

Minutes of the Meeting of the National Experts Committee (NEC) of AfricaRice Thursday November 2, 2023

1. Opening session

The meeting of the National Experts Committee (NEC) of AfricaRice was held virtually on Thursday November 2, 2023. The meeting was presided over by the Chairperson of NEC, Prof Lala Razafinjara, the Director General of FOFIFA of Madagascar.

Director General's welcome remarks: The Director General (DG) of AfricaRice, Dr Baboucarr Manneh, called the meeting to order at about 10h00 and welcomed all participants, including NEC members. He used the occasion of his welcome remarks to express gratitude to the NEC members for recommending him to the Council of Ministers (COM) of AfricaRice for appointment as Director General of AfricaRice and Secretary to COM in February 2023. He informed the NEC that he assumed duties as the Director General in April 2023, and that he prioritized this statutory meeting of NEC as one of the initial tasks he wanted to accomplish in 2023. He recalled the important advisory role that NEC plays to the COM – which includes the review of all key strategic and statutory documents and requests for endorsement, and drafting of recommendations to be approved by COM.

NEC Chairperson's opening remarks: The Chairperson of NEC, Professor Lala Razafinjara, in his opening remarks expressed gratitude to the NEC members for their availability to participate in the NEC meeting. He informed members the working documents which have been produced to respond to each of the proposed agenda items had been shared with all NEC members by the COM Secretariat. The NEC Chairperson formally welcomed the DG of AfricaRice, Dr Baboucarr Manneh, to the NEC meeting, and expressed gratitude for his prioritizing this NEC meeting in 2023.

2. Quorum

Quorum was verified. The representation of some member countries by more than one participant created an impression of a quorum which should not be less than 18 of the 28 member countries. Whereas only seventeen (17) countries were represented in the meeting (see Annex 1), the number of participants was twenty-two (22). In the absence of a quorum the practice is for the meeting to proceed, and the outcome of the meeting be shared with the absentees for a 'No-Objection' to the recommendations/decisions of the statutory meeting.

3. Rapporteurs

The DG of NARO, Uganda, represented by Dr Jimmy Lamo, and the DG of IER, Mali, represented by Dr Mohammed Dicko served as rapporteurs to the meeting, with COM Secretariat providing support.

4. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was considered and adopted as presented.

5. Presentation of dossier to NEC for examination

The following dossiers were presented to the NEC by the Director General, Chief of Staff and Director of Finance & Corporate Services, for examination:

- (i) The Status of Implementation of the 32nd Council of Ministers' Resolutions,
- (ii) Implementation of Council of Ministers' Resolution on Innovative Funding for Rice Agri-food Systems Research in Africa,
- (iii) Involvement of AfricaRice in countries projects,
- (iv) Proposed declaration for COM's endorsement for AfricaRice involvement in national rice projects/ initiatives to provide complementary technical expertise to NARES partner,
- (v) Member States contributions: Amounts contributed and need for revision.

6. Outcome of review of dossiers presented to NEC

The NEC commended the AfricaRice Secretariat for the relevance and quality of the dossiers presented for examination to the NEC. Key concerns, comments and observations raised by the NEC included the following:

- a. Membership dues: The NEC members commended member countries that are to update with payments of their annual contributions. However, concern was expressed by several members on the continuing low response of some AfricaRice member countries about the payment of membership contributions to AfricaRice. The NEC members drew attention to the constitutional obligations of all member countries of AfricaRice about the payment of membership dues.

Recommendation 1: The NEC recommends that an advocacy plan of action be sent to member countries aimed at demonstrating to various decision-makers the need to respect the constitutional provision on membership dues payment to the Association.

- b. Innovative financing mechanism: AfricaRice Management was commended for initiating this initiative. The NEC stressed the need for benefits sharing with the countries from the innovative financing given that derivable dividends will be from the technologies and innovations developed in partnership with the NARIs. The necessity of involving the private sector was also underscored.
- c. Involvement of AfricaRice in country projects: The NEC members expressed appreciation on the capacity of AfricaRice in mobilizing its expertise from the Center and from the international community to bear on the countries' goal of transformation of the rice value chain to attain food and nutrition security. The ongoing process aimed at implementing the AfDB-funded Regional Resilient Rice Value Chains Development Program (REWARD) in West Africa program, led by AfricaRice, was commended given that the program will be mobilizing state-of-the-art expertise and technology to transform rice value chains in the region. The continuing partnership between AfricaRice and the NARIs was also commended. The NEC, however, stressed that AfricaRice needs to take all necessary cautious steps to avoid being seen as being in competition for financial resources with the NARIs.
- d. Visibility of AfricaRice at the national level: The NEC members emphasized the need for all members to appropriate AfricaRice given that the Center is the creation of the member countries. All member countries were therefore urged to ensure that AfricaRice activities are made more visible at the national level to encourage decision-makers to continue to support the Association. The need for reactivation of all the Task Forces (TF) was brought to the fore, given that these TFs play a commendable role in contributing to the visibility of the Center's work in the countries. The NEC urged AfricaRice Management to always contact the DGs of NARIs on projects/initiatives being proposed for implementation in-country. The NEC insisted that such an approach would also add value to the visibility of the Center in the countries.

