

# **Report of the 9<sup>th</sup> Biennial Meeting of AfricaRice's National Experts Committee (NEC09)**

## **Sahel Station Saint Louis, Senegal 2 – 5 July 2014**

### **1. Introduction**

The 9<sup>th</sup> meeting of AfricaRice's National Experts Committee (NEC09) was held from 2 – 4 July 2014 at AfricaRice's Regional Sahel Station in Ndiaye, Senegal. The meeting serves as an important platform for consultations and dialogue between AfricaRice and the National Agricultural Research Systems (NARS) decision makers of member countries on strategic issues related to the Center's programs and activities. In attendance were the Directors General of the NARS or their representatives from the following 17 countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Togo and Uganda. Eight member countries, i.e. Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Madagascar, Rwanda and Sierra Leone were absent. Representatives from the West and Central African Council for Research and Agricultural Development (CORAF/WECARD), Regional Consultation Framework of Rice Farmers' Organizations (ROPPA) and the Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa (ASARECA) and the President of the Federation of groups and associations of women producers in the region of Saint-Louis (FEPRODES) also participated in the NEC meeting. NEC09 was organized back-to-back with the official inauguration of the Regional Training Center in St. Louis, Senegal on July 5; this event was eventually postponed due to last-minute unavailability of key Senegalese government officials.

### **2. Summary of presentations and discussions**

#### **2.1. Opening Ceremony**

NEC09 was officially opened and chaired by the Director General of the National Agricultural Organization (NARO) in Uganda, Dr. Ambrose Agona. He was preceded by the welcome addresses of the Director General of the Institut Sénégalais de Recherches Agricoles (ISRA), Dr. Alioune Fall and the Interim Director General of AfricaRice, Dr. Adama Traoré.

The Director General of ISRA welcomed all participants and emphasized the need for countries to develop and implement comprehensive strategies for the production of rice. Specifically he highlighted that these strategies focus on agribusiness and be geared to developing and enhancing the entire rice value chain to create synergy in optimizing production of quality rice for local and regional markets.

The Interim Director General of AfricaRice, Dr. Adama Traoré welcomed participants and focused his address on the need for Africa to fulfill its commitments and concentrate efforts towards agriculture. He highlighted that there is no sustainable economic development without agriculture; and that there is no agricultural development without research. NEC09 serves towards this aim by enhancing collaboration between AfricaRice and NARS. He also indicated that the purpose of NEC09

is to guide this collaboration to better reach the major objectives of the 2011-2010 strategic plan in improving rice production, processing and marketing to promote development and poverty eradication.

In his opening statement, the NEC chairman underlined the framework that NEC provides for the elaboration and analysis of existing strategies for strengthening AfricaRice and the development of the rice industry in Africa. He welcomed his Director General colleagues and participants to the meeting. He emphasized the important role AfricaRice plays in rice sector development and highlighted the imperative of AfricaRice's expansion into Central and Eastern Africa, with Rwanda recently joining AfricaRice and Tanzania taking vital steps towards becoming a member state. The NEC Chairman emphasized that improved agriculture production is vital to supply Africa's increasing population with food. Increase in population without improved production will result in further imports which increases the vulnerability of the continent to global food crises. He emphasized the critical role of the Rice Sector Development Hubs in concentrating research and development efforts, aimed at increasing quality rice production and improving welfare and wealth creation through agriculture. At the end of the opening address he reminded the audience that the next Council of Ministers' meetings will take place in 2014 (to select the new DG) and 2015.

At the end of the opening ceremony, a minute silence was observed for the two NARS Directors General that lost their lives recently; from Uganda Dr. Emily Twinamasiko, Director General of the National Agricultural Research Organization (NARO), and from The Gambia Dr. Babou Ousman Job, Director General National Agricultural Research Institute (NARI).

## **2.2. Adoption of the agenda and election of rapporteurs**

The proposed agenda was adopted with some minor amendments. Dr. David Arodokoun (Director General of INRAB, Benin) and Dr. E. Abo (Director and Representative for the Director General NCRI, Nigeria) were elected as official rapporteurs.

