**AN**

**ASSIGNMENT**

**ON THE TOPIC:**

**YOUTH FARMERS’ UTILIZATION OF IMPROVED RICE PRODUCTION PRACTICES IN AKWA IBOM STATE.**

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**DEFINITION OF TERMS**

**Youth Farmers**: these are individuals involve in the production of crops or livestock and they are young ranging from 20 to 35 of age. They play a vital role in food security and agricultural production**.**

**Utilization:** this is the act of using something or putting to use.

**Improved:** this the optimization of a previous way of doing something.

**Rice Production:** this is act of bring forth rice by employing methods of production such as; planting, weeding, fertilization, harvesting, processing and storage and distribution.

**Rice Production Practices:** these are methods employed with the goal to maximize rice production while minimizing environmental impact and ensuring the economic viability of the crop.

**An overview of Rice production**

Rice is a major commodity in world trade. Rice has become the second most important cereal in the world after wheat in terms of production, due to a recent decline in maize production. It is widely cultivated throughout the tropics; and where flood controls are effective as in South-east Asia, production is high. Much of the foreign rice imported into West Africa is from South-east Asia. In Sub-Saharan Africa, West Africa is the leading producer and consumer of rice. West Africa accounts for 64.2% and 61.9% of total rice production and consumption in Sub-Saharan Africa respectively. Except for Burkina Faso and Niger, rice is a staple crop throughout West Africa, especially in Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Senegal and Sierra Leone. The River Niger drainage system is a major rice growing environment in the Region. Nigeria has a leading role in rice production in West Africa. Nigeria ranks highest as both the producer and consumer of rice in the Sub-region with figures slightly above 50%. Rice is known to have been grown along the Niger for over 3000 years.

Rice (*Oryza sativa*) is one of the most important cereals globally and represents staple food for over 50% of every household in Nigeria. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (2020), reported that Nigeria produces approximately 2 million metric tons of milled rice and imports close to 3 million metric tons annually. This gap has resulted in Nigeria becoming the highest importer of the commodity in sub-Saharan Africa. To arrest this trend, efforts of relevant agencies had been directed towards boosting the productivity of the crop along the value chain. These include; the Anchor Borrowers Scheme, Agricultural Transformation Agenda Special Programme (ATASP) as well as other initiatives by international agencies. Despite several programmes and projects, rice yield and quality are still very low.

**Improved Rice Production Practices**

Improved rice production practices refer to the adoption of advanced agricultural techniques, technologies, and management practices to enhance the productivity and sustainability of rice farming. These practices aim to optimize resources, increase yield, ensure food security, and minimize negative environmental impacts. Numerous research studies, publications, and experts in the field have highlighted various ways to improve rice production and these includes;

1. **Integrated Nutrient Management:** Balanced nutrient management enhances soil fertility and promotes healthy plant growth. Through the judicious use of organic and inorganic fertilizers, composting, and efficient nutrient application methods, farmers can optimize nutrient availability and prevent nutrient imbalances, thereby achieving higher yields and minimizing nutrient losses.
2. **Pest and Disease Management:** Effectively managing pests and diseases is crucial for achieving optimal rice yields. Integrated pest management (IPM) techniques, including the use of resistant varieties, biological control, cultural practices, and judicious pesticide application, help reduce yield losses and minimize environmental impacts.
3. **Water Management:** Efficient water management practices play a vital role in rice production. Techniques such as alternate wetting and drying (AWD), system of rice intensification (SRI), and precision irrigation can help conserve water, improve water-use efficiency, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
4. **Seed Selection and Quality Control**: Choosing high-quality seeds that are suitable for local conditions is crucial for improving rice production. The development and use of improved varieties, such as hybrid rice, can significantly increase yield potential. Proper seed treatment and storage techniques also help preserve seed quality.
5. **Post-Harvest Management:** Efficient post-harvest management practices are vital to reduce losses, maintain grain quality, and ensure food security. Techniques such as proper drying, storage, and value addition activities contribute to improved post-harvest handling.

