

## Report from the third country training in Tunisia

I visited Tunisia with seven Syrian counterparts from July 31 to August 8, 2009. It was the third country training, part of JICA's support for Development of Efficient Irrigation Techniques and Extension in Syria phase II. All counterparts were irrigation system specialists. Three were from the General Commission for Scientific Agricultural Research, four were from the Directorate of Modern Irrigation Conversion. The purpose of this training was to visit research facilities and extension centers, and to learn about irrigation systems managed collectively by farmer's groups. We visited the Commissariats Regionaux au Developpement Agricole (CRDA) and the Groupement de Développement Agricole (GDA) that administers shared wells in three prefectures, namely Nabeul, Kairouan and Monastir, where modern irrigation-based agriculture is in operation.

Responding to enthusiastic requests from the counterpart, on the first day, we visited a factory producing polyethylene pipes and PVC pipes for irrigation. They were particularly interested in the process of printing model numbers on the pipes. In Syria, the pipes produced in town factories do not have model numbers and there is little quality control. Therefore, farmers in Syria cannot judge the quality of pipes, often resulting in the use of low quality pipes. These farmers have little trust in irrigation equipment in general, and tend to become negative towards modernization of irrigation facilities. Proper quality inspection and control of irrigation pipes is an important issue to be tackled in Syria.

On the second day we visited the national research organization. From the third day we traveled to the three prefectures. In each prefecture we first visited CRDA and learned about the state of agriculture from the staff, followed by a visit to the GDA. GDAs are cooperatives of farmers for joint irrigation system management. They are financed from water fees collected from participating farmers. The GDA committee members have two-year terms of service, and six members are elected by the participating farmers. The committee is responsible for water resource management including development and maintenance of wells and water fee collection. To dig one well, the participation of a minimum of 15-16 farming households are necessary. When there is good rain, the number of participating farming households decrease, which creates budgetary problems. However, just one prefecture such as Kairouan has nearly 300 active GDAs, and it seemed that communal use of wells is very well accepted by many farmers. There is even an annual competition

among the GDA units nationwide. The Bekalta 1 GDA unit in Monastir prefecture, which has won the competition in the past, has sophisticated organizational administration. It not only manages irrigation systems, but also distributes fertilizers, pesticides and mulching materials to farmers as well as collecting used plastic containers for recycling. In Tunisia, through the use of communal wells, farmers can irrigate their lands at a low cost. By contrast, in Syria, individual farmers dig their own wells on their own land, and irrigation activities are also carried out on an individual basis. This situation is considered to pose a major obstacle for achieving water savings.

Tunisia and Syria are both Arabic speaking countries despite the different dialects. The fact that participants could communicate directly with their hosts without an interpreter was a definite advantage for the training. I was the only person who could not understand Arabic, and our counterparts from Syria had active exchanges enjoying the dialectic difference. There was no need for an interpreter, and lively discussions and debates took place between participants, as well as a significant amount of opinion/information exchange. For me, it presented a great opportunity to get to know Syrian people, through traveling with them. For example, I learned that they take everything necessary from their home country, even when traveling to another country with a shared culture. Items carried included sugar, tea, herb tea and bread. Although it was only nine days, traveling together it helped cement the bond among the counterparts. I hope that we will be able to make the most of this experience in the future project implementation. (By Nakayama)



Counterpart participants listening to a presentation at the GDA unit



Group photo at the farm