

AAINews

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Group Training Course on Vegetable Cultivation for the Republic of Tajikistan

At the JICA Tsukuba International Centre (TBIC), trainees from developing countries attend hands-on training courses on rice cultivation, agricultural machinery, irrigation/drainage and vegetable cultivation. Recently AAI was commissioned to conduct one of these training courses, titled the "Country focused Group Training Course on Vegetable Cultivation for the Republic of Tajikistan". This took place from mid-August to the end of November. The objective of this course was capacity building of human resources to contribute to agricultural development in Tajikistan. For this purpose, theory and knowledge about vegetable cultivation and agricultural extension was provided through lectures, practical training and field excursions to learn about the current situation of vegetable production and extension in Japan. In addition to the current situation of vegetable production in Japan, cultivation techniques, and plant physiology, the trainees were also expected to learn about the technical extension system and method.

AAI was in charge of the allocation of training instructors and related administrative work, planning and implementation of the curriculum, co-ordination of lecturers and field excursions, and the planning, preparation and instruction for experiments and practical training. The course was carried out at the TBIC with a staff member and instructor from JICA, as well as a training supervisor. AAI staff served as overall training instructors overseeing the entire training course.

The training course was carried out along the principle of "theory and practice". In planning the training curriculum, we tried to arrange it in such a way that the trainees themselves could learn about the flow; starting from seeding, preparation of the field, applying fertilizer, transplantation of seedlings, cultivation management, to the final yield survey. However, due to the trainees' limited period of stay, multiple stages had to be performed in parallel, and the challenge was how effectively and efficiently to make sure the trainees learned both the theory and practice. Rather than just stand by and observe, trainees were asked to actually get involved in cultivation work themselves, so as to learn with their own hands. Also, in order to avoid one-way communication of information, efforts were made to establish a good relationship to ensure information exchange on various technologies/techniques with each other even after the trainees returned to Tajikistan.

For the first two weeks or so before the actual training on vegetable cultivation started, the trainees were given a general orientation course on society in Japan, course orientation on the objectives, concrete dates/timetable schedule and subjects to be covered by the training course, as well as an intensive language course to learn basic everyday Japanese. In addition, TBIC has evening courses on the Japanese language and computers etc. which can be attended by anybody who so wishes. Also, recreational events are organized in the evenings and on weekends, such as a Japanese cultural evening and other parties, to provide opportunities to meet trainees from other countries.

At the beginning of the training course the trainees asked many questions always making comparisons with technologies/techniques available in their own country. However, as the training moved on they started actively asking questions regarding more fundamental aspects of vegetable cultivation. These were directed not only to the instructors but also to the farmers they visited on field excursions, and thus trainees were trying to make the most of the given opportunities. They worked on practical training, research and report presentations enthusiastically with excellent teamwork, and apparently they fully grasped the significance of the training course. While waiting for the bus to bring them back to the airport at the end of the three and half months of training, I already started missing the trainees. Thus I felt both the happiness and sadness pertaining to the training project, and I am all the more determined to continue communication with those trainees in the future.

(By Hasegawa in Tsukuba, Feb 2002)



Experiment on fertilizer application to potatoes



Practical training on seedling preparation

New Series: Grassroots Collaboration, AAI's approach

Part 1: Why grassroots today? – The significance of grassroots collaboration

Recently it has been pointed out that ‘participatory development’ and ‘development projects based on the real needs of local community’ are said to be necessary and to play a significant role in placing the local community at the centre of the development project and make sure they are the ones who benefit directly from the project. In this new series we would like to discuss one such participatory development method, grassroots collaboration, and report on how AAI is involved in this field.

What is often associated with the word ‘grassroots’ are NGOs, but we do not consider simply that ‘all NGOs equal grassroots’ or vice versa. Rather, we adopt a more ‘functional’ way of thinking. We take the ‘grassroots’ or ‘NGOs’ approaches as they are necessary, or if their ‘function’ is necessary, in order to achieve what we aim at. That is, both ‘grassroots’ and ‘NGOs’ are nothing but ‘means’ to achieve an end. If the objective of a project is clearly laid out, the necessary means will become self-evident without sticking to certain methods or forms of activities. We hope the current series of reports will provide some guidance and hints as to how to create new cases of grassroots development activity.

Needless to say, the goal of ‘participatory development’ is not simply to get local people involved in the project. The real meaning of ‘participatory development’ is to find a way for the local people to be independent from outside help and to be able to solve problems with their own ideas, resources and manpower. Therefore, what is needed for the project to be successful and sustainable is more than mere ‘involvement’. It is necessary that the local people actively lead the project while it is the outsiders who get involved in it under the local people’s initiatives.

What about the reality, though? In more or less all the developing countries the predominant attitude of the host country/community is to see money and hard equipment as the panacea to their current problems. In other words, however much we wanted to hear the local people’s opinions with the ‘grassroots’ ‘participatory’ approach, what ends up being presented to us are the sort of opinions, demands and suggested solutions which would necessitate hard aid from outside donors (i.e., “we need more funds, and more equipment...”). Host developing countries would seldom propose low-cost and realistic ideas that would be implemented within their own current capacity.

