



TERRAVIVA

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Enabling poor rural people
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Cassava sells fast in the capital, Kinshasa

DRC cassava farmers reap rewards from new methods

By Badylon Kawanda Bakiman

KIKWIT - Farmers in the Democratic Republic of Congo are embracing a new variety of cassava which, in combination with improved agricultural techniques, easily outperforms yields from other popular types of this important crop.

Cassava is a staple food in many parts of DRC, and farmers disappointed with harvests of the popular F100 variety, which has proved vulnerable to a plant disease called mosaic, have turned to a newer strain with great success.

“We produced 58 tonnes of TME 419 cassava from a two hectare field in 2011,” said 27-year-old Romain Twarita. “That’s a yield of 29 tonnes per hectare, compared to the 10 or 12 tonnes per hectare of F100 that we harvested in 2010.”

Twarita, the coordinator of Action Jeunes Pour le Développement de Nkara (AJDN), an association of 22 young farmers at Nkara, 90 kilometres from Kikwit, the capital of the southwestern DRC province of Bandundu, says the 2011 crop brought in more than 25,000 dollars for AJDN, against 10,000 dollars the year before, and just 3,000 dollars in 2009, the year the association was established.

He said AJDN has also adopted “binage”, a new method of hoeing which maximises the benefits of irrigation – “worth two waterings”, as Twarita put it. Binage calls for the surface of the soil to be broken up, to allow more rain to soak into it. The young farmers also use compost and manure to

enrich the soil with organic and mineral matter.

“The big problem is a shortage of farm implements, and the lack of understanding from landowners who ask so much money for a plot – 40 or 50 dollars for half a hectare, depending on location,” he told IPS.

“The cassava is bought from farms here by traders, then sent to the capital, Kinshasa, where it sells fast,” said Jacques Mitini, president of the provincial network of small farmers’ organisations in Bandundu, which includes 255 smallholder associations, nearly a third of these representing young farmers between the ages of 21 and 33.

In the west of DRC, in Bas-Congo province, the Comité de Développement de Kakongo (CDK) is planting trees to create windbreaks and maintain soil moisture, boosting production of other crops on a three-hectare plot.

“We are using intercropping, that’s why there are these wind-breaks of moringa trees which also fertilise the earth without us needing to use chemical fertilisers. Irrigation is also important,” said Espérance Nzuzi, president of Force Paysanne du Bas-Congo, a network of 264 smallholder farmers associations, including 87 created by youth.

“The 84 tonnes of TME 419 cassava harvested last year earned us 39,960 dollars, compared to just 6,160 dollars from 14

tonnes of F100 in 2010,” said Nzuzi. On two hectares on the outskirts of Kinshasa, the Congolese capital, another youth association, Jeunes Dynamiques de Malulku (JDM), has also found success with the adoption of new techniques.

“We’ve only been practicing binage since we started this venture in 2010. We produced 15 tonnes of TME 419 from a single hectare that year, but in 2011 we harvested 28 tonnes from a hectare and a half, applying a little bit of chemical fertiliser,” said Anne Mburabata, 32, president of the association.

“Before we started popularising TME 419 cassava, we tested it carefully,” said Didier Mboma, who heads the technical innovation service at the Impresa Servizi Coordinati (ISCO), an Italian NGO which is making free cuttings of the new cassava variety available to farmers.

“Since the tests in 2008, we have planted 3,000 cuttings, and we have harvested 30,000.”

Mboma said that young farmers are strongly establishing themselves as productive farmers, while contributing to the country’s food security.

“Young farmers must move towards professionalisation, and take control of the entire value chain from production, to processing, to marketing,” said Dr. Christophe Arthur Mampuya, from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fishing and Livestock. ■

The world must learn from smallholder farmers

Rousbeh Legatis interviews MOHAMED BÉAVOGUI of the International Fund for Agricultural Development

UNITED NATIONS - As Africa's Sahel region faces a new food crisis, smallholder farmers hold the key to making future development policies sustainable.

That is why it "is just impossible to speak about sustainability" at the Rio+20 conference next month without listening to what smallholder farmers have to say, says Mohamed Beavogui, head of the International Fund for Agricultural Development's Partnership and Resource Mobilisation Office.

Some 18 million people in the Sahel region are at risk of food insecurity and malnutrition, warns the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

Recurring droughts, environmental degradation and high grain prices accompanied by decreasing migrant remittances, as well as displacement and chronic poverty are creating a situation that has resulted among others things in a 26-percent decline in cereal production compared to 2011. Finding long-lasting solutions is pivotal in this context, said Beavogui.

Speaking with U.N. Correspondent Rousbeh Legatis, Beavogui laid out what the world can learn from smallholder farmers to promote sustainable agriculture as a key element of future sustainable development.

