

AAINews

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Collaboration with local NGOs – AAI's attempts in Zimbabwe

This was my first visit to Zimbabwe in the last three years. Although Zimbabwe was said to be relatively rich and well developed for an African nation, as seen in recent media reports, the country is now suffering from an almost shattered economy with a 50% unemployment rate, and inflation running at over 60%. People's anger has exploded into strikes and street demonstrations, pushing the country into the worst economic crisis since its independence in 1980. The drastic drop in the international price of tobacco, which is Zimbabwe's primary export commodity (with approx. 30% share of the total export earnings), and the freeze of financial aid by donors like the IMF following Zimbabwe's military intervention in the civil war in Congo, led the country into serious financial difficulties and resulted in a shortage of foreign currency. Moreover, since early 2000 there have been a number of incidents of unlawful occupation of large farms owned by white farmers, and this has brought about severe damage to production and shipping of agricultural products including tobacco, dealing an additional blow to the country's economy. The general election held in June 2000 in this economic situation ended the era of single party rule which had lasted some 20 years since independence. A presidential election is scheduled in 2002, and more political turbulence is being expected...

As reported in the previous issues of AAI News, AAI has been trying to carry out projects in collaboration with local NGOs engaged in grassroots participatory activities, in order to realise more effective aid activities centred around local society and targeted at local people. As part of such efforts, in 1997 AAI started survey in Zimbabwe to identify some candidate NGOs for such collaboration and partnership. One of the identified NGOs, the Zvishavane Water Project (ZWP), is working on various community-based water-use-related projects in the semi-arid region in southern Zimbabwe, including the construction of small- and medium-size dams/reservoirs, support for vegetable cultivation by creating "Group Gardens", collecting and utilizing rain water (water harvesting), soil and water conservation etc. The purpose of my visit this time was to discuss a new project and prepare a proposal to apply for JICA's community empowerment programme with ZWP as AAI's partner local NGO.

The title of the project proposal is "Mobile Workshop". There is no need to stress the importance of training workshops for human resource development, but the conventional modus operandi of training at training centres has some problems like the cost of participants' transportation, accommodation and food, and inaccessibility for those living faraway from the training centre. To overcome such problems, what we proposed this time was a training centre on the move. Training staff would travel from village to village with a pick-up truck loaded with the necessary equipment, introducing new technologies and information to villages through the medium of AV systems like video, or conducting actual field work for example repairing farming tools or making new ones. In this way it is expected to spread appropriate technologies and techniques. The mobile training centre has the characteristics of a "village smith", repairing farming equipment or manufacturing new ones as noted above. Therefore we are hoping to create opportunities for the village youth to have some vocational training as well. The "Mobile Workshop" and NGO feature some common characteristics (sales points) – namely flexibility and mobility. We look forward to seeing what sort of synergy effects this combination would bring about.

(By Koto in Zimbabwe, Nov. 2001)



Watering vegetables in group garden



Group meeting in a primary school classroom

In Search of the Blue Bird – What Is It that You Have Been Looking For?

Part 6: Epilogue

What is wealth? What is an enriched life really like? And what is hope? This series, which started by raising these questions, is now coming to an end. What is the goal in our life? (What is it that we long for?), is a difficult question to answer, and probably there isn't just one answer. The current "blocked-up" feeling in Japanese society has something to do with the incapability of dreaming, and things like hope and a sense of fulfillment and achievement seem to be found at the opposite end of where Japan presently stands. That "blocked-up-ness" is a result of the collapse of the "stable growth" model and system which had been believed to last almost forever in Japanese society. From now on, we probably cannot survive by relying on the past model of social progress, or by imitating existing products. Therefore, we could call the years ahead the "era of creativity". However, that era cannot be easily achieved without action, and it is necessary to make efforts and learn certain techniques to reach it. At the same time, without going through such pains, we would never get the sense of fulfillment and achievement. That will be a condition to "lead an enriched life".

