

Revisiting Oman

Since the mangrove project in Oman was completed, I have not visited the country for some time. However, recently I had an opportunity to pay a short visit and therefore would like to discuss Oman again in AAI News. When I first visited the country in 1989, I could enter Oman from the neighboring UAE by car and move around the country freely. I visited many oases along the coastal areas and inlands. In particular, in the small oasis among the mountains, I remember having been impressed by how each date palm tree was well taken care of by the farmers. At the bottom of individual trees, livestock dung was carefully placed, and canals and water basins seemed to have been well maintained. The picturesque scenery of date palm farms remains vividly in my memory. It was also surprising that Omani farmers themselves climb up the tall trees and prune them without relying on foreign laborers.

My second visit was in 1997. It was a very rare occasion - all the AAI staff gathered in Muscat. Based on the discussion that time, we established the Muscat Fund, which has been used as a means for our "NGO-like" activities supporting grassroots initiatives. I visited the country a third time in 2003 participating as a GIS specialist in the development study the mangrove reforestation project. My good memory from the third visit was the full days I spent with the GIS staff of the Ministry of Regional Municipalities, Environment and Water Resources. The GIS section had staff from Balochistan as well as from Zanzibar. In addition to Arabic, Urdu and Swahili were often heard in the rooms. As I had spent many years in Dubai, Kenya and Tanzania, I felt very relaxed here. Looking at Dhows in the Mathura Harbor and walking around the Souk, one could feel the ancient trading history from India to Zanzibar, and this is one of the attractions of Oman.

This time, my stay was for one month from February to March, and I could enjoy the best season in the year. I could also visit Jabal Akhdar which I had never been fortunate enough to visit earlier. Jabal Akhdar means green mountains and I could see vividly green terraced fields on the slopes of the dry mountains. This made me really understand what their name derived from. During the visit, an alumni gathering for ex-JICA participants was held. The meeting was attended by 20-30 people, including ex-participants, embassy staff and JICA staff, and an attractive program was prepared. When we gathered at a small marina, a video introducing Japan and another video introducing Oman were shown at the start of the event. The Omani video was produced by the Ministry of Tourism, and featured the beautiful nature of Oman showing deserts and the ocean. After watching the videos, we went on a 1.5-hour cruise, enjoying the views of beach resorts from the sea and observing coral reef ecosystems on a glass-bottom boat. Then we sailed to the off-shore area and enjoyed dolphin watching. We could really experience part of what was introduced in the video. After the cruise, we had a lunch at the marina and exchanged information. It was a short alumni gathering but very rich in content.

Oman was always one of my favorite countries, but with this visit, I have grown even more affectionate towards the place. That is because I could really see and feel everywhere the zealotness of Omani people to develop their own country. Oman is about to graduate from ODA, and will move into forging equal partnerships with countries such as Japan. With this in mind, AAI would like to contribute to implementation of a new type of cooperation activities that are appropriate to the post-ODA era, making the most of cooperative relationships and personal connections which we have nurtured in the past years. (Feb. 2010 by Hiroyasu Onuma)



Mathura's Harbor and souk bustling with tourists



Oasis of the inland town of Nizwa



Terraced fields in Al Jabal al Akhdar

Thoughts on cherry blossom viewing: from group to team

It is spring and the season for flower viewing. Each year, AAI organizes a barbecue party under fully blooming cherry blossoms, inviting participants at Tsukuba and other friends of the AAI. In this event, we try to provide support, which is a little different from the training sessions, to ensure that participants can take the lead in preparation, organization during the event and tidying up, dividing work between themselves.

Although we talk about independent work by the participants, it is the first experience like this for them, and the preparation work is very slow. They stare at the ingredients for a while and buzz around saying how different the meat looks compared to that in their own countries etc. We first show them the tools and methods for plate preparation, how to chop onions finely for the typical tomato and onion salad, show them how we use a stainless steel bowl used in the training for making Kimuchi cabbage salad, how we use a plastic bag to marinate meat with seasoning for the BBQ etc., then leave the rest to the participants.

