

Cassava Matters

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How BASICS is changing Nigeria's cassava seed sector and creating seed entrepreneurs



A cassava stems field

For the past decades, Africa, has been grappling with the sustainable diffusion of improved cassava varieties due to a weak and uncoordinated dissemination strategy. Consequently, improved varieties have often failed to reach the hands of farmers, forcing the yields of cassava in Africa to remain low.

However, the project— Building an Economically Sustainable, Integrated Cassava Seed System (BASICS) has demonstrated that the cassava seeds system can be profitable for the players involved across the value chain and can sustainably deploy improved varieties of cassava stems to farmers while creating jobs.

Researchers say in the last 5 years, BASICS has created a viable and sustainable cassava seed system in Nigeria, opening a vista of opportunities for seed entrepreneurs and cassava farmers looking for new and improved varieties for cultivation.

The Project Director, Dr. Hemant Nitturkar, explained that the project was able to link breeders and researchers who developed improved cassava varieties and technologies; with farmers and processors who benefited from high quality planting materials.

According to him, the BASICS project has created over 150 community based seed entrepreneurs who are running viable

cassava stem businesses in states like Benue, Cross River, Abia and Imo; and facilitated the establishment of two seed companies (namely IITA GoSeed located on the IITA campus in Ibadan, and Umudike Seed at National Root Crops Research Institute (NRCRI) in Umudike, Abia State) to ensure reliable supply of breeder and foundation seeds of varieties in demand.

Until the coming of BASICS, there was no formal seed sector for cassava stems. Farmers would usually share cassava stems with their fellow farmers. In some cases, government would buy improved stems and share them to farmers free of charge. However, most of the stems shared by the government are usually not certified and in small quantity due to the bulky nature of cassava. Such distributions happened only occasionally, either to address some exigencies or to introduce new varieties, and that too were targeted at certain segments/locations of farmers. This approach has proved unsustainable as the spread of improved varieties still hovers less than 40 percent.

Dr Nitturkar said, "In Nigeria, 46 varieties were released in the last 20 years, but we have seen that people do not know about or use more than about five of these varieties."

"We encouraged development of village seed entrepreneurs because cassava stems can

be costly to transport over long distances, so we aimed at locating seed production closer to the cassava growing communities. These village seed entrepreneurs multiplied improved stems, and they made certified seeds available to the farmers on a commercial basis," he explained.

He stated that apart from ensuring that seeds of different varieties are always available to farmers, the seed entrepreneurs formed a vital link between researchers and farmers because "as they are selling these seeds, they also learn from the farmers what new features they require in the varieties. The seed entrepreneurs push up this information to the seed companies who take it back to the breeders."

Dr Nitturkar stressed that the Nigerian seed market has come to stay with 50 per cent of the informed farmers doubling as seed entrepreneurs and root farmers who made additional profits of up to \$1200 from selling stems for two seasons and harvesting the roots in the second season. He said interested seed entrepreneurs can talk with the village seed entrepreneurs or reach out to IITA GoSeed or Umudike Seed for training on how to produce quality stems, how to get certified and how to approach the market.

Dr Peter Kulakow, Cassava Breeder with the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture said one of the greatest achievements of BASICS was its ability to work with young people and women and to empower them in seed production.

About BASICS

Building an Economically Sustainable, Integrated Cassava Seed System (BASICS) is a four-year (2016-2019) project that is working to strengthen all components of the cassava seed value chain. The project was implemented by the CGIAR program on Roots, Tubers and Bananas, led by the International Potato Centre, in partnership with International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), National Agricultural Seeds Council (NASC), National Root Crops Research Institute (NRCRI), Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Context Global Development (CGD) and Fera Science Limited (Fera).

ACAI partners and local government officials continue training on AKILIMO in Tanzania



ACAl partners, local government officials sensitizing a group of farmers in Tanzania

A collaboration between ACAl partners and the local government authorities in Tanzania has ensured a continuation of stakeholder trainings and farmer sensitization during the coronavirus pandemic. Kilimo Joint a capacity building and agricultural consulting enterprise and eSOKO an agricultural digital solutions company and an ACAl primary partner have teamed with government officials of Mkuranga District in the Eastern Zone of Tanzania to conduct training for selected new project partners and farmers on the use of fertilizer in growing cassava as recommended by the AKILIMO decision support tools.

