

## NERICA boosts Uganda's rice yields

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Uganda has begun to see a significant production of rice thanks to the successful development and release of stress-tolerant upland and low-land irrigated New Rice for Africa variety, Nerica rice. According to Dr George Bigirwa, the programme officer for seed production and dissemination at the Alliance for Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), "the NERICA variety responds very well to low rainfall, a minimum of 20mm per week. But the rain should be well-distributed during the three month growing season." Launched in March 2004 by President Yoweri Museveni, NERICA variety has seen rice farming in Uganda rise from 4,000 farmers in 2004 to over 35,000 in 2007. Uganda has also in the same period reduced its rice importation from 60,000 metric tonnes in 2005 to 35,000 in 2007, saving about \$ 30m (Sh51b) according to the Uganda National Agricultural Research Organisation., NARO.

Uganda's varieties of preferences are the Nerica 1, 4 and 10. Nerica 1 and 10 were released in 2002 and Nerica 4 in July, 2007.

Nerica 1 is aromatic in cooking, even when it is flowering or being cooked," said Dr. Jimmy Lamo, rice breeder, National Crops Resources Research Institute, Namulonge. Nerica 4 has stable yields in all ecological zones including flooding areas. Nerica varieties can be grown in places that were not possible before. "Nerica 10 referred to as special quality matures in 99 days, while 1 and 4 take between 110 and 115 days.

Jane Inanda, the AGRA programme officer, warned that despite the good report on Uganda's rice production, more rice is being consumed than produced and called for increased efforts to avail high-yielding varieties to raise rice production and turn around Africa's food crisis. Uganda and Tanzania have successfully developed and released three disease-resistant Nerica (upland rice) varieties.

Only 54% of rice consumed in sub-Saharan Africa is supplied locally. The rest is imported. Uganda and Kenya imports 50% and 86% of rice respectively.