AfricaRice Communications Strategy
April 2019

I.   Background

Effective communication is vital to research organizations to disseminate information on research outputs (technologies, tools, knowledge, policy findings) accurately, rapidly and in a clear and understandable way so that it is easily accessible to all stakeholders.

This communications strategy aims to support the achievement of AfricaRice's mission and strategic plan. It has been developed to more effectively promote recognition for AfricaRice's role in delivering science-based solutions tailored to the needs of rice value chain actors in Africa, raise awareness of how its work is making a difference, enable sharing of information and knowledge with its partners, increase uptake of its research results and support future funding of its work.

The strategy has been built against the backdrop of the following developments:

- The earlier integrated communications and resource mobilization strategy of the Marketing and Communications Unit (MCU), when it was established in 2007/2008 (Annex 1). As part of this strategy, the communications, donor relations, and conventions and grants management functions were integrated within MCU from 2008 to 2015.

- The AfricaRice Strategic Plan (Boosting Africa's Rice Sector: A research for development strategy 2011–2020), which emphasizes the role of information and communications technology (ICT) for increased access to rice knowledge

- The AfricaRice Resource Mobilization strategy (Annex 2), approved by the Board in 2015, which requires MCU to support advocacy and fundraising activities at AfricaRice

- The AfricaRice Partnership Strategy, approved by the Board in 2016, which indicates the important role for communications in fostering AfricaRice partnerships

- The communications strategies/activities of the CGIAR Research Program RICE (Annex 3) and CGIAR Platforms (Big Data, Genebank and Gender Research) in which AfricaRice is involved

- The important role of communications in the CGIAR System's new Business Plan (Annex 4)

- The institutional structure and organogram presented to the Board in September 2015, in which MCU was separated from the Conventions- and Grants-related activities and was housed within the Strategic Partnerships division

Keeping in mind these developments, the current communications strategy has been developed to respond to the Center's new vision and commitment to grow as a pan-African center of excellence for rice research, development and capacity development, supporting efforts of African countries to achieve self-sufficiency in rice.

II.   Focus

This strategy focuses on public outreach (public awareness and communications between AfricaRice and its stakeholders.) It does not cover communications related to extension activities, which includes a wider range of communications and learning activities intended for extensionists, farmers and other users.

Key Objectives

- Raise public awareness about the increasing importance of the rice sector for economic growth and social well-being in Africa
- Promote AfricaRice's positive brand as leader for rice research and value chain improvement in Africa

- Ensure that the significance of AfricaRice's mission, strategy, innovations and impacts are clear to its stakeholders in terms of how the Center is meeting the most relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- Ensure that AfricaRice becomes the primary source of information and knowledge on rice in sub-Saharan Africa
- Build donor support for AfricaRice activities by communicating the outputs, outcomes, impact and benefits of AfricaRice work with due acknowledgment to donors
- Mainstream communications in all AfricaRice projects, which should allocate a minimum of 2% of the project budget to communications for public outreach
- Support Strategic Partnerships Division to better engage with key partners
- Strengthen national partners' capacity in communications skills (on request) and develop synergies through partnership with their communication focal points
- Develop branding guidelines

III. Key Assumptions
- Effective communication is a means to an end, not an end in itself.
- Communication is critical for the success of any project and requires proper planning and budgeting right from the proposal development stage. It should not be considered an 'afterthought'.
- Communication is a key factor for the success of resource mobilization efforts.
- Communication is a two-way process; it is therefore essential to build feedback mechanisms.
- Communication is a responsibility of all staff.

IV. Communication Environment
Information and Communication Technology (ICT) revolution: Technology has dramatically transformed how organizations do communications and engage with stakeholders and media. People have access to almost limitless amounts of information through the Internet. More than half a billion people across Africa now subscribe to mobile services, with the number expected to grow to 725 million by 2020.

What hasn't changed: The need for excellent and compelling storytelling and a strong brand identity continues to be important in communications.

