

# Message from the Director General and the Chairman of the Board of Trustees

**W**ARDA IS growing! While that may not be strictly true in terms of staff complement, it is certainly true from the viewpoint of WARDA's influence across the continent of Africa. Originally conceived as the West Africa Rice Development Association and being made up of 11 member states, within a few years of its creation WARDA spread to encompass 17 member states, including two Central African States (Cameroon and Chad), and its technologies have since spread even further abroad into Eastern and Southern Africa. In recognition of WARDA's continental impact, the Center is now known as 'The Africa Rice Center' (since January 2003). The new name was ratified by WARDA's Council of Ministers at its September 2003 meeting. The story behind the new appellation and expanding influence of WARDA technologies in the region is presented in this year's first feature (*see page 7*).

The latter part of 2002 will forever be etched on the memories of everyone who was living in or visiting Côte d'Ivoire at that fateful time. WARDA's own story of the unfolding events and their impact on life and work in our host country are given in our second feature, 'Crisis in Côte d'Ivoire: WARDA "under fire"' (*see page 13*). WARDA's partnership *modus operandi* was the key to our survival and the continuation of WARDA-led rice research and development in the region. We want to take this opportunity to praise the efforts of those staff who remained in, or returned to, the country and helped in the relocation of the main body of researchers to Bamako, Mali. While Management will continue to be headquartered in Abidjan with frequent visits to Bouaké and M'Bé, we look forward to a full crop season and maintaining the continuity of our research activities from the safety of the Samanko research station of fellow CGIAR Center ICRISAT (International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics) in our member state of Mali. In reality, we have turned the adversity of the Ivorian situation into an opportunity for increased collaboration with our partners in Mali and elsewhere.

Meanwhile, activities led by staff in our Nigeria and Sahel Stations went on unabated. One particular highlight has been the on-going work to develop a rice-sector strategy for Nigeria, which has drawn on expertise from both the Main Research Center and the Sahel Station. This is perhaps the first opportunity that WARDA has had to get involved in discussions ranging from grass-roots level to the top echelons of government on the issue of policies affecting rice. This wide-ranging work seeks to present proposals to the Nigerian Federal Government promoting policies that will increase the competitiveness of domestic rice, hopefully without recourse to large injections of public money into the production and marketing sectors. (*See Box 'Rice sector strategy for Nigeria,' page 18, for details.*)

With the Ivorian situation affecting departures and recruitment, there was a lower intake of staff during this period than in recent years. However, it is our pleasure to welcome the following, who joined the WARDA family during the reporting period: Mamery Camara (Agronomist, Visiting Scientist), Paul Kiepe (Inland Valley

Consortium Research Coordinator and Natural-Resource Management Scientist), Savitri Mohapatra (Assistant to the DG and Public-Awareness Assistant), May-Guri Sæthre (Entomologist) and James Sumberg (Rice Policy and Development Program Leader).

In 2001, our technology transfer team started a program of farmer participatory learning and action research for communities in two inland valleys in Côte d’Ivoire. The program proved a success, with farmers learning to identify problems on their farms and devising their own solutions. In fact, several participating farmers went on to become trainers in their own right. The story is taken up in our third feature (page 23). Meanwhile, other participatory techniques were proving equally successful in Benin and Nigeria. The ‘Participatory Technology Development’ project’s first phase drew to a close in 2003 and we report some of its highlights (page 30).

Impact assessment featured high among the recommendations of the External Program and Management Review of WARDA in 2000. Subsequently, WARDA recruited an Impact Assessment Economist, who has been working on the thorny issue of enumerating the impact of the NERICA varieties (page 33).

Much of the impact-assessment ground-work reported in the previous feature was conducted as part of a project on biodiversity of rice supported by the UK Department for International Development. The biodiversity aspects of the project are reported in the next feature (page 42).

This year’s *Donor Country Profile* focuses on France—a nation with a big stake in the West and Central Africa region, both historically and in terms of on-going collaboration. The feature looks at WARDA and France, from seconded specialists to training, and from participation in the Board of Trustees to informal collaboration in Mauritania and Senegal (page 46).

As we go to press, two exciting events were unfolding. The Ivorian crisis was on the path of a negotiated peace settlement. Both sides in the conflict had declared cessation of hostilities, we had made several trips to our campus, confirming that facilities were still intact and had deployed a ‘maintenance team’ to begin the process of ‘gradual return.’ NERICA (New Rice for Africa)—now the flagship of the CGIAR—was on the move and spreading across Africa. Negotiations, on behalf of our national partners, with the African Development Bank for an initial five-year dissemination project were close to completion and several donors and institutions were committing support. These developments and others will constitute major features in our next report.

Finally, the WARDA Board, Management and Staff are grateful to our donors and partners for their strong support and encouragement during the difficult months of the Ivorian crisis. WARDA looks forward to continuing its dedicated service to the millions of Africa’s population for whom rice is life.



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*Director General*



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