

Comparative analysis of agricultural extension situation in individual countries <Part 1>

Introduction

AAI has participated in agricultural and rural development projects in different countries and has been engaged in various activities to improve the livelihood of residents and to transfer technology to farmers. In these activities, we have had many chances to work together with professional people generally called "agricultural extension officers" as counterparts. In many cases they were local government officials but sometimes they belonged to the private sector or worked for NGOs. Their titles and duties also varied depending on the country and organization, but the common duties of these agricultural extension officers" were to provide technical advice and useful information to farmers. Therefore, when we were involved in agricultural and rural development in each country, the capacity development of agricultural extension officers was as important as development of useful technology. When working together, while building a relationship of trust as a counterpart, we have engaged to develop appropriate technologies for the local people and to strengthen the capacity of farmers.

When working in the field, we have the chance to observe agricultural extension situations peculiar to each country. For example, in some countries, "agricultural extension officers" were socially highly regarded as professional engineers with university graduate degrees, but some of these agricultural extension officers were reluctant to visit farmers due to their insufficient expertise and practical skills. In other cases, some officers were ridiculed by the farmers when they tried to bluff when having insufficient knowledge, and the overbearing manner of some, alienated farmers. However, we have seen many cases where the project improved their expertise and practical skills, and, through training and working together, they were able to interact with the farmers with confidence and flexibility. Additionally, in the technical training courses of the JICA Tsukuba, with which AAI has been engaged over a long period, we have heard many voices of ex-participants saying, "Thanks to the training, I become able to face farmers with confidence though I was afraid to visit farmers before." Or words to that effect.

In another country, "agricultural extension officers" had a certain level of expertise and skills, but the extension services didn't sufficiently reach farmers because the

extension system and the number of staff were not sufficient to cover the agricultural production sites.

In some countries, the teamwork between stakeholders was vulnerable to a lack of mutual cooperation. In these countries, exploring ways to promote collaboration between different organizations and personnel, including the research sector, became one of the major tasks of our activities. Looking at the agricultural extension workers and the extension status of each country in this way, it is interesting to be able to distinguish the characteristics of agricultural extension in each country. In the past editions of AAI news, we have discussed about agricultural extension officers and extension situations in numerous environments and circumstances. Most of these, however, have been introduced individually. Therefore, in this series, we would like to clarify the differences and look for hints for future activities by conducting a cross-sectional comparative analysis of the extension officers and the extension situations in each country.

We would like to proceed with this comparative analysis through brainstorming based on the experience that AAI has garnered after having been involved in various projects in different countries rather than using quantitative information. In the pre-discussion among AAI staff, the following themes were selected as the discussion points for this series from the many aspects of agricultural extension. These are (1) "technical capabilities" of extension officers / organizations, (2) "organizational capabilities" of budgets, personnel, systems, etc., (3) "cooperation capabilities" with other organizations such as research institutes and the private sector, and (4) "distance from the farmers". From the next issue, we will introduce the results of discussion among AAI staff on each theme mentioned above. We would appreciate it if you could provide us with your opinions to help us develop more multifaceted discussions.



An agricultural extension officer teaching a training method of watermelons to farmers (Uganda)