



Connecting people, agriculture and the environment through appropriate technologies

Names of the Acholi People <Part 2>

When working abroad, sometimes we are given a local name. It might be due to the difficulty in pronouncing unaccustomed Japanese names, but it also feels good – as if we are accepted in the local community. As I mentioned in a previous issue, in the northern Uganda, Acholi Sub-region, where I work, each Acholi name carries a specific meaning. I looked forward to getting my Acholi name!

My female Japanese colleagues were given good names like "Laker," meaning "princess," "Lakisa" for "heartful," "Lamaro" for "love," "Aber" meaning "beautiful," and so on. "Atim," meaning "a girl born far away," seemed fitting for a woman coming from a distant country like Japan. On the other hand, naming the men seemed a somewhat rougher process! Due to similar pronunciations, Mr. Ohno was given the name "Onono," meaning "a man with nothing," and Mr. Yuki was given the sobriquet "Oyugi," meaning "garbage." The names were so unflattering that we even doubted whether they were genuine names for people (though they are in fact actual names used in Acholi). Of course, my colleagues disliked these names and refused them for themselves! Eventually they also were given better names!

Another young colleague of mine was named "Oyoo," meaning "a boy born by the roadside." "Oyoo" also means "mouse," though it is pronounced a bit differently. Farmers gave him the name because he was always seen hurrying and running in front of farmers.

Surprisingly, he seemed to like it and accepted the name "Oyoo," saying, "This name suits my impatient nature!"

My Acholi name is "Mwaka," meaning "Year." It is a name often given to boys born around the New Year, but is more commonly given to boys born late. When I introduce myself in Acholi as "My Acholi name is Mwaka," I'm usually met with laughter: "Do you know the meaning of that name?" or "Oh, you liked your mom too much!" However, even though I wasn't born around New Year's or as a late birth, I have a special reason for using this name.

About a year into working in Acholi, while on a solo field monitoring visit to a village, I encountered a member of a farmers' group and she guided me to the field. She was pregnant at that time and later named her baby after me, "Sawada." The fact that a member of the community gave my name to their child made me feel that my work was acknowledged by the farmers, and I was truly happy. The baby's name is "Mwaka Sawada." So, this time, I decided to take his Acholi name for me. After sharing this story, people no longer laugh at me; instead, they fondly call me "Mwaka."

Now, there are five children in the Acholi sub-region with the name "Sawada" named after me. Sometimes, when I bring used clothing from Japan for the children, they show happy faces. It's delightful for me to see Acholi children with the same name wearing clothes that were once worn by my own son.

(November 2023, Sawada)



The first baby Sawada wearing Japanese traditional clothing I brought from Japan.



The second baby Sawada. I'm looking forward to watching him grow.



The third baby Sawada plays with soap bubbles brought from Japan.



The fifth baby Sawada, born in 2022.

'Towards the 21st Century' Revisited <Part 2>

Universal agriculture - agricultural and welfare collaboration through connecting local resources

"Universal" can be interpreted as meaning "all-round", "for everyone", and "anyone can do it". It was with this in mind that a project launched to create an all inclusive comfortable community embracing everybody, young, old, differently abled etc. in mutually supportive agricultural activities to increase everybody's welfare was called "Universal Agriculture".

In Japan's agricultural sector, an aging farming population, a declining number of farm workers, and an increase in abandoned farmland have become pressing issues in recent years. At the same time there are people with disabilities and the elderly who seek greater social participation and employment opportunities (cash income). Addressing these issues by combining them in "agricultural and welfare collaboration" has the potential to prove a happy solution that creates a mutually and self-supportive community in declining rural districts.

We started this community-based activity in 2018 in Fukuroi city, Shizuoka, as a trial in a new agriculture-welfare partnership activity supported by the local Collaborative Community Development Center. For project purposes we rented farms and greenhouses from farmers near facilities catering to people with disabilities. The farms were cultivating grapes, indigo, shiitake mushroom, etc. and grapes and mushroom remain our important cash crops. Manufacturing indigo dyes through the entire process of growing, processing and marketing is an agricultural diversification strategy.

