

AAINews

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Reflections Upon the Souvenir Sellers of Burkina Faso

My mission as part of JICA's preliminary survey team took me to Burkina Faso in West Africa this January. The name Burkina Faso means "The Land of Upright People". The country used to be called Outo Volta since its independence in 1960, but it was renamed in 1984. Although my visit was very short, I got a positive impression of the people as being honest and reserved. Their sincerity and punctuality actually came as a sort of shock for me because I had been accustomed to "Insha Allah" attitude of people in the Middle East.

The JICA survey was to look into the forest conservation planning in Comoè Province in the south-western part of the country. Unlike the Sahelian region in the northern part that is facing the problem of desertification, this target area is relatively wet with some forest cover still remaining. In recent years, however, problems of degradation and reduction of forest resources in this area have been on the rise due to illegal logging, shifting cultivation, over grazing, forest fires etc. This is why there is a need to establish a system of proper forest management planning in order to conserve and sustainably utilize the remaining forest resources. The themes given importance in conservation and utilization of forest resources here are 'sustainability' and 'local participation'. The forest forms an indispensable part of life for local people, as the forest provides them not only with fuel wood or construction materials, but also non-timber products such as their food, forage and medicinal plants, such as 'karité' (used to produce edible oil, soap, cosmetics etc.) and 'nerè' (used to produce soubala paste).

It is a recent major trend that great emphasis is placed on the ownership and sustainability of a project, and on the importance of the participatory approach. These are all very important factors, and during this survey I was made to think especially about the project 'ownership' of the beneficiaries and their relationship with the donor group. 'Local participation' requires not only the formality of local community's involvement in the project. What is crucial is the spontaneous attitude of the local people to assume an active role in the project. In Burkina Faso also I often heard about cases where things go well during the project implementation phase driven by the donor's initiative, but once the donor is gone a lot of problems arise regarding the project management and implementation. Although the project label might carry the word 'local participation', in fact the local people are just doing whatever they are told to do by the donor group, without any sense of ownership or personal initiative. It may probably be the donor group itself who, while insisting on 'initiative' or 'ownership' from the local community, actually deprives them of such forms of involvement for the sake of their own convenience.

It might have something to do with the nature of the Burkinas, but here also people tend to assume the passive, 'whatever-you-say' attitude to any suggestions from us, as it is good enough to receive any sort of development aid whatsoever. I felt that the problem behind this attitude of theirs might be the lack of 'reserve' or 'foresightedness', resulting from poverty. For instance, take the example of shopkeepers selling souvenirs to foreigners in the street. Prices are always negotiated. If I say, "That is too expensive," the initial price of CFAF 20,000 immediately drops down to CFAF 10,000 or CFAF 5,000. It is natural that with foreigners they start with prices much higher than the actual value of the commodity. However, in my eyes the fact that their negotiating prices drop so easily seemed to suggest the extent of their poverty. That is, they want CFAF5,000 today rather than CFAF10,000 tomorrow. This mentality is true not only for souvenir sellers but also for villagers facing forest depletion. They are living their life on a day to day basis. Poverty results in a lack of preparedness for the future, and a lack of foresightedness. Everything seemed to me to originate from this. After bargaining with souvenir sellers in Burkina Faso, I was left with a bitter feeling that I never felt after similar bargaining in the Middle East. I even could not help but feel somehow sorrowful, or mournful, about the souvenir sellers of Burkina Faso, behind whose backs I felt their acute poverty. Still, smiles on the faces of village children were encouraging. I wish the very best for the future of the 'Upright People'.

(By Koto in Burkina Faso, May 2002)



'Karité' trees – an important source of income for local community



Souvenir seller in the capital Ouagadougou



May the future be bright for these children...

Grassroots Collaboration, AAI's approach

Part 2: Collaboration with a local NGO in Zimbabwe

We have reported about our collaboration with local NGOs in Zimbabwe in the past issues of AAINews (Vols. 28, 29 and 36). AAI's work with ZWP (Zvishavane Water Project) can be summarised as follows:

1. Manpower contribution (ZWP's activity survey and collaboration feasibility survey by AAI staff)
2. Financial support (for maintenance of small-scale dams and opening a new office of ZWP)
3. Technical advice (on vegetable cultivation in 'group gardens')
4. Proposal writing for joint projects to be submitted to various funding opportunities such as the Grant Aid for Grassroots Projects of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the JICA Community Empowerment Programme.

