

Progress Report of the Better U Foundation
April 2010

*Thanks to SRI, I will not only have the possibility of increasing my production
but also of having a marketable surplus which will allow me to increase
my sources of income. I can thus ensure the education of my children.*

-- Farmer in Manakara

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on SRI activities supported by the Jim Carrey Better U Foundation (BUF) in Madagascar over the 2009-10 season, covering the 6-month period from September/October 2009 through March 2010. The report follows four main sections: an overview of the BUF's current program portfolio, highlights of the year (including progress on partners' SRI activities in the field, work of the SRI Secretariat, and program management & administration), plus next steps, recommendations for future actions and concluding remarks.

I. Overview of BUF's Current Program Portfolio in Madagascar

- 14 projects were recommended to and approved by the Better U Foundation's Board of Directors in August 2009 for the 2009-10 season including 13 projects for direct and indirect SRI activities in the field and 1 for support and strengthening of the SRI Secretariat. The 14 projects got underway in September/October 2009 and will continue through August 2010. They share a common end-date to allow for harvests to be completed, final data collection and information-gathering for the 2009-10 season to be carried out, field visits to be made, the preparation and submission of final reports to be finished, etc.
- 8 of the 14 projects are with BUF partners that had received grants in 2008-09 (they had very positive results and fulfilled all their reporting requirements; this is their second round of funding); 6 projects are with new partners. Extensive discussions and exchanges were held with all of the groups about their proposed activities and budgets for 2009-10 in order to get clarifications, revisions, modifications, etc.
- Partners have substantial experience in managing rural development projects and carrying out SRI activities in particular so it is expected/hoped that they will contribute to the further dissemination and spread of SRI in Madagascar over the coming years. Some local partners, such as MFR, FLM/Fanilo, Fekritama and SAF-FJKM, have a wide network across the country and have the potential for scaling up SRI. Other groups that the Foundation is collaborating with, such as CARE, CRS and WWF, have very positive reputations here in Madagascar and also have the potential for a wider reach across other countries in Africa, given their international recognition and reputation as well as their presence in many other countries on the continent. These are important strategic alliances for BUF to cultivate.
- Field activities are taking place in 15 out of the 22 regions (for 2008-09, activities were in 10 out of 22 regions). One of BUF's partners, HNI, has more of a national rather than a specific geographic or regional focus given the nature of its activities, i.e. the dissemination of key development messages, including on SRI, through the internet and cell-phone technology. Similarly, the SRI Secretariat supports the coordination of SRI work across the country and collaborates with partners in almost all regions of the island.

II. Highlights of the 2009-10 Season

Highlights for the 2009-10 season, now at the mid-way point, are presented below in 3 parts: partners' field activities, work of the SRI Secretariat, and program management & administration. Please note that information regarding farmers' yields is not available since the harvest season is not yet complete (it varies according to region and in some places, it will not take place until May, June or July). This information will be provided in the final reports that partners submit in August 2010, and will be made available in an overall summary report for 2009-10 activities.

