50 years ago the United Method Women (UMW) built a 12 story building right in front of the United Nations headquarters in order to work closely with the UN to support the newly formed (at that time) Declaration of Human Rights. Called the Church Center for the United Nations, this was the place, right in the middle of downtown Manhattan, where I met two rural women – ARI graduates Judith Daka from Zambia (2001) and Naw Lee Myar from Myanmar (1998 graduate, 2008 training assistant, 2009 staff). The three of us joined six other women (the Philippines (2), Sierra Leone, Brazil, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Kosovo) as delegates invited by the UMW to take part in the United Nations 56th annual Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 56). This year’s theme was the empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges.

In addition to taking part in the assembly in the UN Building, the UMW organized a number of parallel sessions at the Church Center which the 9 of us attended together with UMW staff. For some of these sessions we were invited as speakers and panelists sharing about our own activities. The rest of the time we were able to join the numerous other events taking place. We were also given the opportunity to observe the formal CSW 56 Session in the UN Building, but quite frankly it was not interesting at all. We could only watch the discourse of “official” delegates from the balcony. I felt the real life of the assembly was at the “informal” workshops, panels, and discussions at the Church Center organized by various different women’s organizations. They were full of people and full of energy and I was overwhelmed by the seriousness, passion, and positive attitudes in the network of these women. The themes they dealt with were wide ranging, including human rights, peace, poverty reduction, food security, environmental conservation, mother and child health, vocational training, microcredit, advocacy, and many more. They often presented specific case studies which helped me to really understand the incredible challenges of women around the world.

As I attended session after session there were two major points I began to realize. One was that almost none of the discussions included a viewpoint of agriculture as they searched for answers to the problems of rural women. ARI prioritizes food security in rural families as a solution to poverty and promotes integrated farming for self-sufficiency. In order put these into practice we believe that small scale organic farming is both economically and environmentally effective because farmers do not need to depend on expensive and environmentally damaging chemicals and fertilizers. Rather, they try to maximize the use of local resources. Women’s roles in such agricultural activities is very big, not
How do I know if it is safe to eat? “Safe for my children to eat?” These are the questions asked almost daily by the thousands of people in northern Japan that on March 12, 2011 suddenly found that their lives had been forever changed by the invasion radiation. The answer is simple. Measure it to find out the level of radioactivity. By Japanese government standards if it is below 100 Becquerels per kilogram (Bq/kg), you can eat. (At ARI it has to be below 37 Bq/kg.) All you need is a $40,000 Gamma Spectrometer.

Recognizing that not everyone has one of these fancy pieces of equipment in their living rooms, ARI decided to make its machine, donated by the National Christian Council of Japan, available to the general public. On Jan 10 we opened up a “Becquerel Center” and once word got out, people started coming from all around. Some are farmers who want to see if their crops are sellable, or if their soil is safe for cultivation. Others bring in vegetables from their home gardens or fish from the rivers. Water samples have been brought from far and wide. A local Christian kindergarten has its lunch food test every day. To date about 350 people have paid us a visit and about 500 samples have been measured. And of course ARI has been using it to test vegetables, meat, soil, water – nearly everything that can be found on the farm.

The machine is a Gamma Spectrometer LB2045 imported from Germany and it can provide accurate data on the levels of radiation being emitted from Iodine (131I), Cesium (134Cs, 137Cs), and Potassium. I’ll bet you didn’t know the Potassium in your banana is naturally radioactive. So far nearly all the samples tested in this area have been

Both Judith and Myar of ARI presented good examples of how, after ARI training, they changed their perspectives; how they discovered a new potential in their communities in the form of unused, cheap, or even free local resources. By making use of these resources “development” does not need to depend on outside help. “What is the key to success?” I asked Judith. “Doing it by yourself,” was her simple reply. By practicing these principals they were able to cut costs and increase income, which contributed to local development. Many attendants vigorously nodded their heads in affirmation to the words of Judith and Myar. I reconfirmed that the direction that ARI promotes for the betterment of rural life is in deep demand in many rural areas in the world. Furthermore I realized that people do not have the perspective that the food they eat daily affects the condition of rural people worldwide. I felt it was risky that the professionals – those who deal with rural women’s issues – do not have that understanding. I believe ARI needs to foster more discussion and awareness on these issues.

