

# AAINews

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## Agroforestry in Malawi

The middle basin of the Shire River in Malawi, to the north of the country's largest city Blantyre, is experiencing deforestation, soil erosion of farmlands and decreasing agricultural productivity. This is due to the increasing demand for firewood and the growing acreage of land under cultivation to meet the needs of the dense urban population. This area is also suffering from unquestionable degradation of natural resources such as groundwater, which drives the local people, whose livelihood is already fragile to start with, to further impoverishment.

In this context, agroforestry is drawing attention and raising expectations in this region. Agroforestry is expected to directly lead to increased food production, income generation through production, processing and sales of forestry products, resources management, along with firewood supply. It is also expected that agroforestry practice would improve the soil condition, recover the natural function of soil and water conservation, while revitalizing the local economy. The Government of Japan has already conducted a survey for the forest rehabilitation plan in the middle Shire basin, and drawn up a community-based natural resources management plan. It was decided that a pilot project was necessary in order to fully carry out this management plan, and in October 2002 a preparatory survey was conducted for the pilot project, in which I myself was given the chance to participate.

During this survey it was learned that research institutions around the middle Shire basin have been actively working on agroforestry. At a pilot farm run by the Ministry of Agriculture, experiments are being conducted for the introduction of non-plowing crop production technology. The International Center for Research in Agro-Forestry (ICRAF) has established practical cultivation methods by using several kinds of leguminous shrubs. These methods are already ready for putting into practice by ordinary farmers, and NGOs such as Oxfam and USAID, as well as the EU are helping in disseminating these methods in the local communities. In reality, however, such agroforestry technologies have not yet been effectively introduced and are not being practiced by local farmers.

Therefore, during this preparatory survey we are proposing a new means of agricultural technology dissemination by way of local revitalization using imaginary characters. When we were discussing the possibility of a nickname for this project, a staff member of the local Forestry Department, who was acting as a guide for our survey team, suggested "Mishirere". This comes from "Middle Shire Rehabilitation", and sounding like the name of Tanzania's famous president Nyerere, it can very well serve as a human name as well. So we have decided to create the imaginary character of "Uncle Mishirere" as a symbolic and diligent local farmer, to act as a mascot figure for our campaign of local revitalization. Uncle Mishirere would deliver and distribute crop seeds, give instructions on seedling plot construction at schools and train local ladies about food processing methods. When the community manages to establish some local speciality products, Uncle would help market the products as Mishirere brands (e.g. Mishirere Honey, Mishirere Fruit Juice). We are hoping that, with the help of this character, the sense of participation and ownership among the local people will increase and the community's collective efforts will be formed towards the same direction of local revitalization. We also hope that this campaign will help publicize and gain social recognition for the community's activities and successes more widely, too. Best wishes for the important missions of Uncle Mishirere in the middle Shire!

(By Onuma, on the bank of the Shire River)



Natural forest in the suburb of Blantyre



Discussion with local people



Agroforestry by mixed planting