

ITC Follow-up Project: Seminar on Rural-Urban Migration in Bhutan

Thimphu, Bhutan

24 January 2007

The participants of the International Training Course in Regional Development (ITC), UNCRD's annual flagship training course, formulate their own action plans at the end of the course and implement them respectively after the completion of the course. UNCRD conducts on-site follow-up projects to support ex-participants to perform their plans. On 24 January 2007, UNCRD organized the above seminar to follow up on the progress of action plan implementation by Mr. Thinley Namgyel, an ex-participant of the 34th ITC, who is involved in policy and plan formulation at Ministry of Works and Human Settlement (MOWHS), the Government of Bhutan.

In Bhutan, a rapid rural-urban migration is underway; therefore, the government is required to promote a policy to improve urban living environment. In the meantime, the government also needs to promote measures to revitalize rural villages and curb population outflow. Against such a background, Mr. Namgyel formulated an action plan to comprehensively deal with the migration issue through the cooperation among ministries and relevant organizations. In planning the action plan, he incorporated Japan's experiences in living environment improvement and endogenous regional development in rural mountains, which he learned at the ITC training course. Accordingly, in the follow-up seminar to support Mr. Namgyel's plan implementation, UNCRD disseminated necessary knowledge on living environment and endogenous regional development.

Twenty-five people including officials of MOWHS and regional development experts participated in the seminar. The seminar started with Mr. Namgyel's presentation of his action plan, preceded by his briefing on the issue of rural-urban migration in Bhutan and relevant knowledge he acquired at the ITC training course. Following that, UNCRD staff gave a lecture on endogenous regional development theory and "One Village, One Product Movement" in Japan and introduced a case of Gifu prefecture that promoted regional revitalization through mushroom production.

Various mushrooms grow in Bhutan blessed with a rich natural environment of the Himalayas and they have been a traditional part of the diet for the Bhutanese. Mushrooms are not so heavy as potatoes and other vegetables; thus, it is easier to carry them in the mountains where there are no access roads. Besides, mushrooms are nutritious. They are in high domestic demand and *Matsutake* and some other varieties are suitable for export. Since mushrooms can be sold at high prices, mushroom production is an important source of income for farmers.

Keeping the above background in view, UNCRD held working group discussions after the seminar. With focus on rural revitalization, the working groups discussed endogenous regional development through mushroom production. The groups then visited the National Mushroom Center (NMC) and suitable sites for mushroom cultivation and discussed extension of mushroom cultivation techniques to farmers through the cooperation of MOWHS and Ministry of Agriculture (MOA). They also debated on the methods of grouping farmers, collecting and shipping products and marketing.

UNCRD will assist Bhutan in promoting endogenous regional development through mushroom production in cooperation with JICA Bhutan Office and other international organizations. UNCRD expects the assistance will contribute to the nation's efforts to deal with rural poverty and curb a rapid rural-urban migration on which Mr. Namgyel and his MOWHS colleagues are working.