This newsletter provides information on the FAO project: “Strengthening Linkages between Buyers and Small Actors in the Roots and Tubers Sector in Africa” (ART) Project, which may be of interest to you. The newsletter is a core tool for knowledge sharing among members of the project.

Welcome

Welcome to the fourth issue of ART Flash News, a quarterly newsletter to keep you updated on the ART project.

Check out the previous issue: [www.fao.org/3/a-i7986e.pdf](http://www.fao.org/3/a-i7986e.pdf)

In this issue you will find:

- Results from the field from all the projects countries;
- Tapika Foods Products: a case study from the roots and tubers industry;
- FAO Digital Services in Rwanda for the potato farmers;
- This issue's "personality";
- Upcoming events.

Enjoy your reading!

ART Team

Results from the field

Implementing Farmer Field Schools (FFS) concepts and applications in Ghana

One of the key outputs of the ART project is to enhance the production and productivity of beneficiary farmers by adopting improved cassava varieties, and corresponding sustainable agronomic and processing technologies to meet food and industrial uses.

To achieve this goal, training has been provided to 70 agricultural extension agents and field supervisors to build their capacity in the FFS concepts and applications in cassava production. Training topics include: FFS concepts and practices; tools and skills for assessing rural resources; integrated crop management for ecologically and economically sustainable production; facilitating multi-stakeholder forums; and effective ways to improve impact and sustainability of FFS initiatives.

The main feedback from participants, many of whom are women, is the need to strengthen field support in establishing learning plots and to review the farmer training manual and guide. It was also suggested that the duration of future trainings be extended to ensure that practical sessions and group exercises are completed.
Workshop on “Policies, strategies and programmes for the development of the cassava and derivatives sector and the organizational dynamics within the sector” in Ivory Coast

In Ivory Coast the ART project focuses on cassava two products: namely attiékè and placali. In this respect, a study was carried out on the analysis of policies, strategies and programs for the development of the cassava and derivatives sector with a focus on the role of women.

In order for all stakeholders in Ivory Coast to be able to enrich validate the study, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MINADER) in collaboration with FAO’s Multi-partner Programme Support Mechanism and the ART projects organized a workshop to share the results. The workshop took place in Abidjan from 29 to 30 June 2017. Representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, and Ministry of Commerce and Industry as well as civil society organizations, and research institutes and UN agencies attended the workshop.

This initiative of the project supports the small actors with a focus on woman’s contribution in the cassava value chain, and aims to help creating not only employment, but also self-sufficiency in cassava-based foods.

Findings of the events shows that: there is no a specific strategy targeting cassava, rather, it is included only into a broader staple crops strategy; there is no systematic monitoring and evaluation system to keep track of agricultural sector; actors engaged in the cassava value chain have not a platform to meet discuss and advocate for the cassava sectors. Against this background, FAO is supporting the establishment of a cassava platform for these stakeholders.

Evaluating the impact of climate variability on cassava production and prices in Malawi

Generally speaking, cassava, when compared to other crops, is more tolerant to drought, even under adverse weather conditions emanating from climate change and climate variability. In addition, cassava is not included in the analysis of climate impacts on inter-annual production variability in the country. In response, a climate impact study on cassava production was carried out in Malawi in order to contribute to increased food security and incomes for small-scale producers and traders.

The study identified a correlation between climate variability and cassava production and pointed out that climate variability affects farmers’ decisions regarding cassava production, prices and production risks. The issues identified include: climate data and information and knowledge gaps at agricultural operational units at all levels; untimely information delivery; undesirable quality of climate information and dissemination channels, and inappropriate language used for cassava farmers; limited or lack of storage facilities; lack of knowledge on risk transfers tools such as weather risk insurance and no cassava related risk insurance scheme; and outbreaks of pests and diseases resulting from rainfall and temperature variations. The study recommended the ART project to facilitate and support the establishment of linkages between Ministry of Agriculture and the National Meteorological agency for coordinating climate information which can be adapted to the needs of farmers.

Babra Kyasiimire from Uganda shared how her life has been transformed with the support of the African Roots and Tubers Project

Babra Kyasiimire is a potato grower supported by the project in Uganda. She received trainings on processing techniques, managerial skills, and hygiene standards, which enabled her to diversify her sources of income, access a number of local markets and supermarkets, and increase the number and monetary value of her business transactions.

Babra used to grow potatoes and sell at a low price in the local market. But with the support of the project, she understood the business opportunities that her product offered, and decided to become a potato processor, selling not only in local markets but also in several supermarkets. The demand for her chips is increasing on a daily basis – so much that she cannot satisfy all of the requests.
The trainings that FAO provided were realized in collaboration with the Uganda Industrial Research Institute, and enabled her to enter into the product certification process and to have her products to reach the international markets.

