

Message:

**From the Director General
and the Chairman of the Board of Trustees**

Synergy is not just a phenomenon found in the laboratory or in the plant breeder's screenhouse. At the Africa Rice Center in 2005–2006 synergy has touched everyone connected to the Center so that the first full year of operations in Benin are much more than just business as usual.

Indeed, business far from usual has seen the Center consolidate the success of the first upland NERICAs with lowland releases, begin a new capacity-building project to place biotechnology at the heart of the NARS, continue extension of its remit throughout sub-Saharan Africa, and present the Science Council with a highly appreciated Medium-term Plan. The goodwill towards rice research that was engendered by the 2004 International Year of Rice ensured that the Center continues to enjoy the full support of international donors and the cooperation of advanced international research centers outside SSA.

The Council of Ministers' Meeting held in Ouagadougou in 2005 confirmed the ongoing wholehearted support of WARDA's member States both for the Center's program concentrating on rice and rice-related research and for its progressive and carefully-considered expansion to meet demand from eastern and southern Africa for its international public goods. It was made clear that WARDA should remain as an independently functioning research center and the focal point for rice research in Africa, while collaborating with other CGIAR centers and other partners..

Within the CGIAR system WARDA is leading the development of the MTP for West Africa and an active participant in the Eastern Africa MTP. WARDA readily

adopted the latest CGIAR System Priorities to underpin the Center's continuing engagement with poverty reduction in SSA and the creation and dissemination of the many pertinent international and regional public goods being produced by the Center. Alignment with other CGIAR centers operating in West Africa continues to be a WARDA preoccupation. Common Board members have been identified for the Center and IITA, which remains the host of WARDA's Cotonou headquarters. Common services supporting both WARDA and IITA are being examined for efficiencies that can be obtained while the head-quarters of the two centers are so geographically close.

Hot on the heels of the partnership with ASARECA that activated the ECARRN rice network with a WARDA coordinator based in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, a revamped collaboration is being developed with IRRI and the Japanese Government in Africa. IRRI and WARDA have many decades of experience in rice R & D through working with poor farmers in unfavorable environments across Asia and Africa. Successful development of mutually beneficial IRRI-WARDA collaboration will play a critical role in supporting the rebuilding of the rice sector of resource-poor countries of SSA. Our partnership in rice-vegetable system research with the World Vegetable Center continues to strengthen in West Africa.

Through its partnership with national programs, WARDA concentrated its effort on the three major rice production systems, namely upland, lowland and irrigated. At the same time activities were undertaken in processing; dissemination of research results; policy and marketing issues; natural resource management, particularly impoverishment of soil fertility; water use efficiency; integrated pest management; and technology uptake. Issues such as the high cost of inputs, the unstable market, weak institutional policies and capacity building were addressed. A new area, which received increased attention, was the theme of drought.

Upland NERICAs were planted on more than 150,000 ha across Africa, including about 80,000 ha in Guinea and more than 20,000 ha in Uganda. Congo DRC is one of several countries outside WARDA's traditional area of operations that are turning increasingly towards the Center. A number of upland and lowland NERICAs are showing signs of good adaptation. Traditional WARDA areas are, however, far from neglected and five new irrigated rice varieties have been released in the Senegal River valley to join the three Sahel varieties already occupying more than 70% of the total irrigated rice area in the region. Three interspecific (irrigated NERICAs) and 1 intraspecific varieties were also identified for release in The Gambia.

In preparation for the 2007 EPMP, WARDA commissioned and welcomed teams carrying out Center-commissioned external reviews (CCER) on Integrated Genetic and Natural Resources Management (IGNRM) and Partnerships, and an evaluation report of the

UNDP-sponsored Interspecific Hybridization Project. All of these teams produced positive and forward-looking reviews that acknowledged WARDA's output of research IPGs and made valuable recommendations for the continuation of successful and apposite research projects at WARDA. The highly diversified partnerships with all levels of the rice sector, including farmers, produced by the WARDA model was also recognized as a key factor to the Center's continuing success. The 2007–2009 MTP is already addressing realignments to focus greater efforts on irrigated and rainfed lowland rice ecosystems that have the greatest intensification potential.

The 2005 research days provided an important opportunity for WARDA team scientists from Cotonou and the satellite stations to present the results of their research activities for the previous 12 months and to present research plans and budget requirements for the year to come. We were pleased to welcome outside participants from INRAB (Benin), IRRI (Philippines), JICA (Japan), IITA (Benin) and Sasakawa Global 2000.

