Commercializing agriculture

- Narendra Kumar Gurung

Agriculture is the backbone of Nepalese economy since it is single most important sector which generates 65% employment opportunities and contributes about 39% to the GDP. With the wave of globalization making every sector more competitive today, Nepalese agriculture, too, is facing varieties of challenges and opportunities at the same time. Like many other developing countries, Nepal's subsistence type of agriculture faces tremendous challenges as the country is slowly heading towards commercial and market-oriented future.

Needless to say, agriculture is another feather in Nepal's cap after being home to Mount Everest, birth place of Lord Buddha and the country of hills and mountains. Despite these facts, how to make the agriculture sector more competitive and popularize our products in the global market is a matter of great concern for all, especially at a time when the neighboring countries have already become economic powerhouse.

Keeping all this in mind, the 5th National Agro Trade Fair was held in Kathmandu from March 9 to 11 with the theme of “Commercialization in Agriculture, Food Security and Income Generation” to make Nepal’s agriculture sector more commercially competitive. Around 140 agro entrepreneurs, farmer groups and agricultural cooperatives took part in the fair bringing with them agricultural products from the rural hinterland to the Capital city defying physical barriers. As long as agriculture remains merely subsistence in nature the country can’t prosper. But if Nepali products were to reach the market—local or national—among other things, prices should be competitive that match with the quality of rival products.

The trade fair aimed at providing information of feasible agri-business linkages to the prospective entrepreneurs, promote agricultural commodities to the mass, enhance the public-private collaboration, and also hold discussions among the policymakers and other stakeholders. Agro entrepreneurs as well as farmers, who brought their products in the trade fair, had valuable time sharing their experiences among the exhibitors.

JICA with its long and rich experiences on agriculture in Nepal had a privilege to be the diamond sponsor to organize this fair in collaboration with Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives and Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry. Presently, JICA volunteers (JOCV and SV) are working in the field of agriculture and cooperatives in Nepal also took part in the agro trade fair. Three of their exhibitions were related to the new methods of mushroom cultivation, organic manure preparation and Integrated Pest Management. Besides, the trade fair turned out to be a good opportunity for policymakers, top government officials, agro entrepreneurs and farmers to thoroughly discussion various nagging issues from commercialization of agriculture to export promotion.

While observing the stalls, anybody could find agro entrepreneurs quite optimistic to address the challenges enveloping the agriculture sector. It is said that Nepal imports agricultural goods worth Rs 50 billion every year. If such agro trade fair can be regularly organized Nepalese agriculture would be more marked-oriented and competitive, which could ultimately substitute imported products.

(Mr Gurung is Chief Program Officer of JICA Nepal)
New JICA President’s message

People of the world have become more interdependent as globalization continues. As a key member of the international community, Japan has a duty to address global issues, a commitment which will also help bring peace and prosperity to our own country.

Under my predecessor, Dr. Sadako OGATA, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has grown into an organization which is capable of providing developing countries and areas ‘seamless’ assistance in a variety of circumstances.

JICA is engaged in every phase of development: assisting in peace building in the wake of conflict, helping to immediately rebuild shattered economies and social structures and then to ensure long-term and sustainable development of nations.

As the country’s major development agency, it is important to emphasize that JICA’s activities should reflect both the Japanese people’s will and opinions.

I am humbled by my new role as the President of JICA, an organization which has assumed the country’s responsibility to the world as well as the trust of the people of Japan in providing comprehensive assistance to developing countries and areas across the globe.

We were heartened by the warm messages and support from all over the world in the wake of the Great East Japan Earthquake last March. Assistance came from people even in developing countries whose own survival was at risk and this reminded us of how expansively and deeply our country is connected with the international community.

I do not doubt that many people in Japan who received such support have themselves again felt moved to do something for the international community. I believe that such interconnection between people and the sense of solidarity make the foundation for the development of the international community.

Going forward, JICA is committed to letting the people of Japan know the current situation of developing countries and areas and disseminating its experience-based knowledge to the world more broadly than ever.

I promise that, based on our international cooperation expertise and empathy of the people of Japan, we will walk with developing countries and areas as their partner and play the role of strengthening ties between people living there and the people of Japan.

Akihiko TANAKA, President, Japan International Cooperation Agency

Former JICA Prez Ogata looks back on her term

A focus on the field, human security, assistance for peace-building and for Africa, and organizational reforms. These were the top issues that Mrs Sadako Ogata touched on during a press conference held at the JICA headquarters in Tokyo on March 29, concerning her retirement as president at the end of March.

