

# AAINews

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## At a JIRCAS Workshop

On 13<sup>th</sup> December 2005, we had an opportunity to participate in a workshop titled “Research development for sustainable agricultural productions in arid areas in West Asia,” organized by the Japan International Research Center for Agricultural Sciences (JIRCAS). This workshop was a part of JIRCAS’s research aiming to improve sustainable agricultural production in arid areas in West Asia. Attending the workshop were various researchers from JIRCAS and other institutes in Japan as well as from overseas institutions such as the International Center for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas (ICARDA).

Some of the presentations made at the workshop were:

1. Research Structure of arid land agriculture research in West Asian countries;
2. Introduction of the Development of the Integrated Drought Risk Simulation Model (DRISiMo) and methods for measuring soil moisture, aiming to effectively utilize limited water resources;
3. Screening method for generative reproductive cytoplasm of drought resistant wheat cultivars;
4. Research on functions and forms of root systems of drought resistant crops;
5. Research trends in arid areas in the field of crop production.

Researchers from ICARDA reported on 1) the water harvesting methods in West Asia and North Africa, and 2) improvement in drought resistant genetic features of wheat. Furthermore, an Afghan technician introduced ongoing activities to reconstruct research fields in the country devastated by civil war. The workshop, as a whole, was extremely useful for us to be able to improve our grasp of recent research trends.

AAI has been involved in agricultural development studies relevant to the contents of the workshop, including the Project on Development of Efficient Irrigation Techniques and Extension in Syria and the Study of Central Agricultural Experiment Station Rehabilitation in Afghanistan. Through these activities, we strongly feel the importance of “locally appropriate technology”, “sustainable activities by local residents”, and “utilization of local resources.” These are key phrases of development assistance in recent years. It is emphasized that it is important to build up “something” which contributes to local peoples’ livelihoods, by introducing easily usable and applicable technologies which make full use of locally available resources. In the workshop, ICARDA introduced a magazine called “Indigenous Water-Harvesting Systems in West and North Africa”. This magazine is very useful as it introduces many water resource utilization technologies that can be applied in the field. We obtained a lot of information at this workshop, however at the same time, we felt that researchers should place more emphasis on development of familiar technologies that can be easily applied in the field.

Actually, during the Q&A session of the workshop, points were made about how to link research results with the actual people who need assistance, and the necessity of constantly providing feedback to the people in the research area about the research themes and topics, as well as the results. It should be obvious that any research topic of agricultural studies, as an applied science, needs to be set based on the actual problems people face on the ground. However, what we often hear at our work place is that many researchers do not fully consider the multifaceted problems of agriculture on the ground. Some people also point out that themes which are considered very important on the ground are often left untouched. Moreover, given the recent research trend of compartmentalization, it seems that there is a decrease in the number of researchers who are more comprehensively dealing with issues such as agricultural management, cultivation and agricultural extension.

Consultants like ourselves are in a situation which enables us to relatively easily obtain opinions and information from both researchers and agricultural practitioners on the ground. We have an important role as “glue” for information exchange between the researchers and practitioners, and we can act as a go-between for the two sides. Another important role we as consultants have is to pick up issues that tend to be ignored.

In Japan, AAI’s activities includes training, lecturing at universities and exchanges with research organizations. Overseas, AAI is involved in development studies and surveys and exchanges with NGOs. We find it very meaningful to communicate opinions of researchers and practitioners to each other, making use of various opportunities. We will continue to perform our every day duties as consultants, bearing in mind the critical role we play.