

Close friends from far countries <Part 3>

AAI's training follow-up program

Activities and future program of ex-participants

Targeting the returnees of the JICA Tsukuba training course, we conducted a follow up survey in order to explore possibilities for future support and cooperation and for development of joint projects. Further to the previous issue of AAINews, we would like to introduce activities of ex-participants whom I visited this time, taking stock of the current status and future tasks.

Many participants from different parts of the world are agricultural extension workers. Some are researchers at agricultural experiment station. There are also lecturers at colleges, and one of the ex-participants in Zambia I visited this time was a lecturer. Every year, he teaches raising tomato seedling techniques to between 140 and 150 students at the Natural Resources Development College (NRDC), using what he learned in the vegetable cultivation course in Japan. He was providing practices to the students aiming at improving the core techniques of tomato cultivation, from soil making to healthy seedling production using nursery pots. His enthusiasm inspired his employer to build a large-scale green house for practice of tomato cultivation. Within the green house, he was conducting experiments mixing coconut coir dusts or peat moss with soil to compare tomato growth. He said with a smile that although he would like to have equipment to analyze soil components, he has no means to purchase such equipment. He had the favorable attitude of trying to achieve as much as possible within his ability, despite the situation of having a suboptimal budget for his activities.

In Malawi, the most suitable season for tomato production in open fields is just after the rainy season. As horticultural techniques using green houses are too expensive for most farmers, open field planting is most popular. The rainy season during the summer season (October - March) can be too wet for tomato production and in the winter time (July - September) low temperatures hamper production. Therefore, most farmers plant after the rainy season from April to June. The concentration of the planting period brings about excessive production, resulting in a sharp fall in the market prices. The largest challenge facing Malawi's tomato production is how to space the shipping timing throughout the year in order to maintain a certain level of price. For this, the ex-participants were providing technical guidance to overcome the problem of rainy season cultivation by tackling technical issues related to production. For example, techniques such as covering the plants with simple plastic sheeting against rain or using fungicides, which were introduced in the JICA

Tsukuba training course, were fully utilized. In addition, in Blantyre in the southern part of the country, the ex-participants introduced a new means of marketing the products, on a trial basis, by establishing roofed "platforms" (road stations) to provide places for sales. Moreover, although it ended up as an idea only, due to the transfer of the ex-participants, there was also an action plan to develop a contract between farmers and hospitals to adjust excessive production. We heard that all these marketing techniques originated from the training course in Japan.

As above, looking at the ex-participants' individual activities, it became apparent that they are trying to solve issues they face in a variety of situations using techniques and thinking that were attained in the JICA Tsukuba training course. It should be possible to establish a network to link the ex-participants' knowledge and experiences after their return, with a view to improving the on-going training courses. We are also exploring the possibility of establishing a mutual collaboration system with ex-participants with a view to jointly developing technical cooperation projects in the future, by organizing the Japanophile ex-participants organically in a particular country or region. These attempts may be just a small step in the right direction but we hope to report on this again when things shape up in the near future.



The Zambian participant the NRDC with the seedling nursery in the background



Trial sales of vegetables at a platform in Blantyre, Malawi