

## Names of the Acholi People <Part 1>

Names are interesting because they reflect the country, ethnicity, and culture of a people. In the Acholi region of northern Uganda, where I work, the Acholi language is spoken, which belongs to the Luo language family used by Nilotic ethnic peoples.

Acholi names are typically composed of an Acholi name followed by an English name. For instance, Nyero Philip has only a given name and no family name. English names can be given relatively freely based on religion, celebrities, acquaintances etc. Each Acholi name carries its own meaning. Nyero means "smile" indicating that the person was born smiling. It also has additional meanings such as "people around him smiled when he was born" and "mockery." Additionally, if a boy is born with warts on his fingers, he is named "Ojara," while a girl is named "Lajara." Furthermore, if a boy is delivered with his legs first, his name is "Odoch," and a girl's name would be "Adoch."

Some names are predetermined at birth. The older sibling of twins is named Ocen/Acen, while the younger sibling is named Opiyo/Apiya. The next child born after the twins is called Okello/Akello, and the following baby is named Odong/Adong. Interestingly, if one parent dies before the child is born, the child is also named Odong/Adong, making the situation further complex.

Another fascinating aspect is that many names have negative meanings. For instance, Nyeko means "jealous." In the polygamous Acholi society, it is not uncommon for children to be exposed to jealousy from other wives. Babies born during difficult times were named Ocan/Acan, meaning "poverty." Kilama, meaning "curse," and Komakech, meaning "unlucky man," received their names due to unfortunate events that occurred in the family before or after their birth. Of course, in everyday life, people usually don't pay much attention to the negative meanings of names. Nevertheless, I was curious about the background of these names, so I asked my Acholi friends.

According to my friends, traditionally, in Acholi culture, elders of the family are responsible for giving names to the children, and names with negative meanings may be given regardless of the parents' wishes. Additionally, I have also heard that from a cultural anthropological perspective, people who did not have a written language, like the Acholi, often named their children after significant events of the time to record them. When I asked my Acholi friends about this, they replied, "There may indeed be such a connotation." For example, Komakech is a rather common name, but it is often given to a child when the child's previous sibling has died. The reason why the name Komakech is so common is probably that there are many cases where the children who are born die. On the other hand, there is a habit of "giving names with negative meanings to protect against evil spirits," not only in Africa but in many countries around the world. However, this is not the case with Acholi names.

However, the trend of names is changing with the times. Many children of my friends have names with positive meanings, such as Laker "Princess" and Oteka "Hero." One of the Komakechi even changed his name to Komagun, which is said to mean "lucky man."



Every child has a beautiful name

I have entered over 2,000 Acholi names to make a farmers' list at work. Initially, it was monotonous work, but after learning the meaning behind each name, I felt as if I could see the face of a stranger behind each name, and I could enjoy the work a lot.

(August 2023, Sawada)

# 'Towards the 21st Century' Revisited <Part 1>

## Introduction

In the past, AAINews has run two serials titled 'Coexistence of Nature and Humans -Towards the 21st Century' (No.19-24) and 'In Search of the Blue Bird; What is it that you long for?' (No.31-36) which focused on the themes of global environmental issues, affluence and the way of life.

In the series 'Coexistence of Nature and Humans' published from 1998 to 1999, it was emphasized that 'One of the most important tasks for the 21st century is addressing the environmental problems'. Then we introduced activities that pursue coexistence of nature and humans from Japan and overseas, not only by referring to existing reports but also by interviewing and conducting field research that enabled us to express our insights and thoughts. The series was concluded with the sentence "Keeping in mind the notion of 'Coexistence of Nature and Humans', we would like to continue contributing to various activities aiming at achieving such a co-existence in Japan, as well as contributing to sustainable development in developing countries".

'In Search of the Blue Bird' was published from 2000 to 2001 with focuses on 'affluence' and 'ways of life'. The following concerns were mentioned; 'With limited resources and unlimited human greed, will globalization really work for the better? Wouldn't it just lead to an increasing gap between the powerful and the weak and more environmental destruction?' It also posed the question 'If humans continue with their endless greed for material gains and with development beyond nature's carrying capacity, the final consequence can be expected more or less. Probably it is high time we reconsidered more seriously the education system for the future generations as well as the desirable social system to be built up' "The current 'blocked-up' feeling in Japanese society has something to do with the incapability of dreaming, and things like hope and a sense of fulfillment and achievement seem to be found at the opposite end of where Japan presently stands".

