



MUSEAA Newsletter

November, 2006 Edition

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IV Alumni Lead Ford Security Discussion



Ambassador Eastham receives NASFAM products from Chinyamunyamu

The Public Affairs Section of the US Embassy hosted a panel discussion with the US International Visitors (IV) alumni on August 25 entitled "Food Security, Interventions that Work."

Recent IV alumni Betty Chinyamunyamu, of the National Small Holder Farmers Association and Mr. James Chiusiwa, of the Department of Poverty Management and Disaster Preparedness participated in the discussion, along with Dr. Kenneth Wiyo, Agriculture and Food Security Specialist at USAID Lilongwe. Nearly 50 participants including government officials, Members of Parliament, NGOs and civil society groups as well as diplomats and members of donor agencies.

Dr. Wiyo provided an overview of the food security situation and the USG interventions to help Malawians survive what may be the worst food crisis in a decade. IV alumni drew on their recent experience in the U.S. to discuss both long and short term strategies for improving food security in Malawi. In the Q&A that followed, participants agreed that all food security stakeholders should implement practical changes, for instance irrigation and smallholder crop diversification, if Malawi is to move away from the recurring food shortages.

Malawi-US Exchange Alumni Association Established with ECA Support



U.S. Embassy - Public Affairs Office received a \$3000 grant from Exchanges and Cultural Affairs Bureau in Washington for the establishment of the first ever Malawi US Exchange Alumni Association in early September. Public Affairs invited a national steering committee of key alumni to come to Lilongwe September 29 to draft a proposed mission, objectives and legal structure for the organization.

Public Affairs hosted a National Conference of Exchange Alumni on September 26 attended by over 60 alumni, including the Vice Chancellor of the University of Malawi,

Supreme and High Court Judges, academicians, and other leaders from government, the private sector and NGOS. The attendees debated the Constitution vigorously until a consensus on the organization's Mission and objectives and structure were reached. The membership approved the Constitution and elected trustees and officers by the end of the day. Ambassador Eastham hosted the participants at a reception at his residence to congratulate them on establishing the Malawi-US Exchange Alumni Association.

The alumni seemed energized by the hard work of establishing the Association, and motivated by the prospect of what they can accomplish together. Initially the Association will provide a forum for networking among exchange alumni. Members will also participate actively in Mission programming and work to contribute to Malawi's development by using the knowledge and skills gained during their experience in the U.S. The Ambassador's reception also underscored to the alumni their importance to the Mission.

HIV/AIDS Peer Educators Training at Maula Prison

Public Affairs Officer Mitchell Moss presented certificates to a group of 23 Maula Prison inmates who completed a two-week HIV/AIDS Peer Educators Training Program on May 14.

International Visitor Exchange Alumni Shawo Mwakilama organized the program, with support from the Public Affairs Section, to educate prison inmates about HIV/AIDS, to establish an inmate-led HIV/AIDS Peer Educators' group and to link it with Malawian AIDS Service organizations.

Mwakilama based the program on the WE CARE prison outreach project he visited while in Memphis Tennessee as part of his HIV/AIDS I.V. program. The program provided training on communication and counseling skills, HIV transmission and prevention, sexually transmitted infections, VCT and support for people living with HIV/AIDS.

The Prison Officer-in-Charge, Mr. Dezio Makumba said that the Peer Educators would play a key role in sensitizing close to 2000 inmates at the prison and requested that the program could be replicated in other prisons throughout the country.



PAO Mitchell Moss presents certificate to peer educator



Photo opportunity for Moss and peer educators

Role Models Inspire Girls to Aim High



Panelists Ntaba, Leblanc and Malange speaking during the program



Part of the audience that attended the program

Over 500 secondary school girls participated in a two-hour program entitled “Women: Builders of Community and Dreams” in commemoration of International Women’s Day in Lilongwe.

Cultural Affairs Assistant Pamela Kuwali chaired the panel and moderated the discussion with the audience at Bambino Secondary School Hall. Panelists included IV alumni Sitabene Malange of Eye of the Child, Zione Ntaba of Ministry of Justice and Public Affairs Education Advisor Kimberlee LeBlanc.

