



DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH SERVICES (DARS)

AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIVITY PROGRAMME FOR SOUTHERN AFRICA (APPSA)

FARMERS BENEFIT FROM IMPROVED RICE VARIETIES IN MALAWI

Malawi has 600,000 hectares of land that can be used for rice production. If this area was fully utilised, the country could produce more than 2,000,000 tonnes of rice per annum. Currently, the total production of rice is 150,000 tonnes per annum, which translates to only 7.5 percent of the potential production. This underproduction is mainly attributed to unavailability of high yielding rice varieties.

As part of efforts to improve rice production and increase export volumes, the Agricultural Productivity Programme for Southern Africa (APPSA) has introduced three high yielding rice varieties with a yield potential of up to 6.5 T ha⁻¹. These are Kayanjamalo (6.5 T ha⁻¹), Katete (6.0 T ha⁻¹) and Mpatsa (5.8 T ha⁻¹). These varieties were released in 2014 under the Department of Agricultural Research Services (DARS) in the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development. Since the release of the varieties, APPSA has been promoting these three varieties in Nkhatakota, Salima and Zomba districts targeting smallholder rice farmers. With desirable traits such as high yields and short height, the varieties gained popularity among the farming communities and within three years the number of adopters increased by more than 80%. “*The uptake has just been tremendous and the benefits very evident*”, highlighted Mr Machira, an Assistant Agricultural Research Officer of Department of Agricultural Research Services.



A researcher (Mr. Machira) appreciating the rice variety Kayanjamalo

The farmers are getting an average yield of 5 T ha⁻¹, compared to the local landraces that give an average of 2.1 T ha⁻¹. Dr. Mzengeza, a rice breeder indicated that the great performance of these varieties has raised a lot of interest and brought fortune among many Malawian rice farmers, especially the farming communities living in Salima and Nkhatakota districts.

Rice farmers explained how they have benefited from the new varieties and how some have managed to grow their fishing businesses. “*I have been growing rice on the same*

piece of land for many years, I used to harvest an average of 50 bags the previous years but this time around I have been able to harvest 95 bags after using Mpatsa rice variety” alluded Solomon Chinjedza. “This new variety matures early, is tolerant to diseases but, is not as aromatic as Kilombero and Faya”, he noted. Most farmers indicated that cultivation of the new varieties, coupled with the Sustainable Rice Intensification (SRI) technology has increased the yield two fold. Many farmers reported to have accumulated more assets after adopting these new rice varieties. Mrs. Kupata Hamidu, a prominent rice club member said that she never harvested enough rice to feed the family for the whole year before growing these new varieties. Now she can harvest enough to feed the family and surplus for sale. “After growing the new varieties, I sold 100 bags of rice and added the proceeds to the money which I made from my fishing business to buy a car and expand my fishing business by buying two fishing nets.” Another beneficiary, Chancy Mhango, a widow narrated, “From proceeds of the rice harvest, I bought a parental stock of goats and cows in one season. In the following season, I replaced my grass thatched house with iron sheets”. Katete Sidika, a chairperson of one of the rice groups, expressed that he has bought an oxcart and cows with cash from rice sales. Other members including Hawa Saidi, Emma Ntewa, Lucy Jafali, Esther Maloya and Mirriam Jabili Hawa explained that they have bought different types of livestock as benefits from increased rice productivity.

As with most agricultural development efforts, the issue of sustainability is always a threat but this is not the case with these farmers who are organised in groups. The strong linkages formed between agricultural research scientists and extension staff are benefiting farmers who can easily access the extension messages. Farmers are encouraged to bulk their produce and sell larger quantities as this enables them to negotiate for better prices. They are organised as “Seed Producers Association” and “Grain Producers Association” that exist under an umbrella of “Rice Growers Cooperative”. The associations are multiplying certified seed and this increases farmers’ access to quality seed. In addition, they are milling and selling rice in bulk.





“Having these improved varieties adopted by farmers is a breakthrough on food security to the Malawi nation” said Dr. Mzengeza, Plant Breeder and Chitedze Research Station Manager.

For more about the success story please contact Dr Tenyson Mzengeza, Station Manager at Chitedze Research Station (tmzengeza@gmail.com)