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Adoption of Rice Parboiling Improved Technologies and Poverty Dynamics in Benin: the Ladder of Life Approach

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Abstract

By improving the quality of rice, reducing postharvest losses, reducing drudgery and improving safety for processors, improved parboiling technology contributes to improved food and nutrition security, income and livelihoods of rural parboiling households and communities. The Ladder of Life tool was used to assess the poverty dynamics by exploring the perceptions and interpretations of different wellbeing groups in communities where improved parboiling technology has been adopted in Benin. Forty-eight focus group discussions (FGDs) and individual interviews were held with 480 male and female rice producers and parboilers in the Central and Northern regions of Benin. Findings show that more female actors produce and parboil rice while male participants are rice producers. The Ladder of Life charts found more male farmers (53 %) than female farmers (50 %) under the poverty line in the investigated communities indicating that slightly more women are out of poverty than men. Also, 15 % of male and female improved their livelihood during the last decade and moved out from poverty. It was commonly recognised by both men and women that improved rice parboiling equipment and practices adoption has significantly contributed to bring women out of poverty during the last decade. Almost all the women who adopted the technology moved up on the ladder of life. In communities where traditional parboiling is still prevalent, the proportion of the poor is largest despite the noted decline for women in the lowest levels from 80 % in the last 10 years to the current 62 % while for men, the poverty situation has stagnated to 71 % for the lowest ladder levels. Men and women who are under the poverty line are aware of improved rice production and parboiling but are not applying them because of the lack of financial support and climate changes. The main factors contributing to moving up or climbing the step of the ladder are access to suitable credit and good and improved technologies, proper planning and management, investment in secondary activities such as animal rearing, agri-food processing, good relationship with people of the upper ladder levels, good networking and hard working.

Keywords: Benin, ladder of life, poverty, rice parboiling