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Activities of Ex-participants of the JICA's Vegetable Cultivation Course for Tajikistan **(Small Scale Greenhouse Pilot Project)**

Last year (2004) in July, I was invited to a follow-up session for the participants of the vegetable cultivation course for Tajikistan which was held from 2000 to 2003 in the JICA Tsukuba International Center. It was a great opportunity to see how the participants were applying what they had learned in Tsukuba in their country and to participate in the seminar organized by them on vegetable cultivation techniques.

Many greenhouses in Tajikistan used to be operated under Kolkhozes and Sovkhozes of the Soviet Union, however, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, they became run by individual farmers. Many greenhouses are currently out of action because of the high cost of heating them during the winter and because of maintenance needs which are difficult for individual farmers to manage. On the other hand, there is an increasing demand for fresh vegetables during winter, requiring the expansion of vegetable production in the country. With this background, the JICA participants conducted research on various greenhouse facilities, investigating cultivation techniques with low construction and heating costs, which meet the economic situation in their country. The research led them to information about a greenhouse that uses readily available materials such as straw as insulation to retain heat. This type of greenhouse can be constructed with the country's own technology and has a high heat retention function that is sufficient to produce vegetables in winter. However, due to the difficulty of mobilizing initial capital, the greenhouses were never constructed.



Derelict iron piped greenhouse



A greenhouse destroyed during the civil war

During my stay, prompted by discussions with ex-participants, I called for the formation of an alumni association of ex-participants which could act as a body to raise funding to support their efforts to apply the knowledge and skills they acquired in Tsukuba in their country. Within a short time articles for the association were prepared and submitted to the Ministry of Justice in Tajikistan. After due examination, the submission was approved and the association was registered on August 17 of the same year, as number 3,070, by the National Statistics Committee. After the registration, the association members became even more active than previously, organizing seminars to extend their technical knowledge to farmers and students.

In addition, the association members have made use of JICA's follow-up system, submitting a follow-up project proposal to JICA's Uzbekistan Office, dealing with renovation of dilapidated greenhouses to revive winter farming. The project aims to contribute to farmers' livelihoods by increasing their income from farming through the promotion of greenhouse cultivation to be realized through demonstration. The ex-JICA participants' plan is to construct small greenhouses, with minimum electric heating costs, making full use of compressed straw as insulation/heat retention material. The project budget for the first year is US\$25,270 inclusive of greenhouse construction, demonstration cultivation costs and human resource and project operation costs. They requested the JICA to support them by covering a part of the amount after deducting what they mobilized elsewhere.

Activities of the alumni association of ex-participants of the JICA's vegetable cultivation course for Tajikistan have been expanding well, from research activities, organization of seminars, and incorporation of the association to even a submission of a project proposal to the JICA support scheme this year. Unfortunately, their greenhouse cultivation proposal was not accepted this year. However, I will continuously provide technical support to realize this project of the association and also provide my advice on application procedures. JICA's training scheme coupled with collaboration with activities of ex-participants, will enhance the results and achievements of the training.

(By Hasegawa, October 2005)