

Field trip to Shikoku to study the Japanese Family Income and Expenditure Survey

The Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific conducted a field study trip for the participants of the First Group Training Course in Production and Development of Official Statistics in Support for National Development including the Achievement of MDGs from 26 to 28 January 2011 as part of the curriculum of the four month training course. All 22 participants/official statisticians from 15 countries visited, in two separate groups, Ehime and Kochi prefectures, both in a south-western island of Shikoku, the fourth 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 government offices explained the organization, responsibilities, and main statistical activities of both Ehime and Kochi prefectures. The coordination of FIES at prefecture level with the Statistics Bureau in Tokyo and conducting the survey on sample basis in the prefectures was clearly and thoroughly explained during the visit as well. Through this opportunity, 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. Good and close communication among local government officials, supervisors, enumerators and respondents is another critical factor.

The conduct of the field work of the FIES 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 respondents 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 savings, annual income and household characteristics are 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. The visit to the Japanese country side household proved to be an excellent opportunity for the participants to test their knowledge and skills that they had learnt at SIAP and clarify doubts by 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 Ehime group, their visits to Fruit Tree research Center and Ehime Beverage Inc. made participants understand how the people of this *Mikan*-orange producing prefecture tried to improve the quality of their orange product by using

advanced technologies and tried to produce more market oriented products. For Kochi group, the visit to the Japanese Paper Museum and experience of hands-on papermaking themselves followed by the visit to Nippon Kodoshi Corporation, a factory producing capacitor separator, which is derived from Japanese paper. Those observation made participants understand how the people of the company combined new technology with traditional skill of papermaking, improved the quality of outputs through the product line control, and resulted in the big market share of 70% in the world. Both groups visited Japanese historical sites including Matsuyama and Kochi castles, both of which were medieval Samurai's castles.

The participants were also impressed by the hospitality of Ehime and Kochi people, whose kind and generous treatment of outside visitors 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.