

Being a good “interface” <Part 2>

Extension workers, linking farmers and researchers

In this series, we try to discuss the interface between farmers and researchers, using “linkage” as a key word. The importance of extension workers in creating linkage is obvious. We have been introducing various examples from our extension projects in AAINews. We may be repeating ourselves to some extent, however, in this series, we would like to summarize the important points sorting different issues from the viewpoint of interface.

Efforts to reduce the distance between farmers and researchers

In order to communicate information and technologies smoothly, it is important to have established organizational and individual linkages for communication. Largely, such linkages “appear” to exist in many developing countries. However, often the problem is that these linkages are not properly functioning. Their establishment has been, something like “building a Buddha statue without putting any soul into the endeavor.” What we learned through project implementation is that it is important to build close relationships between people, because what is effective is to increase time and opportunities for extension workers and researchers to be together working jointly. By getting to know each other, “blood” flows through existing organizations and systems, which makes them work organically.



Linking extension workers and researchers through practical training on how to use a pressure meter

Necessity of communication skills

Communication is also an important key word in this series. During implementation of projects, we often receive requests from partner organizations and counterparts to improve communication skills of extension workers. There are kinds of skills that can be nurtured through training, and there are others that can be obtained through on-the-job experience. What projects can do is to offer places and opportunities for extension activities in order for extension workers to gain experiences. Through this type of support we can

achieve autonomous enhancement of communication skills, and this was our project’s intention. On the other hand, listening is a skill which extension workers are supposed to possess and it is important to strengthen such a skill through technical training.



Linking extension workers and women in farming communities through surveying household finance

Use of equipment that leads to trust and confidence

In addition to communication skills, what is necessary for effective extension activities is equipment which extension workers can use in farms. For example, if extension workers have simple equipment to measure irrigation pressure or salt content of irrigation water, they can provide appropriate advice based on the measurement results. This will increase trust of farmers towards extension workers as well as developing extension workers’ self-confidence.

Could we nurture super extension workers?

Incidentally, when implementing projects we sometimes meet super extension workers or super counterparts whose existence affects a project’s success in a major way. Is it possible to nurture potential of any extension worker to make them a super extension worker through training and accumulation of experience? How can one become super extension workers? These are some of the questions we need to seek answers for.

Changing Roles of Extension Workers

It has been some time since the separation of research and actual needs of farmers was identified as an issue and we described the background to this concern in the first part of this series. In addition, diversification and sophistication of extension needs are making extension activities more difficult. For example, rather than extending technologies, extension workers nowadays need to play a coordinator’s role in establishing organizations or systems for sales of agricultural products, placing importance on marketing for profitable agriculture. We need to pay attention to the changing roles of extension workers, when considering them as an “interface”.