

Bridging training and extension activities <Part 4>

Implementing training courses that are useful for extension activities

When we started the virtual technique extension meeting preparation process, we provided the following explanation to the participants to begin with, in relation to the objectives of the training and proceedings of the meeting; the scene set in the virtual meeting is: a new technique ready for extension has been developed at an experimental station in prefecture A. Through the technique extension meeting, the new technique is to be transferred to extension officers in different areas so that they can start actual extension activities.

In this training, the participants are divided into two groups. One group aims to transfer established techniques to extension officers. The other group's job is to extend the technique to farmers. The objective of the virtual meeting is to learn about extension activities through presentations and questions and answers in role playing.

The first group dealt with a new training method for watermelon. At the meeting venue, tea and sweets were provided. Information materials with presentation summary and an easy explanation of the new training method with diagrams were distributed. The presentation was made using a power point projector. Possible questions from farmers were also considered and dealt with including relevant items in the presentation evaluation sheet. These included questions such as notable characteristics of the technique, the difference between the new technique and the existing techniques, and the economic advantages. The second group used an imaginary technique related to the planting density of potatoes. In this group, no information materials were provided. The presentation was done using large paper sheets showing in large letters the presentation summary and the results of the use of new techniques, which were put up on the blackboard. A diagram showing the changing distribution of sizes of crops resulting from differing planting densities was very easy to understand using different colors in a tactical manner, and full consideration was given to supporting the easy understanding of the audience.

In this training course, we teach that verification work for improvement and introduction of appropriate techniques should be done through experimentation and research. However, extension activities of improved techniques are left to individual participants. Our concern has always been how the participants can be supported to perform their extension tasks given that we cannot directly assist participants' work in their countries after the courses. Many of the participants are extension officers. If we can create opportunities for sharing their knowledge and ideas pertaining to extension activities, it would help their work after returning home. Therefore, we trialed the virtual

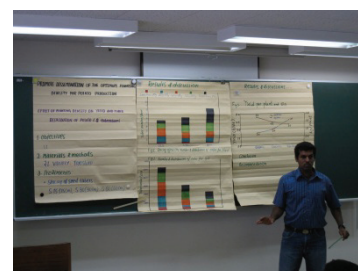
technique extension meeting, using role play and preparatory meetings in small groups, as part of the training program. In implementing this training program, in order to ensure that those participants can clearly picture the process in the program and role play for the presentation part, it was essential to enhance the participants' understanding on the purposes of the training and procedures for implementation. Fortunately, the process went smoothly due to the participants' prior experiences in similar extension activities.

In order to bring out individual participants' knowledge and experience and to promote effective sharing with other participants, the following points were important for us, as the trainers: (i) to be a good listener, (ii) to create the atmosphere and opportunities for every member of the group to speak in the meetings without hesitation, and iii) not to limit the time in the initial meeting and ensure mutual respect and listening to one another's opinions. From the 2nd meeting, a leader naturally emerged in each group who could facilitate subsequent meetings. However, it was also important for the instructors to observe the discussions and steer the discussions to an agreement supported by the majority rather than influenced unduly by opinions of group members with loud voices. It was also felt that the instructors need to provide resourceful judgment based on varied professional experiences in order to nurture participants' ability to devise their own presentation methods and make concrete preparations in the program.

In the training involving small group meetings, a sense of unity emerged among the participants through mutual support. Small group discussions fostered understanding between different group members. During the preparation of supporting documents for presentations, group members explained technical expressions to those who had insufficient understanding and provided active support to those who were lagging behind in their preparation. It was suggested that this kind of training method is effective for training that targets people with field experience, rather than the lecture-type method which predominantly involves only one-way communication.



Distributing presentation materials



Second presentation