

# Out of Adversity

The 2002–2003 period was marked by a military upset that shook the host country of Côte d’Ivoire in September 2002, which forced WARDA out of its headquarters in M’Bé and brought a new range of challenges to the program of research of the institution. The crisis resulted in the departure of several staff starting with the Director of Research, creating a void in the leadership of the Programs Division; the Policy Economist and our two JIRCAS staff, an economist and a breeder. Despite these events, WARDA has succeeded in maintaining the momentum of its research programs. Trials installed at M’Bé and Gagnoa in Côte d’Ivoire before the crisis were almost all completed and harvested by the few WARDA staff who continued to work in the field and take care of the experiments during the crisis. Thanks to the efforts of these brave staff, the 2002 experiments in Côte d’Ivoire were not all lost as might have been expected. Data were collected and exploited. Likewise, seed multiplication for the Genetic Resource Unit continued at M’Bé during the same period to ensure that enough good-quality seeds are available for the next season. Activities at WARDA’s stations in Senegal and Nigeria were essentially unaffected by the crisis and, with the temporary relocation of the majority of research staff to Bamako, Mali, enabling most research activities to be conducted according to plan, the Programs Division was again positioned to vigorously pursue its important and exciting research agenda. In addition to Samanko station for upland experiments, scientists are also using research plots at the *Institut d’économie rurale* (IER) sub-stations of Baguenida, Sélingué and Kléla for lowland rice experiments. The quality of experiments conducted in Bamako testifies to the commitment of the research and farm-operations staff. Diagnostic studies at Samanko, Baguenida and Kléla will provide valuable information on the soil-fertility status of research sites in Mali and will enable scientists to fine-tune their field experiments in the future.

Agronomic trials continued at various sites in Mali, Nigeria and Côte d’Ivoire. New NERICA lines, as well as new iron-toxicity-tolerant lines, have been identified. A large number of fixed and segregating lines for upland and rainfed lowlands were multiplied to provide seeds for future participatory varietal selection (PVS) activities. In the meantime, PVS activities continued in Ghana, Mali and Nigeria. Studies on biological control of, and host-plant resistance to African rice gall midge (AfRGM) continued in Nigeria and significant results are in the pipeline.

For irrigated systems, research efforts were targeted at improving the performance of the rice sector through the development and adaptation of improved technologies to a range of irrigated rice-based production systems, and the development of appropriate land and water management options to prevent and control soil degradation. Components and options for rice integrated crop management were evaluated in different agro-ecologies under various levels of water control with large numbers of farmers in Burkina Faso, The Gambia, Mali, Mauritania and Senegal. Activities in 2002–2003 were developed and implemented in collaboration with national research

and development partners in the various countries. The search for more productive and profitable germplasm for irrigated ecosystems continues and very promising new genetic materials—both intraspecific and interspecific—have been identified.

Collaborative work on the assessment of the environmental impacts of the World Trade Organization (WTO) agreement on rice production systems in Côte d'Ivoire continued, as well as work in Guinea to assess the various impacts of the NERICA varieties. Baseline surveys at household and plot levels will allow an assessment of the impact of rice technologies introduced in the past; and will serve as a benchmark against which the impact of rice technologies introduced in the future can be measured. Follow-up surveys are to be conducted on a regular basis. The ultimate aim is the development of a system that generates regularly updated information on selected behavioral, welfare and environmental outcomes at the household, community, national and regional levels.

Studies of adoption of modern rice varieties in Côte d'Ivoire showed relatively low uptake of varieties released by the NARS and WARDA. Lack of knowledge about these varieties was found to be the major constraint in their adoption (*see* 'Assessing the Impact of NERICA rice varieties: Not Just Surveys and Simple Mathematics,' pages 33–41). The implication is that greater effort should be put into making modern varieties known to farmers.

Several training workshops and meetings were organized in the region. As part of its strategy to revitalize the Nigerian rice sector, WARDA held a two-day technical workshop on the rice sector project, entitled 'The Nigerian rice economy in a competitive world: Constraints, opportunities and strategic choices.' The project was implemented by WARDA in collaboration with the Nigeria Institute for Social and Economic Research (NISER), and is funded by USAID. Various stakeholders in the Nigerian rice economy, including farmers' organizations, private-sector representatives, government and non-governmental organizations, and research and development agents attended the workshop. The participants of the workshop recognized the need to enhance the competitiveness of the Nigerian rice sector by improving the quality of local rice and the efficiency of operators at the production, processing and marketing levels within a comprehensive approach. With rice now high on the development and policy agendas in Nigeria, WARDA and its collaborators are particularly well placed to contribute to the policy dialog and strategy development (*see* Box 'Rice sector strategy for Nigeria,' pages 18–19).

The crisis in Côte d'Ivoire put WARDA's invaluable genebank collection in jeopardy, but appropriate actions were taken in time to safeguard all genebank accessions. These were packaged in two duplicate batches, with one sent to IITA for regeneration and storage. A small team of WARDA staff was deployed for this activity. Another batch is stored in deep freezers in Abidjan. Seed multiplication for regional germplasm exchange as part of our International Network for Genetic Evaluation of Rice in Africa (INGER-Africa) program was done at the Sahel Station in Senegal, and seeds are now ready for distribution next year. A new data management system, including the CGIAR-wide SINGER, is being put in place.

As a contribution to the rehabilitation of agricultural activities, 5 tonnes of foundation seeds were provided to development agencies operating in western Côte d'Ivoire as part of the 'Seeds for Life' project of WARDA for the restoration of rice production in the post-conflict era. The 'Seeds for Life' ceremony was organized under the aegis of the Ministry of Scientific Research, Government of Cote d'Ivoire in partnership with NARS (CNRA, ANADER and PNR).

The annual research planning meeting, called 'Research Days,' was held at Samanko from 28 April to 2 May 2003. Over four days, research staff participated in wide-ranging discussions covering strategic directions, research priorities, methods and collaborative models. These discussions were valuable for research planning and provided important input to the Strategic Plan.

The support provided through WARDA's networks for regional collaboration was a major factor in allowing the Association to maintain the broad scope of its research activity. WARDA scientists are again well positioned to make their contribution to poverty alleviation and food security in Africa through original research and innovative development approaches within the rice sector. Networking and regional collaboration remain indeed the bedrock of WARDA's research and, since the move to Bamako, important events demonstrate that these regional activities continue apace. The recruitment of the Coordinator of the African Rice Initiative (ARI) has kicked-off a number of activities that had not materialized during the interim period. Steering Committee meetings of ROCARIZ, Participatory Adaptation and Diffusion of Technologies in Rice-based Systems in West Africa (PADS), the Inland Valley Consortium (IVC) and ARI have all been held in Bamako.

