

# Cassava Matters Newsletter

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## Success stories of cassava seed entrepreneurs underway

Some Cassava Seed entrepreneurs (CSEs) operating under the Building an Economically Sustainable Integrated Cassava Seed System, Phase 2 (BASICS-II) project have recently been sharing inspirational stories of their successes in the cassava seed business. These stories were captured by a media team from the Sasakawa Africa Association Nigeria, a partner of the BASICS-II project. The team visited the CSEs in their homes in Benue, Nasarawa, Abia, Imo and Akwa Ibom.



A cassava Seed Entrepreneur, Rev Sister Lillian Ifeoma Chibiko, being interviewed in Abia state

The Project Manager of the BASICS-II Project, Prof Lateef Sanni, described the success stories as indicators of the transformative impact that a formal and sustainable cassava seed system could have on the cassava sector.

He said: "I am glad that the experiences they shared even started from the first phase of the project from 2015 to 2020 when some of them were Village Seed Entrepreneurs (VSEs) and the progress they've made as Cassava Seed Entrepreneurs (CSEs) within the framework of the BASICS model developed in the second phase (BASICS-II) which began in 2020".

The Country Director of SAA Nigeria, Dr Godwin Atser said, "Cassava Seed Entrepreneurs are making a lot of money selling certified and quality cassava stems of improved cassava varieties in Nigeria. They have also been instrumental in scaling improved varieties in cassava farming communities in the country. Sasakawa Nigeria is working with the BASICS-II Project to establish more of these CSEs in Nasarawa and Benue, and many of them are organised in cooperative groups.

Speaking on the significance of the CSEs' stories, Dr Atser said: "These stories will no doubt inspire newcomers in the cassava seed business, and show the importance of cassava seed system to food security,

productivity enhancement, income generation and job creation."

The stories showed that in addition to making money for themselves, the CSEs were contributing immensely to the development of their communities, investing in schools, Youth & women empowerment and job creation.

More than a dozen CSEs shared their success stories. One of them, 55-year old Chief Stanley Unah, in Otukpo Benue State, showed the new tractor he acquired from proceeds of cassava seed business which he said had increased his financial ability to acquire new equipment and diversify his agricultural investments. In Itak-Ikot-Oboise, a community in Ini Local government Area of Akwa Ibom

state, members of the community are substantial partakers in the financial and material accomplishments of Prince Michael Ekanem. He narrated to the team, which had colleagues from National Root Crops Research Institute (NRCRI) Umudike (Drs Mark Tokula and Ivy Nwokocha), how he built a beautiful house for himself, and has been channeling part of his cassava seed profit to the development of the schools he established in the community. He recently raised a block of classroom in the secondary school to a storey building from money gotten from cassava stems.

[www.cassavamatters.org](http://www.cassavamatters.org) has concluded plans to publish these stories and many others in a series.



Mr Tu Emmanuel, a Cassava Seed Entrepreneur in Benue State

# Sierra Leone receives \$3million to transform cassava seeds system

The Sierra Leone government has kicked off a project to transform its cassava sector by building a sustainable seed system. Known as Food Systems Resilience Program-Sierra Leone (FSRP-SL), the project is being funded by the World Bank, and aims to transform the cassava, maize, rice and soybean value chains in the country with emphases on seed system development, nutrition, technology adoption, capacity development and yield and productivity enhancement.



A well maintained cassava seed field

The project, worth over \$3million will be implemented by the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA). It will leverage the assets and outputs of IITA projects such as the Building an Economically Sustainable Integrated Cassava Seed system, Phases 1 and 2 (BASICS-I & II) and the Cassava Weed Management Project. The Sasakawa Africa Association in Nigeria (SAA-Nigeria) will also support the project with capacity building for extension agents, farmers, seed entrepreneurs and other stakeholders.

Speaking on the objectives of the project, the Country Representative of IITA in Sierra Leone, Dr Alfred Dixon, stated that the activities are designed to respond robustly to the repeated shocks that smallholder farmers in the country have faced over the last decade.