V. Major Strengths and Challenges for Communications at Africarice

Major strengths
- AfricaRice's powerful pan-African mandate
- Unique structure with direct links to policy-makers and with convening power
- A CGIAR Research Center – part of a global research partnership for a food-secure future
- Strong and increasing demand for rice, which has been identified by African Heads of State as a strategic crop for Africa
- AfricaRice is a respected brand, recognized for its track record of research and partnership success – especially relating to NERICA – testified by several international awards
- Distinguished scientists and alumni (e.g., World Food Prize winners)
- Has developed a wide range of new technologies along the rice value chain
- In-house communication strengths in clear messaging, story-telling and multimedia outreach, (e.g., internationally recognized NERICA promotion campaign, award-winning farmer-learning video initiative; award-winning photos and AfricaRice communications app)

Major challenges
- Declining aid for agricultural R&D

- Inadequate mainstreaming of communications in projects
- Need for a clearly articulated value proposition

VI. Communication Principles

The 4Rs of effective communication are the following: The 'Right message' to the 'Right person' through the 'Right channel' at the 'Right time'. In other words, responses to the following four questions are fundamental to any communications strategy: (a) What do we want to communicate (b) Who is our target audience (c) How do we want to communicate (d) When do we want to communicate

a) What do we want to communicate?

Over the years, AfricaRice has developed key messages to articulate what we do, why we do it, how we are different and what value we bring to stakeholders. Some examples are given below.

- Rice science at the service of Africa (AfricaRice tagline).
- The only CGIAR Research Center owned by African countries
- A partner of choice for rice research and value chain improvement in Africa
- Locally-tailored rice research-for-development capacity with on-the-ground knowledge, data and networks
- Rice research in Africa provides a strong case for investment
- Rice sector development is a potential engine for economic growth across the continent.
- Strengthening rice R&D capacity of member countries in Africa
- Accelerating delivery of rice technologies through Africa-wide task forces
- Making Africa's rice sector dynamic and profitable to attract youth
- Contributing strongly to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and addressing 12 of the 17 SDGs

Content plays a fundamental role in engaging our target audience. The Director General's statements and presentations, AfricaRice's Strategic Plan, documents of projects and CRPs, scientific publications, AfricaRice Science Week presentations and project workshops mainly provide the thematic content for AfricaRice public awareness products.

AfricaRice Communications produces a range of public awareness products, such as the following:
- Annual reports
- News releases
- Feature stories
- Blogs
- Policy briefs
- Country factsheets
- Promotional material
- Presentations,
- Audio podcasts
- Videos
- Posters
- Calendars
- Photo collections

b) Who is our target audience?

AfricaRice's target audience include the following:
- Policy-makers, notably the AfricaRice Council of Ministers
- Donors
- Research partners

- Development partners
- Universities
- Non-governmental organizations
- Private sector
- Trainees and students
- Rice value chain actors
- Media and general public

Each category of our target groups has different communications needs and interests:

Target audience	Communications needs/interests
• Policy-makers, notably the AfricaRice Council of Ministers	Policy briefs, impact factsheets, country factsheets, exhibits
• Donors	Project reports, project success stories, brief information on innovation and technologies, policy briefs, impact factsheets, financial statements, rice statistics, corporate annual reports, exhibits
• Research partners • Universities • Trainees and students	Journal articles, books, annual reports, information on research methodologies and results, training manuals, learning videos
• Development partners • Non-governmental organizations	Brief factsheets on technologies and innovations, manuals, learning videos, exhibits
• Private sector	Brief factsheets on Technologies and innovations, impact studies, information on production costs/profits, exhibits
• Rice value chain actors	Information on technologies, learning material/videos, information on production costs/profits, exhibits
• Media and general public	News releases/briefs, brochures, videos, photos, audio podcasts, rice statistics, impact factsheets, exhibits

c) How do we want to communicate?

The approach and delivery channels will be determined by the category of audience and mode of delivery. AfricaRice uses a range of communications channels, such as:

- Website
- Multimedia (print, audio podcasts, videos)
- Meetings/Workshops
- Exhibits
- Social media platforms: AfricaRice e-daily newsletter, Facebook, Twitter, Slideshare, Flickr, YouTube, ITunes, Instagram, Scribd (digital library service), Mendeley (web service for sharing research papers)

AfricaRice will continue to exploit the exciting opportunities of new information and communications technologies for the dissemination of information it produces.

