

Highlights of the New Strategic Plan (2003-2012)

Introduction

In line with its new pan-African vision, the Center launched in 2003 a new Strategic Plan that charts its course for the next 10 years. It helps position the Center to address the emerging challenges in SSA in association with its partners.

The Strategy will guide present and future efforts of the Center, within the Plan period, in providing technologies for improving the livelihoods of the millions of poor African farmers and consumers for whom rice means food.

Drawing on lessons learned through the implementation of the 1990-2000 Strategic Plan, the new Strategy re-examines the Center's priorities and relevance within the framework of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the CGIAR's vision and strategy for SSA.

It capitalizes on the Center's comparative advantages and seeks to integrate the Center's activities with those of the rice stakeholders in SSA to maximize output and efficiency and minimize transaction costs.

The Center embarked on the strategic planning exercise at the beginning of the millennium and went through an extensive consultation process with its partners. It took into consideration the inputs from the series of consultations between the West and Central African Council for Research and Development (WECARD/CORAF) and the CGIAR in the late 90s and early 2000.

It also took into account the dynamics of SSA's new agricultural research scenario following the emergence of the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) and the creation of the CGIAR Challenge Programs.

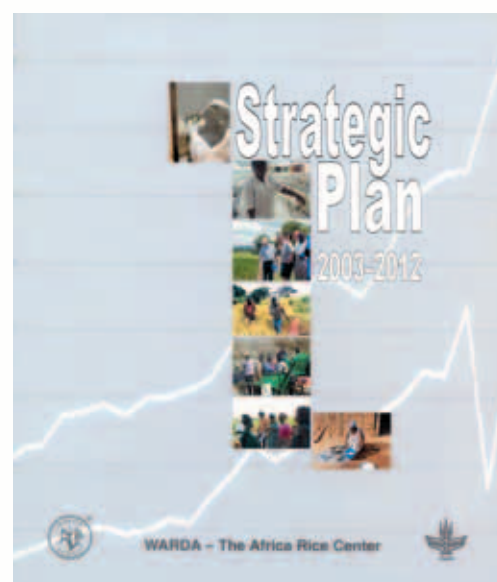
Mission and Vision for 2003–2012

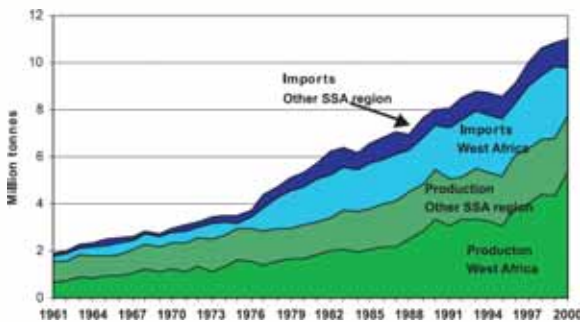
After going through a long gestation period that saw several versions, the new Strategy took final shape in 2003. It defined the Center's mission, vision and the strategic goal for 2003–2012:

Mission: 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.

Vision: 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.

Strategic Goal: 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.





Rice production and imports in SSA and West Africa
Source: FAO

Context and Challenge

Since the mid-1970s, the consumption of rice in West and Central Africa (WCA), and to a lesser extent in SSA as a whole, has increased dramatically. Regional rice production has also increased but to a lesser extent. As a result, WCA—one of the most impoverished region in the world—has become increasingly dependent on the world market for one of its staple foods.

The challenge for the Center is to overcome the major constraints to rice production in SSA:

- Low productivity and sustainability of rice
- Poor quality of the marketed product
- Unfavorable market and policy environment

The research challenge is aggravated by the high level of diversity that characterizes both the natural environment and agricultural production systems in the region. The need for emphasis on the postharvest and policy aspects also adds a complex dimension.

Main Elements of the New Strategy

To address the research challenge and achieve the new strategic goal, the Center will:

1. Pursue coherence and excellence in core research areas
2. Adapt the network-based model for research collaboration
3. Enhance the institutional capacities of NARS
4. Engage directly with the 'rice development sector'

Core Research Areas

The Strategy for 2003–2012 refocuses and streamlines the Center's research programs into two major areas: (1) development of components for integrated rice production systems, and (2) rice policy and development.