During her eight-and-a-half-year term as JICA president, she emphasized that JICA promote a field-based approach through, for example, allocating more staff to the field and introducing an overseas on-the-job training system for new staff, based on her own experience that the reality of people and communities cannot be seized without actually being close to them.

Concerning human security, Mrs Ogata said that she insisted on the importance of giving consideration to socially vulnerable people, protecting them from diverse threats and empowering them to address such threats on their own. As a result, this concept is now incorporated into most of JICA’s cooperation, she added. In the area of peace-building assistance, she mentioned operations in Afghanistan as one good model in her term.

In the case of South Sudan, she said “JICA started the field survey in 2005 and constructed a river port in the capital of Juba, leading to the repatriation of people.” Then she added that JICA provided vocational training and other comprehensive assistance for them.

During Mrs Ogata’s term, JICA greatly increased the proportion of its technical cooperation, ODA loans and grant aid to Africa. According to her, “It’s because the Asian countries had significantly developed with Japanese assistance and more need for development existed in Africa.”

In October 2008, the new JICA was launched through a merger with the Overseas Economic Cooperation Operations of the former Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC). The new JICA is now implementing the aforementioned three forms of assistance under one roof to address issues of developing countries more effectively. At the same time, the JICA Research Institute was established for enhancing research function based on JICA’s field activities. Along with JICA’s vision, “Inclusive and Dynamic Development,” she insisted on the importance of taking a stand for policies and programs that will benefit a wide range of people, including balancing education and employment for younger generations.

In response to a request for a comment on Japan’s progressively shrinking ODA budget, Mrs Ogata said that when Japan received assistance from almost all the world, including least developed countries, in the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake, Japanese people renewed their own understanding that development cooperation is not a one way flow but a reciprocal process within the international system of mutual dependency. Starting in April, Mrs Ogata continues her involvement with JICA as a special advisor.
In the afternoon of March 11, 2011, Teichiro Yotsukura was working as usual at his laundry service facility in the northeastern coastal city of Ishinomaki when a massive earthquake shook the building.

While telling his employees to evacuate as a precaution, he thought a tsunami would never reach his facility located three kilometers inland. Within an hour, the floor was inundated and the equipment he had renewed only a year before with a bank loan was under water. He and his mother decided to stay on the second floor until the water receded.

Next morning, Yotsukura went downstairs and found water as high as 1.3 meters. In northern Japan, wading through chilly water at the breast height for even 30 minutes in early March could be the equivalent of committing suicide. They suffered severe hunger. On the 4th day, water levels dropped as low as knee height and they managed their way home.

The damage to his business was so severe that he gave up any idea of reconstructing it. He laid off employees to allow them to receive monthly labor insurance payments. He first worked in debris removal then took a job as temporary advisor at a city job center.

Yotsukura later took a JICA job as Community Reconstruction Facilitator who coordinates between local communities and municipal governments, and in August he was assigned to the island of Miyato in the neighboring Higashi Matsushima city. The island formed part of Matsushima, a scenic site and popular tourist destination in northern Japan. Three out of the four settlements on the island had been swept away by the tsunami though most of the 1,000 population were safely evacuated.

Working with Yotsukura in the island community is Kayoko Fukuhara, a second JICA reconstruction facilitator.

Kyoto-born Fukuhara was completing her assignment as a JICA volunteer in Kenya and her scheduled flight back home was just 10 days away when the earthquake hit northeastern Japan. After returning to Japan she decided to work as a JICA reconstruction facilitator. Jun Sasaki is another ex-JICA volunteer-turned reconstruction facilitator. Hiroshima-born Sasaki spent two years in Ghana helping 500 villagers as a JICA volunteer until 2011.

He meticulously visited every household to hear local people’s needs and then helped to successfully launch a shea butter production enterprise of local mothers by inviting a wholesaler which traded with global cosmetics firms such as the Body Shop.

After returning to Japan in June 2011 Sasaki worked as a volunteer in the tsunami affected areas before becoming a JICA reconstruction facilitator when he was assigned to the mainland community of Nobiru, adjacent to Yotsukura and Fukuhara’s island.

Pursuing balanced reconstruction
JICA started the reconstruction facilitator pilot project jointly with the Miyagi prefecture, the city of Higashi Matsushima, Miyagi University, and local NPOs. The project aims to assist people-driven community reconstruction to speed up the reconstruction process.