His words: “The people of Sierra Leone and farmers especially have suffered the effects of climate change, Ebola, COVID-19, supply chain challenges, and armed conflicts. These shocks have impacted the food system negatively. So, this intervention will fight the growing food insecurity, improve the resilience and safety of food systems in the country, and feed substantially into the government’s “Feed Salone Strategy”.

On the Cassava Seed System development component, the Project Manager of the BASICS-II Project, Prof Lateef Sanni, stated that the FSRP-SL will utilize the BASICS model due to the success of the model in Nigeria, Tanzania, DR Congo and Rwanda.

“Cassava production in Sierra Leone is low but it holds huge potential for job creation, food security and industrial development,” he said. “But like every other crop, it all starts with the seed. One of the problems of cassava here is the low use of improved varieties and the use of poor-quality stems. So, this activity will change the narrative by developing cassava seed entrepreneurs, promoting the use of improved varieties and establishing structures for quality assurance”.

In the words of Dr Godwin Atser, the Country Director of SAA-Nigeria, “This transformation agenda can only be sustained by a system that has capacity and capability. We will build capacity

across the board because to fully harness the potentials in cassava and other crop value chains, the critical stakeholders must have the capacity to catalyze, maintain and sustain the structure that this project will build. So, a critical part of the FSRP-SL is the training and retraining of the nation’s extension service providers, seed entrepreneurs, farmers and other stakeholders.

A capacity-building workshop for extension officers and advisory service providers has been scheduled to be held in Bo from June 26 to 28, 2024. Participants will be trained in Good Agronomic Practices, Six Steps in Cassava Weed Management and the use of digital tools.



Map of Sierra Leone

# Seed roadmap injects fresh ‘oxygen’ into Liberia’s agricultural sector

*Liberia and international partners have developed a seed road map to help transform the country’s agricultural sector, which has been badly devastated by civil war.*



*A cross section of participants at th summit*

From 1989 to 1996 and 1999 to 2003, Liberia suffered civil wars that claimed the lives of more than 200,000 people, destroyed a once-viable economic infrastructure, suffocated the seed system, and put the country in the league of food insecure states.

At a two-day seed business summit held recently in Monrovia, the Liberian capital, the government of Liberia and international partners developed a seed road map for cassava, maize, rice, soybeans and aquaculture.

The international consortium was led by the Building an Economically Sustainable Integrated Cassava Seed System, Phase 2 (BASICS-II) project of the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA). Partners included the AfDB-funded Technologies for African Agricultural Transformation (TAAT) and the Sasakawa Africa Association (SAA-Nigeria).

The seed road map mirrors the BASICS model and its success stories and aims to

address seed production and distribution bottlenecks, certification, quality control and capacity building for the country’s Central Agricultural Research Institute (CARI). The plan is to focus on business development for early-generation seed (EGS) entities, nurturing commercial seed entrepreneurs (CSEs), advocacy, and scaling.

The BASICS model is a seed system model generated by two projects— Building an Economically Sustainable Integrated Cassava Seed System in Nigeria (BASICS I & II); and Building an Economically Sustainable Cassava Seed System in Tanzania (BEST). In countries where it is in use, the model supports an ecosystem of seed actors – breeder, foundation, and certified seed producers through breeding programs, early generation seed companies, cassava seed entrepreneurs, processors, and seed quality regulators.

Speaking on the prospects of leveraging the successful seed system model, the

Liberian Minister of Agriculture, Dr Alex Neutah, represented by Moses R. Gbanyan, the Deputy Minister for Regional Development Research and Extension, reiterated the government’s determination to boost the progress already being recording with international development partners.

“President Joseph Boakai has stressed his commitment to seed funding, seed development and seed consistency, hence keying into working models and comprehensive strategies is critical for us to transform our seed systems in rice, maize, soybean, aquaculture and cassava”, he said.

The Director for Agriculture and Agro-Allied Industry at AfDB, Dr Martin Fregene, commended the Liberian President for his “high aspirations to tackle the low level of use of the latest agricultural technologies including improved seeds”.

