

# 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

## The Letter From the Country of Sindbad: Are Omani nationals hardworking?

It has been almost six months since I arrived in Oman's capital, Muscat, in April this year. The burning heat of June has long gone, and now mornings and evenings are quite comfortable, although during the day the temperature still rises to 35-36 degrees Celsius. Oman is one of those oil-producing countries in the Gulf region whose oil deposits are expected to be exhausted before long. Convinced that the country should not rely on crude oil production only, Sultan Qaboos of Oman is trying very hard to promote the diversification of domestic industries. Compared to other oil producing countries in the region, such as Saudi Arabia and UAE, in Oman the percentage of nationals in the total population residing in the country is high (Omani nationals 1,700,000 and non-nationals 600,000), while its GDP per capita is almost one fourth of that of neighbouring countries. Therefore, there is a strong sense of urgency in the country that more nationals have to work even if the pay may be relatively low. In this context, the Omanization policy is being promoted to increase the employment of nationals rather than expensive foreigners, and this movement has been initiated in government offices. It is said that already the percentage of Omani nationals among government employees has reached over 90%. On the other hand, in the private sector the process of Omanization is moving slowly, if at all, and the percentage of Omani nationals in the entire private sector is said to be merely 20-30%. Some argue that this is because the pay scale of the private sector, which is targeted at Indians who provide the main workforce in the country, is far too low for Omani workers. This may or may not be true.

Enough of the introduction. What I wanted to report about today is that Omani nationals around Muscat are very hardworking. The photograph on the right hand shows a work scene in a field in the midst of extreme summer heat. The Omani people in the photo are manually preparing a field of mangrove nursery. For them it must be hard and dirty work, but still they seem not to mind and to be committed to the work, thinking that Omani nationals should be able to do any job. On the other hand, around Salalah, a major city in the southern state of Dhofar, this kind of attitude is less obvious. Here most people still tend to think that Omani nationals should not engage in such kinds of dirty work. In the same photo, the assistant section chief is wearing the traditional hat of Oman which is called the Kumma. If you wrap the hat with a piece of cloth called masal and wear dishdashah, you are fully dressed in the traditional Omani style. This wrapping cloth, masal, as used in Oman is not so long as that used in other Arab countries, and the former gives a more formal, sharper impression. Sindbad of the Thousand and One Nights is believed to have come from Sur or Sohar in this country. For seamen like him this shorter type of headgear must have been convenient for working on board ship at sea. Even an elderly traffic safety worker labours very hard in the unbearable heat as if to say there is no other choice. The cost of living in Oman turned out to be higher than I had expected, probably almost the same or slightly higher than in UAE. This may be because most everyday items have to be transported from Dubai. With the low payment (about 120,000 yen per month for a new graduate working in a government office) and the high cost of living, the life of people in Oman is not that easy. However, many people, if not all, are very willing to learn something, and some people try to promote their own careers by first investing to obtain some qualifications. Every day I learn a lot from those who consider labour to be part of prayer. And I wish all the best of luck to those joke-loving, cheerful people of Oman.

(By SHOJI in Oman, October 2000)



## *In Search of the Blue Bird; What is it that you long for?*

### **Part 1: Prologue**

"Why do you want the Blue Bird?" asked Tiltil.

"To become happy. If you find the Blue Bird, you can definitely become happy," said the Sorceress.

In this page of AAINews we ran a series of six articles titled "Coexistence of Nature and Humans - Towards the 21st Century." This series started in October 1998. We then ran another series titled "Partnerships between ODA and NGOs: For More Effective International Co-operation," starting last year. At first glance, these two series may seem irrelevant to each other, but in fact they share the same deeper theme or question, namely "What is the objective of our life?", or "What is sustainable development?" The new series starting today, titled "In Search of the Blue Bird" will be a journey for us to look for what we aim at and what we are longing for. This is what we are expecting in beginning this new series. This, plus the earlier two series of articles will form a kind of trilogy by sheer chance. Or, were they destined to do so?

In this new series of coming articles, affluence and dreams will be the keywords. In addition, the present and future of Japan and the Japanese, the future of our children and their education etc. will also be important themes. We AAI staff are working in the field of international co-operation and are given opportunities to get various experiences both in Japan and in developing countries. In this process, looking at today's Japan from inside and outside of the country prompts us to have various thoughts. For example, we often face these questions: By achieving economic or material affluence, do we necessarily lose (or have we lost) richness of the mind? Is this the real happiness that we have tried to achieve? And is that the same in developing countries? Why and for what purpose do we work to gain wealth? Have we worked hard so far, only to become unhappy? And other questions like these.

