

## RICE FOR PROSPERITY

### NERICA rice and returnees in Northern Uganda: intertwined stories

<p><b>Opening with a farmer Field school session at Padibe-East, Northern Uganda</b></p>	
	<p>With the prevailing and continuing peace in the northern part of Uganda, more than 1,5 million Internally Displaced Persons or IDPs are expected to return to their original land. More than 20 years in camps have weakened the farming capacity of displaced farmers and returnees. The government of Uganda has partnered with Japan and FAO in order to bring support to vulnerable groups, anchor them on their ancestral land and help them produce their own food.</p>
	<p>The project started in 2006 in eight Districts. A second current phase is being implemented nine more Districts. Mr Percy Misika, the FAO Representative in Uganda describes it:</p>
<p><b>Interview</b></p>	
	<p>To bring back food security in insecure households, the government of Uganda through its National Policy on Rice Development has focused on rice as a strategic crop in the project with the objective of increasing rice production and income dissemination of NERICA, ‘the new rice for Africa’.</p>
	<p>In areas where harsh conditions such as a prolonged drought can damage the crops and render the population food insecure, NERICA offers new opportunities, says the National Project Manager, Emmanuel Iyamulemye Niyibigira:</p>
<p><b>Interview</b></p>	
	<p>In the first three years of the project, 1,800 farmers received support for NERICA rice varieties and other rice technologies; 32 facilitators were trained and 64 Farmer Field Schools Groups established in eight districts. Rice has brought people together. A majority of them grew up in IDP camps and have become young productive rural farmers, ready to start a new life and learn. International agronomist Ram Chaudhary conceptualized the first phase of the project in 2006.</p>
<p><b>Interview</b></p>	
	<p>In Abongomola, APAC District, at 350 km north from Kampala, we met John Peter Opio; a well trained facilitator who guides the returnees on practical hands-on farming and management skills. This is the Farmer Field Sschool or FFS approach that he details in these terms:</p>
<p><b>Interview</b></p>	
	<p>There are four rice farmer groups in Abongomola sub-county. Gertrude finds time to actively take part in one of them, chaired by Julius Obote. We talked to both of them:</p>

<b>Interview</b>	
	Growing rice has allowed the community to get together, share knowledge and foster hope for a better living. 'Growing NERICA is easy', says group facilitator Lillian Otim, 32 year old, four children and a convinced farmer
<b>Interview</b>	
	In Amuru District as well, young mother Christine Acire encourages teamwork in her group. Improving their livelihoods is part of her responsibility as the elected Chairperson
<b>Interview</b>	
	Farther north, in Oyam District, at 370 km from Kampala, Albino has made available a study plot on his farm for his 30 member-group. Despite uneven rainfall patterns, they have been able to raise income.
<b>Interview</b>	
	The Japanese funded project through improved rice based farming systems has enabled the returnees to produce more food and to generate cash income. Money should be in the Bank and managed properly. As a group chairperson, Beatrice Adong, a widow with six children, took some steps in this direction
<b>Interview</b>	
	A new generation of young farmers aged between 16 and 40 is emerging, a new work force of motivated men and women in the Ugandan rural world. Eric Lobi lost his parents in IDP camps, in Northern Uganda. He will try to combine the farm activities and University when he gets more cash from his rice
<b>Interview</b>	
	A durable peace is a prerequisite to food security. With NERICA rice varieties and production systems, Japan's support has made an impact.

July/September 2009-09-29

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This radio reportage, a [World Food Day](http://www.fao.org/audiocatalogue/index.jsp?lang=EN) production under the 2009 theme *Achieving food security in times of crisis*, is online at <http://www.fao.org/audiocatalogue/index.jsp?lang=EN>.