Those themes were taken up at time when the Kyoto Protocol was adopted, and it was the time when globalization had already advanced and global warming

had become an issue. International cooperation activities we engage in, whether it is ODA projects or NGOs, have been influenced by the trend of globalization. The economic and cultural exchanges among nations have become more active, and the interdependence among nations has strengthened, based on the premise that globalization is progressing. As a responsibility of developed countries, various projects on financial and technical cooperation have been implemented in the developing countries.

With this regard, how should those of us engaged in international cooperation live, act and move forward in this globalizing world? This was the subject we discussed in the past series. 20 years has passed, and what have we done so far? What should we do from now on? The purpose of the new series is to pause and reflect on these questions.

It seems that not much progress has been made towards the solutions for global issues, and the problem appears to be even more serious compared to 20 years ago. On the other hand, it is also true that there have been some movements that did not exist back then, such as the emergence of 'Glocal' activities where people take action locally and disseminate results globally, re-evaluation of rural region and Satoyama (woodlands) with the trend of returning to rural life, as well as teaching about sustainable development at elementary schools.

In this series, we would like to think about how AAI can cope with the challenges associated with globalization and capitalism, and contribute to the community development, sustainable society and sustainable lifestyle, by incorporating the activities we engaged in.



**Environmental education activities through mangrove planting (Oman, 2013)**

\*The series mentioned above can be found on the AAI website.  
<https://www.koushu.co.jp/aainews/>

## Useful plants in Sudan <Part 2>

### Sorghum

Sorghum (*Sorghum bicolor*) is a field crop representative of Sudan, and along with pearl millet, has long been cultivated as a food staple. Looking at the African continent, after the Age of Exploration in the 16th century, the cultivation of latecomer grains such as maize originating from the New World and wheat originating from the Mediterranean Sea in the north expanded, and sorghum and pearl millet which had been mainstream were gradually displaced with new crops.. In Sudan as well, bread made from imported wheat has become popular in recent years, but traditional staple foods made of sorghum and millet are still influential even today and a certain scale of production is maintained. Especially in non-irrigated areas where rain-fed agriculture is said to account for more than 85% of the country's land area, it definitely supports the livelihood of residents as the main crop.

In the past, AAINews has published articles on sorghum under the titles of “Sorghum and Rainfed Agriculture,” “Pastoral Sorghum Cultivation by Water Harvesting Agriculture,” “Grain Eating Culture of Sorghum and Wheat”, and “What Causes Damage to Sorghum Fields.” We tried to touch on historical and cultural aspects of the crop. This time, at the beginning of this new series, which introduces “Sudan's Useful Plants”, I wanted to focus on the future possibilities and challenges related to this crop.

As mentioned, sorghum is widely cultivated in rain-fed or non-irrigated areas, so it can come across as being non-systematically cultivated but that is how particularly by farmers along the Nile River. For these farmers it is an important task to secure livestock feed and to combine this with crop production in winter (October to April) for raising livestock such as sheep, goats, and cattle. For the sorghum in the irrigated area, an early-maturing cultivar called Abu-sabain (Abu means ‘further’ and sabain means ‘70 days’ in Arabic) is selected, and all parts, such as ears, stems and leaves are used as fodder. In addition, crop production is usually concentrated in the winter season, and summer (May to September), when the weather is extremely hot, is called the “dead season” for crops, and cultivation tends to be avoided. Sorghum for feed has a track record of being cultivated as a valuable summer crop that can be planted stably with a high yield.

