

AAINews

APPROPRIATE AGRICULTURE INTERNATIONAL
CO., LTD

1-2-3-403 Haramachida, Machida, Tokyo, 194-0013 JAPAN.

TEL/FAX:+81-42-725-6250 Email: aai@koushu.co.jp

My Vietnam: On the Mekong River's Banks

Recently I had a chance to spend about a month in Vietnam on business. It was such a short stay, with most of my time spent in Ho Chi Minh City, that I do not presume to discuss the whole country. This said, let me talk a little here about my impressions of what I saw during my stay. The first thing which surprised me in Ho Chi Minh City was the overwhelming number of motorbikes! You rarely see people walking in the street. They mostly move around by motorbike or bicycle (and, needless to say, the richer folk by car). If you stroll in the street, motorbike taxis will swiftly approach you with the drivers crying out: "Get on, sir!" Brand-new motorbikes cost as much as 200,000 yen, and I wondered how it was that so many people could afford them when their monthly salaries must be somewhere in the region between 2,000 - 20,000 yen (salaries vary significantly depending on the employees ability and kind of occupation)... Anyway, it is true that everybody is now working very hard to get a well-paid job, and very many people attend language schools or computer training courses after (or even during!) working hours.

Watching the swarming motorbike crowds, I keenly felt the energy and vitality of Vietnam. But, I could not help but question: where are they heading? What is their destination? In Vietnam, to my eyes, people appeared extremely energetic - all trying their best to forward themselves. This energy might be something the Japanese people have forgotten long ago. But what will the Vietnamese achieve as a result of such efforts? As discussed at the conferences on global climate change, we (i.e. Japan and other developed countries) have advanced far along our development paths. This does not justify our preaching to developing countries and telling them to stop their economic development because it is harmful to the global environment. We come up with such arrogant statements because we have already achieved a certain level of development ourselves. For those who have not, more economic development seems to offer things still to be discovered and is something to be adored and longed for.

In Vietnam a book titled "Lessons from Japan's past pollution experiences" was on sale in the Vietnamese language. In developing countries there is one school of thought that aims to harmoniously attain both economic development and environmental conservation. This approach is based on learning lessons from the experiences of already developed countries. In this respect, Japan, as a country which has achieved what is perceived as economic development, can and should offer a model for other countries. Japan should offer a practical alternative development paradigm that is more concerned about the global environment, reflecting Japan own past experiences and mistakes. In its process of development Japan has devastatingly sliced up its natural environment and has neglected its agricultural activities, while concentrating on industrial and economic development. This was wrong, and one of the most important keywords for development in today's society should be "agricultural life", not only for farmers but also for many others not engaged in farming. The concept aims to draw the importance of nature and agriculture back close to the lives of ordinary people.

However, are the Japanese people able to change their lifestyle at this stage? It is necessary to promote systems to encourage non-wasteful lifestyles=(systems which do not just rely on people moral or ethical commitment). One example of such a system would be the installation of in-room light and air-conditioning devices which cannot be left on when nobody is in the room, as is sometimes seen in hotels where room lights can be turned on only when one enters the room and inserts the room key into a certain place, and which are automatically turned off when the key is removed.

(Reported by KOTO)



Bikes, bikes and bikes...



Main method of transport in the Mekong Delta is by boat

Past Technical Assistance for the Gulf States and Future Challenges (3)

Part 3: JICA's technical assistance in the field of fish culture and desert greening

Since 1980, JICA has been carrying out technical assistance (TA) for UAE's Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, in the field related to the development and expansion of fish culture techniques at the Marine Resources Research Center. Here the TA projects adopt the principle of local empowerment. In spite of the general labour market condition with its overwhelming proportion of foreign labourers (as is characteristic of the oil producing states in the Gulf region) most of the UAE counterpart workers of Japanese specialists are UAE nationals. Also, attempts have been made to develop techniques suitable for local conditions and needs, rather than just blindly introducing Japan's shrimp or fish farming techniques. Moreover, the aquarium attached to the center exhibits the marine life found around the country, contributing to the environmental education of children. There is also a project to distribute young tillapia to local farmers for the purpose of clearing up irrigation water tanks as well as for fish farming. The TA projects cover a wide range of activities, and recently another project has been started to combine aquaculture and mangrove plantation, with the aim of creating and nurturing marine ecosystems along the desert coastline. Some counterpart workers of the early period of the TA projects are now heading the center and the Fisheries Bureau of the Ministry of Agriculture, and have become strong back up for JICA's projects. Through marine farming, the projects have been greatly contributing to the development of the country's manpower and of its economy, and it can be said to be a very ideal form of TA in the Gulf region.