## **2.3. Status of the implementation of recommendations of the 8<sup>th</sup> NEC Meeting**

The status of the implementation of recommendations of the 8<sup>th</sup> NEC meeting (NEC08) was presented by AfricaRice's Deputy Director General and Director of Research for Development, Dr. Marco Wopereis on behalf of Dr. Samuel Bruce-Oliver, AfricaRice's Director of Partnerships and Capacity Strengthening (see Annex 1). Dr. Wopereis reported on the implementation of the vast majority of NEC08 recommendations with two recommendations not having been entirely fulfilled due to circumstances beyond the center's full control, these include the return to Côte d'Ivoire and obtaining leverage from the recently signed memorandum of understanding with the African Union. AfricaRice was congratulated for all its efforts and the high level of implementation of NEC08 recommendations.

## **2.4. Highlights of AfricaRice activities since the last Council of Ministers**

The AfricaRice Interim Director General (Interim DG), Dr. Adama Traoré, presented the Center's activities since the last Council of Ministers (see Annex 2).

Among others, the Interim DG gave an update on countries' consideration to join AfricaRice as member states. AfricaRice has received an official letter from the Ministry of Agriculture of Tanzania expressing Tanzania's interest in becoming a member of AfricaRice. Ethiopia and Burundi are also interested in becoming member states. Concerning Ethiopia's membership this process has accelerated recently, the process is currently with the Ethiopian Ministry of Finance for final approval.

The Interim DG also elaborated on the Center Development Plan that complements the Center's Strategic Plan for 2011-2020 which was approved by the Board in its meeting in March 2014.

### **Summary of discussions**

AfricaRice was congratulated for the activities undertaken and for the developments with regard to its efforts at admitting new AfricaRice member states.

The discussion also highlighted the need for AfricaRice to gain greater leverage from the signed Memorandum of Understanding with the African Union.

There should be considerable advocacy efforts in 2014 and 2015 as AfricaRice is a pan-African institution and should be recognized by the African Union as such. It was agreed that NEC members and AfricaRice will work together to engage the African Union in fast tracking this process.

The conditions for the return of AfricaRice's headquarters to Côte d'Ivoire were elaborated on by the Interim DG in which he noted that there has been considerable development but all conditions remain unfulfilled. Specifically the new building to be provided by Côte d'Ivoire has been taken over by squatters and the government is trying to sort out this issue.

Pursuant to NEC08 recommendation 8 with regards to initiatives in Central Africa discussion revolved around the essential need to setup an AfricaRice Regional Station in Central Africa. AfricaRice has already developed the criteria for selection of a site and this list has been shared with all concerned member countries. NEC members from Central Africa agreed that this is an area of priority and that they will in turn relay this to the relevant authorities to push the process forward.

### **2.5. AfricaRice Research and Development Update for 2013-2014**

AfricaRice's Deputy Director General and Director of Research for Development, Dr. Marco Wopereis, gave a presentation on the research and development activities conducted by AfricaRice and its partners in 2013 and 2014 (until June), using the format for reporting on CGIAR Research Programs (CRPs). The center development and major events were highlighted, as well as progress with regards to the implementation mechanisms of AfricaRice's Strategic Plan. Also highlighted were the major research results, progress with update of research products, impact studies, development oriented activities of research, as well as the knowledge management and capacity strengthening activities of the center (See Annex 3).

### **Summary of discussions**

AfricaRice was commended by NEC members for all its research for development efforts achieved through solid partnerships with NARS.

Discussions then centered on scholarships to member states and the balance of awarding scholarships. AfricaRice was commended for the transparent manner in which these scholarships were awarded. The discussion though centered on how certain member states with limited capacities should be given further priority.

The Deputy Director General and Director of Research, Dr. Wopereis noted that this is an issue that concerns AfricaRice greatly. However scholarships are awarded based on projects and often countries not supported by donors are left out despite all efforts of AfricaRice in trying to obtain funds for these countries. Dr. Wopereis mentioned that it is vital that the center has unrestricted funds (not through projects) to compensate for any gaps. NEC members agreed that they should prioritize assessing and evaluating capacities of NARS in order to identify the areas of reinforcement. It was suggested that each DG should conduct a needs assessment and this should be sent to AfricaRice.