The IV alumni drew from their U.S. experience

and talked about women's empowerment, rights and responsibilities for their own development and that of their country. The speakers inspired the girls by sharing their own stories of the challenges they overcame in order to excel in their education and engage in volunteer activities to benefit their communities.

Complementing the two speakers, Ms. LeBlanc focused on the importance of education for girls and women to achieve their goals. The students participated in a vigorous question and answer exchange that extended the program to nearly three hours.

USG Exchange Alumni Participate in World AIDS Day Panel Discussion

The Public Affairs Section of the US Embassy hosted a panel discussion entitled “Stop AIDS-- Keep the Promise,” November 28 to commemorate World AIDS Day.

Hubert Humphrey Alumni Wise Chauluka, an AIDS communications consultant, Dr. Andrew Gonani, Zomba District Health Officer, and Mr. Wellington Limbe, Director of Malawi AIDS Counseling Resource Organization (MACRO) made individual presentations. These were followed by a discussion with the audience moderated by the Embassy PEPFAR coordinator.

Over 30 participants, including Ministry of Health policymakers, healthcare providers, and HIV/AIDS implementing partners attended the discussion.

Mr. Chauluka noted that his thinking about HIV/AIDS had changed as a result of his experience as a Hubert Humphrey Fellow at Emory University.

He recommended that behavior change should be the primary focus of HIV prevention efforts in Malawi, and illustrated how comparatively few resources were directed towards prevention and mitigation as compared to capacity building, treatment and program management.

In the conversation that followed, participants agreed that there is an urgent need to direct more resources towards an aggressive campaign for behavior change if Malawi is to progress in its fight against HIV/AIDS.

International Visitor Program Participant Encourages Youth Involvement in Socio-economic Development.

When U.S. International Visitor Program Alumnus Ismael Abdul Majeed Kaunda set off for the U.S. in June, he was uncertain of the type of reception he would get from the American people with whom he would spend the next three weeks.

“Being a Moslem I thought I would get problems in the U.S. but to my surprise, I was readily accepted wherever I went.” Kaunda told a highly engaged audience in Lilongwe that attended a round table discussion on Economic Empowerment and Social Work in Islam.

Kaunda attended a three-week program on U.S. Political Process for Emerging Moslem Leaders that took him to five states where he met with various professionals including highly respected Moslem leaders. Addressing over forty young Moslem leaders that attended the event in Lilongwe, Kaunda shared his U.S. experience on religious freedoms, judicial independence and the role of young Moslems in social and economic empowerment programs.

He said contrary to fears of lack of freedom of worship, American Moslems are free to practice their faith without fear of discrimination. He praised the food pantry program run by the Iowa-based Des Moines Interfaith Council which he said provided a reliable source of food to the less privileged and encouraged participants to implement the concept in their communities.

On economic empowerment Kaunda drew from his Los Angeles experience of the Lariba Finance House, a microfinance institution that operates on principles of interest-free Islamic banking, to emphasize the need to pool resources together and form lending institutions that would help to empower young Moslems economically.

One of the participants, Sheikh Rashid Wasike, Director of Programs for the Association of Sunni Madrassas lauded the U.S. government for inviting Moslems to America and enabling them to share experiences with fellow Moslems. He said “I now have a different view. At first I had a negative picture about the U.S. on freedom of worship mainly for Moslems. Actually there is a lot we can learn from our American counterparts”

Acting Public Affairs Officer Pannella DeVolder praised the Moslem youth for actively participating in social and religious activities in an effort to improve their livelihoods. During the event, participants watched a film, “Islam in America” which provided a deeper insight on the universality of Islam and how American Moslems practice their faith.



Kaunda speaking at the event



Part of Kaunda's audience listens intently to the presentation.

