

Early adopter of YIIFSWA-promoted improved yam varieties enjoys “fantastic” yield

Beaming with pride, Chief Joshua Ojedele showed off his 2-hectare yam field cultivated from improved varieties that he got from the [Yam Improvement for Income and Food Security in West Africa](#) (YIIFSWA) project. His farm was lush green with healthy foliage, promising a good harvest. All the mounds had at least one yam plant with tubers. “This has never happened before. See--no mound is missing a plant,” Chief Ojedele said while he led the YIIFSWA-II monitoring team through his field.



Chief Joshua Ojedele in his Agunrege farm.

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The business plan: The compass of the agripreneur

Starting in May 2020, expert trainers from the ENABLE Youth Cameroon (EYC) program had received and analyzed the business plans of aspiring ‘agripreneurs’ participating in the program. They are currently assisting the agripreneurs in finalizing their business plans, which could be financed by a yet-to-be-determined investor.



Aspiring agripreneurs at a YABIC Bouam training.

As part of the business analysis phase of the program, the trainers have trained aspiring agripreneurs on analyzing agricultural value chains. The agripreneurs learned value chain mapping to identify feasible, viable, profitable, and sustainable business opportunities. They were also encouraged to select innovative business ideas with an emphasis on value addition, compared to similar businesses existing in the same sector.

Since the beginning of the business plan phase, the experts have received 223 business plans from the 512 agripreneurs enrolled, which is about 50% of the expected number. Although this phase is a major determinant in the program, some Youth Agribusiness Incubation Centers (YABICs) received as few as three business plans.

The development of the business plan is a crucial step for any aspiring entrepreneur that can help to deepen and concretize the creation of a business. Also, the business plan is a document that shapes and summarizes this project and serves as an overview to present to potential investors. "A well-developed business plan cannot lack funding," said Emmanuel Tchiengue, the value addition expert of EYC.

After the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MINADER) and IITA signed an agreement to start the EYC program in May 2018, a rigorous selection process produced 512 aspiring agripreneurs, of which 45% were female. This first set started their incubation in a sequenced process from February 2019, in 14 YABICs.

The incubation process of EYC was inspired by the IITA Youth Agripreneur model, which follows a practical learning pattern with individuals making discoveries and getting experiences with first-hand knowledge, rather than hearing or reading about the experiences of others. This learning model made it possible to provide practical experience to program participants while allowing them to quickly assimilate concepts through examples as close to real life as possible.



Top: ENABLE Youth Cameroon agripreneurs with workshop facilitators.
Bottom: EYC Marketing Officer Eliane Mbida during a workshop.

An essential part of this training was the strengthening of the entrepreneurial and managerial capacities of aspiring agripreneurs, the development of agribusinesses, and the financing of start-ups by aspiring agripreneurs by providing access to credit upon presentation of a bankable business plan. Throughout this process, the experts stay fully engaged in providing the best support to incubates.

"Many entrepreneurs fail, on average, almost four times before succeeding.

What differentiates those who succeed from others is their perseverance," said Eliane Mbida, the EYC Marketing Expert.

EYC recognizes the operational challenges and issues that the first set of 512 aspiring agripreneurs faced, including the extension of the incubation period to beyond the 12 months expected per batch. Despite this, the EYC coordination unit continues to encourage the aspiring agripreneurs noting that, "Resilience is a key to success."

Got a story to share?

Please send your story with photos and captions every Tuesday to iita-news@cgiar.org or Katherine Lopez (k.lopez@cgiar.org) and Uzoma Agha (u.gha@cgiar.org) for headquarters and Western Africa, Catherine Njuguna (c.njuguna@cgiar.org) for Eastern and Southern Africa, and David Ngome (d.ngome@cgiar.org) for Central Africa.



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Chief Ojedele lives in a community where yam is the preferred crop for cultivation, but farmers stopped growing it due to reduced yields and subsequent crop failures of the traditional varieties. He said farmers in Agunrege, Atisbo local government in Oyo State, were finding it difficult to make ends meet with the local yam varieties in their barns. After each cropping season, they neither had enough to eat nor sell in the market. Consequently, they had no benefit from cropping yam. “We thought the problem was the land, so we abandoned yam production and started cultivating cassava and maize. But with these [IITA](#) yam varieties, no matter how small the planting materials are, they produce something. Now I know it is not the land. The local varieties we were planting were old and had poor seed quality,” Chief Ojedele said.

According to [Beatrice Aighewi](#), YIFSWA-II’s Seed System Specialist, “In the traditional system, farmers recycle their seed yam year after year. As a result, the seed tubers of local varieties lose their quality after years of accumulation of pests and diseases such as nematodes, viruses, fungi, and bacterial infections. Consequently, yam farmers in Nigeria lose up to 50% due to the use of poor-quality seed tubers.”

