

Experiences and Challenges in Conducting the Sustainable Rural Development Program as a Special Master's Course

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Ms. Malala Yousafzai a teen-age girl shot calamitously on her way home from school in 2012 by the Taliban in Pakistan stated the following message for all the young people in the world at the United Nation. “We will continue our journey to our destination of peace and education” then “Our words can change the whole world” attracting the largest audience, and eventually concluded as “Our books and our pens, they are our most powerful weapons” (Tokyo Shinbun, 2013). On the basis of the same principle, we, the faculty members of agricultural science related institutes, set up the Sustainable Rural Development program in 2006 as a master's course aiming to develop leaders for rural area development. With previous reflection on international collaborations in developing countries, participatory approaches were adopted instead of technology transfer methodology. Moreover, we planned a novel approach that can practically and holistically communicate these ideas on rural area development, or a post participatory approach. For the objectives above, the program provided practical and theological training at the graduate level as related to stable food production and supply, and alleviation of poverty in each participant's home country under collaborations between the University of Tsukuba and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) as a special 14-month course. There were numerous constraints such as language barriers to create subjects comprising four categories: basic, preparatory, advanced and specific courses in English. Under our efforts, these constraints were resolved and all subjects are still taught in the G30 program even though the Sustainable Rural Development (SRD) course ended in 2012. From the view-point of internationalization, the commencement of this program brought about changes for faculty members. Our experiences and challenges during the seven years of this program will be introduced as an example of implementation of a program for actions based on the role of universities in Education for Sustainable Development (ESD).

Key words: ESD, rural development, resilience, environment, human network

Introduction

On 8 September 2000, the United Nations Millennium Declaration was adopted by the Millennium Summit of 189 world leaders at the headquarters of the United Nations during the General Assembly. The Millennium Declaration has eight chapters and key objectives as follows; values and principles, peace, security and disarmament, development and poverty eradication, protecting our common environment, human rights, democracy and good governance, protect-

ing the vulnerable, meeting the special needs of Africa, and strengthening the United Nations (2000). The first chapter comprises six pillars; freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature, and shared responsibility. These eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) should all be achieved by the year 2015. The actions of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) commenced from 2004 after approval at the Johannesburg Summit, as a 10 year-program entitled “the decade of education for sustainable development” declared by Japan. In accordance with

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this situation, the role of universities has been issued in terms of international cooperation for the development of rural areas in developing countries.

For instance, this issue was discussed and appealed by the Science Council of Japan (2008). The proposal for the presence of international cooperation for the development and the role of regional studies emphasized a) mutual understanding and correct recognition, b) capacity development support from the bottom, c) the view point of human security, and d) efforts to promote the integration of Japanese experiences toward international common properties. Behind these proposals, the following virtues exist; regional studies function to provide fruitful knowledge and information for strengthening mutual understanding, capacity building as a term prone to reflect the thought from the donor side. Thus capacity development means proper bottom-up capacity development needed to accumulate experiences and create a human network. On the basis of the same principle, we, the faculty members of agricultural science related institutes, determined to set up the Sustainable Rural Development (SRD) program as a special master's course in 2006 aiming to develop leaders for rural area development. With previous reflection on international collaboration in developing countries, the participatory approach has been adopted instead of methodology for technology transfer. Moreover, we developed a novel approach that can practically and holistically communicate these ideas on rural area development, or a post participatory approach.

From the view-point of internationalization, the commencement of this program brought about changes for faculty members. Our experiences and challenges during the past seven years will be introduced as an example of implementation of a program for action based on the role of universities in ESD.

Orientation of Development

The terminology "Development" has been used over a wide spectrum depending on the period by virtue of tremendous situations around the world. After the Second World War, economic development was discussed mostly as an ascending destination. Thereafter sustainable development was popular as a horizontal orientation from the 1980s, considering protection of the environment and natural resources. Recently, with comprehensive aspects comprising widespread points, especially risk management, the development of human security is oriented as a descending orientation in

the 21st Century. For rural development, an identical approach is necessary to strengthen leader's capacity development, so related subjects were newly created for this course. On the other hand, there were numerous constraints related to international cooperation for rural development as shown in Fig. 1. Decreases in regional resilience, and deterioration of natural resources and environment have been remarkable, to say nothing of natural disasters occurring often, and poverty problems associated with many causes such as imbalanced development in rural areas as compared with urbanized areas. To cope with these issues, UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP), introduced the Education Resilience Approaches (ERA) Program through the World Bank (Kelcey and Varela, 2013). The ERA Program offers an integrated resilience framework rooted in the premise that individuals, communities and systems inherent assets and potential for involvement are conducive not just to post-crisis recovery, but to positive transformation. Among countermeasures, the following three are reliable: RES-360° (resilience in education systems), a rapid assessment for an objective view of insights transcending adversity; RES-School (resilience in schools), a more in depth assessment of how resilience can be fostered through core tasks of schools; and RES-Research (resilience in education setting research), a training module for local researchers to undertake policy-relevant resilience research.

