Fr. Daniel Myo Aung meets villagers of Alambo in Kachin State, Myanmar

The plan was to stay a night out in a remote village, but Myo was tense. A week earlier, government troops had attacked a rebel outpost in an area not too distant, killing a number of cadets. After a day of visiting rural communities, he wanted to get us back to the relative security of the regional capital. The place is Kachin State in Myanmar and Myo is an Anglican priest, who is a 2004 graduate of the Asian Rural Institute.

During my nine years on staff at ARI I got to know many people like Myo - dynamic individuals from all over the world who are full of energy and hope. I welcomed them as they first arrived, somewhat bewildered and shivering in the chill of Japan’s early spring. We shared meals, work, laughter, and tears as we came together in our ARI community. Over the course of the training I would witness transformation, as participants discovered in themselves new capabilities, new self-confidence, and new potential for leadership.

Yet, as exciting as this transformation is, it is only the first part of ARI’s mission. The work continues as graduates return to their communities and put their ARI learning to work.

After more than 40 years of training rural leaders, ARI wanted to learn more deeply about the impact of its training on graduates’ local communities. For this purpose, the Board authorized a two-year Graduate Impact Study, carried out by myself, Steve Cutting, former staff member of ARI, and Bev Abma, a research consultant with extensive experience in development work. Together we traveled to remote parts of 12 countries in Asia and Africa to meet with graduates and their communities, listen to their stories, and discover the true reach of ARI.

Myo’s community was one of more than 200 places Bev and I visited for this study, and the moment we arrived I saw Myo in a new light. He was the same fun-loving guy I knew at ARI, but here he was in his element. Myo took us to
three of the 29 villages he works with. When it came time to explain the projects the villages had initiated, he would stand to the side while villagers spoke with great excitement. They talked of building wells, water storage tanks, and toilets, establishing rice banks and money banks, and setting up a generator that runs on rice husk to provide electricity in the evenings. They credited Myo with these achievements, but Myo instantly returned that credit, pointing out that the village development committees had coordinated the projects and the people themselves had carried them out.

Ten of the villages Myo works with are Buddhist communities, and at first they were suspicious of the motives of a Christian priest. Distrust was compounded by ongoing conflict between rebels and government forces. In such a setting, the ability to make people feel at ease was an essential tool for building trust. One woman said of Myo, “At first we thought evil of him, but now we know. He is funny, unselfish, and gives good explanations.”

Many times during our visit, Myo shared with us that living in the diversity of ARI’s community had had a profound impact on him. That a group of people with such different cultural, racial, and language backgrounds could come together at ARI in a spirit of learning and cooperation encouraged him greatly in his community work at home.

As I watched Myo and the villagers interacting, I felt I was witnessing Rev. Takami’s vision - to invest in people who would dedicate their lives to work as leaders for their people. These local leaders are doing what few outsiders can: they connect with the people, build trust, and believe in the people so strongly that the people come to believe in themselves.

**Versatile Leaders**

What impressed me the most was the variety of ways in which ARI graduates adapt their training to match the specific needs in their communities. In Indonesia, Tigor Sihombing teaches farmers how to set up pig and chicken pens with low cost, hygienic fermented flooring systems – a technique he was introduced to at ARI. In Northeast India, Lhingnu Thoutang opened an orphanage/school just a few months after returning from ARI. The school has its own vegetable gardens and chicken pens which supplement the children’s meals and bring in income. In Sri Lanka, Naseer Mohamed has set up over 300 credit unions. He begins in each community, not with a discussion about money, but by...
know many people like Myo - dynamic, back to the relative security of the regional killing a number of cadets. After a day of individuals from all over the world who are full graduate of the Asian Rural Institute. course of the training I would witness transform of energy and hope. I welcomed them as they shared meals, work, laughter, and tears as we visiting rural communities, he wanted to get us opportunities and put their ARI learning to work. Together we traveled to remote places Bev and I visited for this study, and the moment we arrived I saw Myo in a new light. Yet, as exciting as this transformation is, it is the plan was to stay a night out in a remote village, but Myo was tense. A moment we arrived I saw Myo in a new light. He was the same fun-loving guy I knew at ARI, but here he was in his element. Myo took us to his community was one of more than 200 places Bev and I visited for this study, and the leaders, ARI wanted to learn more deeply with graduates and their communities, listen to their stories, and discover the true reach of the diversity of ARI’s community had had a profound impact on us. Many times during our visit, Myo shared with us that living in Eric Tangka (2007, Cameroon) plants eggplants with the kids of his orphanage.

