

## Return to Senegal - after a quarter of a century: What 25 years have done

I have had an opportunity to re-visit Senegal after many years since I participated in the experimental study on pasture cultivation and soil survey in Richard Toll along the Senegal River 25 years ago. Richard Toll is arid and has only a small amount of precipitation. The study therefore was for irrigation agriculture bringing water from the Senegal River. This time, our target study area was Kaolack.

Kaolack is about 4-hour drive south east from the capital Dakar. The saline Saloum River flows nearby and the precipitation is around 700 mm per year, enabling some rain-fed cultivation. Maize and vegetables are grown in the area, however, it is really the center of groundnut production located in the "groundnut valley". In the surrounding area, many groundnut fields are spread. Groundnut cultivation is done in organized plantations which were developed during the colonial era. Senegal's groundnut export accounts for 30 percent of the world's exports, and is the largest national industry. There are large oil extraction factories in Kaolack and mountains of groundnuts are seen in the vicinity of the factories. Groundnut is a highly useful commodity. Nuts are used for food and oil and husks are used for power generation and as soil improvement materials. Moreover, the plant residue after oil extraction provides precious resources as nutritious food for livestock. However, due to continuous cropping over many years, soil quality is deteriorating posing important challenges for the government to counter the trend.

Incidentally, among the Japanese, Kaolack is famous for one more thing. It is renowned as "garbage town". Kaolack is located at an important transport hub and a large number of trucks, buses and taxis pass through. And somehow garbage is left as mounds in many parts of the town. If you ask Japanese people who know the town very well, they would say this is much better than it used to be. When I visited Kaolack, it was during the rainy season. Water in the Saloum River was black and murky with garbage and household effluent, and was releasing unpleasant odors. Water puddles that form in many parts of the town were also black and murky, and we had to be careful to avoid them when walking outside. When the dry season comes, dust of powdery garbage flies in the air, making us want a face mask. We try not to walk around when the situation is like this.

After 25 years, Kaolack still has many donkey and horse cart taxis in town. Of course, there are also many vehicles and motor bike taxis too. People would take time negotiating the price of vegetables at the market

and take these taxis to go home. Tarmac on the roads is crumbling in many places. "Not much has changed over the 25 years" is what we tend to feel.

In our work, the use of PCs has become the norm. Means of communication have changed from fax and letters to emails. In the meantime, the tempo of life in Kaolack remains very slow. This gap may be the difference between those who have kept up with time and those who have been late to get on the time train. We check emails every day where we are around the world. Wherever we are, we are chased by the business of our company or other projects and respond to the emails. While we cannot do much about this situation, it is a little strange that business progresses without anybody discussing issues face to face. I felt conversation with farmers which starts with a cup of tea in Senegal is something which is in complete contrast.

(By Zaisu, December 2011)



Truck with a mountain of groundnuts residue for livestock food



Wind selection of groundnuts