

Partnerships between ODA and NGOs: for more effective international co-operation (4)

Part 4: AAI and NGOs - Our project in Zimbabwe

It was in 1997 that we initiated preliminary research to prepare for our independent project in Zimbabwe. We started it off in Japan with information gathering on various NGO activities in English speaking countries in Africa. This was followed by two field visits in 1998 to select, among the ones identified during the preliminary research, those with whom we would like to work together in the future. During these field visits we applied the following criteria to the selection of a few local NGOs as potential partners.

- * That the nature of their project and targeted regions correspond with those of our potential project, and that the NGO is willing to get involved in a collaborative project with AAI;
- * That the NGO's field of focus is agricultural and rural development;
- * That its activities are field-based with a focus on sustainability, environmental conservation and community participation;
- * That it is a Community-Based Organization (CBO), undertaking grassroots operations in the rural communities.

These criteria can be summarized with a few keywords, such as "community participation", "appropriate technology", "small (or appropriate) scale", and "sustainability". In 1999, in order to understand their projects and intentions in more detail, we conducted another field visit and accompanied a few of the identified NGOs' staffers to see their daily activities.

The NGOs we selected are mainly ones working on agroforestry and/or rural development. Let us introduce one of them:

[Zvishavane Water Project (ZWP)]

We selected this NGO as we found it has a small-scale set-up and was willing to collaborate. In addition, based on our previous experience, we highly appreciated the fact that ZWP is working on water harvesting (a method of collecting and utilizing rain water efficiently, developed in traditional agriculture in arid and semi-arid regions) as part of their project, and that their operation range is in semi-arid regions (belonging to Natural Region IV-V).

Aiming at the improvement of the living standards of the local communities in Zvishavane and Chivi regions in the south-central part of the country, ZWP is carrying out participatory activities for water harvesting and soil conservation in the area. The actual activities are undertaken by some ten staff members, and include the construction of small- or middle-size dams, support for community group gardens, small-scale irrigation, collection and utilization of rain water, fish farming, livestock rearing, and water and soil conservation. While trying to make the local community agricultural activities sustainable with the help of a rain water collection & utilization scheme and soil conservation, they are also interested in the traditional agricultural techniques developed and practiced in this semi-arid region over many years.

Established in 1987, ZWP has a solid base of activities initiated by progressive, hard-working farmers. In Zimbabwe there are many such farmers who have adopted innovative farming techniques since before independence. The group started making wells and dams within the region before developing to assume the present form of NGO. Partly because its operation range is not so large, the staff has constant and direct contact with local communities. It is a very interesting, but typical, genuinely community-based organization.



Installing a water pump for irrigation in a community vegetable garden



Constructing a dam by local people



Rainwater collection facility using the rock surface (with a primary school building in the background)

In the next issue we will introduce other NGOs we have identified for collaboration.