asking them, “What are your dreams?” and builds from there. Then there were the meetings with the communities themselves. In Cameroon, when Jane Francis Berinyuy took us to visit the Yabi Mbot women farmers group, they gave her a big bucket of yams. Jane commented that those were very expensive, to which they replied, “It’s okay. We are rich farmers.” For me, hearing community members speaking confidently and hopefully about their future beautifully completed the story of ARI. Our two-year study was funded by the United Church of Christ and the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR). Bev’s task was analyzing the data collected to create a report for ARI that includes recommendations for the curriculum. My job was sharing the remarkable stories of graduates, collected and laid out with pictures in a book called Rural Leaders: The Work and Community Impact of Graduates of the Asian Rural Institute. Writing this book was a life-changing experience and gave me a deeper understanding of ARI’s mission. I really, really encourage you to get a copy!

Steven Cutting
Consultant

You can order Rural Leaders through the American Friends of ARI (AFARI) website! http://www.friends-ari.org/

The book is free, but AFARI does ask you to consider making a donation to help cover the costs of printing and shipping.

(Sorry, it’s not available on Amazon)
**A Study of ARI Graduate Influence on Communities**

Researchers with ARI staff distilled the learning from graduates, communities, sending body and employee organizations. Changes show that the primary source of referrals has changed from predominantly faith-based entities in the beginning to, more recently, NGOs and graduates. The percentage of women participants has increased from 10% to 47%.

Graduate ability to implement ARI learning depended on their dream or plan – whether it was practical and how it fit with the vision and financial capacity of their sending body. Geographic, political and social factors supported or hindered success.

Graduates were significantly more effective in leadership than in implementing agricultural skills; this is in keeping with ARI’s desire to be a leadership training institution using organic agriculture as the training ground for that.

The practical meaning of “rural” has changed over forty years, with both poor rural and urban dwellers marginalized and in need of food security and dignity.

Recommendations to help ARI shape a response include:

1) **Develop connections with sending bodies** and form teams of trusted graduates in geographic areas to assist in screening applicants. Deepen relationships with potential candidates, choosing those with commitment and vision for communities. Accept two, participants from any one organization, area or language group at any one time. Explore opportunities for ARI graduate internships near their local contexts, as well as sources for seed money for sending bodies to support graduate projects.

2) **Strengthen leadership component** to include tools that support it and transformational community activities. Prepare participants for group facilitation and leadership in gender equity. Better understand and respect participant contexts. Present curriculum material step by step with repetitive, frequent cycles of action and new information. Go beyond “hands-on” work in agriculture and livestock to teaching the scientific method and practical cost-effective methodologies that graduates can translate to their own contexts. Include changing world trends, marketing, adding value and microfinance components. Take whatever steps are possible to formalize certification for graduates.

3) **Build capacity of ARI staff with continuing education and learning visits to graduates, sending bodies and communities.** Clarify the role of Training Assistants and recruit accordingly. Develop a strategic plan for long-term sustainability that responds to changing world realities.

**Beverly Abma**

AFARI Board Member, NGO Consultant

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"Adding Value," new ARI video tells how it is done

Ardhendu Sekhar Chatterjee has spent a lifetime learning together with marginalized farmers and landless households how to revalue forgotten local knowledge.

