

Internship with Bridge Asia Japan in Maungdaw area and Study the rice farming system and its related environmental problems in Kanyutkwin, Myanmar

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1. Activities during the internship

From 14th May to 9th June, 2012, I joined the Bridge Asia Japan (BAJ) as an intern under the Education Program for Field Oriented Leaders in Environmental Sectors (FOLENS), TUAT. BAJ is one of the non-governmental organizations (NGO) which provides assistance for people facing difficulties such as poverty and discrimination in Myanmar. The goal of BAJ is to think and act together with the communities in need in order to build bridges of mutual understanding and trust, and to aid these communities in becoming self-sufficient. To fulfill this goal, BAJ is working in Maungdaw area with local and international staff members. The activities are repairing vehicles and machines used by U.N. organizations and international/local NGOs and constructing basic infrastructures to promote the reintegration of returnees. We also hold technical training courses in repair and maintenance of machines and vehicles for local youths to facilitate their income generation. For this purpose, BAJ composed of five sub-teams such as office, workshop, community social development, income generation and account team.

After my arrival at BAJ, I was assigned as Acting Community Development Program Coordinator for the community development program. During my internship, there were three trainings, one advanced motorbike repairing training course in the head office of Maungdaw, five basic sewing trainings in villages and one life saving training in Maungdaw. My responsibilities were to take charge of these trainings to be efficient and effective for local people during the training periods and to assess the impact of the present and previous training courses for community development.

I attended every Monday meeting with all staff members of BAJ. On that day, team leaders and sub-leaders have to present the schedule for the present week. Program Manager finalized and gave instruction and suggestion for each team. On all other office days, we made meeting with team leaders to discuss about

the daily schedule. In the second week, on Monday, I gave one presentation to all BAJ members about the “FOLENS program”, “my research” and “save our environment”.

When I arrived there, advanced motorbike repairing training was already started. I frequently visited around there to get good relationship with local young people. Under the community development program of BAJ, I gave one lecture to them about my experience and 10 basis points for how to save our environment in terms of clean water, electricity, reducing plastic usage, growing trees and saving energy to save our world. With a program manager and other staff members, we often went to the construction sites and checked the conditions about the labors, raw materials, suppliers and other things.

On Friday, 8th June, 2012, there was a sudden change of the condition of Maungdaw area. The very cruel events painted an ugly picture in Maungdaw area by shedding of innocent people’s blood. 1,000 Bengali-Muslims in the border town of Maungdaw started a severe riot on that day at about 2:00 pm in the afternoon after their Friday midday prayers killing at least four Burmese Buddhists and injured many more. In that time, we heard that the crisis between two groups of people expanded throughout the Rakhine State.

Because of this alert condition, BAJ arranged to send all local staff members (Maungdaw region) to their house safely. Only five people including Program Manager (PM) and me stayed overnight in the BAJ compound to protect the office.

The next day, 9th June, we closed the BAJ and moved to the UNHCR compound, an evacuated area for all NGOs members. On 10th June, we moved to Buthitaung by NGOs cars accompanied by two escort cars. At Buthitaung port, NGOs speed boats were waiting to leave for Sittwe and we arrived there at 4:00 pm. On 11th June, we went to the airport to leave for Yangon and waited the flight until next morning. On 12th June, 2012, we arrived at Yangon safely with other NGO members. There we could visibly escape from danger. We made brief explanation with BAJ head office staff members in Yangon.

From 14th June to 8th July 2012, I was in the Kanyutkwin area, Bago division, to set up field experiment in paddy rice fields. The objective of this study was to assess the greenhouse gas emission from farmer rice field. I also planted shade trees along the road sides and some teak trees in the farmer farm with local people.



Meeting with local people for construction of local community center in village site



Giving speech in the opening ceremony of basic sewing training in village site



Lifesaving training site giving instruction by facilitator



Practicing and repairing the motorbike engine during training



Bengali Muslims setting fire local people's houses in Maungdaw area

2. Experience and achievements

The purpose of my internship was to study the NGOs activities, local community and their environment. To fulfill this purpose, I joined Bridge Asia Japan (BAJ) carrying out developmental assistance activities together with people and communities in Maungdaw area, Northern Rakhine State.

