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AAINews

Connecting people, agriculture and the environment through appropriate technologies

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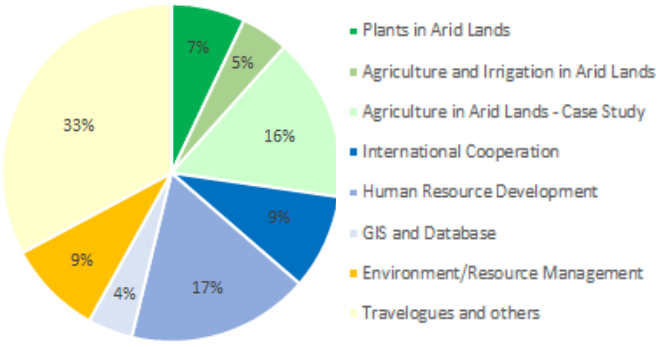
On the occasion of issuing Newsletter No. 100

Since launching the first issue of AAINews in October 1995, this four-page A4 newsletter of "AAINews" has described our members' experiences, thoughts, and feelings gained through their work.

Originally, this newsletter was designed as a tool for exchanging information among the AAI members who rarely met each other in the head office due to having different overseas assignments. As the number of newsletter destinations has gradually increased, it is now also becoming an important tool to convey our ideas, know-how, and past and current work to our stakeholders.

On the occasion of the 100th issue, we looked back on the contents of past newsletters. The memorial edition was published on the company's 30th anniversary in 2014, in which articles were divided into chapters on arid land plants, arid land agriculture, international cooperation, human resource development, GIS & databases, resource management, etc. Based on this classification, articles from the first issue to the 99th issue were classified as shown in the following figure.



Travelogues and others occupy 30% of the whole and are allocated to the first page of each issue and some of the 4th page, describing topics at that time. Dryland-related articles also account for nearly 30% of the whole, which clearly shows that AAI has been focusing on technical cooperation activities in the world's arid areas. As for the articles related to international cooperation and human resource development, many significant series have been planned and published including accounts of overseas technical cooperation projects and training activities at the JICA Tsukuba Center. In addition, past stories also revealed that AAI has been involved in not only agriculture but also environmental conservation and resource management making use of GIS and databases in various projects/activities. In this way, the classification of the past news articles clearly illustrates the many footprints and paths trodden by AAI.

Common to many articles are viewpoints reflecting the themes of "appropriate technology", "optimal scale", and "participatory approach", which are encapsulated by the word "appropriate" that also exists in our company name, "AAI". For example, "Arid land plants" emphasizes the importance of appropriate technology through utilization of plants as a regional resource. "Agriculture and irrigation" offers in-depth discussions on the appropriate scales from the perspective of sustainability. Further, in "International cooperation and human resource development", we have proposed working with NGOs and grassroots cooperation, and have emphasized the importance of participatory approaches in lots of training & extension activities with which we have involved.

The so-called "Arab Spring" has brought with it uncertain situations in the Middle East regions, and accordingly, our target areas are shifting to East African countries. The contents of work are also changing from desert greening/agriculture and irrigation development to other areas such as livelihood improvement and natural resource management. Even if regions or fields are changing, we keep going with the thoughts and principles that have been cultivated so far and will continue to deliver news "from the field" now and in the future. On this occasion, we renewed editorial design of the newsletter with a refreshed mindset. We look forward to receiving your continued feedback and suggestions on the newsletter.

(February 2018 by Onuma)

How to compose study tour for training <Part 4>

Case study: Study tour in the upland rice course

This issue introduces a case study of study tours for "Area-focused training course on upland rice variety selection techniques for sub-Sahara Africa" courses (2006 – 2012) conducted at JICA Tsukuba by AAI. These courses comprised a three-month training period from mid-July to the beginning of November. The training curriculum was prepared with a particular focus on practice, meaning that the percentage of study tours in the entire training was less than 10% of the course. Most of the visit destinations were day trips within Ibaraki prefecture, where around 70% of upland rice cultivation in Japan was concentrated. In addition, regarding seed production technology, we visited Toyama prefecture which is famous for production of rice seed in Japan. Only 3 days were allocated for the visits, since the whole training period was relatively short. Excluding the beginning of August when the training was just starting, the visiting time was automatically decided to take place in middle to late August, because busy days were expected after September due to yield surveys and report writing by the participants. That period was suitable for observation of rice in any region of Japan, since rice plants were approaching the ripening stage. However, it was necessary to consider schedule adjustment carefully, because it overlapped with the period of Obon (Japan's traditional lantern festival). Table 1 shows candidates of destination for these visits, which were selected to understand present conditions of seed production in Toyama prefecture.