## **2.6 Africa-wide Rice Task Forces – Breeding, Agronomy, Mechanization**

The Breeding, Agronomy and Mechanization Task Forces presented an overview of their activities (Annex 4).

### **Summary of discussions**

The discussion focused on the seed issue where NEC members expressed the need for a more strategic effort. AfricaRice is in the process of hiring a seed systems specialist with private sector experience and as member of CARD is fully aware of ongoing seed development initiatives in Africa.

Mechanization efforts were commended and the importance of out-scaling mechanization efforts through the Hubs was stressed. AfricaRice was asked to work with NARS to showcase new machinery to solicit interest from the private sector and to create youth employment.

AfricaRice was asked to work more on bird damage because as the NEC chair put it: ‘school children are now often used as live scare crows’. The need to work on new varieties earmarked for new products, such as beverages was stressed.

NEC members expressed the need to become involved in all Task Forces. . The AfricaRice DDG replied that AfricaRice would like all member states to participate in all Task Forces. This is difficult because activities are funded through restricted projects, with donors often expressing preference for certain countries. He indicated the need for unrestricted funds in particular from member state contributions, to fill any gaps. He highlighted that despite these difficulties, Task Force activities in countries continue to increase.

## **2.8 Africa-wide Rice Task Forces – Policy, Gender, Processing & Value Addition**

The Policy, Gender and Processing and Value Addition Task Forces presented an overview of their activities (Annex 4).

### **Summary of discussions**

The work of the Task Forces was commended. NEC members emphasized the need to have a strategy for mechanization as it is fundamental to spur agricultural growth. Also there was a consensus in the discussion to focus more on agribusiness through a rice value chain approach and the interest in Processing and Value Addition activities that contribute to wealth creation. This would require establishing business incubators in the Hubs. Questions were raised to the gender task force with regards to whether the Task Force works with the household (family) as a unit. The Task Force coordinator replied that data are gathered at the household level, whilst determining gender sensitive roles within the household. Questions were asked about the need for AfricaRice to conduct more research on nutrition security.

### **2.9 Field Visit**

The second day of NEC09 was a field visit to Ross Bethio to see the largest private rice farm in Senegal, SENHUILE, to visit a Women farmers marketing association and then to Ndiaye to visit the AfricaRice Sahel Station for a guided tour of field trials, laboratories, and screen houses.

## **Summary of discussions**

The discussion revolved around the visit where NEC members and participants expressed their very positive impression of the Sahel station and its facilities. They commended the visit to the Women's Association and stressed that AfricaRice should make greater visibility of such support. Some NEC members expressed reservations with respect to the visit to SENHUILE, others thought it important that AfricaRice also works with large rice producing entities. The NEC members had expected a visit to Rice Sector Development Hubs in Senegal and ISRA facilities and said that such visits should be a vital part of any NEC meeting: a visit to the NARS of the host country and at least one Rice Sector Development Hub. The Director General of ISRA recommended that the next NEC meeting be jointly coordinated with greater involvement of NARS in the preparation. The Interim DG of AfricaRice agreed, noting a problem of mis-communication between AfricaRice and ISRA for NEC09. He emphasized that AfricaRice prides itself as the CG center with the closest relations to NARS since it is governed by the member states' Council of Ministers and that AfricaRice pays special attention of direct involvement with NARS.

### **2.10 Overview of AfricaRice M&E and Impact Assessment Framework**

AfricaRice Program Leader for the Policy, Innovation Systems and Impact Assessment program, Dr. Aliou Diagne, gave a presentation on the M&E and Impact Assessment framework used by AfricaRice for AfricaRice's strategy *Boosting Africa's Rice Sector: A research for development strategy 2011-2020*. (Annex 5).

