



# Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

## A new promise for Karamoja

From being referred to as a wild plant, cassava has gained unmatched prominence in Karamoja, a semi arid region in Uganda.

Following a request from the Government of Uganda to introduce cassava growing in the region in 2007, FAO, with funding support from the Governments of Belgium and Spain, started a multiplication programme that provided a steady supply of clean planting materials to agro pastoralists.

Cassava, a crop with diverse advantages has the potential to offer longer-term solutions to the problem of food insecurity and dependence on food aid in the region.

The crop can be left in the ground without serious deterioration, even during dry seasons. The tuber is a valuable source of calories and its leaves can be eaten as vegetables. Besides the stems, cassava can be processed into a variety of low cost, convenient food products for sale, thus providing a regular source of income to subsistence farmers. Although higher yields are achieved on fertile soils, cassava will produce something on even the poorest soils, where more demanding crops would fail. Lastly the cassava peels can be used as animal feed and processed into manure.

FAO distributes varieties that are provided by the National Agricultural Research Organization (NARO). They are

resistant to Cassava Mosaic and have relative tolerance to Cassava Brown Streak viruses.

Organized in groups of 30, farmers are guided by local implementing partners contracted by FAO to establish cassava multiplication blocks in order to generate enough cuttings for individual households. This is supplemented with training in agronomic practices using the Agro Pastoral Field School (APFS) curriculum. This initiative has enabled the communities to access good quality planting materials.



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In Kaboong district, over 220 acres of multiplication blocks have been established. Ato-kenyutu APFS was among the pioneers multiplying cassava in Kapedo Sub County. They have over 20 acres of the MH96/4271 Nase variety from which individual members get cuttings to establish their own plots.

Meri Michael, a farmer, says people are increasingly getting interested in cassava growing and the demand for the cuttings is overwhelming the group members. They sell a bag of cuttings to non-members at Ush 15,000 while a single tuber goes for Ush 500. Once all the cuttings are harvested, the community will establish at least 75 acres of cassava.

Peter Abach, the Sub County Chairperson for Karenga Sub County in Kaabong district, says the Sub County has embraced cassava growing. Members of Lokuwama APFS also pioneered the multiplication of cassava in the Sub County. Cuttings from their 15 acre garden are supplied to the rest of the Sub County.

Mr Abach says local leaders in the Sub County are now promoting massive multiplication of cassava because, unlike other crops, it is not destroyed by wild animals that roam the villages from the neighbouring Kidepo National Park because the tubers are hidden under the ground.

"The community's perception that the cassava is a wild plant has changed. It is now a crop of choice," he says.



James Loukai, 62, successful cassava farmer, says the community of over 20,000 people in Apeitolim, in Napak district no longer requires an external source of cassava or its planting materials.

Loukai started multiplying cassava in 2008. From two acres, he has expanded to 10 acres. He earns Ush 15,000 per bag of stems and about Ush 20,000 for a basin of dry cassava tubers.

Like many people in the settlement, Loukai arrived in the settlement without any capital or skills to engage in crop farming. Neither did he know how he would sustain his family of ten children and a wife.

But today, Loukai is a proud man who is pleased with his progress. In 2012, he earned over Ush2 million from selling cassava stems and dry tubers. He bought four oxen that he is using to increase the acreage of land under cultivation. He has also bought 12 cows and 10 goats over the last four years.

Whereas he cultivates other crops as well, Loukai's niche remains cassava growing because the market for the tubers and stems is overwhelming as more settlers come to Apeitolim. This is compounded by the increasing popularity and appreciation of cassava among the Karimojong.

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