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### Africa rice varieties get elite status

**PORTO NOVO (Commodity Online)** : Rice was cultivated in Africa around 1000 BC in the western bulge of the continent.

The ancient rice variety, 'Oryza glaberrima' is now on the verge of extinction and most African farmers have turned to Asian rice varieties.

Some 20 years ago scientists developed two rice varieties - known as New Rice for Africa (NERICA) - that combined the adaptability of African rice with the high yields of Asian rice. NERICA has since been developed into more than 80 varieties.

But, over the past five years, scientists have been improving African rice to produce varieties that are both hardy and high-yield and can overcome lodging (where ripe grain causes plants to fall over) and shattering (where ripe grain sheds at crop maturity)

In its attempt to revive the ancient variety, Africa Rice Center (AfricaRice) has decided to grant elite status to these varieties in hope that they will play a central role in making farmers' crops more resilient.

Africa Rice Center conducted a series of studies on the yield of African rice and the factors that determine high yield.

Elite rice varieties are recognized to be high-yielding and include Asian rice, which has sometimes been improved with individual traits taken from lower-yielding African rice.

Now scientists have shown that African varieties are resilient and high-yielding in their own right.

They concluded that, contrary to common belief, the yield of African rice is not inferior to that of Asian rice under the unfavorable growth conditions that often prevail in parts of Africa.

The research is part of a wider strategy to develop a range of rice varieties adapted to the continent's varied ecology through projects with the Philippines-based International Rice Research Institute and others.

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