

## Overseas technical cooperation being supported by various people -Touching on a driver we met during many years of technical cooperation in Pakistan-

Many AAI News readers, having lived in developing countries and worked on technical cooperation for many years, have accrued a wealth of knowledge in this field, equal to, or exceeding that of our own AAI personnel.

Since the main purpose of technical cooperation is to transfer technology to the partner country, some counterparts have been appointed as specific cooperation targets or cooperators and we feel sure readers have experienced intense and fruitful collaborations with those who share a mutual technical field.

We AAI staff have had technical exchanges with counterparts and have acted together from time to time through opportunities for technical cooperation in the countries and regions that we have experienced. Based on that exchange, we are still occasionally sharing information on current technological issues and new technologies in these countries. In technical cooperation overseas, it is natural that the relationship between us and our counterparts is the main foundation for achieving the project purpose, and the way we relate to them is important for the success of technology transfer. We would like to discuss this on another occasion in AAI News, but in this article, we would like to step away from that discussion and touch on the various people who support technical cooperation on site and whose lives have touched our own.

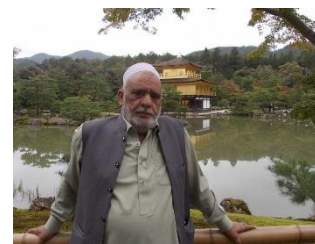
In the field of technical cooperation, in addition to activities directly linked to technology transfer, there are various indirect preparations and efforts to make technical cooperation work successfully. We must not forget that in technical cooperation, we employ local people and have them involved in various tasks.

Here, we would like to introduce a driver we met in Pakistan who had been working with us on some technical cooperation project sites for nearly 30 years. His name is Mr. Nazar. He has acted as a driver for almost all the

projects with which AAI has been involved in Pakistan. Although he is a driver, he indirectly supported our cooperative project behind the scenes. When our car fell into a riverbed after being hit by a reckless oncoming vehicle on a rough road, he was also injured and was trapped in the driver's seat, but despite his predicament he was very concerned about the safety of the Japanese people who were sitting in the car with him. When a terror attack occurred near where we were staying, and while the atmosphere was tense, he was the first to assess the situation at the scene and guided us to the quickest and safest place to evacuate. The number of such anecdotes is endless. We can't say enough about his kindness and sincerity. We loved him, and he also loved us, Japanese people and AAI. The year before last, AAI invited him to



**An old picture of Nazar at a project site in Pakistan**



**Nazar relaxing in a park when he visited Japan**

Japan to see and enjoy our country.

He passed away suddenly last November, 2020. After losing him, we were reminded once again of his rare and precious personality.

When we think of technical cooperation, we tend to think of counterparts with whom we have close technical exchanges. However, there is no doubt that the field of technical cooperation is supported by good relationships with various other people and we are greatly supported by their dedication. The death of Nazar, was an event that reminded us of the important aspects of such technical cooperation.

## Comparative analysis of agricultural extension situation in individual countries <Part 6>

### Cooperation between extension department and external organizations

#### (2) Cooperation with private sector and aid agencies

In the previous issue of this series, we discussed collaboration between Extension Departments (EDs) and Research Centers. This time, we will focus on other external organizations, especially private sector players and aid agencies.

Since agricultural production requires materials, it is important for Agricultural Extension Officers (AEOs) to have knowledge about these materials, how to use them, and new products information. At the same time, it is also valuable for material suppliers to know about demand and information on the ground when they promote their products. In a project in Northern Uganda, we held a dealers' forum that invited various agricultural input suppliers and AEOs together, and could receive positive responses from both participants. In Palestine, we promoted collaboration between materials suppliers and AEOs, then developed manufacturing equipment to enable easy production of compost and silage for farmers. In the same project, we collaborated with private seedling suppliers to promote vegetable grafted seedlings. In a project aimed at water-saving agriculture promotion in Syria, we worked on capacity development of irrigation material suppliers as well as AEOs. In Pakistan, as buyers and transporters provide technical instruction for vegetable and fruit production to farmers, they are essential actors in the actual process of technical support as well as in the marketing. In other countries as well, pairing buyers providing technical instruction with farmers is common in contract farming since the buyer wants the farmer to produce the quality product they desire. However, as there are some cases where instructions from buyers focus only on short-term productivity without considering sustainability or environmental effects, the role of AEOs is also important. In this way, a win-win relationship can be established between the private sector and the extension workers, and for this relationship to work, it is important that the extension workers have reliable knowledge and skills.