They are a group of members participating in the vegetable cultivation training course. While a group is a collection of people, a team is a collection of people who work jointly. With a common objective, each team member's role is decided and through individuals fulfilling their roles, the objective is achieved. Sharing the sense of achievement leads to strengthening of trust and solidarity among team members.

Having said that, it is not that we started the BBQ

event thinking about this kind of grand vision. It is simply a seasonal enjoyment to have fun with our friends, eating and drinking while viewing exquisite cherry blossoms. But through working together for things like the BBQ, a group can become a team, leading to the concept of "collaboration: - helping each other and achieving a common goal." In addition, it is an opportunity to learn the importance of preparation to ensure that the BBQ will be a success. It may be retrospective thinking, but may speak to the point.

Furthermore, through the BBQ event, one sometimes discovers participants' true natures and unexpected characteristics. In the long 10-month vegetable cultivation training course, we have several opportunities for this kind of BBQ event. We would be very glad as the setters of the events, if these events contribute to mutual understanding and teamwork.



Ready to start BBQ



Smiles under the full cherry blossoms



Dancing participants



You grill and I eat....

Rice cultivation in Africa <Part 3>

Upland rice cultivation in Uganda

Uganda's rice cultivation is mainly paddy rice, grown in the low-land wetlands in the eastern part of the country where it has been cultivated for the last hundred years. The country has 70,000 ha of paddy - rain fed and irrigated paddies combined. On the other hand, the upland rice variety is still new and cultivation has been very limited. However, as the NERICA variety was introduced, the cultivation area has been increasing rapidly – from 1,500 ha in 2002 to 40,000 ha in 2008. In order to meet the growing demand for rice, development of irrigated paddy is effective. In 2009, I participated in the NERICA Rice Promotion Project in Uganda as a short-term expert to study the current situation of the cultivation techniques of upland variety farmers. Here, based on the experience, I would like to introduce how farmers in Uganda are viewing and using the upland variety cultivation technique.

This investigation targeted farmers in the area around the National Crop Resources Research Institute near Kampala. The target site is a gently hilly area, and many farmers were cultivating in the relatively flat area in valleys rather than on the hill slopes. The lower flatter area is more appropriate for upland rice cultivation because of its higher water table and more fertile soil that has accumulated organic matter. Many farmers became interested in upland rice cultivation after seeing the crop cultivated by farmers who were trained and guided by project counterparts to start cultivation as initial extension targets. Most farmers had less than one year experience in upland rice cultivation, and many started cultivation with seeds that they bought from the pioneer farmers. Most of the farmers were cultivating NERICA 4, and the cultivation area was mostly small scale, or around 0.1 ha. The largest cultivation area was 1.7 ha.

As there was no existing cultivation technique, the basic knowledge of cultivation was also passed on by the pioneer farmers, and therefore followed the cultivation guidelines developed by the project. For



Upland rice field in the valley between hills

upland rice cultivation, weeding is the important point for increasing yields. In order to make weeding easier, it is important to plant the seeds in rows. We could observe all the farmers, including farmers around the target areas, seeding in rows. Inter-row space was between 25 and 40 cm, which was close to the 30 cm recommended by the project. All the farmers performed weeding three times during the cultivation period, which was also in accordance with the project's cultivation guidelines.

As explained above, techniques that the project promoted were absorbed by the farmers. However, there were also some examples whereby farmers were applying techniques used on existing crops to upland rice. Sickles for harvest were not commonly available, and farmers were typically using hatchets in large plots and harvesting only ear in small plots. Threshing was mostly done by hitting rice ears with a pole. For this, farmers said that harvest without straw is more convenient. The survey area was never before a rice cultivation area. This meant that there was no rice mill. For milling, the farmers needed to take paddy to the mills in a nearby town. For domestic consumption, many farmers were using pestles and mortars which they normally use for grinding maize. Furthermore, many farmers were practicing double cropping and inter-cropping between upland rice and maize, in contrast with paddy rice cultivation which is mostly single cropping. Although this is not directly related to cultivation techniques, I could see people using rice straw as thatch and for walls of huts near the rice plots. I felt that upland rice is penetrating the local people's lifestyles.

