

## A Memo on Rural Life Improvement Movement

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The following two documents (contained in this package) can be the most relevant literature on rural life improvement movement in Japan and other Asian countries:

Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) (2002), *Research on the Life Improvement Programme in Rural Japan and the Prospects for Japan's Rural Development Cooperation*.

Asian Productivity Organization (APO) (2003), *Rural Life Improvement in Asia* (PDF downloadable [http://www.apo-tokyo.org/00e-books/AG-07\\_RuraLife.htm](http://www.apo-tokyo.org/00e-books/AG-07_RuraLife.htm))

Chapter 1 (by Hiroshi Sato) of the first document appears to be an excellent overview. From these documents, some relevant aspects on life improvement program in rural Japan are extracted as below:

### 1. “Rural life improvement movement” versus “rural development”

“Rural life improvement movement” in Japan can be compared with “rural development” as commonly understood in development literature as follows:

	“Rural development”	“Rural life improvement movement”
Objective	Improve quality of life	Improve quality of life
Starting point	What is lacking	What is available
Main approach	Transferring; substituting	Creating; adapting
Important tools	Technology; capital	Information; social capital (mutual help, etc.)
Modality of capital input	Input from other institutions	Input from local government; self-help of farmers
Protagonist	External experts	Farmers; local leaders
Events	One shot	Continuous
Main target	Productivity; increase of income	Better quality of life; security; saving
Main concern	As much as possible	As long as possible

Source: Mizuno, Masami and Hiroshi Sato (ed.) (2007), *Development in Rural Society: Rethinking Rural Development*, Institute of Developing Economies (IDE, Japan) (in Japanese; translation is tentative)

## **2. Importance of “rural life improvement”**

Mr. Hiroshi Sato, senior researcher of the Institute of Development Economics (IDE) and one of the most prominent experts on rural life improvement, emphasizes that the process of economic and social development in postwar Japan was impossible without the scheme of “social development,” particularly the achievements obtained by various life improvements in rural areas. The keyword for social development in rural areas of Japan at that time was “*Seikatsu-Kaizen*” (life improvement).

He also states that Japan was able to quickly and broadly distribute the fruits of rapid growth because social development called “rural life improvement movement” had laid its groundwork during the twenty years period prior to rapid growth.

Japan in the summer of 1945 faced the same array of problems faced by many of the developing countries today such as food shortage, malnutrition, health deterioration, poor sanitary conditions as well as the sense of humiliation after being defeated in war and occupied by the Allied Powers.

## **3. Gender, rural livelihood extension workers, and its relationship with agricultural extension workers**

The greatest factor behind the success of rural life improvement movement was the dedication of the women who became livelihood extension workers (“home advisers”). Female “home advisers” worked together with male “farm advisors” (agricultural extension workers) in extension programs. Livelihood extension workers were expected to be facilitators who enable rural women to become aware of numerous problems that existed in daily life, and recognize them as problems that need to be solved. They introduced new contrivances such as improved cooking stoves, improved work clothes, and nutritious food. Issue-specific specialists were posted in each prefecture to provide logistic support to livelihood extension workers. This established a system in which specialists in food, clothing and shelter offered advice to livelihood extension workers.

According to Masami Mizuno, there was the notion that “improvement of production and improvement of livelihood are on equal footing and that solutions of livelihood problems and uplifting of rural livelihood would lead to the advancement of production activities.” This was in contrast to the production-oriented approach which argued that “improving the existing production would automatically improve the quality of life.”

#### **4. Support of central and local governments and adaptation to local conditions**

Extension programs were designed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries but part of the expenses were borne by prefectural governments. For this reason, while unified instructions were issued from the central body, programs unique to each prefecture were also carried out to the extent that the local government budget permitted. Other ministries such as the Ministry of Health and Welfare (nutritional improvement, birth control, and maternal and child health care) and the Ministry of Education (social education, etc.) also supported rural life improvement movement. While green bicycles were provided as means of transportation for rural livelihood extension workers, public health care nurses rode on white bicycles.

The most common target of improvement was cooking stove improvement, followed by the preparation of preserved foods and the making of improved work clothes. For example, according to the results of the 1956 national survey on cooking stove improvement, 2.2 million households (38 percent of all farm households) had already improved their cooking stoves, 1.58 million households (27 percent) had improved their cooking stoves after the introduction of the rural life improvement movement, and 1.47 million households (25 percent) were planning to improve their cooking stoves within one year.

#### **5. Roots of rural life improvement movement**

Masao Watanabe suggests that rural life improvement movement is similar to the Kaizen movement in Japanese businesses and that both could have the same roots in Japanese thinking and practice. Hiroshi Sato endorses this point of view. From the similarities between the two, Watanabe argues that the idea of Kaizen should be defined as practicing something continuously and voluntarily with the aim of attaining better conditions by utilizing wisdom learned experientially through daily life.