Malawi U.S. Exchange Alumni Association (MUSEAA) was registered on October 10, 2006 thanks to IV Alumnus Austin Msowoya and Fulbright Alumnus Bright Mando who worked together to organize legal papers for the Association. The registration was a well-deserved accolade for MUSEAA's outstanding accomplishments between August 2005 and September 2006. Follow the trail of an ever-growing MUSEAA profile:

- August 25 Panel Discussion on Food Security "Interventions that work" with IV Alumni Bettie Chinyamunyamu of NASFAM and James Chiusiwa of Department of Disaster Preparedness.
- August 29 Planning meeting for formation of an Alumni Association, Public Affairs met with Key alumni to discuss formation of an Alumni Association.
- September 26 Alumni Conference and Formation of an Alumni Association, over 60 alumni from all over the country met at the Public Affairs section to discuss the mission, objectives and legal structure for the Association.
- December 2 In commemoration of World AIDS Day, panel discussion entitled "Stop AIDS: Keep the Promise with IV Alumni Wise Chauluka of WEC Communications and Dr. Andrew Gonani of Ministry of Health.
- January 26 Lilongwe Chapter Alumni planning meeting.
- February 9 Malawi U.S. Exchange Alumni Association, Zomba Chapter Planning Meeting.
- February 10 Malawi U.S. Exchange Alumni Association, Blantyre Chapter Planning Meeting.
- March 8 In commemoration of Women's day, presentations on women empowerment, rights and responsibilities by IV Alumni Ziona Ntamba Of Ministry of Justice and Sitabene Malange of Loita Investment Bank.
- March 9 Public Affairs hosted Malawi U.S. Exchange Alumni Executive meeting for planning 2006 Alumni events.
- May 6 -13 HIV/AIDS Peer Educators Training at Maula Prison by IV Alumni Shawo Mwakilama, currently studying at School of International Training in Vermont, U.S.A.
- May 9 Office of President and Cabinet grants consent to the Association to use the name "Malawi"
- May 26 Global Youth Service Day Outreach Program by Lilongwe Chapter Alumni, activities included presentations on discussion with the youth on volunteerism and HIV/AIDS, musical performances exhibitions and sports. Presentation of outstanding Alumnus Award to IV Shawo Mwakilama.
- July 19 Public Affairs Officer hands over grant of \$ 5000 to the Association.
- Aug 3 HIV/AIDS Peer Educators Training for Zomba Maximum Security Prison by IV Alumnus Shawo Mwakilama
- Sept 14 -16 Alumni 2006 Sustainable Agriculture projects begins with training for the alumni, community volunteers and farm managers on permaculture by expert Kristof Nordin.



Fulbright alumni Mando on his departure day.

Mando Participates in Fulbright Annual Conference

Fulbright alumni Bright Mando participated in the 29th Fulbright Annual Conference at Marrakech in Morocco. Mr. Mando's travel was sponsored by Public Affairs Section and the U.S. Fulbright Association.

Mando was nominated for his key contribution in setting up the Alumni Association. He is the founding member of the Malawi U.S. Exchange Alumni Association.

His key contributions include drafting the legal charter for the Association and compiling registration papers for the Association. We hope Mr. Mando will use his Morocco experience to promote the interests of MUSEAA.

MUSEAA Welcomes New Members

Malawi U.S. Exchange Alumni Association (MUSEAA) is pleased to welcome and introduce the following new members who returned from various exchange programs in 2005-2007 period:

Fulbright Junior Staff Development Program

Mtchaisi Chikanda: Williams College, Massachusetts, MA in Economic Development Reserve Bank of Malawi.

Michael Chimaliza: State University of New York, Masters in Environmental Studies Lecturer Malawi College of Health Sciences

Mackson Ngochera: University of Wisconsin, Masters in Environmental Studies, Fisheries Research Station, Monkey Bay

Vita Nyirenda: Human Rights Law, University of Notre Dame, Former Legal Advisor, Law Commission, Lilongwe.

Godfrey Ching'oma: Kansas State University, Doctorate in Entomology, Bvumbwe Research Station.

Study of the United States Summer Institute Programs

Blessings Chinsinga: Study of U.S. Political Thought, Senior Lecturer, Department of Political and Administrative Studies, Chancellor College.

Ronald Mangani: Study of U.S. Political Economy, Senior Lecturer, Department of Economics, Chancellor College.

International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP)

Ismael Kaunda: IVLP - U.S. Political Process for Emerging Political Leaders, Muslim Association of Malawi, Blantyre Chapter.

Austin Msowoya: IVLP - U.S. Judicial System, Law Commission.

Mary Malunga: IVLP- Small Business Development National Association.

