

Comments on the NRDS by the Steering Committee / drafted by CARD Secretariat

Prior to the General Meeting, the CARD Secretariat consolidated the comments by the Steering Committee (SC) members who reviewed the 11 NRDS documents of the Second Group (G2) countries. Five NRDS (Benin, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Togo and Zambia) have already been finalized and officially launched by the higher Authority of the respective Governments while the remaining six are underway.

These Strategies reflect the importance of rice either as a staple food in three countries, namely, Cote d'Ivoire, The Gambia and Liberia and as a cash and/or food crop under the crop diversification strategy in other countries. Most of the countries aim to be self-sufficient by 2018. A few countries aim to produce surplus for export. These projections set optimistic but credible targets.

Irrigated systems constitute the preferred agro-ecological zone for rice development in Rwanda; rainfed and irrigated lowland systems are favoured in DRC, Liberia, Togo and the Zambia,, and a more general mix of rice development in the three main ecologies will be promoted in Benin, Burkina Faso, CAR, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, and the Gambia.. The proposals for expanding land areas under rice cultivation in some countries were over optimistic, especially for irrigated areas. The targeted yields in some countries were also optimistic yet generally attainable. However, it is necessary to prioritise best-bet strategies for achieving them.

Most countries raised similar challenges and priorities which include:

- improvement of quality and quantity in the seed production and distribution systems
- credible seed policies and release mechanisms
- development and rehabilitation of irrigation and water management infrastructure
- reaching farmers and rice value chain stakeholders through trained extension staff and modern communication tools
- Strengthening human resources in rice research and extension
- appropriate mechanization
- improvement of rice quality through paying more attention to harvest and post-harvest practices
- lifting rice prices for domestic rice to levels received for imported rice
- improvement of market access for inputs
- lack of access to credit
- important role of women in rice production and boosting their contribution to rice sector development

In many areas such as seed production and distribution, O&M of Irrigation schemes, provision of extension service for technology dissemination and agricultural mechanization, the modalities of public-private sector involvement needs to be elaborated further in the implementation stage.

The current rice growing areas and potential areas are defined well, by and large based on the three major rice ecologies. . In most NRDS, it is recognized that there will be a need to improve harvesting, threshing, drying and storage capacity to handle the anticipated increased quantities of rice harvested.

In the future a more regional view of rice development strategies will be necessary to ensure that sufficient volumes of rice are produced that are competitive in quality and price in the specific market segment – which variety, which grade, and so forth. Many interventions that are proposed on a country-basis would also benefit from a regional perspective.

In conclusion, the Steering Committee congratulates the NRDS Task Forces for developing sound strategies. In the implementation/ operational stages, through needs-resource matching, more detail on how to achieve the targets, including those for capacity development, are expected to be analysed and addressed. It is sincerely hoped that governments and in-country stakeholders with their supporting partners will quickly move towards operationalization of these strategies to the benefit of Africa's rice producers and consumers.