Partners' Field Activities

- Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and its partner, the Development Office of the Antsirabe Diocese in Vakinankaratra (a.k.a. Caritas), with support from BUF over the 2009-10 season, have been working in 30 villages with 600 beneficiaries on the promotion and dissemination of SRI. The criteria for selecting the 30 villages were the existence of favorable water conditions, the availability of at least 20 ares/farmer for SRI cultivation, the 'dynamism' and motivation of the village, and the local population's vulnerability and poverty level. Core activities for promoting SRI include training and awareness-raising (especially through showing SRI films followed by Q&A sessions), capacity building, distribution of small agricultural equipment, and technical support and follow-up. CRS and Caritas have adopted a 'Farmer Field School' approach through which farmer groups mobilize and learn from the experiences of each other and share innovative ideas related to SRI. As with other BUF partners, issues related to climate change (eg. delayed rains or too much rain) have slightly affected the planting season. Lastly, the CRS/Caritas site is one of 8 places where the SRI Secretariat has been organizing experimental plots to compare SRI yields with different types of organic fertilizer (simple SRI vs. SRI with regular compost vs. SRI with regular compost enhanced with Guanomad vs. SRI with regular compost enhanced with Zina Bio; see further description of this initiative under Work of the SRI Secretariat).
- CARE Madagascar is currently working with 345 farmers spread out over 16 *fokontany* (the lowest level administrative structure) in the Anosy Region on the promotion and dissemination of SRI. Farmers are cultivating 36 hectares of rice fields using SRI. CARE's approach consists of providing training and extension services, organizing exchange visits amongst farmers, and promoting 'farmer ambassadors' (farmer leaders), where successful SRI practitioners spread the technique with demonstration plots, organize sensitization sessions, share lessons learned, and offer guidance to other farmers. CARE has found that the promotion of new methods such as SRI is particularly challenging in isolated areas that have never had contact with development projects (like some of the areas where they are working in Anosy) and requires innovative and creative approaches to motivate farmers and to attract their attention. As such, CARE has organized a contest where farmers who have demonstrated the best SRI practices by the end of the season will receive some additional agricultural materials. Moreover, to insure against the risk that farmers think that they are taking when adopting SRI, CARE has established an interesting partnership with the World Food Programme (WFP) to have pre-positioned goods as a guarantee for each farmer who decides to practice SRI in case their SRI crops fail or fall below yields attained with traditional rice farming methods. The BUF Resident Advisors will be monitoring this arrangement to see how effective it is in encouraging the uptake of SRI and how replicable it might be for WFP in other regions of the country and/or with other partners working on SRI. The CARE Madagascar team is also participating in the initiative with the SRI Secretariat and other partners to compare SRI yields with different types of organic fertilizer on experimental plots.
- In the MAP Village of Antsahabe and the neighboring community of Ambohimanandray, 92 farmers are practicing the SRI method on 8.85 hectares of rice fields, with the financial support of the BUF and technical guidance of Groupe Conseil Développement (GCD). In addition, 3 demonstration plots have been established in 3 *fokontanys* of the area, materials have been distributed to farmers (seeds, Zina Bio compost, organic fertilizer, weeders, etc.) and a local technician has been hired to respond to individual farmers'

requests and to provide ongoing accompaniment on SRI practices. GCD has also introduced SRI to members of a women's association located in the nearby Commune of Ambatomirahavavy so that they can become 'SRI ambassadors' in their community (training sessions were held with the women, and 3 demonstration plots were established for them in Ivelo, Tsaratanana and Ambohibato). GCD's work on disseminating SRI indirectly to teachers and students in primary schools continues with 2 schools in Antsahabe and Ambohimandray. The idea is to introduce basic concepts and principles of SRI into lesson plans at local primary schools such as through arithmetic, history, culture, natural sciences, geometry, etc. and to encourage students' observation skills with visits to nearby SRI demonstration plots or school rice fields. This initiative has generated a lot of interest with several other members of the SRI Group of Madagascar (e.g., SAF-FJKM, CARE, Peace Corps) and with other NGOs and groups in Madagascar as well, and is another approach that the BUF Resident Advisors will be following closely over the coming months to see its effectiveness and the possibility of being scaled up over time. Antsahabe and Ambohimandray are sites where the SRI Secretariat has been organizing experimental plots to compare SRI yields with different types of organic fertilizer.

