

AAINews

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Life in a character town - on my return from Salalah, Oman

After three years of service as a dispatched expert in Oman, I came back to Japan last December. In Oman, I was engaged in cultivation and research at a new pilot farm in the middle of the desert in Dhofar Province. I lived there with ten counterpart staff members. (See AAINews No.7)

During the week we used to stay, working day and night, at the farm 160km away from Salalah, and on weekends we would go back to Salalah and spend time with family. On the weekend in Salalah you can see people enjoying a game of chess over a cup of tea at a cafe, families going on picnics and having BBQs in the shade cast by trees, and children relaxing on the beach. They enjoy their lives wherever they want and in whatever way they like, without being confined to particular times or places. Physically or mentally handicapped people are also seen in the streets enjoying themselves in the same way. They are fully accepted as part of the community, and although people around help them, they do not see them as something special or strange. As for myself, like everybody else in the town, I would exchange pleasantries with the owner of a snack bar, or smile back and start chatting with those who spotted me and greeted me in the street.

Having been accustomed to such a relaxed life in Oman, what I felt on my return home was that life in Japan is somehow solitary, even if it might be more orderly compared to Oman, where the towns are full of people expressing themselves in a lively manner. If you enter a restaurant in Tokyo, a waiter or waitress will take your order in a highly prescribed manner, and you are expected to eat up whatever comes to your table without uttering a word, and leave the place with very few greetings or pleasantries, if any. In trains seated passengers will not make room for others until they are asked to do so. People have very little interest in what is happening around them, and even when somebody comes and tries to talk to them in the street, they will first look at the person suspiciously then hurriedly leave the spot. What I fear most is that as soon as I find myself among the people back in Japan, my face also seems to transform into one similar to those around me; that is to say it becomes a face devoid of expression.

For the sake of higher convenience and efficiency, it might appear useful to standardise the manner of serving customers in restaurants. Also, it might help minimise possible mistakes and troubles if one carves out one's own mental territory and operates within this limited range without paying attention to one's surroundings. Probably it cannot be helped that many people assume this kind of attitude in Tokyo, a metropolis swollen with such a huge population. However, it seems to me that people here are having to pay the price as they lose their healthy humane emotions and expressions, and every corner of the city looks identical to the other parts, poor in liveliness and vitality. In the field of international development cooperation, the importance of local communities is being stressed. However, the local communities of aid recipient countries seem to have more lively and vivid expressions compared to those of donor countries. We development specialists and consultants from Japan may be able to instruct our counterpart staff on specific technical matters, but I wonder, in return, whether they could provide people in Japan with the know-how of their lively expressions and lifestyles.

(By ZAITSU, Feb. 2000)



His Excellency Ambassador Mr. Kaminaga and counterpart staff in Oman



A resort near Salalah (a tidal blowhole)

Partnerships between ODA and NGOs: for more effective international co-operation (3)

AAI and NGOs - our challenges

Till today AAI has been engaged in technical assistance and development study commissioned by Japan's ODA. Since its early days AAI has been aware of the importance of collaboration between ODA's development activities and NGOs, and we have tried working together with NGOs on various occasions, as detailed below:

Development of appropriate technologies (1986 -) ☒	AAI assisted development projects in arid and semi-arid regions by helping to introduce appropriate technologies such as the Japanese traditional well digging technology of "Kazusabori", water pumping techniques using wind power (zephaturbin), water hammer pump etc. AAI conducted well-boring training in cooperation with NGOs such as 'Kaze no gakkoh' (School of the Wind) and 'Sahel no kai' (Association SAHEL). ☒
Assistance to JVC: Japan Volunteer Centre (1987 -) ☒	AAI provided back-up support for JVC's activities in Somalia and Ethiopia. Within Japan AAI also helped JVC's efforts to cultivate manpower for their field projects by securing a training farm in Togane City (Chiba Prefecture) for hands-on farming practice. ☒
Assistance to Association SAHEL (1989 -) ☒	AAI has been working with the registered Non-Profit Organization, Association SAHEL, since its inception, and we have directly participated in their activities both within and outside Japan. Especially in the field of tree plantation in arid land, AAI has assisted in such areas as the selection of appropriate tree species, seed supply, technology development for seedling production, and tree planting. ☒
Environmental monitoring in Tana Delta, Kenya (1990 -) ☒	AAI conducted environmental monitoring for an irrigation development project in the Tana Delta, Kenya. AAI took part in organizing a team of local NGO staff to carry out periodical monitoring. ☒
Research into the activities of nature conservation NGOs (1995 -) ☒	AAI conducted research on the overseas activities of Japanese nature conservation NGOs, government agencies and research institutions concerned with biodiversity conservation, in order to understand their current activities and thus to classify them by activity type and region. Also AAI studied the current activities of major international organizations including NGOs, in order to analyze international trends in development aid activities. ☒
AAI's own investigation into the possibility of project formulation in Zimbabwe (1997 -) ☒	In Zimbabwe AAI is planning a development project which embraces the key focal concepts of community participation, appropriate technologies, 'small-scale'(or "appropriate scale") approach and sustainability. This is expected to be implemented under the initiative of local NGOs. ☒
Development of a database on funding agencies (1999 -) ☒	AAI is developing a database on funding bodies in Japan which fund NGOs working in the fields of agriculture and the environment.
Application for the 'Partnership Program with NGOs / Local Governments / Institutes' (1999 - 2000)	AAI has submitted a proposal for a community-based river basin management project in Pakistan, for consideration by JICA's 'Partnership Program with NGOs / Local Governments / Institutes.' ☒

