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Scaling Investments for Rice Self-Sufficiency: A side event at the AFS 2024 – To be hosted by the ECOWAS Commission in partnership with AfDB, JICA, AGRA, and WB

September 2-6, 2024

1. Background & Introduction

Brief overview of the ECOWAS Rice Agenda, its Rice Observatory and partners

The importance of the rice sector in contributing to food security in West Africa and the reality of the persistent dependence on rice importation to compensate for the shortfall in supply that is possible from domestic production prompted the decision-making bodies of the ECOWAS Commission to develop its comprehensive rice agenda. The agenda includes the adoption of the ‘Rice Offensive’ in 2014 to engender a sustained and sustainable rice cultivation in West Africa, the development of the Regional Action Plan (2020 – 2025) to accelerate the implementation of the rice offensive to achieve self-sufficiency by 2025, the establishment of the ECOWAS Rice Observatory in 2022 to coordinate activities and investments in West Africa’s rice sector, and the recently validated Regional Rice Roadmap (2025 – 2035) to inform and drive all efforts in West Africa’s rice sector.

The ERO is a multi-stakeholder platform, conceptualized and established by the ECOWAS Commission and its partners (AfDB, World Bank, BMGF, BMZ/GIZ, JICA, FCDO, IsDB, AGRA, AfricaRice), and it plays a major role, in aligning all stakeholders, including farmers, millers, donors, and institutions, to foster synergy, reduce duplications and resource wastage.

ERO is housed at the ECOWAS commission under the Directorate of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD). Its main purpose is to coordinate rice sector-related programmes and projects involving both public and private sector investments, institutions, and policy recommendations for key decision-makers. The vision of ERO is fully aligned with the ECOWAS rice offensive, which is to see West Africa achieve rice self-sufficiency through competitive, profitable, resilient, and environmentally sustainable farming and milling enterprises that contribute to rural job creation, poverty reduction, and gender equity.

ERO's mission is to facilitate collaboration, catalyze growth, track progress, and communicate the impact of the West African rice industry by establishing, coordinating, and harnessing synergies across investments to achieve maximum efficiency, effectiveness, competitiveness, and impact. ERO's overall objective is to help key actors in the West African rice sector better coordinate policy and work synergistically. It has a bottom-up structure that ensures the actions taken at the regional level is based on the strategic priorities identified by national-level stakeholders. Hence, the establishment of national chapters in the countries.

Brief description of the program – opportunity for side event @ AFS

Africa Food Systems Forum is the world's premier forum for African agriculture and food systems, bringing together stakeholders to take practical action and share lessons that will move African food systems forward, and the organiser of the Africa Food Systems Forum 2024 annual summit. The overarching goal of the African countries is to build productive, nutritious, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable food systems that have the power to accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. While substantial progress has been made, overall, action to transform is not yet advancing at the speed or scale required and considerable challenges remain.

The **Africa Food Systems Forum 2024** annual summit will be a timely opportunity to convene diverse stakeholders, including world leaders, investors, academia, farmers’ organizations, and the private sector, to spotlight innovations, technologies, best practices, business models, policy delivery mechanisms, and investments to accelerate food systems transformation in Africa and beyond, with youth and women at the helm. The theme for AFS 2024 is “**Innovate, Accelerate and Scale: Delivering food systems transformation in a digital and climate era**”. The AFS 2024 has provided



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the opportunity to hold side events at the conference, which is an additional session or meeting that will occur alongside the main agenda.

The motive of the side event to be organised or convened by the ECOWAS Rice Observatory, is to delve deeper into specific topics of Rice sector development in West Africa, whereby facilitate networking, share knowledge and best practices, and highlight innovative projects or initiatives on rice that align with the main conference themes. The ERO's side event at AFS will be characterized by thematic focus on aspects of the "Regional Rice Roadmap" and specialized topics that complement the broader conference themes. The event will feature interactive formats such as panel discussions, encouraging active participation and dialogue among attendees.

In addition, the side event will provide the first opportunity to discuss the "regional rice roadmap" outside the ERO membership and stakeholders, and eventually serve as a platform for networking with other experts, practitioners, who share similar interests, potentially leading to partnerships and possible investments. Also, ERO and partners will gain visibility, as it would offer an opportunity to showcase their work, share plans, findings, and influence the broader discourse on the West African rice agenda at the conference.

2. Context and Rationale

Relevance of the ECOWAS side event to AFS and its theme

The upcoming AFS theme "Innovate, Accelerate, and Scale: Delivering food systems transformation in a digital and climate era" encapsulates the urgent and multifaceted approach needed to address the complex challenges facing global food systems today. The event will look at **innovation** in food systems, refers to the development and implementation of new technologies, practices, and business models that enhance the efficiency, sustainability, and resilience of food production, distribution, and consumption. ERO side event at the AFS will equally be exploring the rice technologies, and ways to increasing productivity, and reducing environmental impact.

