

FROM GLOBAL TO LOCAL : SITE-BASED ANALYSIS OF GIAHS'S  
MANAGEMENT SYSTEM AND LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION AS A RURAL  
REVITALIZATION MEASURE IN JAPAN – CASE STUDY IN SADO CITY

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ABSTRACT

Family agriculture and traditional agricultural systems have been threatened in both developing and developed countries because of the globalization of agriculture, declining declines in farming population, and industrialization. In response to global trends undermining family agriculture and traditional agricultural systems, in 2002 FAO launched the Globally Important Agriculture Heritage System (GIAHS) program. FAO defines GIAHS as “remarkable land-use systems and landscapes which are rich in globally significant biological diversity evolving from the co-adaptation of a community with its environment and its needs and aspirations for sustainable development”. FAO aims for the GIAHS initiative to identify and safeguard valuable agricultural heritage systems through catalyzing and establishing a long-term program to support such systems and enhance global, national, and local benefits derived from their dynamic conservation, sustainable management, and enhanced viability.

Japan in particular, has been at the forefront of the issue of an aging and declining farming population. Because of this issue, the sustainability of agricultural production and landscapes in Japan have been threatened. For several decades, Japan and its rural areas have been struggling with multiple efforts towards rural revitalization with varying degrees of success and failure. It is within this context that Sado city in Niigata Prefecture was designated as the first GIAHS site in Japan in 2011. At this time, according to the aims for GIAHS outlined by FAO, GIAHS was viewed as having the potential to contribute to the sustainability of traditional agricultural systems, fitting within the broader context of rural revitalization activities in Japan.

However, nearly a decade after initial adoption, there is still a question of the realities of GIAHS implementation in Sado and Japan as a whole.

Existing literature on GIAHS related to Japan can be divided into three main themes: comparative analysis of GIAHS adaptation in individual countries (Evonne et al., 2016, Jiao & Min, 2016, FAO, 2018), expected outcomes of GIAHS adaptation in Japan (Takeuchi, 2016, Hamamoto, 2016), and analysis of local government management of GIAHS implementation (Tanaka et al., 2019, Kohsaka et al., 2019). Among these studies, several focus on qualitative evaluation of the impacts of preserving traditional agriculture through GIAHS (Kohsaka and Uchiyama 2015, Zhang et al., 2012, Wang et al., 2013, Zheng et al., 2017). In contrast other, studies tend to be conceptual discussions about GIAHS and introductions of case studies in designated areas or countries (Takeuchi 2016, Hamamoto 2016, Jiao and Min 2017 ). Based on a review of the existing literature on GIAHS in Japan, it is clear that there is no analysis of local implementation grounded in site-based methodologies that include local stakeholders besides government officials, nor is there any study that considers GIAHS management system in Japan across different levels and includes contextualization of GIAHS in Japanese rural planning.

Responding to this identified research gap, this research aims to identify the characteristics of the GIAHS management system in Japan and how it has been interpreted as a rural planning strategy in a designated area by fulfilling these research objectives which are to :

- 1) Understand the structure of GIAHS management in Japan
- 2) Identify and analyze the backgrounds, aims, expected outcomes of GIAHS implementation in the national government level and local level
- 3) Identify and analyze the gaps and connections between each management level and how they affect GIAHS implementation at the ground level
- 4) Identify the perception of local stakeholders about GIAHS

In order to achieve these objectives, this study critically analyzes the institutions responsible for implementing GIAHS, namely, FAO, the Japanese the national government, and local municipalities, in order to highlight and contextualize the background of Japanese GIAHS implementation. This is accomplished through analysis of policy papers and reports from FAO, MAFF, and local municipalities regarding GIAHS, as well as a key informant interview with a MAFF official. At the same time, taking Sado city in Niigata prefecture as a case site due to its status as the first GIAHS site in Japan, the study investigates the challenges and opportunities of GIAHS implementation in Sado since 2011 from the perspectives of the local municipality and local stakeholders. Site observation and key informant interviews are conducted to gather multi-perspective opinions in order to identify societal changes after GIAHS designation over time as well as the perception about GIAHS from the perspective of each layer of stakeholders.

This research identifies MAFF's current approach to the GIAHS program in Japan. First, the MAFF's priority is increasing the familiarity of GIAHS among Japanese people to maximize the individual activities in each designated area. Second, MAFF intends that preservation of GIAHS sites should be directed by the local level of management and avoid a top-down blanket approach from the national government because each designated area has a unique situation. In terms of the GIAHS program itself, it seen as having value as an international certification scheme and demonstrating a philosophy of preservation of agricultural systems. However, in terms of its implementation, the impact of GIAHS varies across countries depending on their distinct social, economic, and political contexts. Furthermore, the impact of GIAHS for preserving agricultural systems is not guaranteed. Overall, the approach is very flexible because the specific challenges and potential outcomes of implementation depends on the particular characteristics of each country and designated area.

For the implementation of GIAHS in Sado, this research identifies that Sado GIAHS has been successful in terms of the self-established monitoring criteria, however, the impressions of local stakeholders that GIAHS has had positive impacts is limited. This study suggests that familiarity and understanding about GIAHS among farmers and ordinary citizens have to be improved in order to further realize its potential.

*Key words: Agriculture, Heritage ,International certification, Rural planning*