



Take My Hand

The Newsletter of the Asian Rural Institute



Sowing seedlings at Tsurukawa seminary

ARI Earthquake Recovery

*I*t has been three months now since the earthquake. The moment the ground began to shake, we ARI staff were in the middle of our final planning meeting for the 2011 training program; a meeting that never finished. The tremors started out small, but gradually got stronger and we rushed out of the building in our socks and slippers. It was difficult to keep balance even though we were standing on “solid” ground and all we could do was watch as buildings twisted and windows broke and wonder how much stronger the shaking would get. Little did we know that the worst was not over. Later in the day we heard the news reports of 30 meter tsunamis and the next day the nuclear reactors 110 kilometers away from us started to melt down.

Like millions of others in Eastern Japan, that day turned our lives upside down. Yet even in times like

these (maybe especially in times like these) we could find much to be thankful for. No one at ARI was killed or injured – not even one scratch. This ARI family has come closer together, taking care of each other, relying on one another, and looking to each other for comfort and support. We have held numerous sessions since the earthquake to disseminate information, share our fears and sorrows, and pray! And this ARI family is not just those here on campus, but extends throughout the whole world – graduates, former volunteers, friends and supporters from everywhere. Hundreds of messages of concern, love, and prayer started pouring in by email and post and almost from the first day people started sending funds, no questions asked, just knowing ARI is in trouble. You have all been a tremendous encouragement to us, just knowing how much you care.

Unexpectedly, we have found this disaster to be a time of renewal.

When you shake the foundations, you find that that which is truly strong, truly important will remain standing, while all other things fall away. What we found standing at ARI after the earthquake was our community. On the evening of March 11th, when we had no electricity, no water, and no functioning facilities, we had a big community supper. Almost from nowhere a campfire appeared, together with food, water brought from off campus, and cooking implements. Even with the ground still shaking from the endless aftershocks we could take comfort in being together, offering a hug to someone still trembling from the experience, sharing our stories about where we were when it hit, and enjoying a hot meal. It was a night that will stay in all our memories.

What we also found standing strong after this disaster was our commitment to food self-sufficiency. With seven months of rice in storage,

vegetables in the fields, a freezer full of meat, and chickens that wouldn't stop laying, we suffered no lack of food supplies. Just the opposite, we were in a position to help out our neighbors. When evacuees started coming into our town, we were there after just an hour's notice with fresh eggs, meat, and vegetables. We also assisted with delivering items to people in Fukushima, who were extremely grateful for the chance to not have to cook a meal composed of dried noodles.



staff and volunteers ready for clean-up



sufficient food for ourselves and others

But perhaps the thing that stood most firmly was our commitment to uphold our mission. ARI is here for one purpose and that is to train grassroots rural leaders. It took a great amount of determination and creative planning, but despite all of our challenges, we are at this moment carrying out our program. At this year's opening ceremony we welcomed 20 participants and 1 training assistant from 14 countries. It was a precious event; one that we had come to take for granted. But being nearly robbed of this opportunity showed us just how important this day is, and how resolute we are in our mission.

But we are not through this yet. The going has been tough and there is still a long way to go. Cleaning and repairs to our facilities continue. Most of the emergency stuff has been done, like repairing burst water pipes, replacing broken windows, and getting all the books back on the shelves. The next step is to ready the dorms, which both sustained damage but are repairable. These need to be completed by the end of July when we plan to move the training program

back to the ARI campus. But the big challenges are still ahead of us. Inspectors have declared the Main Building and the Koinonia Dining Hall unsafe. We need to rebuild. We are working with an architectural company to come up with a design and cost estimate, but we can approximate that it will be in the vicinity of \$3,000,000. The good news is that we have already had some significant pledges of support and also, as a registered school, we may be able to qualify for a government grant. But even so, this is no small sum of money and we still have quite a bit to raise.

