

SUMMARY OF THE FSN FORUM DISCUSSION

IMPROVING RICE PRODUCTION IN AFRICA

FROM 3RD JUN. TO 16TH JUN. 2008

I. ISSUES RAISED

- 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 is currently being rolled out (G. Ashton). The issue of improving rice production so far have been established through **different means**, either genetic, conventional inputs, green revolution as a primary pushing, and now using genetically modified crops (M. Cervantes).
- It would be irresponsible for agricultural 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 (G. Ashton)

II. OPINIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

- Rice production increase **does not** automatically **improve** the consumption and nutrition of people (I. Onimawo). People's intake of rice/food/calorie depends on their **purchasing capacity** (their **access to food**), not on the supply (M Y. Ali, G. Kent).
- Critics on the use of rice in Africa:
 - In Africa **traditional food** could bring more ensured food security to common people. A return to traditional staples should be advisable for this reason (M Y. Ali, I. Onimawo). E.g. the level of malnutrition in Nigeria started increasing from the 80s, when rice became a staple food instead of other traditional foods(I. Onimawo).
 - Rice is the **most costly** cereal crop which needs maximum water, endangering the environment (M Y. Ali).
- Rice is only one of the staple foods (rice, maize, potatoes etc) and should not be considered as the only choice for local production and consumption (M. Cervantes). **Emphasis** should be given to develop rainfed/low water requiring rice cultivars along with production of traditional crops (M Y. Ali).
- People concerned with problems of food security should not limit their focus to methods of food production. Globally, there is not shortage of food in the world and opportunities might be found outside agriculture altogether (G. Kent, X. Rakotonjanahary).
- The challenge is how to adapt and scale up new (and good) production technologies for all situations. 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 (X. Rakotonjanahary).
- Distribution of food and facilitating access to production technologies for the poor are as important as the issue of improving food production (M. Cervantes).

III. RICE VARIETIES/SYSTEMS WITH HIGH PRODUCTIVITY

- **NERICA: Devised** by crossing Asian and African native rice strains. It's successful in several West African nations, where most of the continents' rice is grown. Agronomic **advantages**: higher yield, better control of weeds etc. Agronomic **disadvantages**: the neglect or sidelining of other crop varieties or practices of agronomy that may also offer future advantages in feeding Africa (G. Ashton).
- **SRI (System of Rice Intensification):**
 - **Devised** by a Jesuit priest in Madagascar in the 1970s and 80s (G. Ashton).
 - **Water management** is the main challenge for SRI application (X. Rakotonjanahary).
 - Agronomic **advantages**: rice yield increase (from around 2 tonne per hectare to around 8 tonnes, in various climate zones), reduction of water demand (G. Ashton).

IV. REFERENCES

- Springer Netherlands, 1999. **Agroecological Implications of the System of Rice Intensification (SRI) in Madagascar**. Available at: <http://www.springerlink.com/content/vg37m54225284510/> (G. Ashton).
- SIR NET. **The system of rice intensification**. Available at: <http://ciifad.cornell.edu/SRI/index.html> (G. Ashton).