

25 Years of AAI's Work

December 14th 2009 marked twenty five years since Appropriate Agriculture International (AAI) was born. As introduced in AAI News Vol. 61, there have been quite a few changes in the technical cooperation activities of Japan to developing countries over the last 25 years, and our company's activities have also changed significantly. Initially, our activity was mainly to conduct in the fields of afforestation and resource management in drylands, and agriculture and rural development. Our activity expanded into the fields of overseas training/extension activities, and development studies and management of training courses in Japan, as well as rice cultivation support in Africa.

This seasonal newsletter has also evolved from an internal newsletter for information exchange among our colleagues, to a more external PR newsletter to introduce our achievements and technical expertise to a wider audience. Moreover, we have had a number of series in the newsletter based on themes our company colleagues were discussing among themselves. These included themes such as "Coexistence between Nature and People", "Partnerships between ODAs and NGOs", "Grassroots Collaboration", "Re-examination of Development Study", "Coordination between Technical Cooperation and Training Activities" and "Japan's Agriculture and AAI".

At the beginning, AAI had only one staff member. The number has grown over the years and now we have 11 staff including clerical staff. Initially company employees were a group of people who had affection for deserts having spent some years in drylands. However, our company now has a staff complement that can respond to a wider range of specialized fields such as farming practices, training, agricultural society, horticulture and irrigation water use. The new members are coming to play a central role in advancing the company's work.

It has been 25 years of change and development. We have always borne in mind our principles and questions. *"Activities that can truly assist local people."* *"Development and extension of appropriate technologies."* *"What is the appropriate scale of development?"* With these principles and questions in mind, we have always valued the establishment of human and trusting relationships with those who are working on the ground, and we would like to continue to live up to our principles.

Incidentally, in commemorating our 25th anniversary, we decided to create a company logo. The two triangles signify the "A" in "Appropriate" and "Agriculture". The rectangular shape signifies "I" as in "International". The three colors representing "soil", "water" and "greenery" symbolize bringing water to drylands and nurturing plants. They also symbolize the three pillars of AAI's work – "human resource", "water" and "agriculture."



At this occasion, we also decided to redesign the newsletter. Considering requests from readers and ease of reading, we decided to be more flexible and actively print news and stories introducing our achievements and expertise. I hope that you will continue to be AAI partners.

The photograph below was taken at the Tsukuba International Center, when we enjoyed a barbeque under fully blooming cherry blossoms with trainees on the vegetable cultivation course last spring. (By Onuma)



Cooperation in the Training for JOCV Volunteers

The non-profit organization “Nature School Terakoya” has been working enthusiastically on a variety of activities as part of its mission to leave important natural resources globally for future generations based on the principles of coexistence. The supplementary technical training for JOCV volunteers is one of the meaningful activities that the Nature School has been implementing on a continuous basis. There are 6 participants in the training for the rural development volunteers. Their assigned countries range from Uganda and Kenya to Bolivia. All the volunteers are due to be working on water use and management issues in the farming community. The training theme was set as “water management”. The 2-week training program took into consideration the reality that many participants never had a chance to experience agriculture or irrigation. Given this, it included a field visit to farmers in the Kanra-tano land improvement district, and practical sessions, with assistance from local people using the Nature School’s network.



Trainees are lectured about the land improvement district

AAI took part in the training delivering a lecture on “general issues on irrigation”. While preparing for the lecture, we started wondering how we could teach the young people about “irrigation”. Irrigation is said to have triggered the rise of ancient civilizations and it has been an important technology for our livelihood for millennia, however, it does not really catch our attention. We struggled to see how we could best communicate the overview of irrigation and current issues surrounding the technology.

Irrigation is a series of artificial actions for supplying additional water when crops need. However, it is not very helpful to just start explaining further about irrigation by saying “the necessity of irrigation is

obvious.” We then thought it would be good to start with the major premise of nature that “crops cannot survive without water.” The basic source of water for crops is rainfall. Humankind grew crops by rain-fed agriculture in a particular region. Irrigation started from the pressing demand for increased precipitation. This desire started the idea for irrigation. We decided to place emphasis on the course of the development of irrigation.

