

On the 30th Anniversary of AAI

Thanks to your support, AAI is at a critical juncture celebrating the 30th anniversary since its inception. We have looked back at how our activities have evolved in the last 30 years, reviewing each decade as detailed below. We could observe changes in our work and its development over each period.

1984-1994: Aiming to become experts for arid regions

The early years of AAI saw research cooperation work such as sand fixation and tree planting, crop cultivation, selection of salt resistant varieties, and paddy rice cultivation, with the inter-university research cooperation project called Joint Study Project on Improvement of Arid Land Agriculture in UAE as the anchor project. These activities went on over 10 years with the Gulf War occurring in between. In addition, we participated in activities as long-term and short-term experts in the Middle East and Africa. The main work was limited to cultivation, soil management, land use and environmental protection activities in arid regions. During this period we built a solid foundation for our technical specialization in arid land agriculture and international cooperation, accumulating experiences and developing our technical capacity.

1994-2004: Transition into “AAI of arid land agriculture”

During this period, we established our corporate image as the “AAI of arid land agriculture” among related organizations as our experiences in UAE and other countries began to be recognized. Our technical areas also diversified with foci of work expanding to include agricultural research in Oman and agricultural extension support in Syria. Later on, our activities in Oman led to mangrove afforestation and in Syria to water saving irrigation extension. Furthermore, we also came to be able to participate in activities that required comprehensive technical capacity such as water resource development and oasis development in arid regions. While this was occurring overseas, in Japan, we worked on investigating literature related to desert greening methods and techniques, nature conservation, environmental impact assessment (EIA), as well as running training programs in vegetable cultivation technology at the JICA Tsukuba International Center. Experts whom we met through various work projects started to join AAI too, enriching and expanding our human resource base.

2004-2014: Implementation of our own technical cooperation activities

In this period AAI started working on projects that are actually led by us. For 7 years since 2005, we worked on a technical cooperation project related to water saving irrigation and training extension in Syria. AAI also conducted an agricultural extension project in Palestine and a mangrove afforestation project in Oman. Furthermore, we started to become deeply involved in the NERICA rice promotion project in Uganda. In Japan, we continued to deliver the vegetable cultivation training courses at the JICA Tsukuba International Center. We also started to explore AAI’s involvement in supporting Japan’s agriculture through collaboration with organic agriculture groups in Satomi, Ibaraki Prefecture and Ushimado in Okayama Prefecture.

As above, when we consider our work in three stages of 10-year periods, our work transitioned from support programs for individual techniques in arid regions to a portfolio of activities based around regional development and technology extension in arid regions and training in Japan, through geographic and work area expansion. This was a very natural progression. Since its inception, AAI has been investing particular efforts in collaboration and joint action with counterparts on project sites, aiming to establish appropriate agricultural technology suitable for arid regions and to nurture human resources through extension activities. We always placed particular importance on relationship building in the field making friends with many colleagues, and treasuring an atmosphere where we could discuss freely and frankly many and various issues with our counterparts. When our counterparts participated in training courses in Japan, we went to meet them as much as possible, and we kept closely in touch with colleagues in the field. We believe that close human relationships became the basis for our long-term involvement in countries such as Syria and Oman which spans over 20 years. Furthermore, we are determined to continue exploring ultimate agricultural techniques and extension technologies that are useful and realizable, working jointly with technicians on the ground.

As international cooperation and technical cooperation modalities have changed over the years, we continue to pride ourselves as being “a team of a selected few”, and maintain our priority of achieving our vision of providing technical support that truly contributes to people in the regions, always ensuring collaborative actions with those working on the ground. We hope that you will continue to provide your invaluable guidance and encouragement.

(By Hiroyasu Onuma, January 2014)

