



Connecting people, agriculture and the environment through appropriate technologies

**Appropriate
Agriculture
International
Co., Ltd.**

1-2-3-403 Haramachida, Machida,
Tokyo, JAPAN 194-0013
TEL: +81-42-725-6250
FAX: +81-42-785-4332
E-mail: aai@koushu.co.jp
Website: <https://www.koushu.co.jp>

AAI celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2024

Appropriate Agriculture International Co., Ltd. marked its 40th anniversary on December 14, 2024, thanks to the support its partners and stakeholders. Over the last decade, the first generation of staff who joined at its founding has gradually retired, making a generational transition. In addition, 2020 marked a major turning point due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. International travel was suspended, and staff commuting was also restricted. As a result, the company accelerated the adoption of remote work arrangements. At our 30th anniversary in 2014, we invited external guests and looked back on AAI's history since its founding. For this 40th anniversary, instead of looking back, we focused on the future and held an event bringing together former and current staff to introduce what they are doing today. It was held on December 25, 2024.

Since its founding in 1984, AAI has been a small company with no more than 12 staff members, but a total of 23 people have worked for us over the years. For this gathering, in the spirit of "Once part of AAI, always part of AAI," we invited everyone who has been a member of AAI and contributed to our work to join us as fellow alumni. Unfortunately, we were unable to contact some people, and others were unable to attend due to scheduling conflicts. Nevertheless, we were fortunate to welcome participants who traveled from as far away as Ishigaki Island, Oita, Miyazaki, Okayama, Nagoya, and Shizuoka, despite the busy end-of-year period. On the day of the event, 18 former and current staff gathered, along with three longtime supporters from outside the company, bringing the total number of attendees to 21.

The meeting was held in three parts. The first part, titled "Confession," consisted of brief presentations by all participants on their recent activities, interests, thoughts, and other topics. In addition to reports from current staff working overseas, other participants shared a wide range

of topics, including local community activities, traditional festivals, NPO activities, the challenges of starting farming, and personal experiences from their private lives. Although the presentations varied widely in style, each reflected the individuality and personality of its presenter.

In the second part, we explored how participants are applying their overseas experience to benefit Japan. Four speakers gave slide presentations on agriculture and environmental conservation rooted in various regions of Japan. They shared not only the rewards of their daily efforts but also the challenges of integrating into local communities and future challenges, making the session meaningful.



Participants in the 40th Anniversary Event

The third part of the event shifted from the conference room to a Chinese restaurant, where we held a social gathering. Coincidentally, the day happened to mark the first anniversary of the passing of our former representative, Michimasa Kojima. We began with a toast in his memory and then enjoyed deeper conversations and lively discussions, rekindling old friendships.

To celebrate our 40th anniversary, we have published a commemorative booklet that includes a summary of our achievements over the past ten years, as well as excerpts from AAINews articles. The section on domestic initiatives features articles that highlight the unique activities of our alumni, and we hope you enjoy reading it.

We are grateful for your continued support and encouragement.
(February 2025)

AAI's New "Circular" Vision

Bringing Japan's Experience to the World, and the World's Experience Back to Japan

Five years ago, in 2019, Appropriate Agriculture International (AAI) underwent a generational transition and entered a new phase under renewed management. While embracing change, we have continued to uphold the three principles that have guided us since our founding: field-based thinking, dialogue and collaboration, and partnership building.

To commemorate our 40th anniversary, we renewed our website and published a commemorative booklet. At the same time, our current staff refined the company's vision for the future. Building on our strengths while looking ahead to the society we hope to serve, we expressed this vision through three fundamental pillars.

1. Continuing to Grow as a Small but Highly Skilled Team

Our first pillar:

"We respect open discussion and communication among our staff and will continue to develop ourselves as a small but highly skilled team of professionals."

AAI does not seek growth by increasing its size. Instead, we value the strengths of a compact organization where members learn from one another. We see each employee as a whetstone, continually sharpening one another's knowledge and expertise.