The farm is also seeing its share of troubles. One of our pig pens is in a state of slow collapse, so we have evacuated its occupants into temporary housing. The problem is that our sows are pregnant. One just gave us 16 piglets a couple weeks ago and another is due to deliver any day now. This is actually great news, but where do we put all these children?! At the end of May we got word that the grass in this whole Nasu area is above the limit for radiation contamination. Bad news, not only for us, but for all the dairy farmers, and there are a lot of dairy farmers around here. Our hay from last year will run out in about 2 weeks, at which time we will probably have to sell our pregnant

milk cow and our one calf. Buying feed is just too expensive. A bit of good news is that our eggs and pork meat, which we eat and sell, were tested at a lab and found to be completely free of radiation. These animals are fed with local leftovers – rice and bread from school lunches, vegetable cuttings from a nearby department store and from the ARI kitchen, unsold fish from the fish market, and okara (tofu byproduct) from two tofu factories in town. We ceased feeding them anything growing outside on the land.

Our fields are not faring quite so well. Checks have shown that we have radioactive Caesium in the soil. According to government standards the levels are low enough that we are safe to plant, and indeed most neighboring farmers are continuing business as usual. But we are being more cautious. We are currently planting only in greenhouses, and as for the fields, our plan is to clean them through a process called bio-remediation. We are going to raise plants like sunflowers and komatsuna which have been shown to absorb radioactive elements like caesium 137 and strontium 90. Then we have to pull them out and dispose of them in a specially filtered incinerator. It's not clear how long it will take before we can declare our soil safe again, but as the contamination is not so heavy, we hope only one season will be lost.



The Takamis on rice transplanting day

As for our rice – we planted. Again, we were told it is safe to do so, but we took the extra precaution of flushing out our paddies first, which dramatically reduced the soil radiation. Rice transplanting day was a great day. All the participants came to join in this event and we worked together to get the job done. Even Takami sensei came out to be with us for this happy event. Now all we need to do is wait and see if our harvest is edible.

It has not been easy to operate this divided campus. Half the staff is at the seminary to conduct the training program and the other half is at ARI to care for the livestock and fields and manage the cleaning and reconstruction efforts. Both sides are shorthanded. We really miss our volunteers, and are grateful for the three we have at the moment (though more will start coming in July). We arrange for the participants to come up about every 2 or 3 weeks for special events. These times of being together as a whole community are precious.

We are working hard, working together, and even joking and laughing once again. But still there is an overall heaviness in people's hearts. The wind, the rain, the soil, our fresh healthy vegetables; we at ARI love these priceless gifts of creation. But now we must see them as something to fear. The soil and food grown by our own hand must be treated as enemies. The cycles of life, the balance of nature, which we purposefully joined in as an equal partner, have been broken. Our lives have been broken by a reckless lust for limitless energy. This is an evil thing that has been done. Evil. Yes, this is a word I don't really use often, but when those substances of goodness that give life to the creatures of this earth are perverted into things that bring fear and disease, there is no other word that I know of to describe it.

Healing will come, but it will take a long time.♦



Opening Ceremony

a moment nearly lost

On May 14, 2011 ARI held its 39th annual opening ceremony, only one month later than usual. It was a time of pure joy for us to officially welcome our 20 participants and 1 training assistant, who represent 14 different countries. As we watched them enter the upstairs hall of the new farm shop, decked out in their vibrant traditional attire, we found a new sense of appreciation, a new sense of realization as to just how precious this ARI training program is. It was a moment that we had almost lost.

It wasn't long ago that the staff had sat down together to discuss the viability of holding a program this year. We were still discovering the full extent of the damage to the campus, and what was worse we did not yet understand the entire situation at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant and how it would impact this land. In such uncertainty, how can we plan for a nine month program during which we hold the responsibility for the health and safety of our overseas participants? Furthermore, it is our duty to provide high quality, community based, hands on training. Would we be able to offer this?

But as we faced these questions, one thing continued to stand

before us – this is our mission. The Japanese word for mission is *shimei*, which means *use our lives*. ARI's purpose is to provide training to grassroots rural leaders, and in the end we concluded that we must use our lives to find a way to make this happen. Eventually, an idea came that formed into a plan and became a reality. With the tremendous support from the Theological Seminary for Rural Mission in Tsurukawa (the birthplace of ARI), we were able to arrange for the first three months of the training to take place at that location while we readied our facilities at ARI and allowed time for the workers at the nuclear plant to try to stabilize the situation there. At the beginning of May the participants arrived at Tsurukawa, got settled and the training got under way.

