

My relationship with Pakistan

"A Departure Point for the World of International Cooperation"

I joined AAI in February, 2019, and have been working in Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan, as a member of a JICA technical cooperation project since March. Pakistan was the place that opened my eyes to the world of international cooperation. I am still in my first year as a consultant, but I would like to contribute to the people of this country in some way, and as this is my first time to write for AAI News (and my first project is in Pakistan), I would like to briefly introduce myself by retracing my first steps to where I am now.

When I was a university student, I traveled from China to Pakistan for a month. At that time, Pakistan was in a period of security instability, with bombings targeting war materials in the area around the Khyber Pass and terrorism in urban areas such as Lahore and Karachi. However, I could travel safely with the support of local people as my appearance made me look like a shoestring backpacker. Also, since it was during Ramadan, I was able to experience the special atmosphere of this holy period; the city was silent with no restaurants open during the daytime, and after sunset, I had the opportunity to jump into groups on the street who had started eating their "Iftar" meals.

Although some of the areas were insecure and dangerous, for me, encountering the local people and their lifestyles was a serendipity that gave me the opportunity to foster my curiosity and interest in the distinctive character of this Islamic culture and society. From this experience, I realized that I desired to work in these areas in the future. In order to achieve this desire, I was made aware of the

necessity to acquire more specialized knowledge and skills; thus, I began to study development economics, rural development and Arabic.

After completing an undergraduate degree programme in Japan, I entered a trading company with the expectation that I might be able to go to Islamic countries. However, my assignments were mainly domestic midstream and downstream logistics operations in the manufacturing industry, which didn't satisfy my interest, as I had originally wanted to work closely with local communities. This sense made me realize that I wanted to take on a new challenge, and I applied for the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV). As a result, I was dispatched to Sudan as a member of the Community Development Corps, and worked on activities to improve livelihoods, such as food processing in rural areas. After completing my term as a volunteer, I pursued rural development studies in a post graduate degree programme in the UK to make up for my lack of skills and knowledge. Then, I was fortunately given the opportunity to take a new step in the world of international cooperation as a member of AAI.

My main specialised areas are agricultural economics, rural livelihood improvement, and social analysis, which is a bit different from other AAI members who specialize in agricultural production and environmental conservation technology. However, I believe that I have tried to grasp the situation and needs of the field from a different standpoint based on my specialty and experience by being a member of AAI. In conclusion I hope to contribute to the outcomes of technical cooperation as much as possible. Perhaps it was fate that my starting point on this road to working in Pakistan with AAI also began in Pakistan. Although there are many new things for me to work on in Pakistan, I am very much looking forwards to what kind of new starting point it will prove to be for me.

(Kenji Nakamura, July 2019)



A scene after breaking fast



Badshahi Mosque in Lahore