So far, a cultivation system based on four major crops has been established based on grapes, indigo, mushroom, and Senryo (*Sarcandra glabra*). These crops are a well-balanced combination taking into consideration the seasonality and challenges in cultivation management. A small amount of cash income has been earned by selling grapes and Senryo, and was paid as wages to the disabled people who participated in the farming work, which was a remarkable and important step for the agricultural and welfare collaboration activities.

Various agricultural activities at the Universal Farm are carried out in cooperation with a "Support Team" comprised of volunteers.. The project has the additional benefit of counteracting the decline in local farming by bringing grapes cultivation back to a discarded greenhouse and continuing a Senryo field which had no owners to succeed and maintain it.

To date, the Universal Agriculture Foundation has made progress and we would like to expand our activities not only in the existing Universal Farm site, but also roll out the concept to nearby farmers and abandoned farmlands, and to connect with people in the area who are interested in embracing activities that extend the Universal Agriculture concept in the region. Furthermore, an intermediary organization will be established in order to connect "agriculture" and "welfare" and to support the development of Universal Agriculture in the region.

We hope to create a credible and practical system in the region to realize a triple-win network providing benefits for, "agriculture," "welfare" and "local community" through the practice of Universal Agriculture. The time is changing from "global" to "regional." We believe that community-based activities rooted in the local community will become more and more important!



Indigo dyeing



Vineyard in the universal farm



Implanting shiitake mushroom



Harvesting Senryo

Useful plants in Sudan <Part 3>

The Family of Malvaceae

There are many useful plants in the Malvaceae family which has many groups and is widely distributed throughout the world. The African continent and the Indian subcontinent host a lot of varieties of wild species and are assumed to be the homelands of the Malvaceae family. In Sudan, cotton, hibiscus, and okra are representative Malvaceae plants and occupy an important position in agriculture. Cultivation of Malvaceae in Egypt and Sudan has a long history and unique characteristics in terms of culture and usage. In this article I would like to touch on all three.

First of all, let us look at cotton. Cotton genome types are diploid in Asian cotton and tetraploid in Peruvian ('sea island') cotton. Globally, it is thought that there was a process in which long-staple Peruvian cotton, originating in the New World, was then gradually replaced as a premium variety by short-staple Asian cotton originating in the Indus River basin. Cultivars that have long been grown in Sudan were imported from India as "Asian cotton".

The industrial Revolution changed the face of the cotton industry which became developed as a mass production system. Throughout the British Indirect Rule Period, Sudanese cotton production was expanded making the region a prominent production area.

In response to the serious cotton shortage caused by the American Civil War in the mid 19th century, River Nile, Jazeera, and New Halfa were developed as major producing areas in the country. About 100 years have passed since modernization of industrial cotton agriculture occurred in these areas. There are currently around 20 cotton ginning factories operating in Sudan, and cotton is attracting renewed attention as a promising commercial crop for export.

My focus now shifts to hibiscus, a crop that yields flowers used for drinks. This is also considered to be a member of the Malvaceae family, which is native to Africa. Its not known precisely when hibiscus became popularly used for drinks in Sudan. It is called 'Karkade' and the product is usually sold on weighing scales at dry goods stores. While it is served chilled as a summer soft drink, it is also favoured as a hot

substitute for coffee or tea. Karkade is believed to have medicinal properties, and it is said that drinking it cold can lower blood pressure, while drinking it hot can raise blood pressure. Dried baobab flowers are the Sudanese traditional soft drink, but karkade is by far the most frequently consumed drink. Japanese people like the refreshingly sour taste of karkade, but Sudanese people add a lot of sugar, making it a sweet drink.

The third useful plant in the Malvaceae family is okra. The origin of this plant is unknown, and although it is generally believed that it might not be in Africa, it is true that many wild okra varieties grow naturally in Sudan. For this reason, when cultivating for seed production, it is recommended that okra be planted in sufficient isolation to avoid inadvertent hybridization with wild species, but natural hybridization appears to occur during regular cultivation. In cultivation under such conditions, it is difficult to fix and maintain varieties. Whether you like it or not, it is difficult to avoid crossbreeding with wild okra and hybridization with tougher wild varieties is expected to continue.

In terms of usage, Sudanese okra is rarely eaten raw. It is sliced into rounds, dried in the sun, and then powdered to make a thickening food. The processed food either in the form of round slices or powder is called 'Wayka', which distinguishes it from 'Bamiya' which is fresh/raw okra. So, why did this type of usage develop? It is assumed powdered okra is preferred over fresh in Sudan because hybridization with wild species has made Sudanese okra tougher and harder to eat.

