14. The Inland Valley Consortium: Toward Sustainable Use of Inland Valley Agro-ecosystems

The Inland Valley Consortium (IVC) was launched in 1993 in an attempt to address key agricultural and development concerns in Sub-Saharan Africa (i.e. poverty, food security, and degradation of the natural-resource base). From an initial group of seven, membership of IVC now includes 10 West African countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Togo) and eight international research and development institutions (WECARD/CORAF, CIRAD, FAO, IITA, ILRI, IWMI, WARDA and WUR). IVC is a CGIAR-supported System-wide Initiative, convened by WARDA. Funding for the IVC has come from France, The Netherlands, Common Fund for Commodities (CFC), the EU and WARDA.

The overall goal of IVC is to develop—using an agro-ecological approach—knowledge, technologies and operational support systems for intensified but sustainable use of inland valleys in Sub-Saharan Africa. During Phase I (1994–1999), a common multi-scale characterization methodology was developed and adopted by the IVC partners to conduct reconnaissance, semi-detailed and detailed characterization studies. To date, 18 key sites in the 10 member countries have been characterized using this methodology. The IVC characterization studies have considerably increased the understanding of the characteristics and dynamics of inland-valley agro-ecosystems.

More than 100 research activities have been funded through the Consortium via small grants ranging from US$ 3000 to $ 25,000. These research activities have covered all aspects of the IVC research agenda. In addition, a number of more specific studies have been undertaken on various topics, including: a rapid diagnostic appraisal system for water management; the role of female farmers in inland-valley cultivation; costs of water management systems; indigenous knowledge on soil conservation; and functions of natural vegetation in inland valleys. All countries have also completed national state-of-the-art studies on inland-valley research and development. The main goal of these studies was to contribute to an inventory of available technologies. An overall synthesis is being compiled and will be made available in the form of a catalog of technologies.

Objectives for Phase II (2000–2004) are to build on these foundations and focus on four main themes: characterization of inland-valley land-use dynamics; development and evaluation of technologies for improved production systems and integrated natural-resources management; socio-economic and policy aspects of improvements in inland-valley land-use systems; and, technology dissemination processes and impact pathways for

inland-valley development. It was felt that the execution of these themes could be tackled more efficiently if the research area was more concentrated. So, five benchmark areas were created (instead of the 18 key sites) where all research efforts are concentrated. Although fewer than the key sites, the benchmark areas are larger (typically 50 × 50 km) and run across borders, thus stimulating South–South collaboration.

As Phase II is coming to an end, discussions have started on the future of IVC and the possibility of embarking on Phase III. Although the definite proposal has not yet been determined, the direction and outline are already visible. A major emphasis is expected on modeling, especially on the development of a decision support system for policy-makers and on making the existing data available to the public through a web-based database. A second feature will be multi-disciplinary studies into the success and failure of different inland-valley development schemes. Focus will be placed on research questions like where the catalysts and bottlenecks of inland-valley development are to be found, and at which decision-making level. The definitive version of the proposal will be developed with partners and stakeholders at the next annual workshop.

Further reading

Andriesse, W., L.O. Fresco, N. Van Duivenbooden and P.N. Windmeijer, 1994. A multi-scale approach to characterize inland valleys agro-ecosystems in West Africa. *Netherlands Journal of Agriculture* 42: 159–179.

Windmeijer, P.N., T.J. Stomph, A. Adam, R. Coppus, N. De Ridder, M. Kandeh, M. Mahaman and M. Van Loon, 1998. Transect strategies for semi-detailed characterization of inland valley systems. *Netherlands Journal of Agricultural Science* 46: 15–25.