

# **2018 Re-inventing Japan Project (Short-Term) International Students Summit, RJP Program**

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## **RJP Final Report**

### **1. Introduction**

On 22 and 23 September 2018, students from Peru, Mexico and Brazil participated in the Re-Inventing Japan Project Internship at Institute of Environmental Rehabilitation and Conservation (ERECON), in Tokyo, Japan.

ERECON is a Japanese non-profit organization, which aims to contribute to sustainable use of natural resources through projects in Asian countries, such as Cambodia, Nepal and Thailand. The main actions carried out by the organization are related to environmental rehabilitation, conservation as well as environmental education.

Since its establishment in 2000, the NGO achieved very impressive results regarding its aims and during the short-term program Mr. Koji Miwa, Assistant Program Manager at ERECON, shared with the students some thoughts and strategies about this theme.

### **2. Purpose of participating in this study abroad program**

As a Forestry student in the University of São Paulo, in Brazil, I had the opportunity to apply to participate in the 18th International Students Summit, held in Tokyo University of Agriculture from September 24 to 28 and I was selected as the representative of my university.

Since the RJP Internship was held on the preceding weekend of the conference, it was an incredible opportunity to be in touch with practical questions in the agriculture sector and to learn more about the activities taken by an environmental NGO in Japan. Another important aspect was to know more about the challenges faced in Asian countries and realize that even Brazil is very far from these places, we are facing similar problems. Then, learning strategies to address these challenges was something very interesting for me.

### **3. Activities done during the program**

During the two-day program, ERECON prepared very interesting activities for the students, who had the opportunity to learn more about sustainable agriculture in Japan and about the projects that the organization supports currently.

#### **3.1 First day – Organic Lifestyle Expo**

Firstly, there was a brief introduction for the participants about ERECON and its main activities, as well as the presentation about the schedule for the activities to be done during the RJP Program.

After this, the participants went to Organic Lifestyle Expo, an event held in Tokyo International Forum Exhibition Hall and organized by Organic Forum Japan Inc. The purpose of the event is to inform and communicate for a better understanding and development of the organic movement and lifestyle.

There were several exhibitors that encompassed different business within 10 categories:

- 1- Fruit and vegetables, seafood, livestock products, processed foods, raw material and ingredients, drinks, alcoholic beverages.
- 2- Agriculture, farms and home garden, flowers.
- 3- Apparel, fashion, accessories.
- 4- Body care and cosmetics.
- 5- Health & Wellness, aromatherapy, alternative medicine, spa, yoga.
- 6- Baby & Kids, toys, dietary education, miscellaneous goods, art.
- 7- Housing, renovation, building materials, interior, reuse and recycling.
- 8- Tourism, old houses regeneration, traditional food, technology and crafts.
- 9- Alternative energy, hybrid technology, natural energy.
- 10- Overseas merchandise, import, distribution.

During the event, each student should choose a product to know more about it and then present to the others in order to share information about what each of us found more interesting.

For this assignment, as I am a Forestry student, I chose the stand of handcrafted wood products, which included chopsticks, spoons and bowls. It was very interesting for me because working with wood is very difficult and all the products were perfectly made. Besides, I was in touch with wood from different species, that I have never seen in Brazil before.



Figure 1. Bowls produced from organic wood.

### **3.2 Second Day – Visit to *Satoyama* and presentation of project**

In the second day, the participants were in charge to prepare a project regarding organic farming in their countries and then present to the others.

To achieve this goal, the first activity of the day was to know more details about the projects in which ERECON is involved. Mr. Koji Miwa presented the projects about sustainable agriculture and environmental education in Cambodia and Thailand and we all had a very enriching discussion about the challenges faced by the organization to perform its activities.

After that, in order to inspire the students, we had a walk across a *satoyama* landscape, an area where forests and agricultural lands coexist during centuries, in a very sustainable and integrated way. Along the walk, we could see rice, eggplant and other vegetable plantations, bamboo forests and cattle. It was very interesting to realize that all these land uses can be located side by side, being sustainable economically, socially and environmentally.

Finally, after walking for a couple of hours, the participants shared their ideas related to organic farming in their countries. My project was related to agroforestry systems in a city near my university within an agricultural cooperative. I believe it is a viable project, since the farmers are already engaged in an organization, so it would be easier to be implemented.

### **3.3 Participation on 18<sup>th</sup> International Students Summit**

From September 24 to 28, after participating on the RJP Internship, I had the opportunity to be one of the participants of the 18th International Students Summit (ISS), held in the Tokyo University of Agriculture, in the Setagaya *campus*. This event provides a unique experience for youth around the world, who have the possibility to present their works and researches in topics related to agriculture, environment, food and education.

This year's edition was "Students Taking Actions to Increase Youth Involvement in Sustainable Agriculture and to Close the Gap Between Actors in the Food System", being an incredible opportunity for me to share ideas, experiences and knowledge about the topic.

In the first day of presentations, I participated with the exposition of a work I conducted named "Youth promoting agroforestry systems to close gaps between actors in the food system" and it was a very enriching experience for me. Besides doing the presentation to an international audience about what youth from my university has been doing in the area, I could face the challenge of speaking in public for lots of people, in a foreign language.

Another point related to ISS that I really appreciated was about the rich discussions we had during the first days of event. Firstly, we got some conclusions about our session (agriculture) and then we could share it with the other participants, contributing to the final conclusion of the ISS, as well as supporting the discussion related to the definition of the next year's ISS theme ("Youth Transforming Thoughts on Sustainable Agriculture and Resource Management to Connect Local and Global Community").

## **4. Accomplishments/learnings through the program**

Through the program, I had the incredible opportunity to be in touch with a completely different reality from mine. I believe that Japan is much more advanced in terms of sustainable and organic agriculture than Brazil, however we have potential to change this situation and I think it would be possible to implement some of the ideas I saw in Japan. I also enjoyed the contact with the ERECON projects, because it showed me that it is possible to change the status quo, even when the challenges are not easy to solve.

After participating in the program and being in touch with the aspects discussed during it, I am more likely to pursue a career focused on sustainable agriculture and rural development. I really enjoyed it and I believe that this type of non-governmental organizations as ERECON are very important to support farmers where the government cannot act very well.

Regarding the ISS, I am sure that it was one of the best experiences I ever had in my life. Being in touch with many different people, from diverse places, with dissimilar backgrounds was something very special and I will take the learnings I had with them through all my life.

## **5. Suggestions and acknowledgements**

Firstly, I would suggest to create a ISS alumni network (maybe in LinkedIn due to the easiness) in order to connect all ISS participants. My second suggestion is to continue the program for more years, because it is very enriching for all the participants.

At last, I would like to thank Tokyo University of Agriculture and ERECON for the amazing opportunity, specially Ms. Naomi Sakai and Mr. Koji Miwa, who supported us in the activities during the program.