In order to maintain stable irrigation, one needs some kind of physical device to control water (an irrigation system). We advised the trainees to imagine that they were farmers who needed to start irrigation and think how they can solve the problem. Then they can actually go through the process of planning and making decisions on the establishment of an irrigation system. Therefore, we decided to explain the “economics of irrigation”, touching upon factors for decision making such as irrigation size and maintenance standards of an irrigation system, considering convenience, benefits and costs.

The reality is that even existing irrigation systems, which were developed as being economically viable, are facing a number of problems related to administration and maintenance. We cited some of these lessons and explained that an irrigation system does not only have to be economically viable but also socially sensitive. When considering socially sound irrigation administration, small irrigation systems have an advantage as it is easier to ensure cohesion among the farmer users. We mentioned that small scale irrigation systems have been attracting attention in recent years. In addition, we also touched upon the recently predominant opinion that the participatory approach is a useful method for the management of irrigation systems.

Along these lines, we conducted the lecture on irrigation. Our 2.5-hour lecture ended without problems, and maintained the participants’ interest. As the target trainees had a wide range of backgrounds including social sciences, the training made us realize the importance of discussing the holistic the picture of irrigation. We feel that we, too, gained a lot from this training course. (By Matsushima)

Rice Cultivation in Africa <Part 1>

Introduction

In order to achieve comprehensive development through people’s own efforts in Africa, one certainly cannot ignore the existence of rural villages where more than 70% of the population lives depending largely on agriculture. One tends to imagine “ugari” made of corn, and “couscous” from sorghum and millet as staple foods in Africa, however, rice has been grown in West Africa for over 3,000 years. In East Africa, rice cultivation has been increasing rapidly in recent years. This is due to the fact that rice has high nutritional value and is tasty, and that it can be a subsistence or a cash crop. Still, the yield is extremely low in Africa (1 ton/ha), compared with Asia (3-3.5 ton/ha).

Japan’s support to Africa today is centered around three important areas that were agreed on at the 4th Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD IV). These are: 1) boosting economic growth; 2) Ensuring “Human Security” and 3) Addressing environmental issues and climate change. The core of Japan’s agricultural support has been rice cultivation. The rationale for the support is that supply of rice and wheat falls short of demand among the main grain crops (corn, sorghum, rice and wheat), and that rice is more suited than wheat to climatic conditions in Africa. In addition, it is possible for Japan to utilize its experience in supporting rice cultivation in Asia, and the country has a long history of technical support in Africa such as the 30-year support in Kilimanjaro Region, Tanzania.

With this background, the Coalition for African Rice Development (CARD) was established recently with the objective of doubling rice cultivation in sub-Saharan Africa in 10 years. CARD tries to increase yield per unit of rice through selection of appropriate rice varieties for three cultivation systems in Africa, namely

irrigated paddy field, rain-fed lowland wetland, and rain-fed field, including promotion of NERICA, a high-yielding variety that is suited to the conditions in Africa. It also works towards improving cultivation techniques and promotion of necessary inputs (water, fertilizer etc) to increase the yield.

AAI has participated in many agriculture/rural development activities, mainly in the Middle East and West Africa. However since the Upland Rice Variety Selection Technique training course held at TBIC in 2006, we have kept links with rice cultivation in other parts of Africa, participating in the projects described in the table below. In addition, we have been cultivating friendships with trainees specializing in rice cultivation in sub-Saharan Africa, while running courses as part of the Upland Rice Variety Selection Technique course, and have been accumulating information related to rice cultivation in Africa.

Given the current trend in Japan’s cooperation in Africa, in this new series, we would like to report on our efforts to support rice cultivation, which is a core area of Japan’s cooperation. We will share lessons we have learned through our activities, and will dispatch our own thoughts on subjects such as challenges and future recommendations for rice cultivation development in Africa.



