



# TERRAVIVA



Enabling poor rural people  
to overcome poverty

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# New Cassava Varieties Bring Women Autonomy

By Fulgence Zambélé

**A** **BIDJAN** - Women farmers in Côte d'Ivoire are achieving greater autonomy and economic independence thanks to new varieties of cassava.

Cassava is an important staple food in this West African country according to the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization, second only to yams, a similar starchy tuber.

Farmers in the southern and eastern parts of the country have taken up three high-yielding varieties of cassava, known as Bocou 1, 2 and 3, which are resistant to disease and pests, according to Boni N'zué, the coordinator of the Cassava Project, an initiative launched in 2008 by the country's National Centre for Agricultural Research.

"They can produce 32 to 34 tonnes per hectare per year, compared to five tonnes per hectare from traditional cassava varieties," he told IPS.

Eight years ago, when her family's 10 hectare landholding in the southern village of Dabou was divided up, Henriette Adou was allocated a one-hectare plot. The 35-year-old farmer began cultivating it, but when her efforts in the 2007-2008 season produced a harvest of less than three tonnes, she gave up farming for a year.

"But friends advised me to switch to the new cassava varieties and I tried them out in 2009-2010. The results have been even better than I hoped," Adou told IPS. Her 2010 harvest of the Bocou 1 variety amounted to 33 tonnes. In 2011 she

planted both Bocou 1 and 2 and harvested more than 65 tonnes. With cassava selling for around 48 dollars per tonne, her income came to 3,000 dollars last year.

Now Adou is thinking about expanding her field. "I asked my brothers to let me farm another hectare, but only one of them agreed. The others refused, saying that I'm not entitled to any more than what I got when the land was divided up," she said.

Before leaving for the fields, Adou told IPS she had put money aside for a house which she hopes to finish building after the sale of her harvest next year. "I'm putting it up at my own pace because I've become the head of the family," she said with a smile.

Her ambitions go beyond simply selling more cassava. Adou wants to set up an operation to process and market various cassava products, especially attiéké – a popular food in Côte d'Ivoire and neighbouring countries for which a pungent, tasty fufu is made by peeling, boiling and fermenting cassava, which is then drained, dried and steamed.

"I hope to get started processing cassava within the next two years," she told IPS.

Albertine Niamien, 37, is already further along that road. A member of the Association of Women Attiéké Producers (APAD), she also attributes her good fortune to new cassava varieties. "It's three years now since I started plant-

ing Bocou 1 and 2. When I took over three hectares of family land, everyone supported me. We trained two teams of five – some to work on processing and others on marketing," Niamien told IPS.

She told IPS that her annual income, which ranges between 4,000 and 8,000 dollars, has allowed her to cover essential needs for the ten members of her family.

APAD has more than 150 members, according to its president, Véronique Lathe. She is in charge of raising awareness for a cooperative of women, with the aim of meeting the challenge of maintaining quality and moving towards greater industrialisation of attiéké production.

At Abengourou, in the east of the country, Florence N'dri, 40, and Cécile Adjoua, 41, are among the 3,000 growers of the new cassava varieties, who sell almost all of their output to a foreign-owned business that has set up in Côte d'Ivoire.

The two women are each cultivating just half a hectare, producing a yield of around 20 tonnes. "This small harvest brought in about 400,000 CFA francs (800 dollars). It's not yet enough, but I have managed to save a bit of money," N'dri told IPS.

"The guarantee of having a market is very motivating. Now, we're fighting so that our husbands and parents will grant us larger plots," said Adjoua, whose spouse is eyeing her land to extend his rubber plantation. **E**

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.

**TERRAVIVA**

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# Small Farmers in West Africa Need Support



Africa's Sahel region is expecting a good harvest, thanks to abundant rain. **Credit: Zahira Kharsany/IPS**

By Brahim Ouédraogo

**O**UAGADOUGOU - Despite an abundance of rain, promising good harvests for the current growing season, small-scale farmers and non-governmental organisations are calling for support to smallholders to be maintained with a view to eradicating food insecurity in Africa's Sahel region.

The Permanent Interstate Committee for drought control in the Sahel forecasts that between 57 and 64 million tonnes of grain will be harvested in West Africa in 2012-2013, representing an increase of between five and 17 percent over the previous season.

