

AAI and Me – Yoshihisa Zaitso <Part 3>

Future of AAI

More than 30 years have passed since I entered AAI in 1989. Although AAI now has 12 staff members, it was founded by Onuma and was originally operated by just the two of us sharing a desk in one corner of the office of FAI (Fisheries and Aquaculture International Co., Ltd.). Over the years of our operation, some of our colleagues have left to operate farming activities, aiming to pursue organic agriculture. I have already left AAI to find a living in my home country. AAI is approaching a period of major change in the coming few years. Hasegawa, who has been in charge of training activities at Tsukuba International Center, retired in 2019. Onuma and Koto, who have led AAI, are also about to retire.

AAI is like a cooperative of solo business proprietors each individual using our organization to the mutual benefit of their own project and AAI as a whole, and I think AAI has grown to be recognized for that within the consultant world. We have mutually evolved by trying to share our individual expertise and knowledge as much as possible. We also tried to improve ourselves by asking our acquaintances in universities, research institutes and other consultant groups for their assisting even in fields that were unfamiliar to us then applied newly acquired technology in projects, learning more as we did so through repeated trial and error. AAI is an organization that places a high priority on sharing the "I want to try..." approach and keeping the "... what will be necessary for future activities" in mind. This awareness is an important feature of AAI. AAI aims to improve the ability of individuals while ensuring the freedom of each, and staff members are constantly engaged in field activities by creating roles, sometimes individually, sometimes collectively, where they can make the best use of their skills.

I liked this about AAI. The issues to be resolved are judged in the context of each situation and approaches modified accordingly. By necessity, there are no rigid or detailed company rules, and everyone utilizes the company's assets while at the same time being involved in the management of the company and proactively raising company funds to acquire commonly shared knowledge. It has been done by mutual, one might say, unspoken consent. This approach may not be workable at all in a normal company, but it was possible in AAI, and the employees operated the organization by adjusting the work

load in such a way as to make results attainable. That was the spirit of AAI, and I liked it! Larger organizations tend to neglect face-to-face communication and justify this by citing workload and busy-ness. AAI consciously avoided becoming such a larger company, and deliberately set out to create a space for staff to 'hang out' within the company in the form of regular video conferences so that face-to-face communication and discussion can take place as much as possible. It is natural that the position of employees will be changed in the future and the activity strategy of the company will also be changed accordingly. However, I hope that this kind of awareness of organizational management will be continued. I would like the successors to continue the management by all employee while being aware of why the current AAI exists in the form it does.

The development consultancy business is completely unknown in my rural area. And even when I talk about such business, despite the fact that we now live in an era where technology allows almost instant communication and information access no matter where one is, people still think that these events occur on a distant planet. The world of overseas development consultancy is an attractive business where you can connect with a wide variety of people and experience new encounters with nature and life that you cannot experience normally in Japan. I hope many local people will benefit from, and feel, this fun and charm.

Finally, to the colleagues who will be responsible for the future AAI; Even if the staff come and go in the future, please do not forget the idea of "think globally, act locally" as used by AAI, and keep looking at, and learning about, the people, nature and habits of each project site, and take part in international cooperation activities in accordance with the local environment. It is in AAI that the staff share their ability improvement in a flexible system of organization. I want you to enjoy your activities by ensuring a free life, and do not forget to give back information to me who now lives in a rural area!



First overseas activity
(United Arab Emirates, 1978)



Latest overseas activity
(Sudan, 2019)