In recent years, in addition to sorghum for feed, attempts have been made actively to introduce highly marketable cash crops such as sesame, peanuts, sunflowers, soybeans, and rice for summer cultivation in irrigated areas. In addition to these, the author considers that edible sorghum also has a potential as a new cash crop. Until recently, sorghum for food was considered to have a low advantage compared to other cash crops, and there was also a fixed idea that sorghum was suited traditional extensive cultivation in non-irrigated areas. However, considering the deteriorating economic situation owing to the currency depreciation in Sudan and the food situation due to future climate change, sorghum should be re-evaluated as a main summer food crop. On the other hand, wheat is highly dependent on imports, the supply is unstable, and the land suitable for winter cultivation is limited.



**Summer cultivation of early mature sorghum cultivar ‘Abu-sabain’**

In addition, the planted area in the irrigated areas in the summer is overwhelmingly smaller than in the winter, and there are many vacant lands to plant edible sorghum. To this end, comprehensive efforts such as the introduction of modern flour milling technology, high added value, and improvement of the distribution network are required for the advanced use of edible sorghum. Food Research Corporation (FRC) in Sudan has also started research on bread making using mixed wheat flour, and it is attracting attention locally as a substitute for imports of wheat. As such, we believe that the potential for positive utilization of edible sorghum as a crop adapted to the hot summers of Sudan could be further explored.



**Trade of fodder sorghum**

## Farm visiting reports <Part 3>

### Nursery farmer – Iizumi farm –

As the third article in our irregular series focusing on Japanese farms, we introduce “Iizumi-farm,” as a seedling nursery farm running for more than 40 years in Tsukuba city, Ibaraki prefecture, and a destination of study-tours for the vegetable cultivation technology course carried out at JICA Tsukuba by AAI.

Iizumi-farm was established by the grand-father of the current president, Mr. Keisei IIZUMI more than 40 years ago, and Keisei also has more than 20 years of experience in producing grafted and own-root seedlings, since Keisei inherited his family business.

He has several 0.1-hectare plastic houses specialized for nursing seedlings. Plastic houses are equipped with heating boilers and hot water supply piping systems for nursing seedling beds. Portable steam soil-sterilization machines and containers are also installed.

About 40,000 pots of grafted and own-root seedlings are produced and sold by Keisei’s family members and hired field technicians for a season between



**Seedlings are sold on site**

February and the end of the spring holidays in May. In the case of grafted seedling of watermelons, they can produce more than 1,000 grafted seedlings per day with 6 persons consist of 2 persons for preparation (cutting) of scions and rootstocks, 2 persons for grafting (connecting scion and rootstock) and the remaining 2 persons for potting (re-planting the grafted seedling into a pot). The speed and accuracy of the operation is astonishing!

The items are grafted and own-root seedlings mainly of fruit vegetables including tomato, eggplant (brinjal), piman (Japanese green pepper), chili-pepper, watermelon, sweet melon, cucumber and other Cucurbits. Seedlings are sold directly at the farm gate. Recently we can find that vegetable seedlings are sold at DIY stores however the difference in the quality of Keisei’s seedlings is obvious compared to them.

In times past, neighbouring commercial producers purchased their seedlings in blocks of 1,000 pots at a time, however sales have dwindled to 50 to 100 pots because

of the aging farmer population. The main buyers are now ordinary garden owners buying a few pots for their private use. Even under such circumstances, Iizumi receives a lot of inquiries about their seedlings from old friends and neighbouring customers seeking healthy seedlings bred with higher technical skills and from retail shops of agricultural materials who have heard of the Iizumi reputation.



**Grafting watermelon**

Production plans including kinds of crops/cultivars, and production quantities are decided based on the previous sales record. In rare cases, novel/unprecedented crops are tentatively released, however customers come back to the regular/familiar items at the end. Keisei also cultivates regular agricultural produce after he produces and sells vegetable seedlings and these are his major production items within a short period of time between February and May.

At the JICA vegetable cultivation technology course we emphasize the old Japanese farmer saying “nae-hansaku” (healthy seedlings are half the battle for a good harvest). Grafting is also practiced as a useful pest and disease control method to reduce environmental burden. Keisei always readily gives training course participants a chance of on-site practical experience of grafting methods when we visit his farm.

We hope the maintenance and development of his nursery farm for the purpose of perpetuating these techniques and grafting skills continues despite the obvious increasing popularity of DIY stores.



**Participants trying grafting**