2. Contributing to Sustainable Rural Development through Appropriate Technology

Our second pillar:

"We contribute to the sustainable prosperity of rural communities through the development and dissemination of appropriate technologies in collaboration with local people around the world."

This has been AAI's mission since its establishment. Drawing on academic training and field experience gained in Japan, we work with farmers, rural women, and local communities to improve livelihoods while conserving natural resources and the environment.

This pillar reflects our commitment to providing high-quality consulting and technical services rooted in local realities.

3. Returning Overseas Experience to Local Communities in Japan

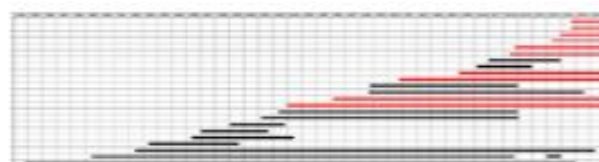
Our third pillar:

"We return the experience and knowledge gained through overseas activities to local communities in Japan and contribute to their revitalization."

This complements our second pillar. While we have long emphasized sharing Japan's knowledge overseas, we place equal importance on bringing home the experience gained abroad to contribute to Japan's future.

We envision AAI members developing through international field experience before returning to Japan to contribute to regional and community development. This continuous circulation of people, knowledge, and experience between Japan and overseas forms the essence of our new "circular" vision.

Our 40th anniversary gathering allowed us to reconnect with former colleagues and reflect on their diverse careers. Seeing retired members contributing to communities across Japan also reaffirmed that international cooperation creates lasting value both overseas and at home.



The complete list of AAI staff members throughout the company's history (current staff shown in red). Viewed as a whole, it resembles a tree growing over time. What shape will this tree have ten years from now?

What, then, is a company? Each employee brings unique abilities, experiences, and perspectives, while society itself continues to evolve. Throughout its history, AAI has continually renewed itself, much like a living organism replacing its cells. At the same time, it has evolved from a relatively homogeneous group sharing an interest in dryland agriculture into a diverse organization with a wide range of expertise, values, and perspectives.

As AAI moves forward, one question remains: What should we preserve as our organizational DNA, and what should we change? Guided by this vision, we will continue exploring this question while embracing new challenges.

Our Concept of Resource Management and Its Technical Development <Part 3>

African Leafy Vegetable in Kenya Program

In agricultural production, there is no doubt that the most important "resource" contributing to production is plant genetic resources, which constitute the production environment including the ecosystem.

In the context of "resource management based on sustainability", which was raised in the introduction to this series (AAI News No. 126), a case study of a program to revive the cultivation of indigenous traditional vegetables is presented in this article.

This "Low Input and Sustainable Agriculture" (LISA) technology, which the author piloted at his project sites in Kenya in 2014, exemplifies practices that successfully maintained and propagated indigenous/local genetic resources used since ancient times that were at risk of being forgotten due to modernization, keeping them in active use.

Alliance Bioversity International (formerly the International Plant Genetic Resources Institute, or IPGRI; hereinafter "BI") was engaged in the collection and classification of plant genetic resources for indigenous vegetable varieties from across Africa at its regional branch in Nairobi, Kenya.

The effort aimed at preventing the loss of valuable global plant genetic resources and promoting their conservation



Introductory workshop

Even in Kenya, the diversity and utilization of traditional indigenous crops were being lost with modernization and Westernization. Unfortunately, this trend was driven by an underlying perception that consuming introduced (Western-origin) vegetables is "modern," whereas consuming local indigenous vegetables was viewed as "backward" or a sign of poverty.

through utilization. Having identified nearly 200 varieties in Kenya alone, BI was exploring methods to advance conservation efforts through the use of these genetic resources.

Consequently, the production and consumption of indigenous local crops including the gathering of wild plants for self-consumption had been declining rapidly.

From 1996 to 2004, BI implemented the African Leafy Vegetable program in Kenya, working together with crop scientists and nutritionists to demonstrate that indigenous



Not only fresh but also dried and frozen produce are available recently

vegetables, particularly leafy green vegetables, were highly nutritious and easy for farmers to cultivate with low inputs. They disseminated these findings through television, posters and workshops that included cooking demonstrations.

