

Editor's Note

The essence of partnership lies in communication—an open sharing of ideas and experiences among partners. Through this quarterly, *Essence of WARDA—The Africa Rice Center*, we hope not only to portray the core of WARDA's partnership-based activities, but also open a channel of communication for all our partners.

In addition to presenting a panoramic view of life and work at WARDA, and of the staff and partners who embody the spirit of the Center, this issue highlights two of the Center's major activities: policy development and technology transfer.

Why Nigerians are hooked to imported rice relates briefly the story of how WARDA is contributing to the formulation of a rice development strategy in Nigeria, a country that has the potential to become Africa's economic powerhouse. The story, *Kindling the minds and hearts of farmers* describes a unique approach to technology transfer, which is transforming the rural world in Côte d'Ivoire and neighboring countries.

We hope that through this newsletter, you will enjoy participating in WARDA's exciting adventure in rice R&D in sub-Saharan Africa.

Foreword

It is my privilege to introduce to you our newsletter *Essence of WARDA—The Africa Rice Center*. I am happy that the launching of this newsletter coincides with the adoption this year, of our new brand name 'WARDA—The Africa Rice Center', in recognition of the Center's leadership role in rice R&D in sub-Saharan Africa.

The launching of this newsletter is yet another testimony to the indomitable spirit of WARDA, which continues to face challenges with remarkable courage and optimism.

I am deeply impressed by and grateful for the "heroic efforts" of our staff—international, regional and local—in maintaining a vibrant and dynamic Center in the face of the Ivoirian crisis, efforts that have been recognized by the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), which supports WARDA. The Center's Board of Trustees and the Council of Ministers of our member States have also been extremely supportive.

As you will see in this issue, by turning adversity into opportunity, our scientists have been able to infuse a new dynamism into their research activities, thanks to the network-based model of regional collaboration that is the hallmark of WARDA's modus operandi.

I take this opportunity to thank you once again—our friends and partners who have stood by us from the beginning—and hope that this newsletter will be your window to the heart of WARDA. I am certain that together, we will deliver the promise of the NERICA (New Rice for Africa), created by WARDA, to the poor across sub-Saharan Africa.



Dr Francisco Reifschneider, Director, CGIAR (left) with Dr Kanayo F. Nwanze, Director General, WARDA, during his recent visit to Bamako, Mali

Kanayo F. Nwanze
Director General

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Why Nigerians are hooked to imported rice: Insights from a comprehensive rice sector study

A blueprint for an effective rice development strategy for Nigeria is in the making, led by WARDA economists in collaboration with their partners in Nigeria. The strategy is being developed in response to a specific request from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), which is supporting the Project on *The Nigerian rice economy in a competitive world: constraints, opportunities and strategic choices*.

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Insights from this Project will be shared with the Presidential Committee on Increased Rice Production and Export in Nigeria, which has invited WARDA to contribute to the debate on the rice sector, so that the Committee can make appropriate decisions to reduce Nigeria's massive dependence on imported rice and boost its rice production. The Committee was established by President Obasanjo in 2002.

Nigeria is the world's second largest rice importer, spending annually over US\$300 million on rice imports alone. It imported 1.7 million tonnes of rice in 2001 and 1.5 million tonnes in 2002. Considering its agricultural potential, why does Nigeria need to import such vast quantities of rice? Ask any Nigerian housewife and you will get to the heart of the problem.

Why Nigerian housewives are hooked to imported rice

Row upon row of brightly colored bags of imported rice—this is the scene that greets you on the streets and in the supermarkets in Port Harcourt, a city in southern Nigeria. The bags are labeled Thai rice, Indian rice, Uncle Ben's rice—everything except Nigerian rice. This scene is not unique to Port Harcourt; it is similar in every city and town and even in many villages in Nigeria.