This year's training program has been described many times as being *extraordinary*, meaning *completely out of the ordinary*. I can't come up with a more perfect word – extraordinary people taking extraordinary action in extraordinary circumstances. And of course this includes the extraordinary participants who came to Japan while so many others were leaving, showing their commitment to take part in this training and their faith in ARI to deliver it.♦

Voice from the Tohoku Soil

by Atsushi Yamaguchi (Gussan) - crops and vegetables manager

Today, from morning I could hear the buzzing sounds of bees everywhere, with mustard flowers blossoming over the whole field. The seeds that fell onto the ground from last autumn patiently survived through the winter coldness and started budding with the warm sunlight of spring on their bodies. Usually those buds are called tsubomina (brassica). As a joy of spring, most of them are harvested before they blossom. But this year they were given this job to bloom their flowers and shed their seeds. By looking at the mustard flower field colored white and yellow, I was thinking they might be feeling fulfilled. It's been three months since the March 11 earthquake and I am

praying for the people who suffered this disaster and are in the middle of this hardship, for their recovery and to get back to their daily lives.

On the farm in ARI our days are also quite different from last year. As a farmer I would normally feel pure pleasure that our vegetables we grow can give energy and hope for many people. But this year is different. We have the dilemma, "Is it really safe? Is it really OK?" and sometimes we stop harvesting. Because lots of uncertain information keeps coming to us, we started doing our own analysis for radiation on our soil and vegetables in order to get precise measurements. Therefore, we made the bitter decision to stop providing

garden vegetables grown outside of our greenhouses to the kitchen until we can get accurate data. Some of our neighboring farmers have refrained from selling and some have not.

The other day I got a phone call from a Fukushima farmer who has a good relationship with ARI. Unlike usual his voice was very weak. "Last week we butchered all our chickens. But there are pullets that I really can't kill. Can anyone take care of them?" It was my first time to hear such a sad voice of an organic farmer who lives on the land and loves the soil and the creatures. People's lives, which are rooted deep into the land, for generation after generation, are now being uprooted.◆



cleaning the soil with our plants



boundary of the 20 km exclusion zone

ARI Joins Citizen's Movement on Radiation

ARI is about 110 km (70 miles) from the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant. We are far outside the mandatory evacuation zone, but we are close enough to experience *low level radiation contamination* of the soil. And while some people shout out that NO level of radiation is acceptable, this is simply not useful counsel for the thousands of people that live on the periphery as we do.

Therefore ARI has decided to join a local citizen's movement that was started by Dr. Yasuyuki Fujimura, a prominent inventor and engineer, professor at Nihon University, and a resident of Nasu Town. This last point is extremely significant. The guidance that he provides others is the same that he follows himself. He garners trust by being in this together with us.

The movement is called **Nasu wo Kibo no Toride ni suru** which means, **Make Nasu the Bastion of Hope**. The premise of the movement is to let people become fully informed of the conditions of THIS area and then

take the appropriate action, rather than panicking or simply trying to ignore the situation. Dr. Fujimura has begun giving free lectures to explain about the conditions of the power plant and how radiation is affecting this region. They are being attended by all manner of people – farmers, hotel owners, businessmen, and even housewives. The next step is to raise enough funds to buy at least 20 Geiger counters, in order to take accurate measurements of the radiation in numerous locations (something the government is not doing). Based on the results of these measurements we can take action such as starting bio-remediation of the soil. ARI is strongly behind these activities and due to our own vast network of supporters we have been able to obtain good equipment for taking radiation readings and have even started our own bio-remediation experiment in one of our fields. Both equipment and learning we are ready to share with the movement. After all, we are in this together, and neighbors help each other. Isn't this what we have been teaching and practicing at ARI for almost 40 years?◆

ARI Graduates in North-East India

Stories of four tough women making a big difference

Since its inception in 1973, ARI has trained more than 1,100 rural development leaders. They come for an intensive 9 months of learning and growing in an international, intercultural community. But what happens to them when they go home? Are they able to implement their ARI learnings in their local settings? To assist and learn from their experience, ARI sustains an extensive graduate network, helping them to organize support groups within their own areas.