**Youth farmers’ utilization of Improved Rice Production Practices in Akwa Ibom State**

Youths represent important agents of change towards prosperity in the overall developmental process in any sector of the economy, agriculture inclusive. Youth has been identified as an important segment as well as a key component of rural agrarian communities. Unlike the aged, the participation of youth in agriculture is a result of numerous qualities that they possessed which include; high latent energy to work, propensity to learn new things, risk takers and high tendency to source new technologies from diverse source. Even though youths are being hindered and marginalized in agricultural programmes and projects, they remain an important force in agriculture in Nigeria. Hence, they need to be carried along in the developmental and poverty reduction process to harness their inherent potential fully in agricultural development and resource utilization. Although some factors determine youth participation in agriculture, Dio *et al* (2018) identified farming experience, land ownership and awareness as positive determinants while age, household size and access to credit as negative determinants of youths’ participation in agricultural production in Nigeria.

Production resources are scarce information inclusive, therefore, all strategies should be geared towards optimization in the utilization of these scarce resources in agriculture. Resources utilization efficiency should not be stagnated to the present short-term goals but should be able to provide food for the present generation without compromising the status of food security of future generations. This calls for improved rice production practices to achieve maximum production. Maximizing rice productivity requires directing attention towards boosting the technical efficiency of the farmers.

Findings reveal that the major improved rice production practices utilized by the young farmers included: the selection of improved rice varieties (88.3%) and appropriate use of agrochemicals (99.3%), while the most intensively utilized practices were: farm planning and use of cropping calendar, timely planting of rice (WMS=2.24) and safekeeping and handling of agro-chemicals (Ogunkunle *et al.,* 2023). Findings reveals that ICT and interpersonal sources are relevant for promoting information on improved rice production technologies, especially among young farmers. From reports, Information and communication technology such as a mobile phones is one of the major sources of information for farmers in rural communities still holds and counts. The possibility on the proper enlightenment of the youth on best practices for rice farming which guarantee sustainability in the entire production cycle is paramount. Several factors have been identified to determine the adoption of improved rice production technologies. These include awareness of such technology, level of education, farming experience, availability and access to funds.

**Factors Affecting Youth Rice Production in Akwa Ibom State**

The factors affecting youth Rice producers in Akwa Ibom can be categorized into; socioeconomic, psychological, institutional and technological factors.

**Socioeconomic Factors:**

a) Access to Resources: Availability and affordability of inputs (seeds, fertilizers, machinery) influence adoption rates.

b) Education and Training: Formal education, vocational training, and knowledge-sharing sessions enhance awareness and understanding of improved practices.

c) Financial Support: Access to credit, subsidies, and investment opportunities positively impact adoption.

**Psychological Factors:**

a) Attitudes and Perceptions: Individual beliefs, motivation, and risk perception influence the willingness to adopt new practices.

b) Social Norms: Perception of social approval, peer influence, and role models impact adoption rates.

**Institutional Factors:**

a) Extension Services: Availability of extension services, their quality, and proximity to farmers facilitate knowledge transfer.

b) Policy Support: Supportive policies, incentives, and regulations promote the adoption of improved production practices.

c) Farmer Organizations: Participation in farmer groups and cooperatives expose youth farmers to new practices and facilitate knowledge exchange.

**Technological Factors:**

a) Access to Information and Communication Technology (ICT): Availability and utilization of smartphones, internet connectivity, and appropriate applications enhance access to knowledge and best practices.

b) Innovations and Research: Youth farmers actively adopt technology-driven innovations that suit their needs, such as precision farming, mechanization, and ICT tools.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, some common factors that jointly determined the utilization of improved rice production technologies including age, years of education, years of farming experiences, availability of improved rice production practices information and knowledge level of improved rice production technologies, etc. Hence, collaborations between government agencies, non-governmental organizations, research institutions, and other stakeholders can enhance the dissemination of knowledge, capacity-building, and access to resources for youth Rice farmers. Introducing targeted programs focusing on their empowerment, skill development, and entrepreneurship can instill confidence, motivation, and a sense of ownership among young farmers, leading to increased adoption of improved practices.

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