



ECOWAS RICE OBSERVATORY

CONCEPT NOTE – ERO Annual General Assembly - 2024

Theme: Aligning Goals and Charting a Road Map to Accelerate the Growth of a Competitive Rice Sector in West Africa.

Venue: Abuja, Nigeria

Date: 21 - 23 May 2024

Background

In West Africa, the demand for high-quality rice continues to outstrip the supply from domestic production resulting in continued importation of milled rice from Asia to meet consumption needs. Increasing population growth, urbanization and changing consumer preferences have further widened the gap in supply, and no country in West Africa has been able to achieve rice self-sufficiency despite having the right agro-climatic conditions and water availability to meet regional demand.

In response to this reality, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Commission adopted the ECOWAS Rice Offensive in 2015, a strategic framework to engender a sustainable and sustained revival of rice cultivation in West Africa and to provide support for the National Rice Development Strategies of Member States towards achieving rice self-sufficiency by 2025. To accelerate the implementation of the Rice Offensive, a Regional Rice Action Plan was developed in 2020 to ensure that the region meets the goal. To achieve this, the ECOWAS Commission aligned with several development partners including the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, AfricaRice, GIZ, the African Development Bank (AfDB), the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), FCDO, AGRA, JICA/CARD, World Bank, and others in strategic partnership.

Based on regional action plan, consultative workshops, field research, and recommendations from public and private sector partners across ECOWAS member states, a regional “ECOWAS Rice Observatory” (ERO) was jointly created by the ECOWAS Commission and its partners. ERO coordinates rice sector-related programs, public/private investments, and policy recommendations for key decision-makers. Given the bottom-up structure of ERO where actions taken at the regional level are based on priorities identified by national stakeholders, ERO has prioritized the establishment of the national chapters comprising primarily the private sector stakeholders across the value chain, research, government, and civil society to coordinate country-specific investments and policies.

Context

The rice sector encompasses various actors, including smallholder farmers, processors, traders, and government agencies. However, challenges such as low productivity, limited access to markets, ineffective coordination/harmonization of the sector, inadequate infrastructure, and vulnerability to climate change pose obstacles to its growth and competitiveness. To address these issues, there is a need to bring



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together the ERO partners who are stakeholders in West Africa's rice sector, to align strategies and chart a road map to accelerate the sector's growth. This includes enhancing policy frameworks, promoting sustainable farming practices, highlight the intervention of the various governments, donors, and development partners, improving market access, fostering research and development, and strengthening value chain integration through the recommendations that will be presented from the engagements. By aligning these elements, the aim is to create a competitive rice sector in West Africa that can meet local demand, enhance livelihoods, and contribute to the region's economic development.

One of the strategies to be presented at the Annual General Assembly is the ECOWAS Rice Road Map which will consolidate and integrate key elements from existing strategies (such as the AfDB Country Compacts, the NRDS of Member States, the ECOWAS Rice Offensive, and the Action Plan: 2020 - 2025) and establish a unified framework to drive the sector.

Objectives

The overall objective of the general assembly is to bring all rice stakeholders within the ECOWAS region together to validate recommendations and the ERO strategy through stakeholders' participation.

The specific objectives are as follows:

1. To present the Regional Rice Roadmap (2024 – 2030) to the stakeholders for validation
2. To promote a better understanding of the coordinating role of ERO in the development of West Africa's rice sector.
3. To present ERO's strategy and orientation based on stakeholders' perspectives and national needs.
4. To foster networking/ visibility among participants to establish potential partnerships/collaboration.

Expected Outputs

1. ECOWAS rice roadmap is presented and validated for implementation.
2. The coordinating role of ERO in the development of West Africa's rice sector is better understood and strengthened.
3. ERO's strategy and orientation are presented to the stakeholders and validated.
4. Networking and partnership opportunities highlighting collaboration prospects among participants is facilitated.

Participants

The ERO General Assembly welcomes the participation of various rice actors (Farmers and Farmer Organizations, Processors and Millers, Traders and Distributors, Input Suppliers, Research and Development Institutions, Government Agencies and Ministries, Development Organizations and NGOs, Financial Institutions). It is important to note that due to limited space, attendance at the **ERO General Assembly will be on a first come, first served basis. The estimated number of attendees is between 120 and 150, subject to the space and budget available for the event.** All private and public sector participants within West Africa's rice sector who share the vision of ERO are encouraged to attend and contribute to the discussions and activities of the General Assembly.





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Conference Plan

The duration for the General Assembly will be two full days. Participants are advised to plan their travel arrangements, accordingly, arriving the night before the first day and departing the day after the event. As a result, attendees will require a minimum of three-night stay to accommodate the conference schedule. It is important to note that the General Assembly is an annual event, and each year it will be hosted in a different member country, allowing for rotation and inclusivity among the participating nations.

Date: 21st - 23rd May 2023

SN	Date	Activity	Location
1	20 th May	Participants' arrival in the host country	Abuja, Nigeria
2	21 st May	Day one - Opening and Kick off	Abuja / Hybrid
3	22 nd May	Day two – Plenary sessions and closing	Abuja / Hybrid
4	23 rd May	Day three – Board Meeting	Abuja / Hybrid
5	24 th May	Departure	

Special Features

The meeting is proposed to feature engaging workshop discussions where participants can delve into the key themes and topics related to the rice sector. The **ECOWAS Rice Road Map** will be presented and adopted. Additionally, **an exhibition and trade fair** will be held, providing a platform for participants to showcase their products, services, and innovations. A **sponsored cocktail reception** will offer networking opportunities and a relaxed setting for further interactions.