How to Recognize the Natural Environment?

The natural environment is where we live, and its conditions have been the focus of increasingly vocal concern for approximately 40 years. In addition, a growing body of social scientists has begun to ask more generally how people construe and think about their environments, and their physical surroundings (Carrier, 2001). Carrier referred to previous articles written by two scientists and said; the life world, imagined from an experimental center, is spherical in form, whereas a world divorced from life, that is yet complete in itself, is imagined in the form of a globe. Ingold (2000) defined sphere as people with a sphere view see themselves as being enmeshed in their surroundings, springing from their close practical engagement with their surroundings. Such people don't distinguish the cultural and the natural realms in very clear way, and see the world as a sphere in which they

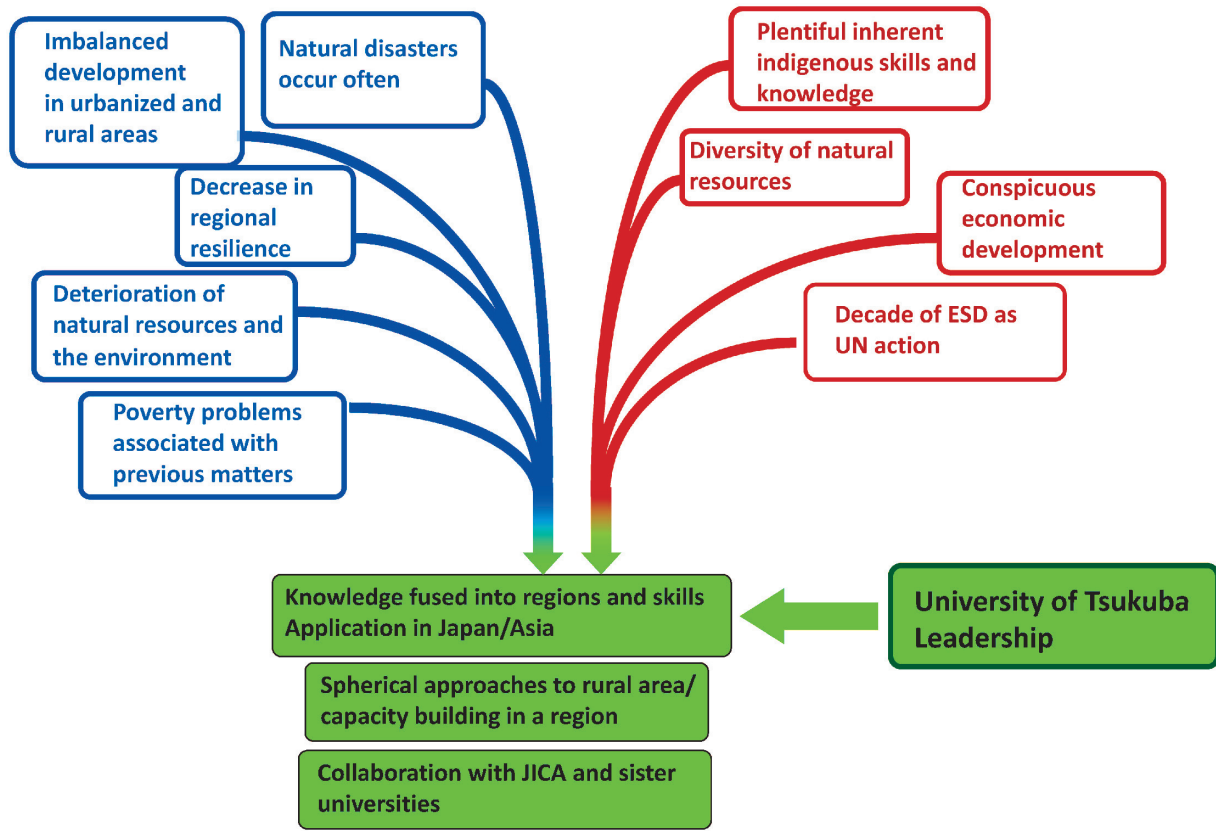


Fig. 1. Scheme of factors affecting rural development and motives for creation of a harmonious community.