- Interaide continues its support of SRI activities in Manakara, in the Vatovavy Fitovinany Region. Over the 2009-10 season, it has been working in 2 rural communes: Ambatrazo and Ambila. Interaide provided training to 76 farmers on SRI, including on the importance of using weeders and on the advantages of manure, and has been providing follow-up technical support and guidance either to individuals or to groups of farmers who are practicing SRI on a total of 792.5 ares, with an average of 13 ares per farmer. As in other regions, heavy rains caused delays in the planting calendar. Moreover, for some farmers, there is little interest in using Guanomad because the recommended dosage (7 kg/are) ends up being more expensive for them than using other fertilizers. The project is therefore encouraging the use of manure, either by itself or combined with other organic fertilizers. Interaide is another partner involved in the initiative with the SRI Secretariat to organize experimental plots to compare SRI yields with different types of organic fertilizer.
- The BUF-supported work of FLM/Fanilo, the development branch of the Malagasy Lutheran Church, is concentrated in 4 regions of Madagascar: Ihorombe, Haute Matsiatra, Itasy and Bongolava. Through its system of *animateurs volontaires locaux* (local volunteer animators) who work with and coach 4 other farmers each, FLM/Fanilo has reached 1,200 farmers (240 small groups) in the 4 regions. FLM/Fanilo organized a training of trainers, provided training and extension support to farmers, and offered agricultural equipment and materials (seeds, weeders, supplies for constructing/repairing small dams, training documents, etc.). The Ihorombe Region confronted a problem of insufficient water this year.
- With support from the BUF, the Center for Rural Promotion (CRP) of Analabe has been focusing its SRI efforts this year in 13 communes of the Amoron'i Mania Region where they have been, for several years, helping farmers to group themselves into small rural organizations and to strengthen their agricultural skills and capacities. An important element of this project has been CRP's efforts to involve and collaborate with local authorities (mayors, *chefs de fokontany*, local representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture) in these various communes. CRP held a workshop in each commune with various stakeholders in order to promote the practice of SRI. It also provided training to 13 dissemination agents (one from each commune), distributed 325 weeders to farmers in the different communes, and offered 12,995 kg of the organic fertilizer Guanomad and 65 kg of seeds (because of the poor quality of seeds in the region, CRP also set up 13 seed multiplication sites to help improve the quality of seeds over time). Some of the communes confronted various problems, such as rotted roots, plant diseases and a damaged dam. CRP sought to resolve these problems with members of the communes, at times in consultation with local technicians of the Ministry of Agriculture, at others in consultation with the SRI Secretariat team.
- Human Network International (HNI), with critical support from the BUF in its early stages, made substantial progress in its efforts to further the promotion of SRI among rural farmers in Madagascar through the internet and cell-phone technology. Soon after receiving the BUF grant, HNI established an SRI 'content committee' made up of some of the members of the SRI Group of Madagascar (Ministry of Agriculture, SRI

Secretariat, CRS, Association TOM, MFR, Fekritama) to determine and validate key messages and to identify proven SRI educational materials in different formats. The ‘content committee’ met regularly for several months and provided a continual stream of educational materials in printed, audio and video formats. The key materials and messages have been collected and organized for dissemination via the internet (HNI’s web site is www.mandrosoa.org) and mobile phones with an SMS-hosted directory. The key materials and messages have been translated into Malagasy, digitized for electronic transmission, and recorded for dissemination using sound studios and voice talent.

HNI practices web analytics to measure the popularity and usage of its website dedicated to the development of Madagascar. HNI’s monitoring has revealed that visits to www.mandrosoa.org have generally increased since HNI began collecting and posting data related to the website; the SRI Secretariat and members of the SRI Group of Madagascar encourage partners, colleagues, and farmers to visit the site, for example.

With regard to dissemination of development messages via mobile phones, HNI negotiated with ZAIN (Madagascar’s largest telecommunications operator) to include SRI messages via a ‘development directory.’ ZAIN agreed to make the SRI information accessible, for free and ‘on demand’, to ZAIN’s 1.75 million phone subscribers in 2 different ways: via SMS and an Interactive Voice Recorded (IVR) system. This new service is called ‘Zain Mandroso.’ In the Malagasy language, Mandroso means ‘welcome,’ but also ‘development’ or ‘progress.’ In early November 2009, HNI and ZAIN performed a field test designed to evaluate the performance of the ‘Zain Mandroso’ service which contains the SRI information directory. The field test demonstrated the feasibility of the project from both a technical and user-friendly standpoint, and provided some valuable feedback to the HNI team. HNI and ZAIN officially launched the new service on March 11th 2010, with approximately 200 invited guests in attendance representing various NGOs, donor groups, UN agencies, relevant ministries, and the private sector. This is an initiative that the BUF Resident Advisors will be following with interest to see to what extent the SRI information in particular (both on the web-site and via the cell-phone directory) is being consulted by NGOs, local associations and farmers’ groups.

