

In 2014, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) collaborated with the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF) and the Ministry of Water and Environment (MoWE) to implement the Project on Irrigation Scheme Development in Central and Eastern Uganda (PISD), seeking the formulation of irrigation scheme development plans for 12 potential irrigation sites, encompassing pre-feasibility and feasibility studies.

To date, four of these plans have been executed in partnership with the Government of Uganda and various development partners in the agriculture sector, leading to the construction of irrigation schemes in Ngenge, Doho, Acomai and Atari River Basin areas in eastern Uganda, and highlighting the critical role of collaboration in addressing local challenges and advancing sustainable development goals.

The Atari River Basin area, in the heart of Eastern Uganda, spanning the districts of Kween and Bulambuli, has long been a region of contrasts. Known for its harsh climatic extremes – prolonged dry spells followed by torrential rains – the area has long suffered crop failures leading to unstable food production, threatening food security and livelihoods.

Not even the fertile soils could improve the situation, thus jeopardising agricultural activity – a key source of livelihood for many households. However, transformative initiatives are set to change this reality.

For instance, while the ongoing upgrade of the Muyembe-Nakapiripirit road, by the Government of Uganda, is set to boost economic activity and market access for the people of Atari, the JICA-supported 'Project for the Development of Irrigation System in Atari Basin Area' is poised to provide a stable supply of irrigation water to revolutionise agriculture, boost rice production and productivity, and enhance food security in the region.

The intervention is in line with the proposed Uganda's National Rice Development Strategy and the broader Coalition for African Rice development (CARD) initiative, a consultative group of bilateral

ATARI RIVER BASIN IRRIGATION SCHEME DEVELOPMENT BRINGS HOPE TO KWEEN, BULAMBULI



JICA experts and rice farmers in Atari River Basin area



The Atari TCP is promoting good practices for utilisation, operation and management of irrigation systems and sustainable rice production

donors and regional and international organisations, working in collaboration with rice-producing African countries to double rice production in sub-Saharan Africa to 56 million metric tonnes by 2030.

ACTION FOR THE REALISATION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 13

A collaborative undertaking between JICA and MAAIF, executed by Japanese construction firm, Zenitaka Corporation, with Sanyu Consultants Inc as the supervising engineer, the approximately \$20m project will see the establishment of a modern irrigation scheme with facilities including, head works, farm roads, canals, flood protection dikes, and a demonstration field, covering 680 hectares on the adjacent sides of Atari River in Kween and Bulambuli districts – with completion of construction

expected at the end of 2026.

By harnessing the river's water resources, the project seeks to mitigate the negative effects of climate change, ensuring stable supply of irrigation water for longer periods of the year, and consequently boosting sustainable rice production and productivity in Kween, Bulambuli and the neighbouring areas.

MODEL FOR SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE BASED ON ENHANCED CAPACITY FOR OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE.

JICA's cooperation interventions in Atari area are not only about infrastructure development and boosting rice production, but also wealth creation and quality of life improvement.

From the beginning, there has been emphasis on technical capacity building and community engagement for sustainable



An aerial view of the irrigation scheme development site

THE INTERVENTION IS IN LINE WITH THE PROPOSED UGANDA'S NATIONAL RICE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY AND THE BROADER COALITION FOR AFRICAN RICE DEVELOPMENT

utilisation and management of irrigation facilities, in addition to the promotion of good agricultural practices.

To complement the Grant Aid Project, JICA and MAAIF, in coordination with the District Local Governments of Kween and Bulambuli, have since 2021 implemented the *Project for Sustainable Utilisation, Operation and Management of Irrigation Systems in Atari Basin Area (Atari TCP)*.

The project has realised the establishment of the Atari Irrigation Water Users' Association (IWUA) which will not only be charged with the

management, operation and maintenance of the irrigation scheme facilities but also instil a sense of ownership of the scheme by the beneficiaries; adoption of improved rice cultivation technologies by farmers, and enhanced technical capacity for technical officers under the Kween and Bulambuli district local governments. These, coupled with the ongoing capacity building of the IWUA in the areas of management, record keeping and irrigation water distribution, will ensure increased rice production and productivity for livelihood improvement.

TRANSFORMING LIVELIHOODS

The impact of Atari Irrigation development interventions is already evident. Farmers who once struggled to harvest enough rice to feed their families are now witnessing a dramatic increase in yields, thanks to the adoption of improved rice cultivation practices being promoted by the Atari Technical Cooperation Project.

The project is also creating economic opportunities beyond farming – farmers in Atari area are being mobilised into forming village savings and loan associations. With the expected reliable access to irrigation water, farmers will be able to cultivate their fields for longer periods of the year.

A RIPPLE EFFECT

Coming on the heels of the Extra-Ordinary AU Summit on the Post-Malabo Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) Agenda, and Kampala CAADP Declaration on Building Resilient and Sustainable Agri-food Systems in Africa, which emphasised investments in water infrastructure and sustainable management practices as vital to strengthening resilience of agri-food systems and ensuring their long-term sustainability, the Atari Irrigation development interventions will have far-reaching implications for Uganda's agricultural sector. The scheme will sustainably transform the arid and flood-prone region into a productive agricultural hub, a lesson which can be replicated in other parts of the country, for national food and income security.

Atari river basin irrigation development interventions are a beacon of hope for the people of Kween and Bulambuli, and eastern Uganda at large. By addressing the region's irrigation water challenges and boosting capacity for sustainable rice production, livelihoods in the region will experience a positive transformation.