

Fishery co-operatives

Success comes calling

The pioneer of Japan's fishery co-operative movement recalls how modern management techniques and skills were introduced

The New Fishery Co-operative Law was enacted in 1949, incorporating the internationally accepted principles of co-operatives. This law greatly facilitated the establishment of Fisheries Co-operative Associations (FCA)s; if more than 20 fishermen wanted to unite by establishing an FCA, the prefectural government would officially approve the establishment of the FCA if they composed and ratified the necessary articles of the association for the FCA, if they submitted the business plan of the FCA to the government, and if they exercised proper control of the fishing rights. Shortly after this law was passed, 206 FCAs were re-established in Hokkaido.

Many of these early FCAs were small in scale and poorly managed due to the lack of experience of the leaders. Eventually, a number of those early FCAs were dissolved and some were amalgamated with other FCAs, with the result that today there are only 129 FCAs in Hokkaido.

Immediately after the war, the government encouraged fishermen to increase their production in order to supply more of food, which was so badly needed by the nation. This led to greater development of offshore and deep-sea fisheries. The established coastal fisheries, on the other hand, did not develop in line with these new ventures. There were too many fishermen struggling to catch the limited stocks of fish in the small coastal areas. This naturally led to smaller catches and decreased incomes for the fishermen. Most of them could hardly make ends meet.

By 1960, the Japanese economy had become very vibrant. Development had been particularly noticeable in the

secondary industries such as steel, textile and shipbuilding. The primary industries such as agriculture and fisheries, however, still lagged far behind in terms of their development.

The central government was well aware of this fact and in 1960 introduced an Industrial Structure Improvement Policy whereby it encouraged people working in the primary industries to shift to the field of industry so as to provide a solid base for the continued growth of the economy. As there were many unemployed fishermen, they, in particular, were lured to shift to industry. This, of course, does not mean that the government attached no importance to fisheries. On the contrary, this programme was promoted to achieve balanced development of primary, secondary, and tertiary industries.

The government realized that the FCAs would play an indispensable role in achieving the objective of the aforementioned policy, and in 1960 it therefore enacted the Fishery Co-operative Association Restructuring and Management Improvement Act, through which the FCAs would be revitalized.

Also enacted that year was the Coastal Fisheries Promotion Act, which facilitated the building of larger vessels and the introduction of such modern equipment as radars and fish finders. Furthermore, the government subsidized the construction of cold storage facilities and markets in the landing areas, as well as other infrastructure.

Co-operative strength

As a result of these acts of the government and because of the strength of the co-operatives, the FCAs experienced tremendous growth during the 1960s, and

they have continued to thrive on the basis of these foundations.

Towards the end of the 1950s, the directors of both Dogyoren and Shingyoren realized that it was becoming increasingly important to modernize the management systems of the FCAs.

The government had been trying to reorganize and strengthen the management structure of the FCAs. In order to take full advantage of the government support, the leaders in Hokkaido determined that education regarding the objectives, structure and management of the FCAs was necessary to ensure their success.

After much discussion, the directors decided to establish an independent organization to deal exclusively with the education of FCA members. In 1961, Shidoren, (the Educational Federation of FCAs) was established, with 15 staff members transferred from the other federations and five newly recruited employees. I was one of the latter five.

We studied all aspects of the management of FCAs in Hokkaido, in particular the causes of, and solutions for, poor management.

We then determined that the two major functions of Shidoren would be:

- to provide comprehensive educational services not only to the directors and staff members of the FCAs, but also to the member fishermen, the members of the community youth groups, and the members of the community women's groups.
- to promote the proper management of FCAs by introducing modern management techniques and skills.

Shidoren also promoted the establishment of women's groups and youth groups in the fishing villages, and these groups were encouraged to become involved in the FCAs operations.

In Japan, it is usually the women who control the household finances, and, therefore, the women's groups, in particular, became involved in the promotion of savings.

As fishery production tends to fluctuate yearly, it is necessary for fishing households to accumulate savings to see them through bad years.

We stimulated the youth groups by providing opportunities for them to study advanced fishery production technology, and engage in fish farming and other such activities. By introducing new management techniques and the latest

developments in fisheries to the youths, the FCAs have advanced with the times.

We in the prefectural federation still had to deal with many problems. Even as late as the 1960s, certain member fishermen of some of the FCAs shipped less than half their products through the FCA. To make matters worse, the members deposited only a small percentage of their savings into their FCA accounts. That was no way to operate an FCA, so the three federations—Dogyoren, Shidoren, and Shingyoren—discussed measures to rectify the situation. They decided to emphasize two points, the first being joint marketing of the products and the second, deposit of their savings into the FCA.

In other words, it was decided that the two important elements—the products and the income—had to be channelled through the FCAs. In this way, the FCAs would become economically strong.

A Joint Marketing Promotion Committee was established with members from the local FCAs. Dogyoren organized training courses in which it disseminated important information relevant to marketing, and, in particular, emphasized the necessity of joint marketing.

A savings promotion committee was also established with members from local FCAs. Shingyoren provided training for them regarding financial affairs. Shidoren has increased the range of its work to include not only the aforementioned two functions, but also campaigns against environmental pollution and a movement to restructure the management of fisheries to deal with the conditions of the 200-mile fishery zone.

The three prefectural federations—Dogyoren, Shingyoren and Shidoren—hold symposiums in Sapporo every year. These symposiums are attended by over 300 representatives from among the two aforementioned committees. The co-operative movement benefits greatly from discussions and exchanges of views, which result from these gatherings.

Shidoren also runs the Hokkaido FCA College in Sapporo. The school recruits high school graduates from the fishing villages, teaches them for one year regarding the business aspects of the FCA, and then helps them find employment in one of the FCAs.

Dogyoren, Shingyoren, Shidoren and the local FCAs have accomplished many things in Hokkaido and are well known throughout Japan for the work they have done in promoting the fishery co-operative movement. They have encouraged fishermen to be strong and to unite and to promote savings in the households, and they have encouraged the youth of the fishing communities to develop their skills. ❸

This instalment, the eleventh, is excerpted from the *Autobiography of Takatoshi Ando*, translated by Naoyuki Tao and James Colyn