

Travelogue from Romania

I returned to Romania in December 2010, five years after my previous visit when I served as a Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteer (JOCV). Romania is an eastern European country located on the west bank of the Black Sea and enjoys an annual rainfall of approximately 600 mm and its fertile black soil yields wheat, corn and sun flowers which are planted on a large scale. In the Carpathian Mountains which dominate the center of the country, fruit orchards are grown and livestock husbandry is practiced. 30 % of the total domestic employment is generated by the agriculture sector and overall the country has relatively good natural and socioeconomic conditions for farming.

On the other hand, if one looks at the GDP in Romania, the agriculture, forestry and fishery sectors only account for less than 10%. It is a very low figure compared to the high percentage of farming population. This is because of the fact that 95 % of the farming population are subsistence and semi-subsistence farmers who only sell their surplus products when it is available. My duty as a JOCV was to support the organization of agriculture cooperative bringing the small scale farmers to work together.

There were always many farmers participating when seminars on forming cooperative development were held, indicating a high level of interest among the farmers. However, they were not necessarily active when it came to the actual establishment of cooperative. Under the communist system, lands were confiscated by the State and people had the image of the old collective farming system when hearing about cooperative.

During my work, I decided to go and help the work of farmers - one farm per day. Although it was a slow business requiring diligence, for me, it was like "killing four birds with one stone." I could learn about different aspects of local farming and see farmers' lifestyles first hand. At the same time I could explain about cooperative while working together in the field, building trusting relationships. One thing I always looked forward to was the lunch which was provided to me as the reward for my labor. Meals and home-made wine at individual farms were absolutely delicious. Regrettably, it did not get to the stage of actually forming cooperative during my term but I believe I was able to lay the groundwork for my successors by establishing a foundation of trust with the farmers.

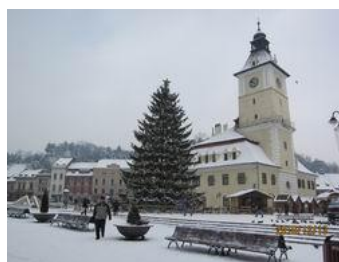
Romania in those days was full of high expectations prior to joining the European Union. The country subsequently achieved its long-term desire of becoming an EU member and on my return I was looking forward

to seeing how Romania had changed.

The transformation in the capital, Bucharest, was stunning. Many luxury cars zoomed around the city and the formerly graffiti infested metro walls were beautifully painted in white. The sight of young people with smart phones seemed to reflect the glory of the EU membership. Contrastingly, the village where I had lived was exactly as it had been, as if time had stopped there. Comparing the nostalgic pastoral scene and the totally transformed city, I had mixed feelings about the realities in the transitional period of the political system.

Former counterpart welcomed me with the same smile as before. According to him, although cooperative was formed since my departure, there has been little practical activity. After joining the EU, support from Japan was terminated and his cooperative was forced to make a major adjustment to its course. However, he continues to work for the cooperative without losing his passion, which made me feel proud again about the fact that I could work with him. I sincerely hope that his tireless efforts will bear fruits.

While I was able to forge deep friendships through working with the farmers, I was faced with the difficulty of supporting establishment of cooperative. I felt that it was critical to attain clear achievements within the limited time available, and to clarify the path for achieving the objectives. I joined AAI January 2011 and am involved in the training program at JICA Tsukuba. I am looking forward to it while at the same time feeling slightly nervous about dealing with the participants who have been selected from different countries. As I did in Romania, I hope to build new friendships at Tsukuba. (Sawada Feb. 2011)



The white winter in Romania was as beautiful as before. The fir tree in front of the church was decorated and the Christmas preparation was progressing.



Reuniting with my counterpart, drinking hot wine with cinnamon. His friendly smile was the same as ever.

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

Rice Cultivation in Africa <Part 6>

Summary of the series and future challenges

In the past five issues of AAINews we have reported on rice cultivation in Africa. These included the formulation of the Development Study on National Irrigation Master Plan in Tanzania, upland rice cultivation in Uganda, current state of rice cultivation in Guinea, and Area-focused Training Course on Upland Rice Variety Selection Techniques for Africa.

