

Opening Address by Kaoru ISHIKAWA,
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Japan
to the Arab Republic of Egypt,
on “WATER USERS’ ORGANIZATION”
on the Occasion of the Opening Session of
Kick Off Meeting of the Water Management Improvement Project 2

Nile Hilton Hotel, Cairo, 25th August, 2008

Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

(I. Introduction)

It is indeed a great honour and pleasure for me to speak at the opening session of Kick Off Meeting of the Water Management Improvement Project 2. This Japanese technical cooperation project aims to organize farmer’s groups, and to use efficiently irrigation water. I am convinced that “Water is life” and “Agriculture is a basis of the nation”. I am very glad to start this practical project for both water and agriculture under the partnership of Egypt and Japan.

Today, I would like to touch upon just three points;

Firstly, Japanese experience, secondly, Japanese organization and finally, Japanese technology for water and agriculture in Egypt.

(II. Japanese experience)

First, I would like to share with you Japanese experience on water.

Japan does not have such a long history of 7000 years as Egypt has; however, we also have some histories of development and coexistence with water by ordinary people like the lower class warriors (Samurais) and farmers.

Especially, projects of excavation canal and ditch were prosperous

in Edo, or old Tokyo as it was so called before the revolution of Meiji in 1868. In Kanto region, including Tokyo, there were many canals and ditches on the ground and underground, which made a complex network since centuries. Their usage extended to many topics; for example, as life water like Tamagawa-josui, as irrigation water like Musashino, for transportation like Edogawa.

(III. Japanese organization)

Secondly, I would like to talk about Japanese organization for water and agriculture.

Organization in Japanese way is today world famous as the key of Japanese success to realize the second largest economy in the world, in spite of the total lack of natural resources. Water resources are not an exception.

Though rain fall over Japan is 1700mm per annum and looks abundant, reality is the opposite due to geographical landscape. Japan is an archipelago. It is narrow in width and very long from the north to the south. Furthermore, two thirds of Japanese archipelago is covered by steep mountains. Thus, fallen rain reaches seas or oceans rapidly without remaining long time on surface or in underground. This means that Japanese farmers do not have abundant water and they must share the scarce resource.

The best way to share scarce resources is to organize themselves and try to manage the resources. That was exactly what farmers did in Japan. They organized themselves to share limited agricultural water and they managed and maintained irrigation and drainage system that they built through tens of generations. And, we want to talk about "water users' organization system", developed in my country as an important social capital. Sharing this experience will change the features of agriculture in the world.

(IV. Japanese technology)

Finally, I would like to introduce Japanese technology which gives contemporary figure to the above mentioned water users' organization.

It is well known that Japanese irrigation and agricultural machine technology is used all over the world and it is state-of-the-art.

Please look at the distributed map of the last page in handout. It shows Japan's grant aid projects on water resources and agriculture. Japan has contributed to the development of Egyptian ordinary farmers through ODA (Official Development Assistant).

We had repaired 34 floating pumps in upper Egypt, improved 4 large regulators of the Bahr Yusef Canal in middle Egypt, established 2 mechanization centers for tractors and combines in the Nile Delta.

(V. Conclusion)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I like to visit the Egyptian Museum in Tahrir square whenever I have free time. Not necessarily to look at Tut Ankh Amon's treasures. I rather like the rooms where they exhibit ancient life style in villages, such as counting the number of cows, fishing in the River Nile, weaving clothes, etc. I also like Sakkara and other tombs where we can see on relieves how farmers 'husband and wife' harvested.

We can detect that in these old days, they jointed their forces and they organized their work. Today's subject is to focus on water users' organization, based on our experiences.

I am convinced that Japanese experience, organization and technology for water and agriculture, which I told you about today, can contribute to further prosperity of Egyptian agriculture.

I hope that this project succeeds, that the creeping water problems of the farmer in Egypt be solved, and that a lot of bumper harvests be brought to the Egyptian people.

I thank you for your very kind attention.