

To Sudan, East Africa!

Sudan was a country which I had wanted to visit for a long time, having worked in West Africa and the Middle East. Many migrant workers from Sudan were in the Gulf States, therefore I had opportunities to mingle with many Sudanese through work and social life. The impression I got about Sudanese through meeting them outside of their countries was that they were generally soft and trust worthy. This time, I finally could visit Sudan. As we have already introduced the country in past AAINews, in this issue I would like to focus on Kassala and introduce Sudanese characteristics and what we experienced in Kassala.



When you hear Sudan, you may worry about safety in the country. In the south, there is South Sudan, a newly independent country which separated from Sudan. In the east, there is Eritrea, and domestically Darfur still remains to be a problem in the country. Although there are travel restrictions to the Darfur province and same provinces boarding South Sudan, the capital city Khartoum and my destination Kassala are very quiet and safe. I felt secure walking alone at night with nothing like mugging attempts on the way. The Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers, JICA are also active in these areas, contributing to the country in their respective fields, with no movement restrictions in the area.

Before work starts, we have to have breakfast. Across the country, their eating habits are focused around breakfast. It is more like what we call brunch. At around 11:30, people go out to eat leaving their work. This breakfast is rather heavy. The most popular dish is foul, which is a broad bean dish cooked in a big pan (see the left photo below), and it is served with bread and salad. Occasionally, people may go a bit extravagant and order fried river fish (see the right photo below) or grilled or fried meat dishes. At the end, they drink tea to end breakfast. Dinner is small and during our usual breakfast



hours in Japan (ie. 7-8 am), they have tea and biscuits.

As for work, my duty this time was related to onion processing. Onions were purchased from local farmers. In Kassala, local farmers are generally land owners. Those who are actually doing physical work on farms are sharecroppers. Remuneration for sharecroppers is based on actual work rather than daily or monthly payments. They are paid based on the area they plow and the amount of harvests with total utilitarianism. My duty was to support a local NGO in dry onion production. In front of a drying machine brought from Japan, I worked every day with the Sudanese technicians who belong to the NGO, peeling and slicing onions, drying and packaging them.

I realized through my living and work in Kassala that the Sudanese in Sudan are the same as the Sudanese I met outside their country. They have a wave frequency that fits me well. Their kindness is very genuine. I think other Japanese would feel the same way. In Sudan, biscuit pots called jiel (see photo) are placed all over towns. Sudan is very hot and everywhere people need water. From jiel, anybody can obtain drinking water for free. I asked about the origin of this system and learned that the idea came from Sudanese themselves. What an attentive and caring gesture! There are water supply points for livestock too.



Sudan still is under US trade sanctions and the impacts are visible. Maybe because of this, we cannot withdraw money from, or send money to, Japan. This is an obvious impediment to business exchanges. I hope there will be increased exchanges between Japan and Sudan especially in agriculture which is the main industry of Sudan. Probably, in Africa, Sudanese are most similar in character to the Japanese and they are very trustworthy.

(By Zaitzu, May, 2016)



Tricycle taxi in the capital



Colleagues in Kassala