- The BUF support is helping Fekritama, a confederation of farmers with 35,000 active members working in 19 out of 22 regions of Madagascar, with its SRI work in 3 regions in particular: Menabe, Boeny and Sofia. In each of the 3 regions, they conducted 5-day training-of-trainers programs with 82 farmer-leaders (3 days theoretical and 2 days field practice) who are now disseminating SRI methods to other farmers through their ‘study circle’ approach. Approximately 340 farmers are now involved in the project and are cultivating 76.85 hectares of rice fields using SRI methods. Farmers have encountered difficulties with water control (too much rain in some places; in others, delayed rains; in another place, a broken dam that needs repairs). Fekritama technicians meet regularly with farmers to speak about these challenges and difficulties, to try to generate solutions, and to provide technical support. Fekritama is another partner involved in the initiative with the SRI Secretariat to organize experimental plots to compare SRI yields with different types of organic fertilizer.
- The BUF provided a grant to the Lions Club of Ambatondrazaka on behalf of the Koloharena of Amparafaravola and the Association of Water Users in Ambatondrazaka to continue the promotion of SRI work in the Lac Alaotra area, an important rice-producing region of Madagascar. Project funds were used to purchase 40 tons of organic fertilizer, 500 kg of seeds and 35 weeders that were distributed as ‘input kits’ to farmers from the 2 associations. The Project is working in collaboration with *Agronomists and Veterinarians Without Borders*, BV Lac (a programme funded by the European Union and the French Cooperation) as well as the Peace Corps. These other organizations have been providing important technical support to farmers on SRI methods and on other complementary topics such as seed production, maintenance of fields, harvesting, and proper storage and treatment techniques after the harvest. Over the coming months, the Lions Club will be organizing additional training sessions on behalf of the 2 associations.

- The World Wildlife Fund (WWF), with support from the BUF, is working in 2 communes in the Ihorombe Region on the promotion of SRI. These are areas that are particularly at risk of deforestation and face pressure on protected environmental corridors, so WWF has been interested in enhancing its SRI work to give farmers alternative livelihoods and to increase agricultural production using intensive methods so that they will not cut down trees (for extra income) or encroach on forest zones (for additional farming land). They are currently working with 30 ‘pilot’ farmers on 3.7 hectares of rice fields planted using SRI, having provided them training and distributed small agricultural equipment and key SRI materials (organic fertilizer, weeders, etc.). Each pilot farmer in turn selects ‘satellite’ farmers to work with – between 1 and 4 persons depending on the availability of land and their motivation. These ‘satellite’ farmers benefit from the guidance offered by the pilot farmers as well as technical support from the project team. The project team is also in the process of creating a network of SRI users in the Ihorombe Region, in collaboration with the SRI Secretariat.
- The Maisons Familiales Rurales (MFR) is an organization that aims to support rural youth in becoming more professional in agricultural techniques at its 9 centers across the country and through an approach that combines practical and theoretical training at the centers and in the field. SRI has been part of their curricula at some of the centers; the small grant they received from the BUF has enhanced their capacity to train and provide extension services in SRI. Since September 2009, MFR has conducted a training of trainers in SRI, held meetings with parents in each of the localities to get their support and encourage their involvement in the centers’ SRI activities, organized training sessions on SRI with students at each center, provided small equipment and materials to each center (weeders, ropes, wheelbarrows, Guanomad, seeds, manure, etc.), established demonstration plots at each center for students to practice SRI and receive guidance from the teachers, and offered follow-up support and accompaniment in the field. 269 youth across the 9 centers, between the ages of 13 and 20, have been trained and are now being supported in the practice of SRI. The youth get practical and theoretical training at the centers and are expected to apply SRI methods at home, on the plots that their parents have agreed to allocate to SRI (the students spend 2 weeks in residence at the center, then 2 weeks at home, on an alternating basis over 2 school years). MFR is another partner involved in the initiative with the SRI Secretariat to organize experimental plots to compare SRI yields with different types of organic fertilizer. Over the coming months, MFR plans to host ‘open house’ sessions at each center in order to allow the wider community to come and observe the SRI demonstration plots, to learn more about SRI, etc. They will also be organizing exchange visits for the youth and trainers at different centers, and will set up additional demonstration plots in neighboring communities in association with local mayors.
- SAF-FJKM is the development office of the Malagasy Presbyterian Church, with a long history of development actions in Madagascar and a wide network across the country. Support from the BUF is enhancing SAF-FJKM’s capacity to train and provide extension services on SRI in 3 regions in particular: Analamanga, Amoron’i Mania and Vakinankaratra. Through this project, 191 farmers are practicing SRI on 41.71 hectares of rice fields. Activities for promoting SRI in the 3 localities include sensitization and awareness-raising (especially through showing SRI films followed by Q&A sessions), training (both theoretical and practical for newcomers as well as for SRI practitioners who needed refresher training and additional accompaniment and advice), distribution of small agricultural equipment and supplies (weeders, seeds and organic fertilizer), and technical support and follow-up. Although harvests have not taken place yet, project staff and farmers have observed impressive tiller growth (e.g., between 70 and 100 tillers at the 3rd month in Ankazobe). As with other partners, SAF-FJKM confronted problems related to water control, pests, and poor weather which hampered access to certain sites. Over the coming months, in addition to continuing its support and guidance to farmers and to measuring their harvests, SAF-FJKM plans to organize exchange visits among farmers to encourage them to observe, share ideas and exchange on different SRI-related matters.
- The goal of the Association Tontolomiaina (‘Association TOM’) is to promote activities that not only help rural households generate income but that also help to protect the environment. Toward that end, it is working, in collaboration with GCD, with 40 farmers in 2 *fokontany*s near Antananarivo: Anjomakely and

