

### This and that in Gaziantep, Turkey

I spent about 1 month in Gaziantep in Turkey in order to explore measures for supporting Syria which has been struggling under prolonged civil war and chaos since 2011. While I will write more about the nature of the work on another occasion, here I would like to introduce various things in Gaziantep.

Gaziantep is located approximately 50 km from the Turkey - Syria boarder and about 100 km from the 2nd largest Syrian city Aleppo as the crow flies. Despite this proximity, unlike Aleppo from where lots of people fled as internally displaced people, Gaziantep remains very peaceful. The differences between the two cities are so stark that we cannot help but feel the complexity of Syria's situation.

Gaziantep used to be called Aintap (Antep). The name conjures images of water and agriculture as the name includes "ain" which means spring in Arabic. The population of Gaziantep is estimated to be around



The Gaziantep Castle

1.3 million and it is the 6th largest city in Turkey. In some ways it is a very modern city with trams crisscrossing the city. It has a museum with a collection of mosaic work from the Roman era. It also has the Gaziantep Castle which was constructed during the Byzantine period in the 6th century. Around the castle, there are public baths called *hamam* and a historic old town with artisans making copper ware, souvenir shops etc, looking rather similar to Aleppo.

Incidentally, I would have expected that there would be at least one or two Chinese restaurants given the city's size however to my surprise there were none. Restaurants are almost all Turkish and all offer kebabs. Turkish cuisine is said to be one of the three world's best cuisines and there are many kinds of delicious dishes. Among them stewed dishes in local eateries are particularly delicious and one cannot get tired of them even if one eats them every day. Many stews are tomato based with vegetables such as okra, various beans, potato, eggplant etc.



Stew, salad and ayran

Many include mutton and chicken and usually come with salad, pulao (rice) and *ayran* (drinking yogurt).

A Gaziantep special is a sweet called baklava and there are specialized baklava shops all over the town. Pistachio is another local product, and there are many nut shops with pistachio displayed along with other nuts such as almonds, walnuts and raisins.



At the nuts shop

All around Turkey, and Gaziantep is no exception, one can often see solar water heater on the rooftops of buildings. Satellite dishes, chimneys and solar heaters form the rooftop three piece suite!



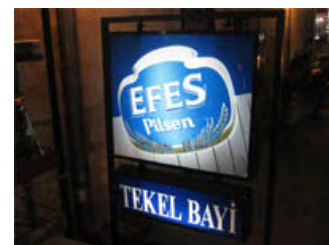
Solar heater on the roof

Turkey is promoting use of renewable energy such as hydropower, wind and geothermal power. By 2023, the country aims to achieve a 30% renewable energy share of the total national energy consumption. On the other hand, the country is dependent on imports of oil, and the petrol price is around 5 lira per liter (circa 250 yen) which is more expensive than the price in Japan. The interest in solar water heating shows peoples' wisdom to utilize the offerings of nature for their daily lives.

During my stay this time, I often reminisced about the scenery of towns around Syria such as Aleppo and life in those places in times past. When will those towns regain their peaceful days?



"Gipsy Girl" – an iconic masterpiece at the Mosaic Museum in Gaziantep



The cheerful sign of EFES (It is a liquor shop.)

(By Akira Koto, May 2014)

## Being a good “interface” <Part 1>

### Introduction

The separation between research and extension, which we discussed in AAINews No. 57, seems to have become a major problem all around the world. Agricultural researchers nowadays, in particular young researchers, are put in the position that they are obliged to conduct research and experiments in highly sophisticated and compartmentalized fields. This makes it difficult to respond to the actual needs of farmers which are inherently diverse. It seems rather than putting efforts on field based research work whose results may be harder to obtain, they tend to opt for research topics that more easily yield visible results in order to increase the number of their published academic papers. In addition, in some developing countries, researchers are not necessarily equipped to identify issues and challenges farmers face even if they visit the farmers. This creates a situation whereby identification of farmers’ needs is not done appropriately.

