

Ingenuity of demonstration fields <Part 5>

Step-up demonstration field

“Northern Uganda Farmers’ Livelihood Improvement Project (NUFLIP)”, a JICA technical cooperation project, aims to increase the income of farmers through market-oriented vegetable cultivation, and here we have implemented farmer training using demonstration fields.

The project targeted a group of small-scale subsistence farmers. They mainly grow field crops such as maize, groundnuts, beans and sesame. There were also farmers who grew cash crops such as cotton and soybeans, but all of their cultivation methods were extensive, very few farmers had experience of growing vegetables for sales. It was difficult for farmers who have only experience in extensive farming to grow vegetables which require detailed cultivation management. Even if they could do it under the project implementation, they can’t continue it without the project support.

The project, therefore, developed a training system which gradually makes farmers independent using the medium of demonstration fields. Due to the twice-yearly rainy season in northern Uganda, the project could fortunately set up a demonstration field twice a year. Therefore, the training during the first rainy season aimed to equip farmers with cultivation techniques. In the training, after learning the knowledge in the lecture, all the members of the farmer group learned to apply the techniques and theory efficiently by practicing it physically in a demonstration field. Even when there was no training, the project staff visited often and carefully instructed on cultivation management according to the plant growth and field condition. This intensive commitment had farmers understand the importance of timely and careful management. It could be said that the demonstration field in the first rainy season was a preliminary step for farmers to learn cultivation techniques. The second rainy season offered the chance of another step to practice the cultivation techniques by themselves. Group members were divided into sub-groups of 5 to 7 people and had each set up a demonstration field. Since the number of fields became more than five times that of the first rainy season, it was not possible for the project to visit the fields frequently.



Step 1.; To learn cultivation techniques in group. The profit is saved for the step 2.



Step 2.; To practice learned techniques in small group. The profit is saved for the step 3.



Step 3.; To start cultivation independently based on techniques and fund obtained in step 1 and 2.

Each sub-group had to manage their field and crops themselves, remembering what they learned in the first rainy season. In addition, the project asked agricultural extension officers to play an essential role in monitoring and cultivation instruction, and the project stepped back and assumed the position of supporter. As a result, farmers could acquire practical experience of vegetable cultivation, and agricultural officers also could accumulate experience of technical instruction.

Since vegetable cultivation costs much more for agricultural materials such as seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides than field crops, there were some farmers who lacked financial resources and, because they could not purchase enough materials, they gave up cultivation. Also, many farmers were not accustomed to investing their money in agricultural production in the first place. Therefore, instead of preparing all the agricultural materials required for the demonstration field in the first season as training materials, the project instructed participants to save all the profits from the demonstration field for use in the second season. In the second season, the project prepared only the minimum necessary materials, and farmers had to purchase other necessary materials by themselves using the profit from the first season. This condition provided farmers the experience of buying and using agricultural materials themselves. As the final step of this system, the profits finally obtained in the second season became funds for each farmer to grow vegetables independently the following year.

In order to establish the intensive vegetable cultivation technology for farmers who have only experience of extensive farming, the project needed to strengthen the financial aspect and change the mind-set of farming at the same time as providing the cultivation technology. The step-up type demonstration field which can gradually improve farmers’ capacity worked effectively in this case.