It will increasingly use electronic channels (web, multimedia, mobile phones) for its communications products and services to reach the maximum number and range of stakeholders in the quickest and most cost-effective ways possible. AfricaRice website, AfricaRice page on CGIAR.org website and social media outlets will be its main vehicles for communications outreach.

d)   When do we want to communicate?

To make the production process more efficient, the development of an annual communications plan at the beginning of the year in collaboration with Management and researchers is essential. The plan will identify the research outputs that need to be highlighted. It will include project coordinators' list of expected publications, events, need for media coverage, deadlines and budgets for the communications products and services.

This strategy recommends the mainstreaming of communication in the project cycle with funding commitments by all projects (a minimum of 2% of the project budget should be allocated for communications).

VII.   Monitoring and Evaluation

Web usage (visits and downloads) and media hits (AfricaRice in the news) will be systematically used for monitoring and evaluation of the Center's communications. Other metrics will include the increase in requests for information, partnerships and visits by interested stakeholders.

VIII.   Expected Outcomes

- AfricaRice's target audience more effectively reached through a well-coordinated communications program and through support to advocacy and fund-raising activities of the Center
- AfricaRice recognized as a leader for rice research and value chain improvement in Africa through systematic branding
- Communications fully mainstreamed in AfricaRice projects, and 2% of the project budget allocated to communications for public outreach
- AfricaRice recognized as a reference for information and knowledge on rice in sub-Saharan Africa
- More productive engagement with stakeholders
- Stronger partnerships with national communications focal points

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Annex 1: Integrated marketing & communications unit strategy developed in 2007/2008

1. The External and Internal Challenges

Like most research Centers, the Africa Rice Center (WARDA) is increasingly facing an unreliable funding situation. Despite a remarkable track record of achievements and international awards, the Center's funding situation remains precarious. The contribution from its member countries continues to be low and intermittent. The Ivoirian crisis and the CGIAR sub-Saharan Africa strategy have also added to the uncertainties faced by the Center and weakened its position. These external pressures have led to a loss of support from some traditional donors.

2. Goal of the Marketing & Communication Unit (MCU)

Help generate sustainable support for the Center's R&D activities through an efficient communications and resource mobilization strategy targeted to donors and partner communities.

3. Objectives

1. To increase awareness of the Center's activities to its stakeholders
2. To strengthen support from donors and member countries
3. To strengthen partnership with NARS, ARIs, NGOs, the private sector and farmers' associations

4. Strategy

The new strategy comprises:
1. Communications Activities
2. Project Development Workflow
3. Project Development Activities

4.1 Communication Activities

- Support the DG in all his communication requirements (reports, presentations, etc.)
- Send out regular news releases on Center's news (research breakthroughs, new products, etc.) to the CGIAR community, NEC, Council of Ministers, press and other stakeholders
- Continue to give a high priority to Center's website, as this is the main entry point for all interested external world) as well as the websites of various projects (ARI, IVC, ROCARIZ, ECARRN, INGER & SWIHA).
- Maintain the Intranet site
- Develop communication material (print, radio, video, website) targeted to different stakeholders (general audience, donors, policy-makers, press, and other partners)
- Develop and maintain media and partner database
- Coordinate media coverage of WARDA events (visits, workshops, meetings, etc.)
- Serve as the first contact for all external queries and requests for WARDA products (technologies, photos, articles, etc.)
- Follow up all requests from CGIAR Secretariat for information, articles, photos, etc.
- Follow up all requests from CGIAR Marketing Group for participation in joint scientific exhibitions

4.2 Project Development Workflow

- Updated donor information posted by MCU on the Intranet for scientists
- Concept note prepared by scientists in consultation with MCU and Project Development Committee
- Scientists discuss concept note with prospective donors
- If donors give green signal, scientists develop full proposals with support from MCU and in consultation with Project Development Committee
- Scientists and MCU follow up with donors for proposal acceptance
- Once proposals are accepted and projects are in implementation, MCU coordinates financial and technical reporting to donors on project implementation

4. 3 Project Development Activities

- Support development, editing and formatting of concept notes and proposals
- Develop and maintain excellent professional relationship with donors