Here, we would like to think about the NGO approach once again. Working in the field of development aid in developing countries, often we encounter the question, "development for whom?" This question leads us to adopt an approach that enables us to deal with the beneficiaries more directly, and there is a need for projects with such an approach. At the level of international 'trends' in development co-operation, nowadays there are a lot of ODA projects supporting NGOs and collaborative activities with NGOs. Today there are various schemes to support such NGO activities, including NGO project subsidies such as NGO Grant Assistance, Grant Assistance For Grassroots Projects and other support funds. Moreover, JICA has recently established such schemes as the Community Empowerment Programme and the JICA Partnership Programme, which are meant to give direct support to domestic and international groups or to work in partnership with NGOs in aid projects. However, 'grassroots collaboration' is not an end but only a means, and what is important is to ensure the sustainability of the project, project ownership and independence of the local community. Having the project started from somewhere physically close to the beneficiaries, and/or with the bottom-up approach, does not automatically ensure that the project's sustainability and ownership will be assumed by the local community.

The sense of ownership on the side of the local community should be nurtured at a slow pace – the pace that the local community functions at, and never at a fast pace dictated by the donor group's timetable of convenience. This is a very important point in collaboration with local NGOs. In the case of our collaboration with ZWP, at the beginning of a new project in a new place we make sure to spend enough time on preliminary surveys to discuss the project with the target community and to understand the current situation thoroughly. By doing so we try to encourage the local community to actively get involved. Our group garden projects in particular, which are ongoing in more than 20 places, have been initiated in areas where we found strong motivation and demand from the local communities themselves. In addition, we try to make sure that the relationship between ZWP and local communities is mutual and equal, rather than having one party dependent on the other in every way. For instance, in the case of small dam construction, raw materials (cement) and equipment (wheel barrows, shovels etc.) are provided by ZWP, but the construction work is done by the local people themselves.

From the NGO point of view, 'power as a system/organization' is important to ensure the 'sustainability' of a project. That is, what is needed is not only the idealism and enthusiasm, but also reliable technologies, lasting resources (funds, organisational structure, human resources etc.) and appropriate strategies. At the moment ZWP does not have any self-generating income sources, but all the activity expenses come from financial aid from its donors. The funds needed for the currently on-going projects are already secured, and the staff members are all tied up with the implementation of those projects. Therefore, in future collaboration with ZWP we would need to hire more staff in order to start new projects. In looking at the vegetable cultivation projects at group gardens, ZWP does not have any human resources capable of instructing about cultivation techniques. As the current donors also do not give technical instruction, there is a need for support to upgrade the technical aspect of ZWP activities. Therefore, for the future collaboration of AAI with ZWP, it is probably more realistic and effective to give support to improving techniques and technologies employed in the on-going projects, such as vegetable cultivation techniques at group gardens, rather than starting up new projects.



Small-scale dam maintenance work



Discussion with a target community



A well for a group garden

Re-examination of Development Study

Part 2: Hard and Soft Type - Search for useful information and flexible use of the scheme

Today, sustainable management of water resources and the alleviation of unstable agricultural production due to the recent decrease in rainfall are important tasks for Morocco. As its main national strategy, the government of Morocco aims to secure water resources by dam construction and expansion of irrigation farming. By 1997, 94 dams and reservoirs were constructed, and agricultural production in irrigated lands has also been expanding. The government plans to expand such projects in the future. Based on such a national strategy, the purpose of the development survey in which AAI took part in 2000 was to prioritize dam development projects and conduct feasibility studies, with the ultimate aim of promoting irrigation by middle-scale dam construction for water resources development. More irrigation projects in 'candidate areas' for development are expected to contribute to more stable agricultural production.

Through this survey it was learned that among the newly targeted project areas, there are quite a few places with already existing irrigation facilities. However, some of them need repair work done on the intake weir and the lower end delivery units of the irrigation system which are timeworn or have been damaged by floods. In general those existing facilities are on a small scale, and the cost of repair work will not be so large. Moreover, since those facilities have a relatively high level of water management capacity due to their usage over many years, many of them can be utilized to increase the efficiency of the new projects. Local people are also hoping to receive technical and financial support to renew or repair such facilities. Therefore, it seems quite meaningful to make use of such information on the existing irrigation facilities for the future surveys and projects, in order to achieve 'visible' development cooperation based on local needs and demands.

Broadly categorized, this survey was of the 'hard' nature (material building/support) rather than 'soft' type (system/mechanism building). The characteristic of the 'hard' type project is that it has a clear objective and output is visible and easy to understand. However, it lacks flexibility and therefore sometimes it cannot adjust to new findings, ideas and options that come to light during the project survey. On the other hand, 'soft' type projects are more flexible than 'hard' type ones, accommodating new factors as they go along. Today, while there is a shift in the trend of development projects from 'hard'-oriented to 'soft', there are some criticisms about the fact that the development survey scheme is still the same, geared for the 'hard' type. From now on, therefore, development surveys should not remain in the conventional framework but new, more flexible survey activities should be introduced to fit the objectives and local conditions stressed in 'soft' projects.