ECARRN organized a Stakeholders' Workshop on priority setting in Nairobi in December 2005 while SWIHA has continued to enlist new partners in its activities, developing working relationships with the national HIV/AIDS programs in Benin and other West African countries, and establishing collaborative working relationships with CABI and several NARES. A SSA Regional Workshop on HIV/AIDS and Agriculture and Nutrition in July 2005 identified negative impacts of HIV/AIDS on agriculture and food security which

need now to be addressed. A new network (ANEHA) to coordinate HIV/AIDS-related agricultural research in Africa was formed.

The reputation of the Africa Rice Center and of its research program continues to play a key part in attracting the high-caliber scientists and support staff essential to sustain an expanding and dynamic program of activities. The number of seconded experts, particularly from Japan, has been increased and there is enhanced collaboration with NARS partners. At ADG Corporate Services' level Mr Koen Geerts took up his duties in April 2006. Other arrivals in 2005–2006 were Dr Ines Sanchez, head of the GRU; Dr Margaret Kroma, sociologist; Post-doctoral fellows Dr Kassa Semagn (biotechnology – RYMV), Boubacarr Manneh (biotechnology – drought) and Dr Kazuki Saito (agronomy); Mrs Samira Hotobah-During, Head of Donor Relations; and Mr Kolade Olatifede, Budget and Planning Officer.

As well as attracting new international staff, a number of appointments resulted in the promotion of existing WARDA personnel. Dr Patrick Kormawa was appointed Leader of Program 2 within the Research Division; at the WARDA Sahel Station, Dr Vincent Bado, the Sahel Agronomist, was appointed Head of Station; Dr Mande Semon, PDF Molecular Biologist, was appointed Upland Breeder.

Scientists joining from cooperating institutions included Dr Glenn Gregorio, of IRRI, who joined the team at WARDA-Nigeria in 2006.

Among the departures were: Mr Long T. Nguyen, ADG Corporate Services; Dr Pierre-Justin Kouka, Head of Donor Relations; Dr Kouamé Miézan, Head of the Sahel Station; Dr Howard Gridley, Upland Breeder; Dr Philippe Morant, IVC coordinator; and Mr Obed Agufana, Human Resources Manager.

The financial health of the center continues to improve so that it meets CGIAR norms and indeed surpasses that of other larger Centers in terms of income turnover. Africa Rice Center's grant income for 2007 is projected at US\$ 12.46 million, an estimated increase of US\$ 0.26 million over 2006 grant income from donors. Expenditure in 2007 is estimated at US\$ 12.20 million compared to actual spending of US\$ 11.15 million in 2005 and estimated spending of US\$ 11.89 million in 2006. The resource allocation to research for 2007–2009 is projected to be more than 66% of the total available.

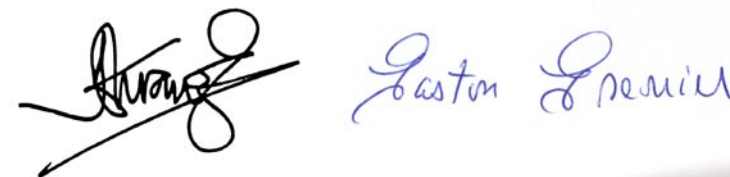
The WARDA Board of Trustees and Management are implementing every possible measure to preserve the value of the investments in the M'bé headquarters and site which continues to be used for some trials and for NERICA seed multiplication.

It is not possible, *writes Gaston Grenier*, to sign off on 2005–2006 without acknowledging that this has been the last full Center year of the current Director General Dr Kanayo Nwanze who hands over the reins on 30 November, 2006 to Dr Papa Abdoulaye Seck of Senegal. In completing the full 10-year tenure allowed

to DGs, Dr Nwanze is responsible for guiding WARDA through many programmed improvements and for navigating other unscheduled changes forced by circumstance. Highlights of his two terms as WARDA DG undoubtedly include the launch and dissemination of the upland and lowland NERICAs, the development of WARDA as the Africa Rice Center and its active expansion throughout sub-Saharan Africa.

Given the volatile background in which the Center has worked for many of those 10 years, he was largely responsible as its public face for the outward appearance of calm and 'business as usual'. Africa Rice Center will remain indebted to Dr Nwanze for his steadfast stewardship through a few unfortunate, unavoidable lows but predominantly through the many high points between 1996 and 2006.

A comprehensive process of selection involving numerous high-calibre candidates resulted in the appointment by the WARDA Council of Ministers of Dr Seck upon nomination and selection of the candidate by the Board of Trustees. Dr Seck comes to WARDA with a history of involvement with the CGIAR in various capacities and a thorough understanding of the issues affecting the production of international scientific public goods in sub-Saharan Africa and of the difficulties faced by the NARS.



Two handwritten signatures are shown. The first is in black ink and appears to be 'Kanayo Nwanze'. The second is in blue ink and reads 'Gaston Grenier'.

