



ON DIT quoi?

A newsletter from Africa Rice Center (WARDA)

WARDA Visiting Fellows and trainees win international awards

WARDA is proud to announce that three of its Visiting Fellows and trainees were recently selected to receive world-class awards:

Christiane Doré prize: The Christiane Doré prize is a highly acclaimed annual award instituted by the Institut de recherche pour le développement (IRD), France. The prize is given for excellence in research (thesis, scientific article, invention or patent).

Fatogoma Sorho, from Côte d'Ivoire, received the 2007 Christiane Doré prize for his thesis on "Rice yellow mottle virus (RYMV) in West Africa", which was unanimously selected by the Christiane Doré jury for the excellent quality of his research work.

Fatogoma did his doctoral thesis under the supervision of WARDA scientist Dr Y Sere and IRD scientist Dr D Fargette.

UNESCO-L'OREAL Fellowship for Young Women in Life Sciences: Created in 1998, the UNESCO-L'OREAL partnership supports women of science and allows the laureates to pursue research on life sciences in world-renowned institutes. Many of you know that Dr Khady Nani Dramé, Visiting Fellow, in the WARDA Biotechnology Unit, won this award last year.

Following on her footsteps, another young PhD student, Ms Yonelle Dea Moukoubi, from Gabon, is the recipient of the 2008 UNESCO-L'ORÉAL Fellowship award. She will receive the award at the awards ceremony in Paris, France, on 6 March 2008

Yonelle is receiving the award for her proposal on "Genetic diversity of lowland NERICA and selection of promising lines adapted to the African agro-ecological diversity." Thanks to this award, Yonelle will carry out the field work for her PhD under Dr M Sié at WARDA.

CODESRIA award: The Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), headquartered in Senegal, is a pioneer among African social research organizations. Through its "Small Grants for Thesis Writing", it has awarded grants to over 1000 laureates from various universities in Africa.

Ms Alice Bonou, from Benin, who was a trainee under WARDA economist Dr A Diagne, has been selected to receive the CODESRIA award. She will receive the prize money of USD 2500 for her thesis on "The impact of NERICA varieties on the rice biodiversity in Benin". She did this thesis as part of her Ingenieur Agronome studies.

Congratulations to all these laureates, who are paving the way to a glorious scientific future for Africa. Let us also give a big round of applause to their supervisors who have nurtured or are going to nurture these young stars.

WARDA-IRRI project ready to take off

A meeting to launch a multi-million dollar project on "Stress-tolerant rice for poor farmers in Africa and South Asia" is being held at WARDA, Cotonou, Benin, 5-7 March 2007. The project, which will be carried out by IRRI and its partners, has been approved for funding by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation through a grant to IRRI for US\$19.9 million over three years. The Africa component of this project proposal was developed by IRRI in partnership with WARDA, which will be its main partner in implementing this component. NARS scientists from all project member countries in Africa are being invited: Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali, The Gambia, Ghana, Senegal, Nigeria, Guinea, Ethiopia, Uganda, Rwanda, Madagascar, Tanzania and Mozambique.

28th Meeting of the Africa Rice Center (WARDA) Board of Trustees

The 2008 WARDA Board meeting will be held, 9 - 14 March, at WARDA-Cotonou. Preparations for the meeting, including all the reports and presentations for the Board, are going full steam ahead.

WARDA's unique rice collection sent to global seed vault

More than 2000 rice varieties drawn from WARDA's collection of rice seed were recently shipped to Svalbard Global Seed Vault (SGSV), located in a remote island near the Arctic Circle.

These varieties represent the first batch of the entire collection of more than 20,000 WARDA germplasm accessions that will be gradually shipped to SGSV.

These varieties are being sent as part of a CGIAR-wide effort to store the seeds of the world's most important crop species in a facility that can preserve their vitality for thousands of years.

WARDA's collection includes rice varieties of the African cultivated species, *Oryza glaberrima* and the Asian rice species, *O. sativa*, which have been grown for centuries by African rice farmers. This precious collection was the key to the development of the NERICA® varieties for upland and lowland ecologies.

WARDA's genebank collection also includes breeding lines and interspecific *O. sativa* x *O. glaberrima* hybrids.

Before shipping, the seeds were sealed in vacuum aluminium foils (10 g seeds per foil). Silica gel was placed in these foils to maintain low levels of seed moisture content necessary for long-term conservation.

The preparation, packaging and shipping of the seeds took two weeks of hectic work by the WARDA Genetic Resource Unit staff members. This included one week for drying the seeds (cold-room drying) in order to reduce their moisture content to as low as 5-6%. A dehumidifier has been installed in the GRU for this activity.

