

AAINews

**APPROPRIATE AGRICULTURE INTERNATIONAL
CO., LTD**

1-2-3-403 Haramachida, Machida, Tokyo, 194-0013 JAPAN.
TEL/FAX:+81-42-725-6250 Email: aai@koushu.co.jp

Brazil: Cerrado - Light and Shadow of Development

The “Cerrado” is the savanna area that is located between the middle-western and northern parts of Brazil. The name Cerrado (“closed” in Portuguese) stems from the infertile and strongly acid soil with high aluminum content that is considered to be unsuitable for farming. With appropriate soil improvement and infrastructures, however, it has been assumed that about 50% of the 24 million ha (approximately 5.5 times of the entire land of Japan) could be cultivated. Since the mid-1970s, the Brazilian Government has been trying to develop the Cerrado. As part of the Government efforts, the “PRODECER Project” was launched as a Brazil-Japan joint national project in 1979. This project was implemented over 22 years divided into three phases. As the project ended in March 2001, I had a chance to join in the Brazil-Japan joint evaluation team of this project.

This project was born out of the mutual interests of Brazil and Japan. In the early 70s, the Brazilian Government started placing strong emphasis on increasing food production to promote exports and increase domestic supply. At the same time Japan was trying to find new countries to trade with because of the massive hike in soy bean prices in 1973 that came as a result of the U.S. policy to prohibit soy bean exports. The regional development of the Cerrado spear headed by this Project, as well as other projects, led to Brazil becoming the world’s No. 2 after the U.S. in terms of soy bean production. Brazil also achieved a marked increase in production of other crops such as maize, coffee, wheat and cotton, and has been greatly contributing to the stabilization of the world food supply.

In the Cerrado, in addition to the migrant farmers brought in by the Project, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of independent large-scale farmers who cultivate some thousands of hectares and various agribusiness developments initiated by multinational crop trading companies (Crop Major) backed by both local and U.S. capital. These multinationals not only buy products such as soy beans and maize from farmers, they also distribute, process and sell those products and provide loans to the farmers. Raw soy beans are used as food and animal feed and soy bean oil produced at the factories run by the multinationals is exported to regions including Asia and the Middle-East. The residue of the soy bean oil are also sold as feed for pigs and chickens. The more we eat pigs and chickens, the more soy beans and maize needs to be produced. Many of us also should remember that Japanese demand for Brazilian broilers hiked when imports from Europe rapidly decreased due to foot and mouth disease and mad cow disease.

Japan’s self sufficiency rate for soy beans is only 6% and Japan is dependent on imports from the U.S. in return for car exports from Japan. Imports from Brazil are still not that big, however Brazilian soy beans have been benefiting Japan through the stabilization or decrease of international price because of the expanded market supply. This also means that Brazilian farmers, who receive only a small amount of subsidies compared to U.S. farmers, are having a hard time because of the drop in the international prices. The migrant farmers of this Project whom we interviewed were no exception. Their path as the Cerrado Project pioneers was not at all an easy one. They migrated before the agricultural technologies for the Cerrado were properly established, and suffered drought and hyper-inflation. Loans they took accumulated to form huge debts of millions of yen due to the high interest rate policy and the international price drop for cash crops. Some farmers left, selling everything, but many farmers including Japanese immigrants stayed after moving in from the south with big dreams of becoming land owning farmers instead of tenant farmers. Many farmers expressed their feelings saying, “Increased debt is the responsibility of the Government that adopted the inflation and high interest rate policy and there is no duty for us to repay the debt.” Is it the pioneer spirit of the farmers that makes them continue to toil on the soil?

