In FY2016, IDACA will be conducting a training course titled “Strengthening of Multi-Purpose Businesses of Nikkei* Agricultural Cooperatives and Establishment of Community Welfare Systems” from November through December, targeting agricultural cooperatives in Central and South America as JICA’s proposal-type training program.

While Japanese migration to Brazil first began in 1908, the Japanese Government aggressively promoted the migration of farmers in the 1960s as a national policy. As JA ZENCHU sent more than 2,500 people under its “Cotia Youth Immigration” program, and through the immense hardships and efforts of pioneer immigrants, there existed 90 Nikkei agricultural cooperatives in Brazil under the Cotia Central Union of Industrial Cooperatives and the South Brazil Central Union of Agricultural Cooperatives during their heydays. In cooperation with JA ZENCHU, IDACA conducted Cotia Central Union of Industrial Cooperatives training from 1979 to 1992, accepting 82 participants. It has been reported that due to the successive dissolution of Cotia Central Union of Industrial Cooperatives and the South Brazil Central Union of Agricultural Cooperatives in 1994, many Japanese agricultural cooperatives fell into financial difficulties and faced a great ordeal. As a result, training for Nikkei agricultural cooperatives was also interrupted. Currently, there are more than 2.9 million Japanese immigrants in the entire world.

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including Latin American countries. They have been active in not only in the agricultural sector but also in various fields, and many Nikkei communities have been formed.

Currently, the numbers of Nikkei agricultural cooperatives in Central and South America are as follows: Argentina (3 agricultural cooperatives), Bolivia (2 agricultural cooperatives), Paraguay (6 agricultural cooperatives), and Brazil (60 agricultural cooperatives). Today, second- and third-generation immigrant farmers are taking on local agriculture.

While in recent years there has been a growing interest in such matters as advanced technologies in Japan, there has emerged the issue of weakening of the organization of Nikkei agricultural cooperatives due to such factors as generational changes among Nikkei people. In addition, in future management, efforts toward “exports” must be stepped up, and developing a system to enable “exporting” has become an urgent issue. Meanwhile, amid a situation where the aging of the first generation immigrants has progressed, with their average age reaching 80, and dealing with welfare services for the elderly has become a pressing need, it has been said that government services in the welfare and nursing care sectors are insufficient, and the welfare sector, such as senior citizens’ homes, home medical care, home nursing care, and in-house care support services, is not working well.

In order to deal with such a problem, it was decided that a training course on the multi-purpose businesses of Japanese agricultural cooperatives targeting senior officials of Nikkei agricultural cooperatives would be conducted in order to look into the direction of strengthening the multipurpose businesses of agricultural cooperatives (in particular, quality management techniques, welfare services, and a management system that makes full use of information technology) and explore the possibility of welfare services in local communities by agricultural cooperative organizations as a new initiative.

It should be noted that, in July 2015, IDACA helped with the field study visits for training mid-level staff members of Nikkei agricultural cooperatives held by JICA Yokohama and conducted by the Association of Nikkei & Japanese Abroad. The training course in FY2016 will be the first time for JA ZENCHU/IDACA to conduct training for Nikkei agricultural cooperatives in 24 years.

REPORTS ON TRAINING COURSES

(1) FY2015 ICA/Japan Training Course on Fostering Core Leaders of Agricultural Cooperatives

The ICA/Japan Training Course on Fostering Core Leaders of Agricultural Cooperatives used to be held twice a year, but the training course for the current fiscal year was combined into one, with participation by a total of 16 people from six Asian countries where strengthening of the organization of agricultural cooperatives has been sought. This training course, which is aimed at developing leaders responsible for revitalizing agricultural cooperatives and farmers’ groups, was conducted from March 14 through April 9.

