

## *Grassroots Collaboration, AAI's approach*

### **Part 2: Collaboration with a local NGO in Zimbabwe**

We have reported about our collaboration with local NGOs in Zimbabwe in the past issues of AAINews (Vols. 28, 29 and 36). AAI's work with ZWP (Zvishavane Water Project) can be summarised as follows:

1. Manpower contribution (ZWP's activity survey and collaboration feasibility survey by AAI staff)
2. Financial support (for maintenance of small-scale dams and opening a new office of ZWP)
3. Technical advice (on vegetable cultivation in 'group gardens')
4. Proposal writing for joint projects to be submitted to various funding opportunities such as the Grant Aid for Grassroots Projects of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the JICA Community Empowerment Programme.

Here, we would like to think about the NGO approach once again. Working in the field of development aid in developing countries, often we encounter the question, "development for whom?" This question leads us to adopt an approach that enables us to deal with the beneficiaries more directly, and there is a need for projects with such an approach. At the level of international 'trends' in development co-operation, nowadays there are a lot of ODA projects supporting NGOs and collaborative activities with NGOs. Today there are various schemes to support such NGO activities, including NGO project subsidies such as NGO Grant Assistance, Grant Assistance For Grassroots Projects and other support funds. Moreover, JICA has recently established such schemes as the Community Empowerment Programme and the JICA Partnership Programme, which are meant to give direct support to domestic and international groups or to work in partnership with NGOs in aid projects. However, 'grassroots collaboration' is not an end but only a means, and what is important is to ensure the sustainability of the project, project ownership and independence of the local community. Having the project started from somewhere physically close to the beneficiaries, and/or with the bottom-up approach, does not automatically ensure that the project's sustainability and ownership will be assumed by the local community.

The sense of ownership on the side of the local community should be nurtured at a slow pace – the pace that the local community functions at, and never at a fast pace dictated by the donor group's timetable of convenience. This is a very important point in collaboration with local NGOs. In the case of our collaboration with ZWP, at the beginning of a new project in a new place we make sure to spend enough time on preliminary surveys to discuss the project with the target community and to understand the current situation thoroughly. By doing so we try to encourage the local community to actively get involved. Our group garden projects in particular, which are ongoing in more than 20 places, have been initiated in areas where we found strong motivation and demand from the local communities themselves. In addition, we try to make sure that the relationship between ZWP and local communities is mutual and equal, rather than having one party dependent on the other in every way. For instance, in the case of small dam construction, raw materials (cement) and equipment (wheel barrows, shovels etc.) are provided by ZWP, but the construction work is done by the local people themselves.

From the NGO point of view, 'power as a system/organization' is important to ensure the 'sustainability' of a project. That is, what is needed is not only the idealism and enthusiasm, but also reliable technologies, lasting resources (funds, organisational structure, human resources etc.) and appropriate strategies. At the moment ZWP does not have any self-generating income sources, but all the activity expenses come from financial aid from its donors. The funds needed for the currently on-going projects are already secured, and the staff members are all tied up with the implementation of those projects. Therefore, in future collaboration with ZWP we would need to hire more staff in order to start new projects. In looking at the vegetable cultivation projects at group gardens, ZWP does not have any human resources capable of instructing about cultivation techniques. As the current donors also do not give technical instruction, there is a need for support to upgrade the technical aspect of ZWP activities. Therefore, for the future collaboration of AAI with ZWP, it is probably more realistic and effective to give support to improving techniques and technologies employed in the on-going projects, such as vegetable cultivation techniques at group gardens, rather than starting up new projects.



**Small-scale dam maintenance work**



**Discussion with a target community**



**A well for a group garden**