The training is conducted around the established Fertilizer Recommendation demonstration plots. Farmers are shown

how to calculate proper fertilizer rates, the appropriate time and suitable weather conditions for applying fertilizer and how to evaluate whether investing in fertilizer for cassava will be profitable. 67 participants from several groups of cassava producers and farmers in Kiparang'anda and Kisuju villages were also trained on using fertilizer to increase the yield of the cassava as well as the quality of their roots by following the recommendations from AKILIMO decision support tools.

The continuation of activities and training has been necessitated by the demand and need from farmers for support. Planting and cropping seasons in Tanzania have a short and specific window which farmers cannot afford to miss.

The team has been working under strict precautionary measures observing safe social distance, wearing protective masks and sanitizing regularly. Between April and May, the team had trained three groups of individuals representing the cassava processing sector in the district.

The government officials are drawn from the District Agricultural, Irrigation and Cooperatives Office (DAICO) and the local District Crops Officer, (DCO). Kilimo Joint has also trained 17 Extension Agents (EAs) in Mkuranga district on farmer profiling using Insynt tool developed by eSOKO.

Source: [AKILIMO UPDATES](#)

IITA-led BASICS-II gets new head



Prof. Lateef Oladimeji Sanni has been appointed the Project Manager of the project: Building an Economically Sustainable, Integrated Cassava Seed System Phase II (acronym BASICS-II).

BASICS-II aims to transform the cassava seed sector by promoting the breeding, and dissemination of improved varieties thereby creating a community of seed entrepreneurs across the cassava value chain. The project, which is being led by the International

Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), will focus on Nigeria and Tanzania with a spin over effect on other African countries.

Prof. Sanni is a former Deputy Vice Chancellor (Development), Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, Nigeria.

He has 30 years' experience in research, consultancy and collaboration as a postharvest expert on tropical root crops mostly implemented by the Natural Resources Institute, United Kingdom; Association of African Universities; West and Central African Council for Agricultural Research and Development (CORAF/WECARD); and the International Society for Tropical Root Crop.

In 2008, Prof. Sanni won the Consultative Group of International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) Award in Regional Technology Development in sub-Saharan Africa.

He served as the Postharvest Scientist with the Cassava Mosaic Disease Project and Cassava Enterprises Development Project (CEDP), at the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture, (IITA), Ibadan, Nigeria from 2004 to 2007. Prof. Sanni is skilled in managing complex multi-disciplinary projects. For instance, he successfully

implemented the IITA-Common Fund for Commodities project with partners (Belgian NGO, Veco Benin; National Agricultural Research Centre in Benin; Sierra Leone Agricultural Research Institute (SLARI), Sierra Leone; and the Federal Ministry of Trade and Investment, Abuja, Nigeria) from 2008 to 2012.

Prior to this appointment, Prof. Sanni successfully served as the Country Manager for Nigeria in a five-country project, Cassava: Adding Value for Africa II (CAVA and CAVA II) hosted in the Natural Resources Institute of the Greenwich University, Maritime, UK; and the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, Nigeria. The CAVA and CAVA II projects were sponsored by Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation from May 2008 to March 2019. While at FUNAAB, he also coordinated IITA-African Cassava Agronomy Initiative's component on the validation and dissemination of IITA-ACAl recommendations to commercial farmers.

Prof. Sanni is a fellow of the Nigerian Academy of Science, Nigerian Institute of Food Science and Technology, Institute of Management Consultants Nigeria, and the President, International Society for Tropical Root Crops.

JDPM and UAM gradually resume training of farmers while adhering to COVID-19 safety measures



Extension agents at a meeting at JDPM office, Oyo

Extension agents working under the Justice Development and Peace Movement (JDPM), Oyo and the University of Agriculture Makurdi have concluded plans to resume training activities previously halted by the COVID-19 lockdown across the country under a cautious regime. The training activities will adhere strictly to the rules on physical distancing set by the country on COVID-19, coordinators from JPDM and UAM have said.