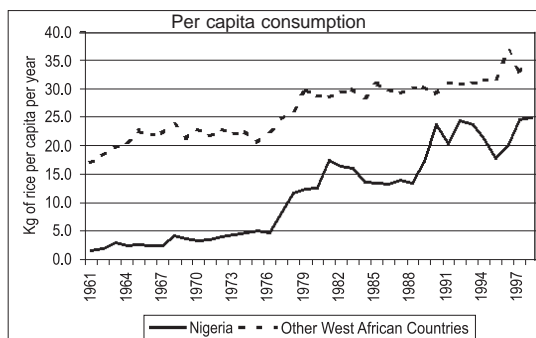


"I prefer to buy imported rice, because it is clean and readily available. If I buy local rice, I have to spend a lot of time removing stones or chaff from it," says Mrs Nike Abamu from Port Harcourt. Mrs Grace Adigun from Ibadan declares, "My husband grumbles when I cook local rice; sometimes it stinks because it is not well processed."

Poor quality and unreliable supply of local rice are the two major problems faced by rice consumers in Nigeria, where rice consumption over the last three decades has grown at an unprecedented rate of over 10% per annum—faster than anywhere else in the world. The growth is the result of a burgeoning urban population and changing consumer preferences.

Rice is easier to prepare than other traditional cereals, and fits in well with the urban lifestyles of the rich and poor. No longer considered a luxury, it has fast turned into a major staple food in the country. "Rice is even replacing cassava and yam to make 'fufu'—one of the most common dishes in Nigeria," says Mrs Abamu.

Although rice production in Nigeria has boomed at the rate of over 9% per annum over the last three decades, largely as a result of expansion in rice area, the production cannot match the soaring demand. The shortfall is overcome by large-scale imports.



The need for a clear picture of the rice scenario

Rice has become such a strategic commodity in the Nigerian economy, representing US\$ 1 billion business, that the Government has formulated several policies over the years, to govern its course. However, decisions have been inconsistent, oscillating between open to protectionist policies. For instance, rice imports were banned from 1986 to the mid-1990s. Since 1995, rice has been allowed to be imported, but with varying ad-valorem duty, ranging from 50 to over 100%.

"This inconsistency in the rice policy has been counterproductive because it hinders the capacity of all stakeholders to develop a long-term strategy," stated Dr Frédéric Lançon, WARDA Policy Economist who is leading the USAID-funded project.

In collaboration with the Nigerian Institute of Socio-Economic Research, the Project has conducted a series of surveys in Nigeria to get a clear picture of the rice scenario, particularly factors explaining consumers' shift to imported rice. Complementary studies are also being carried out to find out the reasons for the failure of big irrigation schemes.

The strength of the Project lies in the way it has been able to involve a wide range of stakeholders, from farmers to processors and traders, achieving a shared vision of issues and possible solutions.

Increasing the competitiveness of local rice

"The surveys reveal that rice consumers in Nigeria are ready to pay for quality," commented Dr Lançon. "Yet there is no efficient mechanism in place to improve the quality of local rice and surprisingly most millers are not even aware of this issue."

The Project's findings indicate the strategic choices that the Government has to make, to boost the country's rice sector. They include the need for:

- Focused, instead of uniform policy on the most promising ecologies.
- Improvement of the input market and sustainable access to fertilizer.
- Improvement of the processing capacity, marketing and retailing efficiency, through financial support and training.
- Marketing campaign to promote the image of the local rice.

The Project's final results and recommendations will be presented at a workshop in May 2003. The Presidential Committee is eagerly awaiting insights from this valuable Project to revitalize the country's rice economy and increase the competitiveness of local rice.

Kindling the Minds and Hearts of Farmers

Once upon a time, Kouame Dembele from Bamoro area in Côte d'Ivoire was a simple farmer who used to wait helplessly for government officials or NGOs to solve his problems on the farm. Now, Dembele provides training to farmers on demand, thanks to a novel approach to farmer learning called Participatory Learning and Action Research (PLAR).



Kouame Dembele from Bamoro

Dembele's training is so valued by other farmers that they are willing to pay him CFA 2000 (about €3) per session—a relatively significant amount for farmers in the region.

This transformation didn't happen overnight. It took several PLAR sessions for Dembele to realize that farmers have within them, the essential ability necessary to solve most of their problems. They only have to learn to better observe, analyze, take appropriate decisions, and organize themselves for action.