By the way, what constitutes affluence? And what is poverty? In order to indicate the scale or degree of poverty, development aid donors often use a so-called poverty index, which is measured by analyzing household income, calorie consumption, the number of hospitals and schools, the percentage of power supply or proper sanitation systems in rural areas, literacy rates, etc. However, we have come to doubt if poverty can really be indicated by material measures only. It is necessary for us all to have some dream to live a meaningful life. Nobody is without dreams or hopes for the future from the beginning. However, when people cannot have a dream any longer, or cannot find the way to realize their dreams, they are put into a desperate, literally hopeless situation. Thinking this way, poverty can be defined as a condition under which people are not able to have dreams and hopes for the future.

What is needed under such conditions is not a vague and abstract future planning which does not have any direct link or benefit to people's daily life, but a concrete, attainable objective, accompanied by the means of self-help and support to realize it. Isn't it the case that only when there is a concrete objective in life, when, aiming at the objective, it is practically possible to take some actions to make our own life better? And when there is appropriate support from others for those who are thus working hard, that we can say we have some hope in life? The support from others should not be permanent, but it should be given only to enable those supported to ultimately stand on their own feet.

Then, what can dreams and hopes be? In this series, we embark on a journey in search of the answer to this question.

"There is everything in this country, but hope." (Ryu Murakami in Exodus from the Land of Hope)



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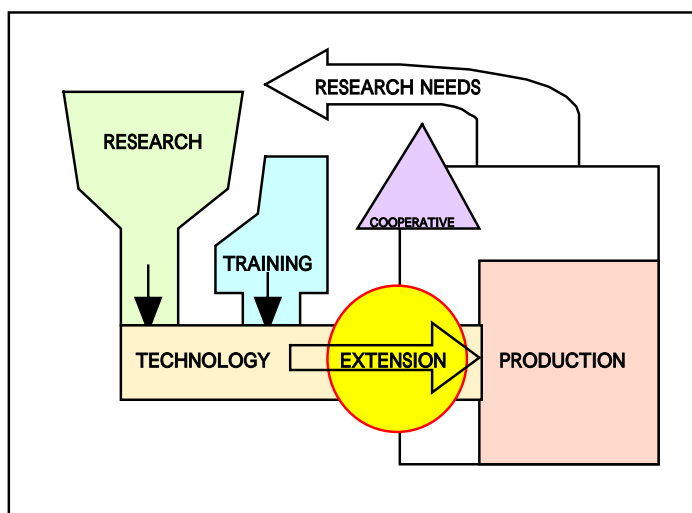
# Agricultural extension and training for agricultural extension agents in Syria

## Part 1: Why agricultural extension today?

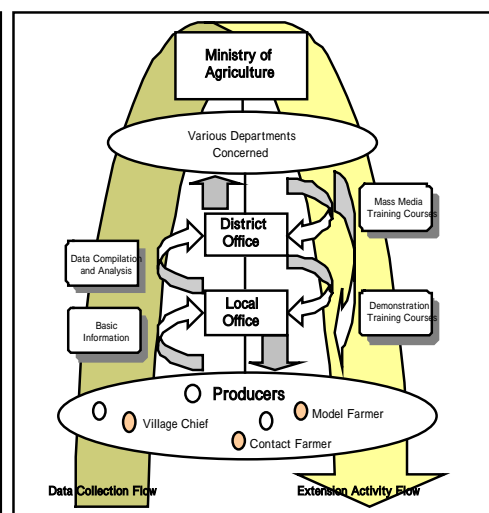
"The goal of technical assistance for development may be summarized in a phrase: "To build up people, the country and heart-felt communication." As thus stated, the fundamental objective of any technical assistance project is to foster the local manpower that should become the main actor for building up their own respective developing countries. So far, certain types of technical assistance, such as the dispatch of experts or Project-type technical cooperation, have spent a great deal of time and energy in developing appropriate technologies which could be adopted and used in the recipient country on a permanent basis. Also effort has been made to transfer technologies to relevant government officials. However, such efforts do not always produce visible outcomes, and recently more "visible" results are starting to be expected from recipient developing countries. In this context, it seems the importance of extension activities is being recognized, in order to make compatible both activities for "building up people" to facilitate people's self-support in developing countries and for producing "visible results". Moreover, while in recent years, cases for software projects are becoming priority subject of development study, the role of those experts working on agricultural extension and farmer's support is becoming increasingly significant. This is because agricultural extension activities to transfer appropriate technologies, information and knowledge to small-scale farmers play a very important role in raising their income level, which normally forms the basic priority in planning rural agricultural development.

Looking at the specific role of agricultural extension agents, their role as promoters of rural development activities by means of organizing farmers is becoming more important than their role simply as conventional technical instructors. This was also evident in the history of Japan's agricultural development. In such agricultural extension activities it is necessary to be comprehensive as well as systematic in working on the improvement of agricultural productivity and the living environment, and in the training of local human resources. For this purpose, today, agricultural extension agents often form an instruction team in accordance with the conditions and needs of the respective locality. At the same time, the importance of the participatory approach in development has been recognized in the field of technical assistance, making it important for agricultural extension agents to master such an approach. Moreover, they are expected to play a role not only as specialists conducting technical transfer but also as co-coordinators for organizing farmers. In turn, it is becoming more and more important for us to develop such multi-talented and capable specialists.

