

1971-85: Genesis

The Africa Rice Center was constituted as the West Africa Rice Development Association (WARDA) in 1971 by 11 West African countries (Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo) with the assistance of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA).

WARDA began operating from Monrovia, Liberia, managed by a Governing Council at the ministerial level, a Scientific and Technical Committee (STC) and an Executive Secretariat.

Emphasis was placed on on-farm adaptive trials through direct introduction of genetic material from other regions, particularly Asia. However, because of the greater diversity of farming systems in SSA compared to Asia, the introduced varieties released during this period were not useful beyond some limited domains, such as the irrigated rice varieties Bouaké 189 and Jaya.

Therefore, such experience—combined with changes in the economic climate—highlighted that a longer-term, more assured commitment to research was needed to generate location-specific technologies within the region.

1985-1990: A CGIAR Center with a Difference

Between December 1986 and June 1988, WARDA underwent some major transformations, triggered by the decision that it should come under the aegis of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), while retaining its status as an intergovernmental association with the Council of Ministers as its highest oversight body.

It was also decided that instead of the former STC, a Board of Trustees would be set up and that the position of the Executive Secretary would be transformed into that of a Director General, who would be recruited internationally, but only from among nationals of WARDA member countries.

Between late 1987 and early 1988 WARDA moved its headquarters from Monrovia because of civil disturbances to M'Bé, Côte d'Ivoire, with a new organizational structure and strategic plan. A new era of WARDA started with the membership of the association increasing from 11 to 17 countries of West and Central Africa (Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Guinea, Guinea Bissau and Nigeria in addition to the 11 original members) and an increasing number of external donors, development agencies and private foundations.

The 1990s: WARDA Takes Off

In the 1990s, a new wave of scientists at WARDA began to explore innovative pathways to research designed to succeed under the specific farming conditions of SSA. It was during this period, that WARDA and its partners revolutionized the approach to rice research in SSA and made history through some remarkable achievements:

- The upland NERICA breakthrough [the first ever fertile interspecific rice progeny from hybridization of African (*Oryza glaberrima*) and Asian (*O. sativa*) rice species] in 1994. The NERICA name was trademarked by WARDA in 2004.
- The release of high-yielding rice varieties for irrigated systems (Sahel 108, 201 and 202) in Senegal in 1994 and in Mauritania in 1996
- Introduction of Participatory Varietal Selection (PVS) in SSA as a fast-track mechanism for dissemination of improved rice technologies in 1996
- Revitalization of Guinea's rainfed rice farming through wide dissemination of NERICA varieties in 1997



2000-2006: Evolution to a Pan-African Center of Excellence

Since 2000, WARDA's research achievements have been internationally recognized and the success of the NERICA rice varieties has helped shape WARDA's future direction, extending its horizon beyond West Africa into Central, Eastern and Southern Africa. Recognizing its increasing role and relevance throughout SSA, the Association was designated the Africa Rice Center (WARDA) in 2003. The networks and consortia convened by the Center, including the Eastern and Central Africa Rice Research Network (ECARRN) based in Tanzania, help maintain its continent-wide activities.

Victim of the Ivorian Crisis

From the beginning, WARDA faced many challenges. But one of the gravest ones occurred in September 2002, when a military uprising erupted in Côte d'Ivoire—its host country. WARDA was forced out of its headquarters, established temporary headquarters in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, and redeployed most of its scientific staff to Bamako, Mali.

WARDA was able to successfully retrieve over 80% of duplicate samples of rice varieties from its genebank for storage outside the risk zone. It managed to cope with the crisis, thanks to tremendous support from the CGIAR and partners across the world.

With the advances made in the peace process and assurances and support from its Council of Ministers, the Ivorian Government and the international community through the United Nations in Côte d'Ivoire, WARDA developed a progressive return plan to its headquarters in Bouaké, which it started to implement in September 2004.

However, hostilities resumed unexpectedly in November 2004 when Bouaké, controlled by the New Forces, was hit by air strikes from the

WARDA and its partners revolutionized the approach to rice research in SSA

Government forces. One of WARDA's senior scientists, Dr Robert Carsky, was killed when a bomb struck the French barracks where he had sought shelter from air strikes. It is a tragic loss for the Center and for Africa where he had spent most of his professional life dedicated to agricultural research.

Temporary Relocation to Benin

The resurgence of the civil strife required the evacuation of internationally recruited and senior non-Ivorian support staff from Côte d'Ivoire. The WARDA Board decided during an extraordinary meeting in December 2004 to relocate the Center's headquarters to Cotonou, Benin, in the facilities made available by the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) and the Institut national de recherches agronomiques du Bénin (INRAB).

The Board also decided that the Center staff will operate from Cotonou with an initial planning horizon of 5 years during which the decision will be regularly reviewed. Côte d'Ivoire continues to be WARDA's permanent headquarters, where its offices, laboratories, field facilities and genebank have remained intact.

Thanks to their remarkable resilience, WARDA staff members have settled down quickly in Cotonou since 2005, which has proved to be a safe haven for research.

Vision for the Future

WARDA's researchers continue to maintain the momentum of high-quality research that the Center is known for. In 2005, WARDA and its national partners made another breakthrough by developing new NERICA varieties adapted to lowland ecologies. In Senegal, five new Sahel rice varieties were released for irrigated rice farmers.