"According to some studies, around 30 percent of cereal production is lost during and after harvest due to inappropriate harvesting techniques, threshing and storage; so you can understand that we're only cautiously optimistic (there will be enough food for all)," said Roland Béranger Béréhoudougou, the regional head of disaster response and humanitarian assistance for the NGO Plan International.

But ROPPA, the West African Network of Smallholder Organisations and Producers, and the international charity Oxfam say the region is still facing its third major food crisis in less than a decade.

To avoid the next drought becoming a humanitarian emergency, they say, donors and governments must support investment in the productive capacities of small producers and build up reserve stocks of food. This will enable a swift response to future crises and help communities to manage volatility.

Oxfam noted that even in a year when harvests are good, 20 percent of the population suffers from malnutrition and hunger while 230,000 children across the Sahel die from causes linked to hunger.

In addition, the instability in Mali – where a transitional government is struggling to come to grips with the capture of the northern part of the country by Islamist groups – threatens to provoke a sharp drop in production of rice in the north, by as much as one-third, while half of all livestock could be lost in

some regions, the group said.

"We're in crisis every other year," said Issiaka Ouandaogo, head of humanitarian affairs at Oxfam's office in Burkina Faso. "So even when we have a good year, 20 percent of the population in the Sahel still faces food insecurity. We need to help small producers boost their resilience. That means access to seeds and agricultural inputs must be the focus."

The successive failed harvests have left some rural households heavily indebted, so part of a good harvest now will go directly to repaying loans, often agreed at punishing rates of interest, Béréhoudougou told IPS.

In some villages in Niger's western region of Tillabéri, smallholders who owe money to local merchants have pre-sold their millet crop for the equivalent of 14 dollars a bag – sometimes even less – while the real price of a bag of millet in the period immediately following the harvest is between 20 and 30 dollars, according to Béréhoudougou.

"We need to put an end to the hellish cycle of debt for rural households with a variety of actions such as cash transfers, cash-for-work programmes, micro-finance and cereal banks," said Béréhoudougou.

According to Dao, 80 percent of small producers don't enjoy this type of support from the government. Every year, he told IPS, the distribution of fertiliser and seed is announced, but then nothing is delivered, or farmers get too little – just one or two bags of fertiliser for the whole season.

In the west of Burkina Faso, Oxfam has put 20,000 dollars into a fund for small loans to allow farmers to buy these vital inputs for themselves. Their needs are modest, Dao told IPS: 40-60 dollars for a farmer working one hectare, perhaps

According to Dao, since it was set up in 2010, Oxfam's rolling fund has helped 120 producers in that part of the country. The rate of repayment has been excellent: this year, 184 farmers will get loans from the fund, which has grown to 46,000 dollars. **E**

# Coffee Time in Uganda



Coffee being dried on the roadside in Busoga, Eastern Uganda. Credit: Will Boase/IPS

By Fred Ojambo

**K**AMPALA - Uganda, Africa's biggest coffee exporter, is racing against time to boost its production of the crop by 60,000 tonnes, or one million 60-kilogramme bags, within the next three years. But some industry players believe that the feat is unattainable.

This East African nation's target is to raise annual output from 3.5 million to 4.5 million 60-kilogramme bags, and it plans to do this through an ongoing government replanting programme.

Francis Chesang, the production manager at the state-run Uganda Coffee Development Authority (UCDA), told IPS that he was confident that this landlocked nation would soon reach its target.

"Our replanting programme is yielding results and we should be able to lift annual production in 2015... because more of the new fast-growing and high-yielding trees are coming into production."

Uganda, the continent's second-biggest grower of the crop after Ethiopia, launched its coffee replanting programme in 1994, a year after the country detected the coffee wilt disease that devastated half its stock of Robusta trees.

The programme aims "to gradually replace old, diseased coffee trees with new, genetically pure and high-yielding coffee varieties at a rate of five percent per annum for Robusta and two percent per annum for Arabica."

At least 140 million trees, mainly Robusta, were planted over the last 18 years, with the goal to plant a total of 200 million trees by 2015, Chesang said.

The replanting aims to "optimise foreign exchange earnings into the country and

payments to farmers," he said.

The crop accounts for 20 to 30 percent of the nation's annual export earnings, with Uganda earning 448.9 million dollars from the export of 3.15 million bags of coffee from Oct. 1, 2010 through September 2011, according to the UCDA.

The country was the world's ninth-biggest exporter of the crop during that period, ahead of Ethiopia, which was in 10th place, according to the International Coffee Organization.