Ambohikambana. These 2 communities represent interesting learning opportunities about the dissemination and uptake of SRI in different settings. Anjomakely is located on the outskirts of Tana (17 km), so residents are involved not just in rice farming but also in other small business activities (carpentry, masonry, etc.). In general, farmers had heard of SRI and had been exposed to it, but they had never really taken it on for various reasons. Ambohikambana, by contrast, is further away from Tana (38 km) and is more agriculture-based, but farmers had limited familiarity and experience with SRI before the project got underway. Similar to CRP Analabe, an important element of this project has been Association TOM's and GCD's efforts to involve and collaborate with local authorities in these 2 communities (mayors, *chefs de fokontanys*, heads of the recently established Agricultural Service Centers), who have offered the use of community spaces for meetings, helped promote the project with farmers, and made valuable suggestions. For example, the Chef of the Anjomakely *fokontany*, a woman, is very enthusiastic about SRI and has been very supportive of the Association TOM's efforts. Activities for promoting SRI in both communities include training and awareness-raising (especially through showing SRI films followed by Q&A sessions), distribution of small agricultural equipment, and hands-on technical support and follow-up. At the beginning, farmers in the 2 *fokontanys* were hesitant and doubtful about practicing SRI since, for many, the notion still persists that 'water and rice are never separate.' Project staff have found, however, that even though farmers have not yet harvested their crop, they are seeing strong and robust tillers, which boosts their confidence and gives them courage that the method is working. Lastly, the Association TOM is another partner involved in the initiative with the SRI Secretariat to organize experimental plots to compare SRI yields with different types of organic fertilizer.

Work of the SRI Secretariat

In addition to the direct field activities with partners as described above, the BUF has also continued to support the operations of the SRI Secretariat over the 2009-10 season. The Secretariat (and SRI Group of Madagascar) was established from a catalytic grant by the Better U Foundation in November/December 2008 in order to create a hub for SRI activities in Madagascar. The objectives of the Secretariat are three-fold: 1) to promote the exchange and sharing of information as well as the coordination of SRI activities at the national level and progressively at decentralized levels; 2) to establish an improved system of communication for SRI within Madagascar through the establishment of a database for the collection of SRI data and the development of a national web-site/blog for SRI; and 3) to network with other groups working in SRI and complementary sectors, such as local and international NGOs, the national agricultural research institute (FOFIFA) and the University of Antananarivo, donors, the private sector, etc.

As noted in previous reports, the Secretariat is increasingly being recognized by practitioners, donors, researchers and journalists alike as the focal point of SRI information in Madagascar. Members of the SRI Group of Madagascar originally included the 10 organizations that collaborated directly with the BUF over the 2008-09 season, but membership has now grown beyond those original partners to more than 40 organizations (please consult SRI Group of Madagascar web-site at: www.groupementsrimada.org for a full listing of organizations).

The ongoing work of the SRI Secretariat includes:

- Promoting the exchange and sharing of information as well as the coordination of SRI activities at the national level through periodic meetings among partners (12 meetings have been held so far since November/December 2008), through its web-site and blog, and through its engagement with the Ministry of Agriculture (a representative has been assigned to the SRI Secretariat and has been attending the meetings along with other MAEP staff).
- Supporting the creation of regional SRI platforms in collaboration with local partners. The regional platforms will help groups that do not necessarily have representation in the capital and that are much closer to the ground – associations, farmers' groups and decentralized services of the Ministry of Agriculture – to better exchange and network among themselves, to address issues related to their local context, and to share

best practices, etc. while still being able to tap the resources of the national SRI Group. 5 regional platforms are emerging in different parts of the country thanks to the encouragement and guidance of the SRI Secretariat, in Ambatondrazaka, Morondava, Fianarantsoa, Ambositra and Antsirabe.

