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South-South Cooperation Dialogue: Supporting the Rice Value Chain through China-Côte d'Ivoire Exchanges

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Introduction

As the third largest rice producer in West Africa, Côte d'Ivoire has made remarkable progress in rice production, from 2 million tons in 2010 to 3.5 million tons in 2017. Despite the progress, Côte d'Ivoire relies heavily on rice imports to satisfy its growing domestic consumption. National rice production is below 50 percent of its demand over the last three decades. However, there are opportunities for Côte d'Ivoire to achieve rice self-sufficiency.

Firstly, the Government of Côte d'Ivoire has demonstrated its commitment to bolster the rice sector by establishing specialised entities to support its rice value chain and developing a national strategy for the development of rice sector. In addition to the government, international partners have provided assistance to the Ivorian rice sector, such as the World Food Programme (WFP) through its resilience programme and AfricaRice Center through applied research.

Secondly, a large surface of marshy land is available for rice production but underdeveloped in Côte d'Ivoire. However, less than half has been developed for exploitation. Thirdly, white rice and parboiled rice are well appreciated by the population, representing a large market of these two types of rice. In 2017, the domestic production of white rice covered 78 percent of the national consumption. The gap was filled by imported white rice, indicating that there was a greater demand than supply at the national level. Therefore, Côte d'Ivoire has a great potential to develop her rice value chain, and to satisfy the demand of the population's rice consumption.

As a complement to the North-South approach, South-South Cooperation (SSC) could be an impactful framework to support Côte d'Ivoire in its rice value chain development, by mobilising relevant expertise of other developing countries and providing access to suitable technologies. In this context, a South-South dialogue was jointly organised by the WFP Centre of Excellence

for Rural Transformation (China COE) and Regional Centre of Excellence against Hunger and Malnutrition (CERFAM), with stakeholders from China and Côte d'Ivoire in June 2021. The objectives of the dialogue were to:

- Understand the rice sector in Côte d'Ivoire, including needs, challenges and opportunities;
- Present the roles and responsibilities of each Ivorian stakeholder;
- Explore how to leverage the experience of China to support the rice sector in Côte d'Ivoire.

With the information provided in the dialogue, an SSC initiative was proposed to address the gaps in the Ivorian rice value chain by drawing from the Chinese experience.

Highlights of the experience of China and Côte d'Ivoire in rice value chain

Although Côte d'Ivoire possesses great potential in its rice value chain, the country has encountered a few challenges in recent decades:

- Low proportion of irrigated rice production, which is very productive in terms of quality and quantity;
- Limited access of smallholder farmers to high-quality inputs and certified seeds, which affects the quality and quantity of rice production;
- Limited access to mechanization in the rice sector; and
- Sub-optimal practices and facilities of harvest and post-harvest management.

In contrast, China has made remarkable progress in its rice sector, tripling its rice production over the last five decades through improved grain yield rather than increased planting area. In China, more than 90 percent of rice is irrigated and, in some areas, 2-3 crops per year can be grown.

One of the drives of this achievement is the investment by the government and researchers in seed breeding of high-yield varieties. Recently, the Chinese Government has been fostering mechanised farming and the upgrading of

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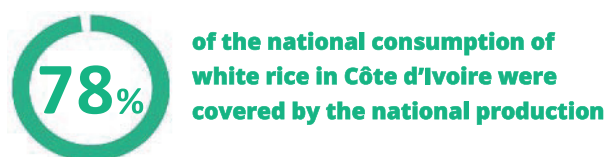
including subsidies from the government and loans from financial institutions for the purchase of machinery.

In recent years, China has also implemented a number of strategies and initiatives to address post-harvest losses, such as

1. adopting good practices in using advanced equipment for stockage and in packaging;
2. creating post-harvest service centres, which provide services of stockage, drying and processing.

By promoting such initiatives, smallholder farmers are better integrated into an efficient supply chain, reducing their post-harvest losses.

Given the relevance and success of the Chinese experience, Côte d'Ivoire could learn from the Chinese policies, strategies, technologies and know-how to develop its rice value chain. Technical and policy-level exchange under the SSC will enable support to the Ivorian stakeholders, achieving rice self-sufficiency in Côte d'Ivoire.



4562 farmers and their households have been supported by WFP in the north of

Collaboration to improve the Ivorian rice value chain

Funded by the United Nations Office of South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC) and facilitated by CERFAM and the WFP Centre of Excellence for Rural Transformation, WFP China COE South-South initiative has been rolled out to further develop the rice value chain in northern Côte d'Ivoire. This region has been receiving support from the WFP in food security, women empowerment and school feeding. Through exchanges with Chinese experts and the introduction of Chinese equipment, local producers and experts benefit from technologies and techniques to strengthen their production capacity.

Prior to the start of the project, two missions were conducted to map the need of target groups and identify the expertise needed for the exchange. In June 2021, CERFAM visited a demonstration site in the south of Côte d'Ivoire, which was created by a group of Chinese experts in 1995. During the visit, the Chinese experts presented their technical assistance and training in seed production, rice production and irrigation. At the same time, another mission took place in northern Côte d'Ivoire, allowing CERFAM to visit local communities and the implementing NGOs, and to conduct basic need assessment.

To kick off the collaboration, a multi-stakeholder dialogue was organized in August 2021 with representatives from UNOSSC, WFP Centre of Excellence for Rural Transformation, CERFAM, ADERIZ (Agency for the Development of Rice Sector), AfricaRice Center and WFP Côte d'Ivoire. In the dialogue, Ivorian stakeholders presented the rice value chain in Côte d'Ivoire and its current state. WFP China

COE and CERFAM also briefly outlined what China could offer to Côte d'Ivoire in support of its rice value chain development

The design and implementation of this initiative focuses on the two key criteria of good practice defined in the methodology for documenting good practice by CERFAM: 1) Partnership and 2) Innovation. By leveraging the expertise and experience of local and international partners, the initiative is expected to have a sustainable effect on rice production in target areas. Moreover, the exchanges with Chinese experts through trainings and workshops bring innovations to relevant policies, technologies and techniques, inspiring stakeholders from the Chinese experience to strengthen their relevant capacity.

FACT ON RICE PRODUCTION IN CÔTE D'IVOIRE		
AVAILABLE LAND	RICE PRODUCTION IN 2017	COVERAGE OF NATIONAL CONSUMPTION BY NATIONAL PRODUCTION
200,000 Ha	3.5 million ton	<50%

Opportunities and challenges in the collaboration

Opportunities:

- Availability of Chinese expertise based in Côte d'Ivoire, whom expresses high interest in the collaboration;
- Willingness of local partners (ADERIZ and AfricaRice Center) to participate in the initiative; and
- Synergies and complementarities with the existing WFP project, allowing further development of the whole rice value chain in northern Côte d'Ivoire.

Challenges:

- Interruptions to local on-the-ground exchange/training due to the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Limited agricultural production due to lean season from October to April; and
- Low education level of producers hindering the learning of new techniques and the application of new technology.

Next steps of the South-South exchange

- Conversion of the project sites into demonstration sites, which showcase the fruit of the collaboration and sharing the experience of capacity strengthening to interested regions/countries
- Documentation of this project to share the experience and promote the upscaling of such SSC initiatives in the region.

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