

## **Possibilities and challenges for sustainable development in West Africa**

### **--Thinking about sustainable rural redevelopment in Mali--**

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The Republic of Mali (Mali) is a landlocked country, located in West Africa. Two thirds of the country is arid and the northern area is part of the Sahara Desert. The main stream of the Niger River flows approximately 1700 km to the west and east of Malian territory, and its banks are used for farming. To date, about 70% of Mali's population has been farmers living in rural areas. According to the "Preliminary Report for the Development of Rice Development Program in the Republic of Mali and Burkina Faso" (October 2009), conducted by the Rural Development Department of Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Mali has a high potential for growing rice compared to other Western African countries. In the report, Mali was also praised as a major producer with near self-sufficiency, which creates the possibility for it to contribute significantly to attaining regional food security.

Additionally, the Office du Niger plays a part in the stable improvement of agricultural production in Mali. This office was established as a public corporation by the French colonial government in 1932, and was incorporated as an institution after independence. Office du Niger is a public corporation that oversees the irrigation system in a field using the Markala Dam, completed in 1947. Office du Niger has an irrigation capacity area of 960,000 hectares (JICA, 2009).

In the past, the agricultural production environment in Mali was prosperous, however, in recent years the urban population has exploded with the influx of rural residents into urban areas, seeking employment opportunities in the high-wage industrial and commercial sectors. As a result, a lack of infrastructure caused the deterioration of living conditions and sanitation, and the overwhelming shortage of housing supply became a serious concern. In addition, the flow of the rural population to urban areas has reduced the number of agriculture workers, and food shortages are also seen in rural areas. In addition to these concerns, political instability and religious and ethnic conflicts after 2012 have worsened living conditions, and the inability to develop sufficient agriculture has caused food insecurity.

In this seminar, I would like to consider new agricultural policies and plans that lead to the improvement of life in Mali and the livelihoods of its people. In recent years, Office du Niger has reached out to investors interested in agriculture, and has begun establishing a land lease system. They introduced land development programs to encourage agriculture and fishery industries as well as agro-business. They also increased employment opportunities in rural areas, preventing unplanned migration to urban areas, and created strategies to lesson the

effects of food shortages. In addition, I hope that we can discuss the possibility of sustainable livelihood improvements in both rural and urban areas through agro-business and industrial development, such as technological investment through the mechanization of agriculture and planned increases in production volume.