Dr. Douglas Lungu: IVLP - HIV AIDS and Infectious Diseases Ministry of Health.

International Visitor Alumna Conducts Capacity Building for Youth NGOs

Working with National Youth Council (NYCOM) and United Nations Development Program (UNDP), International Visitor Program alumna Sitabene Malange conducted a three day workshop on the "Project Management Cycle" for youth NGO's at the Public Affairs Auditorium in Lilongwe. Participants included 38 program officers from various youth-focused NGO's in the Central Region. The objectives of the program were to train participants in the project life cycle from designing to evaluation, to facilitate networking activities amongst the members of NYCOM, and to foster the spirit of volunteerism among the participants.

This training was the first step towards Ms. Malange's initiative to set up a youth volunteer program to be administered by NYCOM. In his opening remarks Mr. Alex Mseka, National Youth Council Executive Director said the training was long overdue and thanked the Malawi -U.S. Exchange Alumni Association (MUSEAA) and Public Affairs for arranging the program. Mr. Mseka also quoted President John F. Kennedy to support his message on volunteerism: "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country."

As part of their social responsibility program, Cresta Hotel Limited donated \$300 to sponsor the program. Presenting the cheque to MUSEAA, Mr. Haroon Sacranie, Chairman of Cresta Limited said the idea of working with the youth appealed to him because they have a crucial role to play in Malawi's development.

At the end of the program, participants were enthusiastic to go back to their work places to implement their newly acquired skills. The program was an excellent opportunity for the NYCOM to interact with members of youth-oriented NGO's, to discuss the challenges they face and ways forward. Once established, the youth volunteerism program will be central the work of the Council, as it will provide a structure within which young people without work can improve themselves and contribute to Malawi's development.

Global Youth Service Day - "Making Commitments Matter"

Over 1200 Lilongwe city secondary school students celebrated this year's Global Youth Service Day event at Silver Strikers Stadium. Global Youth Service Day is the largest annual celebration of young volunteers, where millions of young people in countries around the world participate as volunteers in community projects.

The Public Affairs Section of the U.S. Embassy and Malawi-U.S. Exchange Alumni Association (MUSEAA) organized Malawi's celebrations by communicating with youth on themes of HIV/AIDS, girl-child rights, keeping girls in school, gender based violence and youth volunteerism using musical performances, exhibitions, sports and open discussions. In his remarks the Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) David Gilmour, commented "do yourselves a favor and protect yourselves from HIV/AIDS. It is the biggest threat you will face individually, it is perhaps the biggest threat confronting your country, and will be with us for a long time to come."

Inspired by the strong messages, students took advantage of the mobile Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT) unit provided by National AIDS Commission (NAC) and Malawi AIDS Counseling & Resource Organization (MACRO) to know their status.

Minister of Youth, Sports and Culture, Honorable Jaffalie Mussa, who is also an Embassy exchange alumnus commended American citizens on their strong spirit of volunteerism, branding it "the most important value" he observed during his visit to the U.S. during his International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP).

Two MUSEAA alumni also engaged in lively discussions with the youth. Wise Chauluka, a Consultant in Behavior Change Communication, advised the youth that "behavior change ranks highest in HIV/AIDS prevention;" Sitabene Malange of Eye of the Child, an NGO under the National Youth Council of Malawi, encouraged those who attended to volunteer in their communities.

She also emphasized to the students the importance of volunteerism to national development. Ms. Malange devised an action plan that links the MUSEAA, National Youth Council, Peace Corps, Volunteer Services Organizations, the Malawi Government and



Shawo Mwakilama receives an Outstanding MUSEAA Alumni Award

Malawi's youth to carry out volunteer services nationwide.