- Coordinate DG's visits to donors
- Coordinate donors' visits to WARDA stations
- Develop and maintain donor intelligence (donor contact, interests, call for proposals, deadlines, etc.)
- Develop and coordinate system for review and submission of proposals
- Develop and maintain database of proposals
- Analyze proposal acceptance/rejection and provide regular reports to Management
- Explore capacity building of scientists on proposal development and eventually extend this facility to NARS partners

5. Expected Outputs
- Enhanced image of the Africa Rice Center
- Higher credibility of the Center among all stakeholders
- New projects continuously in the pipeline
- Higher acceptance rate of project proposals

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Annex 2: Communications as a tool to build donor support for AfricaRice activities (Extracted from AfricaRice Resource Mobilization Strategy)

1. Clearly set out the Organization's mission, purpose and aspirations until 2020 based on the 2011-2020 Strategic Plan and the 2014-2020 Center Development Plan in a highly marketable document (e.g. 'Rice Matters in Africa'). This 'Rice Matters in Africa' document will identify high impact funding opportunities for existing and new donors, including the private sector.
2. Ensure that the 'Rice Matters in Africa' document is communicated widely and tailored to different audiences (regional organizations, development banks, private sector, foundations etc.) and will be updated regularly to reflect major political, economic and scientific developments, latest assessment of funding needs and RM successes and progress made.
3. Continue to communicate frequently about R&D successes obtained by AfricaRice and partners through the various media.
4. Ensure that AfricaRice opinions and position statements are heard with respect to recent political, economic, scientific or other developments related to rice in Africa.
5. Ensure that the research activities and successes are translated and communicated to the donors and the public in terms of SLOs and SDGs, especially relating to health and nutrition.
6. Build AfricaRice's image as more than a "commodity-focused" center, emphasizing its relevance for addressing climate change related issues to attract donors who are funding climate change activities.

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Annex 3: CGIAR Research Program on Rice: Communication Strategy

Good communication is critical for RICE to deliver its development impacts. RICE will build on the six elements of the communication strategy proposed by the CGIAR communication community of practice (shown in bold below):
1. RICE will **communicate and engage with partners** through collaborative and participatory approaches to R&D and convening various networks, CGIAR communication community of practice, platforms, and consortia, using tools as above.

2. RICE will **promote learning and sharing of information to improve communications and collaboration**, in general by active engagement in the CGIAR communication community of practice and, more internally in RICE through the learning and feedback mechanisms embedded in its results-based management framework.

3. RICE will **engage with actors on the ground to scale-out technologies and practices**, through the development of multistakeholder platforms and scaling-out activities, using tools such as participatory impact pathway mapping, stakeholder and outcome mapping, and problem tree definition and analysis.

4. RICE will **communicate about the program, the science, results, and progress**, using an array of tools such as a dedicated RICE website, specific project websites, newsletters, media briefs, radio and TV interviews, podcasts, and blogs.

5. RICE will **engage in policy dialogue to scale-up results**, through its engagement with numerous national and regional bodies, and through developing and communicating results of policy analyses.

6. RICE will **make CRP information and resources open and accessible**, as detailed in the RICE open-access and intellectual asset management strategies.

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Annex 4: CGIAR System Communication action plan (extracted from CGIAR System 3-Year Business Plan (2019-2021) draft – 19 Oct 2018)

ACTION 9: Collaborate on shared resource mobilization and communication
9.1. Develop and implement a System-wide marketing and communications strategy
- The Strategy will be developed in collaboration with the CGIAR Heads of Communication Community of Practice, to support resource mobilization efforts, further raise the profile of CGIAR, its Centers and CRPs, and create an enabling environment for the implementation of the business plan.
- More specifically, the communication strategy, initiatives and tactics will promote the new CGIAR narrative, food systems, the five global challenges and the five transformations, featuring the work of Centers and CRPs as evidence of progress towards these.
- The communication strategy will include the following deliverables:
  - "Umbrella" profile-raising marketing campaign based on the new CGIAR narrative featuring the work of Centers and CRPs around the five global challenges and transformations;
  - One major CGIAR-wide publication every business cycle on the "Global state of knowledge on food systems" or other topic to be confirmed;
  - CGIAR participation at high-level global events over the business plan period;
  - Yearly media outreach plans; and
  - Communications around the proposed back-to-back 2020 General Assembly of Centers and inaugural CGIAR Partnership Forum.

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