According to the CGIAR, the SGSV was built by the Norwegian government as a service to the global community, in close consultation with the Global Crop Diversity Trust, which will fund the facility's operations. The SGSV was opened on 26 February.

Branding and marketing of NERICA®

What is WARDA's vision for NERICA® in terms of product development, distribution, use, promotion, trademark, business model and future development? This was the question that was discussed at the meeting on "Branding and Marketing of NERICA®", 4-5 February, WARDA-Cotonou, between WARDA and the CGIAR Central Advisory Service on Intellectual Property (CAS-IP). CAS-IP helps CGIAR Centers to manage effectively their intellectual assets, as public goods.

To brainstorm on this important theme, CAS-IP sent four representatives, including Dr Victoria Henson-Apollonio, CAS-IP Manager, and specialists in law, marketing and communication relating to intellectual property issues. In addition to CAS-IP and WARDA participants, representatives of the private sector Tunde and the nongovernmental organization Songhai were invited to bring in their perspectives.

The outcome of this discussion and follow-up activities will help WARDA identify strategies and develop recommendations, including the use of IP tools to achieve its vision of NERICA success.

WARDA-IRRI project

(Continued from page 1)

IRRI's delegation includes about 20 participants from its headquarters in the Philippines and its eastern and southern Africa office. Dr David Bergvinson, Program Officer, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, is also taking part in this meeting. The Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) will be represented by Dr Issoufou Kapran.

Other special invitees include:

- DGs of national programs in Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Central African Republic, Republic of Congo and the Democratic Republic of Congo;
- SG 2000 from Ethiopia, African Seed Trade Association, Songhai Center and Tunde from Benin; and
- Local and regional farmers' associations in West Africa (ROPPA)

The first day of the meeting (5 March) will be devoted to the project launching ceremony, overviews and visits to the research facilities of WARDA. The second and third days (6-7 March) will be used to develop work-plans. A field visit to Songhai Center is scheduled for 8 March. Preparations for these meetings at WARDA are being carried out by Dr Baboucarr Manneh, who is the coordinator of this project on WARDA's side.

DG pays courtesy visit to Senegal Agricultural Minister

WARDA DG paid a courtesy visit to His Excellency Mr Hamath Sall, Minister of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry, Government of Senegal, on 22 January. DG was accompanied by Dr Macoumba Diouf, Director General of the Institut sénégalais de recherches agricoles (ISRA), Dr Marco Wopereis, WARDA ADG-R and Dr Vincent Bado, WARDA Representative in Senegal.

The Minister expressed the urgent need for strong technical support from WARDA to help boost domestic rice production. The Government of Senegal has developed a national strategy to attain self-sufficiency in rice by 2015.

During the meeting WARDA's technologies, such as the NERICA® and Sahel varieties, the ASI thresher and the Integrated Crop Management (ICM) technologies were highlighted.

DG thanked the Minister and reaffirmed WARDA's total commitment to support Senegal in attaining its goal. As a follow-up to the meeting, Dr Wopereis presented a concept note to Senegalese R&D representatives in St Louis, on possible contributions of WARDA to the Senegalese rice self-sufficiency program.

WARDA at AGM07: Highlights

WARDA had a strong presence at AGM07 held in Beijing on December 3-6. More than 800 CGIAR stakeholders attended. WARDA's delegation included the Board Chair, DG, the outgoing and the incoming ADG-R, Executive Officer and Communications Officer.

The delegation also included two scientists (Drs K Futakuchi and F Nwilene) who were invited by the CGIAR as well as Amos Onasanya, Research assistant, who was selected by WARDA Management to represent the GSS at AGM07.

At the Opening Ceremony of the AGM, the CGIAR Director emphasized three major successes of the CGIAR in 2007, including two that relate to WARDA – (1) the programmatic alignment between CIAT, IRRI and WARDA and (2) the corporate service alignment between IITA and WARDA.

At the Business Meeting, WARDA was enthusiastically felicitated by several donors, CGIAR Chair and the Science Council for receiving a positive EPMR evaluation. The Center was described as “a unique model in the CGIAR and a good example for the third generation of CGIAR Centers – with positive impact in several countries.”

Several important contacts were made by WARDA with donors and partners – including Austria, China, European Union, FARA, France, IFAD, Japan, Sweden and USAID – all of whom indicated strong support to WARDA's new vision and research directions.

The CGIAR Centers and partners' exhibition has been a traditional feature of the AGM. As the AGM07 focus was on advanced science, WARDA's booth highlighted the Center's activities on research and capacity building, relating to molecular biology. It received a good deal of attention from the AGM participants, including the CGIAR Chair and Director.

The Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences (CAAS) in its exhibition displayed a poster on the achievements from its collaborative work with WARDA on NERICA®, including new interspecifics developed for China. The CGIAR AGM07 publication, “Voices from the Field” devoted a chapter to this WARDA-China collaboration.

