

After completion of field assignments in Islamabad

A sense of accomplishment through close cooperation

Since 2019, AAI has been engaged in a JICA technical cooperation project for the capacity development of agricultural extension services in Balochistan, Pakistan (the project). The project aimed to improve capacities of agricultural extension staff, known as Field Assistants (FAs) and Agricultural Officers (AOs) through training to enable them to disseminate appropriate techniques and knowledge to farmers. The project successfully completed nearly four years of work in February 2023.

The project's training programs for FAs and AOs included group sessions in Islamabad and Quetta, as well as farmer surveys and extension activities in their respective regions. However, Japanese experts were not allowed to enter the target area of Balochistan due to security restrictions. Therefore, implementation of training and monitoring of extension activities in Balochistan was remotely conducted through National Staff (NS) in close cooperation with Counterparts (CPs).

The project implementation began in March 2019, with remote training starting around July of that year. From March 2020 onwards, the country faced a series of unforeseen challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic, a desert locust invasion, the refugee influx caused by political changes in Afghanistan, heavy summer rains and floods in 2022, and political unrest in Pakistan. In particular, during the COVID-19 pandemic, conventional face-to-face group trainings and extension activities were suspended for over a year. Given this situation, the project worked closely with CPs and NS through weekly online meetings and individual communication via social networking services to discuss operational matters. Each working group encountered many challenges that required quick and flexible responses, but these experiences contributed to the accumulated knowledge and experience of CPs, NS and Japanese experts. Despite facing many challenges, it was the result of close cooperation that enabled us to complete our field activities without any major problems. Finally, the last targeted group of training and extension activities was smoothly implemented, perhaps owing to the accumulation of a large number of different experiences.

In February 2023, during the final field assignment, the project conducted a follow-up workshop for the last training group, a project evaluation meeting and a Joint Coordination Committee meeting. At



A scene of discussion of the results of project activities at the workshop

the meetings, CPs expressed their willingness to continue their extension activities, making use of the techniques, skills and experience acquired through the project, as well as agricultural extension materials obtained. One CP expressed appreciation for the efforts of the project and added a comment that there have been many training courses for AOs in the past; however, this project focused on capacity development of FAs in each region, which was never done before and was very meaningful. After these meetings, the project held a ceremony to express our appreciation to researchers from the National Agricultural Research Centre in Islamabad, the Directorate of Agricultural Extension in Balochistan and the Agricultural Research Institute in Quetta for the support and contributions to the various activities conducted. CPs hosted a tree-planting ceremony in our honor to commemorate our work and pledged mutual prosperity in the future.

The project team also conducted interviews with each NS, expressed appreciation for their past work, and recalled memories and challenges we experienced together. They were all full of confidence and expressed their aspirations for the future. Despite facing various difficulties over the past four years, we felt a strong sense of "accomplishment" from working closely with the CPs and NS, and we are eager to continue our relationships with them as friends in the future.



A group photo with participants, CP, and NS after the workshop