Japan is no exception to this, however it is particularly apparent among researchers in developing countries whom we have dealt with. Their characteristics can be summarized as follows: (1) researchers rarely visit field sites; (2) due to an elitist mentality, they look down on what farmers say; (3) they have insufficient connection with extension organizations; (4) they tend to like state of the art technologies and machinery which are difficult to use; and (5) academic paper writing becomes something driven by self interest. (1) and (2) should be out of the question, but such attitudes and approaches actually exist. Through complications caused by (1) to (5), it is concerning that the gap between research and farmers’ needs becomes bigger and bigger.

Naturally, it is not so simple that if researchers understand farmers’ needs, they can immediately start

research focusing on the needs. It is easy to imagine that it is not so easy to fill disconnect between researchers and farmers.

There are researchers who are seriously looking at challenges farmers face, but these are still a minority and there is much room for improving and overcoming problems. Firstly, efforts from researchers themselves would be important. We at AAI, as a consultant which works in many fields in various countries, have also been making efforts to improve our ability for investigation, coordination and problem solving, in order for us to be able to play a facilitating role as an interface between farmers and researchers.

In many projects that JICA is supporting in developing countries, we have been trying to shorten the distance between research institutions and farms, which seem to have drifted far apart. We have been trying this through activities under various projects such as farmers’ field school (FFS), introduction of farmer research group, joint research activities with farmers’ participation, and collaboration between extension and research activities. In this series, by investigating an example within a project which we have been involved, we would like to examine concretely the current situation, background and effective methods for narrowing the distance.

Some key words in this series are link, network and communication. In addition, in examining “interface”, we would like to broaden our focus of the interface between farmers and researchers. We would also like to have a look at the example of the interface among staff at different organizations or departments by Japanese specialists in various countries, and "interpreters" who connect nature and people in environmental education activities.



Extension activities with farmers



Workshop with various departments



An interpreter who connects people and nature



# A Memoir of Kassala, Sudan <Part 1>

## Mixture of African and Arab culture

The Republic of Sudan (commonly referred to simply as Sudan) is located in the north eastern part of Africa. The population is around 34 million and the country area is five times that of Japan making it the third largest country in Africa. Prior to the separation and independence of South Sudan in July 2011, it was, in fact, the largest country in Africa.



Sorghum

Stone grilled mutton

Before the north and south separated, Sudan was divided by the predominantly Christian south which also hosts traditional religions and animism, and the north which is populated mainly by Arabic Islamists. However many different non-Arab ethnic groups such as Bejas, Nubias and Fulas also reside in north Sudan, and one cannot simply draw an equation of north = Arab = Islam.

The word Sudan originates from Arabic meaning “black person”. Perhaps it means the black people who accepted the Arab culture from the Arabian Peninsula and the north and became Muslim. In addition to this north-south axis, there is an east - west axis of Sudan and Habesha (present day Ethiopia and Eritrea). These axes, enriched by the exchange of various goods and products, have formed a very colorful culture throughout history - very tangible results of interactions between various and very different indigenous cultures of the African continent.



Public souk (market)

Local specialty lime

The author has been involved in a JICA technical cooperation project in Kassala, Sudan, since January 2011. The project’s main aim is to develop the capacity of State Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Irrigations’ extension services. It has been supporting extension workers’ human resource development through joint work by developing pilot activities that target farmers and women.