- Conducting joint field visits to various sites in order to facilitate discussions among farmers, meet with partners and provide technical advice and feedback where needed. Over the past 6 months, Secretariat members travelled to Vakinankaratra, Amoron'i Mania, Haute Matsiatra, and Vatovavy Fitovinany.
- Networking with other groups that are involved directly or indirectly in SRI in Madagascar (beyond those funded by the BUF) and encouraging them to join the SRI Group for improved coordination and sharing of information. As noted above, more than 40 groups are now registered with the SRI Group of Madagascar, including local and international NGOs, associations, the national agricultural research institute, members of the private sector such as Henri Fraise and GuanoMad, equipment suppliers, etc.
- Keeping the capitalization exercise about the SRI situation in Madagascar updated on a regular basis (members of the SRI Group are requested to provide updates twice a year, before the rice season begins and afterwards).
- Making SRI information available for partners and farmers (where and how to obtain equipment and tools, inputs such as seeds and organic fertilizer, technical sheets and other training materials such as booklets, flash cards, DVDs, etc.). Indeed, this was a very important service that the SRI Secretariat rendered to its members, especially at the beginning of the planting season last fall. Moreover, the SRI Secretariat managed to negotiate deals with suppliers of organic fertilizer and weeders on behalf of SRI Group members, e.g., 10% reduction on Guanomad.

The SRI Secretariat has also undertaken some special initiatives over the course of this year, most notably:

- Participating in 2 World Bank Institute video conference events for knowledge-sharing on SRI, to promote south-south exchange; this included preparing and making a presentation on SRI work in Madagascar (October 2009, and February 2010), and hosting a delegation of researchers and practitioners from Burundi who wanted to learn about SRI 'from the original source.'
- Coordinating an initiative with SRI Group members to evaluate the increase in yields with SRI using different types of organic fertilizer. The partnership includes the Ministry of Agriculture, NGOs and associations,¹ the national agricultural research institute (FOFIFA), and 2 organic fertilizer suppliers, Guanomad and Zina Bio. The initiative consists of organizing experimental plots in different regions of the country where partners are working following a common protocol established by FOFIFA for comparison purposes. Guanomad and Zina Bio provided a free supply of fertilizer (3,236 kg and 2,625 kg, respectively) as a contribution to this effort. The aim is to compare rice yields using traditional rice cultivation methods vs. SRI with regular compost vs. SRI with regular compost enhanced with Guanomad vs. SRI with regular compost enhanced with Zina Bio. Results of this initiative will be shared and disseminated after the harvests expected between April and June 2010.
- Continuing the pilot 'SRI school' initiative through which teachers and students in primary schools are introduced to basic concepts and principles of SRI. School lesson plans that the SRI Secretariat is developing and fine-tuning incorporate notions of SRI in subjects such as arithmetic, history, Malagasy culture, natural sciences, geometry, etc. Students are also encouraged to reflect on rice cultivation, to observe nearby SRI demonstration plots or school rice fields, and to compare results/observations with traditional rice fields. The idea is to expose children to SRI since they represent the future farmers of Madagascar, and they can share the ideas with their parents and family members at home. As noted earlier in this report, this initiative

¹ The 8 organizations participating in this initiative include: CARE Madagascar, CRS, BVPI, Fekritama, GCD, Interaide, MFR and Association TOM. All are members of the SRI Group of Madagascar; all except BVPI are direct partners of the BUF.

has generated a lot of interest with several other members of the SRI Group of Madagascar (e.g., SAF-FJKM, CARE, Peace Corps) and with other NGOs and groups in Madagascar as well. Pilot initiatives are underway in Antsahabe/Ambohimandray, Morondava, and Sambava/Antahala, and more are in the pipeline. Discussions are also taking place with the Ministry of Education for scaling up this work and incorporating it more formally into the primary school curriculum, once the pilot and learning phase is complete.