By Tomoko Arakawa
Green Oil Project

A little while ago, Gussan, the ARI staffer in charge of crops and vegetables, came up and said, “one of our neighbor farmers already asked me about the oil press. When do you think we will be able to order it?” This was exciting news, because it meant there was already interest in our Green Oil Project before it had even started.

ARI’s lovely soil from contamination of radioactive Cesium and doing so in a way in which farmers can make a living by providing a safe and healthy product – vegetable oil. The process works like this:

farmers plant soy beans → soy beans absorb Cesium from soil → farmers harvest soy beans → farmers extract beans from hulls → an oil press presses the soy beans → a lab tests the oil – radiation content 0 → consumers purchase clean soy bean oil → farmers earn a living and the land becomes a little healthier

Of course this is the simplified version but it hits the main points. In actuality there are other crops that have higher absorption rates of Cesium, such as sunflowers, which were used after Chernobyl. But ARI chose to start with soybeans because many farmers have the equipment and experience to grow them. Last year ARI put in two hectares (5 acres) worth and reaped 2.3 tons. In the future we plan to try sunflowers and rapeseed as well. The Cesium tends to settle in the stems and hulls (our measurements showed ARI soy contained 54 Bq/kg), so those need to be disposed of as radioactive waste. The oilcake also contains low levels of radiation (ours had 7-11 Bq/kg) but may be used to make biogas and possibly as fertilizer or animal feed. The oil itself is completely pure. For our first experiment we asked Menno Village Farm in Hokkaido to press some of our soy. The natural method of pressing our organic beans produced a beautiful, high quality oil and the test results put smiles on our faces – Radiation 0. And the soil? In fact our soil was not too highly contaminated to begin with (2,000~4,000 Bq/kg), but each oil crop planting just gets it that much cleaner and safer for other crops.

As part of a long term project we intend to purchase our own oil press as well as sowing and harvesting equipment for soybeans. Thanks to a donation from Christ Church Cathedral in Indianapolis and the assistance of the American Friends of ARI, the press is already on its way, and just in time, as we have literally tons of soy dried and waiting. However, this project is not only for ARI. It is meant to be for our farmer neighbors in the whole region. Making oil is a new venture for all of us. The press we purchased is one of the first to come to the area and we plan to make it available for all who want to use it. It looks like we already have the first farmer in line.

And what is a Green Oil Project you may be thinking? Is it something akin to Green Eggs and Ham? As exciting as it may sound, the oil itself is not green. It is green in the environmental sense of green. The project is about recovering low, about 10-20 Bq/kg. Soil is roughly 2,000 Bq/kg on average, which is deemed safe for farming. Water has been 0.

The center is being run by ARI staff together with a team of retired engineer volunteers. One of the volunteers, Mr. Nishikawa, is a radiation expert who worked on X-ray machines and MRIs in Toshiba. He oversaw the setup of the center and calibrated the sensitive equipment.

Living with radiation is a fearful thing. You can’t see it, taste it, or smell it. Hopefully the precise data provided by our Becquerel Center will bring us all a little more peace of mind.
am from an agricultural community in the southern part of Brazil. My organization is Farmers without Land Movement known as MST. We are working with the government to re-structure land ownership in order to make small parcels of land available to local farmers. My community is formed by farmers, families, the poor and those excluded from society. The cooperative where I work is called Cooperativa Central de Reforma Agraria."

Following in her father’s footsteps, Joelma is fighting for peasant rights. About 10 years ago her father chose to move their family to an MST tent camp to live with the landless people. They themselves were also landless and, wanting to provide for his family’s future, her father realized he needed to fight for others to help his family. He joined the “landless community” to campaign for land distribution and the rights of the poor. At age 15, after moving to the camp, Joelma experienced discrimination. But at school she also had her first experience of standing up for herself, and teaching others something she believed in. Here, a “Community Organizer and Leader” was born!

