

# WARDA's Programs for the Next Millennium: Managing Continuity and Change

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**T**HE YEAR 1999 at WARDA will be remembered for its intense program review and planning activities. First, in early 1999, WARDA revisited its annual program review and planning process to assess the performance of annual work plans, and the continuing relevance of multi-year program priorities and strategies as presented in the three-year rolling Medium-Term Plan (MTP). Second, in June 1999, WARDA underwent a Center-Commissioned External Review (CCER) of its Program Strategy and Management. Third, in preparation for the Fourth External Program and Management Review (EPMR), with initial phase in November 1999 and main phase in February 2000, WARDA took a detailed stock of and documented its programmatic accomplishments since the Third EPMR. More information on this and the outcome of the Fourth EPMR, including WARDA's response, will be provided in the 2000 Annual Report.

The 1999 annual program review and planning exercise was used to critically assess WARDA's multi-year program proposals, as presented in its MTP 1998–2000, and to formulate a significantly revised MTP for the period 2000–2002. As elaborated below, the revised MTP resulted in a sharper operational mandate, and a dynamic and robust program framework that responds effectively to the regional challenges of: growing population and poverty, rapidly increasing demand for food (especially rice), risk of environmental degradation, weak national research and development capacity, and inadequate social capital base for development. The MTP 2000–2002 takes into account the region's agricultural potentials, and builds on WARDA's significant scientific achievements since 1991 and on the advantage of its special relationship with NARS and its concept of an 'open center.'

Overall, WARDA continues to strengthen its role as a pivotal regional center for rice-based systems, focusing its investments primarily on the unique problems of West and Central Africa. WARDA's programmatic vision is to create a regional research program to promote environmentally sound technical and economic change in the rice sector at national and local level, leading to an equitable improvement in food security for the poor, and sustainable reduction in rural poverty. WARDA's programmatic response reflects its operational mandate, which aims at ensuring the maintenance of its scientific excellence in: (i) rice genetic improvement; (ii) technology generation, evaluation and dissemination for rice-based systems; and (iii) providing leadership to inland valley ecoregional activities.

WARDA will continue to conduct strategic and applied research to generate urgently needed technologies for the region. During the 2000–2002 MTP period, WARDA’s output-driven strategy will be implemented more effectively by strengthening its development-oriented rice research efforts through collaborative technology evaluation and transfer, supported by complementary information and training activities. In this regard, and consistent with initiatives already taken in 1998, WARDA will remain open to the participation of rice scientists from East, Central and southern Africa (ECSA) in its Task Forces, thereby responding to direct demand from the ECSA region and ensuring that the rest of Africa benefits from the high spill-over potential of WARDA’s research. WARDA will also strengthen its ecoregional research on inland valleys through the Inland Valley Consortium (IVC). The IVC has developed into a tried-and-tested vehicle for the evaluation and delivery of technologies generated by WARDA and others for productivity improvement in inland valley land use systems. For the MTP 2000–2002, IVC will have a strong focus on integrated natural-resource management to underpin sustainable land use intensification and diversification.

Drawing from lessons learned in African agricultural research over several decades, WARDA’s research programs represent a major departure from the agro-climatic program structure that characterized WARDA prior to 1997, and go beyond the program structure proposed in the 1998–2000 MTP. The revised program structure for the 2000–2002 period allows for consolidation of program activities and consists of two technology-generation programs, the *Rainfed Rice Program* (Program 1) and the *Irrigated Rice Program* (Program 2); a *Policy Support Program* (Program 3); and an expanded and strengthened Program 4, renamed *Systems Development and Technology Transfer Program* from the old *Information and Technology Transfer Program*. A full description of the programs, with goals, objectives, outputs and milestones, is contained in the MTP.

We believe that the new program framework lays a strong foundation for the next millennium, and allows WARDA to: (a) allocate research activities along the R-to-D Continuum in a logical way; (b) explicitly recognize the targeted production systems in technology generation and development, as well as in technology dissemination; (c) achieve a closer integration of the ecoregional research activities based in the IVC with WARDA’s strategic research on technology and knowledge generation for inland valley systems; and (d) create strong cross-program linkages to ensure that the whole program agenda is of the highest relevance and scientific value, and cost-effective and efficient to manage.

This structure is in full accord with the four pillars of the CGIAR Strategy for Sub-Saharan Africa and provides a robust platform for responding to the challenges that face agricultural research and development in the region.

The Center-Commissioned External Review (CCER) on Program Strategy and Management panel was chaired by Dr Bernard Tinker of Oxford University. The panel concluded: “WARDA is now a highly active and respected member of the West African rice research community. Its applied research is producing new technologies, which are being applied at an increasing rate. Some of these are adaptations of well-known principles, as in the saline and alkaline soils in Senegal and Mali. Others are the continuation of its plant breeding for yield and against the pests, diseases and soil constraints of West Africa. The most important is the production of interspecific hybrids (the ‘new rices for Africa’), that are showing great promise in some ecosystems. There seems little doubt that it is now generating impact at an increasing pace. ... WARDA has been treated relatively generously in proportion to the amount [of rice] produced in its region. The increase in rice demand, and this promise of truly important research developments shows that this is both deserved and well applied.”

Beyond the accomplishments that are featured in this Annual Report, there were several others that deserve mention. The new interspecific rice plant type—dubbed ‘New Rice for Africa’ or NERICA—was released and

actively disseminated. The establishment of WARDA's regional network on participatory rice improvement—a process begun in 1998, involving participants from all the 17 member countries—was completed. Decision tools for scaling up integrated management of nutrients, water and pests in irrigated rice agro-ecosystems in the Sahel were further developed. Policy research on competitiveness of rice production was strengthened, including the role of rural financial services in rice technology uptake and resource management. The second phase of the Inland Valley Consortium was launched, with an expanded membership and research agenda. The transfer of all responsibility from IITA to WARDA for rice germplasm management in Africa was finally completed, and a Rice Genetic Resources Unit was established at WARDA.

In the 1980s, WARDA succeeded in improving the productivity of mangrove rice with considerable impact. In the 1990s, WARDA made great strides in raising the productivity and output of irrigated rice in the Sahel, where yields of 4 to 6 t/ha are normal. The stage is now set for a green revolution in irrigated and rainfed rice across WARDA's mandate region in the first decade of the next millennium.

Management of continuity and change is at the heart of WARDA's program management processes, so that short-term efforts remain consistent with longer-term objectives. This spirit is well illustrated in the feature articles that follow. In the 1998 Annual Report, I said: "We remain confident that WARDA will continue to deliver a high level of performance next year and beyond." In 1999, WARDA's dedicated and qualified scientists and support staff, working alongside their national and international collaborators, certainly kept this promise. I am confident that WARDA will continue to remain a high-return investment in the CGIAR System.