Since 1985 a research project on the greening of desert areas has been conducted in collaboration between the Faculty of Agriculture in Shizuoka University and the University of UAE. This project has carried out pilot studies and achieved a number of positive and promising results in the fields of (1) improving crop productivity using techniques such as desert dune fixation, the application of water-saving and saline water irrigation systems and (2) studies into the tolerance of plants against salinity and drought. The University of UAE is the only university in the country, and a great contribution can be expected from this TA in terms of empowerment and education of local manpower. This is what JICA is aiming for. However, in this case the aforementioned employment characteristic of the oil producing countries (i.e. that many of the counterpart staff are foreign workers who return to their respective home countries once their contracts come to an end) seems to pose some difficulties for effective practice and sustainable/continuous progress in the collaboration between the two institutions.

In 1992, Oman which is one of UAE's neighbouring states, introduced the so-called 'Omanisation' which aims at increasing the employment of Omani nationals (rather than foreign workers) at practical and managerial levels. In all of the oil producing countries this kind of employment scheme will be necessary sooner or later. From now on TA projects in support of such a trend will be more desirable for the countries in the Gulf region.

Technical assistance project related to aquaculture



Marine Resources Research Center



Mangrove forest

Technical assistance project related to arid land agriculture



Crop yield monitoring

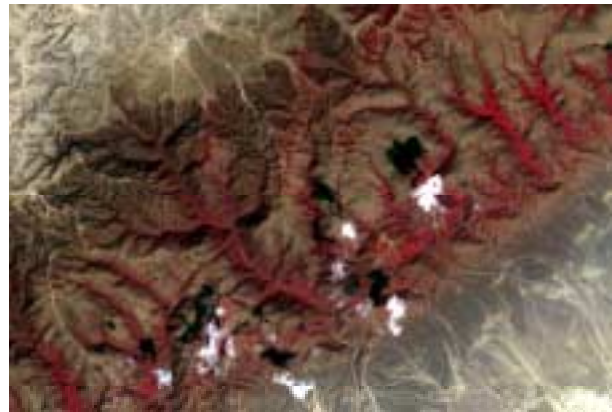


Measuring photosynthesis

Agriculture in the Dhofar Region, Oman (3)

Part 3: Live stock farming in the Jabal Mountain Range

In the mountain range called Jabal in the north of Salalah, grazing livestock on pasturage has been extensively practiced since ancient times. Within Jabal, which is part of Dhofar State, fairly rich vegetation occurs in the monsoon-blessed area stretching approximately 20 km north-south and 80 km east-west, and this is where the grazing is practiced. The main livestock kept by farmers are cows for meat and milk. Also, camels are kept by 30% of the farmers, and goats by 20%. The most important livestock are cattle, which are well looked after by the heads of households and grazed and fed mixed fodder and dried fish. It is even said that the cows are regarded as more precious than the farmers' own children. On the other hand, camels which are also looked after by the heads of households are becoming less important. Compared to cows, camels have fewer uses for people, and camels are given fodder only when it is needed to supplement the grazing on pasturage. It is mainly children and women's work to look after goats (kept for meat and milk), and the goats are fed by free grazing only. Each family lives in a house which serves both as cattle shed and human residence, surrounded by a fenced yard for keeping young calves etc.



