

# Comparative analysis of agricultural extension situation in individual countries <Part 4>

## Capability of Agricultural Extension Department

In preceding issues, we have discussed individual Agricultural Extension Officers (AEOs). Now we would like to focus on the organization to which AEOs belong - the “Extension Department” (ED). At the beginning, we discussed the similarities and differences of each country in which these are found by discussing the perspectives of budget, human resources, organizational structure and extension planning abilities.

It is common in each country that the ED has branch offices, “Extension Centers” (EC) in rural areas. These centers have been set up to respond to on-site issues, but actually they are often used conveniently for data collection and distribution of agricultural inputs by governments and donors. This is a case in which the network of the ED and systems that could potentially work flexibly in the field, are used only for limited purposes. Because a project must achieve its purpose within a certain period, budgets can be used only in a fixed manner and activities are similarly restricted. Even under such limitations, however, an attitude of facing up to problems in the field is important, and project activities in which the voices of AEOs can be reflected in the extension plans are essential.

It is also thought that a common issue facing each country is the gap that exists between needs in the field and the centrally decided extension plan. We have seen in many countries that AEOs working in the field are tossed into action to fulfil extension plans devised by top-down thinking. A bottom-up system, by contrast, is ideal for making an extension plan that contributes to solving problems in the field. In this aspect, the planning system in Uganda where decentralization has been advanced, is of interest. First, the rural office devises a development plan including an AEO's extension plan, then raises it at the district local government level. The district develops a District Development Plan (DDP) that comprehensively considers the plans of all rural offices in the district. Since a DDP includes other fields such as education and medical care, agricultural extension is not always prioritized. However, at least, it is remarkable that Uganda has a system to build a development plan from the bottom up. In

the agricultural extension improvement project that we were involved with in Syria, we tried to identify problems in the field from farmer surveys and collect on the ground statistical data and develop an extension plan based on this. In the project for capacity development of extension officers that we are implementing in Pakistan, we incorporated farmer surveys and extension activities into the training program so that participants could learn the importance of extension plans that meet the problems in the field.

The shortage of AEOs is also a common issue in each country. This issue may be due to a lack of budget, or the area allotted to each AEO may be too large for them to effectively



**Extension activities address farmers' problems (Pakistan)**

cover. Regarding this issue, we introduced our effort in Sudan in AAINews110, in which we saw water inspectors working in close proximity to the farmers' fields addressing problems and cooperating with AEOs at the central level to solve them. Maintaining service quality in EDs is also thought to be a major issue. Although AEOs' capacity can be improved through training, if the ED cannot accumulate skills and know-how as an organization, valuable experience and lessons learned will be lost when the AEOs leave their jobs. In this regard, it is noteworthy that in Palestine, some staff with specialized expertise in each field, known as Subject Matter Specialists, were assigned separately from the AEOs working in the field, and the technical backstop was thus guaranteed for the organization.

Each country's ED faces both various common and specific issues, and they operate their own unique organizations and are working on agricultural extension in their own ways. However, the activities that an ED can take by itself are limited. In the next issue, we will discuss cooperation between the EDs/ AEOs and external partners.