Babycha (in the pink wrap) and staff at the Center for Social Development

In March 2011, ARI staffer Yuko Endo attended a gathering of **ARIGAM (ARI Graduate Association, Manipur)**, a network of ARI graduates working in the North-East Indian state of Manipur. In addition to the meetings she was able to visit 23 grads (from the Class of 1981 through to 2010) in their individual settings.

Manipur is politically designated a “sensitive area” – fragmented by vying separatist movements and bordered on the east by Myanmar and a thriving drug trade. Yuko, who is currently in Sendai coordinating relief efforts for the Lutheran World Federation, came away from the Manipur meetings deeply impressed with the work, particularly of the women, being carried out in this largely tribal, traditionally conservative region.

There is **(2006) Babycha Mangsatabam’s** Conflict Widows Forum, providing support for women whose husbands have been killed in the violence. Given training in organic farming, bokashi and soap making, handicrafts, and gender awareness, these women have been empowered to stand on their own two feet in a society that traditionally would have left them isolated. Taking the initiative they have organized a campaign against the surrounding gun culture, gathering up children’s gun toys and consigning them to public bonfire.

Kahling Toshang (2007) is **Director of the Dorcus Noble Fund** and **Secretary of the ARIGAM network**. One of her first initiatives upon her return from ARI was to apply the ancient art of ‘water-divining’ which she had learned by chance during an ARI field trip from a local Japanese farmer. To the amazement of everyone, including herself, she located 15 potential wells within

her village which are now supplying clean potable water to the entire community.

Applying lessons learned from a colleague in South India she next organized a group of women to produce an organic insect repellent effective for field crops and also for the preservation of bamboo – much utilized in the making of handicrafts. The members of this group are now regarded as area experts in the making of bokashi fertilizers and organic insect repellent. They are often called upon to give workshops in the surrounding communities.

Then there is **(2009) Hechin Haokip, Director of Chandal District’s Center for Women and Girls**. Four years of lobbying have finally resulted in the passage of a domestic violence law protecting women. CWG, with its three-person staff, is the first registered service provider in its district, providing incident reports, counseling and legal services, court accompaniment, and lobbying on behalf of women’s concerns.

Hechin’s own tribal village was destroyed in 1998 by fighting between rival separatist groups. Her father, the village chief, has raised funds and bought land on which to rebuild the village. More than 20 families have returned and with Hechin’s help already have a thriving elementary school. Reflecting on her ARI experience Hechin says “I have met people from many parts of the world and it made me realize the importance of community ties. After coming back from ARI people would ask me about the fancy technologies that would make their life easier and richer. I don’t have an answer for them yet, but I know we don’t need to follow others, we will find our own way of development.”

cont’ on p6

ARI Graduates in Sri Lanka

The civil war is over and there is a lot of work to do

Unlike many of the roads in Sri Lanka, the section of highway going north from the ancient city Anuradhapura to the town Vavuniya is very smooth. Having recently been rebuilt it now carries busses, trucks, and cars safely from the capital, Colombo, in the southern part of the country all the way up to Jaffna in the north. Such seamless transportation may seem like nothing special to people in a nations like Japan, with its impeccable highways and ultra fast trains that link one end of the country to the other. But for Sri Lanka this is something remarkable.

Until 2009 it was impossible to travel across the northern part of the country without risking your life. It was this area, known as the Vanni, where much of the fighting took place during the 30 year civil war between the Sri Lankan government forces and the LTTE “Tamil Tigers” – a war in which over 70,000 people from throughout the country lost their lives. The reason this smooth new road exists



Resettlement map of the Vanni



IDP camps

now is because the war is finally over and the Sri Lankan people are working hard to rebuild. Ceasefires and peace accords were signed several times in the past, but no one believed those had any real meaning. This time, however, there is real hope and confidence that the war is truly over.

