

Ingenuity of demonstration fields <Part 6>

What is the ingenuity of demonstration fields?

In this series, we have introduced some cases illustrating the ingenuity of the demonstration fields that AAI has worked on so far. In this final part, we would like to look back and mull over points of interest and results.

In Part 1, we stated that “the technology itself must be useful and applicable to target farmers” as one of the key points to consider when setting up a demonstration field. However, ‘useful technology’ means different things to different farmers, and changes according to their farming levels and social situations. We introduced the case of Palestine in Part 2 ‘Evolutionary Demonstration’ that gradually changed in terms of the technology introduced in the demonstration fields over a seven-year project period. This was possible because we did not overlook the fact that the technology to be disseminated, that is, the technology required in the field, will evolve as a result of two-way communications and feedback with farmers.

In the case of "Demonstration field with a story" in River Nile State, Sudan, which was taken up in Part 4, we introduced not only the cultivation technologies but also the subsequent oil extraction and marketing flow for the dissemination of oil crop products. It can be said that this is a method that was reached because we were particular about focusing on "extension and promotion" rather than just "introducing" oil crops technology. When a farmer introduces a new crop, "how to sell" is an important concern as well as "how to cultivate". This method was able to capture interest by providing a concrete example in the case of the farmers incorporating the oil crops into their farming plans, and it was able to obtain a greater extension effect than the demonstration field, which merely showed the field where the crops were planted.

One of the typical failures of the demonstration fields mentioned in Part 1 is the "special" demonstration fields created by investing external resources in the leading farms in the region. In these "special" demonstration fields, only selected farmers benefit, and the technology does not extend to other inhabitants which creates jealousy. When setting up a demonstration field, it is necessary to have a clear idea of how the intended technology will be transmitted to target farmers through the demonstration field. In the case of "Demonstration farm model of farmers’ participation and cost sharing" in Kassala State, Sudan, which was mentioned in Part 3, we

introduced a method to have interested farmers bear a part of the cost of the demonstration field. This method, in which farmers voluntarily engage with new technologies despite having to bear some financial burden, suppresses any sense of unfairness among local people and positively extends the technology to motivated farmers.

In Part 1, it was mentioned that a demonstration plot’s main role is as a technology transmission and knowledge transfer site, as well as being an environment for "technique verification" and "awareness raising". The case of northern Uganda introduced in Part 5 exemplified the success of this approach. The farmer group learned practically about the cultivation technologies, fund preparation, and the farm planning in the demonstration field. At the same time, it can be said that they then independently "verified" whether the farming styles recommended by the project were useful for them. In addition, there were community members around among them who were observing them closely even if they were not participating themselves. Some of these observers subsequently asked active group members to teach them their newly acquired technologies. It can be said that this demonstration field also functioned as a tool for "verification" and "promotion".

Demonstration fields are an excellent extension tool. However, farmers can't learn enough by just looking at them, and it is impossible that the technology will extend naturally among farmers by just setting up a demonstration field. When setting up a demonstration field, you must think "how to show" and "how to convey" considering the nature and applicability of technologies, the social situation of the farmers and so on. Only if you think carefully about these points will demonstration fields work as an excellent dissemination tool.



Field day in a demonstration field [Northern Uganda]. This is an ingenious way to extend techniques by providing opportunities for group members to introduce the techniques learned in the demonstration field to other community members.