

Useful plants in Sudan < Epilogue >

Instead of an afterword

In this series, I have introduced several useful plants that I encountered through various JICA technical cooperation projects in Sudan. The term “useful plants” refers to those that provide humans with various benefits and functions. “Useful” here means “serving human life.” However, the line between useful and not useful is not always clear-cut. For example, mesquite, which I discussed in Part 6, is often regarded as a nuisance weed in fields, yet when seen from another perspective, it has useful aspects such as dune fixation and as a source of fuel like firewood and charcoal. Similarly, even crops such as sorghum, wheat, and oilseeds, which are undoubtedly recognized as food sources of economic value, can be viewed differently depending on the historical and cultural context of a given country or region, revealing their relative aspects.

Throughout this series, I have described small observations and accumulated insights gained from daily interactions with Sudanese people during my work in Sudan. There are still more topics on useful plants in Sudan that I would like to write about on another occasion. I would also like to explore animal culture and the usefulness of livestock, but I will leave those as tasks for the future and bring this series to a close for now.

Now at this juncture, I would also like to touch on the recent situation in Sudan and the progress of our technical cooperation activities during this period. As you know, in April 2019 a military coup occurred in Sudan, ending the 30-year-long Bashir regime. This political upheaval occurred at a time when the domestic economy was deteriorating and exhausted due to rising prices and a worsening exchange rate, and persistent public demonstrations were intensifying calls for the president to step down. Subsequently, after periods of COVID-19 lockdowns and travel suspensions, efforts were made domestically and internationally to build frameworks for political agreement under unstable circumstances, raising hopes for democratization. However, the military’s reversal in October 2021 set the clock back, bringing about the resurgence of military rule.

During this time, the technical cooperation projects, for security reasons, were repeatedly forced to suspend the travel of Japanese experts, necessitating remote implementation. Nevertheless, despite such difficult

circumstances, the projects were not terminated and were able to continue. In fact, a new project was launched in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021, and it has been carried forward into the current technical cooperation project (Phase II) in River Nile State. Building on the achievements of the previous project, this initiative has expanded its support to farmers within the state’s irrigation schemes.

However, just as the project was beginning to gain traction, another unexpected crisis struck: the conflict that erupted in April 2023 between the national army and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), followed by ongoing intense fighting in Khartoum and other areas. This has resulted in devastation across the country, countless casualties, and the displacement of many people both internally and abroad—an extremely grave situation. Fortunately, River Nile State has remained relatively stable, allowing the project to continue. This has been made possible thanks to the strong will and tireless efforts of the State Ministry of Production, as well as the C/Ps and the NSs who are committed to continuing farmer support.

Even now, with persistent political divisions and violent clashes stemming from the struggle for dominance under the military regime, it is through the dedication and actions of our Sudanese partners that we Japanese experts are able to continue providing remote support. While the current situation remains highly uncertain, it is important to recognize that farmers, C/Ps, NSs, and the Sudanese people at large are the true victims of the conflict. We intend to continue supporting Sudan with technical cooperation to the greatest extent possible. While praying for a speedy return to peace in Sudan, we would like to do whatever we can to support farmers.



Activity report from the weekly seminar with CPs. Japanese experts participated online.