

## Participating in training for Syrian irrigation engineers in Lebanon

AAI has been committed to Syria for many decades and has developed a special feeling of sympathy for the country. AAI has sent numerous JICA long-term experts to Syria over the years and it was here, too, that we had the experience of supervising our first technical cooperation project, DEITEX (Development of Efficient Irrigation Techniques and its Extension). The country has been in a particularly difficult situation following the outbreak of civil war in March 2011. The conflict has not just destroyed its main economic and social infrastructures but has also generated millions of internally displaced persons and refugees beyond its borders. In October 2019, when such desperate civil war situation finally showed slightly bright signs, a training course was organized by FAO/ICARDA titled “Efficient irrigation techniques and rainwater harvesting” in Lebanon. AAI assigned Matsushima and Koto to the training as instructors, as both experts had earlier been deeply involved in the DEITEX Project in Syria.

The first half of the training provided lectures on theory and knowledge regarding efficient water use and water harvest by ICARDA researchers. The second half was allocated for lectures and practices on design and diagnosis of irrigation systems, farm survey methods, and first aid solutions to damaged irrigation facilities by the AAI instructors and former Syrian DEITEX counterparts. On the final day, each participant prepared an action plan to apply what they had learned in the training to their future duties. In order to make the action plan, firstly they sorted out "useful learnings" obtained from the training, and selected appropriate ones to be utilized in, for example, dissemination activities to solve problems that farmers face. The training course went smoothly and according to plan although we had an unexpected incident involving large-scale anti-

government demonstrations in Beirut and elsewhere occurred on the day of our action plan formulation.

According to the Syrian participants, currently many well-irrigation systems owned by farmers have been destroyed and left as they are due to the shortage of repair parts in the country. In addition, fuel for pumps is also difficult to obtain because its price has soared more than 10 times since the outbreak of the civil war. Many of the action plans focused on first aid solutions to address the maintenance of irrigation systems and damaged irrigation facilities. We admired the willingness of the Syrian engineers to reconstruct existing irrigation systems adopting flexible and available measures under the current difficult situation. The curriculum for this kind of training should be based on actual needs of the participants, but it is often “supply-oriented”, in which instructor's convenience may be prioritized. Particularly in emergency cases like this time of support for Syria, we noticed that it is very important for the instructors to respond promptly and flexibly according to the ability and situation of the participants.

Fortunately, we worked together in this training with the former DEITEX project counterparts, and we were very happy to be reunited again for the first time in eight years. We could not meet each other for a long time because of the civil war, but the joint-work was carried out very easily and fruitfully without being hindered by the long time we had been apart. We again recognized the excellent ability of the former counterparts during the training. In addition, we were very impressed that the sense of solidarity cultivated in the DEITEX Project continues under any circumstances.



Working together with the  
DEITEX C/Ps