

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**