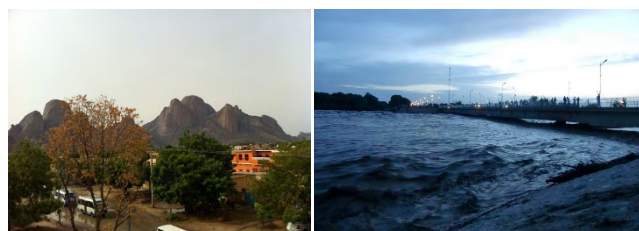
Acacia

Onion field



Arabic dish *mandi*

Fresh fruit juice



Mount Totil

The seasonal river *gash*

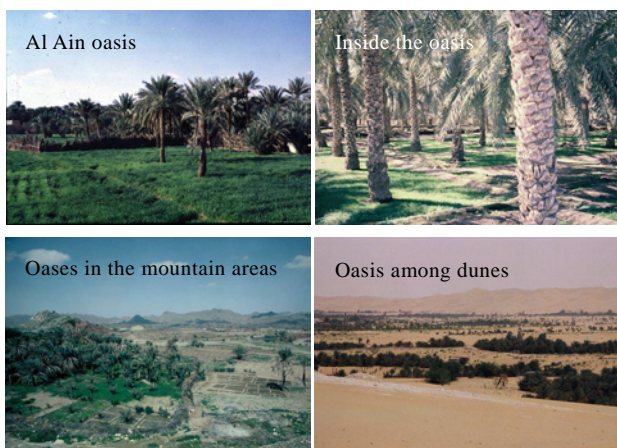
However for me, as someone who has worked in many “Arab” countries such as Syria, Palatine, Jordan and Egypt, the whiff of Arab in Sudan was very apparent. I have always considered Sudan to be a rather mysterious country, a place where African and Arab cultural elements mix.

In this six part series, I would like to use the limited space permitted in AAI News, to offer essays introducing cultural and social issues that exist in this attractive country based on my time and experiences in Kassala. I plan to discuss various topics as they come to my mind covering this and that; farmers, agricultural technology, food processing, food culture and plants etc. In the next part, I will discuss challenges for traditional rain-fed agricultural production and livelihoods of farmers and pastoralists.

## Facts about dry land vegetation <Part 5>

In this fifth part of the series, I would like to introduce the date palm. It is a plant which may not be so well known in Japan. However in the Arabian region, oasis and date palms are almost synonymous and very tightly linked. When one says oasis everybody thinks about date palms and vice versa!

In AAINews, I have introduced several times the old capital Al Ain in the interior of the UAE. Al Ain means 'spring' and there are actually a number of oases around the town. In oases there are always groves of date palms. Inside the oases the surrounding date palms shield inhabitants from high temperature, dryness and strong winds, and fodder such as alfalfa and fruits are planted in the shade of the sheltering date palms. Date palms are also planted in oases in the Hajar mountains along the border with Oman, and oases are dotted among the shifting dunes in the Rub' al Khali Desert.



In the mid-1970s when I started working in UAE, I often saw Bedouin tents in the deserts. When I visited some of the tents, people welcomed me serving a little bit bitter coffee with cardamom. While I was drinking coffee, they usually also served dates in a plastic bag. The combination of bitter coffee and sweet dates was exquisite! I used to feel Bedouin's unique culture of hospitality directly from these experiences.



The fruits of date palms are called dates in English. In Arabic, they use different names for different stages of ripeness. Dried fully ripened fruits are called Tamar. In Japan, these are used as an ingredient for *Otafuku* source. There are many different varieties of date palms with fruit ranging in color from yellow to red. While I was in the Gulf region, I particularly liked a variety called *Khalas* and often ate these dates. I also liked the variety

*Lulu* because its name means 'pearl' in Arabic and that appealed to me.



One day I found a very strange thing while exploring the vegetable souk (market) in Nizwa oasis in Oman. As seen in the photo below, there was a sword shaped item along with other vegetables. As already introduced in AAINews No. 13, this is the stamen of date palm. The scene of people climbing date palms and conducting pollination work is a seasonal event.



Recently I have been participating in agricultural extension projects in Palestine. The west bank of the Jordan Valley areas is highly suitable for date palm cultivation and the cultivation areas have expanded rapidly in recent years. The main variety is called *Medjool* and fruits are one size bigger compared to the *Khalas* and *Lulu* which I so often encountered in the Gulf region. Initially, I did not really like their big size and did not eat these dates very much. However once you become accustomed to eating them, their taste grows on you and is actually very good! I now take them back to Japan as souvenirs which are very popular. Just the other day when I visited a farmer in the Jordan Valley, I coincidentally came across a pollination operation. The accompanying driver received some stamens from the farmer, and took them back with him carefully wrapped in a plastic bag. I thought he also had some date palms at home and asked about it. Apparently stamens work for the "night life". Next time, I will ask him about the cooking method!