The three facilitators are working at the forefront of community reconstruction, engaging in the difficult task of bundling different and often colliding interests and values of people with various jobs, backgrounds and generations. Their role as the interface between people and municipal governments is often nerve wrecking and exhausting. Working with local people, the three facilitators often witnessed the challenge of achieving seamless transition of local human resources from emergency jobs offered by the government to solid employment in the reconstruction process. Lessons obtained from their activities are only beginning to accumulate. The joint project aims to achieve balanced reconstruction, according to Kozo Nagami at the JICA Tohoku Branch in northern Japan who oversees the agency’s involvement. While emphasizing community and social reconstruction by taking account of the weakest people in the community, reconstruction must equally emphasize industrial and economic aspects to restore local economies. In addition, inherent local issues such as a shrinking and aging population should also be addressed.
Lawmakers cutting across party lines, leaders, economists, policy-makers, journalists and others actively took part in the last session of the roundtable discussion on “Nepal’s State-Building: Development and Growth Strategy” organized by JICA Nepal at Hotel Dwarika on March 8. The function was organized to make lawmakers realize the importance of economic growth and development strategy while formulating policies. Welcoming the participants, JICA Nepal’s Chief Representative Mitsuyoshi Kawasaki shed lights on the importance of JICA’s State-Building Program in the present transition period that Nepal is passing through and underscored an urgent need for sustainable peace and development in Nepal. Three experts of state building—Shinji Asanuma, Professor of Hitotsubashi University; Ken Ohashi, former World Bank Country Director for Nepal; and Hisanobu Shishido, Policy Cluster Leader of World Bank—graced the program with their presentations. The first presentation “A Thought on the New Economic Vision for Nepal” by Shishido prioritizes equitable, efficient and strategic distribution of resources. He puts greater stress on economic growth and development to reduce poverty and call for free market entry and exit policy to better investment climate. The challenges he sees are maintaining stable macro economy and bringing in large-scale investment, especially in infrastructure development and shifting focus from political development to economic development. For all this, he says leadership’s commitment to growth-oriented policy is a must. Equally urgent needs, according to him, are exploiting booming markets of India and China and controlling fluctuating prices. Amid marathon cross-party negotiations on a new federal set-up in Kathmandu ahead of fast-approaching deadline to promulgate the new constitution, Prof Asanuma, in his presentation on “State Structure for the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal”, says federalism is Nepalese people’s quest for an inclusive democracy for change by safeguarding national integrity and sovereignty. Management of identity politics and transformation of minority groups are key to encouraging inter-state competition in the new federal set-up, he notes. As people from all walks of life are clamoring against ethnicity-based federalism in Nepal, the Japanese professor says economic viability and serviceability principle needs to be taken into account while discussing on a suitable state model. Calling an end to monopoly of power and dominance by a majority group, Prof Asanuma’s presentation stresses for the formation of federal states considering Nepal’s geography so as to level regional disparities. “One nation, a culture of cultures and one economy” is a development pill for Nepal, he says, adding this idea could maintain cultural harmony, economic development and fiscal management. By the same token, his presentation lays great emphasis on fair allocation of state resources, collection of appropriate taxes, promotion of national markets and adequate funding of state government operations by the federal government. The third and last presentation—“Economic Consequences of Nepali Politics”—by Ken Ohashi, former World Bank Country Director for Nepal, calls for institutionalizing the sweeping changes brought about by democratic movements in Nepal. “The prolonged political instability is hurting economy and it’s high time that all stakeholders acted together, mainly political leaders with a common stand on national issues.” Calling for determining priorities based on national sentiments, his presentation calls on politicians to create investment opportunities and business-friendly climate by ending power crisis, labor problems and strikes. Among more than 35 participants were lawmakers Dr Ram Sharan Mahat, former Finance Minister; Dr Minendra Rijal, former Culture Minister; Pradeep Gyawali, former Tourism Minister, Kali Bahadur Malla as well as former NFIN General Secretary Aang Kazi Sherpa. The four leaders expressed hope that JICA’s State-Building program will help lawmakers deal with economic challenges of Nepal. Lawmaker Malla said the participants gained a wealth of experience during the JICA-organized trip to Japan and Vietnam. (Mr Chhetri is Public Relations Officer of JICA Nepal)
As one of Nepal’s leading child education NGO states; “World Change Starts with Educated Children”, the step towards creating sustainable development (change towards betterment) cannot go without people first being aware of their current surrounding environment and their own attitude towards it. Yet again our four JICA volunteers created this little change in people’s mind.

We, a team of ‘Environmental Education Awareness Troop’, headed towards the West, reaching schools and community in Nepalgunj, Tikapur, Dhangadhi, and Mahendranagar from February 29 to March 5. The aim of our scheme was to create environmental and public hygiene awareness among school students and teachers; and demonstrate alternative teaching method for teachers. Our program comprised of three components—interactive lesson, song, and drama. In contrast to the previous teacher-student session, we try to increase students’ participation by demonstrating fun elements via means of aforementioned alternative learning tools. Throughout our program, we also focused on teachers’ participation. To increase teacher involvement, we spared good among of time explaining our program contents and its aim before the session, urging teachers to support the children to participate when the program starts.