Researching how households in food-insecure regions of India can bridge the most threatening periods of the year by rediscovering hidden resources in their environment he helps them to gain confidence for new steps in their communities.

In 1983, he founded the DRCSC, Development Research Communication and Services Center in Kolkata with five colleagues.

Today 45 staff work in training centers in the most vulnerable districts of West Bengal, assisted by many volunteers from the villages and by young farmers, addressing also recent concerns like how to adapt to climate change.

"Chatterjee, a gifted graduate, and a great teacher as well, is just the right person to come back to ARI and share with participants how it is done. Take what theory you have learnt here — when you go back, you must adapt, adapt to all the challenges you will face. You will have to use local resources... Not only can he show how it is done, but after thirty years experience he can give the encouragement that it really is possible. (JB Hoover, American Friends of ARI).

Documentary film makers Donata Elschenbroich and Otto Schweitzer (Germany) have accompanied A.S. Chatterjee on his journeys through West Bengal and made a video about him titled “Adding Value.” This project was generously supported by Wilson Memorial Church (Watchung, NJ).
Precious are the times of leisure, when people enjoy simple fellowship and music!

6:30am: Practicing leadership by taking care of animals, fields and meals together

Pastor A Sung from Myanmar talks about her learning from the study trip to western Japan

Forestry is one example of environmental care and local resource management

Studying, planning, reflection... community members are always busy with meetings.

Impressions from the 2016 Training

Thank you for your warm support!

Belvin from Zambia was vital in constructing new elevated goat sheds on the ARI farm last year

Precious are the times of leisure, when people enjoy simple fellowship and music!
Paul Daina, ARI’s first participant from the Central African Republic, directs the Association of Volunteers for the Protection of the Environment (AVPE), a food security program of the Evangelical Lutheran Church that also tackles women’s issues, poverty alleviation and education.

Paul values the principles of organic farming and servant leadership learned at ARI. It is “not just the practice, but the underlying philosophy and the ideas revolving around it” that drew him in. He believes these core principles will allow him to achieve his dream of reducing child malnutrition rates.

He emphasizes, “There is a connection between the crops and vegetables, between them and livestock, between them and the whole existence of biodiversity and the overall actions of man.” Although his community practices farming, he understands now that it is not sustainable. “People own livestock, but they do not utilize the manure,” he says. “We feed livestock, but we never feed the soil. We take and take from the soil, but we never think of giving back.” He believes that it is this neglect of the soil that makes it poorer, which in turn makes the community poorer.

“The agricultural practice of shifting cultivation, moving to a new area once the soil doesn’t yield the desired harvest, and the overuse of chemicals have environmental consequences which lead to rampant destruction of nature and her resources.” ARI fostered Paul’s desire to engage with farmers and share methods encouraging them to be more connected with the soil they use, which will increase the sustainability of their farming practices.

The Central African Republic, landlocked and resource-rich but one of the ten poorest countries in the world, experienced several violent governmental turn-overs since gaining independence from France in 1960, resulting in one crisis in leadership after another. At ARI, Paul says he found the true representation of leadership. He notes that a leader should not analyze a social or economic project with personal profits in mind. This is why he believes the key is to appeal to pastors of his community, one that is predominantly Christian, to spread the practice of servant leadership. For him, “it is the leader that guides, prepares the grounds and sows the seed of development to yield a common harvest.”

Paul’s immediate goal is to implement a WWF grant AVPE is receiving towards a reforestation project. His plan is for women to handle the project, which he believes will benefit at least 500 people. He also hopes to strengthen the production of honey while developing and expanding the market for it. Another goal is to utilize waste material in more efficient ways, as ARI does. While his learning and goals gained at ARI are expansive, for him, one thing is certain: “We must all look to help the people.”
**Bhutan**

**Kharma Chuki**

National Organic Program

Karma works for Bhutan’s National Organic Program as a Senior Extension Supervisor in the Tsirang district working on many projects, including agriculture, farm roads, infrastructure, and irrigation. At ARI, she says the most valuable lessons she’s learned are in organic farming, servant leadership, and community building.

