New Rice for Africa (NERICA) was introduced in Uganda in 2003 to help the rural farmers in improving their livelihood in terms of income and food security. Using livelihood impact analysis technique, this study sought to assess the role of NERICA in improving rural livelihood by 1) understanding the production environment 2) exploring the marketing opportunities and challenges and 3) highlighting the changes in livelihood outcomes.

Although the NERICAs currently released in Uganda are upland varieties, they have been restricted to lowland cultivation due to unpredictable rainfall. Without irrigation, the cropping season has to coincide with the rainfall pattern. Given this restriction, the early maturing varieties are being preferred to the high yielding ones as they can escape the drought onset. Because one extension staff serves about three thousand farmers, inadequate information dissemination is a limiting factor. Despite all these challenges, NERICA yield (3.26 tons/ha) in Najja is above the national average (2.2tons/ha). Milling places also double as selling points where buyers and sellers meet. When sold in milled form, rice fetches more profits (Ush432500/acre) compared to (Ush262500/acre) from selling in paddy form. However, transportation cost to the rice mills are a major obstacle. Generally, NERICA farming is also more profitable than maize, its closest substitute. This has caused farmers to grow it more as a cash crop than as a food crop. As a result, they have managed to accumulate assets such as land, houses and motorcycles which act as collateral for loan transactions.

The policy implications of these findings are various: water conserving technologies need to be promoted to reduce the drought risks, early maturity should be given more attention during NERICA promotion, training and or hiring of more extension workers who are knowledgeable in rice agronomy and emphasizing value addition by providing conducive environment to milling services in rural areas.

Fig1. Rice marketing channels in Najja