



Nigeria can save US\$2.1 billion yearly by maximizing use of cassava flour - Adesina



(Above) An NTA news screengrab of Minister Adesina presenting the IITA-developed cassava bread to the FEC; (right) Adesina with DG Sanginga, Sami Mazumdar, head of the IITA Hotel & Catering Services that developed the 50% cassava flour bread, and other staff in the unit's bakery.

Nigeria's Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Honorable Adewunmi Adesina, has said that the country could save a hefty amount of foreign exchange – about N315 billion (US\$ 2.1 billion) annually – just by substituting half of the wheat flour used in making bread with cassava flour that could be produced locally. The Minister issued the statement at the meeting of the influential Federal Executive Council (FEC) in Abuja on Wednesday while presenting bread developed by IITA that used 50% cassava flour.

Presently, Nigeria imports wheat worth N635 billion annually, hurting its earnings from foreign exchange. "The spending on imports is unacceptable," Adesina had said on 12 August during the launch of the Cassava Transformation Agenda at IITA in Ibadan.

Presenting the cassava bread to the members of the FEC, the Minister explained, "This proves that we can replace the wheat that we are importing into this country with cassava substitute of up to 50%."

"This bread is made by the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture in Ibadan," he added. "This alone, if we pursue this, would save Nigeria 315 billion Naira every year," he emphasized.

Members of the FEC, in response, indicated that "Nigeria should eat what it produces", adding that increased use of cassava flour would stimulate production of the root crop and, consequently, create more jobs especially in the rural areas.

In 2002, Nigeria adopted a policy mandating processors to include 10% cassava flour to wheat flour in making bread. The policy, backed by improved varieties from IITA, led raised cassava production by 10 million tons between 2002 and 2008, making the country the largest producer of cassava.

Under the new transformation agenda, Nigeria plans to double its current cassava production from 37 million tons. The government is focusing on critical areas such as value addition to make production demand-driven and the improvement of yield.

IITA Director General Nteranya Sanginga said that the Minister's presentation of the 50% cassava flour bread to the FEC is a big stride in the institute's efforts to gain wider support for our research.

"It [Adesina's presentation] is a very strong statement of the quality of research that we do here, and is a great opportunity for the government and the private sector to know IITA and what we stand for," he said.

"Additionally, the figure cited by the Minister puts a tangible value on our research," he adds, "but this is just one segment of our work. Imagine how much higher that value would be if we consider the whole range of our research."

Help conserve electricity!

Before leaving the workplace at the day's end, 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.

Drought-tolerant maize critical to increasing maize production in West Africa—Study

Access to improved seeds by smallscale farmers is a prerequisite to increased maize production in West Africa, as climate change hurts yield from traditional varieties, says a study by researchers working under the Drought Tolerant Maize for Africa Project (DTMA).

The study led by Abdoulaye Tahirou notes that improved maize varieties tolerant of drought are helping farmers in addressing production risks and called for joint efforts to facilitate their wider dissemination across the subregion.

The DTMA Project, a partnership led by the International Center for Maize and Wheat Improvement (CIMMYT) and IITA, is helping farmers in cushioning the negative effect of drought by developing and disseminating maize with significantly improved drought tolerance.

Tahirou and colleagues found that although seed companies that are critical to the dissemination of seeds in West Africa have expanded since 2007 from about 10 companies to more than 22 in Nigeria, Benin, Mali, and Ghana, their production is still well below demand.

For instance, the production of improved maize seeds in those countries stands at about less than 15,000 tons while more than 80,000 tons are required for Nigeria alone.

Presenting the findings to stakeholders



Participants of the regional meeting of DTMA partners held in Lagos pose for a group photo.

at the regional meeting of DTMA partners and policymakers in Lagos, Tahirou, who is also IITA's Impact Economist, urged governments in the region to tackle the challenge of poor irrigation to pave the way for an all-year-round production of improved seeds to accelerate availability and meet demand.

While commending member countries for adopting fairly liberal seed laws, he advised the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to step up efforts that would see the full implementation of the harmonized regional seed law.

"This will help countries that are lagging

behind, as improved drought-tolerant maize varieties will move freely across the region," he says.

"Equally important for governments in the region is to help seed companies gain access to working capital."

Nigeria's Minister of State for Agriculture and Rural Development, Alhaji Bukar Tijani described the meeting as 'timely'.

"I would like to stress again that this program which is an effort to mitigate the negative impact of drought on maize production and improve dissemination of relevant improved subsector development technology is most timely," he emphasized.

Providing options to cowpea farmers in Burkina Faso

The AVEC-BF project of IITA has completed another Farmer Participatory Varietal Selection (FPVS) on 3-13 October as one of the main activities in the second year of the project. Over 500 farmers from four villages of Northern and Central Burkina Faso attended the activity. The FPVS plays an important role in promoting improved cowpea varieties among farmers as well as to better understand their preferences for further breeding work at IITA and INERA.

Interestingly, about 20 Fulanis joined the FPVS in the northern site for the first time this year. "Although a Fulani is considered a nomad, they showed interest in our activity and hinting that they settle in through the

seed production of cowpeas," notes Satoru Muranaka, JIRCAS researcher. He also observed that many farmers have started to use certified seed in the villages. He adds that the activities of AVEC-BF are now starting to bear fruits.

Experts from the JICA Burkina Faso office comprised of Junji Takahashi, Yoshifumi Tsukii, and Kyota Iizuka observed the FPVS activity. The group lauded the eagerness of farmers to seek improved cowpea varieties for production and to learn new cowpea cultivation techniques.

"The choices of the cowpea farmers are important for us to understand the influence of fluctuating environmental

conditions, even these are different from their responses last year," says Haruki Ishikawa, IITA cowpea agronomist.

Ishikawa was referring to the abnormally less rainfall in many areas of Burkina Faso. "For example, in Pouni village, which is one of our target sites, rainfall for this year at 681.6mm was only half of what fell in 2010," he says

The unstable rains have led to an increase in the market price of cowpea. In 2010, a 2kg bag of cowpea sold for 450-500CFA; in 2011 this rose to 800-1000CFA.

Issa Drabo, INERA cowpea breeder, emphasized that "farmers using our recommended early maturing varieties have already harvested their crops, while local varieties are still suffering from severe drought in the field". He adds that participating farmers have been able to bring their harvest to the market earlier for higher cash income. "We hope that more cowpea farmers realize the effectiveness of the new varieties for their benefit," he reiterated.

Relatedly, Japanese ambassador to Burkina Faso, His Excellency Tsutomu Sugiura, and Norie Harada, the first secretary of Japanese Embassy in Burkina Faso, visited a project site as a follow up to their last year's visit.



Japanese Ambassador Tsutomu Sugiura with farmers of Loango village during one of the FPVS activities.