Another interesting thing was the length of teachers’ participation. We also distributed learning materials (notebooks, cards) to the students and teachers.

Although our visits to those places were brief, the time spent was enough for us to experience the difficulties surrounding the education sector in this country. We came across school system hierarchy and government school employees’ demand towards the government. And we learnt all together how these factors can strongly affect students’ daily learning. A week after our program, we sent out envelopes containing group photos to each visited places. We shall hope that our program has given the students and teachers a small chance to reflect on their beings. The team is planning to continue their program this year.

- Namiko Motokawa, JOCV (Community Development, Kavre)

Health is wealth

At the end of February we, 12 members of volunteers, organized ‘Health Caravan’ for about a week. We visited seven areas—Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, Lalitpur, Dhadingbesi (Dhading), Chapakot (Pokhara), Kusma (Parbat) and Walling (Syangja). Three-eight activities—introducing Japan and JICA; exercises for preventing low back pain; hand-washing and teeth-brushing techniques; teaching sex education; nutrition tips; drama on balanced diet; and health check-up were staged in those areas.

In many villages, people seemed interested in these programs. They lend their ear to us, sang songs together with us, asked how to lose or gain weight and so on. Especially in the nutrition drama, everyone watched eagerly. The idea is very simple, “if you’ve eaten balanced diet, three health supermen can protect our body from illness”. So everyday eat proper balanced diet, three health supermen can protect our body from illness. So everyday eat proper balanced diet for health. Regarding dazzling acting, not only children adults also enjoyed a lot. Our members, despite having diverse occupations and practicing areas, came with their own program and shared several aspects of health. This experience will also expand our activities.

- Rie Sato, JOCV (Nutritionist, Dhading)

Quake risks increasing

– Sourab Rana

A JICA survey team has found that earthquake vulnerability in the Kathmandu Valley is growing higher as a result of haphazard urbanization and mushrooming of tall and unsafe buildings, but at the same time some actions have been taken to reduce earthquake disaster risk in the Valley.

The findings of ‘Data Collection Survey on the Earthquake Disaster Risk Reduction in the Kathmandu Valley’ was made public amid a function at Hotel Himalaya on March 13.

JICA dispatched a five-member team to conduct data collection survey on earthquake disaster risk reduction from February 26 to March 22, 2012. The findings state that a long term approach is required according to the National Strategy for Disaster Risk Management and the forthcoming Disaster Management Act to mitigate and reduce earthquake disaster risks.

The survey lays emphasis on including DRR in the Periodic Development plan for strengthening self-reliance on disasters management.

Since 2002—the year when JICA conducted “The Study on Earthquake Disaster Mitigation in the Kathmandu Valley”, vulnerability from earthquake disaster has increased as more people are migrating to cities and the urban area is expanding haphazardly.

Nepal is vulnerable to earthquakes because the northward movement of the Indian plate is approximately perpendicular to the Himalayan collision belt. This movement is exerting a compressive stress in some transverse faults in the region, which is heightening the risk of big earthquakes.

(Mr. Rana is Program Officer of JICA Nepal)
Aid for School Sector Reform Program

The Government of Japan has agreed to extend a grant assistance of Japanese Yen 930 million (Rs 1006.2 million) to the Government of Nepal for the Project of Basic Education Improvement in Support of the School Sector Reform Program (SSRP) in Nepal.

An agreement to this effect was signed and exchanged at the Ministry of Finance on February 24. The SSRP (2009-2015) of the Government of Nepal is a seven-year strategic program. It is funded jointly by the Government and nine pooling development partners and other non-pooling partners. Japan is a non-pooling partner.

Assistance for Sindhuli Road section III

The Government of Japan has agreed to extend a grant up to Japanese Yen 577 million (Rs 580 million) to the Government of Nepal for the implementation of the Project for Construction of Sindhuli Road Section III, which stretches from Khurkot to Nepalthok (around 37 km).

Japan has been extending grant assistance for the Construction of the Sindhuli Road since 1995. This project is about 160 km, stretching from Bardibas to Dhulikhel. It is the world’s largest Grant Aid projects of Japan.