Recommendation 2: The NEC recommends as follows:

- i. **For correspondences on AfricaRice vacancy announcements and on project implementation the DG of the NARI should be contacted *ab initio*,**
- ii. **For strategic and advocacy correspondences to the Minister, a copy of the correspondence should be copied to the DG of the NARI for effective follow-up.**

- e. Proposed declaration for 33rd Council of Ministers approval: The NEC members expressed satisfaction on the content and purpose of the proposed declaration (see Annex 2).

Recommendation 3: The NEC recommends that the declaration be presented to the 33rd COM for consideration and approval.

- f. Arrangements for the 33rd ordinary session of the Council of Ministers (COM) of AfricaRice: The NEC was informed that Madagascar that currently chairs the Council of Ministers of AfricaRice will be hosting the 33rd COM in 2024. The DG informed the NEC that consultations have been held with the Chair NEC, Prof Razafinjara, who confirmed the readiness of Madagascar to host the 33rd Council of Ministers meeting. Precise dates and modalities for the 33rd COM meeting will be confirmed in due course. The NEC noted the oncoming December 2023 general elections in Madagascar – noting also that a new government in the country will determine the possible dates for the in-person meeting. It was also noted that AfricaRice Management will continue with its logistics arrangements on lodging and resource mobilization to enable the Center organize an effective COM meeting in 2024 in collaboration with the national authorities of Madagascar.

7. Any other business

The DG informed the NEC members of the Center's Science Week which has been scheduled for December 4 to 8, 2023. The members of the various Task Forces are being invited to the meeting which will be an opportunity to refresh all the TFs. The NEC was also reassured of AfricaRice's readiness to continue in its role of strengthening the capacity of its NAREs partners. The DG thanked the NEC for its continued institutional and policy support to the Center.

8. Closing remarks of the Chair of NEC

The interim Chair of NEC, Dr Adolphe Adjanohoun, in closing the meeting, thanked the NEC for their active participation in the deliberations of the meeting. He again commended AfricaRice Management for the excellent quality of the working documents which facilitated the discussions during the meeting. He assured the DG of AfricaRice of the continued support of the NEC in the execution of his duties as DG of AfricaRice

and Secretary to COM. The Chair also expressed gratitude to the substantive Chair of NEC for the confidence he had in him by nominating him to chair the rest of the meeting following an unforeseen interruption in his (the Chair's) internet services. He wished the Association continued success in its endeavors, and thereafter closed the meeting.

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Annex 1

List of Participants at the November 2 National Experts Committee (NEC) Meeting

N°	Country/Pays	Name/Nom	Function/Fonction	Address/Contact
National Experts Committee Members				
1	Benin	Adjanohoun Adolphe	DG (INRAB)	adjanohouna@yahoo.fr
2	Cote d'Ivoire	BOUET Alphonse	DG (CNRA) Representative	bouetalph@gmail.com
3	Nigeria	Emmanuel Abo	Executive Director (NCRI)	meabo2018@gmail.com
4	Liberia	Dr. Victor Sumo	DG (CARI)	Nuwor@yahoo.com
5	Mali	Modibo SYLLA	DG (IER)	syllamodibo08@gmail.com
		Mohamed Dicko	IER	mkdicko@gmail.com
6	Niger	Illiassou Mossi Maiga	DG (INRAN)	imossim@yahoo.fr
		Yacouba Bouda	DG de l'Agriculture, Ministère de l'Agriculture	yacoubabouda@yahoo.fr
7	Tchad	Yassine DOUDOUA	DG (ITRAD)	yassine.doudoua@gmail.com
8	Cameroun	Ngome Ajebesone Francis	DDG (IRAD)	ngomajebe@yahoo.com
9	Uganda	Jimmy Lamo	DG (NARO) Representative	ilamoayo@gmail.com
10	Gabon	Rolexin Adamas	DG (ADAG)	smada@outlook.fr
11	Egypt	MOHAMED SOLIMAN	ARC President	m.soliman41@yahoo.com
12	Madagascar	Prof Lala Razafinjara	DG (FOFIFA)	larazafi@yahoo.com
13	Mozambique	Constantino Senete	DG (IIAM) Representative	
		Hermino Abade	Instituto de Investigação Agrária de Moçambique(IIAM)	habade7@gmail.com
		Sam Camilo	National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute	scamyllo@gmail.com
14	Sénégal	Madiama Cisse	DG (ISRA) Representative	madiama.cisse@isra.sn