“I’m glad the President is engaged in talks for the financing of his agricultural development agenda and for recognizing that seed is key to the programs,” he said. “High productivity is evident anywhere good seeds are being used. So, you can be rest assured of AfDB’s support”

The Project Manager of BASICS-II, Prof Lateef Sanni, also hailed the Liberian government’s commitment but called for “zeal and willingness to go the whole hog” saying that seed sector transformation happens where the leaders “match words with action with regards to removing red tapes and bottlenecks. “Once we all work hard on this road map, we’ll begin to get success stories in no time”, he said.



*BASICS-II team with officials of Sierra Leone’s agriculture ministries, agencies and programs*

According to the Country Director of SAA-Nigeria, Dr Godwin Atser, the seed roadmap provides the needed 'Oxygen' to revamp the agricultural sector in Liberia. "We need a document that will stimulate private sector participation in the breeder and foundation seed sector and create an economically sustainable value chain in which virus-free seeds of improved varieties are multiplied and disseminated to farmers," he said.

Commending Liberia for its readiness to replicate the BASICS model, the Senior Program Officer for the Bill and Melinda

Gates Foundation, Lawrence Kent, urged stakeholders to learn from the success being recorded in Tanzania and Nigeria.

His words: "The cassava seed system intervention is a good investment for agricultural development. In Tanzania, farmers using improved cassava varieties sourced from certified seed entrepreneurs are recording 81% higher yields than those not using it. Similar success is being achieved in Nigeria and other places where the BASICS model is being replicated."

Speaking earlier, the IITA Director for Development and Delivery Office and Country Representative, IITA-Sierra Leone Station Office, Dr Alfred Dixon harped on continuous collaborations, partnerships and close observance of how the seed sector is being transformed in other geographies.

"We need unparalleled networking opportunities to ensure that the road map leads to the desired destination in the shortest possible time," he stated.

## Cassava seed production: Sasakawa primes extension agents for step-down training



Extension Agents at the Cassava Seed production training in Nasarawa

The Sasakawa Africa Association (SAA) in Nigeria recently trained 10 extension agents on cassava seed production and cassava weed management techniques in Benue state. The training was organized within the framework of the Building an Economically Sustainable Integrated Cassava Seed System Phase 2 (BASICS-II) project of the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), which SAA-Nigeria is implementing in Benue and Nasarawa State.

The BASICS-II project is using a systems approach to offer farmers access to clean, disease-free, and high-yielding cassava planting materials. Part of the project's strategy is to establish cassava seed entrepreneurs linked to early generation seed producers who are connected to breeder seed producers and breeding programmes.

SAA is therefore incubating these CSEs in Benue and Nasarawa states and they are generating income and creating employment from the sales of cassava stems. Under the project, 10 cooperative societies have established more than 50 hectares of cassava seed fields across various local governments in the two

states. The establishment of more fields for the 2024 season is ongoing.

The Country Director for SAA-Nigeria, Dr Godwin Atser, explained, "The EAs being trained are expected to step down their training to help farmers who have taken to seed production increase yield and productivity and maintain seed fields that would meet the certification requirements of the National Agricultural Seed Council (NASC)."

He told the EAs that they are instrumental to the success the farmers and seed producers will record since they will act as guides and supervisors. He stressed that the seed producers must use only properly sourced foundation seeds, saying that the project targets the expansion of the use of improved seeds by farmers in the state.

The training covered the basics and guidelines of cassava seed production and how to use the Six Steps to Cassava Weed Management toolkit to ensure clean fields, quality stems, and high root yield.

According to Dr Samuel Wuese, Sasakawa BASICS II Consultant, "The EAs were exposed to good agricultural

practices (GAP), the broad range of improved cassava varieties in Nigeria, pre-planting activities, planting methods, ratooning, pest and disease identification and control, weed management, and marketing of stems and roots. We also trained them on value chain extension delivery, collective market access, and record keeping.