During this period, the participants were blessed with the opportunity to visit many organizations and facilities such as JA Usutonomiya, JA Group Kanagawa Education Center, ZEN-NOH Agricultural Research and Development Center, and JA ZENCHU. In addition, during field study visits conducted in Mie Prefecture, the participants visited JA Mie Pref. Union, JA ZEN-NOH Mie, JA Ise and JA Ibagokubu. From the characteristics of farming in Mie Prefecture, the participants were able to deepen their understanding of a wide range of topics such as the role of agricultural cooperatives, various ways of selling agricultural products such as through direct sales shops and in-shop sales, and creation of added value to local products.

Mr. Balu G. Iyer, Regional Director of ICA Asia and Pacific, attended the closing ceremony, and certificates were awarded to each participant. At the beginning of the training course, JA ZENCHU President Okuno gave a special lecture on the situations in agriculture and development of agricultural cooperatives in Ise City, Mie Prefecture, and the participants were all impressed.

Message from a Former Participant

Mr. Ugyen Tshering
Marketing Assistant, Regional Agricultural Marketing Cooperatives Office, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Bhutan.

This is a good opportunity for me to express my deep feelings on this special occasion on the farewell night. It’s time for departure, but I hope that there will be another opportunity to come back again and be among the most educated and important persons like you all.

Beside the knowledge gained from IDACA, I have also obtained many ideas as to how to work with the community, sit among the farmers and share what I know and take good feedbacks for my personal improvement.

As I learned during my one month stay in Japan, I can observe many changes in myself and could now say that I have gained enough to disseminate information to the community and uplift the living standards of rural people, if not in a big way, but to some extent.

Sincerely speaking, the content of the training was good, the top of which was that the knowledgeable lecturers and professors are the main engine of the organization. I have seen all the good qualities in all the people of Japan.

We wish you a great achievement hereafter and hope that you will start to teach all minds of people, irrespective of their knowledge levels.

Thank you heartily for the good hospitality shown to us, and we assure never to forget it, but rather assure to replicate the good ways in our country.
An Opportunity for Exchanges to Reach Out to Others

Tetsu Takahashi, former director of JA Iwate Hanamaki

I have been invited to give lectures on JICA’s courses in agricultural cooperatives, training courses for rural women, and the like, that have been implemented by IDACA, but many of the encounters I have had were very fulfilling and valuable experiences.

As I am always busy running around trying to take care of immediate things, it has been difficult for a person like me to give lectures under satisfactory conditions, and I would like to apologize for that. And yet, you participants have listened enthusiastically to my lectures and posed questions, so I am very grateful about that.

There is always an interpreter during my lectures, and I have always given thought to such matters as where I should build up excitement during my lectures targeting foreigners, what would go over well with them, and whether the interpreter is having a hard time. Nevertheless, I have been helped by good listeners and good interpreters.

The reason that I feel that I have succeeded in reaching out to people from countries that I do not know about and who do not speak my language in an encounter lasting only a few hours is that perhaps we share a common position as people who are trying to understand and develop agriculture, rural areas, and agricultural cooperatives. I am looking forward to a lot of encounters in the future.
The FY2015 Follow-up Guidance and Survey Project jointly conducted by the International Cooperative Alliance - Asia and Pacific (ICA-API) and IDACA was carried out, targeting the Philippines and Cambodia. Following the report on activities in the Philippines, which was posted on the previous “IDACA News,” we will report on activities in Cambodia this time.

The contact organization receiving the survey team was the Department of Agricultural Cooperative Promotion (DACP) under the Cambodian Government’s Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries. The DACP willingly took care of coordination in various matters such as making various arrangements and contacting former participants. Also, many of the former participants who gathered opined that their participation in the training course resulted in the improvement of their personal skills as well as their awareness of work, and that they recognized the importance of cooperatives and began working to create farmers’ organizations. We came to realize that many participants who acquired knowledge and experience through training in Japan are engaged in various activities and that their enthusiasm has become a driving force for the cooperative movement.

1. The Current Situation of Agricultural Cooperatives

The Royal Decree on Cooperatives in Cambodia was issued in 2001, while the law concerning agricultural cooperatives was issued in 2003. This law makes it possible for farmers’ groups to establish joint-owned agriculture-based business entities, and operate and supervise joint agriculture cooperatives may engage in joint purchasing and sales of production materials, and that includes revitalizing micro and small-scale entrepreneurship activities in rural areas, increasing social and cultural values, and diversifying agricultural productivity. In addition, it is written in the law that agricultural cooperatives can collaborate with relevant organizations including development partners such as private firms, government, and NGOs.

