



Upland Rice Gains Quickly As Staple Crop



Photo: Matt Herrick

A 32-year-old father of five, Majidu stands in his upland rice field with his daughter, talking about how he went from digging latrines to commercial farming in just a few years with USAID assistance.

In the 1990s USAID supported studies of rice seed in an effort to boost Uganda's production of rice as a staple food and export crop. The studies sought a strain of rice that was suited to be grown outside flooded rice fields and paddies, which undermine wetland conservation and require farmers to work in pest- and disease-ridden swamps.

Researchers began to look to Uganda's cooler, elevated uplands for solutions. Officially the home of Uganda's coffee farms, recent coffee wilts and depressed world markets had reduced the practicality of coffee as a cash crop for commercial producers. Working with local partners, USAID developed several rain-fed varieties of rice that matured early and had good yields—5,500–8,800 pounds per hectare. Farmers were trained how to dig seed trenches, plant straight rows and make the best use of rainfall. USAID also promoted nontraditional alternative crops for local producers and connected those producers to established markets, improving export prospects.

In 2003 farmers produced around 110 tons of upland rice; by early 2004, production had risen to 275 tons. The initiative has reverberated along the entire market chain. Aside from local buyers, Ugandan traders now also sell upland rice to Congolese and Kenyan markets. And Uganda's only rice milling machinery distributor now sells 200 rice mills a year, compared to the previous average of four a year.

Photo & Caption