In her community, almost all of the farmers practice organic farming techniques. However, they lack a great deal of knowledge. This is why, Karma says, she wants to take the knowledge she has gained and teach the farmers.

When asked about her overall goal, Karma says “I want my community to become 100% organic.” The Bhutanese government shares that vision, aiming for all of the farmers in the country to shift to organic farming by 2020. So far, three districts in the country are recognized as such. Even in Karma’s own community, about 90 percent of the farming there is organic.

Karma has several tasks planned. First, she plans to meet with people, especially the poor and marginalized, to find out their needs. Secondly, she plans to train the farmers, especially on making organic fertilizers. “They use cow dung, but not decomposed compost.” Because of her training here on the importance of decomposition and organic fertilizer, she’s now more confident in being able to make them and showing others how to do it.

Karma also plans to teach the farmers how to properly grow crops. Now, they do it in their own ways, like improperly setting up the beds, for example. She will also inform them on the importance of crop rotation. “In my community, they grow the same crops every year in the same fields. Maybe because of that we have a low yield.”

Another issue that she plans to tackle is weed control. Rice is a staple crop and the yield is affected by weeds. To combat them, she plans to grow indigenous crops in the marshes. First, she says she will run trials, using small portions of some farmers’ fields. If the trials are successful, she will expand. She says this is beneficial because she will be using local resources and improving the soil.

Karma believes that her work will benefit the farmers, and increase the gains that her community is already making. “They [the farmers] can increase their source of income through the sale of organic vegetables, the main source of income. I can say they developed a lot through this. Even now they were able to buy a mini truck because of organic farming. If I train them, I think they can do more. They can produce more.” By producing more crops, the farmers will be able to use the extra money to pay for their children’s education and necessary products that they cannot produce themselves, like “oil, sugar, and soap”. Karma says that the changes she plans to make will “take time, but after a few years, it will benefit the farmers”.

Before coming to ARI, Karma says that she had “no idea” about servant leadership, even though she serves communities. After she began attending ARI, she learned how to lead and work with people, and find dignity through labor. She says the staff here at ARI made a great impression on her in learning servant leadership. “I’m really impressed by them. We [the students] have learned a lot through their action.” Some of the things that the staff did that really stood out to her were that “they [didn’t] bother over their titles”, worked equally with the participants, and that they had very positive attitudes.

When asked whether or not her leadership skills improved since being in the program, Karma, modest as ever, was hesitant to say so. However, she did say that she would try her best “to follow [the staff’s] footsteps.” When it comes to training her home community on servant leadership, she says she doesn’t have any plans as of yet, but that she will “lead by example”.

Wil Merchant
YASC Young Adult Service Corps Volunteer
Episcopal Church

Karma harvests rice grown in one of ARI’s off-campus fields.
PHILIPPINES  I believe that mission brought me to ARI. It wasn’t my will to be here, but I believe God put me here. I’ve learned much about loving all of God’s people and creation and have found people who share my concerns. I love that I see God’s glory in the community here, in the fellowship, understanding, and respect that everyone has for each other. I see it in nature, watching tiny seeds grow into a bounty of fruits and vegetables. God is truly at work here!

USA  In serving ARI as a missionary for the Anglican Church, I love that everyone here is really friendly, something interesting is always happening, and I’m learning about so many cultures. This community is becoming like my second family. Honestly, I feel ARI is helping me become a better person.

INDIA / JAPAN  I came to ARI because I wanted to work with my hands; I felt that India’s educational system is too based in theory. My dad is an ARI graduate and because of his work, I became curious about rural development and community living. I love living here, the warmth of the people, excellent food, seeing it go from farm to table and back, and the lessons for my daily life. I’ve learned how to open up and be more honest with myself. Being here is one of the happiest and most peaceful times in my life.

