

From assistance to business—from support to collaboration <Part 5>

Is “business” conceivable for cooperation with ex-participants of JICA Tsukuba?

AAI has been conducting training courses on upland rice variety selection techniques for Africa and vegetables/upland crops cultivation techniques at JICA Tsukuba. To date, 212 participants have completed the courses and returned to their home countries. We regard them as human assets. After returning home, many of the participants went back to their original work place, and have been working as extension officers, teachers or researchers. Then they move positions and they receive promotions. We featured their post-training work in home countries in AAINews No. 70, 71 and 72 in the series called “Close friends from far countries: AAI’s training follow-up program”. In the series, we introduced a Zambian ex-participant who organizes irrigation groups, provides training for vegetable cultivation targeting the farmers who are beneficiaries of irrigation, and teaches classes on tomato cultivation at an agricultural school. We also introduced ex-participants from Malawi who work on NERICA variety selection and tomato cultivation during the rainy season. We communicated, in the series, our dream of developing small projects in their countries making use of the network of ex-participants.

Among other African ex-participants, some went for further study to obtain bachelors, masters or doctorate degrees. Some were seconded to United Nations agencies, and some resigned from the government position and moved to NGOs or a partially government owned biotechnology company. Still, the target of their work remains to be the majority of small scale farmers who live in remote farming villages without benefiting from growing industries in urban areas.

The ex-participants are working on the social issues that the farmers directly face. We can join the effort to solve the issues and also seek profits at the same time. We would like to create a win-win-win situation whereby the three parties: farmers, ex-participants and AAI – will all benefit from our joint venture. Even if the profit is small, it would be good to

establish a business whereby at least the investment can be recovered. Isn’t it an effective way of increasing farmers’ income to have small-scale business that responds to a niche in their needs, looking at business with the objective of improving farmers lives? The idea is for us to provide financial support to the ideas of ex-participants. This will further motivate their passion for their work and encourage their continued support for farmers.

For example, the ex-participants from Zambia have organized irrigation farmers and provided support on vegetable cultivation (AAINews No. 71). It is conceivable that they could establish a “seed bank” to distribute high quality seeds to support cultivation of better quality vegetables. In this case, we could utilize our experiences in southern Zimbabwe when we collaborated with the local NGO in “the Seed Bank Project”. In the seed bank project, we bought quality seeds on behalf of the farmers who did not have easy access to towns. Farmers who received the seeds would cultivate vegetables, and after the sales, they would pay the price of the seeds back to the seed bank.

Out of the 212 ex-participants, 152 receive AAINews four times a year. We hope to continue to play the role of catalyst by dispatching information and technologies from our side based on our experiences and knowledge.

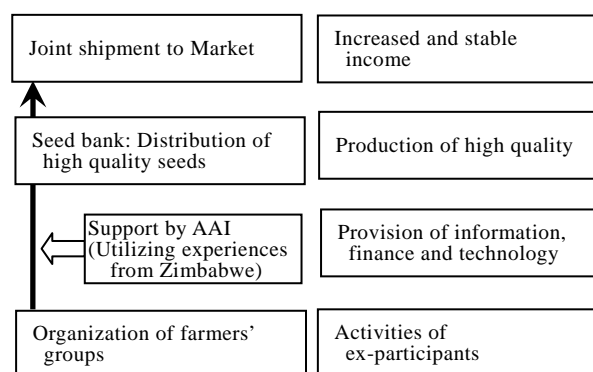


Image diagram: Support for the Zambian ex-participants



Seed Bank Project members



Farming plot jointly managed by the members



Project meeting