## **Summary of discussions**

NEC members stressed that setting viable targets with appropriate indicators is fundamental. The Mlax software presented seeks to automate survey processes and do away with cumbersome paper-based procedures. AfricaRice was commended by the NEC for this development, seen as an essential step to enhance M&E and impact assessment efforts. NEC members mentioned the importance of facilitating use of the tool by field workers and limiting the number of questions in a survey to avoid spending hours with one particular farmer. . It was highlighted that it is not easy to move to an automated system and that quality control of the information gathered remains essential.

## **2.11 Status of Implementation of Rice Hubs in countries (Schedule, activities, governance)**

AfricaRice's Program Leader for Rice Sector Development presented the status of implementation of Rice Hubs which includes identifying Hubs, agreement on the governance structure of Hubs, and the development of a common vision and workplan for each Hub (Annex 6).

### **Summary of discussions**

The Rice Sector Development Hub approach de-mystifies the concept that agricultural development is simply for food security, in fact the approach promotes agri-business to develop wealth creation and improve incomes. The challenge of the Rice Sector Development Hubs is sustainability. NEC members agreed that AfricaRice's Task Forces conduct thematic research, whilst activities in Rice Sector Development Hubs combine Task Force products and local innovations towards tangible outcomes and impact along the rice value chain. Task Forces are technology suppliers and service providers for consideration by value chain actors in the Hub. NARS are not best placed to coordinate Hub efforts and must find an exit strategy for that role.

Multi Stakeholder Platforms (MSPs) were seen as essential engines for driving activities in the Hubs towards impact, involving essential stakeholders. The researchers' role in the Hubs is one of facilitation.

The Hub approach deals with horizontal and vertical linkages along the value chain from farmers to seed producers, retailers, processors etc. The Rice Sector Development Hub approach of AfricaRice was commended. But it was also stressed that the value chain approach has to be better understood by stakeholders and the process should be elaborated so that all elements of the value chain can be considered. The elaboration of a common vision and workplan for each Hub in 2014 is an essential step forward in that respect.

Difficulties with timely reporting (both technical and financial) by NARS partners were discussed at length and a recommendation was formulated to address this important issue.

## **2.12 DG Recruitment Process**

The AfricaRice Interim DG gave a comprehensive brief on the DG Recruitment Process (Annex 7). The selection of the next DG of AfricaRice is ultimately the responsibility of the Council of Ministers. A Steering Committee (SC) was selected to support the selection. The SC is responsible for all logistics and planning involved in DG recruitment including advertising the post, assessing the candidate applications, and recommending a shortlist of candidates for Board interview, and supporting the Board Chair with the interview process. The deadline of applications was extended to May 31, 2014. Kincannon and Reed (K&R) is assisting with the search and has facilitated selection of candidates for the shortlist. The Board has now approved the shortlist. Three candidates will be interviewed at AfricaRice early September. An extraordinary COM Meeting will be held in Uganda to

select the new DG, ideally in October 2014 with the candidate assuming the post starting January 1, 2015.

### **Summary of discussions**

The NEC members thanked the Interim DG for the comprehensive presentation, noting the process. The Interim DG was thanked for all his efforts and for spearheading the center in this crucial transition phase. They expressed their full support to the new DG of AfricaRice. The transparency of the process was commended. Several NEC members emphasized that proficiency in French is as crucial as being proficient in English. They stressed that the candidate will be dealing with Francophone countries and a lack of proficiency in French would be a major handicap and a recommendation was formulated accordingly..

### **2.13 Return of AfricaRice to Côte d'Ivoire**

The regional representative of Côte d'Ivoire, Dr. Amadou Beye, gave an update on developments with regards to the AfricaRice's return to Côte d'Ivoire (Annex 8). The presentation covered the latest developments since the last Council of Ministers. Dr. Beye presented an update on the main issues of concern with regards to the move which includes the security in the country, the settlement of contributions' arrears, the review of the headquarters agreement, contribution to relocation cost and the allocation of headquarters in Abidjan.

