

## Consideration on remote operation <Part 3>

### Effect of fostered ownership

With the worldwide spread of the novel coronavirus infection, we have become quite accustomed to remote work, and the implementation and ingenuity of online operations have become well established. In a situation where overseas travel is still difficult, we communicate with local staff using SMS which also has chat and free call functions, and conference tools including videos are used as much as possible in remote operations, in addition to conventional telephone and email. Despite our success, when compared with technical cooperation scenarios where direct contact between people in the real field was commonplace, remote work inevitably feels limited and frustrating.

In implementing a technical cooperation project, it is said that it is important to build a relationship of trust with the local side and foster ownership. But such a good relationship can not be established in a day. By accumulating casual conversations on a daily basis and collaborating on-site, we inevitably deepen our relationships both in work and private life. It will take a certain amount of time to build unwavering mutual trust using any network of layers of communication. Assuming that in the case where a new project is started in a situation where local activities are restricted, building relationships while completing everything with only remote work as a tool seems to be a rather difficult task.

By the way, the Syrian water-saving irrigation extension project that was affected by the civil war and the technical cooperation project in the state of River Nile in Sudan, (mentioned in AAI News No. 108) were both examples of sudden interruptions and an immediate transference from on-the-ground to remote support. However, as in Syria's case, fortunately for the Sudanese technical work, the interruption occurred at the final stage of the project. Within the Sudanese Ministry of Production, which is a counterpart (C/P) organization, the understanding of the project contents has progressed, and each committee for farming and irrigation has been set up for budgeting for the next fiscal year. A committee for cooperation and discussion across the director level, which is important as a decision maker, has begun to function. In technical cooperation, activities are usually started for staff who are active at the field and/or farmer level.

However, due to inter-departmental conflicts in C/P efforts can fragment and in the organizational culture of vertical division within the ministry, coordination between bosses of C/P became a significant obstacle to mutual coordination and obstructed smooth horizontal cooperation. To address this, a cohesive entity called a Committee for Budgeting was formed in this project, in which the director-general level, who is the boss of C / P and others, collaborates beyond departmental boundaries. Therefore, it is probable that the Sudanese side functioned as a team and remote management was facilitated even if Japanese experts were absent due to the unexpected interruption.

In the project, the ownership of the partner country's institution is also constantly required to be fostered in relation to the sustainability after the project is completed. However, this time, it seems that the ownership of the project on the Sudanese side had reached a certain level, so each C/P and staff consciously and autonomously played their own role in the organization. There was no need for detailed remote instructions from the Japanese side. Furthermore, the project management with the absence of Japanese experts seems to have created a sense of unity in the C/P born out of a certain sense of crisis. People who had tended to be passive until then became newly aware of their roles, and became more active. Although it was a completely unexpected chain of events, we really felt we had no option but to withdraw our physical presence and resort to remote involvement. This said, at the same time the withdrawal offered us a glimpse of an interesting aspect of human behaviour. We believe that we have achieved certain results despite the sudden crisis as we implemented a project with a strong element of local ownership.



Discussion among each department for budgeting