Likewise, for the **acceleration** which involves speeding up the adoption and scaling of these innovations to meet the urgent demands posed by climate change, population growth, and resource constraints. More so, accelerate development of regional rice markets, and this can be achieved through the ERO side events as well. The implementation of the Regional Rice Roadmap will create conducive environments for innovation and encourage sustainable practices. The increased investment from both public and private sectors is crucial to rice development, and initiatives aimed at transforming rice sector.

The **scaling** involves expanding successful innovations to reach a broader audience and have a significant impact on global food systems. This means for ERO, building on the existing and expansion of the necessary rice investment packages, such as solar irrigations systems, expansion of rice processing capacity, rice farmer organization, storage and drying infrastructure and digital connectivity, to support large-scale implementation of new technologies. Furthermore, regional rice broad scale will involve knowledge sharing and capacity building for important rice actors: private sector players, producers, and consumers about new technologies and sustainable practices to ensure widespread adoption. Ensuring regional collaboration among countries and organizations to work together to share resources, knowledge, and innovations to address global food security challenges effectively.

The **digital and climate era** refers to the current epoch characterized by rapid technological advancement and significant environmental changes. This era poses both challenges and opportunities for food systems transformation, and quite an important aspect for the rice industry development. On the one hand, rice is affected by climate change and on the other hand it contributes to climate change through the emission of methane gas when rice is produced. Increasingly erratic weather patterns, rising temperatures, and extreme events such as droughts and floods threaten rice production and overall, the food security. Innovations in climate-resilient rice cultivation, water management, and sustainable farming practices are critical. Digital revolution advances in digital technology, including big data analytics, and remote sensing, offer unprecedented opportunities to optimize rice production practices, predict climate impacts, and enhance decision-making across the rice value chain.

To successfully transform food systems in this digital and climate era, a holistic approach is needed that integrates innovation, acceleration, and scaling. The ERO side event and focus will be based on understanding the rice systems as interconnected networks of production, distribution, and consumption, and addressing challenges at multiple levels



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simultaneously. Ensuring that innovations and practices are environmentally sustainable, economically viable, and socially inclusive and the overall goal is contributing to building food systems that can withstand and adapt to climate impacts and other disruptions.

On a final note, "Innovate, Accelerate, and Scale: Delivering food systems transformation in a digital and climate era" is a call to action for all stakeholders involved in food systems to embrace new technologies, collaborate across sectors, and work swiftly to implement and expand sustainable practices. By doing so, we can create resilient, efficient, and equitable food systems capable of feeding the world's population while mitigating the impacts of climate change. This is exactly the interest of ERO and its work in the rice sector.

The support of ECOWAS Partners at the side event

There are many organizations that are partnering with the ECOWAS Commission in implementing its Rice Agenda and some of them would be participating in the upcoming AFS (**AfDB, JICA/CARD, World Bank and AGRA**). These partners will be asked to play a crucial role and collaborate with the Commission to maximize these opportunities:

Visibility: Gain exposure to a targeted audience of professionals in the field of agricultural innovation, acceleration and scaling, **Networking:** Connect with key stakeholders, potential collaborators, and thought leaders that can play critical role in the ECOWAS rice agenda, and **Influence:** Contribute to shaping the discussion on rice sector innovations for development, showcasing your organization's expertise and leadership.

Partnership Roles and Responsibilities

We envision this partnership and support to include the following roles and responsibilities:

- **Content Collaboration:** Co-developing the agenda, identifying/selecting speakers, and defining key discussion points.
- **Promotion:** Jointly promoting the event through our respective networks, social media channels, and other communication platforms.
- **Logistics Support:** Assisting with event logistics, including venue setup, audiovisual requirements, and participants registration.

Next Step: Following the registration and submission of proposal for the side event on the platform of the organizers, ERO is awaiting the final approval for the event. ECOWAS and its partners through ERO has jointly designed the concept of the side event to present the roadmap and create an avenue to explore the investments opportunities for its implementation. This is in the hope that the goal of ECOWAS and its partners to facilitate the opportunities that will render the West Africa's rice sector more productive and competitive.