### **Summary of discussions**

It was relayed to the NEC members that the move will be done in distinct phases. The government of Côte d'Ivoire has pledged USD 2.4 million for the return of AfricaRice staff. Despite the promising developments there are still some issues with regard to taking possession of the AfricaRice Headquarter building these include (i) the existence of a wall that has been built during the last few months in the compound of the main building allocated to AfricaRice which poses a security threat; (ii) the incertitude with respect to the duration of which the building is allocated to AfricaRice along with the additional construction that has to be done; and (iii) the construction company is occupying the building since 2-3 months, blocking access for AfricaRice.

### **Summary of discussions**

NEC members emphasized the importance of AfricaRice's return to Côte d'Ivoire and work with the authorities in Côte d'Ivoire to remove any remaining obstacles delaying the return. The Côte d'Ivoire NEC Representative Dr. Yte Wongbe, Director General of the Centre National de Recherche Agronomique (CNRA) stressed the importance of AfricaRice to take immediate possession of the building once the construction company has left. He re-emphasized the full support of the government of Côte d'Ivoire to facilitate AfricaRice's return.



## **2.14 Consultants' Report on Revision of Member Country Contributions**

Consultant Mr. Anthony Youdeowei presented a *Proposal for Revision of Member States Contributions to AfricaRice* where he updated the status of contribution of AfricaRice Member States (Annex 9). The proposal highlights the status of contributions by member countries to AfricaRice and outlines a new formula to determine annual Member States contributions to AfricaRice.

As of May 2014 unpaid outstanding contributions from AfricaRice Member States amount to USD 4,068,064 with only 3 Member States, namely Nigeria, Mali and Uganda recording no arrears in payments for their contributions.

### **Summary of discussions**

There was quite a long discussion by NEC members on the situation and the way forward for Member Country contributions. It was suggested by some NEC members that many nations experienced years of conflict that did not permit them to maintain their contributions and that this has resulted in years of arrears. There was a constructive debate on the settlement of arrears but all emphasized in the end that these arrears were a result of obligations that the respective countries signed up to, and thus there was a general consensus that efforts have to be made with regards to the outstanding arrears.

It was also noted that AfricaRice without Member States' contributions has no unrestricted funding with funding of the center entirely dependent on project funding and funding earmarked to CGIAR Research Programs. It was clear that unrestricted funding is essential to cover gaps in funding for research for development activities in Member States specifically when it comes to capacity building and Task Force and Rice Sector Development Hub activities.

The NEC members commended the consultant for his efforts but there was consensus that more work is needed to derive a credible formula for annual contributions by member states, with input from AfricaRice's Policy program. .

### **3. Recommendations**

#### **Recommendation 1: Continue strengthening capacity building efforts**

Capacity building across the rice value chain and training of rice research and extension staff remains a main priority for AfricaRice's member countries. The opening of a regional training center in St. Louis is a major step forward. The NEC also congratulates AfricaRice with the increased number of scholarships offered and group training events organized over the reporting period. The NEC noted that awarding scholarships is related to project funding and that this may pose restrictions with respect to the nationality of scholars that may apply. NEC recommends that AfricaRice:

- Up-dates information on rice research capacity in AfricaRice's member states in collaboration with the NARS
- Investigates ways to mobilize unrestricted funding to build capacity in countries who do not profit sufficiently from project funding
- Pro-actively sources funding for capacity strengthening efforts in Central Africa

#### **Recommendation 2: Strive for full participation of all member countries in AfricaRice's Task Forces**

The NEC noted with satisfaction the quality work ongoing in AfricaRice's Taskforces as reported during the meeting. Taskforce activities are often determined by projects. A major issue is how to perform activities in countries that do not have project support. The NEC recommends that AfricaRice:

- Investigates ways to mobilize unrestricted funding to ensure full participation of all member countries in all of AfricaRice's Task Forces

#### **Recommendation 3: Greater visibility and more rapid out-scaling of agricultural machinery development efforts**

The NEC noted with satisfaction the work being done on agricultural machinery in the various Hubs through the newly established Mechanization Task Force. The NEC recommends that AfricaRice:

