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**Tuesday, July 19, 2011**

**FRONT PAGE » Up country » Upcountry insight: Rice farmers target increased production by 2009**

**Upcountry insight: Rice farmers target increased production by 2009**



BY JOSEPH MUDINGU

**EAsTERN PROVINCE**

GATSIBO — Rice farmers in Gatsibo district have taken advantage of reclaimed plots of land by the government and other Non governmental organisations to increase their production.

Many cooperatives have sprung up to cultivate the crop, reportedly said to be the main source of directly consumed calories for about half the world's population, 90 percent of which is produced and consumed in Asia.

Coprroz Ntende rice cooperative, cultivating in Ntende swamp that stretches from Rugarama sector to Akagera national park through Rwibogo sector, has taken a big step in the field of rice growing and aims at doubling its production by 2009.

The president of the cooperative, James Karangwa says that many residents from the three sectors of Rugarare, Rwibogo and Gitoke are today benefiting from rice growing; after ADRA reclaimed the land in 2003.

Despite tremendous advances in global agricultural production, many countries still face immense challenges in supplying sufficient food for their growing population.

In Africa, for example, projected demand will require tripling of the current agricultural output over the next 30 years.

Indeed, a country's capacity to produce surplus food remains among the key distinctions between developed and developing countries. In the mid-1990s, an estimated 800 million people faced food shortages across the developing countries.

Many rice growing areas in Rwanda are targeting to increase their production by adopting the new methods of growing rice which requires controlling field water levels and enough spacing of rice plants.



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Contrary to popular belief, rice is not an aquatic plant and the main reason it is submerged in water is for weeds control.

Patrick Hishamunda, the agronomist responsible for educating rice growers in Rugarama says the new methods if adopted would increase production and would require less land.

“Conventional methods of rice cultivation use 60-70 kilos of seeds per hectare; the new method requires just five kilos per hectare,” he said.

The WWF report suggests that major rice-producing countries such as India, China and Indonesia should convert at least 25 per cent of their current rice cultivation to the new system ‘rice intensification’ method (SRI) by 2025.

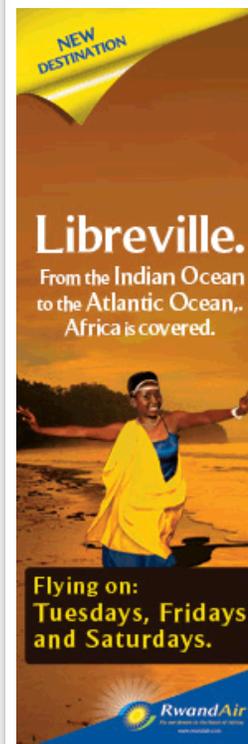
This would not only massively reduce the use of water but also help ensure food security.

The manager of Coproriz Ntende, J. De dieu Sinzamuahara says that the cooperative today produces three tones per hectare making a total of 708 tones out of the 236 hectares in a season.

“We are going to more than double our produce by the end of next year because more land is going to be reclaimed and with the new method we intend to produce between five and six tones per hectare,” Sinzamuahara said.

Focusing on India, a country which faces a major water crisis, yet has the world’s largest area under rice cultivation and a rapidly growing population; WWF reports that the ‘rice intensification’ method has helped increase yields by over 30 percent.

The Rural Sector Project (RSP) has taken over the responsibility of reclaiming the remaining



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hectares of the swamp that stretches through three sectors in Gatsibo district pushing the total number of hectares to 600.

The cooperative has plans of building a rice factory through a loan from BRD to meet the estimated increase in production after the remaining hectares have been reclaimed next year.

Apart from increasing production of rice in Gatsibo, people in the rural areas have acquired knowledge and skills in marketing of their produce through seminars sponsored by the farmers' cooperative.

Other farmers that have embarked on extensive rice growing in Gatsibo are in sectors of Murambi, Kiramuruzi and Kiziguro that have adopted the newly reclaimed swamp of Kanyonyomba with over 400 hectares.

If Rwanda is to replicate this new method across the country, there will be a remarkable increase in quality rice production which would attract competitive prices on the world market.

The latest UNEP report on the state of the planet revealed that crop production has improved over the past 20 years, but it does not correspond with population growth.

In fact world cereal production per person peaked in the 1980s, and has since slowly decreased.

In these circumstances, the reported success of a new method of rice growing that could save hundreds of billions of cubic meters of water and increase food security is welcome news.

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