

AAINews

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The Struggle of Farmers for Water (Morocco)

At Since this March AAI has been involved in JICA's development study in Morocco, and I was given an opportunity to visit the country. Featured in the movie "Casablanca", Morocco is well known as a tourism destination. Casablanca itself is a commercial city with not many tourist attractions, and the country's major tourism area is the southern part of the country with Marrakech, designated as a World Heritage Site, at its center. Although it did not succeed in the competition, Morocco was bidding for the right to hold the football World Cup 2006 after the 2002 World Cup in Japan and South Korea.

The objective of our survey was to short-list candidates out of 25 sites proposed for construction of small- to medium-size dams, and to conduct feasibility studies at the selected sites.

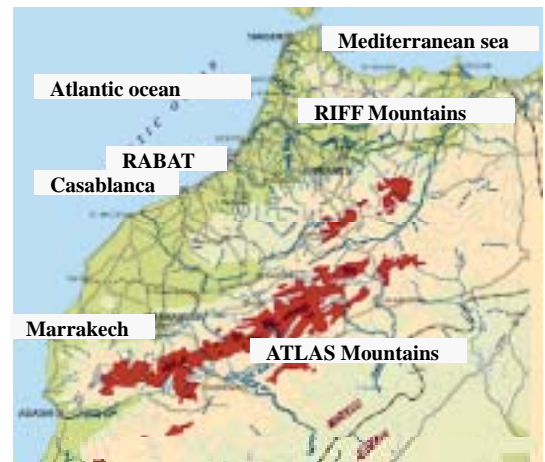
In order to visit all these sites we had to travel around the whole country. As I have only traveled in the Gulf States recently, to my eyes the natural environment of Morocco appeared quite diverse. The area on the Mediterranean coast starting from the Straits of Gibraltar, which is near the Riff Mountains, receives a fairly good amount of precipitation and here wheat is cultivated with rainwater. On the other hand, the southern side of the Atlas Mountains, the so-called spine of Morocco, is a dry region leading to the Sahara desert, and here and there we found oasis farming of a scale so large I'd never seen its like before. On the northern side of the Atlas stretch are extensively irrigated areas where wheat and various fruits are cultivated in the mild climate.

In general, the life of many farmers in Morocco is rather difficult. The severe drought, in particular, has continued from last year and has added to their hardships to the extent that the government has declared a state of emergency. Where there was no irrigation, wheat and beans were left to die and the almond fields were full of dry, dead trees. In Morocco cattle ranching is also a major agricultural activity, but due to the shortage of fodder caused by the drought, farmers were having to sell off some of their cattle to buy fodder for the rest. We were told that, with so many farmers wanting to sell their cattle, the market is now at the mercy of the buyers, which has drastically reduced the price of cattle.

Since the purpose of our visit was to survey sites for new dams, the farms in the target areas we visited were not benefiting from irrigation, except for some in oases (though quite a few oases were also suffering water shortages). While the government is trying to improve irrigation facilities, farmers in the non-irrigation area are making great efforts themselves to secure water employing various methods. For example, they use ditches meant exclusively for flood water (Photo 1), as well as watercourses to lead water from rivers by constructing stone barrages. Weirs built during the French colonial period bring water to the fields even now. Also, floodwater is deposited underground and used for various daily activities (Photo 2). Who knows how long these facilities and methods have been in operation, but in any event, I was impressed by the farmers' wisdom, creativity and patience in trying to save and make use of every single drop of the limited water supply.

These facilities are far from perfect. It takes ages to build them, though it does not cost much. Sometimes they get damaged, but can be rebuilt by the farmers themselves with some effort. It would be nice if we could harmonize the existing facilities which can be operated and fixed by farmers themselves, and those modern facilities that may be introduced in the future. We should think of a way to incorporate what we have learned from the farmers in Morocco, and to borrow their wisdom in carrying out our development aid work in the country.

(By ZAITSU, August 2000)



Map of Morocco



(Photo1) A ditch used only at the time of flood



(Photo2) Underground water tank to deposit floodwater

Partnerships between ODA and NGOs: for more effective international co-operation (6)

Final part : For better ODANGO; Who are we helping, after all?

Very often those working in the field of international co-operation for development (for example JICA experts and JOCV volunteers) when reflecting upon their experiences in the field, say that they were there on a mission of technical assistance and supposed to be teaching or conveying something to the people of the beneficiary country, but in reality they learned more than they taught. As this kind of sentiment shows very clearly, development aid or international co-operation is not a one-way street only involving input from developed to developing countries. In the case of rural development, so-called rural villages certainly have a great number of problems. It is true that they need some support from the outside in order to tackle said problems. However, the problems can hardly be solved by imposing foreign ways of thinking and foreign methods imported from developed donor countries.

For example, take the farming system. Over the years, many rural villages learned to use the natural resources available to them in their particular area, and have developed their own natural systems of agriculture such as "complex farming" and "resource-circulation farming." The farming system in Laos as reported in AAINews Vol.22 is one such example. However, as a result of "modern" rural development activities initiated by developed countries, more productive species and popular commercial crops were introduced to increase the agricultural productivity and income for farmers. At the same time new fertilizer, pesticides and machines started to be used. In many cases this has led to the collapse of local resource-circulation systems, and has resulted in heavy debts for farmers who have bought modern farming materials and expensive farming machines.