The two organizations are partnering with the African Cassava Agronomy Initiative (ACAI) of the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) for the dissemination of the AKILIMO decision support tools to farmers in Oyo State and Benue State.

Both JDPM and UAM commenced full dissemination activities in 2019 and have so far covered dozens of rural communities and local government areas in the two states; gathering farmers at their homes, village squares, under trees, community schools, and churches. Using battery-powered mobile projectors, videos, and other paper-based tools developed by ACAI, the organizations (through their extension networks) are teaching farmers best weed control methods, safe use of herbicides, and best planting practices in cassava-maize farming systems.

The training activities were however halted over a month ago following the outbreak of COVID-19 and lockdown measures put in place by the state and federal governments to curtail the pandemic in Nigeria.

But at separate meetings held recently at the JDPM office in Oyo and another in Benue, the extension agents resolved to resume training under COVID 19 regulations set by the government to ensure that cassava farmers were armed with best-bet weed control and planting techniques as the farming season begins.

Godwin Atser, IITA, and ACAI Digital Extension and Advisory Services Specialist, who was present at the meeting in Oyo, commended the extension agents for the work they did before the lockdown. He stated that "recommencing the training at this time is a humanitarian gesture to farmers to enable them to avert hunger and cushion the effects of the looming economic recession."

The trainings will be conducted based on government COVID-19 safety rules and regulations which allow a limited number of persons to gather while maintaining a physical distance.

Other safety measures harped upon at the meeting included the proper washing of hands and compulsory use face masks by trainers and trainees at every training event. Farmer Field days which are to come up soon will also be conducted under COVID 19 rules.

Godwin, who expressed his appreciation to the extension agents for their hard work and cooperation towards the success of the ACAI project, stressed the need to follow up on farmers who have been trained and have adopted the intervention in order to serve as points of reference to others.

The meeting, which used its sitting arrangement to illustrate how the extension agents could ensure social distancing at their training venues, also made plans for advocacy visits to community and local government leaders to ensure the sustainability of the project.

At the end of the parley, safety kits (nose masks, hand wash, buckets with water taps) were distributed to all the extension agents present.

Also present at the meeting were the JDPM coordinator, Rev. Fr. Gabriel Adeleke and the dissemination project leader for JDPM, Mr. John Fakorede.

YARA Fertilizer Tanzania and Kilimo Joint in new collaboration under ACAI to bring new partners to the project

Two ACAI project partners in Tanzania, YARA Fertilizers and Kilimo Joint have struck a collaboration that will see them engage secondary partners to scale and disseminate AKILIMO agronomy advice tools in the country.

The partnership has been developed after months of discussion between representatives of the institutions and ACAI team consisting of Fredrick Baijukya, ACAI project coordinator for Tanzania and Thompson Ogunsanmi, the project scaling specialist.

ACAI has adopted as part of the scaling strategy to engage secondary partners affiliated to the project's primary partnership network. This will play a key role in ensuring fast dissemination and sustainability of use and application of AKILIMO tools beyond the lifespan of the ACAI project.



ACAI partners working with partners on the field

Using a vetting criterion agreed upon between ACAI and all project partners, Kilimo Joint and Yara identified 60 potential new partners for scaling and dissemination of AKILIMO agronomy advice tools. Out of the identified 60, Kilimo Joint indicated they have a working history with at least 20 of them. These newly identified potential partners operate at different segments of the cassava value chain including production, processing, and marketing.

The potential secondary partners were selected by looking at their operational capacity in the cassava value chain in the country, trusted farmers in their networks, products and/or services, distribution channels and the ability to resolve farmers' bottlenecks like access to inputs, market and credit.

ACAI has also integrated these criteria into the scaling checklist then follow up with

the secondary partners to confirm their readiness to work with YARA and Kilimo joint. These partners will then be trained by the two companies under the auspices of ACAI project before they can start to disseminate some of the technologies to their farmers.

Source: [AKILIMO UPDATES](#)

This newsletter is produced by African Cassava Agronomy Initiative (ACAI) in collaboration with the BASICS projects.

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