Table 1. Candidates of the study tour destination

No.	Subject of Training	Destination
1	Production of breeder's seeds and foundation seeds	Toyama Agricultural Research Institute
2	Role of extension workers in seed production mainly on field examination	Agriculture and forestry promotion center supervising seed production farms
3	Seed production technology	Seed production farm and agricultural cooperative

Considering the flow of seed production, we started from production of breeder's seeds and foundation seeds (No.1 in Table 1) on the first day, followed by No.2 and No.3 on the second day. Fortunately, No.2 and No.3 destinations were close, so it was possible to visit them on the same day. In the morning of the second day, we visited the production site first, and then we were provided lectures in the afternoon. Since the above-mentioned destinations can cover the main subjects of the study tour, we searched for other visit destinations in the vicinity for additional training subjects on the third day. After several adjustments, finally we decided to move from Toyama to Kyoto on the third day, visiting field trials of upland rice at the university farm, and research activities of African agriculture at the Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies of Kyoto university. Although it was not the main subject of this study tour, it was useful to learn the field researches related to the keywords of "upland rice" and "Africa", which were unique destinations among the entire training program. Accordingly, the training schedule of the study tour was determined as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Training schedule of the study tour

Day	Morning program	Afternoon program
Day 1	Moving to Toyama	Toyama Agricultural Research Institute
Day 2	Seed production farm and agricultural cooperative in Toyama	Agriculture and forestry promotion center in Toyama
Day 3	Moving to Kyoto; University Farm, Faculty of Agriculture, Kyoto University	Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies, Kyoto University; Returning to Tsukuba

After determining the training schedule, the next step was making appointments with the host organizations. Careful consideration was necessary so as not to impose excessive burden to the relevant organizations in Toyama, since they were very popular as a destination in other JICA training courses. By the way, a study tour is different from a day trip, which visits multiple destinations in one itinerary; therefore, schedule adjustment is sometimes rather difficult. Even in this course, one of the visits was cancelled in the interests of our host's convenience and was transferred to an alternative destination. In addition, thoughtful preparation is essential for the implementation of an efficient study tour. For example, a study tour tends to have a group of around 10 overseas participants, so detailed itinerary such as train timetable should be taken into consideration along with the timing of breaks for meals and/or restrooms.

Because this course was newly established in 2006, there were many trials and errors in coordination with visit destinations which were also new. However, such coordination work became easier as we repeated the course and gained better understanding of visit destinations and had more information about their actual situations.

Toward sustainable forest conservation <Part 4>

Conservation of mangrove forests with the participation of local residents

Our past issues “Lessons learned from mangrove ecosystems” (No.43-48) have already reported the significance of mangrove forests, which are especially important in arid lands as a source of valuable green resources and conservation of local ecosystems. Development study and technical cooperation projects were carried out in Oman as shown in the table below, in order to implement planting and conserving mangrove forests properly.

“The master plan study on restoration, conservation and management of mangroves in Oman” conducted surveys of the natural environment (geography, soil, water quality, etc.) as well as socio-economic surveys of the study area. Investigation activities in the wetlands were extremely difficult, but with the cooperation of local residents, the surveys revealed multi-purpose usage of mangrove forests by communities, such as not only sources for direct use in the form of fuel, construction materials and animal feed, but also as nurseries for shrimps and fish as well as a beekeeping site. In addition, environmental education can be provided to school children, through conducting planting of seedlings and removal of seaweed with them. The master plan formulated through the surveys proposed establishment of a Mangrove Information Center to carry out continuous surveys on mangrove forest ecology, human resource development for the surveys, and dissemination activities / environmental education for local residents.

Based on the results of the study, the “Qurm Environmental Information Center (QEIC) development project” was implemented as a technical cooperation for establishing a core center of mangrove forest conservation in Oman and its surrounding areas as well as developing human resources. The project activities included mangrove reforestation, monitoring of mangrove ecosystems, environmental education and training of expected QEIC staff, in order to functionalize the future QEIC.

It is anticipated that QEIC will be a base for environmental education and dissemination activities after establishing the center and building capacity of center staff. It is desirable QEIC will be a visitor center for nature and bird observation, like the ones commonly established in various places in Japan, which perform exhibition events and observation gatherings for visitors and local residents, in addition to implementing environmental education programs and other dissemination activities for conservation of mangrove forests.