The students enjoyed an exciting afternoon of Basketball and Netball games, and visited the colorful and informative pavilion provided Population Services International (PSI), Malawi Red Cross, National Youth Council, NAC, and MACRO. A student from St. John's

Secondary School commented that the messages from Youth Alerts' Schools Team Presentation "delaying sexual debut" gave her "more confidence in making lifetime decisions." Perhaps, the most inspiring moment of day came when Deputy Chief of Mission David Gilmour presented the Outstanding MUSEAA Alumni Award to Shawo Mwakilama because of his strong commitment in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

Shawo is a recent graduate of Chancellor College and participated in the "University Leadership and the fight against AIDS," international visitors program. He drew



Youth Minister Jafali Mussa and Deputy Chief of Mission David Gilmour inspect a pavilion

upon his experience in the U.S. to develop a Peer Education Program for prison inmates and wardens at Maula Prison in Lilongwe. He modeled the program after the HIPS Corps of the University of Tennessee and the WE CARE Project under the Calvary Episcopal Church targeting centers in Memphis, Tennessee.

The 29 peer educators now have the responsibility of training 2000 fellow inmates at Maula Prison on how to prevent HIV transmission, provide care, offer counseling and referral services and deal with issues related to stigma. DCM Gilmour characterized Mwakilama as "an excellent example of how young people can use their talents to benefit their community."

MUSEAA Implements Permaculture Civic Out-Reach



Permaculture expert Kristof Nordin showing his Permaculture garden.

MUSEAA won a \$15,000 U.S. State Department Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs grant to implement a civic out-reach campaign on permaculture project in Malawi. The project was recognized as one of the best three out of 70 project proposals submitted from across the globe.

The word “Permaculture” is the combination of the two words “*permanent*” and “*agriculture*”. Two Australian men named Bill Mollison and David Holmgren coined the term in the 1970’s. It is an agricultural philosophy that allows us to use the resources that we have around us to their fullest

potential.

By observing and learning from our environment, such as how does nature replenish its soil, how does nature protect and conserve its water resources, how has nature adapted to the specific climate of an area, etc...we can learn how to imitate these natural processes in our daily living. The more closely that we can work with nature, the more likely we are to establish a balance which will provide us with the things that we need without hurting the environment.

One of the founding fathers of Permaculture, Bill Mollison, has defined Permaculture as “the conscious design and maintenance of agriculturally productive ecosystems, which have the diversity, stability and resilience of natural ecosystems.”



Photo opportunity for community volunteers, alumni and Nordin at a Permaculture garden

The Alumni Project on Permaculture began in September 2006. MUSEAA chapters identified plots as follows: Plot for Zomba Chapter is in Mangochi. This location was selected because of community International Visitor Alumina (IVA) Amina Mlongoti’s work with Mangochi Muslim Women Association; plot for Blantyre Chapter was selected in Chiradzulu because IVA Mary Malunga’s work with members of National Association of Business Women (NABW) in Chiradzulu; plot for Mzuzu Chapter was selected in Mzimba because of IVA Catherine Munthali’s affiliation with Tovwirane AIDS support organization; plot for Lilongwe was selected at Kauma Orphan Care centre because of Hubert Humphrey Alumna affiliation with the organization.

A Permaculture Look at Genetic Engineering

There has been a lot in the news lately about advancements being made in the field of genetic engineering. This technology is giving scientists and researchers the ability to change the characteristics of living organisms by altering their genetic makeup. This new science has many implications for humans and animals, but currently much of the research is being focused on the creation of new varieties of plants, which will have certain desirable characteristics. These characteristics can generally be grouped into three main categories: higher yields, pest or disease resistance, and nutritional modification.

Proponents of this new technology claim that genetically altered plants will have the ability to help end hunger and malnutrition in the world, while critics of genetic engineering often focus on the unforeseen dangers to people who eat these new foods. There are many people who are concerned that there has not been enough research on the long-term effects that these plants may have on consumers. The validity of these concerns may certainly deserve further investigation, but at the same time they seem to be taking emphasis away from the bigger picture.

Permaculture encourages us to “see the whole picture” by observing and learning from what nature has to teach us. We also need the courage to learn from our mistakes. About 50 years ago, we began to hear about a new type of agriculture that was labeled the “Green Revolution”.

The Green Revolution was the beginning of our efforts to increase food production through the use of hybridized plants and chemical inputs such as fertilizers and pesticides. At the time, this "new" technology was promoted as having the capacity to end the world's hunger and nutritional problems, just as genetic engineering is being promoted today. These higher yielding crops were introduced around the world, along with new methods of agriculture that were foreign to many of the traditional methods that were being used.

