



WARDA – The Africa Rice Center

ADRAO – Le Centre du Riz pour l'Afrique

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Charting a Bold Course for the Future: WARDA Forges Ahead

Referring to the recent positive developments in Ivory Coast to end a six-month-long political crisis, Dr Kanayo F. Nwanze, Director General of WARDA – The Africa Rice Center, said, “This augurs well for WARDA, which is boldly charting its course for the future, affirming its pivotal role in rice research and development in Sub-Saharan Africa.”

WARDA’s headquarters are in Bouaké, Ivory Coast. Although the conflict, which erupted in September 2002, has had serious financial implications for the Center, which was temporarily forced to evacuate its international staff from Bouaké, its US\$30-million Campus remains intact and its staff are safe.

WARDA has also been able to successfully retrieve over 80% of duplicate samples of rice varieties from its genebank, and a large part of its scientific and financial data from its Campus for storage outside the risk zone. The “heroic efforts” of some of its local staff to maintain field experiments on the Campus despite the crisis have been widely acclaimed.

Emerging stronger from the crisis, WARDA staff are rallying to ensure that the Center continues to remain vibrant and productive, capable of delivering high-quality research products, such as the NERICA (New Rice for Africa) technology, which if well disseminated across Sub-Saharan Africa, promises to revolutionize the livelihood of millions of poor rice farmers in the region.

Every field of the Center’s activities—from management of research to administration, finance, human resources, information, and capacity building—has been infused with a new sense of dynamism and is becoming more streamlined and focused.

Commenting on the upbeat spirit of the revitalized Center, Dr Nwanze said, “Challenges can either make or break a person or an institute. Fortunately for WARDA, the Ivorian crisis has forced our staff to creatively rethink their strategy, which is not only helping the Center stay on course, but is also bringing further efficiency in the management of our resources.”

However, the impact of the Ivorian crisis on the Center’s financial capacity has been overwhelming. Dr Nwanze expressed his deep gratitude to the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) and the World Bank for providing emergency financial assistance and for strong moral support in recognition of WARDA’s achievements. In addition, the regular support from the Center’s donors,

as well as improved resource management, have been crucial in keeping WARDA viable for the moment.

“However, to ensure that the achievements and research effort of several decades do not go waste, steady and long-term commitment from donors is essential,” Dr Nwanze said.

A MORE FOCUSED RESEARCH STRATEGY

Turning adversity into opportunity, WARDA scientists profitably used the initial period after the crisis to conduct a thorough review of the research strategy, structure and operations for developing a more coherent research system.

As Dr Jim Sumberg, Acting Director of Research, explains, “The goal was to use the challenges faced during this period to create a Center that is significantly more focused and more efficient, and thus better placed to deliver the potential gains associated with research outputs generated over the last few years.”

WARDA has temporarily (with a timeframe of up to two years) relocated some of its scientists to Bamako, Mali—a major rice-producing country in the region possessing a wide range of rice ecologies. This strategic move will ensure the continuity of the Center’s research activities. The WARDA Management will continue to operate from its temporary headquarters in Abidjan, Ivory Coast.

WARDA plans to mount a full, but more focused research agenda in 2003 in Mali, complemented by efforts in the Center’s regional locations in Senegal and Nigeria as well as in other locations. This will be possible largely thanks to WARDA’s network-based model of regional collaboration, which has been valuable in maintaining the Center’s research-and-development (R&D) activities outside of Ivory Coast undisturbed.

The crisis has also proven to be a productive gestation period for refining WARDA’s new 10-year Strategic Plan, which will position the Center to address efficiently the challenges of the future. “The Plan is built around two strategic elements: the pursuit of excellence in a limited number of core research areas, and the reinvigoration of the network-based model for regional research collaboration,” Dr Sumberg explained.

Appointments for two key positions—Head of Genetic Resources Unit and the African Rice Initiative (ARI) Coordinator—have been recently filled, which will help strengthen activities in these two important areas and achieve greater integration in WARDA’s R&D sectors.

WARDA has been actively participating in the development of the Challenge Program led by the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA), ‘Improving Livelihoods and Natural Resource Management in Sub-Saharan Africa’—a task for which the Center is well-positioned thanks to its significant achievements in research as well as research systems.