Excerpts from the interview follow.

Q: Regions like the Sahel seem to be hit by famine every few years, often for predictable reasons. What structural changes can be made to break this cycle?

A: Firstly, we should invest in providing targeted communities with greater capacity to implement self-help activities in response to production shortfalls, as well as more effectively coordinate and implement governmental and international relief activities.

Secondly, we have been learning that in areas where attempts were made to build long-lasting sustainable approaches like re-greening of land, solving the issues of water availability, drip irriga-

tion, bounds, the adverse effects of droughts have been less than in areas where this kind of work has not been undertaken.

But this means what? It means that we should work all together. Governments should encourage the right policies that allow to have the right inputs, particularly drought-resistant seeds, as well as policies that allow good extension services to be adopted and easy access – particularly for women and young people.

Q: IFAD has supported organic farming pilot projects, such as among cocoa producers in Sao Tome, as a way to leverage higher-paying markets. Are these kinds of markets – organic, fair trade – expanding, and do they offer an opportunity for public-private partnerships that really benefit small farmers?

A: Yes, it is a very good way to contribute to the creation of wealth for the rural smallholder farmers.

We have had very successful experiences in Sao-Tomé, Sierra Leone, Uganda and in many other places in Latin America and so on.

But what have we learned? What are the success factors in order to get there? When I say "there" I mean the situation whereby the farmer is getting the fair price on its product, increasing his or her income in a very respectable manner and the partner, the private company, is also satisfied that it is making money. Because that is the reality: it is about making money, but in a fair manner.

So the first success factor is that we should think long-term. We should work with real private sector professionals, partners, committed also to development, to just human beings. Besides business and trade, fundamental to this is that we need some kind of ethical approach to the work. So in short, we need genuine commitment from everyone.

The second success factor is that we need to work through organised producers to ensure a critical mass. Allowing



Picture: Kitty Stapp

Mohamed Beavogui

to have, firstly, the size for delivery and, secondly, minimised processing and marketing costs.

Thirdly, we need to ensure quality to have good access to markets and good prices and we need to optimise logistics to reduce cost again, as well as an easy transfer of knowhow and good practices.

Q: Gender equality is a priority for IFAD. Are governments giving women, especially young and rural women, the attention and support they deserve?

A: I think we have a long way to go in that area for the time being. Policies are changing. If you look at what is happening now in Africa, the new constitutions are giving more and more space to women. You look at the governments, you are having more and more women getting to high-level positions, women are getting also better positions in different corporations.

The issue where I think there is a lot of work to do yet and which need a bigger push is really women in the rural areas.

In the documentation, there is a lot of talk about how do we help women, but when you go into actual activities, you will see that the extension service for agriculture is geared very frequently towards men. That issues like land are first devoted to men. So, that is where we have to work and to continue supporting. ■

Young Ivorians fishing big profits out of small ponds

By Fulgence Zamblé

A BIDJAN - Mathieu Djessan looks over the four-hectare expanse of fish ponds with satisfaction. The aquaculture enterprise the 29-year-old runs here near the town of Tiassalé in southern Côte d'Ivoire is quickly proving profitable.

"When we harvest them in May, it will be our third batch of fish in 13 months. We sold the first two lots to reach maturity between December 2011 and February 2012: 5,500 carp and 4,900 catfish. Despite major losses of fry – juvenile fish – we pocketed more than five million francs CFA (around 10,000 dollars)," Djessan told IPS.

Djessan manages three fish ponds along with three friends, here 120 kilometres northwest of the Ivorian commercial capital, Abidjan. Each pond holds 6,000 carp and catfish, growing fat on rice bran.

The four partners started the project with money they scraped together between them, combined with 4,000 dollars borrowed from several private benefactors. They say they've already repaid their debt.

"We needed to find something to do to make ends meet," said Chantal Aya, 26, one of Djessan's project partners. "So we chose to invest in what looked like a promising sector, not just in this region but also in the north, centre and west of the country which often lack fish."

Even here in the south, much closer to the ocean, over the past two years fish has seldom been available in the markets in places like Tiassalé and Sikensi. When there has been fish, brought in from Abidjan, it was too expensive for most people.

"Carp which normally costs 1,000 CFA (two dollars) was selling for nearly 2,500 CFA here," Eugène Logbo, a fish monger at the Tiassalé motor park or transit hub, told IPS.

Logbo's two large tables are covered with carp. "These don't come from Abidjan, they're from the aquaculture ponds right around here. For two or three months now, there's been a steady supply of fish from the ponds, and the price has become affordable. The cost of a half-kilo carp has fallen back to 1,500 CFA."