She also stated that the current average yields of local yam varieties are less than 25% of the yield of released improved varieties, which range from 30 to 40 t/ha. New agricultural technologies, such as high-yielding improved varieties coupled with good agronomic practices offer

the promise of improving productivity and farmers’ livelihoods. However, the adoption of these enhanced yam varieties has been slow because of the absence of a formal seed system that can sustainably produce and distribute large quantities of quality seed at affordable prices.

The adequate supply and distribution of these improved varieties are critical to the intensification of yam production in Nigeria. The current high level of production is due to farmers’ practice of periodic relocation of yam fields in more fertile soils, rather than input intensification. Agricultural intensification is critical for agricultural productivity growth.

YIFSWA-II’s intervention

In the initial years of implementation, the project successfully demonstrated to farmers the high performance of the three improved and released varieties, namely Asiedu (TDr 89/02665), Kpamyo (TDr 95/19177), and Swaswa (TDa 98/01176), as well as the value and better performance of quality seed vs. farmer-saved seed.

YIFSWA-II is working to establish a formal seed system that is commercially viable and sustainable to boost yam productivity in Ghana and Nigeria. The project seeks to ensure that farmers like Chief Ojedele have access to quality seed tubers that have the consistent characteristics of the varieties, are free from pests and diseases, and have a high percentage of sprouting for good field establishment.

Reaping the benefits

Chief Ojedele, who participated in three types of demonstrations, is already reaping the benefits of early adoption of these technologies. According to him, since he participated in the YIFSWA-II project, he spent the first two years multiplying the few seed tubers he acquired from the field trials using the Adapted Yam Miniset Technology (AYMT).

In 2019, he planted clean seed tubers he amassed from the AYMT, which resulted in “fantastic” yield. Data collected in his field showed yields of 32.6 t/ha (Asiedu), 30.0 t/ha (Kpamyo), and 37.5 t/ha (Swaswa).

“These yam varieties have been good to me. The yam produces big tubers and in multiples. It is what I used for my son’s wedding. In Nigeria, you cannot marry without presenting yam to the bride’s family. My yields have been so good that I had more than enough for my son to give to his bride’s family as part of the bride price. I can’t thank YIFSWA-II enough. The yam has taken me to places I have never been in my own country. I was so excited when I crossed the Onitsha Bridge to go to the National Root Crops Research Institute (NRCRI, Umudike) and participate in the naming ceremony of these improved varieties. YIFSWA-II makes me feel like I am part of a greater farmers’ community outside of Agunrege,” Chief Ojedele said.



Early adopter showcasing harvests from his farm.



You are invited!

The Tenth Annual Summit of the African Green Revolution Forum (AGRF) will be held virtually on 8–11 September 2020 and will be co-hosted by the Government of Rwanda and the AGRF Partners Group.

Participation is free. Please register ASAP using this link: <https://agrforum.org/summit/catalog/course/agrf-virtual-summit-2020>. IITA and partners are organizing two partner events on 7 September: the launch of the Excellence in Agronomy 2030 platform, 3-4:45 pm; and Agriculture Technologies for Feeding Cities (TAAT), 5-6.30 pm, Rwanda time (UTC +2).

IITA partners trained on effective management and administration of grants

Years of dealing with IITA's project partners have shown that many of them have faced challenges in managing and understanding the rules that guide grant administration, especially as they relate to sub-agreements signed with the Institute. These gaps have affected project reporting, resulting in delayed fund disbursements to their institutions and from IITA donors.



IITA Deputy Director General for Special Duties Kwame Akuffo-Akoto gave the opening remarks to kick off the training.

As part of efforts to strengthen efficiency and collaboration with partners, the IITA Project Development and Administration Unit (PDAU) reached out to these partners to organize a training. In conjunction with the IITA Capacity Development Office (CDO), the PDAU team conducted a free 2-day webinar on 28 and 29 July, as the first of a planned series of training for partners on all ongoing IITA projects.

In his opening remarks, IITA Deputy Director General for Special Duties [Kwame Akuffo-Akoto](#) noted that the training would be an excellent opportunity to enhance collaboration and understanding between IITA and participating institutions. He said the training would further improve the participants' knowledge of key concepts and expectations that will enable them to handle better the challenges they face

in managing projects. Achieving this will also lead to improved efficiency in project delivery.

The Interim Head of PDAU, Kayode Awobajo, welcomed participants and encouraged them to apply the lessons learned from the training in handling their different projects. He also urged them to maintain close interaction with the PDAU team after the webinar. He used the opportunity to commend his team for the extra efforts in organizing the event despite the challenging times. He also appreciated colleagues from CDO and ICT units for their collaboration in ensuring the success of the event.