GERMANY  I came to ARI to meet new people, have new experiences outside Germany and learn more about agriculture and Japanese society. Some of the things I love about ARI are being able to talk with many people and learn something new every day, morning gatherings, working with nature and that everyone here is very caring. We all can learn a lot besides agriculture here: we learn more about friendship, love, respectfulness and tolerance. I think ARI makes everyone a better person.

What brought me here is the unique international community and my interest in organic farming. I love sharing healthy food, working, and living with people from different countries. ARI is my second home and a place to learn about life. Here, my point of view has changed so much, and I am finding out what is important in my life. I didn’t think that human relationships were important to mental health, but now I see how important they are to one’s happiness.

Just as ARI attracts a diverse group of participants, it attracts a diverse range of volunteers who agree that coming to ARI is life-changing. 

Find out about volunteering on our website: www.ari-edu.org/en/volunteer/
Have you watched our volunteer video? Search YouTube for “Volunteer Voices from ARI”
To carry out our mission to create an environmentally healthy, just and peaceful world where everyone can live to their fullest potential, ARI believes it is important to share the mission with overseas participants and our own neighbors, the Japanese people, especially the youth.

From ARI’s founding, speaking engagements at schools have been part of our outreach. Last year, ARI staff, graduates and participants visited more than 20 schools from elementary age through university, enjoying classroom discussions with 10 students or speaking to an audience of 1000.

ARI has a long history with the motto That We May Live Together and practices achieving it through Foodlife, Servant Leadership and Community of Learning. These approaches face the opposite direction from where Japan is looking and seem even radical in a way.

Japan is a global economic power. However, there are problems such as environmental destruction, exploitation of natural and human resources, as well as overwork and stress. People are feeling emptiness in spite of the fulfillment of their materialistic needs. Especially young people are struggling with a sense of loneliness and isolation. I strongly believe that ARI can encourage them. ARI talks are a helpful opportunity for Japanese students to learn alternative concepts and values, and the fact that life can be essentially more simple. They help students think about the meaning of happiness. This is one way for Japanese schools to benefit from these visits.

Our Training Assistants, who are graduates of ARI working for grassroots people in their countries as rural leaders, can have a powerful impact on students when they talk and present their unique stories, views and personality. In fact, we have received enthusiastic feedback from the students who have said, “My heart was fired up”, “I learned that the social poverty resided within our heart which had lost connections and love”, “I realized that love could change one’s life” and more.

It is valuable for ARI community members to reach out and share our stories, our mission and our activities with students in Japanese schools not only for promotional purposes but also to spread our ideas to be part of creating a sustainable and peaceful world. At the same time, it is worthwhile for Japanese students of all ages to understand more about values and an image of the future they have never heard of before. I believe that this outreach and interaction of ARI with students will build a good foundation in Japanese society to develop more decent and inspiring leaders for the next generation.
AFARI Establishes Takami Scholarship Fund

Dr. Takami spent much of ARI's first 20 years in two ways. One was at ARI in rural Tochigi, Japan developing a unique rural leaders' training program. His vision of bringing leaders from rural areas, women and men, with different religions and races and languages together to produce 90% of their own food while attending classes and visiting organic farms and social welfare organizations all over the country, required tremendous energy, insight and dedication.

At the same time Takami Sensei also spent a large amount of time traveling to North America and other regions to spread the good news about ARI and raise much needed financial support. To this day, no Participants are expected to pay for their training. Although Dr. Takami has long retired, ARI remains thoroughly committed to this principle and continues to work with individuals and organizations to finding the necessary funds. One important source has been scholarships. Unfortunately some of our most loyal scholarship partners, such as the World Council of Churches and others, have been forced to cut back on these critical programs.

In response to this situation, and to honor Dr. Takami, specifically in the year of his 90th birthday, the Marsey family has established the Dr. Toshihiro Takami Scholarship Endowment Fund to be managed by AFARI. Each year, 5% of this fund will be sent to ARI towards scholarships for Participants. The cost of a full scholarship this year is $17,850.