At Bonoua, on the edge of the Aby Lagoon southeast of Abidjan, Williams Yao Brou has built two ponds covering 2.5 hectares. At the moment they're filled with 3,800 newly-hatched fish.

Through the whole of last year he sold nearly 3,500 fish, but

he expects to sell all the fish now maturing in his ponds within the next three months.

"A maintenance problem cost me 300 hatchlings, but I don't think that will happen again," said Yao Brou. He says he earns around 6,000 dollars per production cycle.

"This business has become more exciting as other young people start coming to me for training, and to help me... This will allow us to produce enough to make up for the occasional shortages of fish," he told IPS.

He learned aquaculture techniques in the early 2000s, when he worked at a massive complex of ponds that were built in 1996 at Mahapleu, in the west of the country. That project, set up with finance from the African Development Bank, was abandoned in 2007 for lack of investment in the upkeep of the ponds.

In addition to supplying fishmongers at the local market, the young aquaculturists are looking for new outlets for their output. "Selling fish at the market or at motor parks won't yield quick profits. We want to find restaurants to supply directly, so we can shift our fish faster," said Aya, formerly a management student in Abidjan. Unable to find a job in the city, she opted for self-employment in aquaculture.

"Generally, the problem is finding start-up funds," Yao Brou told IPS. "But young people nowadays understand the need to share their ideas and projects, and together find some small seed capital to get started."

According to Dramé Sékongo, an agricultural engineer in Tiassalé, aquaculture requires only minimal equipment, money and know-how. "What Ivorian farmers are starting to do – especially the youth – is digging ponds in low-lying areas, alongside rice fields, to earn a bit of money. But some government support would help a bit," he told IPS.

In March, Côte d'Ivoire and the International Fund for Agricultural Development signed a 22.5 million dollar agreement to finance a project supporting agriculture and commercialisation in three northern regions – Bouaké, Korhogo and Bondoukou.

According to an IFAD press release, the project's goal is to help improve food security and boost incomes for small producers, particularly rural youth and women.

Co-financed by the Ivorian government, this project will be carried out by the Agriculture Ministry and IFAD expects it will bring direct and indirect benefits to more than 25,000 poor rural families. ■

"This business has become more exciting as other young people start coming to me for training, and to help me... This will allow us to produce enough to make up for the occasional shortages of fish"

Niger links climate change to food security



By Esther Tola

Climate change is one of the three major challenges that hamper agricultural development in the west African state of Niger. And a change in long-term weather conditions could put food security in doubt says farming experts in the country.

“Environmental crises lead to drops in production of food crops, but also in pastoral activities,” says the manager of the International Fund for Agriculture Development’s Vincenzo Galastro. “Climate change makes such crises recurrent. It is a problem we face every day.”

Galastro says farmers must adapt to climate change, and that means changes to what they plant. “We are working with farmers to determine the major varieties of food crops. Then we try to find out which of these crops are showing more resistance and adaptation to climate change.”

Drought in the region makes food security, and therefore agriculture, a focus point for Niger. The projects supported by IFAD in the state are all aimed at ensuring that producers deliver to the needs of the people, but the fund is also trying to keep workers in rural areas.

Galastro says the projects are making a difference to the citizens of Niger, with access to food improving as a direct result of the efforts made. Local communities are empowered through improved farming practice and techniques. The focus is also on crops that can improve food security, such as millet,

cowpeas and farming with animals.

“We’re also working on strengthening local farmers’ associations because we believe it’s a way to introduce the notion of food security’ sustainability which is topical,” Galastro says.

Key role for women

IFAD’s says its policy is built around the role that women play in producing food. “Women are generally those in charge of managing food and ensuring food security within their households,” Galastro says.

“They think of survival strategies and then adopt them for feeding their families. As for men they’re often migrating to other places since seasonal migration is one of the strategies adopted by households.”

“The women then take care of the houses and manage the food for it to remain longer. That’s why we consider they must be included in the food security project; they actually have a huge role to play.”

The approach is working, says Galastro. There are an increasing number of women found in leadership roles on farms. Women are representing the citizens of Niger on all levels; not only in the national government, but also in local communities. “Of course there is still a lot to do, but the progress is evident.” ■



Des fermiers résistent aux faibles précipitations

By Ngala Killian Chimtom

SANTA - Olivier Forgha Koumbou lave quelques carottes fraîchement cueillies dans un petit ruisseau et les mange avec délice. Sa ferme florissante à Santa, dans la région du Nord-Ouest du Cameroun, ressemble à un miracle au milieu des fermes environnantes où des carottes, pommes de terre, poireaux et la laitue ont fané et sont morts.

