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“Competition for Resources in a Changing World:
New Drive for Rural Development”

Growing Rice in Africa: the Vital Importance of Sound Water Management

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Abstract

Since the recent food crisis, an important paradigm shift has taken place in rice research. The emphasis shifted from rainfed upland rice to rainfed lowland rice production. For the past ten to fifteen years research at WARDA concentrated on the rainfed uplands, which is the home of the poorest people in Africa. It is here where the greatest opportunity lies of making an impact on tackling poverty. However, by targeting the upland rural poor and alleviating them out of poverty the people living in urban areas will not be fed. The recent food crisis made clear that besides increasing productivity also the total production needs to be raised. A SWOT analysis of the major rice growing ecologies in Africa shows that the most suitable ecology for meeting both requirements, alleviating poverty and feeding the continent, are the inland valley lowlands. If only 10% of the 200 million hectares of Sub-Saharan African inland valleys were successfully developed by installing low-cost water management structures the continent could produce enough rice to meet the rice consumption needs of the entire continent and even have a surplus to export.

Keywords: Rainfed agriculture, rice, SWOT analysis