Although generally only one agricultural cooperative with 38 members in 2001, there are 750 registered agricultural cooperatives today, and membership has reached 77,373. Women members account for 56% (43,832 people) of the total membership. The number of units of contribution paid totals 5,316,375 US dollars. The number of participants covered in the follow-up survey was 15 (number of former participants who participated in ICA training courses between FY2013 and FY2015). In the latest follow-up survey, 10 of the 15 participants held a conference room at DACP, and we interviewed them on such matters as the status of implementation of the action plans they drew up during their training courses.

The results of the survey were in cases where three former participants achieved some kind results including reports that results have been achieved by regularly holding training sessions to improve technical capacity for increasing productivity; cases in which four participants partially implemented their action plans, but the plans were suspended midway due to budget shortage; and cases where three participants have yet to implement their action plans because they were unable to raise funds. Gaining support through collaboration with NGOs and former participants taking the initiative and implementing their projects can be cited as factors that helped the successful former participants to achieve success. In contrast, among other things, not being able to continue working on the same task due to personnel changes, etc., and failure to gain the approval of supervisors, or obtain financial support from NGOs, etc. were cited as factors that prevented implementation of the action plans. Opinions were voiced from the Japanese side that with regard to action plans, if it has been found out that implementation would be difficult, the participants should draw up revised plans, and that in implementing the plans, the participants need to collaborate with relevant organizations, constantly conduct monitoring, and perform follow-ups after implementing the plans.

3. Visits to Agricultural Cooperatives

After the interviews, the survey team visited three agricultural cooperatives in Takeo Province and Kampot Province that are under the guidance of former participants.

1) Stok Sdomb Agricultural Cooperative

This agricultural cooperative was founded by 63 members in 2008, and it now has 265 members (123 male members and 142 female members). Within its area of jurisdiction are 14 villages in the Prey Khamba Region of Takeo Province. The cooperative has six board directors (5 men and 1 woman) and does not hire any employees. The directors share daily tasks and receive 50 US dollars in remuneration. The amount of a unit of contribution is 25 US dollars, and the amount of contribution that has been paid in is 47,000 US dollars. The agricultural cooperative primarily purchases rice from farmers, mills the rice, and sells it to private-sector merchants. This agricultural cooperative is also engaged in the savings and credit business (interest rate of 2 percent for savings, 2.5% to 2.6% interest rate on loans). The problems that it currently faces include consolidation of dispersed agricultural land, shortage of precipitation, and shortage of funds. This agricultural cooperative uses an annual business report format under the guidance of JICA experts.

2) Rolous Meas Agricultural Cooperative

This agricultural cooperative started in 2003 as a farmers’ group and became an agricultural cooperative in 2013. It was registered on January 18, 2013 as an agricultural cooperative with 111 members, and there are currently 204 members (including 134 women). The amount of a unit of contribution is 25 US dollars, and the amount of contribution that has been paid in is 53,160 US dollars. Within its area of jurisdiction are seven villages, where the cooperative is engaged in such businesses as the credit business, the sale of fertilizers, supplying of livestock feed and drinking water.

3) Kampot Pepper Agricultural Cooperative

Kampot Pepper Agricultural Cooperative was founded in 2009, and it currently has 342 members. This area is in one of the largest pepper producing area in the country, and the cooperative’s seven principles written in the Khmer language were posted on the wall, along with the cooperative’s organizational chart, a list of its members, and financial information, among other things. Education on cooperative philosophy is actively promoted, and the board directors were saying: “We encourage participation in agricultural cooperatives, but we do not force anybody to pay contributions. We respect education and raise funds to help our members and children.” In addition, this village has been selected for the NGO World Vision’s “Child Support” program, and has been offered training in such matters as bookkeeping, business planning and development, and leadership.