



El Niño sets farmer on path to cassava

Thanks to an El Niño early warning, Augustine Phiri, a farmer in Malawi, switched his attention from maize and tobacco to cassava, opening a world of opportunities that would not have been possible with his past crops.

In his Mbwadi Mbwadi gardens in Lilongwe, cassava takes up a lion's share of the land. He also grows maize, sweet potatoes, and soybean—the latter for feed for his livestock. He also has a processing plant donated by Kellogg Foundation for producing high-quality unfermented cassava flour and fermented cassava flour (*Kondowole*) that the locals use to make *nsima*, a local delicacy.

Phiri is one of the beneficiaries of the Unleashing the Power of Cassava in Africa (UPoCA) project funded by USAID and implemented by IITA that is working to promote cassava as a food security and income-earner among vulnerable communities in Africa. It is working to build the capacity of farmers such as Phiri to grow and process the versatile drought-resistant crop.

Under UPoCA, Phiri has been trained on production of high-quality cassava flour and other products and recipes using the flour such as donuts, cakes, cookies, *chin chin*, tit bits, and *gari*; on packaging and marketing; and quality and safety management.

After the training, he put in taps for washing hands all over the processing center; all his staff now wear uniforms and have medical certificates clearing them to handle human food. With the new marketing skills, he is getting new markets for his new and old products. He



Farmer-turned-entrepreneur Phiri demonstrates how to make the fermented cassava flour (Kondowole). Behind him are racks with cassava chips drying before milling.

now supplies 250 kg of *gari* a month to a Nigerian restaurant in Lilongwe.

Phiri says he discovered cassava in 1997 when his wife, during a workshop, learned about the looming El Niño that would result in extreme climatic conditions. They were encouraged to grow cassava that performs relatively well under such conditions compared to other crops.

"At that time, we were growing a lot of maize, harvesting about 100 tons per year. I did not have any cassava seeds and I did not know much about growing the crop. I visited the government's Chitedze research station where I got more information on growing cassava, such as the right size for the planting material, making ridges, spacing, and other good production and

crop management practices," he said.

"I was also given 30 bundles of stems. I started on one acre, expanded to 5, to the current 12," he added.

UPoCA continues to strengthen his cassava processing initiative by addressing the bottlenecks he is experiencing. One is drying—an important step in processing cassava—during the rainy season. The project is looking into appropriate technologies that address this such as using solar and steam dryers.

Phiri would like the Malawi people to change their mindset towards cassava. He says: "To the Malawian, food is maize. They only reach out for cassava in times of famine when maize is not available. It is a fire extinguisher but is it not better and less costly to prevent the fire in the first place?" he concludes.



Mrs Phiri packs the fermented cassava flour for sale.

November 6 is

IITA Open Day

Celebrating "Unity in (Bio)Diversity"

See you at the Conference Center and Sports Center!

Help conserve electricity!

Before leaving your workplace at the end of the day, make sure that you have:

- (1) Powered off all unnecessary electrical office/lab equipment;
- (2) Turned off air conditioners; and
- (3) Switched off all lights.

IITA-Malawi introduces new cowpea and soybean recipes to Malawians

Malawian farmers cultivating cowpea and soybean now have new options of processing the two leguminous crops, raising prospects of improved nutrition and more incomes, thanks to the N2Africa project.

Although cowpea and soybean are popular crops in Malawi, they have limited uses in home consumption. Farmers use cowpea leaves as vegetables and a few other dishes are produced from the grain. Soybean is mainly used in porridges which require several other ingredients and this limits its use in the home.

IITA-Malawi scientists who are working under the N2Africa project introduced three new food products each of cowpea and soybean to farmers in that country giving farmers more options.

The products which were introduced to farmers in Bwalo II Village in T.A. Mtembalame, Lilongwe District at a two-day training included soybean (soymilk, soy cheese, and soy pop); and cowpea (*akara*, *olele*, and *ekuru*).

These products are popular among rural and urban dwellers in West Africa and are currently being used in fighting malnutrition especially among women and children.



Women and men prepare a soybean dish.



A man-participant helps pound cowpea and soybean

Hakeem Ajeigbe, N2Africa's Southern Africa Hub Coordinator and Dissemination Specialist, said the main objective of the training was to demonstrate to the farmers how they could prepare some food dishes from soybean and cowpea for home consumption and income generation, which would boost the production and marketing of the crops.

"It was also aimed at creating awareness among the farmers on simple and locally adaptable ways of preparing soybean and cowpea for home consumption and income generation," he added.

About 107 participants attended the training including 29 men and seven village chiefs from seven villages. N2Africa Farm Liaison Officer in Malawi, Gloria Kasongo led the training team, which included Peter Nkoma, Food Nutrition Officer with the Department of Agricultural Extension Service, Ministry of Agriculture, Malawi.

It was observed that farmers loved the new food products such that some male farmers went home to call their wives to come to the training and learn so that they could prepare the new products at home for better nutrition.

Also, during the training, men were so motivated to the extent that they "broke" the gender barrier and took part in pounding using the mortars and pestles, which are considered as women's equipment in the house.

The training was the first time for over 90% of the farmers who attended the cooking practicals. They learned that they could make other products from soybean and cowpea.

Most of the farmers pledged to produce more soybeans and cowpeas so that they could have more for home consumption using the new recipes.

DDG-Support visits IITA DRC

The IITA Deputy Director General-Support (DDG-S), Lakshmi Menon, visited IITA DRC last month to touch base with staff and evaluate the progress of the rehabilitation of the newly acquired IITA premises in Kinshasa, where the institute plans to have permanent offices in the near future.

Menon held fruitful discussions with the station staff during a general meeting. All staff present were delighted to meet her.

Upon return at Ibadan, Menon thanked the DRC staff for the work done towards the new offices. In an e-mail, she said: "Even though it was a very short trip, I think it was very productive. I got a very good idea of the new building and the upgrades planned. I also got to meet most of the staff. I want to thank all of you for this. I look forward to visiting you after you have all moved into one office."



DDG-S Lakshmi Menon with the IITA-DRC staff