If the aim of ‘grassroots’ ‘participatory’ projects is ‘independent’, ‘self-supporting’ development (eventually) without reliance on any outside help, then this kind of (wishful) thinking on the part of developing countries needs to be reformed. After all, do the local people in developing countries have the independent thinking needed for this kind of development approach? That is the significant starting point. It is necessary for them to realize the significance of having their own ideas, and the joy of having their ideas being realized and embodied. However, such a process is hardly possible in a top-down system. Here at this point, an effective means to facilitate the bottom-up initiative from the development field would be to have foreign development assistants from the outside serving as catalysts, that is working with the ‘grassroots’ approach. Therefore, this can be considered as a ‘challenge to the top-down system.’

In the coming issues we will report on several cases of AAI’s grassroots collaboration in various developing countries, that took place in the past and are still on-going today. Then we hope to reflect upon the significance, tasks and future prospects of grassroots collaboration.

New series: Re-examination of Development Study

Part 1: Development Study at a Turning Point

'Development Study' is defined as an activity to support development planning of various projects of a public nature, which are useful for the socio-economic development of developing countries. Japan's development study activities conducted in a number of developing countries have greatly contributed to the development of the respective countries. Most of the development projects focused on basic infrastructure, in other words so-called 'building-type' development aid. However, some cases of 'building' aid have not been very effective as the 'building' was left without sufficient management due to lack of manpower and funds. Meanwhile in Japan, the dragging recession has reduced tax revenue, and a more effective use of national budget is called for. Public opinion strongly desires a review and reform of the ODA policy. Also, as public interest in overseas development aid increases, a more effective use of the aid budget is being requested.

One of the results of this trend is the shift from the conventional 'hard' aid activities such as construction of irrigation facilities, dams, roads and ports, to 'softer' aid projects like the establishment of management systems and human capacity development to operate the constructed facilities. The 'soft' projects are based on the notion that, in order to ensure that the project runs effectively and sustainably, the scale of development should be that which is most appropriate to the local conditions and that a proper system and the correct manpower is needed to manage the development activities.

In this context the conventional type of 'development study' has also come to a turning point, as different approaches and focuses are in demand today. Consequently, though the main objective of development study remains rooted in development planning, various forms of research activities have started to appear recently. For instance, participatory research methods such as PRA are occasionally employed to reflect the 'real needs' of local people in the project, and verification studies are being introduced in order to ensure implementation of proposed future development plans. The important key phrases in this new development trend include 'local participation', 'sustainable development', 'NGO collaboration', and so forth. Attempts are being made to expand collaboration and communication with local people (local groups and NGOs) during the study activities, so as to establish and implement realistic development plans that are genuinely useful for local people. Moreover, the focus of project planning has also expanded from simple economic effects, and today great care is taken to consider the local resource circulation system and environmental conservation.

For today's development aid at this significant turning point, development study activities will continue playing an important role in forming good project plans. If development study is done effectively, the resulting projects can be confidently expected to contribute to development, poverty alleviation and lifestyle improvement etc. in developing countries. As AAI has been involved in various development studies of JICA (mainly master plan study and feasibility study), we have had good opportunities to see the field reality in respective developing countries. This new series will report on several such cases and discuss the role and challenges of development research activities that we became aware of along the way. We would also like to consider future prospects, the mission of development study within the framework of the current ODA paradigm, and the potential/possibility of its reform.



Irrigation channel construction (Brazil)



Meeting with a local people's group (Morocco)

Homepage “Root Design”

AAI and the NPO, Association SAHEL, have established a homepage titled ‘Root Design’, based on the experience of practical and sustainable tree plantation activities in the Middle East and the Sahel region. The concept of ‘Root Design’ was discussed in AAINews Vol. 12. This homepage contains more information gained afterwards as well.

From the 11th to 15th November, 2001 the sixth international root study symposium, “Roots: The Interface Between Plants and Mother Earth” was held at Nagoya International Conference Hall. On this occasion we took part in the poster presentation session and corporate exhibition where we presented the above homepage and exchanged information with root researchers from other countries.

Below is the summary of the homepage. Please have a look if you are interested.

Root Design for Practical and Sustainable Afforestation

- Our Trials and Findings in Arid Areas -

URL : <http://www.open-resource.org/rootdesign/> **Appropriate Agriculture International Co. Ltd. & Association Sahel (NPO)**

Part I : Living in arid lands

A living life in the arid land is described especially in relation with trees, not by statistical data but by our actual experience in the area.

Part II : Root design - the basic concept

Why and how roots can be designed, and what kinds of possibilities are expected from the root designing?



Part III : From seeds to seedlings

- living with trees in the nature -

A practical guide of root design and afforestation, which helps to learn the necessary steps through experience in the field.