

Teaming Up With Viet Nam to Improve Rice Cultivation in Mozambique

– Project for Improvement of Techniques for Increasing Rice Cultivation Productivity –



Mr. Tamura meeting with water user association directors about construction of irrigation facilities (Photo: Masato Tamura)

Mozambique endured a 17-year civil war after gaining independence from Portugal in 1975. Once peace was established in the nation on the east coast of Africa, a democratic election was held in 1994 and it has experienced rapid economic growth of 6-8% per year since the late 1990s. The capital city of Maputo developed wonderfully, but farming communities around local cities stayed poor. JICA has been implementing the Project for Improvement of Techniques for Increasing Rice Cultivation Productivity in Nante, Maganja da Costa District, Zambezia Province, a technical cooperation project, since January 2011. Rice paddies spread out across the Nante District in Zambezia Province in the northern part of Mozambique. However, the irrigation facilities established under Portuguese rule were destroyed during the civil war and are nearly unusable. This technical assistance aims to develop farming techniques suitable for the land in the area, involve farmers in the repair of irrigation facilities and improve the capacity of the area to enable continuous farming.

Of special note is the fact that this project marks the first time that JICA and Viet Nam have engaged in Triangular Cooperation* on the African continent. Japan manages the progress and financial affairs of the project while experts from Viet Nam, a prominent rice-producing country among those in Asia, are in charge of technical guidance on rice cultivation. Mozambique and the southern part of Viet Nam both have a tropical climate. Their weather conditions are similar to each other, and a good portion of Vietnamese rice cultivation techniques are compatible in Mozambique. They improved rice fields and cultivated rice on an experimental basis in the target district of Nante. However, the district lacks farm equipment. The Vietnamese experts have cut down bamboo and used it to make tools for cultivation. If there are no irrigation pumps, they cleverly lift water by tying ropes to buckets.

"Viet Nam is also a developing country," JICA expert Masato Tamura, the project manager said. "The Vietnamese experts are working hard to teach agriculture in their own country, too."



Vietnamese experts providing rice cultivation training for farmers (Photo: Masato Tamura)

That is why they have been able to keep the farming work going even when they face inconveniences like a lack of agricultural machinery and farm tools. I think experts from a developed country would have complained about it."

Rice was planted in test fields in January 2012. The village in which project headquarters is located is around 45 km away from the project site. The experts wake up at five o'clock every morning and spend one hour traveling to the project site. Unfortunately, roads became impassable because of lingered bad weather. The rice planting should have taken one day to complete; it took three weeks. This project is also the first time Viet Nam has given assistance to an African country with JICA. The experts on the project have an enthusiastic, never-say-die attitude. One time, the growing rice plants became infested with pests. The earnest Vietnamese experts were worried that the rice plants would die if left in that condition, so they anxiously asked Mr. Tamura if they could send away to Viet Nam for pesticides and spray them over the plants. Mr. Tamura, who himself has been involved in international agricultural assistance as a farming expert for over 35 years, explained to the Vietnamese experts that fish in the canals, which farmers eat, would all die if pesticides were used. He told them that they did not have to provide pesticides and that he would take responsibility if anything happened to the rice plants, which finally calmed the Vietnamese experts.

The first rice plants produced rice in the test fields in May. The yield was seven to eight tons per hectare, which was two to three times the yield under local farmers' cultivation methods. The quiet dedication of the Vietnamese experts and the actual harvest began to change the perspectives of local farmers, and they began to voice their opinions proactively. "More rice can be harvested in this environment than in Japan if irrigation facilities are upgraded and we can establish a system of organized farming," Mr. Tamura said of the project goal. "The great gains of this project can spread into neighboring areas, and since it is low-budget, the Mozambican Ministry of Agriculture can apply this project to the entire country. We are trying to get local people to feel confident that they can do a fine job themselves by the time this project is finished in two years. Then, we want them to grow delicious rice and build a brand so that they can increase profits as well as volume and improve their lives. That will give Viet Nam more confidence, too."

This inaugural collaboration aid between Japan and Viet Nam is looking to improve rice cultivation in Mozambique in a huge way.

* When developing countries (Mozambique and Viet Nam) cooperate for development (South-South Cooperation) and the side providing aid (Viet Nam) has restrictions in terms of capabilities, a developed country (Japan) provides supplementary techniques, funds, aid experience and knowledge. This is called Triangular Cooperation.