

Collaboration with Universities as part of our International Cooperation Activities: Reflection from the Lecture at Ibaraki University

In the previous issue we reported on our seminar for students at Shizuoka University. This time we would like to report on a special lecture series given to graduate students at Ibaraki University. The request came from the Department of Agriculture for AAI to participate in a lecture series titled “Special Lectures on Agricultural and Environmental Engineering”. Specifically, we were requested to talk about the work of experts specializing in agricultural and environmental fields and involved in overseas agricultural development and environmental restoration projects, their entrepreneurship, things to be careful of and things to expect. We were to give lectures on these issues referring to the technologies, knowledge and research attitudes at different levels, that is, from the laboratory, pilot farm and actual field levels. Based on AAI’s experience, we decided to discuss the techniques, knowledge and relationship (communication issues) needed for agricultural and environmental experts, while talking about environmental conditions of arid and semi-arid areas, the current situation of desertification, natural and social factors behind environmental degradation, and specific cases of counter-desertification projects.

AAI delivered three lectures in total under the title “Starting Business Based on Technology and Knowledge About Agriculture and Environment; Professionals Rising to the Challenge of Desertification.” At the first lecture, just like the lecture at Shizuoka University, we explained the current situation of the environment and desertification in arid areas, resources management and the ‘softening’ of aid activities in developing countries, and discussed the role of consultants in technical co-operation. At the second lecture we reported on AAI’s activities such as development studies overseas and training courses in Japan, and also suggested a get-together (exchange session) with people currently studying at the Tsukuba International Center (TBIC). On the third day we took the students to the TBIC to learn more about the realities of the training, and it was followed by an exchange session (as suggested) with the trainees.

We discussed how we should proceed with this session, and decided on a sort of role-play practice. That is, the students became “petit” consultants and gathered information about the trainees’ home countries through interviews. The participants of the training course on vegetable cultivation techniques in southern Africa were from Botswana, Namibia, Swaziland, Lesotho and Zambia; countries with which the students were not very familiar. Therefore, the students seemed to be interested in learning about those countries in general, especially about the agriculture issues. In the morning before the exchange session the students were given some common information through presentations on each country. During the session both the trainees and students gave brief self-introductions, after which there were only one-on-one interviews so that everybody had a chance to talk. To let the students learn how to communicate, we helped them as little as possible.

After the session many students said that they regretted their poor English language skills. At the same time, there were also many who said they felt a renewed incentive for international work through this interaction with different cultures. The best part of this session was that somebody mentioned ‘hanami’ (cherry blossom viewing) at the end of the session and a “sports-cum-hanami party” took place under the cherry trees in full blossom at the TBIC. Some of the participants were even requesting to get together once again before the trainees went home. We believe that the basis of international co-operation is in this sort of individual interaction. If the students and trainees could feel the joy and beauty of such interaction, it was more than desirable for us. We hope that through these sorts of events, international interaction/exchange gets promoted and the networks of friends become wider and wider around the world. As a private company it is our great pleasure to be able to make any tiny contribution possible to developing the capacity of those who wish to be involved in international exchange and international co-operation. Last but not least, we would like to thank Prof. Hisashi Kobayashi who invited us to give the lectures at Ibaraki University, and the TBIC trainees from southern Africa for their co-operation.



Exchange Session



Group Photo



Hanami Party