

Useful plants in Sudan <Part 1>

Introduction

Previously, AAI News published a series of essays titled “Essays on Sudan Kassala” which explored aspects of “useful plants” within Sudanese agricultural culture and cultivated plants, obtained through the experience of a project in Kassala State, Sudan. After that, the author's activity site in Sudan shifted from Kassala State to River Nile State, and the agricultural types tackled in the project changed from dry farming to irrigated farming using river irrigation from the Nile River. It became a good opportunity for me to reconsider Sudanese agriculture from a different angle. Here, as a new series, based on the accumulation of observations and investigation made so far, I would like to take up the issue again, on the usage of “useful plants” in Sudan.



Vegetable market in a rural region

I use the term "useful plants" not from an academic perspective but as I have discovered them through experience in the project, and my focus is on their role in the daily life of Sudanese people. The mission of agricultural experts like us is often to study and to improve the livelihood of farmers from the practical point of view. This is because we need to be properly involved on the ground..

While focusing on various aspects of "useful plants" such as history, cultivation methods, preparation and processing methods, usages, sales, food culture, etc., I would like to introduce "useful plants" by adding my own unique perspective. I am going to introduce Sudanese farming culture in a multifaceted and comprehensive way to the best of my ability. When we talk about Greater Sudan's agricultural and cultural complex, it is sometimes interpreted as encompassing a vast area extending as far as West Africa. However, unless otherwise specified, please note that the term "Sudan" in this and forthcoming

articles is limited to the so-called "Republic of the Sudan" which resulted after the separation of the north and south of the former Sudan.

When agricultural experts link useful plants to farmers' livelihood improvement in the project, it is the better if there are more options for means and methods. The Nile River flows through the central part of Sudan from south to north, and its benefits are immeasurable for the establishment of irrigated agriculture. But when it comes to ‘useful plants’ for development nationwide, options are limited by arid conditions elsewhere in Sudan. Useful plants are restricted by arid conditions. When I traveled to tropical Indonesia in the past, which has a humid climate, I was overwhelmed by the richness of the variety of “useful plants” and the diversity of usage by residents. Compared to dry countries/regions such as Syria, Palestine and Sudan, which the author has been in contact with on a daily basis, I was stunned by the breadth and variety of options for preparation and processing there in Indonesia when aiming to utilize plants for improving the livelihoods of farmers. The diversity of such wetter lands was somewhat enviable, however, there is still considerable variation and depth in the use of "useful plants" even in dry areas, and I think that there are also interesting points found in Sudan in terms of their usage.

Regarding “useful plants” in dry land Sudan, of course, it includes cultivated plants such as okra and onions etc., but sometimes we also pay attention to trees and weeds around the fields, and explore usefulness from the perspective of project implementation. I would like to report about them, too, in this series.



Women processing onions after harvesting