3. Content of the side event session

The Side event theme: Scaling Investments for Rice Self-Sufficiency

Considering the over vision of ECOWAS and its partners in the regional rice sector. "To progress towards cost-competitive, cost-effective, sustainable, and nutritious rice self-sufficiency in West Africa" and considering the overarching theme of the 2024 AFS, the theme is "Scaling Investments for Rice Self-Sufficiency" with a deep focus on the opportunities and challenges in the rice sector. This was based on:

1. **Understanding of the Conference AFS Theme** - for instance, the conference is about innovations, accelerations, climate and scaling and the side event theme might cover areas like financing sustainable rice Innovations, climate resilience (the REWARD project is well suited here), and sustainable rice production.
- 2.
3. **Identify Interests and Gaps** – exploring the current challenges and opportunities, with a focus on pressing topics that need urgent attention and practical solutions towards achieving rice self-sufficiency in West Africa. As well



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as considering the interest level of the potential conference attendees and stakeholders with the aim to drive meaningful discussion and assessing the necessary feasibility.

Side event objectives

The broad objectives of the workshop are to have a side event that present a high-level panel discussion session that clearly relates to key thematic areas of policy frame work and financing sustainability and rice innovation with other objectives aiming to

- Present and Facilitate Strategic Partnerships towards the ECOWAS Rice Roadmap 2025-2035 - the event will promote the formation of strategic partnerships essential for developing and implementing comprehensive rice investment packages identified within the roadmap.
- Identify and Address Investment Barriers - understanding these challenges and formulating actionable solutions to overcome them.
- Showcase Successful Investment Models - attendees will gain practical insights and proven strategies that can be replicated and adapted across different regions.
- To promote dialogue and collaboration among policymakers, researchers, and practitioners to enhance policy implementation and impact
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The side event will highlight scaling innovations, diversity, and inclusion

To showcase scaling innovations, diversity, policymaking and inclusion at the side event on "RICE DEVELOPMENT" during the Africa Food Systems Forum 2024 (AFS 2024 conference), will consider the following strategies.

- Diverse Speakers selection: by ensuring speakers represent a variety of stakeholders in the rice sector
- Interactive Sessions: by case studies or models or lead papers presentations where speakers can share their experiences and lessons learned. Brainstorm solutions to common challenges, thereby fostering a collaborative environment.
- Inclusive Communication: ensure that presentations and materials are accessible in multiple languages (English and French) spoken by participants. Provide translation services where necessary to facilitate understanding and participation.
- Inclusiveness: this will clearly put into consideration gender balance both for participants and for the panel sessions.

4. Approach – the proposed format of event

The side event will be held at the AFS venue in the Afternoon session of the day. This session is planned for 180 mins. Two panel sessions are planned to discuss two different but related topics. The side event approach will prioritize an engaging and participatory sessions with the support of an effective moderation. The panel sessions will focus on:

- a) **ECOWAS Policy Frameworks and Sustainable Solutions** - Rice is a staple food for millions in the ECOWAS region, crucial for food security and economic stability. However, sustainable rice production faces challenges like climate change, cross-Sectoral Coordination, inconsistent agricultural policies, resource constraints, weak implementation and enforcement, inadequate policy support and market dynamics. This side event will explore the Regional Rice Roadmap, focusing on increasing productivity and sustainability. It aims to share best practices, identify opportunities for enhancing sustainability, recognize and recommend solutions on policy gaps and discuss innovative approaches. This first panel session will dive more into the ECOWAS Roadmap 2025 -2035 and will feature four key panellists mainly:
 - Ministers of Agriculture from the Council of Ministers, who are key policymakers.
 - Representatives from CARD at the continental level.
 - Representatives from ECOWAS Commission at the regional level.
 - Representatives from National level.



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b) **Financing Sustainable Rice Innovations:** Unlocking Investments for a Resilient Rice Sector in ECOWAS rice production requires innovative practices and robust financial investments. This side event at the AFS 2024 conference will explore the critical role of financing in driving sustainable rice innovations. It aims to gather financiers, policymakers, researchers, and agricultural practitioners to discuss strategies, opportunities, and challenges in funding sustainable rice production initiatives. The event will delve into innovative financing models, investment opportunities, and policy frameworks supporting the adoption of sustainable practices. Highlighting successful case studies, it will facilitate knowledge exchange and foster partnerships to enhance the resilience and sustainability of West Africa's rice sector. The second panel session will centre on innovation and investment discussions, featuring another set of four panellist from:

- The Bank.
- Private sector players including millers, input suppliers, and farmers (both large and medium scale), providing diverse perspectives from within the private sector.
- The government, a representative to respond to the discussions and provide governmental perspectives.
- The region, a representative as well.

5. **Presentation of a Lead Paper:** The lead paper presentation aims to effectively communicate the purpose and objectives of the side event to participants, setting the stage and expectations appropriately. It will highlight the outcomes from the ECOWAS Rice Roadmap Annual General Assembly and discuss the overarching targets and strategic packages designed to achieve regional rice self-sufficiency.