So as not to repeat such failures, and in order to aim at community-based sustainable development, today it is seen as increasingly important to work in a very close relationship with local communities. In this context, the role of NGOs nowadays has been re-evaluated and is now seen as crucial. However, NGOs alone cannot solve all the problems, and thus the collaboration between ODA and NGOs is a very important theme in the field of development aid today. In pursuing this, however, ODA workers should not employ NGOs simply as useful instruments, but instead establish a genuine collaborative relationship with NGOs, in which they can freely exchange their opinions, learn from each other and grow together. In addition, it would be problematic to see this partnership with NGOs only in terms of the efficiency of aid work, as if the idea of efficiency derives only from the convenient wishful thinking of the donor.

Lastly, it should be noted that NGOs, and certainly not ODA, aren't the main actors in development aid activities. The local communities as beneficiaries should realize that they are the main players, and only when they start thinking of their own way of development and start acting according to their ideas, can real changes take place. We should never forget the very basic fact that the role of both ODA and NGOs is that of catalyst, to provide stand-by support for the local communities' own development activities. What we sometimes feel, seeing NGOs from other developed countries is that they are more like business, or profit-seeking companies rather than good-willed volunteer organizations as are the case with most Japanese NGOs. Those overseas NGOs have talented staff who joined because working for such NGOs is better-paid compared to working for government agencies or private companies. Furthermore the work is more rewarding. However, it is also a fact that such organizations have become rigid in order to ensure their own survival which is possible only by carrying out development projects of their own. It also cannot be denied that in a way, their international development co-operation is also a means of fund-raising for themselves. What is and should be the ultimate goal for those engaged in development aid? For how long should we go on with our aid activities? Needless to say, aid activities should serve the interests of local communities, and yet, at the same time, development aid workers should always keep in mind that eventually they have to let local people stand on their own feet, for their own good.



Small-scale water weir built by a traditional method



Large-scale dam and power generation facility built by modern engineering work

Final Part: The Demonstration Project of Large-Scale Desert Greening by the Japan Petroleum Energy Center(5) - Past progress and behind the scenes -

It's already been one year since we started this series of reports from Saudi Arabia in AAINews Vol.25. During this period the situation surrounding the demonstration project has changed drastically. In the initial plan drawn up in 1996, not even a Saudi counterpart institution had been decided. We did not know whether it would be the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Urban and Rural Affairs, the Ministry of Planning or, perhaps, academic institutions. According to this initial plan, the project was supposed to carry out demonstration projects proposed by the Japanese side, solely in Khafji, and the planned greening area was 45hectare. Only towards the end of 1997 did King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology (KACST) officially became the counterpart, and the basic plan which had been made only based on proposals from the Japan side was revised. As a result, without changing the total financial scale, the budget structure was reshuffled in order to incorporate research projects proposed by KACST. Finally in December 1997 the memorandum of agreement on the large-scale demonstration project was signed by both parties. This whole process delayed the actual start of the project by one year and eight months, and in April 1998 part of the research, which had been planned to take place solely in Khafji, was also shifted to KACST's HQ in Riyadh and Muzahimiah research center. With this division of the project between Khafji and Riyadh, the greening-related budget assigned for research in Khafji in the initial plan was reduced by 30%, which went to KACST-initiated research in Riyadh. In addition to this budgeting negotiation which took some time, the land purchase for the project was completed only after the summer of 1998, and construction of necessary facilities started in Khafji only in December 1998. Meanwhile in Riyadh, part of KACST's research farm (Muzahimiah research center) was made

available for this project, but additional construction work for the new research activities was delayed almost half a year. The incorporation of the new local company, Arabia Greening, which was to implement the project, was also delayed significantly. These delays in turn led to a delay in employing staff and procuring the construction materials and equipment. Apart from all these factors, there were other reasons for the delay in progress of the entire project, including: the delay in negotiation over the water supply point in planning the waste water treatment facility in Khafji (late 1998 till autumn 1999) and the delay in negotiations as to whether to use a domestic generator or to rely on the grid - the decision was to use the latter upon KACST's request (January to June 1999), etc. Meanwhile, as a result of the two FY budget negotiations (FY 97 and 98) the budget scale for activities in Khafji was further reduced to 60% of the initial amount due to the relocation of some other research activities to Riyadh. In November 1999 Saudi Arabia issued an official request to extend the project for another three years, but before the Japan side made any official reply the negotiation over concessions between the only foreign oil development company, Arabian Oil Company Ltd., and the government of Saudi Arabia came to a deadlock (November to December 1999). In February 2000 the final attempt was made to move this negotiation forward by Japan's then Minister of International Trade and Industry who visited Saudi Arabia and discussed issues with her Oil Minister, but the negotiation was broken off as Saudi Arabia demanded railway construction in return for the oil concessions. This meant that the oil concessions held in Khafji by Arabian Oil for years were lost finally. As recalled at the time of writing (March 2000), till recently, the issue of early retirement of a large number of Japanese staff as well as the very survival of the company itself were reported by the media. It is now expected that the greening area in the Khafji research farm will end up covering merely one hectare, and the project will be closed with this minimum operation. As of March 2000, construction of the wastewater treatment facility in Khafji has not yet been completed, while the application researches in Riyadh (Muzahimiah research center) are making good progress. Some of the symbiotic microbes cultured there have been separated from the soil and brought back by a researcher of Idemitsu Kohsan Co., and are currently being cultured for multiplication in Japan. However, since the actual operation of the project started only in the second half of 1999, solid progress and results worth reporting to outsiders need to be delayed till further data are accumulated.

