

Consideration on remote operation <Part 4>

A planned remote operation

In this issue, we would like to introduce a JICA project in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Province in Pakistan as an example of remote project management which was planned from the beginning of project formation. KP Province is located in the mountainous region of northwestern Pakistan and shares a border with Afghanistan. This project aimed to improve capacity development of agricultural extension officers, known as Field Assistants or FAs in KP Province, through training to enable them to disseminate appropriate techniques and knowledge to farmers. However, KP Province was severely restricting entry for foreigners due to serious security issues after the outbreak of the Afghan conflict.

This project was unique in that field work was incorporated into the training program as shown in figure 1 below. In this program, FAs could practice in the field to utilize the knowledge and skills they acquired in the training sessions.

FAs learned basics of agricultural technology and extension methodology in 'Session 1' with group training. After the session, they conducted a farmer survey in their duty area to clarify the actual farmers' situations and to identify problems farmers faced. This was 'Field Work 1'. In "Session 2", they learned techniques and knowledge to solve the problems they had identified in "Field Work 1". In "Field Work 2", they practiced a dissemination activity to transfer the techniques and knowledge they learned to farmers. Finally, in the "Follow-up workshop", they reviewed the whole training activities, and devised an action plan regarding their own duties.

Since the FAs were provided “place” and “opportunity” to utilize what they learned in the sessions, they were able

to get experience of dissemination activities and build confidence, and to improve their relationships with farmers. The project also developed various extension materials such as posters, pamphlets, texts and videos as tools for extension officers, so that they can carry out dissemination activities effectively.

Although the training sessions were implemented in Islamabad, the capital city, where the Japanese experts were based, the operation of field activities was managed remotely due to security reasons. This remote operation was an integral part of planning from the time the project was designed. To monitor FAs' field work remotely, the project assigned staff members called Monitoring & Evaluation Officer (M&E Officers).

The M&E Officers were in charge of monitoring and reporting the activities of FAs and acting as the eyes and ears of the Japanese experts who could not reach the field. In order to obtain accurate reports, the project developed a format for the monitoring report which can accurately record necessary information. In addition, when recruiting M&E officers, rather than relying on past work experience, the project focused more on the candidates' capacity for the footwork which is needed for field work and the kind of personality which can build good relationships with FAs.

M&E officers played an effective role in obtaining field information remotely. This said, there was also a limitation that the information received had inevitably passed through an M&E Officers personal "filter.". We still need to consider how to improve the quality and quantity of information. obtained remotely in the field.

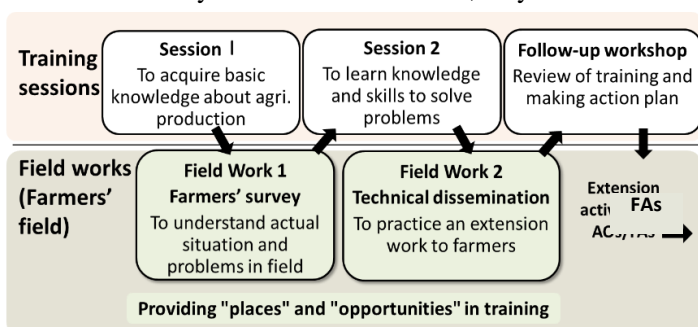


Figure1. Flow of training program for Field Assistants in the KP province project



A scene of field work by a field assistant overseen by M&E officers