There are a number of ways for classifying the rice cultivation systems in Africa. Although some classification systems are unique to individual countries, the four classification types introduced in the 4th part of the series can be applied for different parts of Africa. These are namely slope of hilly area, inland area, floodplain and coastal lowland area. In this last part of the series, we will summarize case studies that were introduced in each part in the series using these four classifications.

In the first part, we introduced the efforts of the Coalition for African Rice Development (CARD) to increase rice production in Africa. CARD classifies rice cultivation system in three categories namely irrigated paddy field, rain-fed lowland wetland, and rain-fed up land field. The organization works on selection of high-yield and locally adapted varieties, improvement in cultivation techniques and promotion of necessary inputs (water, fertilizer etc) to increase yield. Three geographical conditions, namely inland area, floodplain and coastal lowland area are applicable in Guinea. Depending on the availability of irrigation systems, coastal lowland can be divided into two categories - irrigated paddy field or rain-fed lowland paddy field. Slope of hilly area would be rain-fed up land field.

In Tanzania introduced in part two, the annual precipitation is between 500-1,000 mm. Whether they grow rice in paddy in inland area or in floodplain, irrigation is basically essential. Therefore the nation-wide irrigation master plan was formulated. Given that there are insufficient financial resources, and insufficient technical and organizational capacity necessary for irrigation facility development and management, a manual was produced focusing on small scale irrigation facility development. Official guidelines were also developed for establishing a system for development and promotion of small scale irrigation led by prefectural government with full participation from local farmers.

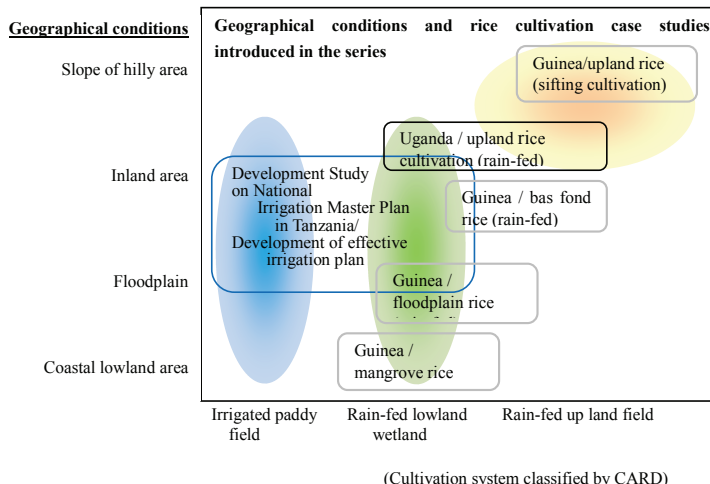
Part three focused on upland rice cultivation in Uganda, introducing local farmers' efforts to stabilize upland rice cultivation in inland area which is considered to contain a high level of

water and nutrients in the soil compared to slope of hilly area.

In the example of Guinea in Part four, we reported on basic and simple paddy rice cultivation in inland area and floodplain along rivers. The country's development plans promote development of low-input irrigation facilities and rice cultivation that is appropriate for local environmental conditions. Unlike Tanzania, Guinea has an extremely large amount of rainfall and experiences frequent flooding. These aspects need to be considered in irrigation facility planning and consolidation, as well as in development of new cultivation techniques.

As understood in these examples, even with shared geographical elements, the environment for rice cultivation differs depending on rainfall and its distribution. It is important to identify appropriate technologies for the particular environments. It is also important to understand differing appropriate cultivation environments both for paddy rice and upland rice.