Aid agencies also are partners of EDs in developing

countries. Particularly, governmental agencies often work together with AEOs. However, in many cases, AEOs tend to be used merely as a source of labor, since aid agencies provide funds for their activities, especially in the case of material distribution projects. In Tanzania and Laos, we have seen cases where many aid agencies, all conducting similar projects were competing to secure AEOs. Even when projects must achieve their purpose within a limited period, in terms of agriculture promotion in target area it is important to consider how these works contribute to AEOs' capacity development.

On the other hand, even if the AEOs are regarded as a labor pool by aid agencies, if they perceive the work to be an opportunity to improve their own capacity, the results obtained will be different. The words of AEOs from Nepal were impressive. "It is also important work for us to effectively distribute materials from aid agencies for local agriculture promotion." These words made us realize that the AEOs' mindset is also important. In this way, the relationship between ED and aid agencies is more delicate than the relationship with the private sector. However, it can build beneficial relationships if everybody involved understands and respects each other's position.

Cooperation with external organizations is essential, as agricultural promotion cannot be achieved through the efforts of EDs alone. Especially for EDs in developing countries with limited budgets, it may be necessary to be particularly creative when it comes to using whatever is available. The ability to maintain good relationships with private sector players and aid agencies, and to organize and grasp the necessary information, is also an important ability for a good AEO.



**Dealers' forum held in Northern  
Uganda**

## Consideration on remote operation <Part 5>

### Adaptation to the ‘normal’ and tools for remote operation

After the spread of COVID-19, the daily operating procedure of technical cooperation had to be reconsidered to accommodate the new circumstances. As a result we saw the evolution of a new operating paradigm and now combining remote operation with field work has become mainstream. Given the restrictions in movement and behavior, maximizing the effect of implementation with flexible thinking is required more than ever before.

Because we have been undertaking a continuous process of trial and error under the difficult conditions in developing countries, it is crucial to look at the subject of adapting positively to meet new global challenges to work in the face of an epidemic of infectious disease that has left no corner of the world untouched. This article discusses the characteristics of, and impressions made by, several remote tools frequently used in the recent daily operation of technical cooperation in the ‘new normal’.

#### 1. Messenger and Chat Function of Social Networking Services (SNS)

Messenger Apps including Skype, Microsoft Messenger, LINE and WhatsApp are frequently used nowadays as an alternative to e-mail. In terms of sending text messages there is no difference with conventional e-mail, however user impression of communication speed is quite different when it comes to messenger Apps. The use of such SNS messengers for the purpose of communicating with counter-parts (CPs) and national staff members (NSs) has noticeably increased, although e-mail is still utilized.

It is difficult to confirm whether the sent e-mail messages have already been read or are as yet unread, and it generally takes some time to receive replies to messages. By contrast the messenger and chat function of SNS allows us to make interactive communication at the time one is connected. Sharing information and ideas among the group members and moving on-line calls when the need arises are easily made by messenger and chat functions of SNS. The chat function is particularly attractive to CPs and NSs who have difficulties in reading and writing English because it facilitates quick and easy clarification of requests through live conversation, rather than having to boot the e-mail application and send messages later on.

This said, messenger is not suitable for sending long texts and it tends to cause rough and careless information sharing among the members. This author feels it has poor recordability and preservative qualities compared to e-mail, but there is a room for improvement with a little ingenuity.

#### 2. Video Conference

Since the staff of AAI are generally engaged in their work in different countries, regular video conferences have regularly been held. Skype was used even before Covid for company meetings but because the number of video conferences with external partners has increased since last year, eZoom and Microsoft Teams are also now used.

