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

Key messages and outcomes

Introduction

Stakeholders in East Africa's rice sector including government representatives, development partners, youth and farmers groups, researchers and academia, donors, and investors, as well as the private sector convened on 18th May 2021 to share experiences for the development of inclusive and sustainable rice systems in Kenya and the wider East Africa region. The Kenya national conference which was held simultaneous with national conferences in East African countries of Burundi, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda, was part of the East African Rice conference 2021 which took place from 18th – 20th May 2021.

The Kenya national conference held in Enashipai, Resort & Spa, Naivasha, shared common objectives with the virtual regional conference. The objectives were: (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 policymaking and implementation; and (iii) to boost multi-stakeholder collaboration toward achieving national and regional rice self-sufficiency, increasing food and nutrition security, and alleviating poverty through inclusive and sustainable production and commercialisation.

The opening session

The national conference was facilitated by Dr. Hannington Odame, Executive Director, Centre for African Bio-Entrepreneurship and Regional Hub Coordinator, APRA-East Africa; and Dr. Mary Mutembei, Head of Rice Promotion Program, Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries and Cooperatives (MoAFLF&C). Dr. Odame gave opening remarks and objectives while Dr. Mutembei walked participants through the programme and expected conference outputs and deliverables. This was followed by pre-recorded

opening remarks from Abdelbagi M. Ismail, IRRI Regional Representative for Africa, and Yusuke Haneishi, General Coordinator, CARD Secretariat, Nairobi. Abdel shared his reflections on ‘Working Together for a Rice Secure Africa’ while Yusuke reflected on the *Progress on the Implementation of the National Rice Development Strategies (NRDS) in Eastern Africa*.

The Agriculture Secretary, Mr Josephat Gathiru delivered the keynote speech on behalf of Prof. Hamadi Iddi Boga, Kenya’s Principal Secretary, State Department for Crop Development and Agricultural Research, MoALF&C. Mr. Gathiru shared a brief history of rice sector development in Kenya and envisioned where the sector wants to go. He recognized the importance of the conference, adding that it was relevant to Kenya’s need to reduce the value of rice imports which is currently Ksh25.1 billion. Important mentions were the Agricultural Sector Transformation and Growth Strategy (ASTGS), the National Rice Development Strategy (NRDS) and the rice promotion programme (RPP) of the Ministry of Agriculture. He emphasized the importance of mechanization, strong markets, and extension services in a bid to move Kenya to a food secure nation by 2030.

Giving reflections on behalf of the council of Governors CEO Mrs. Jacqueline Mogeni, Robert Kiteme, the technical-in-charge of agriculture sector, mentioned that Kenya has identified rice as a food security crop. He reported that the county governments had undertaken the following actions: 1) production of hybrid varieties 2) subsidizing mechanization, 3) establishment of irrigations facilities, 4) support to private sector, and 5) creation of cooperatives. He concluded by noting that the counties need to do more with regards to strengthening farmers’ capacities to deal with existing challenges, providing innovative approaches to water management, value addition, rice agribusiness finance and warehousing. Mr. Kiteme affirmed the county government’s commitment to domestication of conference outcomes with support from the national government and all stakeholders.

Thematic presentations, discussions, and suggested interventions

The opening session was followed by technical presentations and discussions on six priority thematic areas across six streams (A-F). The table below gives details of the presentations and discussions, and suggested interventions.

Table 1: Summary of themes, issues, and interventions

Streams	Key themes	Key issues	Suggested intervention
A: Rice research and development (R&D).	1) Innovations in rice mechanisation and post-harvest.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High post-harvest losses due to low mechanization at drying • Low quality milled rice due to varied moisture content. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adoption of an appropriate rice grain drier.
	2) Establishing regional/national centres of excellence for rice R&D.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for a national centre of excellence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of centres of excellence in Eastern and Western regions of the country.
B: Inclusive markets and value chains.	1) Rice commercialisation and livelihood outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited incentives for investment in the rice value chain • Low quality paddy rice leading to low returns to farmers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilize Warehouse Receipt System (WRS).
	2) Marketing and value addition: the experience of rice processors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequate marketing structure and function • Limited data to inform policy and planning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for improved efficiency and effectiveness in rice value chain.
C: Rice-based livelihoods – gender and youth integration.	1) Gendered livelihood dynamics in rice-based food systems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for policy that captures the social cultural context of rice farming communities. • Need for women and youth participation in management affairs of the sector. • Need for intergeneration partnerships and equity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of gender friendly policies and technologies responsive to social–cultural context.
	2) Jobs and employment opportunities in the rice sector: opportunities for entrepreneurships for youth.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth are not passionate on agriculture as a source of employment. • Need for conceptualization (making sense) on the available job opportunities in the rice value chain. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity building and mentorship on available opportunities in the rice value chain.

Streams	Key themes	Key issues	Suggested intervention
D: Integrated rice Sector development in a changing climate.	1) Integrated rice seed sector development: county experiences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Restrictive seed regulation and research – focuses on formal seed system only. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of an integrated seed regulatory framework.
	2) Enhancing sustainability and resilience in local & national rice system to cope with climate change.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited climate resilience rice varieties Limited rice varieties suitable for saline and sodic soils. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of rice seed varieties suitable changing climate and environment (Salinity, sodicity).
E: Inclusive finance & investment	1) Improving access to credit & finance for small producers and processors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inadequate data for planning and implementation Limited compliance to contractual agreements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhanced data collection analysis and reporting.
	2) Rice sector financing & public-private partnerships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weak partnerships arrangements in the rice value chain. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhancing partnerships and collaboration (public-private-producer-partnerships).
F: Agricultural policy reforms.	1) Agriculture policy reforms and foresight.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weak seed system Low quantity and quality of paddy rice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need for strengthening the formal seed system.
	2) Rice, dietary changes, and household food & nutrition security.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overreliance on rice as single source of food and lack of diversification in nutrition. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mainstreaming nutrition security in the rice value chain.

Contribution of the national conference to EARC 2021

The key outcomes of the national conference will contribute to finding solutions to some of the challenges that face Kenya's rice value chain including high cost of inputs and labour during production, low adoption of mechanization across the value chain and slow adoption of improved technologies by smallholder farmers, increased competitiveness of imported rice to domestic rice and its products and difficulty in the implementation of policies on rice grain trade through borders.

In so doing, the rice value chain will take advantage of existing opportunities such as availability of large irrigable areas for rice cultivation, high yielding, stress tolerant varieties (inbreds and hybrids) being

developed in the region, potential for large-scale cross border investment in rice value chain, growing demand for local non-aromatic rice in the region and existing government policies which favour domestic rice production and private investments. One of such policies is the Kenya National Rice Development Strategy (2019-2030) which aims to expand area under rice, increase productivity, improve competitiveness of locally produced rice and promote private sector participation in the rice value chain.

The outcomes were virtually presented at the regional EARC 2021 conference on 19th and 20th of May 2021. Collectively, these national and regional outcomes will contribute to the realization of an East African rice strategy, and feed into regional and continental discussions on sustainable livelihoods through rice agri-food systems in Kenya and beyond.