Still, upland rice cropping in Uganda is in its infancy. Although farmers are adding their innovation to cultivation techniques, in order to establish upland rice cultivation, it is important to increase production efficiency with the use of sickles and threshing machines, and to improve market access through measures including establishment of rice mills. In addition, it is necessary to pay attention to potential problems, for example pest outbreak, which may arise in future as the cultivation areas increase.



Pestle and mortar (left)
A hut with rice straw roof (right)

Bridging training and extension activities <Part 2>

Clarification of extension needs and implementation of training that is directly useful for extension activities: Case study from JICA Tsukuba

AAI has been implementing the group training course: “Vegetable Cultivation Technology II” since 2005. From 2010, AAI has also been entrusted to deliver the group training course: “Vegetable Cultivation Technology for Small Scale Farmers”. The training program these days has an “action plan” as a training component, and training objectives have shifted from the previous leader training type to a train-the-trainer program aiming to develop the human resource base in developing countries in the broad sense through training participants to acquire skills for training others in their home countries. It is requested to formulate the extension activity action plan to increase effectiveness of extension activity. In this issue, we would like to introduce various procedures and twists to bridge the training in JICA Tsukuba and the work area of participants in their own countries.

Having individual themes and problems raised in the inception reports prior to coming to Japan, participants attend lectures, master theories through individual and group experiments and practical sessions, and see the actual application of the theories at field visits. The ambiguous problem at the inception report stage becomes clearer after the lectures and workshop on problem analysis and individual interviews/discussions with technical advisors, leading to the decision on the theme of individual experiments. Once individual experiments begin, field days, mid-term progress report presentation and group discussion meetings on the results are organized, which should guide the participants to develop action plans. The results of experiments and practical sessions are recorded in technical reports and an action plan to improve the participants’ jobs will be developed. Action plans are drawn up with careful confirmation of whether the information and knowledge gained through individual experiments and what was learned in the training course are reflected and whether these are really something that can be applied in the participants’ home countries. By revising through these checks, by the time of the action plan presentation session just before participants’ return home, their plans become more tightly focused on actions that can be implemented in their daily work in their home countries. For evaluation tests of newly introduced technologies, it is necessary to have an implementation plan of a minimum 3-year period, to reproduce the technologies in their home countries, as the results are evaluated using locally appropriate

materials and methods. Therefore action plans often entail on-farm experiments involving local farmers. Factors and levels that are important in experiment plans have to be developed with full consideration to issues such as social and natural environmental conditions and feasibility of material procurement at the local level. The final draft action plans are expected to be shared with other staff in the participants’ work division after their return home in November.

As described above, we have been trying to improve the action plan formulation process so that it will include actions that are implementable at the participants’ work place. This is one of our efforts to link training courses and the field. In addition, from 2010, in order to enhance the participants’ understanding, as part of the inception report presentation, participants will be asked to discuss what kinds of activities they would like to engage in, in their home countries after the training. This will enable the participants to reconfirm their post-training action plans during the training period. We also added a section “describe useful subject learned and applicable to your duty is preferable” in the weekly evaluation sheets that are filled out and submitted by the participants. Through the monthly consolidation of the evaluation sheets and our feedback to the participants, we hope to ensure that the action plans at the end will be meaningful.

Furthermore, in addition to the above mentioned efforts in our training activities in the field of extension, we hope to further improve the field day activities. To date, field days were merely the opportunities for participants to make presentations on the mid-term progress of their experiments. However, we hope to make the field day provide a place for practicing extension techniques so that the participants will be able to communicate necessary information in an accurate and effective manner for their extension activities. Through these efforts, we expect that contents of our training courses will become highly relevant to actual practical work on the ground.



Field day – participant play a role as an extension worker and others as farmers