Les pluies sont légèrement tombées ici au début du mois de mars, mais ce n'était pas suffisant pour empêcher le soleil de faner les cultures puisque les méthodes traditionnelles d'irrigation ont échoué à cause des faibles précipitations. Dans la région du Nord-Ouest, les précipitations moyennes annuelles se situent juste à 380 millimètres, mais elles sont censées être comprises entre 1.000 et 2.000 mm.

"Les fermes ne m'ont pas donné un bon rendement cette année", déclare à IPS, Tembene Tangwan, un agriculteur de 43 ans. Il explique qu'à cause des faibles précipitations, il ne peut pas utiliser sa méthode traditionnelle pour irriguer ses cultures.

"Nous avons l'habitude d'acheminer l'eau par tuyau depuis une altitude plus élevée vers nos fermes, et utilisons des arroseurs pour l'irrigation. Mais aujourd'hui, les sources d'eau tarissent, et la faible pression dans le système ne peut pas amener l'eau par les tuyaux", dit-il. "Nous ne pouvons que prier pour le retour des pluies".

Mais son voisin, Koumbou, 32 ans, ne reste pas là à se tourner les pouces et à prier pour le retour des pluies. Pendant qu'il enlève les mauvaises herbes à travers sa culture de carottes, il affirme fièrement: "Nous développons de nouvelles stratégies lorsque nous sommes confrontés à un défi supplémentaire".

Au lieu de reculer et de regarder sa récolte faner, Koumbou avait commencé à collecter de l'eau.

"J'ai découvert que durant la nuit, le volume d'eau dans le cours d'eau à proximité augmente. J'ai donc acheté des récipients pour y stocker de l'eau, et le soir j'amène mes ouvriers agricoles pour la recueillir. Cette eau est ensuite utilisée pendant la journée pour irriguer

les cultures", explique-t-il à IPS. Koumbou est déjà en train de créer une tendance, et d'autres agriculteurs commencent désormais à suivre ses méthodes. "C'est le seul moyen de s'en sortir", affirme Christopher Neba, qui a aussi commencé à récolter de l'eau.

Koumbou cultive des carottes, des pommes de terre, des choux, la laitue et des poireaux depuis 25 ans. Il dit que sa mère lui a appris à cultiver à un âge tendre.

"Lorsque j'ai eu sept ans, j'ai commencé à accompagner mes parents au champ. Je suis resté agriculteur depuis ce temps".

Aujourd'hui, il fait un bénéfice moyen d'un peu moins 5.000 dollars par an. Mais cette année, il croit qu'il en fera même plus.

"Le fait que plusieurs agriculteurs ont perdu espoir et abandonné leurs fermes signifie que les prix augmenteront considérablement cette année, cela implique plus de bénéfices pour moi. *Continued on page 9*



There is growing awareness of the dangers of streambank cultivation.

Cameroonian farmer won't let low rainfall defeat him

By Ngala Killian Chintom

SANTA - Olivier Forgha Koumbou washes some freshly picked carrots in a small brook and eats them with relish. His thriving farm in Santa, in Cameroon's North West region, looks like a miracle in the midst of surrounding farms where carrots, lettuce, potatoes and leeks have withered and died.

Rains fell lightly here in early March, but it was not enough to prevent the sun from withering the crops as traditional methods of irrigation failed because of the low rainfall. In the North West region the average annual rainfall stands at just 380 mm, but it is meant to be between 1,000 to 2,000 mm. "The farms have failed me this year," 43-year-old farmer, Tembene Tangwan, tells IPS.

He explains that because of the low rainfall he cannot use his traditional method of irrigating his crops.

"We used to pipe water from a higher altitude to our farms, and used sprinklers for irrigation. But now, the water sources are drying up, and the low

pressure in the system cannot carry water through the pipes," he says. "We can only pray that the rains will come back," he adds.

But his neighbour, 32-year-old Koumbou, is not sitting back and putting his hands together in prayer to ask that the rains return. As he weeds through his crop of carrots, he proudly says: "We develop new strategies when we are faced with an additional challenge."

Instead of standing back and watching his crop wither, Koumbou began water harvesting.

"I discovered that during the night, the volume of water in the nearby stream increases. So I bought containers to store water in, and at night I take my farm workers to collect it. The water is then used during the day to irrigate the crops," he tells IPS.

Koumbou is already setting a trend, and other farmers are now starting to follow his methods. "It's the only way out," says Christopher Neba, who has

also begun water harvesting.

Koumbou has been cultivating carrots, potatoes, cabbages, lettuce and leeks for the past 25 years. He says that his mother introduced him to farming at a tender age.

"When I turned seven, I began accompanying my parents to the farm. I have remained a farmer ever since."

