

AAINews

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Interesting Photo Album from Guinea

Conakry, the capital of Guinea, has an annual precipitation of 4,000 mm. The downpour is impressive as most of the rain falls between June and September. Many times, I witnessed torrential downpours, stronger than any rain I have experienced in Japan (See photo 1). My visit this time was during the rainy season and it was raining in Conakry every day. The roads became rivers and potholed tar roads formed ponds. Conakry has slums at every corner of the town and is extremely dirty. Fortunately, heavy rain flushes the town's garbage away during the rainy season.



Please have a look at photos 2, 3, and 4. They were taken on my way in country. Photo 2 captured a taxi with a large number of passengers. I counted 14 outside and perhaps 7 or so inside although I couldn't see all of them. This means a rough total of 21 passengers. Unbelievable! I heard that the taxi fare is the same whether you are in or riding outside of the taxi. Is there no limit for the load because people are not goods? Photo 3 shows people on top of the truck who look as if they are almost falling off. It is none of my business, but I cannot help thinking they should sit more in the middle part of the truck. Photo 4 is a telegraph pole, although it looks like any timber you may find anywhere. Although there is no picture, empty cans were hanging on the connected wires.



Guinea is located in West Africa and is adjacent to six countries, namely Guinea-Bissau, Senegal, Mali, Cote D'Ivoire, Liberia and Sierra Leone. It is located on the border of Anglophone and Francophone Africa. Perhaps because of continuous civil war, Guinea is one of the poorest countries in Africa a continent which has so many poor countries. After achieving independence in 1958, Guinea parted from the suzerain France and was going towards sovereign socialism. However, with the collapse of socialism, support from socialist countries stopped. This led to the total breakdown of almost all the infrastructure including roads, electricity and postal services. The taxi passengers have no choice but take a taxi in this way. The people on the roof of the truck are not having fun or playing around. I heard that, because of the extremely bad road conditions, there are areas where the trucks cannot navigate without the direction and support from the people on top. The telegraph pole may be a temporary solution due to the lack of materials, which were probably stolen. As the postal service is not functioning, letters are entrusted to friends and taxi drivers.



Today, Guinea is trying to get out of poverty with assistance from international organizations and developed nations such as Japan. The future will be very difficult. The country accepts foreign assistance as if it is their natural right to receive it. Some technicians do not show any willingness to work without income from foreign aid. There is also serious structural corruption and social decay. It is said that a part of government funds also disappears as bribes. Excellent technicians seem to either lose faith and leave the country or chase after money. The monthly salary of high level government officials is around US\$ 1,000. In rural areas, a vegetable seller was trying hard to sell a bundle of leeks for two cents.



During this investigation visit, I walked around the interior of Guinea. The smiles of the children were universally heart warming and I could learn a lot, supported by kind people. We will continue investigations in Guinea. I feel that something must be done to change the situation. (By Zaitso, October 2008)



Are Japan's cultivation techniques and the wisdom of creative Japanese farmers applicable?

- Case study of training activities at Tsukuba International Center -

Part 4: Pruning effects can be seen even with the determinate type tomatoes

Fruit vegetables such as Cucurbitaceae and Solanaceae require pruning. There are different pruning methods for different vegetables. For tomato plants, lateral branches are removed from the stem to ensure only one main stem. For eggplants, the lateral branches are removed, except for the two branches that grow from the node below the first flower. Leave the two lateral branches and if they become crowded, remove some leaves. For watermelon and other melons, remove the terminal bud at a low node when there are 4 to 5 primary leaves, and leave 2 to 4 vigorous vines that shoot out from the nodes between the stem and primary leaves. The purposes of pruning are to effectively manage pest control, growth and harvest. Pruning also aims to increase the quality of the products and to shorten the harvest period to intensify the farmland productivity. Some of the expected effects of pruning are; 1) avoidance of overshadowing crops due to crowding; 2) improved work efficiency; 3) reduction of pest and disease outbreaks; 4) timely harvest of a large number of uniformed fruits of similar sizes and quality; and 5) effective use of farming plots. The work accompanying pruning includes a) training of vines and fixing of the stem on support poles; b) disbudding exercise to remove small unnecessary lateral buds; c) in case of watermelons, removal of excess fruits, leaving only two well-shaped fruits, after around four fruits are produced on the four lateral vines; and d) other removal of leaves and terminal buds.