Rice cultivation (Kilimanjaro, Tanzania)



Upland rice cultivation training course at TBIC

Project	Duration	Rice related activity
National Irrigation Master Plan, Tanzania	2001-2003	Formulation of the irrigation master plan with rice cultivation as the main crop Demonstration through support for regional irrigation plans
NERICA Rice Application Plan / NERICA Rice Development Plan , Uganda	2007-2009	Experimentation and selection of rice varieties by the researchers at the National Crop Resources Research Center in Uganda. Enhancement of seed variety improvement technologies
Sustainable rural development plan in highlands and central regions in Guinea.	Ongoing since 2008	Establishment of low-input type irrigation system using water throughout a year Adaptation of rice cultivation methods to suit local environment
Upland rice variety selection technique course	2006-2009	Development of human resources that contribute to superior variety selection, which forms the basis for rice variety promotion in Africa

Mini Series Considering Project Evaluation <Part 2>

Further to the last part in Issue 61, we would like to discuss evaluation methods. In this issue, we would like to focus on the stage of utilizing evaluation results as the next step. One important point is to make sure that evaluation exercises do not become “evaluations for the sake of evaluation”. Instead, results of the evaluation must be utilized in planning subsequent actions.

Various training activities take place in projects aiming at human resource development. As we mentioned in the last part, what is important is the content, training materials, and their effectiveness as well as the quality of trainers. Here we would like to look at evaluation of trainers and training courses, and how we could utilize these evaluations to improve future training, using a concrete example.

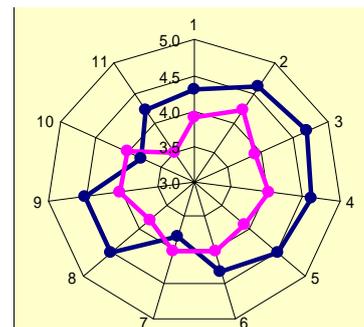
In this example, in order to evaluate trainer’s quality, a questionnaire was developed comprising some 20 questions. Trainees and training observers rated each question using five grades from “absent” to “excellent”. The results were captured in a radar chart. The following is an example of the trainer evaluation sheet and chart.

Example of trainer evaluation sheet

Evaluation method for trainer performance in giving lecture						
Put * mark in the square which express the skill degree of trainer for each element as follow:						
No	Evaluation element	absent	weak	acceptable	good	excellent
1	Expressing him self well and give welcomes to trainees					
2	Introduction of lecture is stimulating and clear					
3	Showing the objectives of lecture					
4	Showing the relationship between the current and the previous lecture					
5	Preparing handouts of lecture and delivering to the participants					
6	Used the training aids					
7	Preparing the training aids by making ready to use					
8	Used many methods to tempt attention					
9	Giving a chance for trainees to participate					
10	Answered the trainees questions positively					
11	His ability to process the subject of lecture					
12	Expressing about his enthusiasm toward the subject					
13	Asking exciting questions to attract the attention of the participants					
14	His performance refers to his self-confidence					
15	His voice and pronunciation is clear					
16	His explanation is understandable and easy to follow					
17	He gave something new and/or useful to the participants					
18	Facilitating group discussion / workshop in good way					
19	Using body-language (moving communications)					
20	Create a good learning environment within the training program					
21	Emphasis on the important points					
22	Collect the important points together with a rational series					
23	Time allocation to each subject of the lecture					
24	Sharing trainees in the abstracting the lecture					
25	Using questions in order to know the level of understanding of the participants					

The example chart shows evaluation on two different trainers using the same evaluation items. In this case, the difference in quality of the two trainers is very clear. It is also easy to see which aspects are each trainer’s strengths and weaknesses. For each trainer, it gives a good opportunity to know one’s own strengths and weaknesses following evaluation by others.

Example of trainer’s evaluation



It is clear that we can obtain useful information from this kind of trainer evaluation. We also learned that once people see the difference between trainers, the focus of evaluation tends to become comparative and marking, falling into a pitfall situation whereby the evaluation exercise becomes the objective in itself. In order to avoid the “evaluation for the sake of evaluation” phenomenon, the “next step” of improving on the areas which are evaluated as weak becomes extremely important.

The next step is to utilize the evaluation results for improvement. There are different methods of utilizing the results: 1) results should be shared with individual trainers in confidence so that they realize their weaknesses; 2) provision of individual guidance on how to improve on the weaknesses; 3) conduct training and workshop to enhance trainer’s capacity.

Along the line of thinking to evaluate trainers, it is possible also to evaluate training courses themselves. Using the rating with evaluation sheet and translating them into radar charts, it is possible to visualize the assessment results. In terms of the evaluation of training courses, it is also important not to stop at pointing out weaknesses based on the results. The more important part of the evaluation is to develop a “prescription” for improving on the weaknesses and based on the prescription make an effort to refine the courses.