Satellite image of Jabal (November 1994): the dark red indicates natural forests and the light red indicates grasslands

These livestock are raised mainly by grazing them on the natural vegetation of the mountain range, and in the season of scarce pasture the cattle are moved to neighbouring regions (northwards or southwards) in search of more grass. It is said that today this type of traditional pasturage has declined due to an increase in artificial fodder supplied by humans. However, in the monsoon season which renders the region around Salalah greener, one can see a lot of livestock (especially camels) coming down from the mountains. Apart from livestock farming, frankincense and honey are famous and very expensive farm products from this region. In the monsoon season, locally grown cucumbers and mushrooms also enter the market. In addition, compost made from cow dung, though not called an agricultural product, is an important income source for local farmers. (See AAINews Vol. 2 for details about frankincense)

In 1994, the number of livestock in this region was reported as amounting to 147,000 cows, 47,000 camels and 89,000 goats, but numbers are thought to have increased since then. Local people try to amass more and more cattle, regarding them not as a mere income source but rather as a form of property. However, the current number of cattle clearly exceeds the natural carrying capacity of the region's pasturage. It is readily apparent that the natural vegetation is rapidly degrading due to the practice of free grazing. Locals recall that until about two decades ago, Jabal was covered with thick forest and grassland - so dense that one could easily get lost if one left the path. Although both farmers themselves and relevant agricultural authorities admit the fact that overgrazing is occurring, no proper measures seem to have been taken so far. Only in a few areas the Forestry Department of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fishries in Salalah is carrying out small-scale projects such as tree planting to recover the lost vegetation, and the preservation of some areas for seed production.



Jabal in monsoon season: everywhere covered with grass



Jabal in dry season: formerly green now reverted to brown soil

A Sketch of Pakistan (3): Overseas workers and Dubai syndrome

Pakistan's GDP per capita is a little over US\$400, and monthly salaries of untrained labourers range from 1,000 to 3,000 rupees (approximately 3,000-9,000 yen). Due to such low income levels in the country, the material wealth of the oil producing countries in the Middle East, combined with their geographical proximity, attracts many emigrant workers from Pakistan. It is possible for them to earn ten times more in the oil-rich countries than in their home country. Since there is a general labour shortage in the Middle East due to small populations and the local Arabs dislike of hard, dirty work at oil wells, farms, and road or house construction sites, Pakistani workers willingly and easily can take over such work. As a result there is a well-established relationship of labour demand and supply between Pakistan and the Middle East.

A glance at a world map reveals how geographically close Pakistan and the Middle East (the Arabian Peninsular) are to each other. In fact the distance from Karachi to Dubai (UAE) and the distance from Karachi to Islamabad (Pakistan's capital city) are almost the same. As in Pakistan, Islam is the dominant religion in the Middle East. Indeed there are so many Indian and Pakistani workers in the Middle East that in terms of linguistic population, Hindi and Urdu speakers (the spoken forms of these two languages are almost identical) are the majority in this region. In this sense, Pakistani workers find little culture shock and it is easier for them to work in the Middle East than in other countries such as Japan. (This, however, may not be the most logical conclusion if one observes and compares the very different ways Arab and Japanese employers treat foreign workers).

Although the peak period has passed, money earned and sent back home by overseas workers still contributes significantly to Pakistan's economy. However, the overseas work of the Pakistani does not have solely positive effects. Negative aspects to this situation are known as 'Dubai syndrome'. Dubai represents a popular destination among Pakistanis for overseas work. In order to go abroad and work, normally people have to resort to grave debts and pay high commissions to agents, which makes the workers psychologically insecure. Even if a man manages to secure work overseas, his family left behind starts experiencing problems such as divisions within the family during the absence of the head of the household. Another problem is that families sometimes indulge in overspending as a result of their increase in income. On their return to Pakistan, overseas workers find their families in such disappointing situations, and they themselves have become accustomed to such a high-income lifestyle by now that they end up having great difficulties in readjusting themselves to Pakistani society...

Recently my business brought me to both the labour-supplier, Pakistan, and the labour recipient, UAE, with only a very short interval of time in-between. UAE's currency is called the Dirham (DH), and DH1 is approximately 30 yen. In Pakistan, 1 rupee is about 3yen. That is to say DH10 is more or less equivalent to 100 rupees. 300 yen in Pakistan, i.e. 100 rupees, is a significant amount, but in UAE, DH10 quickly disappears. This simply means that there is a huge gap in commodity prices between these two countries. One can easily understand how, after becoming accustomed to high levels of income and expenditure while working abroad, the gap in lifestyles felt on returning home could be disturbing. It depends on each individual how badly he misses what he used to enjoy once but can enjoy no longer, but it is a sad fact of human nature that many realize the importance of something only when it is lost.



**Fruit store
in
Pakistan**



**Pakistani
workers in
UAE**



**View of a
local city**



**View of
Abu Dhabi**