Today, he makes an average profit of just under 5,000 dollars annually. But this year he believes he will make even more.

"The fact that many farmers lost hope and abandoned their farms means that prices will rise significantly this year, and that means more profit for me. I do sympathise with my neighbours, but that is how things stand for now," he says.

While there are no concrete figures available of how many farmers have given up on farming, it is not a welcome development in a country that largely relies on food imports.

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Women farmers are key to a food-secure Africa

Busani Bafana interviews JANE KARUKU, the first woman president of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa

BULAWAYO - While women constitute the majority of food producers, processors and marketers in Africa, their role in the agricultural sector still remains a minor one because of cultural and social barriers.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), women are the majority of the world's agricultural producers, supplying more than 50 percent of the food that is grown globally. And in sub-Saharan Africa the number is higher, as women grow 80 to 90 percent of the food in the region.

But it is a situation that the new Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) boss, Jane Karuku, says must change in order for Africa to feed itself.

Karuku, a Kenyan business leader with a career spanning over 20 years, became the first female president of the organisation in April.

AGRA is a partnership that works on the African continent to improve food security and enhance the economic empowerment of millions of smallholder farmers and their families. It does this through nearly 100 programmes in 14 countries.

Karuku joins AGRA from Telkom Kenya, a subsidiary of France Telecom-Orange, where she was the deputy chief executive.

She told IPS about her dream of seeing smallholder farmers become the drivers in Africa's quest for food security. Excerpts of the interview follow.

Q: Do you see your appointment as a milestone for women farmers in Africa?

A: As AGRA's first female president, it is a great honour to advocate on behalf of the tireless women who are sowing seeds and working in fields across Africa. They are the real heroines in this story, and I hope to highlight their important contributions

for a food-secure future.

Q: Do food security policies recognise the role of women farmers in the production, processing and marketing of food in agriculture?

A: Across Africa there are great signs of progress when it comes to smallholder farmers, the majority of whom are women who are building prosperous lives for themselves and their families.

Success for smallholders, however, has been lopsided. Women smallholders and rural entrepreneurs on the continent are neither participating fully nor deriving benefits in equal measure in the agri-economy owing to gender obstacles driven by cultural and societal norms. This must change if Africa is to transform the capacity to feed itself and realise the quality of life envisioned for rural households and communities in sub-Saharan Africa.

Q: In your appointment speech you said: "Smallholder farming is a way of life in Africa, full of challenges and equally full of huge opportunities." What will you do to strike a balance for food security?

A: My focus is to work to remove the obstacles that prevent smallholder farmers across Africa from significantly boosting productivity and income, while safeguarding the environment and promoting equity. I am committed to ensuring farmers have a full range of choices when it comes to approaching their work.

Q: Smallholder farmers hold the key to food security in Africa. What is your vision for improving their situation?

A: My vision is a food-secure and prosperous Africa achieved through rapid and sustainable agricultural growth that is based on smallholder farmers who produce staple food crops. AGRA's mission is to trigger a uniquely "African Green Revolution" that transforms agriculture into a highly productive, efficient, competitive and sustainable system to ensure food security and lift



Pic: Busani Bafana / IPS

Jane Karuku

millions out of poverty.

Q: Where do you see the role of AGRA in advocating assistance for smallholder farmers to cope with the impact that climate change has on food security?

A: AGRA and its partners work together to determine the kinds of environmental safeguards farmers need to increase their yields and improve their livelihoods. By focusing on sustainable development practices, AGRA reduces environmental degradation and conserves biodiversity.

Rebuilding soil health and enabling Africa's smallholder farmers to grow more on less land should reduce the pressure to clear and cultivate forests and savannahs, thus helping conserve the environment and biodiversity.

AGRA's sustainable agricultural practices include improving soil health through integrated soil fertility management. We do this through using a combination of fertilisers and organic inputs, and techniques that are appropriate for local conditions and resources. Through advocating the use of agro-ecologically sound approaches to soil and crop management, such as fertiliser micro-dosing in arid areas, AGRA will guard against potential overuse of fertilisers that could harm the environment. ■

Des fermiers résistent aux faibles précipitations

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Je sympathise avec mes voisins, mais c'est ainsi que les choses se présentent pour le moment", dit-il.

Bien qu'il n'existe pas de chiffres concrets disponibles sur le nombre de fermiers ayant abandonné l'agriculture, ce n'est pas un développement opportun dans un pays qui dépend largement des importations alimentaires.

Le Cameroun dépense en moyenne 122 millions de dollars par an pour importer du riz, du sorgho et du millet. L'année dernière, les insuffisances dans la production de riz ont entraîné l'importation de 80.000 tonnes, qui ont coûté 240 millions de dollars.