The hope of the AFARI board is that the Takami Scholarship Fund will grow to such an extent that the 5% annual disbursement will one day be able to provide multiple scholarships. In this way, the Fund will be a lasting legacy to Dr. Takami and to those who make donations to it. In order to start the fund on this growing path, the Marsey's have given the AFARI community a challenge.

The challenge was to raise funds equal to the original donation of $10,000 during Dr. Takami's 90th birthday year (ending September 30, 2017). Then, once the $10,000 had been reached an additional gift would be made matching Dollar for Dollar up to another $5000.00. We are happy to announce that all challenges were already met and as of this writing $32,595 has been donated in this first year establishing the fund.

We hope that the many friends and colleagues of Dr. Takami will choose to make an additional gift this year to this fund, and continue to give additional gifts to this fund as they are able. We also hope that supporters will consider making a legacy gift to this fund by putting it in their will. Such a gift would serve to help future generations of Participants and the communities they serve, to benefit from the tremendous life work of Dr. Takami for many years to come.

Any donations to this fund can be sent by check or online or by stock transfer with the additional instructions that it is designated for the Takami Scholarship Fund. Any inquiries about making a legacy donation to it can be made to J.B. Hoover, AFARI Executive Director, at (206) 349-2807.

TAKE MY HAND / SHORT NEWS

Want to Donate Your Car? Give AFARI a Call!

“We were planning on donating our car to our public radio station, but if AFARI can use it, we will donate to AFARI instead.” These were the words of a supporter in Chicago who was “right-sizing” to become a one car family. The car they wanted to donate was in very good shape. I used the car for last year’s mid-west speaking tour and then drove it Seattle. I sold the car for them for a good price and they were able to donate the proceeds to AFARI. It was a win win win. The donor received a good tax deduction. AFARI got a good donation. The buyer got a good car at a reasonable price and is now also an ARI/AFARI supporter.

If you are “right-sizing” or giving up driving or replacing your car and thinking of donating it, give AFARI a call first, before your local radio station. We may be able to create a win win win with you as well.

contact: john.b.hoover@gmail.com
Meeting with groups and individual supporters, we shared news about ARI in churches, classrooms, living rooms and retirement communities, interacting with overseas development professionals, students and friends of Takami Sensei from the 1950s. Rene fielded many questions about his work as a forester in the Philippines and how ARI training has influenced his life’s work.

Our listeners ranged from grade school girls to a 96-year old. We toured ARI style: lodging entirely in homestays and driving a car donated by strong supporters, Tom and Michiko Morgan. Such hospitality deepens our connections and saves funds that support ARI.

In 2017, ARI staff members (Ecumenical Relations Coordinator Kathy Froede from USA, and Meal Service Head Acivo Rhakho from NE India) will tour the northeastern US from Oct 22 until Nov 12. I will help arrange homestays, itinerary, and logistics, joining them in the early part. Please be in touch with AFARI (206-349-2807 or john.b.hoover@gmail.com) if you would like to invite them to your church or gathering!

J.B. Hoover
AFARI Executive Director

Thank You!
ARI thanks all volunteers — too numerous to mention here by name—who helped in creating this issue of Take My Hand by proof-reading, editing and writing!
Takami Sensei, fondly known as ‘Tom’ by many, is now in an elderly care facility and made a healthy appearance at the birthday party ARI organized for him in ARI’s Koinonia House dining hall. The Takamis’ older son Shin and his family joined us in this warm celebration.

The birthday cake, album, song and dance were all handmade and full of the love, respect, and thanks we ARI members have for him, and it made for a beautiful gift! Many thanks to overseas friends, supporters and graduates for the heartfelt greetings that you sent to celebrate this special occasion. We put them all in a memory album.

Takami Sensei, thank you for ARI. The gift we received from you has impacted thousands of graduates, volunteers, visitors and staff members for more than 40 years.

(Kathy Froede)