WARDA is actively engaged in a comprehensive capacity building program of its national partners relating to rice research, particularly state-of-the-art molecular biology tools and research impact assessment methodologies.

In line with its new pan-African vision, WARDA launched in 2003 a new Strategic Plan that charts its course for the next 10 years. It helps position WARDA to address the emerging challenges in SSA in association with its partners. The Strategy for 2003–2012 refocuses and streamlines WARDA's research programs into two major areas: (1) development of components for integrated rice production systems, and (2) rice policy and development.

WARDA's rich experience of developing partnership models has given it a comparative advantage to spearhead the development of a regional Medium Term Plan for West and Central Africa as part of CGIAR's SSA strategy for greater programmatic and structural alignment.

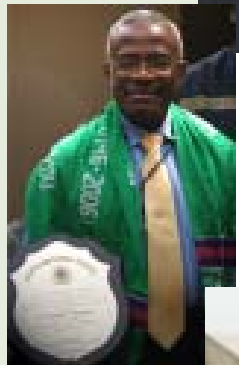
The First Africa Rice Congress held in 2006 recognized the role played by WARDA, not only in African agriculture and, therefore, in the continent's economic growth but also in providing leadership in rice science and development. The Congress resolved and urged all stakeholders to maintain the Center's identity, as previously resolved by the WARDA Council of Ministers in September 2005 and the National Experts Committee in June 2006, and to strengthen its capacity for the welfare of African rice farmers.



World-Wide Recognition

WARDA's researchers are the first Africans to receive world-class awards. During 2000-2006, many awards and distinctions have been showered on WARDA:

- The prestigious CGIAR King Baudouin Award for NERICA in 2000
- High honors from the Government of Côte d'Ivoire in 2001
- The Senegalese President's Science & Technology Award for the development and promotion of the ASI rice thresher in 2003
- The World Food Prize awarded to Dr Monty Jones for NERICA development in 2004
- Japan's International Koshihikari Prize to Dr Moussa Sié for extending the Upland NERICA breakthrough to lowlands in 2006
- First Africa Rice Congressional Honor bestowed on Dr Kanayo F. Nwanze in 2006 in recognition of his outstanding contribution to rice research and development in Africa during his term as WARDA Director General (1996-2006)



WARDA's Strength: Partnership at All Levels

WARDA was established as a partnership organization in an era before partnerships were a la mode. WARDA's modus operandi is "partnership at all levels."

The basis of the Association itself is a partnership among West and Central African Countries. From 1991 to 1999, WARDA-NARS collaborative research was mostly coordinated through thematic Task Forces, which enabled regional coordination of research activities to maximize the benefits of individual research activities and to avoid duplication of effort among partner countries.

In 1999, the WARDA-NARS Task Forces were merged with the West and Central African Council for Research and Development (WECARD-CORAF) to form a Regional Rice Research and Development Network for West and Central Africa (ROCARIZ), operated on the Task Force mechanism.

WARDA hosts the central coordination of the ROCARIZ, the International Network for Genetic Evaluation of Rice in Africa (INGER-Africa), the Inland Valley Consortium (IVC), and the African Rice Initiative (ARI). It also supports the Coordination Unit of the Eastern and Central African Rice Research Network (ECARRN), based in Tanzania. All these operate on the basis of linkages with many countries across SSA.

The Interspecific Hybridization Project (IHP) model, a triangular South-South partnership has been developed to bring together the pool of expertise from advanced research institutes to national programs. IHP was key to the advancement of the upland NERICAs in SSA.

For accelerated dissemination of improved technologies, WARDA has developed and adapted several participatory models, such as Participatory Varietal Selection (PVS), Community-based Seed Production Systems (CBSS) and Participatory Learning and Action Research (PLAR). The ASI—the most widely used rice thresher in the Senegal River Valley—is a highly successful product of partnership.

WARDA has also been involved in agriculture and health-related issues. From 1994-2000, it coordinated the Human Health Consortium to evaluate the health and social impacts of lowland and irrigation. In 2001, the CGIAR launched the Systemwide Initiative on HIV/AIDS and Agriculture (SWIHA), hosted by WARDA. A pan-Africa network (ANEHA) was launched in 2005 to rapidly increase the scale and scope of activities and resources aimed at mitigating the effects of the pandemic on farming communities in SSA.

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1971-2006: WARDA's Epic Journey from a Regional Association to a Pan-African Center of Excellence



Thirty-five years ago, the seed of an innovative idea was sown in West Africa. Most people thought it would not survive like many plans that have been launched in Africa with big fanfare but have fizzled out along the way.

However, to everyone's surprise, the idea took shape and grew, nurtured by all those who believed in it. Today, after triumphing over many hardships and attempts to trample it down, it has blossomed into a giant tree, whose branches are spread across sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and whose fruits have become world-famous.

This is in essence the story of the evolution of the Africa Rice Center (WARDA), which despite all the odds stacked against it, has grown from a regional association to become the premier Center for rice research and development in SSA.

WARDA continues to generate a stream of technologies adapted to SSA farming conditions and its flagship technology—the New Rices for Africa (NERICA)—has not only become a beacon of hope for millions of poor rice farmers and consumers across SSA, but has also received worldwide acclaim.

WARDA's core activity is research for development based on partnership. Its mission 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. It is committed to capacity building of its African national partners and has made human-resources development one of its priority activities.