Now, let us think about "wealth" or "richness" once again. UNIQLO, a clothing retailer, is thriving today. They offer inexpensive, high-quality goods, and therefore, UNIQLO neatly suits the current social situation of Japan with its recession and deflation. Hamburgers and gyudon (beef bowls) are on sale in fierce "price-down" competitions. But, can everything be justified if it is cheap? Isn't there something terrible happening behind the "price-down" phenomenon? The "hollowness" of the domestic manufacture industry is one problem, and what about the rivalry between massive retail stores like UNIQLO and local shopping streets? If low prices were all that is wanted, then the clothing store, electrician, vegetable grocery, fishmonger and pharmacy run by somebody we know in the locality, would lose their *raison d'être*. In reality, however, our towns have always had a local shopping street, which serves as a hub of people living there and coming to shop there. Can we really afford to lose all this, in pursuit of the cheapest and the most efficient? At the end of such absolute market-oriented capitalism, wouldn't we see a world completely void of the real "enrichment" in life?

Let us take another viewpoint and think about "organizations and individuals". In the market economy companies are compelled to try to attain continuous economic "growth" in pursuit of profits. However there are other sorts of organizations which aim at something that cannot be purchased with money, such as the sense of commitment, fulfillment and achievement (e.g. Non Profit Organizations -NPOs). In pursuit of those elements in life, probably working for NPOs might be a shortcut, compared to working in profit-making companies. But before reaching such a conclusion, we also need to think about the meaning of "becoming a salary man"(i.e., becoming part of an organization and having to live a life dependent on the organization). It is questionable whether one can attain the sense of fulfillment and achievement simply by working for NPOs. Of course that is not the case. Be it a profit-making company or non-profit organization (and irrespective of whether one remains within the organization or not), what is needed is to avoid being compelled to become part of an organization, and to live an independent life as an individual without fully relying on the organization. And this has a lot to do with "enriched life". Whether an individual can lead an enriched life or not depends on his or her own effort.

As the saying goes: "the ultimate happiness given to humans is hope". We can endure difficult situations if we do not give up hope. However, it is also true that "hope" alone does not make things move forward. The driving force to be added for that purpose is "desire". Nevertheless, it is also very dangerous to give human desire free rein, as is shown in such examples as environmental destruction due to overexploitation and also in social distortion caused by too much emphasis on the market economy. Controlling human desires is a difficult task, but it is necessary to try to give the right direction for the desires to proceed. What is required in making such an attempt is a sense of mission. This way of thinking has an important implication in contemplating the future direction of AAL.

Then, now, what is it that you have been longing for?

Agricultural Extension and Training for Extension Workers in Syria

Part 6: The future of agricultural extension and extension staff training - the common problems and the prospect of extension -

In recent years as the focus of development aid projects has shifted from 'hard' to 'soft', the training of extension staff in the field of agriculture and rural development has become a very important theme. At the same time, however, such common problems as the incapability of the extension staff, insufficient facilities and equipment needed for extension activities, the vulnerable linkage between extension activities and research etc., have not yet been solved in many developing countries including Syria. In the final part of this series we would like to ask the question as to whether there is any concrete and effective remedy for such problems.

First of all, is there any problem in the current agricultural extension system itself? Will the traditional existing system keep functioning effectively in the future? The same shortfalls have long been pointed out about the system. Then, isn't it the case that there are some problems in the very current extension system / method itself? Take the example of the agricultural extension system in Syria. The number of extension staff is greater than 5,000, and at a glance it looks like a well organized system. What about the reality though? Aren't there some unattainable unrealistic preconditions for this system to function well? Then, isn't there any realistic and specific solution? Let us think of some.

1) Separation of extension staff into 'Specialist' and 'Generalist' categories

It would be useful to create two different categories of extension staff, that is: the senior extension staff who are trained in good technologies for specific matters (thus called SMS: Subject Matter Specialists), and who would lead farmers and other ordinary extension staff; and the Generalist staff who would act as village development co-ordinators; not employing specialized technologies but rather applying their general overall knowledge. Different types of training should be conducted for these two types of extension staff. This is to solve the problem of the lack of capacity of the extension staff. It is necessary to give the most appropriate training according to each trainee's ability and needs, rather than to give the same sort of training to everybody.

