



# Banking on Africa's rice potential

by Savitri Mohapatra



*The 3rd Africa Rice Congress issued a clarion call to increase investments in Africa's rice sector so that the continent can realize its rice promise*



The 3rd Africa Rice Congress, held in Yaoundé, Cameroon, in October 2013, emphasized the need to invest in the modernization and mechanization of Africa's rice industry and aggregation of farm output, while safeguarding land rights of smallholders and improving livelihoods. There was also a call to establish a world-class research infrastructure in Africa to identify rice genetic materials for resistance to major biotic and abiotic stresses and to strengthen the rice sector development hub network as well as other rice-related research, extension, and capacity building for greater and faster impact across the rice value chain.

under the aegis of the Cameroonian government.

"We recognize the need to scale up our investments for modernizing the rice sector and also increase our support to research and extension," stated Cameroon Prime Minister Philemon Yang, in his opening message that was delivered by Cameroon Minister of Scientific Research and Innovation Dr. Madeleine Tchuente.

The Congress took stock of advances in rice science and technology and provided opportunities to discuss institutional innovations, policies, partnerships, and investments needed to ensure that rice sector development becomes a veritable engine for smallholder and agribusiness development and economic growth in Africa.



Rice has become more critical to achieving food security and political stability on the continent. Despite rapid growth in rice production in sub-Saharan Africa (8.4% per year) from 2007 to 2012, the African continent continues to rely heavily on the world market to satisfy increasing consumption demand for rice, with imports reaching 12 million tons of milled rice in 2012, costing more than US\$5 billion.

"This will not only contribute to food security, but will also help reduce rice imports and create attractive employment across the rice value chain," said AfricaRice Deputy Director General Marco Wopereis. "Let's not forget that, over the next 15 years, an estimated 330 million young Africans will be looking for a job."

These issues were debated in a Ministerial Policy Dialogue—organized with support from FAO—involving ministers from Chad, Cameroon, The Gambia, Mali, and Senegal.



## Engine of Africa's growth

Themed *Rice Science for Food Security through Smallholder and Agribusiness Development in Africa*, the Congress was organized by the Africa Rice Center (AfricaRice), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and the Institute of Agricultural Research for Development of Cameroon (IRAD)

## Special events

Private-sector and research and development partners showcased their work in the Congress

Exhibition, which featured a special section on small-scale rice mechanization. A Cameroon Rice Day allowed participants to visit the IRAD research facilities in Yaoundé.

*Realizing Africa's Rice Promise*, a new book jointly published by AfricaRice and CABI, was also released as part of the special events of the Congress. The book provides a comprehensive overview of Africa's rice sector and ongoing rice research and development activities, indicating priorities for action on how to realize the promise of rice in a sustainable and equitable manner.

A side event focused on a training course in science journalism relating to rice R&D activities in Africa was organized with support from the Global Rice Science Partnership (GRiSP), the CGIAR Research Program on Rice.

A plaque of appreciation was presented to Cameroon President Paul Biya for the support of the Cameroon government to the rice sector. A distinguished service award was presented to Dr. Papa Abdoulaye Seck, former AfricaRice director general and current minister of agriculture and rural equipment of Senegal.

### Promising initiatives and exchanges

During the closing ceremony, awards were presented for best papers, best posters, most promising young scientist, and outstanding local entrepreneurs from Africa in seed production and local manufacturing of small-scale machinery.

Immediately after the closure of the Africa Rice Congress, the 2013 Global Forum of GRiSP was held, at which updates on global and African rice initiatives were presented, followed by sessions on *Bilateral support for African rice* and *Coordinating investments in rice development in Africa* involving a broad range of investors interested in Africa's rice sector.

"Such exchanges will help us find ways to leverage opportunities and make the most of our resources and knowledge to boost Africa's rice sector," said GRiSP Director Bas Bouman.

More than 650 participants attended the Congress from 60 countries—including 35 African countries. They comprised rice farmers, seed producers, rice processors, input dealers, agricultural machinery manufacturers, representatives from agricultural ministries, national and international rice research and extension communities, nongovernment organizations, donors, and other development partners. 🌾

*Ms. Mohapatra is the head of the Marketing and Communications at AfricaRice.*



The Congress formulated the following recommendations for governments, farmer organizations, civil society, the private sector, R&D partners, regional economic communities, and donors:

#### Investments in Africa's rice sector

- Invest in modernization and mechanization of Africa's farming and in aggregation of farm output, while safeguarding land rights of smallholders and improving livelihoods;
- Strengthen farmer organizations to ensure that farmers capture a fair share of value added in the value chain;
- Stimulate the development of public-private partnerships and small-scale enterprises, and provide technical and business training to Africa's rapidly growing cadre of unemployed youth to find jobs in the rice sector;
- Combine supply-shifting, demand-lifting, and value-adding investments to ensure rapid and sustainable development of affordable rice and rice-based products for different consumers;
- Consider the establishment of strategic regional rice reserves, relying on national stocks, but with coordination at the regional level to reduce price volatility;
- Establish minimum and maximum import tariffs agreed upon at the regional level that allow for raising import tariffs in times of low world market prices and vice versa;
- Develop sustainable seed systems through coherent policies, strategies, and functional public-private partnerships.

#### Investments in rice R&D and capacity building

- Foster greater regional and international collaboration on the development and diffusion of improved varieties, ecological intensification of rice farming,

- and management of abiotic and biotic stresses in the face of climate change to sustainably increase rice production;
- Establish world-class research infrastructure in Africa to evaluate rice genetic material for major stresses and consumer demand, and ensure that progress made worldwide in rice genetics and breeding can be captured;
- Strengthen and expand the rice sector development hub network and facilitate rice knowledge exchange to achieve greater and more rapid impact across the rice value chain;
- Urge African governments and their development partners to substantially strengthen the retention and training of new research and extension staff, while updating agricultural curricula in vocational training schools and universities;
- Urge African governments to comply with the Maputo Declaration and increase the proportion of their national budgets to scientific research to levels commensurate with international standards;
- Acknowledge AfricaRice as leading the African component of GRiSP to enable the pooling of resources, building capacity, and aligning of national and international rice research agendas;
- Ask FAO to stimulate national, regional, and global partnerships to develop Africa's rice sector, as part of the efforts of the Coalition of African Rice Development and under the overall umbrella of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program.