I would like to introduce an individual experiment related to pruning methods for tomatoes, which was conducted by a Samoan trainee this year (2008). The trainee is based at the Department of Crops, within the Samoan Ministry of Agriculture. His work entails technology extension using demonstration plots, problem analysis as part of the vegetable cultivation group activities, investigation into counter measures, and development of work plans. His problems at his work area are the low quality of imported seeds, insufficient production of seeds by the Ministry of Agriculture, and insufficient knowledge of pest control. In addition, due to careless crop management, improvement of crop quality is difficult, which impacts negatively on marketing and new market development. The main vegetables cultivated in Samoa are pumpkin, cabbage, cucumber, Chinese cabbage and tomatoes. Among these vegetables, the biggest challenge Samoa faces is how to produce a large fruit tomato that has a high market value. In Samoa, they grow red large fruit and determinate variety of tomatoes. When the seedlings are transplanted, they are fixed to a short support and are left to grow freely. With this method of cultivation, the harvests will vary in sizes and the total harvest does not increase. Therefore, the trainee examined which cultivation techniques in Japan can be applied to his situation, and then conducted an individual experiment to evaluate the effect of limiting fruit numbers and its training.

He used a red large fruit bearing determinate variety of tomato that is similar to the main variety cultivated in Samoa. They were planted in a plastic covering house as a shelter from rain, with 75 cm space between each plant and 100cm between rows. The number of fruit bearing branches was limited to two, three or four in different sections. The plants in these sections were trained towards the wire at 1.8 m above ground and one section was for plants that were left to grow freely as is commonly done in Samoa. The result was that as the number of fruit bearing branches increased from two to three, the number and amount of harvest increased. However, in the section with plants with four fruit bearing branches, the yield went down. The highest yielding section among the four sections was the one with plants with three fruit bearing branches. Pruning requires additional work such as disbudding and training. It also increases the cost, as training materials are necessary. However, pruning makes pest and weed control and harvest work more efficient, and makes it possible to harvest in a timely manner and reduce dropping and rotting fruits. We are positive that the trainee was convinced that pruning could lead to improvement in fruit quality.

Given the result of the individual experiment, the trainee is thinking of including in the post training action plan in his country, a plan to cultivate high quality and high yield tomatoes applying the pruning technique. In many developing countries, there is still little demand for intensive use of farmland and for improving market values including increasing fruit quality and controlling the harvesting period. Therefore, fruit vegetables are mostly grown on the ground without support or a trellis. It is considered that pruning techniques will attract attention from now on, as they increase work efficiency including timely harvesting, which in turn leads to an increased harvest.



Japan's agriculture and AAI

Part 4: Training in a farming region – Activities at Nature school Terakoya and regional cooperation (Kanra Town, Gunma Prefecture)

In the previous issue we introduced the activities of a farm producer group in Ushimado, Okayama Prefecture and its cooperation with communities. As recommendations, we suggested support activities for people who are interested in becoming farmers. We also suggested accepting trainees from other countries, as well as the possibility of getting involved in the pre-departure training for the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV). From the same perspective, we visited the Non-Profit Organization Nature School Terakoya (Terakoya means a temple school), which is already implementing these activities in the Tomioka Area, Kanra Town, Gunma Prefecture.

The Nature School provides supplementary technical training for the JOCVs before their assignment and accepts JICA trainees from overseas. One of the features of these training programs is cooperation with local farmers and agricultural cooperatives. Responding to the Nature School director's passionate efforts, the head of the youth division of the local agricultural cooperative, JA Kanra Tomioka, called for cooperation from local farmers to accept trainees. In the supplementary technical training for JOCVs, the volunteers spend 3 to 6 months (depending on the type of position) working at a farm as a village development extension officer. Through working and interacting with local residents, the training aims to nurture useful skills and knowledge for working as a JOCV in the countries of their assignments. A characteristic of the training is the fact it emphasizes practical work. In sessions on participatory rural appraisal (PRA) and rapid rural appraisal (RRA), volunteers experience and learn to draw stories out of farmers by weeding together and drinking tea together during breaks between the farm works. For farmers, it is not only to have additional manpower. By having another "family member," there is the advantage of receiving new stimuli and having increased opportunities to hold family discussions.

