

17. The Concept of WARDA, Inc.

In March 2002, WARDA launched the African Rice Initiative (ARI) with the NERICA Consortium for Food Security in Sub-Saharan Africa as the implementing mechanism (*see* Appendix 15). While this new Initiative is expected to lead to measurable and sustained impact on food security in the region, there is a need to put in place some safety nets that will ensure that this effort is sustainable and that constraints (availability of seed, support to farmers and small business within farming communities, access to inputs, product quality and markets) are substantially minimized. Hence the concept of WARDA, Inc.

The main goal of WARDA, Inc. is to achieve significant reduction in rice imports in Sub-Saharan Africa. The general objective is to contribute significantly to food security and poverty alleviation in Sub-Saharan Africa through the development of viable rice seed production and marketing sectors.

Given the current status of the rice sector, the primary objective is to provide a service that is not currently available so as to meet the growing demand for rice and rice seeds, and improve farmers' self confidence in market development and competition. Improved farmers' competitiveness will lead to reduced rural unemployment, increased and diversified income, and an overall improvement of the well-being of populations of the rural and urban poor. It will also free scarce foreign exchange from rice importations that will be used to boost other sectors of the economy.

Specific objectives include:

- Developing and promoting public–private partnerships aimed at creating a sustainable seed production system in Sub-Saharan Africa;

- Increasing opportunities and competitiveness of rice farmers through policy support, contractual arrangements and development of entrepreneurial actions;
- Decreasing rice importation as a result of increased production and increased farmers' incomes.

WARDA is cognizant of the fact that for the impact of its research and dissemination of NERICA and other new and improved technologies to be fully felt, conditions such as adequate political support, sustainable agricultural financing, and a conducive policy environment are imperative prerequisites for the development of a robust, viable and competitive agricultural sector in Sub-Saharan Africa. It is equally imperative for WARDA to fully participate in scaling up investments in agricultural development by promoting innovative approaches that take into account current changes in the socio-economic and communications environment and in the institutional context. The creation of a self-sustaining subsidiary will advocate for farmers' empowerment, thereby reducing the adverse impact of large government-supported schemes and producers' transaction costs, and promoting farmers' participation in sustainable economic growth.

WARDA, Inc. will specifically target ways to (i) improve farmers' ability to adopt new and improved technologies developed by national programs and WARDA; (ii) enhance public–private sector dialog, research and development activities, capacity building and advisory services; and, (iii) provide support to farmers and agribusinesses. WARDA will play the role of facilitator in bringing about these developments with active farmer participation. It will draw on its experiences in PVS, CBSS and PLAR.