



Report on Ethiopia national rice conference held on 18th May 2021

Key messages, outcomes and required actions for sector development

As part of the 2021 East African Rice Conference (EARC), national workshops were held in six African countries: Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda. EARC aimed to identify policy reforms to transform Africa's rice sector through scientific innovations, and the national events provided an opportunity to assess such opportunities in each of the six countries, individually. This report presents the outcomes of Ethiopia's national workshop, which was held in parallel venues in Addis Ababa and Bahir Dar.

Introduction

On 18th May 2021, the Ethiopian national rice conference gathered senior officials, experts, researchers, and businessmen drawn from the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), federal and regional agricultural research institutes, private companies that engage in rice seed production, importation of agricultural machineries and agro-chemicals, farmers, and rice processors.

The national conference was facilitated by Dr Dawit Alemu, Manager of the Bilateral Ethiopian-Netherlands Effort for Food, Income and Trade Partnership program and APRA Ethiopia country lead. Alemu introduced the objectives of both the national and regional conference 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 conference content for both the national and regional events.

The opening session

Following the opening event were technical presentations and discussions on six priority thematic areas, listed in the table below. The conference was officially opened by Mrs Yenenesh Egu, Director of the Agricultural Extension Directorate of Ministry of Agriculture. She acknowledged the importance of the conference, which is relevant to Ethiopia where rice is one of the priority commodities next to wheat, oil crops and cotton. The importance of rice was presented both in terms of the opportunities and challenges it provides such 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. Mrs Yenenesh Egu reflected that the national and regional conference provides an opportunity to deliberate on the rice sector and identify key directions that will guide future intervention options.

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 their respective pre-recorded speeches, which focused on the importance of the regional conference, expectations, and future engagements of respective organisations in supporting rice sector development, both at the national and regional levels.

Thematic presentations, discussions, and suggested interventions

Following the opening event were presentations and discussions on the six streams in respective two key focus themes. The key outcomes of the presentations, discussions, and the suggested interventions, are summarised in the table below.

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"> • Research and innovation in rice mechanisation and post-harvest management is at its infant stage. • Very low level of rice mechanisation, considerable post-harvest losses and low competitiveness of domestic rice compared to imports. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of technology transfer through south-south cooperation, public-private partnerships mechanisms and private sector initiative, given the availability of innovations in rice mechanisation, especially in Asia • Need for sustainable human capacity building.
	Establishing regional centre of excellence for rice R&D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethiopia has established a National Rice Research and Training Centre through support from the Japan International Cooperation Agency. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to further capacitate the centre, design curricula for the diverse areas of specialisation, including mechanisation and post-harvest management.
Inclusive markets and value chains	Rice commercialisation and livelihood outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased commercialisation of rice has boosted livelihood options for all value chain actors in rural, peri-urban, and urban context. • Lack of integrated promotion (production, processing, human capacity, etc.) hinders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for integrated promotion of rice production and its commercialisation to new potential areas. • Create private incentive for improved participation.

Streams	Key themes	Key issues	Suggested interventions
		expansion of rice production to new areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote commercial rice farming.
	Marketing and value addition: the experience of rice processors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rice processors provide not only processing services, but services as marketing spots Marketing relation between producers and processors continues to affect quality paddy and milled rice production resulting in limited competitiveness of domestic rice to imports. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote improved marketing systems that will benefit all actors fairly and ensure competitiveness of domestic rice to imports
Rice-based livelihoods – gender and youth integration	Gendered livelihood dynamics in rice-based food systems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> About 11% of smallholder rice farming households are female headed who are less endowed with resources (land, labour, irrigation), achieve less productivity and limited access to public services (extension, credit, etc.). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The need to ensure provision of adequate public services to female farmers (extension, credit, etc.). Design women empowerment mechanisms in relation to resource ownership.
	Jobs and employment opportunities in the rice sector: opportunities for entrepreneurship for youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased rice commercialisation provides job and employment opportunities directly (farm and processing activities) and indirectly (emerging businesses), both for casual and permanent labour. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need to build the capacity of the youth to engage in different business opportunities rice offers (access to finance, capacity building, both technical and entrepreneurial).