and their practical activities occupy the center. In developing countries, people see the natural environment from this view. On the contrary, globe is defined as people with a globe view, on the other hand, seeing themselves as being distinct from their surroundings. Such people draw a distinction between the natural on one hand, and the social and cultural on the other. They see the world as a globe, outside of which they stand and which they observe at a distance, so that their environment is a construction of contemplation rather than practical engagement. Groups for environmental protection see the world with this view in the Western Cultures. Escobar (1999) proposed the following regimes as nature; 1) Organic nature: characterized by the fact that nature and society are not separated ontologically, so that there is no clear separation of the biophysical, human and supernatural worlds. This resembles Ingold's sphere orientation. There is a range of manifestations of such organic views of nature among peasants and village societies, but they spring from a practical engagement with the natural environs. 2) Capitalist nature: its core is the objectification of

nature linked to the spread of patriarchal and commodities. This produces an alienated view of the environment, apprehended through the mechanisms of capitalist rationality and control. This resembles Ingold's globe orientation. 3) Techno nature: only now emerging, so tentative. In this regime, the boundary between nature and culture is blurred through such things as genetic engineering. The approach to the natural environment is mediated by modern technologies and developments, and hence indirectly by the drive for profit that motivates many. This also resembles Ingold's globe.

Sustainable Rural Development Education Program

To teach the above objectives, the program commenced in 2006, providing practical and theological training at the graduate level relate to stable food production and supply, and alleviation of poverty in participant's home country under collaboration between the University of Tsukuba and the Japan International Cooperation Agency as a special 14-month

course comprising 4-month on-site learning period in the home country prior to coming to Japan. The first 4-month period of learning used a remote TV conference system (e-Learning) and the other 10-month learning period was in Japan inclusive of an international internship in Thailand. Basically, the aim of this course was to foster leaders for rural area with the capacity to develop and create novel ingenious techniques rooted in their home regional areas. In order to realize this purpose a style of ESD action principle were adopted, considering how to develop and what natural environment to target, thus the subjects provided by this course were not only social sciences but also natural sciences, including Farming Systems and Conservation of Soil and Water Resources to name a few. The general information provided by JICA (2005) describes the background and motives of the program as follows; in most developing countries, the capacity development of human resources is essential for sustainable agriculture and rural development. A special 14 month long Master's Program on Sustainable Rural Development started in 2006 at the Graduate School of Agro-Bioresources Science and Technology, University of Tsukuba in corporation with JICA Tsukuba Center. This training program was designed with the following basic concepts to provide possible countermeasures for sustainable rural development in Asian and African countries: 1) comprehensive approach to rural community development, a. capacity assessment of individuals, organizations and the society, b. learning of techniques and methodologies to improve problems, and c. preparation of realistic action plans and their implementation. 2) Implications of Japanese and Asian knowledge, a. learning Japanese and Asian experiences in rural development projects and researches, b. verification of tentative action plans through Program in Thailand, called the international internship with devoted collaboration with Kasetsart University at Bangkok, for application in home countries, and c. preparation of action plans utilizing Japanese and Asian knowledge and their implementation.

Moreover the concepts of this course were: a. preparatory program in respective countries using JICA-Net system (remote TV conference system), b. individual technical program on a specific theme supported by supervision from an appropriate faculty member of the University of Tsukuba with expertise in the same field area, qualifying as a master's thesis. Eventually,

the report written by each participant was published in the Journal of Developments in Sustainable Agriculture (JSDA), an online journal published by the Agricultural and Forestry Research Center, University of Tsukuba, and each participant was awarded a Master's degree from the University of Tsukuba, c. continuous communication through post-program monitoring reports.

The participants of this training program were required to earn 30 credits from of the university, write a technical report approved by the university as mentioned above, submit an approved job implementation plan authorized by his/her organization, complete other necessary tasks of the training program, and participate in the training program with a good attitude. The university also faced numerous constraints such as language barrier in developing subjects that comprised four categories: basic, preparatory, advanced and specific courses in English. Through our efforts, these constraints were resolved and all subjects are still taught in the G30 program even though the SRD coursed ended in 2012. In the last seven years, a total of 37 students graduated from this course and returned to their home countries, almost all are still working in rural development as a leader with higher expertise. Recently, many factors causes disturb sustainable development such as a decrease in resilience spreading in the world (Tanaka *et al.*, 2012). We trust this program we have developed will be the key to extend internationalized education programs with our further efforts. Of course, successive experiences and the human network incorporated with JICA's collaboration will be a precious asset and contribute to rural development to a greater extent.

Epilogue

Ms. Malala Yousafzai a teen-age girl shot calamitously on her way home from school in 2012 by the Taliban in Pakistan stated the following message for all young people in the world at the United Nation. "We will continue our journey to our destination of peace and education" then "Our words can change the whole world" attracting the largest audience, and eventually concluded as "Our books and our pens, they are our most powerful weapons" (Tokyo Shinbun, 2013).

We should be responsible for enhancing education to alleviate rural livelihoods and ameliorate vulnerable resilience of people in the areas, even though there are still many constraints to be resolved.

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