

Ingenuity of demonstration fields <Part 3>

Demonstration farm model of farmers' participation and cost sharing

I have been involved in the agriculture and livelihood improvement cluster of the JICA project, "Capacity Development Project for the Provision of Services for Basic Human Needs in Kassala, the Republic of Sudan" (K-Top), for about four years from May 2011 to March 2015. In this project, the technology exhibition in the demonstration fields also served as an important dissemination method and tool. However, this was not limited to a mere technical demonstration and we have attempted to bring out the pro-activeness and independence of farmers. In this issue, I would like to introduce this activity as an example of this approach.

First of all, I would like to explain a bit about the background to the project. Sudan has been stigmatized as a terrorism-supporting nation in Europe and the United States for many years with the result that other donors' aid forms have been limited to humanitarian (emergency) types. By contrast Japanese assistance was characterized as technical cooperation (development-type) and was evaluated as a unique method in itself. K-Top was formulated in response to "Reconstruction assistance" after the 2005 peace agreement concluding the eastern conflict Peace Agreement, and in the area of agriculture and livelihood improvement, the two foci of "economic growth" and "poverty eradication" were requested by the Ministry of Agriculture. It started in various districts and focused on various themes, from horticulture to mechanized agriculture, flood irrigation to traditional rainfed methods, and furthermore encompassed livelihood improvement activities. However, the eastern conflict was a minor and relatively short conflict compared to the Sudanese Darfur conflict and the South Sudan War of Independence, so it was considered to be a realistic development project at the implementation stage.

As part of the K-Top agriculture and livelihood improvement plan, demonstration fields focusing on "development" were created on the above-mentioned themes and in the aforementioned districts as the process unfolded, we gradually realized how passive the farmers actually were. This was actually coming as no surprise. The assistance



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form of other donors, including state ministry services and NGOs, was "humanitarian /emergency", and the main thrust of these interventions was the distribution of goods and money. An inevitable consequence of this aid was that farmers exposed to such one-sided assistance become passive. The farmers continued their normal activities while receiving support, but remained the same with no change once the crisis support was over. It was pointed out that this passive dependence created vicious cycle that stifled creativity and innovation on the part of farmers who opted to wait for future handouts rather than improve their work technology or practices.

Under these circumstances, K-Top proposed and implemented a demonstration field model that was a "development type" and what is called a "beneficiary burden". The first year was a purely technical demonstration with the project bearing the full cost of the exhibition. However, from the second year onward, the principle of beneficiary burden was gradually introduced. For example, in the horticultural area and flood irrigation area, the payback method was used, and the project supported the initial input of seed and fertilizer costs, etc., but if there was a profit through harvesting and sales, the demo farmers in the second year were able to pay back the full cost to the State Department of Agriculture. The repayment was used as a fund, and the Ministry of Agriculture created a circulation system in which it was used as a source to generate income to invest in the following year's demonstration field. In addition, since the traditional rain-fed area is a poor area in Kassala, the project provided technical support for the creation of water harvesting terraces. From the following year, we sought farmers to bear part of the cost through the cost-sharing method.

It is believed that the demonstration fields should not be used for technical demonstration only, during the cooperation period, but must be sustainable and replicable for recipient governments and farmers. If the State Ministry of Agriculture and the farmers bear mutual costs, which would lead to the stability and sustainability of the service, it will obviously be advantageous. In the demonstration fields of K-Top, rather than ending with one lucky farm, we aimed at a solid participatory model that would create the next "demonstration field".