It is inevitable that any development has a certain influence on the natural environment and the indigenous people. Although it is increasingly recognized that measures should be taken to develop sustainable agricultural practices thereby protecting ecosystems and conserving biodiversity, the reality is that not enough has been done. In the Cerrado, many environmental impacts have been pointed out. Endemic flora and fauna has decreased and there is runoff of top soil due to large-scale mechanization and monoculture. Water is contaminated with large amounts of fertilizers and pesticides and water sources are depleted due to inappropriate irrigation activities. The Cerrado is rich in medicinal plants and there have been a number of cases of friction between large-scale developments and the indigenous hunter-gatherer Indians who live in reserves and the traditional small-scale farmers.

This story may sound too big and too far from people living in Japan. However, the light and shadow of the Cerrado development have a direct connection with the stomachs of Japanese people and therefore it is not an issue restricted to the far ends of the Earth.

(By Fuyuki Kojima in Cerrado, Brazil. April 2002)



Distribution of Cerrado



Feijao Beans irrigated by Center Pivot

Grassroots Collaboration, AAI's approach

Part 5 Our Activities in Laos

As introduced in AAI News Vol. 22 and 29, we conducted a feasibility study on agricultural and rural development for the area along the Mekong River from 1997 to 2000. This was the start of the AAI's involvement in Laos. After the feasibility study, some AAI staff members visited Laos as part of a technology exchange project and some close associates of the AAI participated in the agricultural development projects of the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) and some NGOs. In addition, project type technical cooperation on aquaculture nurtured by staff members of the sister company FAI (Fisheries and Aquaculture International Co., Ltd.) started in Laos. As it is, Laos is rapidly becoming a very close country to the AAI. Compared with countries such as Zimbabwe where the AAI started its grassroots activities, Laos is much more easily accessible from Japan. We visited Laos from May 2002 in order to find suitable grassroots activities for the AAI. We thought through what kinds of contributions the AAI could make for the agricultural and rural development of the country.

The following four areas were identified as possible fields of intervention.

- 1) Contributing to building a system of government extension services for the residents of the villages that were selected in our feasibility study,
- 2) Contributing to the development of small and medium size enterprises which process excess produce and products that do not last long in order to assist farmers to increase their income,
- 3) Contributing to local development, and thereby to environmental education, through technical assistance in the areas of organic farming, natural dye manufacture, tea production and food processing at the existing model organic farm, and
- 4) Contributing to the promotion of environmentally friendly agricultural practices that integrate agriculture, forestry and fisheries by purchasing a plot in Laos to demonstrate organic farming involving local farmers.

The organic farm mentioned in number 3 is located in the suburb of the popular tourist town of Vangvieng that lies about 150 km north of Vientiane. In recent years this area has been building a reputation as a scenic resort with its limestone karst mountains. There are many outdoor activities such as kayaking, fishing, trekking and camping and many young backpackers from Europe visit the area. No large-scale hotels have been built and many accommodations are guesthouses with a small number of rooms and bungalows. The organic farm grows mulberries, vegetables and fruits, and produces and sells value added products such as silk, mulberry tea, jam and fruit wines. There is also a health food restaurant that uses organic vegetables and chicken. Accommodation there is not for tourists in search of organic produce, but for people who would like to work on the farm in exchange for food and lodging. This system is called WWOF (Willing Workers on Organic Farms).

Last November, an AAI associate who is knowledgeable about textile designing, visited the farm to share her textile designing and plant dye techniques. In the future we are planning to send people who can provide skills in organic cultivation, tea processing and food processing. In this case, we do not plan to "teach" Japanese skills. Rather, we would like to try to extract good potential by finding out what the local residents are thinking through understanding the local skills. We believe only in this way we can identify the real needs of the people. For this kind of work it is highly important to spend enough time; i.e. the AAI staff members who will be sent to the region need to interact with people with a common vision over a long period. We firmly believe through this type of activity local residents can eventually take full ownership of the project. The AAI is determined to pursue activities truly beneficial to the local residents with a clear vision for agricultural development in Laos.