Every Monday, they had meeting with all the staff members and announced their weekly plan. There were discussions and suggestions by different team members of BAJ to smooth their activities. What I got from that weekly meeting was to understand that planning, good preparation and sharing data information are very important to progress the activities. Before starting daily works, they had team leaders meeting for daily plan. In that meeting, program manager requested to give comments and suggestions from different teams and set decision for daily activities. What I understand is taking the vision from bottom and set the decision plan by the top and working together with different teams are very important points for an NGO to finish successfully all their activities. On Monday meeting, I gave one presentation to all BAJ staff members about my research and 10 points to save our environment. I noticed the people's interest about environment and discussed some points related to their daily life. And I also gave one lecture to young local people about my experience and environment which is very interactive and I received a lot of questions from them concerning with waste management and clean water, and also international experience.

BAJ is working over there with three main goals. The first one is providing opportunities for acquiring vocational skills and capacity building. By utilizing appropriate and traditional technologies that exist in local communities while introducing new skills, BAJ provides opportunities for acquiring vocational skills and capacity building to such vulnerable individuals as returnees, young adults deprived from educational opportunities and women with limited employment opportunities. For this purpose, BAJ provided a lot of trainings in BAJ compound and also in the village sites. As an acting community development program coordinator, I discussed with the facilitators to improve the training activities and suggested to use interactive systems, visual media such as activity related videos and to focus on good and weak points of the training participants. I also learned a lot of things from these trainings such as how to plan and manage the training, selection criteria of the participants (eg. age and education level depend on type of training, their attitude and willingness to the training), public interests to the training and how to motivate young people (eg. incentives and self esteem by training) to become actively participate in the training.

The second goal is assistance in income generation. I had good experience about income generation that not only providing the training such as basic and advanced sewing training, they also gathered young women who already finished the sewing training and generated their income by providing necessary things in the BAJ workshop. They received clothes order from other NGOs for income generation of young women.

The third goal is development of basic infrastructures for community vitalization. What I learned from this section was how to get smooth communication and discussion with local people, project planning and supply chain for the raw materials and labor management in constructing the community center.

Unfortunately, I didn't finish my internship period because of the Bingly-Muslim Crisis in Maungdaw and other areas, spreading around the Rakhine State. I had experienced how to reach the evacuated area with NGOs members and the way to come back to Yangon from Maungdaw area. During moving to the evacuated area, I recognized the role of leadership and the ability of the leader to make timely decisions for safety the staff members of BAJ to send back to their home and to reach saved area.

In Kanyutkwin, Pago Division, I conducted the experiment by the help of local farmers to assess how much rice fields in this area produce greenhouse gas for global warming. In this area, I joined with local people to grow shaded trees along the road side and also in the farmer farm.

To conclude, I can state that my internship at the BAJ was a rewarding experience and provided me with some new perspectives that I did not come across during my studies back at the college.

3. Relationship to the future career development as a field-oriented leader in environmental sectors

Internship experience will have a positive impact on my future career development. Through internship, I gained a lot of experience about NGO activities and local community. It was very exciting that NGOs were working not for their profit but only for local community development. Most of the NGOs in that area worked for community development especially on basic infrastructure such as bridges, schools, roads and local community centers. Some NGOs worked to enhance local people's income generation by vocational training. But I found that NGOs in these areas are working only for local people, not directly addressing environmental issues. As a future field oriented leader in an environmental sector, I would like to fulfill this gap to integrate community development and also an environmental sector. For this purpose, I shared and exchanged the knowledge about how to save our environment with NGO members and local young people. The environmental aspects should also be the priority focus in community development. I believe that in the near future after graduation, I can participate with local people for community

development intern of social, economic and also environmental sectors by working with humanitarian organizations. In order to be a field oriented leader, I have to learn to enhance my knowledge and skills related with environment and also communication under FOLENS program. Lastly, I would like to thank Mr. Tsuji Fukio and all BAJ staff members, for their kind help during my stay there as an internship participant. I would also like to thank all FOLENS members for enabling /allowing me to participate in this internship, where I got a lot of valuable experience for my life.