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Research Institute



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

Key messages and outcomes

Introduction

On 18th May 2021, Rwanda National Rice Development Strategy (NRDS) taskforce and resource people in the country's rice sector gathered in a national workshop to discuss the key policy reforms which are envisioned in the NRDS 2 (2020-2030) for the transformation of the rice sub-sector in Rwanda.

The national workshop was facilitated by Dr Murekezi Charles, former Director General (DG) of Agriculture Development, Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources (MINAGRI) and the Focal Point for NRDS taskforce and CARD initiative in Rwanda. Dr Murekezi introduced the objectives of the 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. He also shared the conference agenda in the context of the regional rice conference which was a build-up of the national conference which took place from 19th – 20th May 2021.

The opening session

The opening session was followed by technical presentations and discussions on six priority thematic areas, listed in the table below. The Workshop was officially opened by Dr Charles Murekezi, DG, Agriculture Development, MINAGRI. Murekezi appreciated the tireless effort and contributions of the taskforce in the development of NRDS 2 and encouraged the members who attended the workshop to also contribute to the workshop discussions to identify key challenges and interventions. He noted that

the conference provides an opportunity to deliberate on key directions that will guide future interventions on rice which is an important crop in Rwanda and the entire East Africa. Murekezi stated the key pillars of Rwanda's NRDS 2 to include i) enhancing rice production and productivity through research and extension; (ii) increasing total factor productivity and resilience of rice farms to climate change; (iii) facilitating sustainable and market-driven production systems, and (iv) improving policy and institutional environments for increasing the private sector investments in rice.

As part of the opening session, the pre-recorded speeches by 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, were shared. These presentations gave expectations from the conference and future engagements of the respective organisations in supporting rice sector development both at the national and regional level.

Thematic presentations, discussions, and suggested interventions

Presentations and discussions were made in six streams across two key focus themes. The key outcomes of the presentations, discussions, and 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"> • Small plot sizes. • Inadequate machinery adapted for rice cultivation. (Marshlands and post-harvest activities). • Limited skills in the mechanisation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consolidation of small plots to facilitate mechanisation. • Research and Development: Adaptation of machinery for rice farm operations). • Capacity building mechanisation (maintenance).
	Establishing regional centre of excellence for rice R & D.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient marketable adapted rice varieties (high yielding, aromatic, and long grain). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen breeding for market rice varieties.

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Blanket fertilizer recommendations. Lack of linkage with existing regional centre of excellence and absence of national centre of excellence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research for develop appropriate fertilizer recommendation. Drawing new terms of agreement of collaboration with regional centre of excellence. Create centre of excellence.
Inclusive markets and value chains.	Rice commercialisation and livelihood outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Productivity (increased 3-fold, but yield gaps exist). High cost of production. Smallholders dominate rice producers posing market linkages challenges. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve access and use of high-quality seed, adopt appropriate fertilizers, mechanisation, reduce post-harvest loss (to increase productivity and reduce cost of production). Strengthen farmers in cooperatives (attract public infrastructure, aggregate produce, and easily access markets).
	Marketing and value addition: the experience of rice processors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dominance of short grain (not preferred). Price: high production and processing cost (underutilization of mills). Milling recovery and quality low (mixing of grades & Illegal sub-machines). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prioritize increasing access to long grain and aromatic varieties. Reduce cost of production and improve processing capacity. Improve postharvest handling to improve quality of paddy rice; enforce of regulations & standards.
Rice-based livelihoods –	Gendered livelihood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tailored extension training and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women have adequate representation in decision

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gender and youth integration	dynamics in rice-based food systems	<p>information for women is limited.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women are involved in most rice cultivation activities. • Women play multiple roles and chores in the household resulting in increased burden and reduced effectiveness 	<p>making organs in rice cooperatives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop extension training programs tailored to women. • Develop and/or introduce technologies to reduce drudgery and save time: • Early child development centres could be strengthened to provide care for child during farming hours.
	Jobs and employment opportunities in the rice sector: opportunities for entrepreneurship for youth.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The extension services are under supplied. • Low capacities of cooperatives and WUA to manage irrigation infrastructure. • Post-harvest mechanisation demand is increasing a changing climate. • Proximity access to inputs still low. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth have opportunities to provide services in extension, capacity building of cooperatives and WUA in OM&M of irrigation infrastructure and input distribution.
Integrated rice Sector development in a changing climate.	Integrated rice seed sector development: county experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of appropriate equipment of harvest, processing, and handling. • Weak linkages of seed value chain actors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research and Development: Appropriate machinery • Professionalization of value chain actors. • Improve awareness of quality seed of good performing varieties.

Streams	Key themes	Key issues	Suggested interventions
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low adoption of quality seed of high performing varieties. 	
	Enhancing sustainability and resilience in local & national rice system to cope with climate change.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flooding of marshlands. Insufficient water for paddy rice during dry spells. Emergence of new diseases. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Land husbandry of watershed management. Improvement and rehabilitation of reservoirs (dams). Introduction of new pesticides and breeding for disease resistance.
Inclusive finance & investment	Improving access to credit & finance for small producers and processors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low levels of agricultural finance. High interest rates, Agriculture related risks. Low private sector investment, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tailored agriculture financial productions, longer grace period and guarantee schemes. De-risking facilities (agriculture insurance, matching grants, catchment management). Public investments in public goods (infrastructure, roads, electricity, and technical assistance).
	Rice sector financing & public-private partnerships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low levels of agriculture loans. High interest rates. Agriculture related risks. Low private sector investment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tailored agriculture financial productions, longer grace period and guarantee schemes. De-risking facilities (agriculture insurance, matching grants, catchment management). Public investments in public goods (infrastructure, roads, electricity, and technical assistance).

Streams	Key themes	Key issues	Suggested interventions
Agricultural policy reforms	Agriculture policy reforms and foresight.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability, access and use of quality inputs still inadequate. • Low levels of mechanisation due to small plots. • Improve the quality of locally produced rice (mixed grades and sub-standard machines). • Inadequate financing and low private sector investment. • Rice value chain integration inadequate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen inspection, certification, and registrations systems. • Improve affordability through time-bound incentives (subsidies). • Develop policy implement consolidation of rice plots to allow mechanisation. • Enforcement of standards. • Wider implementation of product and system process certification schemes. • Operationalization of the private sector leveraging strategy. • Establish a rice value chain platform of rice stakeholders.
	Rice, dietary changes, and household food & nutrition security.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in rice consumption accompanied changing preferences (long grain and aromatic varieties). • Inadequate rice processed products. • Absence of nutrient dense rice varieties to address nutrition. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis on breeding for long grain and aromatic varieties. • Innovations and investment in rice processing and value addition. • Breeding for nutritional higher nutritive value and bio fortification.

Conclusion

The national and regional rice conferences appreciated the EARC organising team for providing an opportunity to reflect on the status, challenges, opportunities, and experiences in the country and East Africa's rice sector.