

"Human Resource Development"- Our Challenges in Training Activities

Part 2 Training work at the Tsukuba International Center

As introduced in AAI News Vol. 37 and 39, AAI has been putting a lot of effort into training activities, in order to utilize experience gained in developing countries into training works and at the same time to utilize experience in training into field works in developing countries. At the Tsukuba International Center, AAI has conducted courses on vegetable cultivation for Tajikistan and southern African countries. The objective of these courses is to nurture capacity building of human resources that will contribute to agricultural promotion in the particular country or region through technical training on vegetable cultivation for researchers and technicians who have been involved in agriculture research and extension activities. The main content is a series of technical training sessions ranging from formulation of plans for cultivation experimentation to practical training such as cultivation techniques, growth observation and compiling results of the experimentation. The curriculum is designed so that participants can absorb a wide range of technologies that can be applied in their own countries, including the acquirement of basic knowledge through lectures and field visits to local farms. In addition to teaching, it is also an important responsibility for us to select participants, to create training curricula, and to arrange various lectures, practical sessions and field visits. Both courses lasted for 4-5 months, however were conducted in different seasons. This meant that it was necessary to carefully consider our choices of vegetables and field visit sites.

One problem we faced was that participants had different levels of basic knowledge and language proficiency, and some would have problems fully understanding lectures. We conducted a benchmark test at the beginning of the courses in order to grasp individual levels of ability. The test results were communicated to the trainees at an early stage so that they would know their own level in order for them to develop individual objectives. What we felt strongly through the training was that trainers need to continuously study harder than the trainees. By doing so, trainees will feel their teacher's sense of passion. The sense of achievement on the part of the trainees is the same as that felt by the trainers; i.e. they are two sides of the same coin.

From this year, one of the evaluation criteria for the course is to what extent technologies that are applicable to participants' countries are taught. Practical work is conducted using materials prepared by trainers. However, it is necessary for trainees to acquire knowledge and skills enabling them to apply the newly gained technologies in their own countries, using materials obtainable in their countries. For instance, how would one judge the physical and chemical properties of soil that is obtainable for raising seedlings by soil block? How would one extract effective micro-organisms in order to create fermented fertilizers? How would one obtain nitrogen sources for making compost alternatives to chemical fertilizers and obtain materials other than straw? Mulching material can be grass, straw, leaves of bananas and dates instead of plastic sheets. Can we also use these materials for preventing drought, weeds and top soil run off and for controlling ground temperature? In this way it is important to tell the trainees about our experience in different countries and support their eagerness when they are trying to think of ways of applying skills and technologies they acquire in the course.

Our training session that fully utilizes experiments and practical work was very well received by the participants. In particular, they valued lectures and practical components at local farms, saying that they had a very unique opportunity to experience something they cannot do in their own countries. However, it tends to be time consuming to try to harness trainees' understanding through practical work as the core of the training curriculum. It is important to cater for participants with varied levels of experience and knowledge and to foster mutual understanding between trainers and trainees. Moreover, in order to conduct training that relates to different situations in the trainees' countries it is necessary for trainers to have sufficient techniques on hand to draw the connections and for the training session to have enough time. It may be beneficial to establish a "gathering hole" where trainees can go freely to meet trainers to discuss issues and concerns. This would increase the amount of time trainees and trainers can have to interact and help them foster their relationships. AAI is determined to continue offering high quality training, emphasizing technology that can be applied to developing countries, and valuing good relationships with each trainee.



Visit to grafting workshop



Learning different tomato cultivars



Visiting an organic farm