

Field trip to Shimane and Yamaguchi to study the Japanese Family Income and Expenditure Survey

The Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (SIAP) conducted a field study trip for the participants of the Second Group Training Course in Production and Development of Official Statistics in Support for National Development including the Achievement of MDGs from 26 to 28 October 2011 as part of the curriculum of the four month training course. All 30 participants/official statisticians from 14 countries visited, in two separate groups, Shimane and Yamaguchi prefectures, both in a south-western island of Honshu, the biggest island in Japan.

The field study trip expanded participants' learning through active hands-on experience and knowledge about statistical service in local government, increased participants' knowledge and understanding of Japanese Family Income and Expenditure Survey (FIES); and advanced technologies and historical/cultural heritage of Japan.

The visit to the Local Government Office was one of the most important activities in this field trip. During the visit, the senior officials of the statistical offices of the local governments explained the organization, responsibilities, and main statistical activities of both prefectures. The collaboration on FIES between prefecture governments with the central government, namely Statistics Bureau in Tokyo, and the data collection for the survey on sample basis at the prefecture level was clearly and thoroughly explained during the visit as well. All participants were able to learn that the close collaboration between central and local governments is a paramount factor in producing high quality and timely statistics in Japan. Close communication between local government officials, supervisors, enumerators and respondents is another critical factor in producing accurate and reliable statistics.

Actual work of the FIES at its front line was explained in detail by the supervisors and enumerators, who were present at the field observation, visit to respondent households, for the benefit of the participants. Visits to sample households to meet the respondent households and observe how monthly income and expenditure data are recorded in a family account book were a very exciting moment for the participants. Other essential information such as household characteristics, annual income and savings were also collected in a well organized manner. A warm welcome and hospitality was received by the participants from the households who made participants exceptionally comfortable in exchanging their experiences. Participants were of the view that the cooperation extended for the FIES by the respondents was outstanding. The enumerators' skills and knowledge in approaching the households were well understood during the discussions with both the respondents and enumerators.

Sampling procedures adopted in selection of households for survey purposes and issues relating to non-response and substitution of households were discussed at the request of participants. Their visit to the respondent households in the beautiful local area of Japan proved to be an excellent opportunity for the participants to apply their knowledge and skills that they had learnt at SIAP in the metropolitan area of Tokyo and clarify their doubts through asking questions from the authorities. The question and answer session not only built their confidence on what they had learnt at SIAP but also was a great opportunity to learn good lessons on the efficient conduct of the FIES in Japan.

To learn in person the application of advanced Japanese technology into economic and social life was another objective of this trip. For Shimane group, the visit to Matsue castle, medieval

Samurai's castle, next to the Prefecture government building, impressed participants with the beauty and comfort of the capital city. They also visited Eco-Clean Matsue, garbage disposal unit equipped with the most advanced melting furnace, as well as the aquarium of living beings in Sinji Lake, which is designated as wetland under the Ramsar Convention. Those observations made participants focus on the measures to save the environment. For Yamaguchi group, the visit to Rurikouji Temple, whose highlight was a five story wooden tower or Pagoda designated as a national treasure, warmly welcomed the participants with a beautiful pond in front and colourful autumn trees in the back. They also visited Ube Kamaboko company, a producer of steamed fish paste which is the most favourite traditional Japanese processed food, and observed its clean and fully automated production line.

The participants were also impressed by the hospitality of Shimane and Yamaguchi people, whose kind and generous treatment of visitors from abroad were regarded as unique and outstanding local character among Japanese.

Now, participants are back from the trip with lots of knowledge and experiences which cannot be learned in the classroom.





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