In a nutshell, that is what PLAR is all about—an effort to promote technological change by improving farmers' capacity to exchange knowledge, experiences and practices, and thus find solutions for themselves.

The result is not only a tangible increase in agricultural productivity, but also more self-reliant farmers and a more sustainable farming system. Although at an experimental stage, the PLAR approach, which is based on the principle of a bottom-up social learning process, is quietly shattering myths about technology transfer and changing the way farmers think of themselves as well as the way the others think of them.

In the Bamoro and Lokakpli areas in Côte d'Ivoire, for example, the rice yields of those farmers who adopted the integrated crop management (ICM) technology thanks to PLAR, increased by about 0.6 tonnes per hectare in the first year itself.

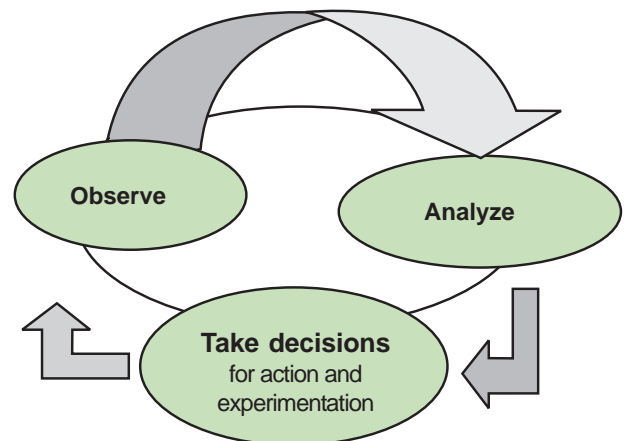
Farmers from these areas are now forming a rural knowledge center and the trained farmers not only impart technologies, but also key elements of scientific thinking as well as the advantages of community action to neighboring villages through farmer-to-farmer learning.

Rural knowledge center



“PLAR serves as an entry point for disseminating knowledge about complex issues and interactions, such as ICM, for which the conventional top-down technology transfer approach is not suitable,” explains Dr Toon Defoer, WARDA's Technology Transfer Specialist. It was Dr Defoer who developed the basic idea of this methodology, and can be called the Father of PLAR.

However, unwilling to take sole credit for it, Dr Defoer said that everyone who has come in contact with PLAR has a share in its evolution, because it is an approach that has to be adapted to specific conditions.



The approach is being successfully used by WARDA in inland valley rice-based systems on several sites in Côte d'Ivoire in close collaboration with the national extension service, Agence nationale d'appui au développement rural (ANADER).

PLAR has also been initiated in Mali, Togo, and Benin, and will soon be extended to Guinea, Ghana, and the Gambia, and eventually to other countries as part of the rice network, Réseau ouest et centre africain du riz (ROCARIZ), coordinated by WARDA.

PLAR uses a wide range of learning tools, such as cropping calendars, maps, diagrams, and monitoring forms. These tools help make complex concepts easy to grasp. The PLAR learning tools at present form the basis of 28 modules that constitute the curriculum for farmer learning on ICM. The modules are planned to be published as a set of training manuals in English and French.

News and Notes

Milestones

23rd Meeting of the Board of Trustees, Bamako, Mali, 24–28 February 2003



Board with His Excellency Seydou Traore, Minister for Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Fisheries, Government of Mali (front row, second from left)



Retrieval of duplicate samples of rice germplasm from the WARDA gene bank for storage in a risk-free zone.



Dr Francisco Reifschneider (left), Director, CGIAR, and Dr Lindsay Innes (right), outgoing Board Chair, during the former's visit to Bamako, Mali, on 27 February 2003.

Workshop



The 'First workshop on iron toxicity in rice-based systems in West Africa', jointly organized by WARDA, CTA, the Inland Valley Consortium, and the Rice Network, ROCARIZ, was held in Cotonou, Benin, 19–21 March 2003.

Seventeen researchers from Belgium, Benin, Burkina Faso, France, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo and WARDA attended the workshop to discuss the problem of iron toxicity, which is a widespread nutrient disorder of lowland rice in West Africa.

New and old faces at WARDA



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