Although there are differences between these Apps in terms of sound and picture quality all have enhanced and convenient information sharing and recording functions compared to previous physical meetings. Although there are some differences between the Apps in terms of sound quality and data communication capacity, including speed, each one of those video conference applications comes with convenient functions including the shared screen and recording meeting sessions, therefore video conferencing is useful for the record of proceedings and preservation of references compared to “real face-to-face meetings.”

#### 3. Video Teaching Materials

The experiences gained in on-line presentations at the university and remote lectures for the JICA training program have also been applied and replicated increasingly frequently in current domestic operations. There are several ways of implementation including showing presentation slides on-line and making explanations via live broadcasting, in addition to streaming lecture slide videos previously prepared with direct sound recording or remote narration editing.

Mis-statement in verbal explanation and typographical errors on presentation slides were often overlooked in past conventional live presentations and lectures, however these errors are noticeably recorded in the video teaching materials. That is why recording and reading text in manuscript must be made with more care when video teaching materials are to be the final product.

# The role of intermediary distributors in Balochistan Province, Pakistan <Part 1>

## Overview of agricultural market distribution and major intermediary distributors

There has been much discussion of the roles played by each intermediary distributor in distribution channels, as various technological innovations have been introduced. While there is an argument that they are not needed, it is also true to say that they exist because they are needed. One role of intermediary distributors is to act as a bridge between producers and consumers. In rural areas of Africa and Asia, in so-called developing countries, there are many gaps in terms of quality assurance, payment terms and conditions, as well as the lack of roads and distribution facilities. Particularly in the handling of agricultural products, which are biological resources, intermediary distributors fill in these various gaps from production to consumption. Since 2019, AAI has been working on a technical cooperation project targeting Balochistan province, Pakistan. We obtained interesting findings about intermediate distributors through research of actors in agricultural distribution channels. In this issue, we would like to introduce the overview of agricultural market distribution in Balochistan province and consider the role of the intervention of intermediary distributors for farmers.

Agriculture in Balochistan province contributes to one-third of the province's total GDP, and about two-thirds of the labor force is employed in agriculture. A diverse variety of crops is grown in the region because of the complex topography and varying climatic conditions. The northern region of the province is also known as the fruit basket of Pakistan, with grapes and apricots accounting for more than around 90% of the country's production.

Balochistan province is one of the most famous fruit production areas in Pakistan, but the province is characterized as having fewer public markets for agricultural products than other provinces. While Balochistan occupies 44% of the total area of Pakistan, there are only two public markets, one in Quetta and the other in Nasirabad. In terms of distribution facilities, there are more than 500 cold storage facilities in Punjab and 25 in Sindh, whereas there are only a few cold storage and packaging facilities in Balochistan. In addition, because of the complex topography, the roads in different regions are notoriously bad and the accessibility to markets in the

province is very poor. Consequently, the majority of fruit farmers tend to sell their products to markets outside the province.

Next, agricultural distribution channels in Balochistan can be summarized as follows, taking fruit tree farmers as an example.



The pre-harvest contractor visits farmers during the flowering period and negotiates the amount of contract deposits and payment options. Once the contract is signed, the contractor will be responsible for all subsequent management of production, including pest management, fertilizer application, pruning, harvesting, packing, storage, and shipping. There are many advantages for farmers who do not have advanced farming skills, financial capital, or for those who prefer to minimize the risks of sales and weather conditions. The payment amount and terms to the farmer are set through negotiations, based on the wholesale market prices and taking into account the labor and the risks incurred by the contractor. On the other hand, some farmers produce and ship directly to wholesalers without relying on any contractors.

Another interesting actor is a commission agent, the most important actor in the distribution chain. On the upstream side of distribution channels, the commission agent provides financial support to pre-harvest contractors, procures agricultural materials, and lends money to farmers without requiring mortgages or paperwork. In the midstream and downstream, the commission agent is also involved in price and supply/demand adjustments in the wholesale market. Therefore, it can be said that they control the entire distribution channel.

Despite poor markets and distribution facilities in Balochistan, it is interesting that agricultural products reach consumers from farmers through the intervention of various intermediary distributors. In the next issue, we will discuss the role of pre-harvest contractor and commission agent in more detail and consider what their intervention means to farmers.