Mulberry tea production



Organic mulberry field



Organic lunch

Re-examination of Development Study

Part 5: Importance of the Preliminary Survey

A preliminary survey on development study entails various important activities such as (i) verification of the background conditions and contents of the project requested/proposed by the local government, discussion on the method of the target study, and confirmation of logistical matters (capacity) for hosting the project, (ii) collection and analysis of relevant references and information, plus field visits and (iii) negotiation over the scope of work (S/W) of the target study and signing of the project contract. This means that the nature of the target study will be determined during the preliminary survey period, and any confusion or misunderstanding/mistakes during the preliminary survey will affect the entire project afterwards. In other words, the preliminary survey has to be conducted with great care and consideration.

In the past, AAI has been involved in the preliminary survey for the study on pumped storage hydroelectric power development in Maharashtra, India, and more recently for the study on the management of forest reserves in the province of Comoe, Burkina Faso, and for a pilot study on community vitalization and afforestation in the Middle Shire, Malawi. The latter two recent cases, as reported in AAINews Vol.38 and Vol.40, are projects aiming at sustainable management of resources in a participatory manner. In Burkina Faso, the lack of funding and manpower had stagnated such efforts, while there was no specific/detailed forest management plan for better conservation and utilization of resources. In this context a request came for a development study on the establishment of a forest management plan, and a preliminary survey was conducted to verify the background and contents of the requested project and to determine the scope of the development study. In the case of Malawi, a management plan of natural resources in rural areas had already been set up by a development study conducted earlier. A pilot project was required in order to carry out this management plan, and technical support was requested for this pilot project, for which the preliminary survey team was dispatched.

Having taken part in these preliminary surveys as a member of the survey team, I was able to feel their importance on the ground. Negotiation over the S/W of the target study is a crucial part of a preliminary survey. Also, the signing event of the agreement on the upcoming project takes the form of a formal ceremony, with certain high-ranking people attending from the host counterpart side. Therefore, much effort is required for its preparation and prior informal consultation with the signing parties. Also, although in some cases consultants in the survey team are given some time set aside for their field visit/investigation, normally during surveys quite a few activities are packed into a short period of time. As a result, the survey team members have to complete their job in such a hurry that often they end up neglecting thorough discussions with their project counterparts over the important framework of the target study. Moreover, it is possible that such time constraints facing preliminary surveys may lead to a situation where the project ends up lacking the flexibility to incorporate potential changes in the requirements from the counterparts at a later stage.

Therefore, considering the importance of a preliminary study, I feel that much more time should be allocated to it. When I took part in a project formation study in Latvia I also felt that in the entire process of development activities, i.e. in the flow from project formation study – preliminary survey – target study to the project execution – communication and interaction with the project counterpart at an early stage (such as during the project formation study or the preliminary survey) is extremely important. In order to foster the sense of ownership of the project on the side of the counterparts, thorough and in-depth discussions and exchanges of opinions with them should be initiated as early as possible. Moreover, the current rules prohibit individuals and organizations who took part in the preliminary survey from participating in the target study phase. This system should also be reconsidered since the project can be executed more effectively when those who are well informed of, and know very well about the contents and nature of the project, are involved. While it is understandable that such a regulation is considered necessary for the sake of securing transparency and accountability for the project, more improvement and reconsideration seems to be necessary with regard to the development study system, including the very meaning of the preliminary surveys.



Meeting with a local association (Burkina Faso)



Meeting with the project counterparts (Malawi)

Mini-Series: Work and life in farms - Various movements in Japan

Part 2: Preservation and inheritance of traditional culture – reflections on the basic lifestyle