1. Integrated Rice Production Systems

The major rice-growing ecologies in SSA comprise rainfed uplands, rainfed lowlands and irrigated systems. The Strategy emphasizes the development of components for integrated rice production systems for greater resource use efficiency.

Activities under this program will seek to:

- Improve resource use efficiency for more productive, profitable, and socio-economically viable rice production systems in SSA
- Develop stress-tolerant rice varieties and agronomic practices that best fit or better optimize existing production systems in SSA and are acceptable to both producers and consumers

2. Rice Policy and Development

Based on the Center's successful experience, the Strategy highlights the importance of participatory R&D approaches, appropriate policy and market environment for the rapid uptake of improved technologies. It also focuses on the need for impact assessment in the rice sector on productivity, profitability and poverty.

The thrust of this program is to:

- Build strategies for competitive rice sector development in SSA through a better understanding of rice policy and market dynamics
- Assess the impact of technical, policy and institutional change within the rice sector

Implementing through Projects

These two programs will function through a limited number of well-focused projects with specific outputs and milestones within the 3-year rolling Medium-Term Plans (MTP).

The production system-based approach will seek to:

- Stabilize the fragile natural-resource base of upland systems
- Intensify and diversify rainfed lowlands
- Improve resource use efficiency in irrigated systems through integrated crop management approaches

Constraints such as unstable policy environment, poor R&D linkages and limited market integration cut across production systems and will be addressed through an integrated approach.

Research Collaboration and Capacity Building

Owing largely to the Center's unique origin as an association of African member states, partnership is at the heart of the Center's *modus operandi*. The Center aims to enhance the institutional capacity of NARES by extending its highly successful R&D network model to other rice-producing areas of Africa.

Engagement with the Rice Development Sector

As part of its new research agenda, the Center will reach out beyond its traditional partners to ensure that its knowledge and technologies are relevant and accessible to a broader range of actors interested in rice development in Africa; ranging from international development banks and bilateral agencies, through government and research institutions to NGOs and the private sector.

It will explore the creation of a self-sustaining subsidiary through public-private dialog that would provide support to farmers and small businesses within farming communities.

Capitalizing on Achievements and Technological Advances

The Center will build on its R&D successes, such as the NERICA breakthroughs for both upland and lowland ecologies; high-yielding varieties for the Sahel; the ASI rice thresher; integrated crop management strategy; farmer-participatory approaches; efficient rice germplasm distribution in SSA; and policy strategy to revive the rice sector in Nigeria.

It will draw upon its valuable rice germplasm collection, accumulated databases and research results and the enhanced capacity of NARS in SSA. It will also efficiently exploit the new opportunities offered by advances in biotechnology, GIS, modeling, information and computing technologies.

Research Priority Setting

To achieve its goal over the coming decade, the Center will address those priority areas where (i) it has or could have a comparative advantage; and (ii) it can have rapid and substantial impact. It will place emphasis on those countries where substantial impact can be achieved in 5–10 years, with a plan to scale up to other countries in the region.

The Center and its NARS partners will periodically conduct priority-setting exercises by country to revisit and coordinate research strategies.

Financing the Strategic Plan

To create an efficient financial environment for achieving the Center's strategic goal, the Center will concentrate on three main areas:

- Full cost recovery of expenditures
- Targeting innovative avenues for income generation
- Significant cash surplus and reserve to ensure financial stability and sustainability

Conclusion

The new Strategic Plan represents both continuity and change. The Center will continue to:

- Focus primarily on rice with priority on WCA
- Develop new germplasm and complementary technologies
- Address key constraints in the major rice production systems
- Use the network model for regional rice research collaboration
- Work in partnership with research institutes throughout the world

At the same time, in opening new ground, the Center will:

- Focus on an integrated production systems approach
- Expand activities into eastern, Central and southern Africa
- Emphasize more postharvest, policy and institutional issues
- Engage directly in the rice development sector
- Maximize the judicious use of biotechnology

This combined strategy will enable the Center, working in partnership, to make a significant contribution to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and poverty reduction targets of NEPAD in SSA. ♦



A growing concern: sub-Saharan Africa's heavy dependence on imported rice