We will discuss in more detail about the above project in Zimbabwe, which AAI has initiated on its own (i.e. independent from ODA), and for which AAI has carried out three field trips already since 1997 as part of preliminary research and preparation. From now on, in cooperation with local NGOs, AAI is planning to implement a development project which would meet the local community's needs as much as possible. In this process we hope to make sure that the project is sustainable and participatory (community-based), taking into consideration the importance of environmental conservation, appropriate scale and appropriate technologies. In the future we hope that this kind of project will be implemented by ODA as well. Through this project we also aim to reflect upon, and try to improve, the current system and working of ODA, while studying further and actually implementing assistance for grassroots local communities. Therefore, we see it as a good sign that Japan's development aid agencies have started schemes which involve grassroots NGOs/NPOs. These include the 'Grant Assistance for Grassroots Projects' and 'Subsidiary System for NGO Projects' of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and 'Community Empowerment Program' and 'Partnership Program with NGOs / Local Governments / Institutes'.

AAI has extensively networked with Japanese NGOs as well, while at the same time we have a fairly good amount of information on NGOs operating in aid-recipient countries. Therefore, AAI hopes to actively take part in JICA projects involving NGOs such as the above 'Partnership Program'. Our ideal form of development aid is to work in collaboration not only with JICA but also with local NGOs, however small they may appear, in order to ensure that our aid activities are genuinely serving the interests of local communities

Saudi Arabia News (3)

Part 3: The Demonstration Project of Large-Scale Desert Greening by the Japan Petroleum Energy Sector (PEC)

Development of water treatment technology - water circulation system for decomposition and removal of concentrated NH₄-N(Riyadh)

The demand for this technology has derived from the recent trend of fisheries promotion in Saudi Arabia. With this technology, NH₄-N can be decomposed and removed from the water once used for inland tank farming of tilapia 'Oreochromis Niloticus' which can survive both in freshwater and brackish water (up to 10,000 ppm). Thus the purpose of this project is to develop and demonstrate water-saving freshwater fish farming technology with the water recycling system. Moreover this project aims eventually to establish a water-saving agro-fisheries system by incorporating the techniques of intensive fish farming as well as hydroponics.



Development of water-saving irrigation technology

1) Water-saving irrigation technology using perforated tubes (Riyadh)

This project aims to demonstrate the underground irrigation technology by using perforated tubes (brand name: Leaky Pipe, see figure below) buried underground. In this way, there would be very little water evaporation and salt accumulation on the ground surface, which normally cannot be avoided in the conventional irrigation methods (e.g. with sprinkler or drip irrigation). This underground irrigation system can be used for growing lawns for sports grounds etc.



2) Technology to form impermeable layer with polymer solution (Riyadh)

This is to develop a technology to form underground impermeable layers by infiltrating polymer solution into the soil. The solution will react with the polyvalent cation in the soil and form a hemispheric impermeable layer, through which water will not seep down easily. This layer can be formed at any depth, and with this method it is expected that irrigation water can be retained longer in the root zone of crops without draining fast, and also accumulation of salt on the ground can be prevented.

3) Water-saving irrigation with water-holding materials (Riyadh)

The sandy soil of arid land has a very poor water holding capacity, and the climatic conditions are such that it lacks enough microbes and organic substances for vegetation to flourish in the soil. In attempting greening in such environment, the only water available for plants is that provided artificially by irrigation. This project aims at increasing the water-holding capacity of the soil by using artificial water-holding materials, industrial materials such as water polymer as well as natural water-holding materials made of organic substances such as peat moss. The appropriate conditions are being studied for mixing these materials with the soil according to target plants.