15	Gambia	Demba Jallow	DG NARI	demsondoe@yahoo.co.uk ; dembatrawally@gmail.com
16	Sierra Leone	Adam Sheka Kanu	DG (SLARI) representative	skanuadam@yahoo.com ; contehar@yahoo.fr
17	Ghana	Paul Bosu	CSIR	pp.bosu@csir.org.gh csirdgoffice@gmail.com
18		iPad (unidentified)		
Africa Rice Center				
	AfricaRice	Baboucarr Manneh	DG AfricaRice	B.Manneh@cgiar.org
	AfricaRice	Abdulai Jalloh	Director, Research & Innovation	A.Jalloh@cgiar.org
	AfricaRice	Nwalozie Marcel	Chief of Staff	M.Nwalozie@cgiar.org
	AfricaRice	Nafissatou Ndiour-Bella	Director, Strategic Business Initiative	N.Ndiour-Bella@cgiar.org
	AfricaRice	Kolade Olatifede	Director Finance & Corporate Services	K.Olatifede@cgiar.org
	AfricaRice	Fassouma Sanogo	French-English Translator	sfassouma@gmail.com ; f.sanogo@cgiar.org
	AfricaRice	Aly Diomande	French-English Translator	a.diomande@cgiar.org
	AfricaRice	Sylla Passokona	Simultaneous Interpreter	passokona@yahoo.fr
	AfricaRice	Florent Bilé	Simultaneous Interpreter	florentbile555@yahoo.com

Annex 2

THE AFRICARICE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS (COM) DECLARATION ENDORSING AFRICARICE'S SYSTEMATIC INVOLVEMENT IN NATIONAL RICE PROJECTS/INITIATIVES

Preamble

The Council of Ministers of AfricaRice gathered in Antananarivo, Madagascar, on.....2024 in the presence of the AfricaRice's National Experts Committee and partners, hereby:

1. *Underscore* the need for AfricaRice member countries to attain their set goal of attaining self-sufficiency in rice production;
2. *Recall* the AfricaRice statutory provisions requiring Africa Rice Center to support the member States to achieve operational efficiency in the pursuit of the countries' goal of attaining rice self-sufficiency;
3. *Recall* the 32nd COM's resolution requiring AfricaRice Management to provide proven knowledge-based systems which member countries could deploy in advocating for investments that would lead to increased performance of the rice value chain and the attainment of rice self-sufficiency in member States;
4. *Also recall* the 32nd COM's resolution that requires AfricaRice Management to consolidate links with NARIs, sub-regional research and innovation institutions, regional economic communities in a bid to strengthen their capacity in rice research and development as well as the policy environment, to enable the creation of impact on the livelihood of the African populace;
5. *Acknowledge* that climate crisis, commodity price increases and several other emerging crises constitute significant challenges to food sovereignty on the African continent;

6. *Emphasize* that AfricaRice has the requisite capacity to mobilize its expertise and expertise from the global scientific community to bear on the member States goal of attaining rice self-sufficiency by 2030.

Collective action needed

7. The Council of Ministers of AfricaRice by this declaration call on member States of the Association to endorse AfricaRice involvement in national rice projects/initiatives to provide complementary technical expertise to NARES partners by specifically:
 - a. Inviting AfricaRice to contribute to the conceptualization and development of each country's rice value chain projects/programs;
 - b. Involving AfricaRice in the implementation of such projects/programs;
 - c. Ensuring AfricaRice involvement in the monitoring and assessment of impact of such projects/programs.
8. The Council of Ministers urge each member State to seize the opportunity of the One CGIAR (to which AfricaRice adheres) and the capacity of AfricaRice to mobilize global expertise in ensuring that state-of-the-art technologies are mobilized from the global community in the drive to attain self-sufficiency in rice production.

Adopted by the 33rd Council of Ministers of AfricaRice ordinary session on 2024 in the presence of the National Experts Committee of AfricaRice and its partners.

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