

## Grassroots Collaboration, AAI's approach

### Part 4: Social interactions with community-based organizations in Oman

AAI has formed a very strong relationship with Oman through its development activities thus far. Also currently AAI is conducting a development study on the restoration and conservation of mangrove forests there, and a long-term expert from AAI is working in the country. With its fossil energy resources, Oman is a relatively rich nation. In addition, the Government of Oman has been making great efforts to improve the livelihood and welfare of its people, by creating employment opportunities through the "Omanization policy" (a policy to give priority to the employment and technological empowerment of Omani nationals instead of employing the foreign workers who used to dominate the country's labor market) and by providing free education and medical services.

The Dhofar Governorate in the south of Oman, where many of our activities have taken place so far, has a unique natural environment. The mountainous area of this region is covered with rich vegetation thanks to the monsoon coming from the Indian Ocean. This enables this area to support a stockbreeding industry based on the available natural resources and to attract tourists from neighboring Gulf States. However, in recent years the natural vegetation here has been rapidly depleted mainly due to excessive grazing (see AAINews Vol.2, 13-18). The Omani Authority is gravely concerned about this problem, and it is planning some countermeasures such as control of livestock numbers by providing financial support and plantation activities by relevant government agencies. However, less activity involving the local community is being planned or considered. In addition, in the past there have already been some government-led projects for vegetation rehabilitation, but no noteworthy outcome has been achieved.

In this context, since last year AAI has been conducting activities for social interaction with, and information gathering from, local people, in order to facilitate the project of environmental rehabilitation and vegetation recovery in the mountain area in a way that is linked with the livelihood of the local community. As stated above, Oman as a whole has a reasonable level of life and welfare, but at the local level there are people with financial difficulties that prevent them from being socially independent. One example of such people is divorced women. The Dhofar Department of Agriculture and Fisheries is supporting honey production activities in the mountain area as part of the empowerment scheme for such ladies. *Zizyphus spina-christi* (Christ thorn, local name Sidr) which is found in this area produces high-quality honey. AAI collected information on beekeeping techniques in Japan as well as traditional techniques in Oman to introduce to the local women's groups.

Another AAI activity in this area is to help the facilitation of forest regeneration in collaboration with local organizations for physically challenged people. Plantation activities, including transplantation of seedlings, are introduced as part of the rehabilitation activities for handicapped people. Through such active interaction with the local people, this project aims to promote plantation and forest recovery activities with local participation. Dhofar Department of Agriculture and Fisheries is also trying to start up the "small-scale greening project" as part of their vegetation recovery scheme. This project is to encourage each person in the local community to plant trees in a small plot (20mx20m). These are then dispersed widely in the mountain area. AAI has become the first organization to provide financial support for this project.

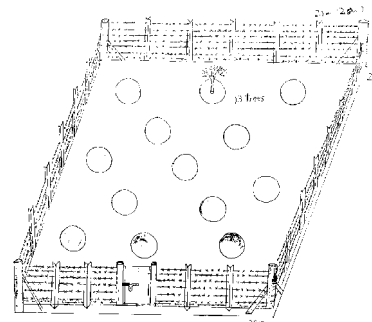
This type of interaction between AAI and the local people in Oman has just started, and due to time constraints not enough interaction has been achieved yet. However, we believe that it is important to keep trying and continue the interaction in order to understand the local people and their needs better and eventually to contribute to solving the problem of environmental conservation and vegetation rehabilitation in this area. There is a rich tradition of strong communal sense and mutual support among the people in Oman. Drawing upon such culture, we are trying to promote regional environmental conservation through collaboration with the local community in various aspects, by linking children's education, rehabilitation of the handicapped and women's empowerment with plantation and other environmental activities.



Facility for the physically challenged in Salalah



Mountain landscape in the dry season



Blueprint of the small-scale greening project