



UCORIRWA/ J.Bavugamenshi

UCORIRWA trainers teaching demonstration farmers to plant rice following SRI methodology

Making Rice a Cash Cow in Rwanda

Rice production has become a significant component of the agricultural sector in Rwanda. IFAD-financed projects assist in the introduction of intensive cultivation methods.

Owing to support by the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources (MINAGRI), the area under rice cultivation in Rwanda rose from 3 549 ha in the year 2000 to currently about 12 000 ha, all of which is irrigated. Subsequently, rice production in Rwanda has increased to about 55 000 t in 2007. It is a profitable enterprise as far as the utilization of scarce cultivated marshlands and labour is

concerned. In Rwanda, rice is mainly cultivated by resource-poor smallholders who grow the crop through farmer-cooperative schemes set up by the Government. The 12 000 ha is cultivated by about 62 000 farmers operating under 55 cooperatives, with an average of 0.2 ha per household. The domestic rice consumption and hence the demand for milled rice grains has also risen substantially. Despite the steep production increase, the country currently imports about 30% of the rice it consumes from countries such as Tanzania, India, Vietnam and Thailand. Thus there is an urgent need to improve the total crop productivity.

SRI in Rwanda

The system of rice Intensification (SRI), a collection of cropping strategies and production principles that are reported to boost yields, while reducing external agricultural inputs, was introduced in Rwanda in 2006. Since then, the system has been adopted by the rice farmers participating in the IFAD-funded Support Project for the Strategic Plan for the Transformation of Agriculture (PAPSTA) implemented by MINAGRI, and has proved to be both successful and popular. Two project-supported areas (Kibaza in Bugesera District and Rwabutazi in Kirehe District) have particularly shown the potential of SRI. In Kibaza, rise yields have increased from 4 t/ha to at least 6 t/ha with a total production of 135 t. In

Rwabutazi, rice yields have increased from 4 t/ha to at least 7 t/ha with a total production of 401 t in 2008. This achievement is attributed to the work done by the Union of Rice Cooperatives of Rwanda (UCORIRWA), a service provider for PAPSTA since September 2007. The total number of rice farmers in both marshlands, currently 2 000, is anticipated to increase with the project-financed rehabilitation of the irrigation infrastructure. To reach these farmers, UCORIRWA is employing 5 extension workers and has trained some 16 demonstration farmers. Furthermore, the replication of SRI in the Rural Sector Support Project (RSSP) supported marshlands has already begun, with encouraging possibilities for replication countrywide.



Demonstration farmers preparing land as instructed in SRI practice.

Factors Hindering the Full Potential of SRI in Project Marshlands

Despite the notable increase in yields, a number of challenges and constraints appear to hinder the maximum productivity potential of SRI in Rwandan marshlands:

a) Access to seeds - Due to accelerated reclamation of marshland, the area under rice has gone up significantly in the country, increasing the demand for rice seeds. To overcome seed shortages, farmers are growing seeds of poorly performing rice varieties available to them. In general, these seeds are comparatively low-yielding, low in culinary-quality and fetch low prices. The untimely access to good quality seeds has also been reported to limit farmers' ability to start the season on time and obtain the high yields possible with SRI.

b) Irrigation water - The equitable distribution of water is a major constraint amongst rice growers, particularly during the dry season and for farmers whose fields are located at the lower end of a marshland. In new marshlands, water is sufficient but often not distributed equitably or technical difficulties cut farmers off. Furthermore, the deterioration of the drainage and irrigation infrastructure often results in the silting of canals, and the destruction of levelled plots.

c) Marketing - the joint purchase of inputs and the marketing of produce is difficult to organise. For instance, of the 135 t of rice produced by farmers in Kibaza in 2008, their cooperative was only able to market 6.2 t. Producers had to market the rest individually, realising relatively low prices.

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