Rice, whether it is paddy or upland, requires a large quantity of water compared with other crops. In order to increase the productivity and its stability, it is essential to deploy wisdom to effectively utilize limited water resources. Effective utilization which AAI has been working on is considered to be becoming critical. The status of rice in Africa is different from that in Asia. Rice cultivation needs to be an integral part of the multiple cultivation system involving various crops that are appropriate for the local environmental conditions. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to develop techniques, ensuring effective utilization of a variety of geographic conditions, and diversification of crops and cropping periods. Furthermore, in continuing to be involved in rice cultivation in Africa, AAI will try to foster relationships with the 50 ex-participants from 16 countries who participated in Area-focused Training Course on Upland Rice Variety Selection Techniques for Africa introduced in Part five.



Visiting the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms

We have already visited Ushimado, Okayama Prefecture and Satomi, Ibaraki Prefecture to explore possible ways to increase AAI's involvement in Japan's agriculture. This time, we could visit the agribusiness company Nanairo (seven colors) Farm Pty. Ltd, which is run in a system that was new to us. The Nanairo Farm grows organic vegetables in 2-ha farming plots located in Yamato and Ayase, in the central part of Kanagawa Prefecture. Currently, the farm is run by seven staff dealing with everything from clerical business to farming work. The representative, Mr. Katayanagi started farming when he was 45 after running a family business upon graduating from university. After repeated trials and errors he finally came to the business model known as CSA.

CSA is an agricultural business model based on membership, often translated as "agriculture underpinned by communities" or "community supported type agriculture". In CSA farms, local residents become members of the farm, paying a certain amount to the farm in membership fees. The farms are run with these fees. Because farmers can access cash before planting, uninfluenced by unpredictable yields and transitional period, it makes it possible for them to have a stable business. Another key characteristic of the CSA is that some members want to be actively involved in farming and they participate in farming activities and distribution and shipping work after harvest as core members or volunteers, forming communities centered on agricultural. Presently, all the shipping work at the Nanairo Farm is done by volunteers. While we were listening to Mr. Katayanagi's explanation at the farm, some staff and members were busy with shipping and distribution related work. At the end of the work, everybody gathered to have lunch together. Mr. Katayanagi said that a community is something that is formed by people who gather because of mutual interest and joint activities.

The Nanairo Farm's community originates from local currency communities. Local currency is a currency traded only in a specific area. Such currencies are often distributed as rewards for local community activities including volunteer activities, and are considered to be useful for promoting community work. In the case of the

Nanairo Farm, its predecessor Toratanu Farm which produced flower seedlings was part of the local currency system. This existing local currency community, which was already acting as the core of the community activities, became a trigger for the CSA farms.

In addition to the already existing communities, the Nanairo Farm has developed a mailing list and dispatches information from the farm on a daily basis to the registered members, reporting on the work and any happenings on the farm. Those who wish to, can participate in the farming work. The members are not merely treated as clients. Rather the farm is making efforts to make people become interested in farming. By raising awareness of the consumers about the cultivation scene, they are trying to change the consumers' perceptions and understanding and expand the circle of communities. Formation of communities involving consumers, as in this example, may be possible because the farm is close to the cities and towns where consumers are living. However, the activity is interesting in that there is no division between the producers and consumers. It is about the formation of a community centered around local farming activities.

The current situation surrounding Japan's agriculture is difficult. According to the statistics of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, the average annual income of open field vegetable farmers from farming was 1.77 million yen in 2009. This is significantly lower than the average income of company employees. The Nanairo Farm's effort is characterized as trying to maintain farming under the difficult conditions in Japan, jointly with producers and all the members. Moreover, a "Farmer's Market" which sells surplus products is an important activity of the Nanaimo Farm. The Farm is eyeing the possibility of expanding the business scale using the government's various subsidy systems to become the "6th industry" (agricultural business form with diversified business components from agricultural production, processing, shipment and distribution, including the possibility for export and other outlet development). The Nanairo Farm is located close to the AAI office and we hope that there will be future opportunities for collaboration.



Seven color farm shipping and transportation centre



Vegetables on sale at the shipping centre



Listening to Mr. Katayanagi's explanation at the farm