2) Learning from successful farmers in the locality (Farmer-to-Farmer Extension)

In general, farmers are conservative people who are reluctant to change their traditional methods or to try something new. However, if they are shown that a certain method is beneficial and profitable for them, they will introduce the same system without being forced to do so. Especially when farmers themselves try out some new technology and it turns out to be successful, other farmers will readily follow suit. Often that is the most realistic, non-text-type technique of extension, without any incomprehensible special terminology. What is to be learned is already there in front of their eyes. Often such technology and information that proves to be acceptable for the farmers spreads by word of mouth. Sometimes such a pretext as "there are not enough motorbikes" is used for unsuccessful extension activities. However, if that is a problem, then another method of information/technology transfer which doesn't require such modes of transportation should be used.

3) Charge for the agricultural extension service (privatisation or creation of incentives)

In addition to the insufficiency of equipment for agricultural extension activities, the low salary level is another main reason for extension staff's complaints in many developing countries. In principle, agricultural extension activities are free of charge and are conducted as a public service. This said, there is a need for the system to give some further income for extension staff with their special abilities and technology/techniques. In Syria most civil servants have second jobs. For instance, after working at the Irrigation Bureau during the daytime, one of the staff members works as an irrigation-related consultant in the evening, planning irrigation facilities or giving technical advice. If the technical ability of agricultural extension workers leads to additional income, that would give a good incentive for extension staff to increase their knowledge and technologies. And this in turn may lead to the development of new technologies that are actually useful for farmers.



Training for farmers (Syria)



**Learning from a successful farmer
(Zimbabwe)**



PRA survey (Laos)

Mini-Series: Efficient Use of Water Resources in Arid Land

Part 2: Traditional method of water use in Morocco

In Morocco, though some parts in the north do have rich water resources, most of the land belongs to the semi-arid and arid zone with an annual rainfall of 100-700mm. In such regions it is difficult to provide enough water to all the farmlands with irrigation. Therefore the traditional method of water use (water use rights) has been used to adjust to the limited water availability. On the other hand, modern technologies are also being introduced recently for more efficient use of water resources.

The newly introduced technologies include the centre-pivot irrigation and drip irrigation methods (Photo 1). These technologies are used for cultivation of cereals such as wheat, and vegetables, making a good contribution to increased productivity. However, many farmers have not been able to afford such modern technologies due to lack of funds and capacity. Those farmers, bound in the traditional method of efficient use of limited water resources with the help of nature and livestock. Basically, the closer one is located to the source of water, or the higher up the stream one is located, the stronger are one's water use rights. The rights are handed down from generation to generation, making it difficult to obtain new water use rights. On the other hand, however, it is also a fact that this traditional custom sustains the agricultural activities of the region.

Photo 2 shows a shallow well reliant on livestock power, and the amount of water available from this well determines the extent of vegetable cultivation in the summer. Photo 3 shows a simple ditch to capture water from irregular floods into the farm. In this region wheat cultivation is carried out to whatever extent possible given the limited water available from the overflow from irrigation water in the upper basin, and rainfall. In the years when the amount of water is not enough to produce wheat of sufficient quality to sell as cereal, then the substandard wheat is used for cattle feed.

These methods try to utilise whatever water is granted by nature in the year, thus they can be called sustainable water use technologies that have been inherited over many years. The location and number of shallow wells make it possible to estimate the amount of water usually available in the region, while the location of irrigation ditches helps us understand the irregular movement of water over many years. When the area of the upper basin region with a constant water supply and the amount of water use in the region are taken into account, it becomes possible to estimate the amount of currently available water resources in the entire region. This should be able to serve as an important factor in drawing up a future development plan.

For effective use of limited water resources it is crucial to have not only technological development of crop cultivation and irrigation, but also a good understanding of the traditional water use methods inherited in the region over many years. Also, it is needless to say that excessive development of water resources will only mean eventual water depletion. Determination of development scale should be done based on the real resource development capacity in each region. And traditional customary technologies and restrictions that have been practised in the region for years (regarding the cultivation area, crop types, period of cultivation, space between wells, irrigation frequency etc.) should be considered for such determinations. Only then would the modern agricultural technologies, which are to be introduced in the future, work sustainably in the respective region.



Photo 1: Drip irrigation is getting popular in recent years



Photo 2: Shallow well using livestock power



Photo 3: Simple ditch for capturing rainfall