

Reconsideration of Support Activities for Agriculture and Farmers – Comparison between Syria and Japan

Part 6 - Reconsideration of support activities for agriculture and farmers (Last in the Series)

This series attempted to examine current situations and problems in Japan's support systems for agriculture and farmers, comparing Japan's issues with Syria's, and to utilize lessons learned for future support for developing countries. This series was triggered by the fact that we hosted counterpart participants from Syria and participated with them in field visits to learn about Japan's agriculture and extension activities. In farmer support projects we are involved in, support tends to be provided through the government and NGOs which support agriculture and farmers, rather than offering support to farmers directly. In this type of support, it is difficult to see the project impact on the ground. At the same time, if the support activities are conducted systematically, there is a high potential for the support to have ripple out effects to a large number of farmers. It is essential to consider the possible weaknesses and strengths and their relationship when providing support.

To summarize this series, based on knowledge and lessons gained from the Syrian counterpart training program, I outline different angles related to training contents and examine how to evaluate the applicability of the contents in the home countries of the participants.

| | Support for Experiment, Research and Extension Activities | Support for Organization of Farmers | Support for Non Governmental Sector |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|--|
| Training Subjects | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Visit to agricultural experiment centers - Visit to extension centers - Lecture on extension system - Visit to farmers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introducing agricultural cooperative activities - Introducing water users' association activities - Introducing examples of different support | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Visit to the Ground Work Project - Visit to activities of NPOs - Farms targeting tourists - Seed and nursery company |
| Participants' Tasks in Syria | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identification and confirmation of roles of agricultural experiment center and extension organization, and their utilization - Understanding of historical background - Significance of improving product quality - Legitimacy of value addition | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understanding of historical background - Judging the needs for a farmers' organization - Confirmation of applicable areas | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understanding support capacity and present circumstances - Understanding historical background - Examination of applicable areas |
| Roles of Japanese Specialist | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support for strengthening extension activities - Advice on farmer support methods - Assisting technology transfer with TOT | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introducing case studies - Support for organization | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provision of data and materials - Advice on application |

Setting future targets: There is a significant difference between Japan and developing countries, be it with agricultural systems, technical levels and surrounding economic and social circumstances. It is often difficult to apply the Japanese systems as they are, in developing nations, therefore, in aiding understanding of what is taught, it is necessary to adjust training substance in a way that better suits the situations in developing countries. However, it is possible to introduce Japan's case as a future target for the participants' country. For instance Japan's water users' associations are promoted as an integral part of efforts for equitable water distribution and land improvement. It is not possible to apply this system directly to Syria which has a totally different historical background.

Learning from history: Japan's extension system and agricultural cooperatives evolved over many years. Therefore, there is a lot one can learn from the past and processes, rather than trying to apply, or learn from, the present day system alone. For instance, rather than looking at Japan's current situation of extension projects being consolidated and diminished, there is more to learn from the close and trusting relationship between extension workers and farmers and how the friendly atmosphere was created during the time of active extension activities represented by the "green bicycle" approach which extension workers used to visit farmers.

Negative example: It is difficult to say "learn from Japan" nowadays. Japan's agriculture has a lot of problems which are not common in developing countries, including aging of farmers, a lack of successors, and increasing abandoned farmlands. Therefore our legislative system, organizational set-up and activities are designed to respond to the existing problems. These aspects might be useful as "negative examples" for learning.

The significance of training programs in Japan, in a surrounding with political, historical and environmental differences, is that they enable participants to discover techniques adaptable to their own countries, with a firm understanding and full acceptance of the differences that exist between Japan and their home countries. In order to enhance the actual effects of the training programs, it is necessary to extract useful lessons and techniques from both the strengths and weaknesses of Japanese way in supporting agriculture and farmers. It is also important for the training hosts to confirm necessary issues and challenges from the reactions of participants, in order to improve the quality of our future support.

This training program in Japan was designed to include the technical cooperation project staff from the Japan side. It was very meaningful for both the counterparts and the project staff to discuss the adaptability of different techniques, as we made field visits and listened to lectures together. Ideas coming from joint experiences and mutual understanding need to be passed on in the efforts to support agriculture and farmers in Syria.