Furthermore, by applying the skills gained, she diversified her business to mushroom-growing, thus doubling her income.

Given her success, she has been contacted to train young people to see the potential of potato processing and how it can change their lives for the better.

Assessment and workshop on national cassava seed systems in Cameroon

In order to improve the cassava sector in Cameroon, the ART project conducted an assessment of the national cassava seed systems in collaboration with the Institute of Agricultural Research for Development.

Findings of the assessment were discussed, enriched and validated during a national workshop held on 26 and 27 September 2017 in Yaoundé. The workshop also provided an opportunity to review the activities conducted in the field, capitalize on the lessons learned and draw conclusions and recommendations for further project interventions.

Results shows that in Cameroon, the quantity of cassava seeds is insufficient and quality is not satisfactory, as the improved varieties do not always meet the consumers’ needs. This is partly a result of the predominance of the informal sector in the cassava seed system.

After the plenary discussions, participants made the following recommendations: establish a national platform with seed producers and multipliers to ease access to foundation seeds; create and produce a National Catalogue of Species and Varieties; and strengthen the capacity of cassava farmers, extension agents and seed multipliers on the optimal use of traditional and improved cassava varieties.

Regional and national workshop series on Agricultural Value Chain Finance

Under the organization of the ART project coordinator, a series of regional and national workshops on "Agricultural Value Chain Finance" was offered throughout 2017 to facilitate the provision of financial services to the cassava, potato and yam value chains. Approximately 180 beneficiaries from ministries, commercial banks, microfinance institutions, agribusiness service providers, producer groups, small and medium Enterprises, and cooperatives received different trainings on financial services, risk assessment and risk strategies for increasing investments in roots and tubers while defining principles for agricultural investments in the sector.

After the trainings, access to credit by roots and tubers beneficiary producers increased dramatically. One example is Rwanda, where the reluctance of commercial banks and microfinance institutions to provide loans to small potato producers turned into active collaboration. According to interviews with financial service providers, in one district covered by the project alone, 82 loans and micro-loans contracts have been signed, with 100 percent of repayment from Irish potato farmers. Project's capacity building events created opportunities also in Ivory Coast, where a commercial bank trained on agricultural value chain finance, singed the first contract with a cassava SME processor and exporter.

In addition, organizing the Regional Workshop on Value Chain Finance for Roots and Tubers (R&T) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, represented a forum to share findings and exchange the lessons learned in each of the beneficiary country, on the constraints limiting the access to and the provision of financial services to the potato and cassava value chains.

From the roots and tubers industry – case study on Tapika Food Products in Malawi

Tapika Food Products is an enterprise benefitting from the trainings on agriculture value chain finance provided by the ART project. The enterprise is working on scaling up the production of cassava and other products by involving 4,000 smallholder farming families in eight districts of Malawi that are experiencing food and nutrition insecurity. It is focusing not only on community empowerment but more specifically on women’s empowerment. As it continues to grow, the business aims to: expand processing facilities; scale up cassava production in Rumphi district by involving 800 farming families; provide tree seedlings; complete the Malawi Bureau of Standards certification; and explore export market opportunities.

Read more ▶ http://tapikafoods.com

FAO and the Roots and Tubers Value Chain

FAO digital services in Rwanda

One concern for potato farmers in Rwanda is the lack of access to information on prices. The FAO Digital Inclusion Project is supporting small farmers in the district of Rulindo to access trade and price information with mobile voice services in the local language.


This issue’s “personality”

Agricultural Engineer, Specialist in Management and Management of Cooperatives. Mr. Gounse is currently working in the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries of Benin. In addition, he is the focal point for the ART Project in the Ministry, facilitating the implementation of project activities for the cassava and yam sectors. Mr. Gounse is contributing to the project by organizing business meetings and training of beneficiary actors between the R & T Value Chains; supervising the implementation of Farmer Field Schools on cassava and yams, and establishing partnerships. Currently, Mr. Gounse, with NGO partners and project consultants, supports SMEs in Benin, in coaching and the development / implementation of simplified business plans to facilitate access to funding for the beneficiaries of the project.

Upcoming events

Cameroon: Organization of producers-financial services providers’ fora, February 2018.
Ghana: Validation Workshop of the study "review of public procurement policies for linking smallholder to institutional buyers", “Market research study” and Producers-Buyers meetings, March 2018.
Ivory Coast: Workshop on Experience sharing and lesson learned to support the development of cassava platforms, March 2018.

CONTACT

For more information visit: www.fao.org/in-action/african-roots-and-tubers

Kindly send any contributions or requests to Margherita Bavagnoli at: margherita.bavagnoli@fao.org

This newsletter has been produced with the assistance of the European Union under the project “Strengthening linkages between small-scale actors and buyers in the roots and tubers sector in Africa”. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of FAO and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union.