6. Expected Outcomes

At the end of the side event, the following outcomes are expected:

- **Enhanced Understanding of Key Opportunities:** Participants will gain a comprehensive understanding of the current landscape for rice investment in West Africa, including key opportunities for scaling up innovations and the challenges that need to be addressed.
- **Identification of Successful Models and Best Practices:** Attendees will be exposed to case studies and examples of successful rice investment packages, providing practical insights and lessons learned that can be applied in different contexts.
- **Increased Collaboration and Partnerships:** the event will facilitate networking and collaboration among stakeholders, including investors, policymakers, agricultural experts, and farmers. Development of Actionable Recommendations: Through panel discussions, and interactive sessions.
- **Advocacy for Supportive Policy Frameworks:** The discussions will highlight the need for supportive policy frameworks that facilitate investment in sustainable rice production. Implementable actions will be identified from the side event.

7. Participants

- We would make an open invitation to all attendees of AFS and stakeholders in the rice sector to participate in the meeting. Likewise, we would reach out to bring relevant rice sector players and support the participation of identified panelists where required. The proposed side event key attendees will be drawn from: ECOWAS and Partners (AfDB, WB, JICA, AGRA etc.) rice networks
- The ERO Board members
- The ERO technical committees' representatives, the national chapter representatives, and other identified relevant stakeholders (policymakers, researchers, industry experts, millers, farmers, marketers, input suppliers etc.)



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Annex I: Proposed agenda (REVISED)

Side event at the AFS 2024: hosted by the ECOWAS Commission & Partners – Proposed Agenda

Time (WAT)	Event	Brief explanation	Focal person
Date and Time: 03 September 2024 (90 minutes: 16.30 – 18.00 CAT)		Venue: Room MH3, Kigali Conference Centre	
Arrival of Organizers and Participants			
16.35 – 16.40 (5mins)	Opening Session	Welcome remarks	Mrs. Massandjé TOURE-LITSE Commissioner Economic Affairs & Agriculture ECOWAS Commission Dr Agnes Kalibata President Alliance for Green Revolution in Africa
16.40 – 16.50 (10 mins)	Lead Paper Presentation	Overview of Regional Rice Policies and Strategies in the ECOWAS region: the Policy Frameworks and Sustainable Solutions, and Financing Sustainable Rice Innovations.	Dr. Boladale Adebowale ECOWAS Rice Agenda Coordinator Directorate of Agriculture and Rural Development ECOWAS
16.50 – 17.20 (30 mins)	Panel Session 1 (ECOWAS Policy Frameworks, Governance and Sustainable Solutions)	Composing of a) Council of Ministers, such as Ministers of Agriculture who are key policy makers. b) Private sector representative – ECOWAS Rice Observatory National Chapters Q&A	HON. Dr. Henry Musa Kpaka Ph.d. Minister Of Agriculture & Food Security, Sierra Leone Hon. Mr. Kobenan Kouassi ADJOU MANI Minister of State, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development - Côte d'Ivoire Hon. Dr. Mabouba Diagne Minister of Agriculture and Rural Equipment, Senegal Hon. Sen Abubakar Kyari Minister of Agriculture and Food Security - Nigeria To be moderated by: Dr. Agnes Kalibata President Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA)



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17.20 – 17.25 (5 mins)	Video Break	Short documentary on ERO and Road map design	
17.25 – 17.55 (30 mins)	Panel Discussion 2 (<i>Financing Sustainable Rice Innovations: Unlocking Investments for a Resilient Rice Sector</i>)	<p>a) The Bank (Development banks) b) Private sector players, providing diverse perspectives from within the private sector. c) Development Partner</p> <p>Q&A</p>	<p>Dr. Martin Fregene Director of Agriculture and Agro-Industry at the African Development Bank (AFDB)</p> <p>Dr Ashwini Sebastian Agriculture and Food Global Practice World Bank (WB)</p> <p>Ms. Senna Steemers President AFEX</p> <p>Mr. Fumihiko Suzuki Director of Economic Development Department JICA</p> <p>To be moderated by: Alain Sy TRAORE Director Agriculture and Rural Development ECOWAS COMMISSION</p>
17.55 – 18.00 (5 mins)	Closing (5 mins)	Summary session Summary of key takeaways & Call to action for participants	Mrs Massandjé TOURÉ-LITSE Commission for Economic Affairs and Agriculture ECOWAS COMMISSION
18.00 – 18.20	Cocktail & Networking – To be Confirmed Presentation of the AGRA 2.0 Publication Signing of MoU (ECOWAS Commission & AGRA)		