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Research Institute



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Report on Burundi national rice conference held on 18th May 2021:

Key messages and outcomes

Introduction

On 18th May 2021, Burundi national rice conference brought together stakeholders in the country's rice sub-sector to discuss the growth of the sector and ways to harness the sub-sector's socio-economic contribution to the country and the East African region.

The conference was attended by senior officials, experts, researchers, farmers, rice processors, businessmen from the Ministry of Environment, Agriculture and Livestock (MINEAGRI) and regional agricultural research institutes, and private companies engaged which engage in rice seed production, importation of agricultural machineries and agro-chemicals.

The conference was facilitated by Eng. Mbarushimana Jean Claude, cabinet advisor and focal point for Burundi's National Rice Development Strategy (NRDS). Jean Claude opened the conference and introduced the conference objectives as (i) to facilitate knowledge exchange on rice sector research and development at national and regional levels; (ii) to take stock of public, private and donor-supported initiatives to inform policy-making and implementation; and (iii) to boost multi-stakeholder collaboration towards achieving national and regional rice self-sufficiency, increasing food and nutrition security, and alleviating poverty through inclusive and sustainable production and commercialisation. In addition, he provided the context of the conference and its contribution to the East African Regional Rice Conference.

Opening session

Following the opening session were technical presentations and discussions on six priority thematic areas: rice research and development, inclusive markets, and value chains, rice-based livelihoods –

gender and youth integration, integrated rice sector development in a changing climate, inclusive finance and investment, and agricultural policy reforms.

Acknowledging the importance of the conference and its contribution to the East African regional conference, and in consideration of rice as one of the priority commodities in Burundi, Jean Claude highlighted the opportunities and challenges which face the sub-sector as (i) increasing trend in the expansion of rice production linked with agro-ecological suitability and existing potential, (ii) compatibility of rice in local farming systems and traditional foods, (iii) economic incentives of rice production (comparative advantage), and (iv) rapid increase in domestic rice consumption and the associated burden on foreign currency due to rice imports. He added that Burundi national conference provides an opportunity to deliberate on these issues and identify key directions that will guide future intervention options within the sub-sector.

As part of the opening session, Dr Abdelbagi Ismail, Principal Scientist and International Rice Research Institute Africa Representative, and Dr Yusuke Haneishi, General Coordinator of the Coalition for African Rice Development Secretariat, shared pre-recorded speeches, which focused on the importance of the conference, expectations, and future engagement of the respective organisations in supporting rice sector development, both at the national and regional levels.

Thematic presentations, discussions, and suggested interventions

The table below presents the key outcomes of the presentations, discussions, and suggested interventions.

Table 1: Summary of topics, themes, issues, and suggested interventions

Streams	Key themes	Key issues	Suggested interventions
Rice research and development (R&D)	Innovations in rice mechanisation and post-harvest.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Burundi has smallholder farmers with small land plots.Families do not invest in rice mechanization.Private sector is not well developed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Use of small rice mechanization.Land consolidation.Sensitization for entrepreneurship in rice mechanization.

Streams	Key themes	Key issues	Suggested interventions
	Establishing regional centre of excellence for rice R&D.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of funding. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> East African Governments should invest in Rice Centres of Excellence.
Inclusive markets and value chains.	Rice commercialisation and livelihood outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional and international commercial strategies are not well developed in Burundi to face global commercial requirements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing based-commercial strategies for the rice value chain. Strengthening the private sector.
	Marketing and value addition: the experience of rice processors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low level of post-harvest technologies that affects the quality of the milled rice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promoting good practices in harvesting, threshing, drying, and winnowing before rice processing.
Rice-based livelihoods – gender and youth integration.	Gendered livelihood dynamics in rice-based food systems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rice production is highly demanding for women and youth in terms of effort, time, and financial investment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Empowering youth and women. Incentives.
	Jobs and employment opportunities in the rice sector: opportunities for entrepreneurs for youth.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth does not have access to loans. Lack of skills in elaboration of business plans. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creation of specific banks for youth and women. Capacity building on entrepreneurship.

Streams	Key themes	Key issues	Suggested interventions
Integrated rice Sector development in a changing climate.	Integrated rice seed sector development: county experiences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seed industry not well developed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sensitizing private and public companies to invest in the seed sector.
	Enhancing sustainability and resilience in local & national rice system to cope with climate change.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Floods, drought, salinity, new emerging diseases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early warning system. Development of tolerant rice varieties Watershed protection Irrigation facilities adapted to climate change.
Inclusive finance & investment.	Improving access to credit & finance for small producers and processors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small producers and processors access to bank loans. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing new funding approach adapted to small producers and processors.
	Rice sector financing & public-private partnerships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fear of investors to finance the rice sector. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rising awareness. Insurance companies.
Agricultural policy reforms	Agriculture policy reforms and foresight.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funds are needed to implement rice policies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fund mobilizing for rice policy implementation.
	Rice, dietary changes, and household food & nutrition security.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing rice demand due to urbanisation and high growing population rates. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustainable rice intensification.

Conclusion

Burundi national conferences provided an important opportunity for stakeholders in the rice sub-sector to reflect on the status, existing challenges and opportunities and share their experiences. The suggested interventions are a step in the right direction towards the growth of the sub-sector.