What many farmers have found in this short period of time, especially in countries such as Malawi, is that as they have adopted these new methods of agriculture many have become locked into a cycle of dependency. Hybridized seeds cannot usually be saved for replanting, so farmers that used to be able to save local seeds from season to season are now forced into purchasing new seeds for each year's crops.

Modern agricultural practices have replaced traditional methods of restoring soil fertility, so farmers are now dependent on purchasing chemical fertilizers to make up for this loss. Monocropping has disrupted the natural balances of pest control, forcing farmers to rely on chemical pesticides.

Traditional methods of agriculture that used to rely on nature to provide everything that people needed—free of charge—have been exchanged in favor of expensive and labor intensive practices. To meet the rising costs of these inputs, many people end up selling off much of their harvested food, leaving them with less than they had before they made the switch to the Green Revolution. This shift in agricultural practices has also created a situation where the majority of people attempt to meet each year's food requirements in a single season. It has now become such a common occurrence in Malawi for food reserves to run out while people are waiting for the next harvest to mature that it has been labeled the "hungry season". In this sense, the Green Revolution has actually done more to foster the problems of hunger and malnutrition than it has to end it.

The other thing that has happened is that an "over-emphasis" has been placed on single-crop agriculture to meet all of the nutritional demands of the world's population. In a book that was published in 1984 by the National Research Council in the United States entitled *Amaranth: Modern Prospects for an Ancient Crop*, it states that:

"Most of the world now receives the bulk of its calories and protein from a mere 20 species—notably cereals such as wheat, rice, maize, millets, and sorghum; root crops such as potato, sweet potato, and cassava; legumes such as beans, peanuts (groundnuts), and soybeans; and sugarcane, sugar beet, and bananas. These plants are the main bulwark between mankind and starvation. It is a dangerously small larder from which to feed the planet."

This limited focus has caused people to forget about the foods that they used to eat. Many of these "traditional" foods contain a much higher nutritional value than the ones that are now grown, have had many years to adapt to their surroundings, and can provide food on a year-round basis rather depending on a single unpredictable rainy season. Our Permaculture Nutrition project here in Malawi has identified almost 400 of these local food plants that could easily meet all of the nutritional requirements of the country's citizens on a year-round basis without the need for foreign intervention or biotechnology.

As we have removed agriculture from the cycles of nature, we seem to be finding many unforeseen problems. When seen through the "eyes" of Permaculture, this push toward genetic modification seems to be one more step in the wrong direction. There is plenty of food and land available in the world to feed our growing population, but it will take a rethinking of the current systems that we are using:

Higher yields can easily be achieved when one compares the overall production of a year-round mixed crop system to the single-season monocropped methods that are currently being used. With this in mind we shouldn't need to genetically modify plants for higher yields, we simply need to use the ones that we've always had available to us more wisely.

Insects and diseases become naturally managed as the balance returns to the land and we begin to take advantage of the plants that have adapted over many years to their various predators. This eliminates the need for genetically modified "resistant" plants.

Growing and eating a wide variety of healthy plant foods on a year-round basis can eliminate nutritional deficiencies. This takes away the need to genetically alter single food crops to include all of the nutrients that a person should be receiving. Trying to meet all of our nutritional needs through the use of a limited handful of plants is not only unhealthy for us as humans, but also for the environment from which we receive our food.

Permaculture focuses on the wide variety of plants, animals, insects, and microorganisms that all work together to ensure a healthy environment for growing food. It also places humans back into this cycle. If we are willing to work with nature rather than against it, we will begin to see that we have everything that we need to keep our environment and ourselves healthy for a long time into the future.

With Time Running Out, Scientists Attempt Rescue of African Vegetable Crops

A Victim of Urbanization and Neglect, Many Species May Be Lost

Researchers call it "African spinach," a kind of shorthand for hundreds of green leafy vegetables that are a mainstay of traditional African diets. Eaten largely in rural areas, African spinach provides millions of African consumers with the vitamins, nutrients, and minerals needed to maintain health and fight off deadly infections. Included are crops with names such as *Garden Rocket*, *Cats Whiskers*, and *Garden Huckleberry*.

