

Collaboration with universities as part of our international co-operation activities: Reflection from the lecture at Shizuoka University

Nowadays, probably partly because of the change of status of national universities into independent administrative entities collaborative activities in various fields between the public sector and academia, or public and private sectors, have been widely reported in the media. However, most of these activities are research collaborations. Universities assume two major roles: research and education. These days many companies are looking for people who can be immediately absorbed into the workforce without much on-the-job training, and universities must respond to such needs as well. As reported in AAI News Vol.39, AAI has been actively working with universities for the purpose of manpower development in the field of international cooperation, and also asking those universities to increase the opportunities for interaction. One such opportunity came from Shizuoka University, which requested us to give a special lecture on environmental restoration for students studying human environmental science at the Graduate School of Agriculture. The contents of the lecture included: characteristics of arid/semi-arid environment, the current situation of desertification, natural and social factors behind desertification, preventive measures against desertification, and the relationship between agriculture and the environment. It was a good opportunity for AAI to introduce our past experiences to students.

Graduate School of Agriculture, 11 November 2003
Course on Human Environmental Science

Special Lecture on Environmental Restoration

1. Participants self-introduction (10:30-11:00)
2. Environment of arid and semi-arid areas, and the current situation of desertification (11:00-12:00)
 - Characteristics of the arid and semi-arid environment
 - Desertification: current situation, preventive measures, challenges and future scope
 - Current situation of agricultural development in arid and semi-arid areas
3. Case studies (13:30-15:30)
 - Resources management in arid land: a case from Dhofar region, Oman
 - Resources management by nomadic livestock keepers in Syria
 - Forest plantation in UAE
 - Importance of environmental consideration in irrigation development: cases from Kenya and Pakistan
4. Q&A (15:30-16:00)

At the lecture, AAI staff talked about the background leading up to this special lecture, AAI's past and present activities and general issues on arid and semi-arid environment and desertification. During our talk we tried not to give mere textbook explanations, but rather we tried to give views and experiences gained during extended stays in arid areas, and also we tried to introduce problems which the students might be interested in looking at as their thesis topics. Regarding the current situation of desertification and preventive measures, while discussing the current problems and future prospects, we also tried to stress the importance of resources management thinking. In talking about agricultural development in arid areas, we mentioned the recent 'softening' trend of development assistance, as well as the importance of partnership activities with NGOs, local governments and universities. Moreover, we stressed the importance of having the 'sustainability' viewpoint, as well as of water saving especially in this "Century of Water".

In the afternoon session reports were given on some projects by those who had actually been involved in the projects, so that the real feeling of each case could be conveyed to the students. Specifically, we focused on the problem of over-grazing as a major cause of desertification, and talked about resources management in the Dhofar Region of Oman and the Abdel Aziz mountain range of Syria. Also discussed was the case of afforestation in UAE, including its technical challenges and future scope. In the presentation about the cases from Kenya and Pakistan, we discussed the importance of environmental consideration in developing irrigation systems, impacts on the environment and local livelihood, the importance of the basin-wide view and of participatory activities.

During the Q&A session the role of consultant in technical assistance was discussed, and we explained our role in development projects, our relationship with JICA, and our philosophy as consultants. We asked the students to write up their reflections about our lecture and questions, and we tried to answer them as much as possible. We would be most happy if our lecture provided a chance for students to think about international cooperation and if it helped them work on their research. Also, for us it was a good opportunity to learn what students today think about overseas cooperation and what sort of information we need to provide them with further. We would like to continue this sort of collaboration and interaction with universities in the hope that our activities will help students learn about the reality of development assistance, and help them get involved in international co-operation activities in the future.