Soil survey in a muddy mangrove forest

Distributing mangrove seedlings to school children

Various activities were carried out in the technical cooperation project, such as formulating exhibition plans at the center, developing environmental education programs, and preparing education materials for each program. Through these activities, providing information on mangrove forests and their ecosystems will lead to a better understanding of the recipients. In addition, different environmental education programs were implemented involving inviting school children and their parents as well as hotel employees, or by visiting schools. These activities are effective in raising awareness and strengthening capacity with the participation of residents. Although it is rather difficult to have tangible results through these efforts in terms of changes in people's awareness, it is deemed that well-planned and continuous activities will lead to sustainable conservation of mangrove ecosystems.

Title	Master plan study on restoration, conservation and management of mangroves in Oman	Qurm Environmental Information Center (QEIC) development project
Objectives	Formulating a master plan of mangrove forest conservation of each site, including capacity building programs for relevant persons and dissemination programs for local residents.	Organizational and human resource development for QEIC, so as to establish a core center for national and regional mangrove forest conservation.
Major activities	- Survey of the natural conditions of existing mangrove forests along with socio-economic factors - Evaluation and classification of the value of each mangrove ecosystem - Preparing technical guidelines of mangrove plantation - Formulating a master plan of mangrove forest conservation	- Preparation of training materials and guidelines for capacity building of QEIC staff, and implementation of training for them - Studying monitoring methods of mangrove ecosystem - Preparing guidelines of mangrove plantation - Implementation of environmental education programs and preparation of education materials - Establishing database of mangrove forest/ecosystems

Readers' voice - Celebrating AAINews 100

To commemorate the issue of the 100th issue, the voices from readers of our newsletter have been posted. We appreciate your continued support.

It was my great pleasure to have received a series of AAI e-Newsletter in a regular manner. In my opinion, the newsletter is such an amazing instrument to share information about agriculture, ideas and useful techniques among concerned people from across several countries in the world. Congratulations on the 100th commemorations of the issuance and edition of AAINews. Thank you very much for your hard work and efforts. Please keep the Newsletter going. Wish you all the best of luck and success in your future endeavors.

Amin ABU-ALSOUD
Farm Management and Extension Expert, Ramallah, Palestine

It is always of great interest for me to study and learn about agriculture practices around the world. AAI has compiled agriculture practices in newsletters delivered to inbox through mail. These newsletters provide information on the latest agricultural technology, news, best practices and a variety of other timely topics. It is with great pleasure to read the present AAINews which is not only intended for researchers in the field of agriculture but also for policymakers, stakeholders, farmers, teachers or anyone with an interest in various agriculture practices. In AAINews important news, emerging trends, innovations or strategic issues practically are highlighted that helps in the documentation and sharing of good practices and case studies in developing countries.

Ghulam Ghafoor
Peshawar, KP, Pakistan

I became a reader of the AAINews from mid-2000. This newsletter has had a positive contribution in my daily undertakings, as it has been very informative, educative and provides an opportunity to understand different situations facing the developing countries, and the appropriate measures in addressing the related issues as well. The AAI has been undertaking numbers of projects to address development issues among the developing countries, which are often similar to what this side of the world is facing too. It is in this way that this newsletter has served as an important tool in sharing knowledge including the value and usefulness of indigenous knowledge in solving agricultural challenges. While commemorating the 100th issue, I would like to commend the AAI team for their contribution to the developing world and please keep up the spirit.

Andreas S. Mbinga
Ministry of Agriculture Natural Resources Livestock and Fisheries, Tanzania

I have been regularly receiving AAI newsletter since 2011 by email and have been reading most of them. These newsletters are very helpful in knowing the projects and activities happening in the AAI project areas. More importantly, these are very useful in gaining practical technical knowledge and skills including field experiences and study reports in different countries around the world which are very helpful for extension workers like me to extend the contents to the farmers and colleagues. Thank you very much AAI for continuous support through newsletters. I am very happy that AAI is publishing its No. 100. With huge Congratulations, I wish its great success in the future.

Sandesh Dhital
Senior Horticulture Development Officer, Ministry of Agriculture Development, Nepal

AAI published digital books
– The best selection of AAINews –

We would like to announce that AAI published 3 digital books titled "Plants in Arid Lands, "Agriculture in Arid Lands" and "Irrigation in Arid Lands" as a series based on the best collection of AAI News. Please search through Amazon Books if you are interested in such publications.