Streams	Key themes	Key issues	Suggested interventions
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited exploitation of other opportunities that rice offers for youth (like mechanisation and plant protection, machine maintenance, etc.). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documentation and promotion of all possible business opportunities rice offers among youth (mainly graduates with no job).
Integrated rice Sector development in a changing climate	Integrated rice seed sector development: county experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The national rice seed strategy (2017) recognises several challenges of production, processing, storage, marketing and use of early generation rice seed and certified seed as a result the availability and use of quality seed is low. Quality Declared Seeds system is expected to enhance production and distribution of quality seed of available improved rice varieties. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The need to promote the development of integrated rice seed sector (informal, intermediate, and formal). Clear identification of roles and responsibilities of actors engaged in rice seed system (research, public and private seed producers).
	Enhancing sustainability and resilience in local & national rice system to cope with climate change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increases in the variability and trends of climate change in the rice ecosystem, affecting production systems (variety, agronomic practices, irrigation). Coverage of available technologies to the diverse climate change challenges is limited (heat, drought, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need to enhance the availability of responsive technologies to climate change challenges.

Streams	Key themes	Key issues	Suggested interventions
		flooding/submergence, and salinity tolerance and associated agronomic practices).	
Inclusive finance & investment	Improving access to credit & finance for small producers and processors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased demand of smallholders to invest (mechanisation, irrigation) but access to finance is very limited. Limited access to finance from the formal financial institutions, mainly banks for smallholders. Relatively, rice processors have better access to formal financial institutes but are often challenged with unavailability of required technologies, infrastructure (especially electricity and land). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need adaptation of experiences from Asian countries with well-developed smallholder dominated rice sector. Promotion of different financial schemes like grantee funding and financial literacy schemes.
	Rice sector financing & public-private partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rice is considered one of the priority commodities for commercial investment, but still there is limited investment in the rice sector (very few commercial farms) Limited infrastructure (road, electricity, water) has 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen the national rice stakeholders' platform. Ensure the implementation of existing incentives for inclusive finance and investment.

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		constrained rice sector financing/investment.	
Agricultural policy reforms	Agriculture policy reforms and foresight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rice considered as priority commodity linked with ensuring self-sufficiency (import substitution) • The implementation of developed rice R&D strategies is often challenged with the limitations related with human capacity, infrastructure, and institutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The need to strengthen the governance of the rice sector (operation of the national and regional steering and technical committees, National Rice stakeholders' platform, etc.)
	Rice, dietary changes, and household food & nutrition security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The increase of demand for rice has reduced the level of self-sufficiency from about 70% in 2008 to about 24% in 2019. • This is associated with the compatibility of rice into the local/traditional food system (<i>ingera</i>, or Ethiopia's staple food and local beverages) in addition to the European dishes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to expand rice production to different parts of the country to ensure food and nutrition security and boost self sufficiency

Contribution of Ethiopia national conference to the regional conference

The outcomes of the national conference were shared at East Africa Rice Conference, 2021 which was virtually held on 19th and 20th May 2021. Mr Abebe Haile, a participant, businessman in the rice sector reflected on a question on the transformation of East Africa's rice sector in by 2030. He stated that the following four issues need are important for the transformation of the rice sector:

- Ensuring that research innovates and produces varieties and mechanical technologies that suit the biophysical and socio-economic conditions in East Africa, and that the private sector is engaged in R&D of these technologies. In Ethiopia, the focus of research is more on variety development and the role of private actors is very limited.
- Engagement of the private sector in developing and marketing available technologies from the research institutions to ensure improved commercialisation which is inadequate in Ethiopia. The available improved varieties are often handled by public actors, reducing the speed and extent of adoption of available technologies.
- Ensuring that farmers have the knowledge and skill to use available technologies from the above two actions.
- Providing an enabling environment to include trade policies, infrastructure, financial and other services. If the rice sector is to be modernised, promotion of mechanisation is crucial, which requires easy access to finance, especially for private actors.

Responding to the question on the 'big idea that he could transform East Africa's rice sector', Mr Abebe noted that all participating African countries know what they need to do to enhance the performance of their respective rice sectors, since almost all countries have rice specific R&D strategies and that governments and development partners have shown commitments.

On 'the big obstacle' that might prevent rice sector transformation and how to overcome it', he noted that as an outcome of the national conference, the key challenge identified was limited implementation of the designed national rice R&D strategies and limited regional integrations.

Mr Abebe indicated that one 'key issue' that was missing from the conference discussions, which he thinks will need to be addressed to transform East Africa is that large commercial farms seem to be left out of such discussions, despite being key drivers in technology adoption and addressing challenge of self-sufficiency in rice.

Conclusion

Both the national and regional rice conferences gave an opportunity for relevant stakeholders to reflect on the status, existing challenges, and opportunities, and share their experiences on the countries' rice sectors.