

Rice Cultivation in Africa <Part 1>

Introduction

In order to achieve comprehensive development through people's own efforts in Africa, one certainly cannot ignore the existence of rural villages where more than 70% of the population lives depending largely on agriculture. One tends to imagine "ugari" made of corn, and "couscous" from sorghum and millet as staple foods in Africa, however, rice has been grown in West Africa for over 3,000 years. In East Africa, rice cultivation has been increasing rapidly in recent years. This is due to the fact that rice has high nutritional value and is tasty, and that it can be a subsistence or a cash crop. Still, the yield is extremely low in Africa (1 ton/ha), compared with Asia (3-3.5 ton/ha).

Japan's support to Africa today is centered around three important areas that were agreed on at the 4th Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD IV). These are: 1) boosting economic growth; 2) Ensuring "Human Security" and 3) Addressing environmental issues and climate change. The core of Japan's agricultural support has been rice cultivation. The rationale for the support is that supply of rice and wheat falls short of demand among the main grain crops (corn, sorghum, rice and wheat), and that rice is more suited than wheat to climatic conditions in Africa. In addition, it is possible for Japan to utilize its experience in supporting rice cultivation in Asia, and the country has a long history of technical support in Africa such as the 30-year support in Kilimanjaro Region, Tanzania.

With this background, the Coalition for African Rice Development (CARD) was established recently with the objective of doubling rice cultivation in sub-Saharan Africa in 10 years. CARD tries to increase yield per unit of rice through selection of appropriate rice varieties for three cultivation systems in Africa, namely

irrigated paddy field, rain-fed lowland wetland, and rain-fed field, including promotion of NERICA, a high-yielding variety that is suited to the conditions in Africa. It also works towards improving cultivation techniques and promotion of necessary inputs (water, fertilizer etc) to increase the yield.

AAI has participated in many agriculture/rural development activities, mainly in the Middle East and West Africa. However since the Upland Rice Variety Selection Technique training course held at TBIC in 2006, we have kept links with rice cultivation in other parts of Africa, participating in the projects described in the table below. In addition, we have been cultivating friendships with trainees specializing in rice cultivation in sub-Saharan Africa, while running courses as part of the Upland Rice Variety Selection Technique course, and have been accumulating information related to rice cultivation in Africa.

Given the current trend in Japan's cooperation in Africa, in this new series, we would like to report on our efforts to support rice cultivation, which is a core area of Japan's cooperation. We will share lessons we have learned through our activities, and will dispatch our own thoughts on subjects such as challenges and future recommendations for rice cultivation development in Africa.



Rice cultivation
(Kilimanjaro, Tanzania)



Upland rice cultivation training course at TBIC

Project	Duration	Rice related activity
National Irrigation Master Plan, Tanzania	2001-2003	Formulation of the irrigation master plan with rice cultivation as the main crop Demonstration through support for regional irrigation plans
NERICA Rice Application Plan / NERICA Rice Development Plan, Uganda	2007-2009	Experimentation and selection of rice varieties by the researchers at the National Crop Resources Research Center in Uganda. Enhancement of seed variety improvement technologies
Sustainable rural development plan in highlands and central regions in Guinea.	Ongoing since 2008	Establishment of low-input type irrigation system using water throughout a year Adaptation of rice cultivation methods to suit local environment
Upland rice variety selection technique course	2006-2009	Development of human resources that contribute to superior variety selection, which forms the basis for rice variety promotion in Africa