

## Close friends from far countries <Part 2>

### AAI's training follow-up program

#### Activities of ex-participants

As discussed in the previous issue of the AAI News, we visited Malawi and Zambia in July to see post-training activities of the participants. We selected the southern African Region, because there are quite a number of ex-participants from our courses in JICA Tsukuba, and we focused our visit on ex-participants who have maintained regular contact with AAI trainers. In this issue and the next issue, as much as page space allows, we would like to explore some future challenges and possible solutions by introducing the current activities of selected participants.

In Zambia, an ex-participant is organizing irrigation groups to teach beneficiary farmers about irrigation systems. After his training, he studied in the Netherlands for a short time, and is now working as a middle-level officer for land use management. He has been actively exchanging e-mails with the AAI trainers, suggesting the idea of starting a project to distribute vegetable seeds through the establishment of a seed bank. Therefore, we were looking forward to seeing him during this visit.

He was working on the organization of irrigation groups and the development of a water distribution plan; a model project to achieve stable vegetable production through the introduction of irrigation technology. He was also providing technical support aiming to increase the cash income of farmers, making full use of various seedling production and vegetable cultivation techniques that he learned in JICA Tsukuba. He indicated that the biggest future challenge facing him was ensuring the supply of high quality vegetable cultivars and seed distribution. The ex-participant seems to be looking for financial, rather than technical, support.

The next visit was to an ex-participant who is working on NERICA extension. We have introduced our NERICA related work in a series in this newsletter entitled Rice Cultivation in Africa. NERICA has been one of the foci of the series. Naturally, situations surrounding agriculture differ greatly from country to country in Africa. In Malawi and Zambia which we visited this time, NERICA has been attracting much attention.

Although Malawi is not a Coalition for African Rice Development (CARD) priority country, traditional paddy rice cultivation prevails in lowland wetlands along the shore of Lake Malawi which are known as the "dimba". However, as even the dimba is occasionally hit by drought, development of a new drought-resistant strain of NERICA has been trialed using the variety selection tests conducted by the ex-participant, and several new varieties have been examined as possible

candidates for extension. What is very interesting, talking to the ex-participant, is that NERICA is considered as a possible variety for crop development for the intermediate zone between dimba and munda (farmland) which is currently underutilized.

Malawi's staple is maize which is the top crop in terms of both production and consumption. However, from the viewpoint of dispersing risks, departure from the maize based monoculture farming system and crop diversification has been an important policy issue. NERICA seems to be expected to be considered not only for dimba but is also expected to become a niche crop that can be grown in the currently un-utilized or under-utilized intermediate zone in the future. The ex-participant was a researcher in the breeding field, and said that propagation and establishment of a stable supply of NERICA seeds is the immediate challenge. However, the cultivation techniques of the upland variety in the un-utilized and under-utilized intermediate area have not been established. Neither has the crop rotation system, including the upland rice variety. In order to develop these techniques, critical challenges remain such as the establishment of a crop rotation system and establishment of sustainable farming techniques underpinned by organic material circulation based on cooperation with livestock farming. We are thinking that our company may be able to provide technical support for the development of these farming techniques as NERICA's extension continues.



An ex-participant (Upland rice course) from Malawi: He is promoting superior variety selection of NERICA in his country.

An ex-participant organizing farmers' groups and teaching them vegetable cultivation.



Stable vegetable production using an irrigation system: Products are collectively shipped to nearby markets.