Master plan study on storage type hydel development

JICA started the Nationwide Master Plan Study on the Storage Type Hydroelectric Power Development in Nepal from December 2011. The study aims at preparing the Hydroelectric Power Development Master Plan for the next 20 years within the framework of power system development plan that shall articulate development plan of selected Storage-type Hydroelectric Power projects of 100MW to 300MW suitable for domestic power supply. The study will be carried out in close cooperation and coordination with the Nepal Electricity Authority by the nine-member team led by Takashi Mimura. The final report of the study will be submitted by August 2013.
Operation and maintenance of Sindhuli Road

The Technical Cooperation Project Team on the Operation and Maintenance of the Sindhuli Road led by Hiroki Sinkai came to Nepal on January 9, 2012 and started its work in partnership with the Department of Roads and the Department of Water Induced Disaster Prevention.

The overall goal of the project is to secure safe and smooth road traffic along the Sindhuli Road, whereas, the project objective is to improve the routine, recurrent, periodic, and emergency maintenances as well as proper road management of the Sindhuli Road by the Department of Roads (DOR) and Department of Water Induced Disaster Prevention (DWIDP)*. Altogether 11 experts ranging from Road Administration to Road Disaster Prevention Plan will be dispatched intermittently from January 9 to December 2015. The project is expected to enhance the operation and maintenance system of the Sindhuli Road through better road management system and enhancement of the knowledge and skills of the DOR and DWIDP on countermeasure works against disasters.

Six-lane road awareness

A road awareness program was organized on Kathmandu-Bhaktapur Six-Lane Road from January to second week of March. The program meant for students, road users and transport workers was organized by the Department of Road with JICA’s support using the expertise of Prestige Consulting Pvt Ltd.

A team of road awareness experts explained about road safety, including the dangers of excessive speed, the possible consequences of driving under the influence of alcohol to transport workers. Similarly, students and other road users were taught about potential dangers on the road, traffic signals, pedestrian crossing signs, traffic rules etc.

This kind of awareness program is key to change the manner of both road users and pedestrians for a better traffic culture.

Incoming and Outgoing Staff

JICA Nepal welcomes the following new staff members:

Satoshi Fujii
Senior Representative

Kyoko Suzumura
Project Formulation Advisor
(Volunteer Section)

Toru TAKE
Senior Representative

Chihiro SANO
Project Formulation Advisor
(Volunteer Section)

Yoko SHIRAKAMI
Project Formulation Advisor
(Volunteer Section)

JICA Nepal wishes to extend a warm THANK YOU to the following outgoing staff:

Toru TAKE
Senior Representative

Chihiro SANO
Project Formulation Advisor
(Volunteer Section)

Yoko SHIRAKAMI
Project Formulation Advisor
(Volunteer Section)
Mediation of people, by people, for people

- Santosh Chhetri

Local people in Sindhuli and Mohattari districts are amicably settling disputes through community mediation, an alternative dispute solution as a supplemental tool to court-referred resolution. An increasing number of people have started realizing that community mediation is more suitable to settle local disputes instead of fighting prolonged legal battles involving huge expenditure.

Thanks to the Strengthening Community Mediation Capacity for Peaceful and Harmonious Society Project (COMCAP), the Sindhuli road corridor area today is slowly taking pride in having a peaceful community and promoting harmonious relations. COMCAP is launched by the Ministry of Local Development and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) in January 2010.

The formal justice system still remains inaccessible to a large extent, especially for the marginalized communities in the corridor area that connects both the districts where the gap between the rich and the poor is conspicuous. Both the districts have 10 community mediation centers and 17 district trainers. COMCAP has provided basic community mediation training to 270 community mediators and 10 VDC assistants of 10 VDCs, who were selected through a socially inclusive process. Each VDC has 27 community mediators—three persons, both men and women, from each ward.

Always a win-win situation

Community mediators are the villagers trained to facilitate for resolving disputes that are causing divisions in community levels. Mediation sessions are conducted maintaining privacy and are not choked with overload hearings like in the courts. Dispute management through community mediation is a key to ensure lasting peace in the society. All 10 mediation centers provide free mediation services to both disputing parties to resolve disputes. During the mediation process, three mediators—two chosen by the disputants and one by the VDC—remain impartial and settle disputes resulting in a win-win situation for both sides.

Figures speak for themselves

Out of 91 registered cases in the two districts, 69 have been resolved by community mediation centers from March-November 2011 and 22 cases are pending. Cases related to property, money and land top the list of disputes in Sindhuli and verbal abuses and physical assaults in Mahottari. Inter-caste and ethnic disputes are not registered so often as more than 70 percent, out of 91 cases, were the disputes within the same caste or ethnic group in this period.

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If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions for what you would like to see in future issues, please do not hesitate to write us.