MORE STREAMLINED FINANCIAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGEMENT

Despite the enormous difficulties of managing WARDA's financial and administrative activities imposed by the Ivorian crisis, the operations are on the way to fast recovery with minimal resources and greater efficiency. The allocation, disbursement and monitoring of research expenditures have been further refined—with a positive impact on staffing structures and operations.

“The emphasis has been to reduce to a minimum the disruptions to the planned Work Program for 2003,” stated Michel Dubé, Director of Finance and Administration.

The current crisis has imposed extraordinary burdens on the Center's cash-flow situation, but the emergency grants from the CGIAR are helping WARDA to tide over the initial effects of the crisis.

“Many extraordinary expenses were one-time occurrences and most have already been dealt with, leaving a few for the next quarter. Other monthly recurring costs of special nature will be partially absorbed by savings thanks to further improvements in operations,” Mr Dubé explained.

He added, however, that despite the savings and streamlined operations, WARDA will still face estimated additional costs of close to \$40,000 per month or half a million dollars a year.

REVITALIZED TRAINING, LIBRARY, INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY SERVICES

The Training, Information and Library Services (TILS) are refining their delivery systems, seeking to take a leading position at the regional level for capacity-building activities, using new information and communication technologies.

The Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Unit has been particularly proactive during the crisis, ensuring that the communication links between WARDA and the outside world remain accessible and efficient at all times.

ICT has also made it possible for the scientists and the support staff to retrieve vital data for continuing their work. WARDA has embarked on using new technologies, such as video-conferencing and efficient information back-up systems, as part of its new strategy.

For its public-awareness activities, WARDA launched a more appealing and professional web-site in English and in French, and is actively engaged in creating satellite web-sites for the various networks that the Center coordinates.

CRITICAL IMPORTANCE OF WARDA FOR SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

In Sub-Saharan Africa—the most impoverished region in the world, where a staggering one-third of the people are undernourished and childhood mortality rates are among the highest in the world, where nearly half of the population struggle to survive on \$1 a day or less—WARDA's NERICA continues to be a symbol of hope for millions of poor upland rice farmers.

“NERICA’s major characteristics of higher yield, higher protein content, pest resistance, and reduced drudgery should lead to reduced imports, increased farmers’ income and family well-being and overall poverty reduction in the region,” Dr Nwanze said.

For example, in Guinea, by using NERICA, farmers are grossing US\$65 per hectare with minimal inputs, and \$145 per hectare with a moderate level of inputs.

To replicate a similar success story in other Sub-Saharan countries through the rapid dissemination of NERICA, the African Rice Initiative (ARI) was launched in March 2002, in line with the guiding principles of the NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa’s Development).

According to ARI’s projections, by end 2006, some 200,000 ha will be under NERICA cultivation with a production of nearly 750,000 tonnes per year, achieving rice import savings worth nearly US\$90 million per year.

“Improvements in agriculture of this kind are essential for providing pathways out of poverty for poor people in Sub-Saharan Africa,” stated Dr Nwanze. “WARDA will continue to offer to the poor such relevant technologies,” he added, citing that NERICAs for the most promising lowland ecologies are in the pipeline.

Building on its past achievements and based on its revitalized strategy, WARDA is forging ahead. Encouraged by the increasing demand for its services and products beyond its existing constituency of West and Central Africa, the Center decided to adopt this year the designation ‘WARDA – The Africa Rice Center.’

However, implementing in full the concept of ‘WARDA – The Africa Rice Center’ will require a much more extensive resource base than what the Center now has. “Additional resources will have to be generated through such mechanisms as ARI, the implementation of ASARECA’s rice research network or other donor-supported rice projects in eastern and southern Africa,” Dr Nwanze said.

About WARDA – The Africa Rice Center

WARDA – The Africa Rice Center is one of the 16 international agricultural research Centers supported by the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR). WARDA is also an autonomous intergovernmental research association comprising 17 member states.

The mission of WARDA is to contribute to food security and poverty eradication in Sub-Saharan Africa, through research, partnerships, capacity strengthening, and policy support on rice-based systems, and in ways that promote sustainable agricultural development based on environmentally sound management of natural resources.

The ‘New Rice for Africa’ (NERICA), which is bringing hope to millions of poor people in Africa, was developed by WARDA. The success of the NERICAs has helped shape the

Center's future direction, extending its horizon beyond West and Central Africa into Eastern and Southern Africa.

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