It can be suggested that powdering was the optimal use of half wild partially cultivated okra.

We don't normally think of these very different crops coming from the same family but all three are widely utilized in Sudan which is why I have introduced them in this article.



Harvesting okra in Sudan

Lectures at Obihiro University of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine

AAI often lectures at universities and government offices in Japan, conveying knowledge and experience in technical cooperation activities overseas especially in dryland areas. We are also talk about developing careers as development consultants for students and public. In recent years, the author has been giving lectures regularly at Obihiro University of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine (OUAVM) and Nippon Veterinary and Life Science University. The invited lecture at OUAVM, in particular, has been held unbroken since the first lecture in 2013, and this year marks its 10th anniversary.

The lecture series at OUAVM is titled 'International Agriculture and Animal Husbandry' (until 2019 it was titled 'International Animal Husbandry'). The programme is co-organized by the University and the JICA Obihiro Center. The lectures introduce the status of agriculture and livestock production in various countries, and are given to second-year undergraduate students majoring in livestock science and veterinary science. The lecture series consists of 12 lectures in the first or second semester delivered relay style by several lecturers taking turns. AAI is in charge of one lecture in which we showcase our field activities related to livestock feed resources from technical cooperation projects conducted in Mongolia, Palestine and Sudan. In addition, we explain to students our position as a private development consultancy involved in ODA (JICA) projects, and the significance and the rewards of being an implementor of technical cooperation activities in developing countries.

Briefly touching on the content of our lecture, in the case of Palestine, there was a strong need for finding a way to utilize local resources, considering the various constraints imposed by Israel's occupancy policy which impedes favourable farming conditions. We explained about the process of developing appropriate technologies for 'Resource Recycling' such as silage and compost production to promote the use of agricultural residues and manure. In the case of Mongolia, we focused on the importance of securing and maintaining water sources in winter and summer camps for livestock and introduced ways to manage

'Unused/Underused' grassland as well as how to encourage the optimal nomadic movement of pastoralists. Lastly in the case from Sudan, we explained the process of selecting and introducing the technology of 'Water Harvesting (WH)' for sorghum production for livestock feed, targeting poor pastoralists on the eastern bank of the Atbara River. We also explained the danger of unilateral service provision from the project side, and the need for requesting beneficiaries to bear a certain cost.

In the lectures, students submit a short report, choosing one from the three themes above. They can either just review the lecture content, researching on their own, or they can find actual relevant practices conducted in the Tokachi area in Hokkaido. The table below shows the results of theme selection which indicate the direction of students' awareness and interests. We found it noteworthy to see the number of students who are interested in WH techniques for dryland areas.

It is encouraging to see students' reports that show their interest in international cooperation exhibiting thoughtful analysis and enthusiasm for specialization even though some may be shy when it comes to vocally expressing opinions in the public lecture. Enabling them to express their feelings in writing offers a useful alternative method of communicating motives and interests. In the past, several students who attended the lecture subsequently joined AAI as interns. We are looking forward to having the yearly lecture in Hokkaido again, and hope that some of the students with whom we will interacting will become development consultants or NGO workers who can take a leading role in agriculture assistance in Japan and overseas in the future.

Year	Resource Recycling	Unused/Underused	WH	Subtotal/Total
2022	36 (65.5)	19 (34.5)	-	55 (100)
2021	23 (59.0)	16 (41.0)	-	39 (100)
2020	45 (61.6)	28 (38.4)	-	73 (100)
2019	56 (59.6)	14 (14.9)	24 (25.5)	94 (100)
2018	21 (46.7)	13 (28.9)	11 (24.4)	45 (100)
2017	23 (45.1)	15 (29.4)	24 (25.5)	51 (100)
2016	23 (54.8)	8 (19.0)	11 (24.4)	42 (100)
2015	28 (47.5)	14 (23.7)	13 (25.5)	59 (100)
2014	33 (50.0)	14 (21.2)	11 (26.2)	66 (100)
2013	42 (49.4)	20 (23.5)	17 (28.8)	85 (100)
Subtotal/Total	330 (54.2)	161 (26.4)	19 (28.8)	609 (100)

Selection of the theme by year