



## Technology: Mwea farmers reap big

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Workers on a rice farm in the Mwea irrigation scheme /MONICAH MWANGI

**Monicah Mwangi** [@monicahmwangi](#)/ The well-manicured green fields stretching to the horizon on either side offer an amazingly beautiful view of the Mwea irrigation scheme, as the enticing Pishori aroma fills the air.

The scheme produces more than 50 per cent of rice grown in Kenya. Since it started in 1954, farmers had been using traditional farming practices, where they would plant randomly on the paddy.

Until 2012, John Gakuya's production was so low that he sometimes only managed to produce enough for his family consumption. However, this changed after a modern rice farming technology was introduced in the scheme.

"The new technology has increased my yield from 20 bags per acre to 30 bags of a 100kg each," he said.



The phasing out of the traditional rice farming practices began in 2013, when the Japanese International Corporation Agency introduced the new technology through a programme called Rice-based and Market-oriented Agriculture Promotion Project.

Known as a water-saving rice technology, the programme involves levelling of the farm, use of healthy seedlings, line planting, intermittent irrigation and improved weeding.

By December last year, the new technology had been adopted by 75 per cent of farmers in the scheme.

Explaining how it works, former Rice-Mapp project manager John Njogu (2012-17) said the technology encourages land levelling, which then ensures the water used settles well on the purposed paddy. “In 2012, flooding was the norm here, but with the new technology, where little water is used, the water conflict among farmers is now a thing of the past,” he said.

### **MONEY-MAKING VENTURE**

Njogu said an average farmer at Mwea irrigation scheme is now earning Sh1 million every six months. “This project is proof that agriculture can be good business in Kenya,” he said.

He added that it is important and profiting for all the farmers to adopt the technology, which he said has increased production profit by 40 per cent.

Farmer John Ndungu said his yields increased rapidly after he took up the technology six years ago. “Before the technology, I used to get between 13 and 19 bags per acre, but I am currently doing between 25 and 30 bags from an acre,” he said.

The current farm price for a kilogramme of Basmati 307 rice, which is what the scheme plants, is Sh75.

Ndungu said the technology is easy to adopt and encouraged others to join him. “After ploughing, the field is flooded before being levelled using a handheld tool, which is dragged on the surface of the farm so that it is uniformly levelled,” he said.

In intermittent irrigation, farmers are only required to irrigate their farms for three days before taking a break of seven days.



Rice-MAPP field extension officer Tatsuo Narabu said it is unnecessary for rice fields to be flooded throughout. “Farmers are required to irrigate their farms only when necessary. This saves on the amount of water used,” he said.

The technology encourages farmers to plant young rice seedlings, which should be transplanted to the fields at two weeks and a maximum of three weeks, instead of the usual five.

“We encourage farmers to use young seedlings. The younger the seedling the better, and the higher the yields,” Njogu said.

The farmers were also trained on line planting and mechanical weeding and harvesting. The planting space should always be marked and measure 30 by 15cm.

### **LOWER PRODUCTION COST**

The improved weeding technology helped farmers cut on cost of production by using weed pusher machines. They explained that before the weeding machines were introduced, farmers would hire eight people to weed for two days on a one acre farm, something now done by two people within a day.

“Rice farming has been made much easier and cheaper. The weeding machine is locally available and at a reasonable price,” farmer Gakuya said.

The rehabilitating project has been continuing, and experts hope that all farmers in the scheme will have adopted the new technology in three years. “We are targeting about 2,000 households in our expansion project,” current Rice-MAPP project manager Wilson Oyange said.

According to Vision 2030, Kenya must be self-sufficient in rice, and Oyange is hopeful that with the new technology adopted by all, this vision is achievable. “With the help of the government and other financiers like Jica, it will be possible to do it,” he said.