Through our development study experiences in Pakistan, Laos, Brazil etc. we have learned about various forms of agricultural extension in developing countries. There are some problems observed in agricultural extension activities in all these countries, such as organizational difficulties and the capacity and capability of agricultural extension agents engaged there. In addition, it has been pointed out in many countries that "facilities are not sufficient for the extension activities", "collaboration between the extension organization and research organization is poor", or "basic information needed for efficient agricultural extension is not provided at the ground level". Meanwhile, AAI has sent an expert to work on the project of agricultural extension and improvement in Syria on a long-term basis. This was followed by the dispatch of another specialist to work on the education and training plan for agricultural extension. In the following issues we would like to report on our agricultural extension activities and training for extension agents in Syria, and discuss the future tasks in this field.



Conceptual map of agricultural extension in Syria -



Proposed flow of agricultural extension activities in Laos -



## Mini Series: Permaculture element technology (1)

### Part 1: Comprehensive planning with an overview

Permaculture involves the creation of a life-support system within a minimum available area of land, whether rural or urban, by making full use of the particular characteristics of local fauna and flora and other conditions such as existing buildings and the environment. We reported on one such example from Zimbabwe in AAINews Vol. 21, and from this issue we would like to run a new mini-series about the elemental technologies of permaculture. Before discussing individual technologies, it is necessary to have an overview. This is because each element composing a permaculture system, such as houses, roads, ponds, farms, forests and so on, does not exist independently, and it is important to understand how different elements are related to each other. As listed below there are some basic principles in permaculture designing, applicable to any climatic or spatial conditions, and a comprehensive plan for the proposed permaculture site must be made only after mastering said principles.

Basic principle	Description
Inter-relational positioning of each element	By positioning elements involved in the places where they can support each other, the whole system can function efficiently. For example, windbreaks around a house should be placed in such a way that they obstruct winds but do not obstruct sunshine in winter.
Extraction of multiple functions of each element	It is necessary to select the right elements and place them in the right places. For example, a pond can be multi-functional when used for irrigation, supplying water for cattle, fire prevention, fish farm etc.
Complementary functions of different elements	Functions of different elements can be complemented by each other, especially in terms of water, food and energy supply. For example, the function of a solar power water heater can still be complemented when there is no sunshine by a firewood stove with a water heating function.
Efficient energy use planning	With proper methods, energy such as wind and sunlight can be obtained and utilized efficiently.
Stress on utilization of biological resources	Biological resources should be preferred to fossil fuel resources. For example, instead of using chemical nitrogen fertilizer, leguminous plants can be planted which can fix nitrogen in the soil.
Energy recycling	External natural energy such as water, solar power and wind power should be used and recycled by using a proper circulation system. For example, water can be utilized efficiently by placing a water reservoir at a height below which water flow can be used at many points, such as water tanks and power generators.
Small-scale intensive system	Most of the targeted land should be efficiently used and managed. For example, a forest with a proper strata of various species does not require much effort for management.
Utilization and acceleration of natural transition of flora	The process of natural transition should not be disturbed. This can be achieved by utilizing existing species or planting those species which can adjust to the particular place easily. For example, grass cutting in addition to weeding and ploughing will have the effect of mulching.
Ensuring biological diversity	Diversified cultivation should be preferred to monoculture. Growing a variety of useful plants helps prevent pest damage.
"Contact" effect - effect of two different environmental conditions contacting each other	Natural topographical conditions should be made full use of at the contact point between two different environments, where a great deal of biodiversity will be found. For example, by changing the shape or depth of a pond, different kinds of plants and fish can be accommodated in different parts of the pond e.g. in the deep areas and in the shallows.

The next step of permaculture site design is to establish a good comprehensive plan, for which the key points are as follows:

- 1) Conduct observation and survey in order to understand the limits and restrictions dictated by the existing conditions of the target site and resources available there. This can provide information to be used to decide locations of basic infrastructure such as paths, fences and buildings.
- 2) Make full use of the existing topographical conditions and ecosystems, rather than trying to manipulate them.
- 3) Fully understand the landscape and topography of the area, as well as the flow of sunshine, wind and the air. Utilize large water bodies such as the sea and lakes as well as natural vegetation (i.e. their functions of evapotranspiration, wind prevention and shade provision), and consider improvement of the soil condition by means of use of certain plants, grazing control, alteration by machinery and use of organic substances.
- 4) Make efficient use of water resources by means of collection, dispersion and deposit.
- 5) Plan disaster prevention facilities such as wind breaks or fire breaks in forests, in order to minimize damage caused by potential disasters like fire, earthquake and flood.