According to David Muwonge, the deputy executive director of the National Union of Coffee Agribusiness and Farm Enterprises, Uganda is unlikely to meet its increased coffee production target as yields remain lower than potential because the country is yet to replace all the coffee trees destroyed by the 1993 wilt disease.

"I think it will be really hard to achieve this target because we are yet to plant 60 million trees," he said. "The target is achievable, but only when all the new trees are in production."

Fred Kyobe, a 64-year-old farmer in the Wakison District in Uganda's Central Region, told IPS that production volumes have taken long to recover from the wilt disease devastation as the youth did not have the patience to venture into coffee farming.

"My sons have abandoned farming in favour of motorcycle taxi businesses in town, and my vigour is reducing due to old age," he said.

Coffee here is grown by at least half a million smallholder farmers, 90 percent of whom own fields ranging from 0.5 to 2.5 hectares, according to the UCDA. The

sector employs 3.5 million people.

The crop remains a key export commodity for Uganda in spite of it dropping from contributing 60 percent of export earnings to the current 20 to 30 percent, Muwonge said.

"Coffee is still central to the Ugandan economy for employment, farmer incomes and hard currency earnings in spite of the drop in its export revenue share due to the diversification of exports," he said.

"The urge to pick immature coffee is driven by poverty, since at times urgent needs may arise before your crop fully matures," Sunday Mugaga, a coffee farmer in of Kayunga District in Uganda's Central Region, told IPS.

London-based Tullow Oil Plc, France's Total SA and China National Offshore Oil Corporation are jointly developing Uganda's oilfields, whose reserves the government upgraded to 3.5 billion barrels from 2.5 billion barrels.

"With oil production not expected to reach commercial levels until 2016, coffee production still has a significant role in the country's economy," he said. "Uganda could thus benefit from increasing its output over the coming three years in the form of higher export revenue."

Meanwhile, many farmers remain committed to coffee because of the high prices they receive for their crops amidst the rising global demand, Isaac Ntumwa, a coffee farmer in the Central Region district of Masaka, told IPS.

"Many farmers in my district have embraced the crop with hopes for a better harvest in the next few years," Ntumwa said. **E**



Eco-villages are working towards self-sufficiency for small rural farmers. Credit: Will Boase/IPS

# Eco-Villages Breathe New Life Into Rural Senegal

By Koffigan E. Adigbli

**D**AKAR - Eighty-odd kilometres outside Dakar, the Senegalese capital, solar power and an irrigation scheme are transforming a traditional village into what the government hopes will be a model for the future of the countryside.

The project, in Mbackombel, a settlement of a little more than a thousand inhabitants, has strengthened farming and herding activities with sound water management strategies, as well as made the village self-sufficiency in energy. The village – whose name means “baobab with delicious fruit” in Sérère, a local language – is enjoying greater food security and incomes, improved protection of the environment, and a wealth of new opportunities for young people.

According to Demba Mamadou Ba, the director of Senegal’s National Agency for Eco-villages, the concept being put into practice here will bring the benefits of modern life to even the smallest village. Each eco-village represents an investment of a million dollars.

Mbackombel’s photovoltaic panels are used for much more than providing lighting to its 35 compounds. They also provide electricity for a computer laboratory and library at the village school, which runs from kindergarten through to the end of primary school: all part of reducing the digital divide and connecting Mbackombel with the rest of the world via the internet.

Solar panels also supply power to run a mill and pump water from a borehole for livestock and irrigated gardens and water livestock. Village residents are growing millet, sorghum, groundnuts and more.

“We also practice aquaculture. Currently, we only have juvenile hatchlings in our ponds, but beyond raising fish for food, we hope to make a profit from this,” said the village chief, Robert Birame Ndour.

Alouise Thiaw, 25, agrees that the rural exodus that drains young people from Senegal’s countryside has been reversed in

Mbackombel as income-generating activities linked to the eco-village project take root.

“I was apprenticed to a mason in Dakar, but since this project was launched, I’ve returned to make a living here. This building, for example, was built by us, the youth... I work for the project managers here, and earn 55,000 CFA francs (around 106 dollars) a month,” he told IPS.

According to the Senegalese Minister for Ecology, Ali Haidar, the eco-village project was launched in 2008 with 4.5 million dollars in finance from the Global Environment Facility and the United Nations Development Programme. The objective is the effective application of a model of innovative development for the participatory, sustainable development of rural areas like Mbackombel.

