

Conducting training in Japan for Syrian counterparts of the technical assistance project

A JICA training course for Syrian counterparts was held for one month from October 3, 2011. This training was part of The Project on Development of Efficient Irrigation Techniques and Extension in Syria. Although there have been similar training courses in the past, this course was held under special circumstances and emotions which were different from before. The so-called “Arab Spring” which started in Tunisia has now rippled over to Egypt, Libya and to Syria. Syria has been in an extremely volatile and confusing situation. Therefore until the last minute, we were doubtful if the counterparts could come to Japan. The training course, which was held under this special situation, had an original objective of learning Japan’s agriculture, agricultural extension and training system. In addition, the training was also closely linked with the project activities in Syria with an aim to directly support the on-going project and further revitalize the project. It was aiming to be a practical training whereby the participants were expected to gain knowledge and techniques that can be immediately translated into action after returning to their home country.

There were seven participants: four extension officers and three officials dealing with training issues. Three of them were from central government agencies and four were from local governments. Five of them were male and two were female. The ages of the participants were also varied, from those who were in their 30s to 50s. It was a well composed and balanced group in all respects. Training contents were tailor made to suit the specialties of the participants. In the first two weeks, training focused on Japan’s agricultural extension and training programs, as well as farmers’ cooperatives, farmer’s markets for direct sales of farming products and distributions, irrigation schemes, and training was facilitated through lectures and site visits.

One of the new features of the training compared to past training courses was a discussion between the participants and Japanese experts on topics related to the project’s activities. With the facilitation of the Japanese experts, the participants discussed different aspects of the project, including experimental research, demonstration plots, training activities and extension activities. For each field, the participants reported on the

current situations and based on their presentations, active discussions took place on existing challenges and future courses of action.

In the fourth week which was the last week of the training course, a two-day workshop was held with the objective of formulating a future training plan based on identified training needs. In this workshop, the participants conducted job analysis of water extensionists to take cognizance of their expected roles as extension officers, writing down the types of capacity which will be required of them to play their expected roles. Then based on individual capacity, we conducted individual and institutional capacity assessment. Reactions of the participants were positive and many expressed their interest in using the same methods as soon as they returned to their home country.

By the way, the significance of the training courses in Japan is for the participants to learn what they may not have in their countries and learn about state-of-art technologies in Japan. We also hoped that the participants got to know about the Japanese approach to careful and meticulous work, the importance of timely work completion and a sense of respect to people of different cultures and the idea of Japanese peoples’ modesty.

In this training, these elements were included. In addition to the official training, it was vital to include extracurricular activities to experience various aspects of “Japan”. We organized Tokyo sightseeing from Akihabara, Asakusa Kaminari Mon (the temple gate), to overlooking the metropolis of Tokyo from the Government Office observatory. Furthermore, the participants experienced pear picking at a tourist farm, a fine Japanese style BBQ, tasted sashimi and sushi and tried using chopsticks, and had some Japanese language lessons for beginners. For souvenirs for their families and friends back home, they were impressed by the variety of items at the 100-yen discount shops.

We would be extremely happy if the knowledge and wide experiences they gained in Japan will be utilized in their future work in Syria and will encourage them in their efforts to continue their projects in the country under the current difficult circumstances.



Activities at the agriculture improvement and extension centre



A workshop to develop a training plan



Sushi, sushi and sushi!