We expect the EAs to facilitate timely procurement of quality inputs by the farmer groups and ensure that farmers keep records of all their farm activities such as date of land preparation, planting, the quantity of inputs used, date of inputs used, pests and diseases infestations and measures taken, yield and income earned and so on"

One of the participants, Miss Mbazeden, described the training as beneficial and enriching.

The training, which was held at Ritz Gold & Suites, Makurdi, Benue State, was also attended by the State Coordinator of Sasakawa, Mrs Comfort Anum and the Director, Agricultural Extension and Risk Management, of the Bureau of Agricultural Development and Mechanisation, Mrs Veronica Igbanu.

# Farmers give thumbs up to cassava seed system intervention

*Cassava farmers in Benue State are excited over the positive outlook of their cassava fields as they anticipate high yields this harvest season; and hundreds among them taking up the business of selling improved seeds in local communities.*

Typically, yields in Nigeria are less than nine tons per hectare but improved varieties grown by Cassava Seed Entrepreneurs (CSEs) offer 20 tons and above, according to Sasakawa Africa Association. Farmers across the country now aim to achieve higher yields in addition to selling stems for additional income and sustainably facilitate the diffusion of varieties throughout the country

“We planted the TME 419 variety and the performance has been awesome,” said farmer Vitalis Iorlaha. “The fact that we can sell the stems and make money from roots and stems gives me a lot of joy. Honestly, this project is a life changer.”

The Building an Economically Sustainable Integrated Cassava Seed System (BASICS-II) project is using a systems approach to offer farmers access to clean, disease-free, and high-yielding planting materials. Central to BASICS-II, which

is led by the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), is the establishment of CSEs that are linked to early generation seed producers which are in turn connected to breeder seed producers.

In this framework, Sasakawa Africa Association (SAA) is incubating CSEs that are generating income and creating employment from the sales of cassava stems in Benue and Nasarawa states. The project has successfully helped 10 cooperative societies to establish more than 50 hectares of cassava seed fields across various local governments in the two states with more fields planned for the 2024 season.

According to the Country Director for SAA-Nigeria, Dr Godwin Atser, who recently visited one of the seed fields, the cassava seed entrepreneurs will form the foundation of a cassava revolution in North Central Nigeria. “They will be the source of quality cassava planting materials of improved varieties for farmers in the region and beyond”, he said.

An elated farmer in the community, Mrs Dorathy Amile, said in an interview that apart from exposing farmers to improved cassava varieties, Sasakawa, through the project, supported them with training and inputs that eased cultivation.

“Sasakawa is acting as a catalyst for agricultural development in our community,” said another farmer, Mr Success Agindi. “Getting inputs has not been easy so, we are very grateful for this intervention. Apart from easing our access to inputs, their intervention has enlightened us in terms of how to identify quality and genuine planting materials.”

On becoming seed producers through the project, Rosemary Usuo and Nyitse Nyaregh, admitted that even though they were new to the guidelines for seed production being given to them, they were determined to follow through to reap the maximum benefits.

“Those guidelines and recommendations are laid down by the National Agricultural Seed Council (NASC),” Jonathan Yassah, the Programme Officer for SAA Market Oriented Agriculture and Focal Person for the BASICS-II project in Benue and Nasarawa States, explained.