There is one person who has followed this project from a broader viewpoint on the Saudi side, namely, the head of KACST's natural resources and environment research center, Dr. Alsali. He has been persistently stressing the importance of training of young researchers and fostering human resource development in Saudi Arabia. Like the saying has it, "creating a country starts from creating people". Not only Saudi Arabia but also other oil producing countries in the Gulf region have developed to assume the features of modern states, leap frogging several centuries from the era of the Bedouin. It is a reality that these countries are having to rely on foreign laborers in order to retain the management of their modern states. Many people may think that KACST is full of talented staff with doctorates from developed countries in the West. However, the harsh reality is that it is staffed with Saudi researchers with little field experience and poor capacity to operate experimental equipment. What is known outside about Saudi Arabia tends to be biased towards oil-related information and her strict religious restrictions. There are only limited opportunities to know more about other aspects of the country such as her history, people and the environment, and outside people including ourselves may be being too hesitant to step forward to get such opportunities. What the people in Saudi Arabia really want was indicated to us by Dr. Alsali, in his rather reproachful email. We would like to end this series "Saudi Arabia News" with his words, which we find unforgettable: "I thought you, only you would stay and work with us for a long long time. But after all you were the same as the others."



Part 3: Making full use of the participatory method

On this page in the previous few issues we have outlined the PCM method and discussed actual examples of participatory methods in development research such as Project Cycle Management(PCM) and Rapid Rural Appraisal(RRA). This time, as a summary, we would like to consider further efficient and effective applications of these participatory approaches.

In the field of regional development, planning requires consideration of the beneficiaries' needs while understanding the development policy of the recipient country. At the same time, the plan has to be drawn up based on the mutual understanding or agreement between concerned government agencies and local communities. In many cases, beneficiaries' actual needs at the ground level are not the same as what the local government agencies understand and claim to be their needs. Therefore, it is necessary for development researchers to conduct an independent survey to confirm what the actual needs are, while of course considering information from government agencies. For this purpose, there are several methods to investigate beneficiaries' real needs, such as the conventional Problem Census, RRA, long-term residential participatory survey, PCM etc. PCM, in particular, has developed as a method for community-based, participatory development projects.

We have discussed earlier that different survey methods need to be employed for different stages of a project and different scales of targeted localities. For example, in the case of a survey on environmental awareness, different types and qualities of surveys such as scoping, screening, Initial Environmental Examination(IEE) and Environmental Impact Assessment(EIA), are conducted depending on the stage of the project flow, i.e. preliminary survey, Master Plan(M/P), and Feasibility Study(F/S). In the case of a development survey, at the level of M/P relatively large areas are targeted for the survey, and seminars and PCM workshops are useful methods of collecting opinions from a wide range of people. On the other hand, at the F/S level it is more important to employ more participatory methods such as the conventional sample survey, RRA and PRA, in order to get direct and detailed information / opinions from targeted communities. What is important is to understand both the strong and weak points of the existing survey methods, to be aware of their limits, and to be creative in applying the methods to make them most effective in different situations.

In AAINews Vol.21 we reported on a river basin conservation project in Pakistan. In this project so-called group-promoters are sent to villages in the targeted region to establish and stay in long-term contact with the local villagers. These group-promoters try to understand the various needs of the local people as well as the existing social groups and their relationships and interests, in order to make a decision as to what kind of development activities would be most effective for the local communities. Moreover, the project sees the organization of the beneficiaries as the precondition for people's participation, their empowerment and eventually for sustaining the effect of the development activities. The "Aga Khan Rural Support Project", which is well known as a successful rural development project in Pakistan focusing on social development, also employs the same approach. At each and every level of the project, community participation is ensured and any activities, which cannot get local people's approval, are dismissed. More importantly, development researchers and NGOs are expected to act as the local communities' representatives, while at the same time they are also expected to be the representatives of government agencies and explain the government's position to local communities. That is to say, development researchers and NGOs are expected to play an important role to facilitate smooth communication and establish trust and a good working relationship between government agencies and local communities.

The so-called "participatory approach" can take different forms, ranging from understanding of beneficiaries' needs and organizing and empowering local people, to co-ordination between local communities and government agencies. Therefore, we think that what is important for efficient use of these approaches is not only just to pick up and apply various existing methods to different situations, but also to be creative enough to improvise and combine different methods, in order to optimize their effect according to the circumstances.