For this particular survey in Morocco, the survey team consisted of experts in various fields, and during a relatively long survey period the team obtained important information through interviews with local organizations, questionnaires and discussions with local communities. Such information should be utilized to solve the problems that the local people are facing directly, and such activity in turn will bring about better development projects. Sometimes survey teams are sent to create or 'dig out' new project potentials. In such cases, however, the survey period is generally short and it is difficult to get truly down-to-earth information. There is a need for a new system to make full use of the useful information obtained during development surveys, to link to future project planning.



Rain-fed farming area (hill region) and irrigation farming area (along the river)



Intake weir in use for several decades



On-farm canal needing repair work

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

Part 3: Importance of rain-fed farming in Syria

We have reported on the current situation of rain-fed farming in Syria already in AAINews Vol.10. In this issue, we would like to discuss the same topic from the viewpoint of efficient water use, with particular focus on the relationship between rain-fed farming and irrigation agricultural practice. Syria is hugely dependent on rain-fed farming, with approximately over 75% of its agricultural area engaged in rain-fed farming. The volume of harvest varies significantly every year, and agricultural production is highly unstable. By contrast, the productivity of irrigation farming is far above that of rain-fed farming. For instance, in the case of cereal crops the area of irrigation farming is merely 30% of the total cereal cultivation area, but over 80% of the total cereal production of the country comes from the irrigated area (10.6 times more in terms of per acre production than in rain-fed areas). Similarly, in the case of fruit cultivation, the irrigated land, which accounts for a mere 15% of the total fruit cultivation area, yields 60% of the total production (7.9 times more compared to rain-fed areas), and the irrigated vegetable farm land (75% of the total vegetable cultivation area) yields 90% of all vegetables (3.5 times more compared to the rain-fed area). Therefore, in order to secure increased food production to feed an increasing population, it is imperative to expand agricultural production by promoting more irrigation farming. In fact the irrigated farm area has been expanded from 652,000ha (irrigation rate 11.6%) in 1985 to 1,210,000ha (22.6%) in 2000. However, the increase rate in the past five years is rather low, and considering the current situation of water resources depletion, an immediate and drastic increase in irrigation land area cannot be expected. Moreover, another challenge to be considered from the viewpoint of poverty alleviation is to overcome the instability of rain-fed farming, on which a majority of farmers are currently dependent for their survival.

Rain-fed farming can be called an eco-friendly agricultural practice, with its advantage of secured sustainability and bringing with it none of the problems of salinization which often result from irrigation farming. Increasing productivity of rain-fed farming would prevent excessive reliance on irrigation farming for food production. In Syria, efforts to achieve efficient water use and stable productivity have been made in areas with relatively good annual rain fall, for instance by constructing terraced fields built in the traditional method using stones, or utilizing the micro-topographic characteristics of the area. However, in semi-arid areas there are concerns with regards to soil degradation and desertification due to the speculative agricultural practice of expecting rain with no assurance. Yields from rain-fed farming depend on seasonally and spatially inconsistent rainfalls, making it difficult to expect an overall increase in any single crop. The only positive expectation that can be made about rain-fed agricultural productivity is that there might be good rainfall somewhere where rain-fed farming is practiced, and that might contribute to an increased overall productivity of rain-fed farming in the whole country. That is to say, it is no use trying to achieve successful cultivation of one certain crop in one place, but it is necessary to have a number of options and thus diversity in cultivation in order to overcome the instability of rain-fed farming.

In fact, farmers in arid areas have survived severe environmental conditions by selectively resorting to different options according to the climatic conditions of each year, while also making use of available local resources. In years with relatively good rainfall they cultivate a variety of crops depending on water content in different soils of different topographical or land conditions. Also, in some regions in East Africa rain-fed farmers provide against drought years by planting crops with a long harvesting period, such as cassava. In drought years they would not conduct any forcible farming, in order to allow water to deposit in the soil. Therefore, in traditional agricultural systems evolved over centuries there is a very clever system of risk evasion. What this system aims at is not an increase in productivity, but stability. They seem to have overcome instability/insecurity in production by covering a larger area with dispersed and diverse cultivation. It should be kept in mind that there is a great danger in trying to introduce large-scale development activities aiming only at economic growth and efficiency in such areas with traditional agricultural practices.



Damage by salinization (Syria)



Rain-fed farm (Zimbabwe)



Dam for water-harvesting (Pakistan)