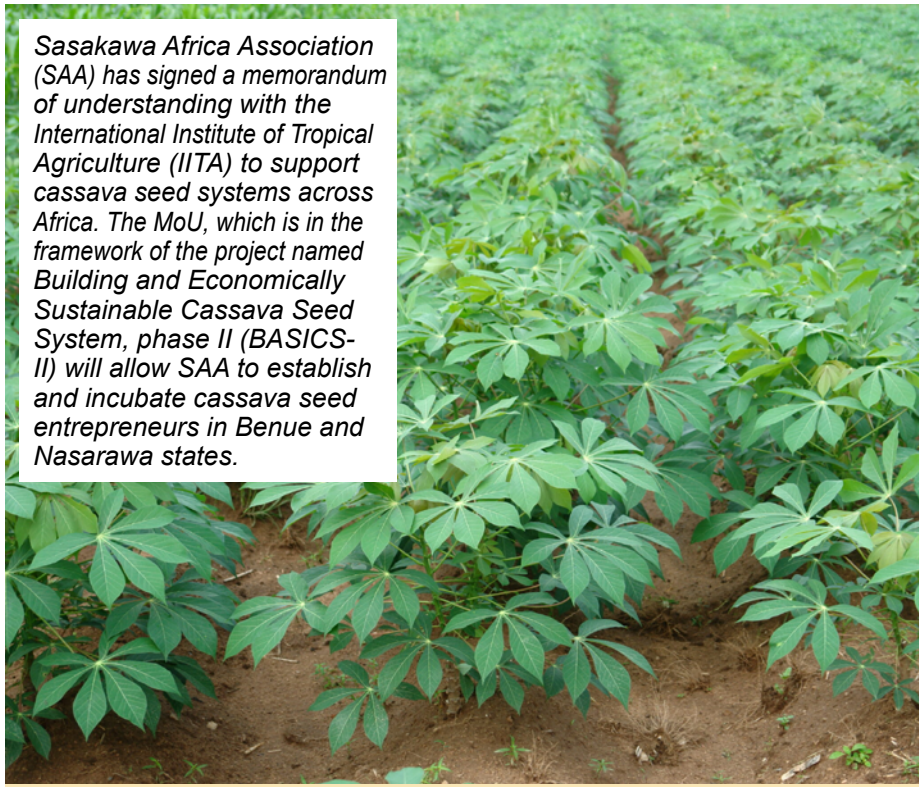
“The essence of following them is to ensure that CSEs get the right early generation planting materials and their fields are certified by NASC so that SAA will be able to link them to markets to sell their stems. The target for a seed producer is the stems, the roots are only additional,” Jonathan added.



IITA, NRCRI and Sasakawa team members with Cassava Seed Entrepreneurs

# Sasakawa, IITA, sign deal to promote economically sustainable cassava seed system

Sasakawa Africa Association (SAA) has signed a memorandum of understanding with the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) to support cassava seed systems across Africa. The MoU, which is in the framework of the project named Building and Economically Sustainable Cassava Seed System, phase II (BASICS-II) will allow SAA to establish and incubate cassava seed entrepreneurs in Benue and Nasarawa states.



A clean cassava field

“This partnership will create at least 100 cassava seed entrepreneurs that will make a decent living from the sales of cassava stems and they will form the foundation of a cassava revolution in Nigeria”, says Dr Godwin Atser, Country Director for SAA.

Although Nigeria is the largest producer of cassava, the country is yet to maximally exploit the benefits of the ‘Rambo crop’ due to low productivity caused primarily by poor planting materials (seeds) that are often diseased.

According to official data, average cassava yield in Nigeria are below

10 tons per ha as opposed to Thailand with more than 20 tons per ha where cassava seed system is much advanced. This trend has limited the competitiveness of Nigerian farmers and their ability to tap into the export market.

However, using the BASICS-II approach which emphasizes the use of improved-certified cassava seeds, farmers can more than double their yield, says Prof. Lateef Sanni, Project Leader of BASICS-II.

“We are excited to partner with SAA in this project as they will bring to the table their expertise in agricultural extension delivery and help us to scale the BASICS Model to new geographies,” Prof Sanni added.

Limited access to quality seeds and propagation materials for well-adapted varieties hinders efforts to transform cassava systems. As a result, African farmers plant old, often diseased stems. On the flip side, breeders had developed a suite of improved varieties but have struggled to deliver to farmers stems that serve as seeds. Governments and NGOs have occasionally launched campaigns to multiply and distribute cassava stems, but these efforts have been sporadic, unreliable, and unsustainable.

In the last four years, the BASICS-II project demonstrated that the use of improved cassava stems can change the narrative of low yield per hectare and provide multiple streams of income for farmers as they trade stems and roots all together. Besides, the seed system creates jobs (commercial seed entrepreneurs), and wealth across the value chain.



## Editorial

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