- Organizing a field trip for SRI Group partners to Behenjy, approximately 40 km south of Antananarivo, in collaboration with Professor Bruno Andrianaivo from the Department of Agronomy at the University of Antananarivo. The purpose of this visit on March 19th, which approximately 29 persons attended, was to view rice fields that Professor Andrianaivo had planted with his graduate students in order to see whether SRI methods help shorten the growing cycle as compared to non-SRI practices. They experimented with 5 different types of seeds that are promoted in the highland areas. Preliminary results show that SRI ‘gained’ about 20 days over traditional techniques, and that the Japonica variety was most responsive. The implications of such findings are important especially in areas where there can be 2 or 3 harvests each year, such as in the Boeny and Sofia Regions. What this finding tells us is that, depending on climate factors and planting calendars, farmers may be able to squeeze in an additional rice harvest during the year or plant other crops during the ‘off season.’ They also get to harvest their rice a bit earlier. This could be another incentive for them to take on SRI, beyond the other advantages that SRI presents such as getting higher yields, using less water, needing less seed, and not depending on expensive chemical fertilizers.
- Organizing a 2-day workshop for SRI trainers that will take place on April 8th and 9th in Antsirabe (3 hours south of Antananarivo) in order to exchange experiences, promote the sharing of best practices, review training and adult learning techniques, discuss dissemination and uptake challenges, etc. with a view toward developing a qualified pool of SRI trainers that can be a resource for local and international NGOs, associations, farmers’ groups, etc., that can have a common vision and understanding of SRI as a methodology, and that can be deployed internationally, upon request, to other countries that seek to learn about SRI, such as Burundi or Senegal. SRI Group members have delegated technicians to attend this 2-day workshop as have the newly established Platforms in different regions. Approximately 20 trainers are expected to participate (not including facilitators, organizers and invited guests). A second workshop will be organized for another group of trainers later in the year. The BUF Resident Advisors will be joining the workshop meeting and will present certificates to the trainers during the closing ceremony.
- Participating in dialogues on Madagascar’s rice policy and national rice strategy with other stakeholders (donors, UN agencies, ministries, NGOs, etc.), such as at an upcoming meeting at the offices of the Food and Agricultural Organization on April 15, 2010, and previous meetings in 2009, in order to help ensure that SRI is systematically woven into the national rice policy and strategy and is embraced at higher levels.
- Preparing and planning a national workshop on SRI in late June/early July 2010. Participants will include various stakeholders including donors, UN agencies, relevant ministries, local and international NGOs, farmers’ groups, and special invited guests, such as, if possible, Norman Uphoff and/or Erika Styger from Cornell University, Corinne Lalo from TF1 France, Nicolas Duriez from the Rotary Club Lille, and Jim Carrey, Founder of the Better U Foundation, or another representative. The purpose is to take stock of progress-to-date on SRI work in Madagascar, especially over the last 2 years since BUF began its direct support to groups, to discuss challenges in SRI dissemination and uptake as well as solutions, and to consider cross-cutting issues and future orientations. The event will be covered by the media, hopefully both local and international.

Program Management & Administration

Over the 2009-10 season, particularly from September/October 2009 through March 2010, the efforts of the BUF Resident Advisors have been focused on the following:

- Carrying out general networking and information-sharing with partners, donors and other relevant groups, especially with a view toward fostering the long-term sustainability of SRI work in Madagascar, e.g., US Embassy, French Development Cooperation, German Development Cooperation, International Fund for Agricultural Development, World Bank, European Union, JICA, Missouri Botanical Garden, WWF, USAID-funded Programme Salohi, Ambatolampy Youth Training Center, etc.
- Serving as liaison on behalf of the BUF with partners, government officials, donors and other groups.
- Monitoring grants for 14 projects funded by BUF during the 2009-10 season, involving regular discussions with partners, review of mid-term reports, feedback on progress, field visits to some sites, and dealing with administrative and contractual/agreement issues. Having regular meetings and consultations with each partner to ensure smooth start-up and continuation of field activities.
- Participating at SRI Secretariat meetings hosted at GCD and CRS offices on a monthly or bi-monthly basis, including input on agenda, review of post-meeting minutes, feedback on Secretariat blog and web-site.
- Participating in the Earth Institute of Columbia University's Global Classroom session on "Integrated Approaches to Sustainable Development" at the World Bank Institute's Development Learning Center, as resource persons on SRI.
- Being in contact with the SRI Secretariat and partners regarding their potential involvement in a research study with the University of Wageningen (Netherlands) on "The evolution of SRI as a social movement," with Madagascar and Tamil Nadu as case studies, which has funding support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

