

DISCUSSION: IMPROVING RICE PRODUCTION IN AFRICA

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | | |
|------|--|---|
| I. | GENERAL INFORMATION..... | 1 |
| II. | INTRODUCTION OF THE TOPIC | 1 |
| III. | LIST OF CONTRIBUTIONS | 2 |
| | Contribution by George Kent, Department of Political Science, University of Hawaii, USA | 2 |
| | Contribution by Xavier Rakotonjanahary, Rice breeding coordinator, FOFIFA, Madagascar . | 2 |
| | Contribution by Manuel Cervantes, Agricultural Economist, Nicaragua..... | 3 |
| | Contribution by Prof. Ignatius Onimawo, Biochemistry Department Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Nigeria..... | 3 |
| | Contribution by Dr M Yusuf Ali, Principal Scientific Officer On-Farm Research Division, BARI, Bangladesh | 3 |

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Duration: 03.06 - 16. 06.2008

Number of participants: 5

Number of Contributions: 5

II. INTRODUCTION OF THE TOPIC

There is an interesting debate about rice in Africa, prompted by the Japan International Co-operation Agency (JICA) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) partnership with the Alliance for Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) initiative currently being rolled out.

This initiative relies mainly on the NERICA rice variety, devised by crossing Asian and African native rice strains. NERICA is not a genetically engineered rice variety but while it has some distinct

agronomic advantages, including higher yield, better control of weeds etc, it also has some downsides such as promoting this practice while neglecting or sidelining other varieties of crop or practices of agronomy that may also offer future advantages in feeding Africa.

Nevertheless NERICA has already shown some notable successes in several West African nations, where most of the continents' rice is grown.

There are other initiatives which should also be investigated and experimented with in the region. One such is the SRI, or system of rice intensification, devised by a Jesuit priest in Madagascar in the 1970s and 80s. This system has increased rice yield from around 2 tonne per hectare to around 8 tonnes per hectare in various climate zones, all while reducing water demand.

There is more on SRI at these addresses - <http://ciifad.cornell.edu/SRI/origins.html> and <http://www.springerlink.com/content/vg37m54225284510/>

It would be irresponsible for researchers to concentrate on methods of food production that hold as yet unquantified risks while failing to investigate and perhaps incorporate other equally fecund opportunities in developing the agricultural potential of Africa and elsewhere.

Best

Glenn Ashton

www.ekogaia.org

III. LIST OF CONTRIBUTIONS

Contribution by George Kent, Department of Political Science, University of Hawaii, USA

Glenn Ashton says, "It would be irresponsible for researchers to concentrate on methods of food production that hold as yet unquantified risks while failing to investigate and perhaps incorporate other equally fecund opportunities in developing the agricultural potential of Africa and elsewhere."

I agree that it would be irresponsible for **agriculture** researchers to focus so narrowly. But, taking a broader view, I see no reason why people concerned with problems of malnutrition in the world should limit their focus to methods of food production. Many methods of food production are known, and huge quantities of food are produced. Globally, there is not a shortage of food in the world.

If the interest is mainly in providing a better livelihood for low income people, why limit the focus to food production? Indeed, opportunities might be found outside agriculture altogether.

Where people have money in their pockets, food shows up.

Aloha, George

Contribution by Xavier Rakotonjanahary, Rice breeding coordinator, FOFIFA, Madagascar

I am Xavier Rakotonjanahary, a plant breeder and rice breeding coordinator at the National Center of Research Applied for Rural Development (FOFIFA in Malagasy acronym) in Madagascar. This is my first comment to the Forum while I followed up most of the discussions on this very informative and useful forum.

I agree with George saying that "Many methods of food production are known, and huge quantities of food are produced", and "indeed, opportunities might be found outside agriculture altogether". However, I would say that globally, there should not be a shortage of food in the world, because the reality is quite different in many parts of the world! Fortunately, at this moment, the world summit on food crisis is going on and hopefully, some improvements will come out from political decisions. There are of course, other opportunities from outside agriculture such as nutrition education, increase of GDP, etc,...