- Find ways to ensure all of AfricaRice member states gain access to successfully tested agricultural machinery
- Reflects on ways to out-scale agricultural machinery beyond the Hubs and providing opportunities for youth employment

#### **Recommendation 4: Greater emphasis on nutrition security**

The NEC noted that AfricaRice's research does not sufficiently highlight work done on nutrition security despite the work done in the Rice Processing and Value Addition Task Force. The NEC recommends that AfricaRice:

- Develops new innovative projects around rice fortification, use of glaberrima's for low digestibility rice and diversification of rice-based systems

### **Recommendation 5: Accelerate establishment of an AfricaRice Regional Station in Central Africa**

During the Council of Ministers (COM) Meeting in Chad in December 2013, it was agreed that the Ministers of Chad and the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville) would highlight the essential nature of a future AfricaRice presence in the Central Africa Region within the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS). The NEC noted that AfricaRice has developed a list of criteria to guide selection of the country to host the Regional Station but that the matter has not yet been brought to the attention of ECCAS. The NEC recommends that AfricaRice:

- Contacts the Ministers of Chad and Republic of Congo (Brazzaville) to remind them about the importance of the ECCAS meeting and that this meeting is scheduled for the second half of 2014
- Ensures participation of the Director General in the ECCAS meeting

### **Recommendation 6: Strengthen efforts to establish viable and sustainable rice seed production systems**

The NEC notes the success of various seed initiatives to provide quality seed to rice farmers but also the problems occurring with counterfeit seed in some member countries. NEC recommends that AfricaRice:

- Assists the member states to ensure greatly improved access to quality rice seed to all rice farmers through quantification of seed needs and development of seed road maps working with both the formal and informal rice seed sector (community-based seed systems)

### **Recommendation 7: Further operationalization of the Rice Sector Development Hubs**

The NEC congratulated AfricaRice with the ‘reverse research approach’ that is being pursued in the Rice Sector Development Hubs, taking the market as a starting point and working within a rice value chain context. Clear out-scaling strategies need to be identified for successful technologies in the Hubs, working with development partners from both the public and private sector. NEC recommends that:

- Rice Sector Development are established in all member countries; a special effort be made for Gabon with support from AfricaRice where no rice sector development hub has been established so far
- NARS take ownership of activities in the Hubs and consider Task Forces as service providers to value chain actors in and around the Hubs
- NARS facilitate identifying a common vision (business idea) for each Hub with rice value chain stakeholders and a 5-year road map to achieve the vision and consider establishing business incubators in each Hub
- NARS identify a suitable development partners or value chain actor (champion) to eventually take over the responsibility of coordination of Hub activities
- AfricaRice continues providing backstopping to rice R&D efforts and knowledge management

### **Recommendation 8: Field days during NEC meetings to showcase NARS achievements**

NEC appreciated the field visit held on the second day of the NEC meeting. NEC noted the great work done by AfricaRice in supporting a women’s organization producing quality rice for the Dakar

market. The visit to a large-scale rice producer highlighted opportunities and constraints met by such producers. The NEC noted that rice technologies can be taken up by both smallholder farmers and large-scale private producers and that most of the work done so far is aimed at smallholder agriculture. The NEC believes that it is good practice to highlight partnerships between AfricaRice and the NARS during field days. The NEC recommends that:

- Field days in future NEC meetings will showcase NARS achievements in the country and are coordinated by the NARS concerned
- AfricaRice and NARS reflect on how to create an enabling environment to facilitate public-private sector collaboration to boost Africa's rice sector

#### **Recommendation 9: Recruitment of new AfricaRice DG**

The NEC noted with satisfaction progress made with the recruitment of the new DG of AfricaRice. The NEC asks the AfricaRice interim DG to convey the following recommendation to the DG selection committee:

- The candidates present their seminar in whatever language they prefer, but they will be required to answer questions in both French and English

#### **Recommendation 10: Technical and financial reporting by NARS**

The NEC was informed about the difficulties observed by AfricaRice in receiving financial and technical reports from the NARS. The AfricaRice DG urged the NARS DGs to ensure outstanding reports are sent to AfricaRice as soon as possible. Meanwhile, exceptionally, 50% of funds earmarked for 2014 will be released by mid-July to ensure field work can be done as planned. The NEC recommends that:

- AfricaRice verifies on a monthly basis progress made by NARS in terms of financial and technical reporting and communicates any delays observed to the project coordinators concerned, with a copy to the DG of the NARS concerned
- AfricaRice reports back in the next NEC meeting associated with the next COM on this issue

#### **Recommendation 11: AfricaRice continues the process of moving its Headquarters back to Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire**

Since the COM meeting in Chad, AfricaRice is planning to move its Headquarters (HQ) back to Cote d'Ivoire, whilst maintaining a strong presence in Benin. The return of AfricaRice's Headquarters will be done in distinct phases. The expected starting date for that phased return was June 2014 as agreed upon during the COM meeting.

The Cote d'Ivoire government has pledged to contribute US\$2.4 million to the return of AfricaRice staff to Cote d'Ivoire. To really start R&D activities in Cote d'Ivoire and making full use of the Mbe facilities additional funding will need to be raised.

AfricaRice is still facing a certain number of difficulties with respect to taking possession of the building:

1. The existence of a wall that has been built during the last few months in the compound of the main building allocated to AfricaRice which poses a security threat
2. The incertitude with respect to the duration for which the building is allocated to AfricaRice and if additional construction can be done

3. The construction company is occupying the building since 2-3 months, blocking access for AfricaRice

The NEC noted these problems but is of the opinion that some AfricaRice staff (the team already present in Abidjan) must take immediate possession of the building once the company has left the building. The NEC noted the progress made and appreciates the efforts made by both the Government of Cote d'Ivoire and Benin to facilitate this process. The NEC recommends that:

- Cote d'Ivoire DG continues to play a catalyzing role between AfricaRice and the Cote d'Ivoire government to facilitate the return and keeps NEC colleagues informed
- AfricaRice takes immediate possession of the building in Abidjan once the building has been vacated
- AfricaRice sets a new time line for the start of the phased return of the HQ to Abidjan
- AfricaRice works with the Cote d'Ivoire authorities to get written assurance that AfricaRice can use the property in Abidjan and the facilities in Bouake as long as AfricaRice needs them

### **Recommendation 12: Increase in membership contributions**

Membership contributions have not changed since the inception of the Center and almost all member states have arrears in payment. Meanwhile, the Center does no longer receive any unrestricted funding – with the Center's income almost entirely depending on project funding or funding earmarked to CGIAR Research Programs, such as the Global Rice Science Partnership (GRiSP). The COM has approved a resolution to revise the membership contributions. The NEC noted the tremendous support by Nigeria, contributing most on an annual basis and having a zero balance.

The NEC was of the opinion that the proposal by the consultant needs to be revisited because the augmentation proposed is too drastic and does not take into account differences in importance of rice in the various countries. The NEC recommends that:

- Efforts are made to recuperate outstanding membership contributions as soon as possible
- NARS DGs reflect why payments are not made on time and double efforts to recuperate arrears, 'marketing' rice success stories with AfricaRice involvement, and identifying innovative ways for payment, e.g. through a levy on rice importation
- AfricaRice assists countries in documenting the reasons why payment of AfricaRice membership fees is essential to their country (to be annexed to the 'demand note')
- AfricaRice pursues reflections and develops a methodology that ensures a realistic and equitable increase in membership fees – and that this is presented during the next NEC and COM of AfricaRice

### **Motion**

The NEC congratulated the interim DG of AfricaRice for his leadership and for maintaining the performance of AfricaRice over the reporting period with support from the entire AfricaRice team.

### **Vote of Thanks**

The NEC thanks the DG of ISRA and his staff and the Regional Representative of AfricaRice in Senegal and his staff for all their efforts in organizing the 9<sup>th</sup> meeting of the NEC. Finally the NEC expressed its gratitude to the Government and People of Senegal for their warm welcome and their great support to AfricaRice and for having authorized and facilitated the organization of this highly successful meeting.

(END)