Cela survient au milieu d'une insécurité alimentaire croissante dans le pays. Le Programme alimentaire mondial déclare que 400.000 personnes dans le nord du Cameroun ont besoin de 40.000 tonnes d'aide alimentaire pour éviter de souffrir

de la faim.

En attendant, le délégué à l'agriculture dans la région du Nord-Ouest, Cletus Awah, impute les pénuries d'eau à des pratiques agricoles irréfléchies.

"Nous avons dit aux agriculteurs de limiter leurs terres à au moins 15 mètres des sources d'eau. Mais très souvent, ils cultivent jusqu'aux lits des fleuves, détruisant la végétation qui protège ces sources d'eau et, par conséquent, les niveaux d'eau sont obligés de baisser", déclare-t-il à IPS.

Awah estime qu'une solution à la baisse de l'approvisionnement en eau viendra lorsque les agriculteurs commenceront à protéger les sources d'eau. "Les fermiers doivent immédiatement stopper l'activité agricole trop près des cours d'eau, des ruisseaux ou des zones humides", souligne-t-il.

"C'est de notre faute que les sources

d'eau tarissent", dit-il. "Nous avons découvert que les terres marécageuses ici étaient si fertiles que nous les exploitons sans penser aux conséquences. Progressivement, l'eau s'est retirée, et aujourd'hui, nous payons le prix. Cette année, je n'ai pas exploité la terre marécageuse sur ma ferme et c'est pourquoi j'ai encore un peu d'eau".

Pendant ce temps, le département régional pour l'agriculture croit aussi que la collecte de l'eau est une solution à court terme pour les agriculteurs.

"D'urgence, nous prévoyons de construire des installations de stockage de l'eau afin que le peu d'eau disponible puisse être collectée et stockée pour une utilisation éventuelle par des agriculteurs pour irriguer leurs cultures", indique Awah. Il ajoute qu'une stratégie à long terme, c'est de planter des arbres qui peuvent aider à protéger les sources d'eau. ■

Cameroonian farmer won't let low rainfall defeat him

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Cameroon spends an average of 122 million dollars a year to import rice, sorghum, and millet. Last year, shortfalls in rice production led to the importation of 80,000 tonnes, which cost 240 million dollars.

This comes amid rising food insecurity in the country. The United Nations World Food Programme says that 400,000 people in Cameroon's north require 40,000 tonnes of food aid to avoid going hungry.

Meanwhile, the North West regional delegate for agriculture, Cletus Awah, blames the water shortages on reckless agricultural practices.

"We have told farmers to limit their farmlands to at least 15 metres away from water sources. But very often, they farm right on the riverbeds, destroying the vegetation that protects these water sources and, therefore, water levels are bound to drop," he tells IPS. Awah believes a solution to the dwindling water supply will come when farmers begin to protect water

sources. "Farmers must immediately stop farming too close to streams, brooks or wetlands," he says.

Koumbou has heeded the appeal.

"It is our fault that water sources are drying up," he says. "We discovered that the marshy lands here were so fertile that we cultivated them without thinking of the consequences. Gradually, the water receded, and now we are paying the price. This year, I did not cultivate the marshy land on my farm and that is why I still have some water."

Meanwhile, the regional department for agriculture also believes water harvesting is a short-term solution for farmers.

"As a matter of urgency, we plan to construct water storage facilities so that the little available water can be harvested and stored for eventual use by farmers to irrigate their crops," Awah says. He adds that a long-term strategy is to plant trees that can help protect water sources. ■

SÃO TOMÉ E PRÍNCIPE: Modelo para o sucesso da Agricultura



By Ulrich Vital Ahotondji

LIBREVILLE - O sucesso do Programa de Apoio Participativo à Agricultura Familiar e à Pesca Artesanal de São Tomé e Príncipe está no centro das atenções do fórum regional que está a ter lugar no vizinho Gabão, organizado pelo Fundo Internacional para o Desenvolvimento Agrícola.

O programa de desenvolvimento agrícola, conhecido pela sigla portuguesa PAPAFFPA, levou à revitalização das plantações de cacau e de café em todo o país, após os agricultores terem recebido formação e assistência com o objectivo de se organizarem em cooperativas. O programa pretende melhorar os níveis de vida da população rural mais pobre, garantir a segurança alimentar e aumentar os rendimentos, ao mesmo tempo que respeita o meio ambiente.

O PAPAFFPA também tem ajudado os agricultores oferecendo-lhes conselhos sobre comercialização e gestão, apoio à produção e transformação de produtos de alta qualidade e, nalguns casos, obtenção de certificação de comércio equitativo e certificação orgânica.