The Nature School was established in 2001 as a voluntary organization, aiming to "nurture healthy and active children". It became a non-profit organization in 2003 with three main activity areas, namely environmental education, youth training and international cooperation. One of the features of the Nature School is that its activities are supported by local communities and the circle of activities is gradually expanding throughout the communities. From these activities emerged a new initiative to strengthen local capacity and organization to receive trainees, calling for the participation of farmers who have previous experience of hosting trainees. It was even decided to establish the "Kanra Tomioka Farming Village University" in September 2008. In addition to receiving JICA trainees, there is a movement towards offering a place for training, targeting those who want to return or come to rural areas to practice farming. It is expected that these activities will further strengthen the horizontal linkage between farmers and will lead to the establishment of organizations that can form partnerships for the revitalization of the communities.

The Nature School activities are considered to be an example of regional revitalization involving international cooperation. Basically it was the key people, the staff of the Nature School and agricultural cooperatives, who were the motivating force behind the successful expansion of activities. In addition, the existence of host farmers and the links between people have been important. It is not only the links between key people that are important, but also the links between a key person and local residents, as well as between farming families hosting trainees. Moreover, it is critical to recognize that for the Nature School activities to be integrated in local communities, it has been necessary to establish daily interactions with the residents and create a trusting relationship. In future, in order to contribute to the promotion and revitalization of local agriculture, AAI could act as a go-between for various communities such as Kanra (Gunma Prefecture), Ushimado (Okayama Prefecture) and Satomi (Ibaraki Prefecture) so that they will get to know each other, share information and learn from each other, leading to joint activities. Through such activities, we should consider what role the AAI can play to contribute to society.



Outside of the Nature School - Terakoya



Field of Shimonita leek – a local specialty



Listening to the activities of the Nature School

Mini Series: – Visiting a project of a Former Colleague

Part 3 – Community revitalization through the Nature School Terakoya and international cooperation

As introduced on page 3, we have visited the Nature School Terakoya that has been engaged in activities to revitalize communities in Kanra Tomioka Area in Gunma Prefecture, incorporating international cooperation aspects. During our visit, we had a chance to hear from the staff about the details of the school's activities.

The Nature School is already engaged with various activities including the supplementary training courses for JOCV volunteers and reception of JICA trainees. The Nature School deals with a wide range of services, from providing suggestions to JICA on practical training activities, negotiations with JICA regarding training activities, coordination with hosting farmers, to organization of study meetings and reporting meetings. The School also plans and conducts the “Fieldwork Practical Course.” In this course through lectures and practical work, they teach the wisdom and art of learned by the farming villages, which are immediately useful in developing countries, and methods to improve living that have been used by life improvement extension officers. This course also offers an opportunity to learn about the processes and issues that need attention when organizing a workshop in developing countries, as well as facilitation skills. A 3-4 day course is organized targeting university and graduate students majoring in development studies, JOCV volunteers to be dispatched on assignment, and NGO staff. Moreover, the School organizes the “International Terakoya”, targeting students of different nationalities from junior high schools and high schools in Gunma Prefecture. The two-night International Terakoya has been organized once a year for the last five years (since 2003).

This activity is unique in that its achievement is not only the support for promotion of international cooperation, but also its contribution to the revitalization of farming villages. During our visit, we could observe a practical session on food processing for trainees from Panama and visit a direct sales outlet for local produce run by a local producer group. The training for Panamanian trainees was conducted at a Kanra Town facility called “Lala Kanra.” At this establishment there are various facilities such as an audiovisual room and a kitchen for cooking lessons. The Nature School rents these facilities from JPN Yen 750 – 2000 for a half-day to conduct lectures and practical sessions. The teachers were mothers from the area. We could see them teaching how to make traditional sweets rooted in the area, and hearing about sweets in Panama from the trainees. Rather than simply offering food-processing lessons, there was genuine interaction between people. We strongly felt the value of the local residents' involvement in international cooperation activities.

Another place we visited was the “Health Village – Ainoda Farm Product Direct Sales Centre.” It is open daily from 13:00 until the evening, except for the New Year break period. Their specialty is a *namaimo konnyaku* which is made from the plant called devil's tongue grown locally with reduced amounts of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. The shop also displayed a variety of seasonal vegetables and side dishes. The producers bring their produce to the centre before 13:00, and the turnover is distributed back to each producer using simple sales slips. Shop keeping duties are rotated among the members. People have shop-keeping duty on average three times a month. When we visited the shop, the farmer on duty told us his recollection of days with a trainee he accepted recently. Here, we also could find interaction between people. Moreover, if trainees who experienced the food processing and sales system here could make use of the know-how in their home countries and countries of their assignments, the ripple effects will be enormous.



Scenery of Tomioka area in Kanra Town



Practical cooking session at Lala Kanra



Health Village - Ainoda Farm Product Direct Sales Centre