WARDA's entry on the Rice Media Project submitted by Dr P Van Mele for the AGM07 COM+ Communication for Sustainable Development Award 2007 made it to the top 5. It was showcased as part of the display of the best communication campaigns at the AGM.

Six entries from WARDA for the CGIAR research photography contest were included among the top 24 selections and were displayed at the AGM. These were submitted by A Togola, B Toulou, E Onasanya, B Cisse, S Mohapatra and M Vrolijk Van Mele.

JICA and ARI spearheading a series of capacity building programs

The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the African Rice Initiative (ARI) have been actively spearheading a series of capacity building programs for rice scientists and technicians of African national programs as well as for rice seed producers. As part of a “Japan Capacity Building program for African Agricultural Researchers,” Dr Y Sokei, JICA specialist working with ARI, coordinated a training program on “Research capacity development for evaluation of NERICA@s in West Africa, 15 November to 14 December.

Eleven participants attended this program, including three from Benin, two from The Gambia, two from Guinea, one from Sierra Leone, one from Mali as well as one Japanese Volunteer from Burkina Faso.

The program focused on hands-on training on the fundamentals of field experiments on rice, such as experimental design, calculation of fertilizer and seed, field management, data collection and statistical analysis. The program was supported by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF), Government of Japan and JICA.

WARDA participates in “Research Promotion Week” in Côte d'Ivoire

WARDA Representative in Côte d'Ivoire, Dr S Diatta, participated in the Research Promotion Week that was organized by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Government of Côte d'Ivoire, 5–7 November, in Abidjan.

The theme of the event was “Promotion and use of research results and technological innovations for the reconstruction of post-crisis Côte d'Ivoire.” The Research Promotion Week included conferences, documentary films, exhibitions and radio/TV programs on research outputs.

Thirty four institutions (national and international centers as well universities) took part in this event including WARDA, which had set up a booth of posters and publications. Dr Diatta was invited to make a presentation on behalf of the Center and the exhibitors at the Closing Ceremony.

Seminars

Ms Chiharu Sone, Visiting fellow at WARDA under the Japan-CGIAR Fellowship Program for two months (December 2007 through early February), presented a seminar on the results of her studies related to salinity tolerance of rice on 30 January. Ms Sone is a PhD student at the Laboratory of Crop Whole Plant Physiology, Okayama University.

Dr. Philippe Ryckewaert, Horticultural Entomologist, who visited WARDA from 12-19 December, gave a seminar presentation on a Project “Agro-ecological management of lowland rice – vegetable production systems in West of Africa” on 14 December.

New publications

- Nos amies les fourmis by Van Mele, P. and T. T. C. Nguyen
- GM crops in Europe: How much value and for whom. 2007 by Demont, M., K. Dillen, E. Mathijs and E. Tollens in *EuroChoices* 6(3):46-53.

My family!

On dit “Welcome aboard”

Dr Franklin Simtowe joined WARDA as Post Doctoral Fellow in Impact Assessment Economics. Dr Simtowe is Malawian and received his PhD from the University of Hohenheim in Germany.

On dit “Bravo”

Akahoua Simon Ncho, Consultant Research Assistant, WARDA, who co-authored a chapter in the 2007 publication “Exploitations agricoles familiales en Afrique de l’Ouest et du Centre.”

On dit “Bye Bye”

Silue Lassina from Finance on 7 December 2007

On dit “Condolences”

- Houan Ban, GRU Technician at M’bé on the death of his son on 26 December
- Fidelia Babadjidé, Bilingual Secretary at WARDA Research Division, who lost her father on 29 December 2007
- Family of Soumaila Gangba, WARDA Security Guard, who died on 19 January

African proverb

When spider webs unite, they can tie up a lion.

Workshop to facilitate exchange of information on rice economies

Following the recommendations of its 5th External Program and Management Review, WARDA organized a workshop entitled “Consultative Workshop: Fostering the Exchange of Statistical Data and Information on the Rice Economies of WARDA Member States,” 12–14 December in Cotonou, Benin.

The objective of this workshop was to think on ways and means of strengthening cooperation in the exchange of information, and in the collection, processing and dissemination of reliable and detailed data on rice technologies and the rice economies of WARDA member states.

The workshop participants were experts in agricultural economics from national programs and in agricultural statistics from national services in charge of crop surveys and agricultural statistics of 11 WARDA member States: Benin, Burkina-Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Uganda and Senegal.

Experts from regional and sub-regional institutions such as WAEMU, RESIMOA, INSAH and AGRHYMET also took part in this important meeting. Recommendations were made and focal persons were identified to help implement the workshop recommendations.