Carmida Viegas, directora do programa, explicou que o projecto começou há seis anos com um pequeno grupo piloto. Os pequenos produtores agrícolas tinham terra e plantações funcionais mas precisavam de se tornar comercialmente bem sucedidos. “Organizámos estes agricultores em associações e organizações e criámos uma cadeia de abastecimento, identificando parceiros para o desenvolvimento de algumas culturas.”

Resultados encorajadores nas cooperativas

O PAPAFFPA criou quatro cooperativas especializadas que estão a transformar a produção nas suas áreas respectivas. Uma cooperativa dedicada a produzir pimenta e outras especiarias já assinou acordos de parceria com diversas companhias europeias, enquanto que outra centrou a sua atenção na exportação de café orgânico, tendo assegurado a certificação necessária para operar como produtora orgânica

que obedece às normas do comércio equitativo.

A cooperativa dedicada à produção de cacau de elevada qualidade exportou perto de 90 toneladas em 2011, comparado com apenas nove toneladas exportadas em 2009.

Uma segunda cooperativa produtora de cacau, a Cooperativa de Exportação de Cacau Orgânico (CECAB), está em vias de se tornar a principal exportadora de cacau do país, com os seus 1.800 membros a gerarem receitas ascendendo a quase 1.4 milhões de dólares.

“Tudo isto tem sido possível devido ao esforço colectivo – e à determinação dos pequenos produtores e ao apoio prestado pelos seus parceiros,” explicou Andrea Serpagli, funcionária do IFAD responsável pelos programas em São Tomé e Príncipe.

Sébastien Balmisse, assistente técnico encarregado da implementação do PAPAFFPA, destaca o facto das mulheres estarem envolvidas em todos os aspectos do programa, estando não só fortemente representadas nos campos mas também possuindo poder de decisão no seio das cooperativas

A ameaça das alterações climáticas

A implementação do PAPAFFPA tem as suas dificuldades. “O maior problema que temos de enfrentar é a seca que destrói as nossas culturas,” explica Higinio Sacramento, um pequeno produtor e presidente da CECAB.

“Estamos a tentar criar medidas graduais que reduzam os efeitos da seca através do desenvolvimento de sistemas de irrigação e também com a introdução de técnicas agrícolas que ajudem a conservar a água no solo,” confirmou Balmisse.

Apesar destes desafios, o PAPAFFPA está a produzir resultados positivos para as populações das zonas rurais de São Tomé e Príncipe. ■



Some youth are breaking the trend by moving back to the village.

Youth leave city to pursue farming

By Moustapha Keita

CONAKRY - Like many rural youth, Abdoulaye Soumah spent a few years in Conakry, trying his hand at various jobs in the big city. But he has since returned to his home village, transforming a seven-hectare plot of land inherited from his parents into a model of success.

"I produce about three tonnes of rice per hectare, and harvested a total of 20 tonnes in November. I keep a small part to feed my family and sell the rest," Soumah told IPS during a tour of his fields at Somayah, 50 kilometres from the capital.

"A 100-kilo sack of rice sells for 650,000 Guinean francs (around 100 dollars). My harvest is generally bought up by rural traders and some from the city. They buy unprocessed rice, which they store before reselling it in markets in Conakry," he said.

Soumah doesn't own any agricultural machinery. Since setting up his farm in 2008, he has relied on relatives and locals hired on an occasional basis – paying each worker less than a dollar a day – for labour-intensive tasks like planting, weeding and harvesting.

He also enjoys support from local agricultural extension workers like Sékou Mansaré.

"Even though there is abundant rain in the region, we're practicing irrigated rice cultivation here," said Mansaré, explaining a system of small embankments and trenches that channel water through the rice fields.

"We sometimes use pumps to adjust the water level as needed during the

different stages of growth, or to drain the water before the harvest," said Mansaré, who also advocates the use of organic fertiliser.

He advises farmers to use locally-available resources wherever possible. He makes fertiliser from agricultural waste like cow dung and chicken manure, and the water for irrigation comes from the nearby Mériyé River.

Rice is the staple food for Guineans, with national output ranging between 500,000 and 700,000 tonnes per year, according to statistics from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. But the country's rice harvest is not enough to feed its population of 10.6 million, and Guinea imports between 200,000 and 300,000 tonnes of rice per year.

An initiative launched by the government in 2011 is aimed at reducing the dependence on imports by increasing domestic production by farmers like Soumah.

"I grow a local rice variety called 'Djoukémé', which is prized for the way it expands when it's cooked," he told IPS.

With his rice farm providing him with an income of roughly 20,000 dollars a year, the 29-year-old has been able to send his children to school, build a house for himself, and even reinvest some of his profits in a small flock of sheep and a motorcycle, which he operates as a local taxi.

