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AAINews

APPROPRIATE AGRICULTURE INTERNATIONAL CO., LTD
1-2-3-403 Haramachida, Machida, Tokyo, 194-0013 JAPAN.
TEL/FAX:+81-42-725-6250 Email: aai@sk9.so-net.ne.jp

For whose good?

At the referendum held on 23rd January in 2000, the residents of Tokushima Prefecture expressed their disapproval of the Ministry of Construction's plan to build a barrage on the Yoshino River. Since the old days the Yoshino has been feared for its occasional rage. This construction plan was to replace traditional fixed barrage No. 10, which has become so old that it may no longer be adequate to prevent floods when the water level rises. It was supposed to be a precautionary measure against the sort of flood disaster which can be expected at the average rate of once in 150 years. The construction cost of one such barrage is said to be 95 billion yen. There is no doubt about the importance of flood control, but just as with many other recent cases of large-scale public construction works, this construction plan seems to be based on the reasoning of the construction contractors. Some might question who would take the responsibility once the anticipated disaster happened, but with the majority of the residents in opposition, how can the Construction Minister and the Governor of Tokushima Prefecture justify their forceful construction plan? Their argument focused solely on flood control, and it seems that not enough consideration was given to other aspects of the river basin relationship, which are embedded in the daily activities of the people living along the Yoshino. Though, certainly, it would be tempting for rural prefectures to invite large-scale construction and civil engineering work in order to create employment and revitalize the local economy.

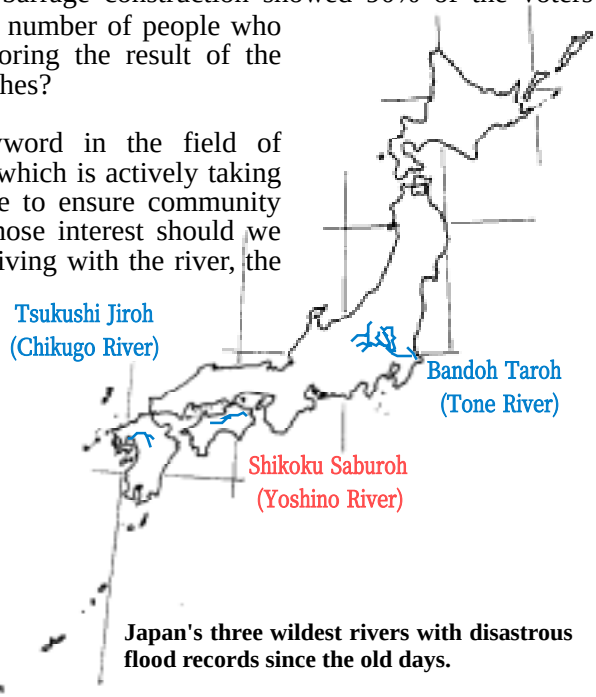
A river serves the daily lives of local people in a most intimate manner from its upper stream area right down to the lower stream where it reaches the sea. It provides water for drinking and agriculture and industrial activities. It is anything but a mere watercourse to discharge and drain unwanted water into the sea as quickly as possible. Thus it is natural for them to have their banks eroded, for them to accumulate piles of sand and pebbles, and for their running courses to meander. The barrage construction would straighten this type of natural watercourse with concrete and the barrage would render the living river a dead canal; all in the name of flood control. Can this be fully justified if it is said that it is for our good, to secure our daily life? Considering the negative impact of such construction works on the natural environment, there is a move to go back to traditional construction methods using natural materials such as "jakago (gabion)" and "sodachinshoh (fagot mattress)".

The residents in the vicinity of the No.10 barrage must be desperate to have proper flood-proof protection for their houses and fields, and there are also various other needs in the upper, middle and lower stream areas to consider. For example, some people may wish to keep the recreational use of the river, while others may need to secure the environment for their agricultural or fishing activities. The planned barrage, however, seems to serve more of the interests and needs of the Ministry of Construction, politicians well connected with the construction industry, and huge general construction companies. The residents of Tokushima perceived that Japan's current administration does not reflect the wishes of its citizens, and probably that was why the result of the recent referendum regarding the barrage construction showed 90% of the voters opposing the ministry's plan. Irrespective of the range or number of people who cast their vote, if the construction work continues ignoring the result of the residential voting, what about the residents' articulated wishes?

Today, "community participation" has become a keyword in the field of development aid. It is rather ironic that a donor country, which is actively taking part in aid activities in developing countries, is not able to ensure community participation in its own domestic administration. For whose interest should we expect the Yoshino to exist? If it is for the local people living with the river, the administration and the people should have more active discussions to come up with various suggestions from both parties. Only by working out a better solution in this interactive, participatory way, can genuine administration for the people and locality be expected, and our taxes utilized more sensibly and meaningfully.

(By Fuyuki KOJIMA, February 2000)

P.S.
The Ministry of Construction and residents along the Yoshino River are continuing discussions after the voting.



Japan's three wildest rivers with disastrous flood records since the old days.

Partnerships between ODA and NGOs: for more effective international co-operation (5)

Part 5: AAI and NGOs - Our project in Zimbabwe (contd.)