Consequently, these indigenous local vegetables began appearing in major Nairobi supermarkets. Initially, urban wealthy consumers, in particular, were motivated by a desire to revive their cultural heritage and traditional roots, leading to increased consumption of these local vegetable varieties and driving a subsequent expansion in both demand and production across suburban and rural areas.

The "reintroduction of indigenous vegetable varieties" in this program was piloted as a LISA technique due to several outstanding characteristics: (a) being native to the region, they required no modification of the cultivation environment; (b) they were easy to grow, resistant to pests and diseases, and highly sustainable, requiring minimal inputs such as chemical fertilizers and pesticides; (c) procuring and saving their own seeds was relatively easy; (d) they contributed to maintaining crop diversity; (e) they were highly nutritious and effective for improving nutritional status; and (f) they possessed potential market value in addition to their utility for home consumption.

Aimed at improving the livelihoods and nutritional status of small-scale rural farmers, this program to promote the cultivation of traditional vegetables continues today with the support of various aid organizations.

AAI and I – KOTOU Akira <Part 2>

My Personal Reflection on AAI

Looking back, I believe AAI is quite a unique organization. It was founded by a group of people who simply wanted to do something interesting in the drylands. That pioneering spirit led us to pursue initiatives beyond the conventional JICA/ODA framework, resulting in the establishment of the “Muscat Fund” and the launch of “AAI News” as a platform for sharing ideas and exchanging information.

AAI News was first published in 1995. It has recorded the issues of the time, along with our thoughts and reflections. In 2014, the articles were compiled into a book to commemorate the company's 30th anniversary. The volume is filled with articles that reflect the spirit, philosophy, and values of AAI. The significance of AAI News lay not only in disseminating information, but also in the editorial process itself, which provided valuable opportunities to discuss and share the ideas and values that shaped AAI.

The Muscat Fund was established in 1997 to support small-scale, grassroots initiatives that addressed local needs and promoted sustainable development. One of its most memorable projects was a collaboration with the local NGO ZWP (Zvishavane Water Project) in Zimbabwe. As for how it all began, Mr. Ozeki of the Africa Japan Forum (at the time) introduced us to PELUM, an umbrella organization of NGOs. Through that connection, we eventually found our way to ZWP. However, ZWP's project site was located far from the capital, Harare, and this was before e-mail was widely available. We first made contact by letter, and our relationship began when they replied. I still vividly remember my first visit to their office, changing shared buses on the way to our initial face-to-face meeting. In retrospect, our partnership with ZWP began with a chance encounter and a journey, and I cannot help feeling that there was something almost destined about it. Cherishing such connections, I believe, is one of the most important aspects of international cooperation.

In my view, AAI was an organization ahead of its time—unique in its character and unlike any other. Creating and

sustaining such an organization required continuous efforts and ingenuity to foster a shared mission and sense of purpose.

As an organization, AAI aspired to be a flat, network-based group rather than a hierarchical structure. We valued networks not only within the company but also beyond it, maintaining close ties with people from other consulting firms, universities, NGOs, and NPOs, as well as close associates who were almost like members of the company. When we relocated our office from Yokohama to Machida in 1995, we chose a location that was easily accessible to visitors from outside the company. Our year-end parties were also distinctive, with invited guests from outside the company sometimes outnumbering our own staff.

We also placed great importance on sharing knowledge and experiences within the company through returnee seminars, study sessions, and seasonal events such as cherry blossom viewing and summer fireworks. Informal gatherings after work at the office also played an important role. Through these various occasions, we cultivated and shared a common mission and sense of purpose.

I learned many things at AAI, but if I were to highlight just three key lessons, they would be the following:

1. Avoid leaving decisions pending whenever possible.
2. Always meet deadlines—and aim to complete tasks about one week ahead of schedule.
3. Thorough preparation is the key to success.



**AAI office - more like a university research lab
than a conventional company office**