, which devastated its infrastructure and agriculture, leaving more than 800,000 people without sufficient food.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs collected donations from the people of Taiwan through the TFDR and commissioned the TaiwanICDF to assist farmers in restoring food production through the "Postdisaster Reconstruction Project to Enhance Food Security and Livelihood in Southwestern Haiti". It is expected to restore a rice production area of 700 hectares, assist in the repair of the irrigation system, and produce 5,600 tons of rice, which could benefit 3,500 farmers, increasing their income through exporting grain and in turn stabilizing the local economy. The average annual income of each beneficiary farmer's family is 1,420 USD. In addition to this project, the TaiwanICDF is also

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implementing a WASH project with CARE Haiti in response to the earthquake. The WASH project aims to ensure safe and clean water resources and to provide hygiene information on the prevention of waterborne diseases to those affected by the earthquake.

We are also implementing the “Pilot Project for the Implementation of Emergency Management System to Reduce Medical Emergencies in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines”, assisting Saint Vincent in assessing the structural safety of important buildings, improving the capacity of disaster relief units to prevent hurricane disasters through training, and reducing the emergency medical burden in the event of natural disasters to protect the people of Saint Vincent.

Taiwan has also shared its experience in preventing floods and landslides with Central America. The “Belize Urban Resilience and Disaster Prevention Project” which integrates the flood early warning system into the disaster prevention and rescue system of the Belizean government, shortens the related work process by more than 30 percent. When Hurricane Eta hit Belize in November 2020, the hurricane caused the highest rainfall and the highest river water level recorded in recent observation history. However, through the early warning system to monitor the water level changes and the simulation results of the geographic information system (GIS), the flood warning was provided to the San Ignacio city government three hours in advance, allowing the government sufficient time to organize the evacuation of people along the riverside, successfully reducing casualties.

Eventually, we are ready to start the “Early Warning and Disaster Management Project in Guatemala”, setting up hydrological monitoring stations and establishing an early warning system to improve their disaster prevention capabilities. And through the community training, self-awareness of disaster prevention will be established, resulting in disaster reduction and enhanced disaster resilience, reducing the loss of life and property.

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Interview conducted in September 2022
by Dr. Antoine BONDAZ

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