In the previous issue we reported on one of the NGOs AAI hopes to collaborate with in the future for our original development projects in Zimbabwe. This time we would like to introduce another.

[Zimbabwe Women's Bureau (ZWB)]

The reason for selecting ZWB as our partner NGO was that its organization is fairly large and stable, it stresses the importance of community participation in its projects, and ZWB showed sufficient willingness to work with AAI. This organization is large compared to ZWP, which we reported about in the previous issue. ZWB has 13 project sites, which is not only rural area in arid and semi-arid area but also sub-urban, across the country. This fact which is acting extensive was particularly appealing.

ZWB aims to improve the social basis of local communities and achieve sustainable local development. It is carrying out training, information dissemination, financial support etc. for women and their families in both rural and urban areas. As more specific themes, it is working on the issues of basic education, gender, women's rights, health and hygiene, HIV/AIDS, land acquisition and utilization, poverty alleviation, efficient utilization of natural resources, and training and loan schemes for business management which aims at enabling people to create opportunities to gain profit on their own.

ZWB was established in 1978 as a result of the movement to improve the status of women and was initiated by students and teachers in urban areas. Compared to other NGOs born and developed in rural areas, the urban-born ZWB takes extra care in maintaining a good relationship with local communities. Women working as ZWB's field workers in charge of activities in each project site are not sent from cities but are chosen from local communities, who are far more familiar with local matters. They are working as a bridge between ZWB's headquarters and local communities. Since their field activities are shaped according to local realities and needs, their projects are accepted by local communities without difficulty.

Their field activities at over ten projects sites across the country include exchanges between farmers and the inspection of successful farms, distribution of solar cookers and so-called homestead development. This entails household-level activities such as rain water harvesting, kitchen gardening, and small livestock husbandry for the purpose of improving livelihood, health and hygienic conditions within each household. At the same time ZWB helps with construction of local activity centers, which serve as a base for the group members of each project site to carry out various activities such as bee keeping, handicrafts, pottery, plantation, production of cooking oil, rice farming, organic farming, etc, and the supply of equipment and materials. It also provides technical assistance When it comes to actual activities, ZWB basically leaves the initiative to the local members.

“Homestead Development” Contour ridges are built to harvest water, and water melons etc. are planted to prevent soil erosion.

“Indigenous fruit tree” It is used to produce liquor from the fruit and nuts from the seed.

“Bee keeping boxes” The harvested honey is shipped to market.

“Seedling plot at a project site” Seedlings of mainly indigenous tree species are produced, to be distributed or marketed later.

Saudi Arabia News (5)

Part 5: The Demonstration Project of Large-Scale Desert Greening by the Japan Petroleum Energy Center (PEC) (4)

In this issue we introduce research related to the fourth theme, "eco-friendly & energy-efficient technology" and the last and fifth theme, "cultivation technology of salinity-, drought-, and heat-tolerance plants".

Eco-friendly & energy-efficient technology

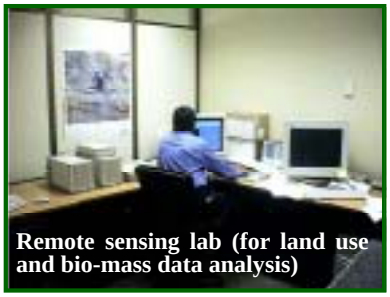
1. Demonstration of solar power technology


Solar power greenhouse (under construction)

Solar power technology has been developed mainly in the West (US, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, and Spain etc.). Saudi Arabia, with such favorable conditions as the copious sunshine typical in the desert area, lags behind these countries in terms of the scale of its solar power generation. This research project has the following objectives: a) to examine the marketability of solar energy as an independent power source in Saudi Arabia, b) to establish the physical and technical durability and reliability of solar power technology under the severe climatic conditions of the desert, c) to optimize the operation method (by anticipating and protecting the facilities against sand and silt adherence / accumulation), d) to establish the reliability of new types of solar battery such as the see-through amorphous, etc., e) to make the solar power system practical enough to start operation on an industrial scale. The project is to suggest various plans for solar power application such as its use as an energy source for hydroponics facilities etc.

2. Effective land use plan & technology employing remote sensing and Geographic Information Systems (GIS)

This research project aims to develop remote sensing technology to monitor the long-term changes in the desert environment. These include factors such as the green-cover ratio, vegetation status and the agricultural productivity of the vast territory that is Saudi Arabia. It also aims to demonstrate and disseminate GIS technology which can be used for urban planning etc. The project is trying to develop the technology to comprehend the seasonal changes of vegetation, its geographical range, and the growth of agricultural products, by processing data from satellites such as Landsat, SPOT, JERS-1, etc. It is also developing a database of geographical information including vegetation, soil classification, geology, topography, plus roads, buildings and the sewage systems of Khafji and a few other sites in the north-eastern parts of the country. The GIS outcomes fed with the data from such a database will be demonstrated for utility in urban and land use planning.