"The Soumah farm should be an example for other youth who balk at

working the land for a living. They should be inspired by his success," said Koleya Bangoura, a prominent personality in Somayah.

"Farming is difficult," he conceded, "and young people don't always have access to credit to finance their projects."

Bangoura also noted a growing scarcity of land for aspiring farmers due to urban sprawl from the capital.

In May 2011, Guinea and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) signed an agreement providing 31 million dollars to support the country's national investment programme in agriculture. The overall objective of the programme is to sustainably boost income and food security for poor rural people in Guinea.

"IFAD, working with Guinea, is investing a lot in response to the challenge of food insecurity," said Jean Marc Telliano, Guinea's agriculture minister, in Rome in February.

Visiting Somayah, IPS noted that there is a lack of information among potential beneficiaries as to how to access the new support.

"I heard that the conditions for selection for loans are very rigorous," Soumah told IPS. "In any case, I don't want to become dependent on support like this."

Ibrahima Bangoura, from the Association of Youth for Agricultural Development, based in Conakry, said: "We have to improve the perception of financing amongst role-players in the agriculture sector. This is a key responsibility for the government and donors." ■

News briefs

'Land rush' rules postponed

FREETOWN - The adoption of international guidelines to regulate so-called land grabs has been postponed after negotiators failed to agree on conditions for large-scale land investments and enforcement.

The guidelines, in the making for several years, were sparked by fears that a "land rush" is leading to hunger, conflict and human rights abuses.

More investors have flocked to the developing world over the past decade, snapping up huge tracts of farmland. Investment has intensified since the 2008 food and fuel price crisis. A September 2011 report by Oxfam International estimated as many as 227 million hectares of land in developing countries has been sold or leased since 2001.

Once in place, the United Nations' Committee on World Food Security guidelines are meant to protect people, mainly in poor countries such as Sierra Leone, from "land grabbing".

Number of hungry children rise in Sahel

DOUERARA - The drought that has destroyed the majority of the harvest in Douerara, a small village about 800 kilometres east of Mauritania's capital Nouakchott, is causing more rural populations to run out of food.

Apart from Mauritania, other countries in the Sahel, an arid zone between the Sahara desert in North Africa and Sudan's Savannas in the south, are similarly affected. These include Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Niger and the northern regions of Cameroon, Nigeria and Senegal.

Twelve million people will soon suffer severe food insecurity and hunger in this region, aid agencies say.

This year's drought has been labeled the "worst in decades" by the United Nations. As a result, food prices have tripled in Mauritania and other Sahelian countries, while the price of livestock – the main currency in the region – has dropped rapidly after pastures started to dry out.

Smallholder farmers encouraged to trade

AMBAYAMA - The eastern Sierra Leonean community of Lambayama is finally waking up to the reality that they can farm rice for both self-sustenance and for trade to make an income. This is part of the country's government plan called the Smallholder Commercialisation Programme (SCP) that is trying to put local farmers back in control of the country's most-consumed crop.

Increasing local rice production not only helps keep prices more stable, but also promotes national food security. Agriculture contributes about 50 percent to the country's GDP and employs over 75 percent of the national work force.

The SCP is trying to change the way farmers operate by mechanising production, organising individuals, and promoting business.

The goal is to increase the crop yield and provide mechanisms that facilitate selling the product on the market.

Cutting out the middleman

CASAMANCE - Cashew nut production in the Senegalese region of Casamance has dropped sharply from last year. The drop has been attributed to a decrease in rainfall, conflict in the regions and low prices.

The Casamance region produced 40 000 tonnes of cashews in April last year and employed more than 220 000 people. But as of April this year, production stood at only 8 000 tonnes.

The nuts are exported in unprocessed form. Farmers and local traders are accusing each other for the sharp fall in production. Farmers feel robbed by local traders who export the nuts at much higher prices. But traders say farmers are located in isolated areas which, combined with bad road infrastructure, result in high transportation costs.

While agriculture and smallholder farmers in many African countries form the bedrock of the economy, the youth hold the keys to the continent's future. And throughout the region, particularly in Central and Western Africa, we find young farmers playing a crucial role in the continent's economic growth. In our coverage, IPS hopes to raise the voices of these young farmers and showcase their innovative solutions to increasing agricultural productivity in Africa, taking into account factors like climate change, agricultural investment, access to credit, trade and market niches.

Coverage of young farmers' contribution to agricultural productivity in Africa can be found at: http://www.ipsnews.net/new_focus/africa-young-farmers/index.asp or you can subscribe to our special edition newsletter by emailing bandilehleh.kubeka@gmail.com with the words "subscribe - Africa's young farmers newsletter" in the subject line.

TERRAVIVA

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