

Distance Learning for Developing Countries

I have been engaged in JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) NET Distance Education for developing countries for these three years. In 2003

I was responsible for producing the contents of teaching materials for two courses on Remote Sensing and GIS. Each course includes power-point viewgraphs of eleven modules, with voice and video of a lecturer. I am proud to have served as the lecturer. Each module will be edited to about 30 minutes.

In 2004 they were delivered to six countries in two sessions via JICA NET. The first session was for Thailand, Malaysia and Turkey and the second session for Vietnam, Philippines and Laos. Each session is composed of three modules, including Video Show lasting 30 minutes. This is followed by a Question-and-Answer (Q&A) videoconference lasting 30 minutes, repeated three times. The total number of participants was about sixty to eighty per session. After the Remote Sensing and GIS courses I conducted examinations of those who participated in 75% or more of the sessions. Average successful completion was about 70 to 80%, depending on country. A certificate was presented to successful candidates in the name of the Japan Society of Photogrammetry and Remote Sensing and JICA.

In 2005 I am continuing JICA NET Distance Education, with an additional session entitled "Application of Remote Sensing and GIS". Nine afternoons from 15:00 to 18:30 Japan time (9:00-12:30 in Kenya, 13:00-16:30 in Thailand and Sri Lanka, May to July this year) was the first session, which I have just finished. JICA plans another two sessions in 2005: for Vietnam, Philippines and Turkey in August to October in 2005, and Cambodia, Bangladesh, Laos and Malaysia in January to March 2006.

My experience up to now may be summarised as follows.

Q&A sessions in the form of videoconference proved very tough for me in terms of trying to return adequate answers to participants. The sessions included a lot of noise and multinational English! But I did enjoy Q&A because I could see the class and participants. I am summarising these Q&A in written form in English, totalling almost seven hundred questions and answers on Remote Sensing and GIS courses. This will be useful for participants who want to study more.

The role of site facilitators proved very important for successful Distance Education; these operate Satellite Communication, collect questions and questionnaires from participants and also conduct on-site examinations.

Participants showed more interest in Q&A sessions because they could enjoy Q&A originating not only from their own county but also from others. The interactive manner should be a key for Distance Education.

So far, responses from participants and site facilitators have been satisfactory. Examinations will create some sort of positive motivation and tension amongst participants. I plan to revise the teaching materials in consideration of the results of examination and Q&A records.