Botanically, African spinach encompasses dozens of nightshade and legume species, and scores of cucumbers, pumpkins, and melons. Many are grown for their leaves as well as for their fruits.

Scientists fear that many of these important vegetables are fast disappearing, however, leaving behind just a fraction of the most popular varieties and a growing dependence on foreign vegetables that are less nutritious and more dependent on pesticides and fertilizer.

Symbols of Strength

"There are lots of reasons to be concerned about Africa's green leafy vegetables", says Patrick Maundu, a Kenyan ethnobotanist who studies the relationship between plants and people.

"Traditional vegetable crops are not only part of our rituals, they are used to fend off malaria, help nursing mothers build up their milk supply, and assist rural communities to survive long periods of drought," he says.

Maundu knows from personal experience how important African vegetables can be. "At the age of six, I was sent out with the boys in my village to take care of livestock. It was up to us to find food and so we quickly learned to identify edible plants." Maundu remembers that the older boys taught the younger ones which plants tasted best, which ones could be used to treat injuries and illnesses, and which ones to avoid. "That's where I got my early training as an ethnobotanist," he says.

It was the women of the village, however, who were the real experts, he says. His grandmother, now 101, began teaching him about African leafy greens at an early age. "I remember her telling me is that after the famine of 1928-29, people were so desperate for food that they would eat just about anything. To find out if a plant was edible they would see if baboons would eat it. If they did, then the women of the village would try it, and then kids." "The men," he says with a smile, "were always last." "I didn't realize it at the time, but it was really the women of the village who made sure that these crops survived. Women are responsible for the family food supply and they're the ones who value traditional leafy vegetables the most."

Race Against the Clock

Today, Maundu is a member of a team of Future Harvest scientists trying to conserve Africa's traditional vegetable crops. Working with national scientists in Cameroon, Kenya, Senegal, South Africa, and Zambia, he and his colleagues are helping to ensure that Africa does not lose its traditional vegetable crops, a process that is now occurring at an alarming rate.

Maundu estimates that there are more than 45,000 species of plants in Sub-Saharan Africa, of which about 1,000 can be eaten as green leafy vegetables. "Many of these are unknown to us and many more are falling into disuse or are simply being lost. For example, few scientists have ever heard of *Cats Whiskers*, a crop that is well known to village women, he says. By tradition, pregnant women grow *Cats Whiskers* to help regain blood lost in childbirth. It is also used to treat an AIDS-like disease called *Chira*, which is believed to be a curse put on those who are unfaithful to their spouses. Maundu speculates that *Cats Whiskers* may help to boost the performance of the body's immune system.

There are also many unusual types of *Amaranthus*, which warrant attention, he says. One variety produces up to 40 tons per hectare (16 tons per acre), an extraordinary amount for a green leafy vegetable. *Amaranthus*, a western health food store favorite, is grown mainly for its leaves, but also produces small nutritious seeds.

Neglect Cited

Agricultural research and development organizations have neglected African vegetables for a variety of reasons and have been slow to conserve them, adds Geoffrey Hawtin, director general of the International Plant Genetic Resources Institute (IPGRI), one of the 16 Future Harvest Centers.

"There are literally hundreds of species to deal with and many of these crops are found only in remote locations. Moreover, most of them don't fit the conventions that scientists are accustomed to dealing with in traditional conservation programs," he says.

"That's beginning to change, however," Hawtin says.

Since 1996, researchers from five countries — working with Maundu and other Future Harvest scientists — have been busy collecting and analyzing African Spinach varieties in a program that emphasizes not only conservation, but also how traditional vegetables are used and marketed. "The goal," Hawtin notes, "is literally to prevent Africa's leafy greens from disappearing."

The work is arduous and involves quantifying the health and economic contributions of African vegetables and convincing government officials that they are worth saving. It also involves producing improved varieties through what scientists call "participatory plant breeding," a process in which scientists and farmers produce traditional plant types that significantly outperform the varieties they normally grow.

FROM THE EDITOR

MUSEAA Newsletter is published by the Public Affairs Section of the US Embassy in Malawi for the Malawi-US Exchange US Exchange Alumni Association (MUSEAA). Submit articles for future editions to ChirwaMC@state.gov. Have a happy reading.