III. Next Steps

For the next six months (April – September 2010), the priority will be placed on the following actions:

- Organizing a second visit to Madagascar by members of the Foundation's Board of Directors. Such a visit might take place during a late harvest period of one of our partners (May, June or July) and/or during the national workshop on SRI that is being planned for early September. This would be an excellent opportunity for the BUF to review its accomplishments over the past few years, to share SRI achievements with a wider audience (donors, UN agencies, relevant ministries, local and international NGOs, media) and to give an important boost to SRI efforts in the country.
- Meeting with financial partners, such as the French Cooperation, German Cooperation, European Union, the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), to present a progress to-date of SRI work in Madagascar, particularly that of BUF partners, and to discuss the possibility of these agencies' supporting SRI activities in Madagascar in order to scale up and ensure their sustainability in the long run.
- Consulting with technical partners, such as World Food Programme, WWF, and the Agricultural Service Centers funded by the European Union, to discuss ways that SRI activities can be incorporated into their on-going programming so as to build upon existing knowledge, capacities and structures and to anchor SRI in the long run.
- Strengthening ties with international groups, such as, the Rotary Club of Lille and the French television station TF1 France, and the International SRI Secretariat at Cornell University established by a sustaining grant by the Jim Carrey Better U Foundation, each with mission to help ensure the sustainability of SRI work in Madagascar.

- Having continuing meetings with partners about progress in the field and following special initiatives that partners have initiated such as CARE's arrangement with WFP for the pre-positioning of goods as an 'insurance' against losses or lower yields, the SRI Secretariat's work on introducing SRI into school lesson plans, HNI's cell-phone program, etc.
- Conducting field visits to selected project sites, such as in Anosy, with CARE Madagascar; in Menabe with Fekritama, GCD and MFR; and in Ihorombe with FLM/Fanilo and WWF.
- Bringing in other relevant ministries (besides Agriculture) to the discussion on SRI and encouraging them to incorporate SRI into their strategies and workplans, such as the Ministries of Environment, Education and Commerce.
- Planning and conducting a 'Listening Exercise' to get feedback and input from a range of persons about SRI, those who have benefited from BUF support and those who have not, those who practice SRI and those who do not, etc., time permitting.
- Planning additional MadaMovie films for Madagascar and elsewhere, time and budget permitting.

IV. Concluding Remarks

Despite some challenges and constraints that have been noted above and in previous reports, there has been significant progress on SRI in Madagascar over the past couple years, thanks in large part to the support of the Better U Foundation since it established a presence in the country in 2007 and began funding partners' work on SRI 2 years ago. This progress is seen in the active engagement of a wide range of organizations involved in the SRI Group of Madagascar, the fact that SRI is more often on 'the radar screen' of different groups working in rural development, the increasing number of farmers practicing the method, the amount of land area that is being dedicated to SRI cultivation, and the growing yields per hectare. Collaborative learning and sharing among partners at different levels have contributed to this dynamic growth.

Our partners have demonstrated skill and sophistication in promoting participatory development and have manifested a sense of local ownership by engaging communities and consulting farmers in meaningful ways at different stages of their projects. Some of our partners, for example, have provided input and materials to farmers on credit in order to reinforce their commitment and to establish revolving funds so that their resources will stretch further, and so that they can continue extending support to other farmers. Moreover, BUF-supported activities have often been integrated into ongoing, larger programs or have been a contribution to existing activities. Examples include CARE and the Tambiroa Project in southern Madagascar funded by the European Union, and CRS' Global Food Crisis Project funded by the agency's core monies. This has the advantage of building on existing resources, capacities and infrastructure and of maximizing the value-added of BUF's investments, thereby avoiding organizational dependency on BUF support.

This is a critical stage for SRI promotion in Madagascar. In order to strengthen and consolidate the positive results gained thus far and to render SRI activities sustainable over the long run, it is important that SRI promotion in Madagascar have continued support for several more years, from some combination of sources. The BUF will attempt to seek further international support in order to continue on the path of progress and to maintain the positive momentum that the Foundation has already most generously contributed to and helped to generate.