"We lived in the country and I went to school in the city," Joelma explains. "The kids were really bad to me, calling all of us from the camp names and worse. Our clothes smelled like smoke from the fires we cooked on in the camp. We were poor, landless, and lived in a plastic tent. It was terrible. I started talking to the kids at school, telling them why we lived there and what MST was doing. They started to understand and agree with us. I didn't want to move to the camp and hated it at first. When I started helping teachers in the classroom at the small school in the camp and working with the children, I began to love it. I really learned what MST was and understood why we were there."

After Joelma finished high school, the leaders of the camp recommended her for a scholarship to attend the Latin American School of Agro-ecology. This rural university had a unique approach - alternating 3 months of study at the campus with 3 months in the rural community putting into practice all that was taught. "I worked with farmer families experimenting with what we learned in class, making fertilizer and compost, creating gardens with plants that work together," explains Joelma.

"After school I returned to the camp to work because I liked the community life, living close to the people I help. With the women’s group, we began producing bread to sell to the schools. Much of the land in the area had been stripped and was useless. My organization worked with the local communities to recuperate reclaimed land by planting banana trees and other local plants."

"I am very excited to come to ARI and learn to be a rural leader and thus help my community and my family to produce from the land using traditional methods. We never know everything, and we learn by teaching and doing, as well as from the experiences of other communities. My community is poor and doesn’t have much knowledge. I want to teach farmers how to live better. The people may have land but they are not organized. I want to teach how to organize their farm for a good life and more abundant farm. Also, I want to develop confidence and not panic when talking to others."
Joseph Kora is a quiet, thoughtful man from the Western Highlands of Papua New Guinea. His village of 600 is located up in the mountains at the end of a very long and windy unpaved road. Houses, scattered on the hillsides and valleys, are made of bush materials and have no electricity or running water. The tropical climate, with only 2 seasons, wet and dry, enables some crops to grow year around but prevents farmers from going to market during the rainy season. "A challenge we face every day is carrying our garden food to the market. By foot it would take us 4 hours to sell food at the nearest market due to the bad road condition," explains Joseph.

In the first days of life at ARI Joseph found things to be a bit confusing. There were so many people and buildings. There were a lot of machines that use electricity. And women and men were working together. "My society is male dominated. Men don't spend time in the kitchen. Women have little time/ability to speak in public. Women defer to men, and women and men don't mix. Already in the past two weeks at ARI I see women can do everything, just like men do. Being an advocate of change, I see women as an integral part and an equal stakeholder of our community. Both men and women are equal and play their specific roles. One cannot do without the other. I believe women are key to programs being successful and my work will involve total participation of women."

The main source of income for the villagers is selling pigs but the growth rate is very slow. Fed once a day, or twice, if there is surplus food, pigs take at least a year to mature. "I want to learn about livestock, too," says Joseph. "Pigs are the only resource to get money. If I have the ability to fatten pigs faster, we can have more income which is needed for school fees for our children."

"As a pastor, my activities include working with people in rural areas for both spiritual and physical well-being in all aspects of living a meaning and contributive life in peace and harmony. I am concerned with the totality of their lives which is why I am involved with literacy programs, healthy living programs, appropriate rural technology in farming concepts, and the spiritual conditioning of their lives."

by Kathy Froede
The ARI campus is undergoing a transformation. The landscape of this mountainside has not seen such fast paced change since the days ARI was first being created. Pictures tell the story much better than words so take a look. Or better yet, pay us a visit. If you have spent time here in the past you will be astonished at what you find.

**New Koinonia & Classroom**

The construction of the new Koinonia and classroom buildings started at the beginning of April.

But before that, the old Main Building had to be demolished. It was the oldest building on campus. The much loved Sri Lankan mural in the office could be preserved, and it will find its place in the new Koinonia House.

What used to be a volleyball court is not a massive construction site. The new buildings are scheduled to be completed at the end of August. The community is looking forward to a new warm community space!

**ARI Shop**

The old ARI shop was the first thing to be dismantled after the earthquake. We now have a beautiful new space in the Farmshop for selling our goods.

