

13. ROCARIZ: A Model for Regional Collaborative Research

ROCARIZ (*Reseau Ouest et Centre Africain du Riz*), a rice research and development network for West and Central Africa, was created in 2000 following in-depth consultations between WECARD/CORAF, WARDA, the region's NARS and USAID. This network is a direct descendant of the WARDA–NARS Rice Task Forces. ROCARIZ aims to strengthen NARS' research, development and technology-transfer capabilities through small-grant funding of these activities, sharing of results in review meetings, joint monitoring and evaluation tours, and training. Presently, around 100 scientists from 17 West and Central African countries regularly participate in ROCARIZ activities. The guiding principles for ROCARIZ are trust, mutual respect and joint ownership.

The Network is organized around seven Task Forces: Breeding, Mangrove Swamp Rice, Natural Resource Management, Sahel Natural Resource Management, Integrated Pest Management, Economics and Technology Transfer. ROCARIZ activities are overseen by a Steering Committee and the Network's coordination is hosted by WARDA. A program of two-year small research grants is the cornerstone of partnership activities. During the 2000–2002 period, ROCARIZ made over 154 small grants to researchers in 17 countries, as well as a special grant to Rokupr Rice Research Station in Sierra Leone for work on mangrove rice. The participation of national institutions in ROCARIZ has increased by 30% in the same period, and the Network diversified its partnership to include NGOs and farmers' groups.

A major achievement of ROCARIZ has been the institutionalization of the Biennial Regional Rice Research Review (termed the '4Rs'), where rice research and development activities conducted by NARS are reported. The 4Rs capitalized on the gains of the WARDA Task Force annual meetings



implemented in 1991–1997, by improving the interaction among Task Forces and increasing the diversity of partners. This has helped improve the quality of rice science in West and Central Africa. In 2002, the 4Rs attracted over 150 participants from Africa, Europe and North America, and 73 papers were presented. The public recognition associated with 4Rs awards (for best paper, best presentation of results, and outstanding contribution to rice R&D in WCA) is an important part of ROCARIZ's efforts to support the emergence of a stronger and more dynamic research culture in the sub-region.

Capacity building of NARS in the 1990s was focused on thematic group training, with less effort devoted to skills transfer. ROCARIZ has initiated short-term hands-on training on research tools and methodologies for individuals and groups to cover specific areas, such as molecular biology and

impact assessment. Network activities will build on these initial efforts to cover a broad range of skills development. ROCARIZ also re-activated a Visiting Fellow Scheme to allow NARS scientists to acquire special skills at other institutions.



In line with the vision of an inclusive stakeholder partnership, ROCARIZ has initiated credit support to small-scale rice seed producers in rural areas with a view to adding value to

community-based seed systems. This should create an enabling environment for the emergence of Village Seed Enterprises.

At a time when there is much interest in and discussion of the need for further research integration at both sub-regional and continental levels in Africa, the ROCARIZ experience provides a concrete example, and raises the question whether there is a role for a single, continent-wide rice research and development network.

Further reading

WARDA, 2001. *Merger of WARDA Task Forces and CORAF Rice Network*. WARDA, Bouaké, Côte d'Ivoire, 23 p.

Yobouet, N.Y. and M.A.B. Fakorede (Comp.), 2001. *Summary of WARDA/NARS Task Force Activities 1991–1997*. WARDA, Bouaké, Côte d'Ivoire, 204 p.

