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

Key messages and outcomes

Introduction

On 18th May 2021, Uganda national rice conference gathered senior government officials, experts, researchers, and businessmen to deliberate on ways to grow the rice sub sector. The participants were drawn from East Africa's sector players such as Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), rice development cooperation projects, rice association of Uganda (RAU) and private rice producers, processors, and exporters. The government officials were drawn from the country's ministries of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF), Gender, Labour and Social Development (MoGLSD), Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MoFPED), and the National Agriculture Research Organization (NARO).

The national conference was facilitated by Mr. Richard Kabuleta, Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, Agriculture Planning, Policy and Development, MAAIF. Mr. Alex Lwakuba, Commissioner, Crop Production Department introduced the objectives of both the national 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 the national and regional rice self-sufficiency, increasing food and nutrition security, and alleviating poverty through inclusive and sustainable production and commercialisation. Lwakuba also provided the conference agenda for the regional conference which was held from 19th–20th May 2021 to explore the outcome of the national conference.

The opening session

The opening session was followed by technical presentations and discussions on six priority thematic areas, listed in the table below. The conference was officially opened by Mr. Ronald Ssegawa Gyagenda, undersecretary, MAAIF, who represented the Permanent Secretary. Mr. Ssegawa acknowledged that rice is important for food and income security in Uganda and the entire East Africa where it is among the commodities which have been prioritised by the government of Uganda. He applauded the organisers of the conference noting that it will go a long way in boosting rice linkages across the region. In his remarks, Mr. Fukase Yutaka, chief representative, JICA Uganda highlighted the importance of partnerships, noting the great opportunity presented by the conference in discussing the rice situation and how best to develop its industry, not only in Uganda but the entire East Africa. Dr. John Jaggwe, Executive Director, AGRA, made the keynote speech.

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

Thematic presentations, discussions, and suggested interventions

Following the opening session, discussions were held in six streams across two 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">Value chain actors need efficient and highly productive agro-engineering technologies to operate profitably.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Need to develop and promote partnerships to disseminate and scale out technologies for the rice value chain actors.

Streams	Key themes	Key issues	Suggested interventions
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NARO has developed agro-machinery innovations that need to be scaled up and disseminated. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need to regulate and ensure quality of available technologies.
	Establishing regional centre of excellence for rice R & D.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue being an inter-regional destination for training. Need to optimize research funding. Need to strengthen organizational frameworks and cross border collaboration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote digital innovations in rice value chain. Strengthen the institutional framework for capacity building of actors along the value chain.
Inclusive markets and value chains.	Rice commercialisation and livelihood outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficult to evaluate livelihood outcomes of different interventions. Limited commercialisation of rice producing households. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is need to improve collection and dissemination of rice data related to livelihoods.
	Marketing and value addition: the experience of rice processors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rice associations are not strong enough to effectively engage the government on the policies. Domestic production has been falling over the past 5 years while importation is increasing. Falling prices of rice paddy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a national rice platform that brings together the rice value chain actors. Need to engage with the relevant government agencies to review and have a harmonized policy on inputs on rice. Build the capacity of the rice associations to engage

Streams	Key themes	Key issues	Suggested interventions
			the government on the implementation of favourable policies.
Rice-based livelihoods – gender and youth integration.	Gendered livelihood dynamics in rice-based food systems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The sector is highly dominated by women at production while men dominate marketing. Gender disparities in incomes for men and women. Food security and nutrition undermined by these gender disparities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote labour saving technologies to increase youth and women involvement Support youth and women participation in decision making at household and policy levels. Strengthen marketing capacity of producer associations and cooperatives.
	Jobs and employment opportunities in the rice sector: opportunities for entrepreneurship for youth.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 78% of Uganda’s population below 35% with a mean average age of 16 years; poverty level is 21% 61% employed in agriculture. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Harmonise government and partner approaches to increase employment among the youths. Support business development capacity building programmes targeting youth.
Integrated rice sector development in a changing climate.	Integrated rice seed sector development: county experiences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rice is omitted from the regulations on Quality Declared Seed (QDS). Limited quantities of foundation seed for most rice varieties. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support large scale rice producers to engage in production of QDS. Review regulations and restore rice on the list of enterprises for QDS.

Streams	Key themes	Key issues	Suggested interventions
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roll out a digital seed tracking system.
	Enhancing sustainability and resilience in local & national rice system to cope with climate change.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rice development initiatives are not fully harmonized with climate sustainability best practices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote sustainable rice farming.
Inclusive finance & investment	Improving access to credit & finance for small producers and processors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low capacity by smallholder farmers to access the available agriculture financing mechanisms. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ACF is under review to incorporate the needs of the value chain actors.
	Rice sector financing & public-private partnerships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government and partners are heavily investing in the rice value chain, but these investments are not harmonized. The National Rice Steering Committee is inactive. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing government investments with support from ADB, IDB, JICA should be streamlined The National Rice Steering Committee should be revived and strengthened. Fast track the conclusion of the National Agricultural Finance and Insurance Policy.
Agricultural policy reforms.	Agriculture policy reforms and foresight.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The review and conclusion of the National Rice Development Strategy has not been concluded. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fast track the completion and adoption of the National Rice Development Strategy.

Streams	Key themes	Key issues	Suggested interventions
	Rice, dietary changes, and household food & nutrition security.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rice has limited dietary diversification. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote integration of protein rich foods like rice. Promote innovative nutrition enhancing technologies like Bio-fortification.

Conclusion

The national rice conference gave an opportunity for stakeholders to reflect on the status, existing challenges and share experiences on opportunities in East Africa’s rice sector.