Remote sensing lab (for land use and bio-mass data analysis)

Cultivation technology of salinity-, drought-, and heat-tolerance plants

1. Lawn cultivation


Lawn cultivation

The research activities under this project include: a) a survey of the current utilization and distribution of lawns in Saudi Arabia, b) a survey and assessment of the growth of Bermuda grass and Zoisia grass - both eco-friendly and salinity tolerance species - which were selected in Japan, c) the study of various aspects of lawn cultivation such as the colors, growth density, coverage and the extent of pest damage, etc., d) an examination of salinity-, drought tolerance of the selected grass species, e) the collection of genetic resources that can be utilized in Saudi Arabia and other countries to examine their potential as useful lawn grass, f) and the supply of lawn grass seedlings to the main, large-scale pilot farm in Khafji. After selecting species suitable for cultivation in Saudi Arabia, the project will try to develop appropriate cultivation methods for the selected species at the main pilot farm. It will also try to devise technology for water-saving lawn grass management by incorporating some of the water-saving technologies reported earlier.

2. Plantation of date palms and other trees


Date palm and tree plantation


Tissue culture lab (for cultivation of date palms and other greening trees)

The date palm is a symbolic tree which forms the landscape of not only Saudi Arabia but also the vast area ranging from the Gulf region to North Africa. It is also a major agricultural product of this entire area. It is said that there are over five thousand varieties of dates in the world, out of which some 450 are produced in Saudi Arabia. Normally the dates are classified according to the quality of the fruits. Since the area around Khafji hosts a highly saline environment, called "sabkha" (meaning salty wetland or swamp), it is necessary to select highly salinity- and drought-tolerance tree species for the greening of this area. Under these circumstances, the objectives of this research are including : a) the collection of date varieties to be used for micro-propagation by tissue culture, and genetic analysis and photosynthesis research, b) the production of high-quality date seedlings by means of tissue culture, c) the development of genetic analysis technology to conduct identification of date varieties, d) the collection, from within and outside the country, salinity- and drought-tolerance tree species for greening activities, e) the study of the growth of date palms and other greening tree species in the area highly prone to salt damage, f) an examination of the functioning of salinity- and heat-tolerance in relation to the photosynthetic process, and g) the production of tree seedlings to be supplied for cultivation in the main pilot farm.

Mini Series: The participatory approach in regional development (2)

Part 2: Application of the participatory method to development research - experience in Laos

As reported in AAINews Vol.22, we had an opportunity to be involved in rural development study in Laos. The main objective of this study was to formulate a rural development plan focusing on the rice-farming region along the Mekong. This development plan aims to organize farmers' groups and to introduce dry-season rice farming with the help of irrigation facilities on an affordable scale. It also aims to stabilize agricultural productivity by improving the traditional farming methods. It was thought that the participatory approach was essential in this kind of study in order to make sure that the beneficiaries' needs were reflected in the final plan, while at the same time ensuring the sustainability of the project.

Therefore, we organized PCM workshops in priority areas selected from the entire target region, for the purpose of allowing the beneficiaries to analyze their own development problems and to clarify their objectives regarding the development project. In selecting participants in the workshop, we arranged things in such a manner that people could attend from as many different backgrounds and of as many different statuses as possible. We tried to include the village chief and elders, representatives of women's organizations, youth organizations, other farmer's organizations, and teachers etc. At the workshop we used a lot of visual materials such as illustrations so that the participants could understand the facilitator's talk as much as possible. In addition, we tried to make the atmosphere relaxing and interesting, with tea breaks, games and jokes. After the workshop we sat together with some concerned people from the regional level to form a PDM. Moreover, as part of the last stage of this process we gave feedback from the PDM to as many people as possible, including those who could not attend the workshop. The Story-Teller Caravan formed by the staff of the Information Ministry and the National Library performed a musical puppet show on an outdoor stage, explaining the PDM so that the beneficiary farmers could understand the content of the PDM better. This performance contained other attractions like games to get the audience interested. It was strongly felt that these kinds of activities can serve as a very effective means of extension and enlightenment.

PDM, which is output of PCM workshop, reflected the wishes of the local farmers. But the project objectives and planned value tended to be shown only as the expectation value of the local community. In parallel with the PCM workshop the research team conducted a detailed Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) targeted at those villagers who seemed to be very knowledgeable and informed about the village. In this RRA work we involved only the researchers, interpreters and villagers and no concerned government officials, in order to allow villagers to speak their minds without fearing possible intervention by vested interests. Also, we tried to spend as much time as possible with the villagers, by often having meals with the villagers, so that we could hear their detailed and straightforward accounts of their life in the village. The information obtained in this manner as well as the outcome of the RRA exercise, enabled us to discern various things about the village including the situation of natural and human resources, and topographical, soil and climatic restrictions, the executive body's capacity, and the impact on the environment. However, when compared with such ground information, the development plan shown in the PDM was judged to be rather inappropriate in terms of its practicality.

This experience made us realize that what is really crucial is the way we place, analyze and evaluate the results obtained from various participatory development approaches, and how we use different methods at different stages of development study.

PCM workshop

Puppet play by the Story-Teller Caravan

Eco-friendly & energy-efficient technology

1. Demonstration of solar power technology

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