4) Research and development of water-saving irrigation systems and selection criteria of water supply and sewage appliances (KACST HQ)

Water resource utilization and management in arid lands is not possible without water-saving technologies. Here criteria for assessing water-saving appliances are being developed as part of such technologies. By developing a database on various appliances, the project aims at easing the process of selecting appropriate water supply and sewage appliances for efficient water resource management in Saudi Arabia.

5) Development of irrigation planning and rehabilitation methods for the purpose of water resources conservation in Saudi Arabia (KACST HQ)

80-90% of the groundwater use in Saudi Arabia is for agriculture, and a great deal of such water is not being used efficiently but wasted. Under these circumstances, this project consists of four main activities: (a) development of management and assessment systems in irrigation planning; (b) development of an overall analysis model in the field of irrigation water use system, groundwater resources and planning; (c) field visits and inspection; and (d) proposal for the rehabilitation of existing irrigation plans. It aims at promoting more efficient water use and thus improving the country's water resource management. At present necessary facilities are being set up and these research projects are just starting to take off seriously. Incidentally, at the time of writing (December 1999) when the issue of Arabian Oil Company's oil drilling concession in Khafji oil field, which was to expire in February 2000, was a major news item in newspapers, the government of Saudi Arabia requested an extension of the large-scale greening project.

(Please note that we failed to mention the above project numbered (5) earlier in AAINews Vol.25 and introduced it here for the first time.

Mini-Series: Natural Environment of Wetlands (3)

Part 3: Lubana Lake in Latvia

As featured in AAINews Vol.18, in the Baltic country of Latvia there is a wetland known as Lubana Wetland. It is named after the largest lake in the country. The land use pattern of this wetland is as follows; To the north-east and south-west of the Lubana Lake and the fish farming ponds, are high and low bogs, and the land around the bogs is used for agriculture. There are also patches of forest in the area. In terms of acreage the forested areas account for 36% of the wetland, and the agricultural land and marsh areas occupy some 25% each. The marsh areas are made of a complex mixture of high and low bogs as well as those which are somewhere mid-way. Moreover, along the rivers there are water meadows, which account for about 10% of the entire wetland. Here you can see fragments of various biotopes neighboring each other like a mosaic, forming a complicated ecosystem. The biodiversity in this area is correspondingly rich with a number of valuable species of wild fauna and flora.

In the past, the area surrounding Lake Lubana used to suffer frequent floods. Then dikes were built to prevent such damage. Today the water level can be controlled by operating floodgates. However, while a high and stable water level is necessary for the wellbeing of fish species in the lake, a relatively low water level is desirable for agriculture and forestry in order to facilitate draining of excessive water after floods. Thus there is a conflict of interests among the beneficiaries of the lake and the surrounding wetland. Once the flood control was in place, the number of migratory birds such as mallards and green-winged teal which used to visit this area decreased drastically. After being drained of water, peat becomes dry and hard, which in turn affects the subsequent course of vegetation growth. Therefore, the water level control for the sake of human economic activities has caused the drying up of the wetland, accompanied by various adverse impacts on the conservation of biodiversity in the area. People used to use grass harvested from the water meadows as forage for their livestock, but today this practice has become rare. As a result bushes have started growing in the water meadows, which may transform the area into forested land in the future. It can be said that this is one example where human activities are maintaining certain types of biotope which are important for the conservation of biodiversity.

Various human-related phenomena in this area, such as fish farming ponds, water meadows, agricultural fields and plantations are closely linked with the surrounding ecosystem in and around the wetland, and the relationship is especially dependent on the water level and water quality of the lake. Therefore, in order to promote both development and conservation in a harmonious and compatible manner, a complex system of water level control is necessary. In order to assess the main factors and their function in affecting the water quality and water level of Lubana Lake, a development assessment is in progress conducted by a Japanese Development Study Team. Already study has been on-going for a long time and various data are available on the ecosystem of Lubana wetland. In Japan, especially in Hokkaido, there are a number of researchers who are studying the hydrological and ecological aspects of peat bog development and conservation. We hope that the development study activity in Lubana wetland will contribute to facilitating communication interaction, and collaboration among such researchers. We also strongly hope to see an environmental management plan for conservation and sustainable utilization of the wetland being established as a result of the research process and with a full understanding of the present environment of the area.