Coming back to the SRI and the Nerica rice for improving rice production in Africa, they may be classified as new technologies which can contribute to higher agricultural productivity; **the challenge is how to adapt and scale up (or adopt) such practices for all situations**, as Glenn mentioned there are some downsides on Nerica lines. Same thing is for SRI on water management which is the main challenge for SRI application (the best management is to maintain 1 cm water depth on evenly puddled paddy field). I think for a technology to be fully successfully applied and scaled up, **conditions or prerequisites should be offered or fulfilled**

before implementation, which implies that there should be many alternatives or options to be envisioned and analyzed.

Best.

Xavier Rakotonjanahary

Contribution by Manuel Cervantes, Agricultural Economist, Nicaragua.

I am commenting for the first time in this forum, and I read a lot of interesting issues and experiences on food.

The issue of improving rice production so far have been established through different mean, either genetic, conventional inputs--green revolution as a primary pushing--and now using genetically modified crops, where rice is getting into. Perhaps to increase rice production is not the problem but to distribute it along the distance between communities. Who will cover that cost?.

Although the WFP helps to distribute food--grains, there still exists a variety of local aspects to consider about food consumption; In Asia; rice, in America; Maize, england; Potatoe, and so forth. Is only rice nutritious enough for people to develop? or just to keep people alive.

I heard two years ago from an African specialist in rice production, that they have developed a highly productive variety of rice, But they still are having serious trouble to help people have the rice just on time. They still have famine in a lot of communities.

Do we really need emphasize talking about production or we should focus on another important issue such as the way the WFP facilitate the production get to the poor people, since the technology is not available for poor people to increase their yields and production. Do poor people in developing countries needs also the subsidies developed countries give their farmers?.

Manuel Cervantes

Contribution by Prof. Ignatius Onimawo, Biochemistry Department Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Nigeria

I think the issue of improving rice production in Africa has many dimensions but I will only look at two.

Firstly **increased rice production does not automatically improve consumption and nutrition** of the people. A major factor is access which is determined amongst others by the purchasing power. There is no market in Nigeria that you will not find rice. The question is how many people can really afford it. The law of demand and supply only hold sway in a perfectly competitive market. Over 70% of Nigerians live below US\$1 per day.

Secondly, rice became a staple food in Nigeria only from the 1980s. Prior to this Nigerians in the South consumed roots and tubers from cassava, yams, cocoyams etc as their main staples while Nigerians in the North consumed grains such as maize, sorghum, millet etc as their staples. **If we return to our former foods we shall be better for it.** Statistics show that the level of malnutrition started being on the increase from the 80s when this craze for rice began. The situation is quite complex.

Prof. Ignatius Onimawo

Contribution by Dr M Yusuf Ali, Principal Scientific Officer On-Farm Research Division, BARI, Bangladesh

Dear Prof Onimawo,

I believe you are perfectly right. I think rice is the most costly cereal crop which needs maximum water, endangering the environment. Even in Bangladesh where average annual rainfall is around 1600 mm (though mostly in rainy season -June to Sept), due to excessive use of ground water for rice in winter season serious arsenic problem (in water) has occurred, endangering the health of million people. Yes general people intake of rice/food/calorie depends on purchasing capacity, not on supply. Being unable to purchase rice at Taka 35-42/kg poor people are consuming cheap maize flour (Taka 16/kg) as their staple food in maize growing districts of Bangladesh, though maize is mostly regarded as poultry feed. I also believe that **in Africa traditional food** (as you mentioned) could bring **more ensured food security** to common people. Therefore, emphasis should be given to develop rainfed/low water requiring rice cultivars along with production of traditional crops. (Conversion: 1 USD = 69 Bangladesh Taka).

Regards,

Dr M Yusuf Ali