

# AAINews

APPROPRIATE AGRICULTURE INTERNATIONAL

CO., LTD

TEL/FAX:+81-42-725-6250

1-2-3-403 Haramachida, Machida, Tokyo, 194-0013 JAPAN

E-mail: aai@koushu.co.jp Home Page: <http://www.koushu.co.jp>

## **An Introduction to the Farmer Field School (FFS) in the Community-Based Forest Management (CBFM) Programme in the Philippines**

The AAI mainly targets the Middle East and African countries so the Philippines, in South East Asia, was not particularly familiar territory. However, I had an opportunity to visit the country as a short-term JICA expert and my main duty was to implement extension activities as part of the Community-Based Forest Management (CBFM) Program. This is an on-going technical cooperation project. The extension activity was designed with the aim of promoting the sustainable use of natural resources by providing support for participatory and sustainable CBFM activities. The Farmer Field School (FFS), which was a participatory technology extension method developed by the FAO, was employed in the extension activity. Agricultural extension officers and CBFM coordinators were used as the FFS facilitators.

Originally, the FFS was developed in the late 1980s as a means of implementing an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and targeted a group of between 20 and 30 farmers. IPM-FFS involves comparative experimentations between IPM and non-IPM plots. These are called “learning fields”. They are studied from the time planting begins and throughout the growth period. Study continues until the time of harvest of rice, vegetables and other target crops. The plots are monitored and examined every week to gain new knowledge and create techniques that deal with cropping, diseases and pests, as well as to learn about agricultural ecosystems. It is also an empowerment process to nurture “thinking farmers” and “decision making farmers”.

The FFS is a highly rigorous extension method and has various rules. It has a framework to teach a set of techniques in a systematic manner. For instance, every week at the same time and at the same place, the members (participating farmers and facilitators) gather for a session that is specified by a set curriculum. Once these sessions are conducted according to the schedule and participating farmers continue to take part without dropping out, a certain amount of results can be expected. Naturally, the FFS implementation details and impacts on participating farmers depend very much on the quality of facilitators. Therefore, it is essential to train high quality facilitators for the success of the FFS.

Because of the nature of the FFS, regular and continuous commitments are required on the part of both the FFS participants and facilitators. In particular, for a project like this, which deals with the management and conservation of forest resources, farmers’ incentive to participate in the FFS tends to be weak if only the conservation aspect is emphasized. Therefore, the FFS takes the approach of supporting and improving the livelihood of farmers, combining various Income Generating Activities (IGA), while reducing pressure and dependence on forest resources. Moreover, it is essential to have government’s budgetary support for various FFS related expenses including stationery, materials, training service fees (facilitator’s fees) and transport fees. The FFS is an extension tool and what is important is the proactive and continuous involvement of farmers, as well as the role of facilitators to support the process. There is the potential to apply the FFS to other extension methods, making the most of some of the intrinsic features of the FFS approach, without necessarily dwelling entirely on its systematic form.

(By Koto, August 2008)



An FFS session under a mango tree



Presentation by a farmer



Example of a “learning field”