**Administration Annex**

The Admin Annex will offer a reception space for visitors, a printing room, a conference room and a temporary computer lab for participants.

Pictures tell the story much better than words so take a look.
Joining the Cambodia Study Tour

Last January, the ARI Supporters Association in Japan organized a study trip to Cambodia. Those who joined learned about the country’s turbulent history, visited graduates’ workplaces and joined the first Cambodia graduate meeting. One of them was Rev. Chiemi Ishii, pastor of Mabune Church in Kawasaki.

The shadow of the darkness wraps the body. My biggest memory of the Cambodia study tour was when I had a homestay in a traditional wooden house on the outskirts of Phnom Penh. “Yes I know this.” This is the place where I can be myself, at ease, in connection with nature and people; a place with care and warm feelings where the air is pure enough for fairies to live; and quietness. I could sleep in tranquility.

When I was a child I visited my father’s hometown for our Buddhist ancestral ceremony. There I slept with all my relatives under the mosquito net with a small burning mosquito coil. On the table at the ceremony a feast had been prepared of vegetables grown by my uncle’s family. My cousins smiled and laughed as we played in the house together.

In the house in rural Cambodia that memory suddenly came back to my mind. It may be because the family of ARI graduate, Aneth, welcomed us as if we were relatives. There is no toilet in the house. They use rainwater and water from the river behind the house. It is inconvenient if we compare it to a modern house, but what is this compared to peace and calm? The next morning the quiet was shattered. At 4:30 AM loud pop music started blasting from the neighbor’s house. I didn’t understand what had happened. I couldn’t go back to sleep, so I got up and started to meditate in the garden. It was a very symbolic incident. The violence of modern life had invaded the peaceful and quiet life.

I heard that in Cambodia the scar of the war is still deep and they cannot move forward without assistance from overseas. However, the silhouette of traditional rural life that touches the essence of human beings still remains. The ARI graduates we met are trying their best to practice sustainable agriculture in their respective places. I hope that they continue to make these efforts in Cambodia, asking the question, “What is it that is fundamentally important in life?” The seeds that ARI is growing are the seeds that grow the true quality of human beings. I felt that once again very strongly.

by Rev. Chiemi Ishii
ARI sends rice to Tohoku

On Jan 12th we loaded up the big blue truck with 1.2 tons of newly harvested rice. We had had a bumper crop and wanted to share it with our neighbors in need to the north. The rice was delivered to the Tohoku Help group to assist with their "Rice of Hope" project. Former ARI staff member, Kiyoshi Nagashima assisted with the arrangements. Mr. Nagashima is originally from the city of Sendai and has devoted a huge amount of his time to assisting the people there after the earthquake and tsunami. Tohoku Help is carrying out a number of projects such as establishing a center to measure radiation in foodstuffs, providing support for non-Japanese disaster victims, and offering counseling or “mental care” to the many people suffering from grief, depression, and other effects of the tremendous strain of this disaster. For more on the work of Tohoku Help please see their website (in English).

http://tohokuhelp.com/

ARI Facebook fans unite!

With Facebook’s increase, many ARI-related people have tried to connect and communicate with each other through various Facebook groups. Last March, these scattered groups were united into one, to channel graduates, volunteers, old staff members, fans etc. into one common group “ARI community (Asian Rural Institute at Tochigi Japan).” You will find the latest pictures of participants’ projects, helpful links related to sustainable agriculture and other good stuff there.

And, of course, from ARI’s public relation section you will still find the latest info on what’s going on around campus under our official Facebook account.

“Asian Rural Institute”

Frequent Flier Mile Donations Really Work!

This year they brought four participants to ARI. Dolphe from the Philippines, Soniman from Indonesia, Chonglise from India, and Act Ka Hti from Myanmar are all a part of this learning community today because of your miles. Thank you!!

For information on donating miles to AFARI please be in touch with J. B. Hoover: Tel. 206-349-2807 / john.b.hoover@gmail.com

If you fly Delta you can help out ARI with their Skybonus program without even using any miles!!