Bachir Camara, president of the monitoring council for the national eco-village agency, said the country planned to create 14,000 eco-villages by 2020, within a broad framework of fighting against poverty.

“This programme is initiated/carried out in partnership with the Africa Enterprise Development Agency. Drawing on the expertise of 15 leaders from the business community in France, the eco-villages are undeniably a means to attaining the Millennium Development Goals,” he told IPS.

Mamadou Kane, representing the International Fund for Agricultural Development in Senegal and Gambia, said that IFAD supports the eco-village initiative. In his view, the project is a way of experimenting with organic agriculture and creates the possibility for people to become self-sufficient in terms of their own food.

IFAD has supported agricultural development in Senegal for several years. “Village development is at the heart of our concerns and is a good thing which can bring development to Mbackombel,” Kane told IPS. **E**

# Farming Among Waste



Smallholder farmers around the Yaounde city centre are increasingly farming on urban wastewater sites. **Credit: Monde Kingsley Nfor/IPS**

By Monde Kingsley Nfor

**YAOUNDÉ** - Cameroonian urban farmer Juliana Numfor has six plots of land where she grows maize, cassava, sweet potatoes and leafy vegetables, including cabbages, wild okra and greens.

The soil in which her crops grow is moist and visibly marshy, and a stream of water runs near it. But if you take a closer look you will notice that the water is dark and smells unpleasant. In fact it is wastewater, which comes from a student residential quarter in Yaoundé, popularly called “Cradat”, that is less than 400 metres away from her plots of land.

But it is precisely thanks to the wastewater that Numfor is farming on this public land.

She told IPS that she prefers planting her crops on urban wastewater sites because she can easily irrigate them by using the readily available wastewater. She said that this was because rainfall had become increasingly irregular – coming and going when she least expected.

“The kind of crops on this piece of land can grow on any fertile land if it is well watered. But during this period in August, which is supposed to be a very wet time of the year in Yaoundé, very little rainfall has fallen. It makes it impossible for vegetable crops to grow without proper irrigation,” Numfor said.

While there are no official figures of how many people are farming in these areas, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MINADER) admitted that the practice was overwhelming.

Smallholder farmers in and around Yaoundé can be seen planting their crops on public land, along railways, in conservation areas, and even near roads.

“This is a long-time practice that has only intensified due to a lot of causes, climate change being one. Many farmers have resorted to urban farming with wastewater,” Collette Ekobo, an agricultural inspector at MINADER, told IPS.

One 45-year-old woman told IPS that she knew 11 other women who cultivated crops on land near wastewater. “All I know is that the ground is very fertile. I think when people empty their sewers and other household waste into this water, it makes the land

very fertile for farming. And there is water all season round,” she said.

Rural-urban migration, aggravated by the adverse effects of climate change on rural farming, is thought to be one of the main reasons behind the growing number of urban farmers in the city. In 2011, MINADER began warning farmers about the climate variability affecting agriculture across the country. Yaoundé, which is located in Cameroon’s Centre Region, experienced reduced rainfall.

“Over the years in Yaoundé, the rainfall pattern has been so variable and not easy to understand. Rainfall has become very irregular, unpredictable and reduced ... this leads to prolonged dryness and the drying up of streams, accompanied by exceedingly hot climatic conditions – all of which provoke poor agricultural performance and low output,” the ministry said.

Ekobo said that because of the changing climate, many farmers found it difficult to predict when to start planting.

“The land is rich with urban resources like organic waste, which is used as compost, and urban wastewater, which is used for irrigation. There are also direct links to urban consumers,” Ekobo said.

He told IPS that toxic waste from homes, hospitals and industries was probably deposited or carried into the wastewater.

“This water contains pathogenic organisms and disease vectors similar to those in human excreta. Pathogens that are brought in with the wastewater can survive in the soil or on the crop and are responsible for human diseases,” he said.

At a local market in Obili, a neighbourhood in Yaoundé, stallholders displayed large piles of vegetables that range in price from 200 CFA Francs (50 cents) to 300 CFA Francs (75 cents) per bunch. And consumers here did not care where the produce was grown.

“I totally ignore the fact that they are grown in wastewater because even if they contain germs, the organism cannot survive in the pot with very high temperature,” one woman, who bought three bundles of bitter leaf or *Vernonia amygdalina*, told IPS. Another said she felt the vegetables were safe if cooked in hygienic conditions and besides, “no one has ever complained after consuming these vegetables.” **E**