

Introduction

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

The *modus operandi* of WARDA is partnership at all levels. WARDA’s research and development activities are conducted in collaboration with various stakeholders—primarily the national agricultural research systems (NARS), academic institutions, advanced research institutions, farmers’ organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and donors—for the benefit of African farmers (mostly small-scale producers), as well as the millions of African families for whom rice means food.

In 2003, in recognition of an emerging wider role, the Association took on the designation of ‘WARDA – The Africa Rice Center.’ In pursuit of this emerging role, the Center will actively extend its services and knowledge beyond its traditional mandate area in support of rice research and development in Eastern and Southern Africa. More information on the history and past achievements of WARDA is provided in Appendix 1.

In the process of elaborating a new Strategic Plan for WARDA for the next 10 years, it is useful to take stock of what has been accomplished in the implementation of the previous Strategic Plan (1990–2000), analyze the gaps in implementation which could constitute part of the new challenges to be addressed in the new Plan, and at the same time benefit from a synthesis of the lessons learnt from the whole process.

Major Achievements in Implementation of the 1990–2000 Strategic Plan

- Recognition of uplands, rainfed and irrigated lowlands as the three major rice production environments in West Africa;
- Materialization of the concept of upland–lowland continuum as a major rice production environment in West Africa;
- Characterization of the key constraints in major production environments and their relative contributions to yield loss;
- Development of improved intra- and inter-specific germplasm (e.g. NERICAs, WITAs, Sahels) for the major production environments;
- Development of improved agronomic practices and post-harvest technologies;
- Adaptation of integrated crop management (ICM) approaches to irrigated rice production systems;
- Development of effective partnership with NARS through the Task Force mechanism;
- Establishment, implementation and effective functioning of major networks, including expansion of activities beyond traditional mandate region—e.g. International Network for Genetic Evaluation of Rice in Africa (INGER-Africa), Inland Valley Consortium (IVC), West and Central Africa Rice Research and Development Network (ROCARIZ);
- Adaptation of participatory approaches to rice research and technology transfer in West Africa;
- Improvement of national human capacities of stakeholders through training (e.g. postgraduate, research staff, extension agents, farmers), workshops, and a visiting scientist scheme;

- A wealthy genetic resources unit with over 20,000 accessions covering different *Oryza* species;
- Links established and collaboration developed with Eastern, Central and Southern Africa (ECSA).

Lessons Learned through the Implementation of the 1990–2000 Strategic Plan

- Major rice production systems are dynamic and can be inter-connected in time and space;
- Post-harvest processes can contribute significantly to improving rice productivity and profitability;
- Traditional African rice germplasm (including other *Oryza* species) needs to be exploited efficiently (e.g. in the development of the NERICAs);
- Farmer participation in technology development and transfer may significantly increase research impact;
- Decisions taken by the farmer to adopt new technologies are conditioned by his (or her) resource status; therefore, there is a need to provide alternatives (or options);
- Decisions taken along the production–consumption chain are conditioned to a certain degree by the policy environment;
- In addition to WARDA and traditional partners involved in the conventional production–consumption chain (i.e. NARS, extension agencies, rice processors, consumers), rice stakeholders also include banks, bilateral agencies, ministries and local NGOs.

Mission, Vision and Strategic Goal

While WARDA’s programmatic and geographic mandates have remained the same, the Center’s mission has evolved over the years in response to the changing environment and priority development needs of the region.

The mission of WARDA – The Africa Rice Center for the period 2003–2012 is:

“to contribute to poverty alleviation and food security in Africa, through research, development and partnership activities aimed at increasing the productivity and profitability of the rice sector in ways that ensure the sustainability of the farming environment.”

To achieve this Mission, **WARDA’s Vision is “to become a Center of Excellence, a Leader in Rice Research and Development as well as a Hub in a Region-wide Network for Collaborative Research.”**

It is only through such a network-based, collaborative strategy that research outputs and development activities are likely to have broad positive impact on the livelihoods of the individuals and communities that grow, process, market and consume rice.

It is in this light that the following Strategic Goal has been set for the period 2003–2012:

“to significantly increase the quality, usefulness and availability of knowledge and technology within the rice sector to support and improve the well-being of the poor in Africa.”