As our car sped along this road I saw many familiar sights of the Sri Lankan countryside: rice paddies, large water reservoirs called “tanks,” jungles, and herds of cows and goats walking right on the pavement and blocking traffic – Sri Lankan traffic jams, I called them. If I looked keenly I could see peacocks off in the distance.

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Which is precisely what (2008) Menovino “Nino” Krose is doing in her small village. The first thing she did upon her return from ARI was to organize her community to clean up its garbage. Dubbed the “garbage watch woman” by bemused villagers Nino recruited the school principal to teach waste management to the students, who now pick up village garbage as part of their class sessions. “At ARI,” says Nino “I learned the importance of cleanliness both for human health and for the environment.”

Nino also started a piggery project to provide food and income for the poorest women of her village, but soon realized she needed to involve the other women to help her run it. Together they are now able to provide free piglets to local widows. Using her ARI training Nino came up with a fermented pig feed using locally available sawdust, and combining it with rice bran and microorganisms gathered from the nearby forest. It has been so successful that people from neighboring towns and villages now come to buy the local pig feed. And the price of sawdust is going up!

Babycha’s organization is **The Center for Social Development (CSD)** where she is project coordinator for an ambitious program aimed at helping traditional farmers address issues of climate change and free trade. Fueling the project is the fact that the global economic downturn is sending many formerly city-

bound young farmers back to the land to work with their parents. Capacity building with these people includes teaching not only organic farming skills, but lobbying skills as well so they know how to address their problems, where to go, and whom to talk to.

Babycha and her staff have organized rallies and campaigns lifting up the status of farmers. With increased profile the farmer’s clubs and associations have been able to get the attention of key government departments. This has resulted in access to improved seed stock, new farming facilities, training opportunities, and improved relations with agriculture department officers. Association members who in the past were often ignored now find their expertise valued and consulted by department staff. One, they say, of the great benefits of being part of the farmer’s associations - apart from the practical lessons learned - has been the confidence it has given them to address major issues for themselves.

Learning from what a group of villagers can do by banding together, more than 150 of the NGOs working in Manipur began in 1994 to form their own coordinating organization called the **United NGO Mission Manipur (UNMM)**. Originally the heads of all the member groups were men. Today 45 of these NGOs are women’s groups, led by women, focusing on women’s issues and concerns.

However I also saw things that reminded me I was in a place very different from the “safe” southern part of this island. Men in military uniforms carrying big guns patrolled the streets. We passed by a number of large police stations and military compounds, all surrounded by vicious spirals of razor wire. Four wheel drive UN vehicles darted back and forth and we were waved quickly through checkpoint after checkpoint, which not long ago required long stops, many questions, and detailed searches.

My destination of Vavuniya is the entry point to the Vanni. Beyond this town foreigners are still not allowed to travel without a special permit from the Ministry of Defense. This is the location of one of the main offices of an organization called the Sewa Lanka Foundation, a Sri Lankan NGO, staffed by both Sinhalese and Tamils, which carries out peace and community building projects nationwide. ARI has trained six people from Sewa Lanka, each working on projects in different areas of the country. In Vavuniya I was looking forward to meeting two of them – Annet Royce (2001 ARI graduate) and Rama Mathiyaparanam (2008 ARI graduate). Chandana Mallawarachchi, (2007 ARI graduate) who rode up with me from Anuradhapura is also a Sewa Lanka staff member.

For the last two years, Annet and Rama have been working to assist thousands of IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) from all over Northern Sri Lanka that had been evacuated to this area. They were caught in the middle of the intense fighting that occurred in the last two years of the war and tried to escape it by running north. As the fighting also moved north, they continued to run until they reached the sea and had nowhere else to go. In May of 2009 the LTTE finally gave up, announcing that they had “silenced their weapons” and that the “battle had reached its bitter end.” 300,000 people that had been trapped in the battle zone were taken in busses by the government to the surroundings of Vavuniya to live in temporary camps.