In Tama, Kawasaki city, Kanagawa prefecture there is a public museum called “Nihon Minka-en” (museum of old Japanese houses). It was established in 1967. Some 20 traditional houses and other old buildings are preserved in the open grounds of this museum, and in its exhibition hall one can get some basic knowledge about traditional Japanese houses. Inside the preserved houses items used on a daily basis in olden times are displayed, such as farming equipment, weaving machinery, and tools made of straw and bamboo. Open classes and demonstrations of making these traditional tools are held all year round at this museum, in collaboration with some local cultural societies e.g. “society for preserving traditional tool-making techniques” and “society of traditional paper making”. Today, while traditional rural villages engaged in primary industries are disappearing due to the shift in the country’s industrial structure, these societies are trying to preserve and hand over traditional manual techniques which used to be common in such villages. For this purpose they collect data on traditional tool-making techniques from all over Japan, and hold classes and demonstrations on a voluntary basis. I took part in a class on straw/bamboo craft making and Japanese paper making. The process of making such items using natural materials was a refreshing and enjoyable experience as it was something new for me. However, traditionally, people used to do paper-making in winter when the water is very cold, and straw/bamboo crafts were made at night after a day’s hard work on the farm. So “enjoyable” wasn’t probably the right word to describe such work for the people of the past. Still, it was nice to see all those who were participating in the class, working earnestly and enjoying the activities. The organizer of the class was, however, lamenting the absence of young people in their society to hand over the traditional techniques to.

In Niigata Prefecture there is a small settlement with some 20 old-style houses on the bank of the Nou River, 15km upstream from its mouth by the Sea of Japan. This is a heavy snow area with as much as 6m of snow piling up during winter, but the traditional thatched houses have survived so many harsh winters till today. However, as the residents of the settlement became older and the local population declines, more and more houses have lost their owners and have deteriorated. These traditional houses, made of natural materials and perfectly adjusted to the climate of Japan, are free from negative effects to human beings or the environment and their thick beams, bamboo-made ceilings, wooden flooring and traditional fireplace create a special soothing atmosphere. In the past when village life was still lively, specialized craftsmen and the villagers used to work together to build and maintain their traditional houses. Such collaboration contributed to forming a tight local community in which human relations were closely interwoven. One of the traditional dishes of this locality, “bamboo sushi” is made of locally available marine and farm products, and it is really delicious. They used bamboo leaves to preserve the sushi during summer, and this delicacy used to be served on auspicious occasions. Every aspect of village life was linked with farming, and developed into special local culture and tradition through the interaction of the people.

Recently, while more attention is being paid to the issues of food security and “alternative lifestyles”, new concepts and trends have emerged such as “food and agriculture education”, “slow food movement”^{*1}, “shin-do-fu-ji”^{*2} and green tourism^{*3}. However, the major trend of the world still inclines towards the over rich consumer society where cheap commodities of foreign origin flood the market, purchased, briefly used and thrown away as people’s lifestyles become westernized. Such a lifestyle, needing to burn fossil fuels, keep air-conditioning on all the time and live a comfortable and convenient life in the closed space of modern apartment buildings, is too far away from the basic farming life. The word “culture” comes from “to cultivate”. Traditionally culture has been nurtured, preserved and inherited along with agricultural, silvi-cultural and aqua-cultural life-styles, but after the Second World War most of us have distanced ourselves from such fundamentally cultural activities. However, I believe that our national or cultural identity can still be found in traditional culture which is today being fast forgotten. Only by reconsidering the basic lifestyle and preserving and inheriting our traditional culture, could we start understanding the real, humane, life-full lifestyle. I feel that such a lifestyle would eventually reduce the negative pressure on the environment of this planet, and can show us the direction that all countries in the world should head for in the future.

*1: A movement started in northern Italy in 1989. As opposed to fast food culture, the “slow food” movement aims at enjoying food slowly, eating traditional high-quality stuff while protecting small-scale local producers. It tries to reconsider the entire lifestyle of today through food.

*2: A Buddhist term meaning that it is better to live on food grown within one’s own locality, since one’s body and the surrounding soil are considered as one unity.

*3: Recreational activities to come close to the nature and culture of rural farming / fishing villages through interaction with local villagers. “Taiken minshuku” (local inns for real experience) offer one mode of green tourism.



Open class on traditional paper-making



Traditional Japanese house



Bamboo sushi (the local delicacy)