The training, delivered in four different sessions, drew participants from across Africa, Asia, South America, and Europe. One hundred and twenty-four delegates (124)

participated in the first session, which was on the "Essentials of proposal development (IITA experience)." The afternoon session focused on the "Fundamentals of efficient contract management" and attracted 76 participants.

On the second day, the session on "Grant administration: Key success factors in meeting donor financial deliverables" had 78 attendees, while the afternoon session with the topic, "Effective record-keeping for managing projects," attracted 69 participants.

The webinar participants gave positive feedback and were enthusiastic about attending future training.



Kayode Awobajo (right), PDAU Interim Head, welcoming the webinar participants.

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Wash your hands regularly with soap and water; practice physical and social distancing; wear face masks; avoid crowds and public places; keep a 2-meter distance from the next person; practice general sanitation and hygiene.

Manioc 21: Changing lives of farmers in Central Africa

The project Cassava of the Twenty-First Century, code named Manioc 21, has helped improve the lives of farmers in Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Manioc 21 was jointly executed by the Technical Center for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA), [IITA](#), and the Regional Platform of the Farmers Organizations of Central Africa (PROPAC). The final implementation phase of the project ran between May and July 2020.

IITA supported the upgrade of farmers' cooperatives by providing processing equipment, training farmers on how to use them, and training cooperatives members on the use of ICT tools. The project identified two sets of equipment for the cooperatives: those for local fabrication and others to be bought from the market.

To ensure quality and the effectiveness of the fabricated equipment, a team of experts from Nigeria led by Suraj A. Adegbite and Adeniyi Ogunkoya visited the equipment fabricators in Cameroon and the DRC. Some of the fabricated equipment included cassava paste mills, cassava flour mills, and hydraulic press. Equipment bought directly from the market were distributed to all selected cooperatives in Cameroon and the DRC. The equipment included aluminum pots, weighing scales, buckets, water drums, push trucks, bag carriers, sealing machines, plastic basins, wheelbarrows, etc.

Manioc 21 organized capacity building sessions at different levels in Cameroon and the DRC. A training workshop for cooperative representatives brought in technicians to empower them with skills and techniques on how to operate the fabricated equipment. Potential enumerators also received coaching to assist the cooperatives in data collection, processing, and decision making by setting up tools on information and communication technology (ICT).

At the end of the training, 133 persons were trained (66 from Cameroon and 67 from DRC) to optimize development strategies for the cassava supply chain and management of the 10 cooperatives. The ICT tools have the Open Data Kit (ODK) forms used for data collection, Short Message Service (SMS) tool used for communication between farmers and the system, and the dashboard used to get information that is accessible on the website <https://iitamanioc21.com>.

Ten main cooperatives made up of over 5006 members were selected within the Central Africa Region, five from Cameroon and five



Top: Manioc 21 staff, Kemga Adolph, teaching farmers on the use of ICT in 2019.
Bottom: Some members of the cooperatives trying out the tricycles.

from DRC. The Cameroonian cooperatives selected include Union des GIC de LENDOM (UGILE), Société coopérative avec conseil d'administration des producteurs de manioc d'oganisoa (SOCOOPROMOS), Société coopérative de manioc, autres tubercules produits agricoles (SOCOOPMATPA), Société coopérative de fumage et de séchage au Cameroun (DEFUSCAM), Société coopérative de manioc (SCOOPMAN / ODEFCON). In DRC, the selected cooperatives include Coopérative d'action communautaire pour le développement et l'assistance socio-économique (CACODASE), Consortium ASA-CADECVIM (CADECVIM), Regroupement des femmes paysannes (REP), Coopérative paysanne agricultures, éleveurs et multiplicateurs des semences (COOPAEMUS), and Fédération de coopératives Congo (FECCO).

In Cameroon, the project delivered 11 brand new tricycles to the cooperative representatives at the IITA Cameroon campus. The President of the SOCOOPROMOS Cooperative, Ebogo Essinidi Gisèle, said, "Our hearts are full of

joy since we came to collect our tricycles. Manioc 21 has put smiles on our faces."

Gisèle spoke of the project's work, highlighting the support cooperatives had received since 2017 when the project Manioc 21, showed up. "We have been trained and later received equipment, including these tricycles. In the heat of COVID-19, the team visited us, they restructured our transformation site, and gave us materials like bag carriers, wheelbarrows, generators, and many other things," she continued.

In an interview, Ondoua Joseph from SCOOPMAN Cooperative highlighted the difficulties they had with transporting their products using motorbikes. "Before now, we could transport a sack of cassava at a time and later struggled to take the transformed products to the market. But today, thanks to IITA and Manioc 21, with the help of the tricycle, we are able to transport not less than a ton of cassava from our farms to the transformation site and then to the markets much faster and easier," he said.