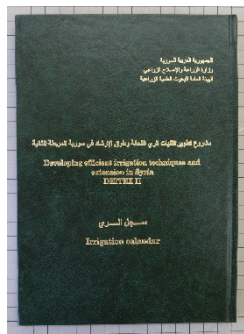


Water saving irrigation extension tools in Syria <Part 4>

For the Project on Development of Efficient Irrigation Techniques and Extension Phase II (DEITEX II), which aimed to achieve water saving irrigation in agriculture by farmers, it was an extremely important task to understand the actual irrigation water amount. In order for farmers to practice water saving irrigation, it is essential for them to understand the actual situation of their farming plots. However, many farmers cultivate their crops based on vague memories and instinct, and they are not accustomed to keeping records. There were a small number of farmers who took notes on a scrap of paper, but no farmer was keeping records in a notebook. We developed the irrigation notebook, thinking that by keeping records in one notebook, and by understanding quantitatively the volume of their irrigation water and fertilizer inputs, farmers might notice what aspects needed to be improved in their farming. This idea was designed to lead to increased awareness about the need for water saving.

The irrigation notebook concept came from the “Maternal Health Notebook”. This is issued in Japan and provides all the necessary information on maternal health with sections for recording progress and information. This manual intrigued us because of its cover on both information and recording. We mulled over an irrigation version following the basic principles. It was just a thought. What finally triggered the development was that one extension worker with us requesting the Japanese notebook we were using. Many of the Japanese team members were using the field notebook which can fit in a shirt pocket. Every day, we would take out the notebook from the pocket to jot things down. For the Syrians, not accustomed to taking notes, our note-taking behavior, must have seemed curious. Intrigued, one day he asked for one. Rather than simply offering one, we decided to work on developing a Syrian version of the field notebook. We discussed daily with the counterparts regarding the size, page numbers and looks of the notebook. We visited printshop many times developing prototypes.



Green hardcover of the notebook to create a field look

As in other extension tools, we first communicated to the extension workers the objectives of the irrigation notebook and how to use it. Then, the extension workers distributed the irrigation notebook to individual farmers as part of their extension work. To the farmers, we emphasized the point that the notebook is not for recording information for our project, but for their own future. We took care to minimize the farmers’ potential feeling of being imposed upon. From the planning and development stage, we were anxious as to whether the farmers would actually use them. However, once distributed, the notebooks were very popular and our worries were unfounded. During the project, when we

visited farmers, we checked to see if they were using the irrigation notebooks. We also actively promoted the use of the notebooks. In some cases, the irrigation notebook was used as a communication tool, with the extension workers interviewing farmers and noting what they had to say in the notebook, and assisting them to compile their own observations.



We received unexpectedly positive feedback on the irrigation notebook. On the strength of this we produced the 2nd edition. In this 2nd edition, we tried to improve coordination between the notebook and other extension tools. We included guidance on how to use the discharge measurement kit and the irrigation calendar. We also added an analysis sheet to enable farmers to conduct simple economic analysis by themselves. Through these additions, we aimed at making the irrigation notebook even more practical and aligned with our project activities.



The 2nd Edition

In April 2011 after we finished distributing the 2nd edition to farmers and when we were planning to make full use of the 2nd edition, Syria was engulfed by the Arab Spring. The Japanese team was evacuated and we could only provide remote support to the project from Japan. One year after the evacuation in April 2012, we invited counterparts, extension workers and farmers to Jordan to wrap up the project activities. We will never forget the deep emotion we felt when farmers and extension workers showed us the irrigation notebooks crammed full of records. We greatly admired their efforts despite their extremely difficult circumstances. We really hope that Syria’s situation will be stabilized as soon as possible and that the farmers will be able to focus on their farming work and make further use of the cultivation records.



Notebook crammed full of information



Checking the notebooks in the crop field