

Tsukuba Challenge!

It has been six months since I started to learn how to provide training and guidance in delivering the Region-focused Training Course on Vegetable Cultivation Technology and Marketing Method for Small Scale Farmers at JICA Tsukuba.

During this time, I felt the need to enhance our ability to provide high quality training and guidance. Primarily instructors need a wide range of knowledge and experience to be able to teach technologies which participants can apply in their own countries. Participants need to pass on standardized knowledge and technology; variety selection methods, ways to determine planting types, cultivation management and marketing related to vegetable production technology involving a number of different crops. For them to be able to do this, it is important to build a relationship that enables everybody to exchange opinions frankly and without reservation or hesitation. Communication ability is critical to ensure the provision of accurate and appropriate guidance and directions to participants during training courses. This involves thought from everything from setting up individual experiments to management throughout the entire training courses. This will earn the trust of participants and will lead to participants acquiring technology that are applicable in their own countries. We have been feeling that by forming a trusting relationship with every participant, a training course, as a whole, becomes tighter and raises spirits and enhances enthusiasm! Getting this right is not something we can achieve in a day. We have learned that this is something which can be only achieved by cumulative experiences, and fundamentally by treating participants with respect.

Simultaneously there are benefits for everybody. What was nice is that we could share moments of deep understanding with participants both personally and professionally. There were 12 participants from 11 nations this year. Although situations in their countries vary greatly, they were relaxed, exchanging jokes at times, stimulating each other, and they were trying to make use of what they gained during the training to improve agriculture in their countries. For a long training period (in this case 9 months), teamwork between the participants proved important. I became involved in the course as a support personnel in the middle of the training period, and I learned a lot from the participants, from their diligence, sincere attitude and their sense of fun, through the daily training sessions and accompanying them on field trips. The participants went back to their home countries in early November and they immediately and directly faced farmers in their work places. The knowledge and technology which they learned during the training should be passed onto farmers directly. I feel very fortunate for having had the opportunity to directly work with participants who will shoulder extension responsibilities in their own countries. As an international cooperation professional, this type of work is highly rewarding.

Incidentally, my involvement in vegetable cultivation courses goes back to 2011. I was a student at National Farmers

Academy. My first encounter with the vegetable cultivation course was when I participated Training Program for University Students in KCCP (Knowledge Co-Creation Programs) in JICA Tsukuba. I met many participants from different countries and learned what their expectations were regarding the courses in Japan and I understood part of what they were learning. What was particularly impressive was that many participants were interested in technologies which they could pass onto farmers directly, such as pest and disease diagnosis and calculation methods for determining fertilizer inputs. The largest gain for me was that I could witness very closely and directly the actual international cooperation actions for agricultural support, and I could make use of this experience and knowledge in my work in Mozambique.

I went to Mozambique to work as a Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteer (JOCV) in 2012 after I graduated from my National Farmers Academy. I was sent to the District Service for Economic Activities office, Jangamo district, Inhambane province on the southern coast. The farmers were largely subsistence farmers and many of them went to South Africa as migrant workers for cash income. Given the situation, it was deemed necessary to increase productivity of cash crops and improve marketing for sales. I visited farmers with local extension staff and worked towards the objective of increasing incomes for the district as a whole. However the insufficient communication skills of the 7 extension staff meant that they could not really understand local challenges which prevented them from effectively providing extension services. To improve the situation and quality of extension services to farmers, I tried to emphasize the strengths of colleagues at regular meetings. I also organized study sessions to discuss challenges and the problems they were facing, promoting sharing of individual's knowledge and experiences for mutual learning and improvement.

I firmly believe that how participants utilize the knowledge and technologies which they gain through training in Japan after returning home is a very important aspect of training programs. I hope to contribute to ensure that participants can effectively use their knowledge and technologies acquired in their training in Japan through supporting the training program, looking back to my experiences in Mozambique.

(By Ioki, November 2015)



Learning with
participants