While many international aid organizations offered to help these IDPs, the Sri Lankan government turned them down. The only organizations allowed into the camps were Sewa Lanka and the World Food Program. The reason is because ending the war through military measures resulted in a huge loss of life and a great deal of human suffering, and the government did not want people’s stories to become known by the outside. Journalists are completely restricted from the area. This means Sewa Lanka had a lot of work to do and the first task was to feed the people. Rama said that for the first three months all he did was, “cook, cook, cook.” Later, as the IDPs got settled and were able to obtain their own stoves, Sewa Lanka stopped cooking and started distributing rice and other foodstuffs.

Annet is the regional manager responsible for the entire area of Northern Sri Lanka. Her main task since the end of the war has been to resettle the IDPs from the camps. So far about 275,000 have been transferred back. She

explained that the job is difficult because the land is completely destroyed. Roads and bridges are damaged, houses are broken, fields are barren, and there are land mines everywhere. Before a family can be resettled the land needs to be made safe and some basic infrastructure, such as access to clean water, has to be put in place. Before the war, the Vanni was the main area for agricultural production for the whole country. Now the farmers have to start from zero. Therefore, Sewa Lanka has also initiated several livelihood programs such as distributing local varieties of chickens.

Annet arranged for me to see the IDP camps, but I was allowed only to look from the road. Some were tents and some were buildings made of corrugated metal and they went on for kilometers. At one point we passed a military compound and I was told that it used to belong to the LTTE. It was now abandoned but it made me shudder to realize how recently this was a battle zone.

Annet and Rama also took me around the Sewa Lanka farm at which Rama is an agricultural trainer. He was extremely excited to show me the 6,000 egg incubator he built, the design of which he learned at ARI. After that we had lunch together at Annet’s house – delicious, spicy Sri Lankan dishes prepared by her mother. A big surprise was that Kannan (2006 ARI graduate) was able to join us. He is the Project Manager in Jaffna and even though he has many demands on his time, he had jumped in a car and sped down to Vavuniya. A drive that normally takes four hours he made in two.

Altogether four ARI grads from Sewa Lanka sat and ate together at Annet’s table. Though they work in the same organization they don’t often see each other and they laughed a lot as they reminisced and shared stories about ARI. I asked them what part of their training was most meaningful to them, and got quite a variety of answers, such as learning patience, better understanding people different from themselves, time management, and changing their approach from commanding leader to serving leader. As I sat and listened to them talk I came to realize just how much they love ARI. They hold their nine months of training as a precious time during which they felt encouraged and built their self-confidence. Every day they face challenges, difficulties, and stress greater than I have ever had in my life. But the ARI community touched their hearts and gave them lasting hope that their efforts really can help to build a world in which we can all live together.♦



Chandana, Annet (and kids), Steven, Kannan, Rama

ARI Farm Shop Completed!!

In stark contrast to the many broken buildings populating this campus, the new ARI farm shop is now standing proudly, beautifully, and very nearly completed. Its timing is a miracle. When the earthquake hit, the rickety old prefab structure had already been torn down, the new foundation had been laid, and the cement had set. When the shaking stopped, there wasn't a single crack to be found in the whole slab. Had the earthquake come later it might have caused a half built farm shop to come tumbling down, at great peril to the workers. Had it been earlier, I don't even want to think about what kind of twisted mess the shoddy old steel building would have turned into, or who might have been inside at the time. There is a blessing to be found here.

What's more, at a time when we are facing a shortage of building space, we have a completely new and safe structure at our disposal. We have already made use of it once to hold our opening ceremony. Now we intend to move our staff offices to its second story, most likely permanently. In the short run this will save us on having to rent a temporary prefab, and in the long run it will save on our reconstruction expenses. The building also has a small field classroom we can use full time until a proper classroom can be built. And of course we are eager to get our rice and equipment safely back inside the shop.

It is a gorgeous building, made of cedar wood from local forests, some of it harvested by ourselves. The trees that serve as the ceiling beams are a hundred years old, which, according to the architect, means the building will stand a hundred years. And the passive solar air and water heating system ensure that we won't need to rely on anything but the rays of the sun for most of our energy needs, setting the example that we can live without nuclear power plants and oil companies. Thank you for helping to make this possible!



American Friends of the Asian Rural Institute

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