Cassava is a vital food and cash crop in Uganda, contributing significantly to basic food requirements of smallholder farmers. However, years of the devastating Cassava Mosaic and Cassava Brown Streak diseases caused massive crop losses to farmers and affected food security of many households. In northern Uganda, this was coupled with war and displacement, leading to near extinction of the crop.

FAO thus embarked on a campaign to boost cassava production through the “Regional Cassava Initiative in support of vulnerable smallholders in Central and Eastern Africa” project. It was funded by the European Commission (EC) to a tune of USD 4.3 million, of which USD 776,535 was for Uganda.

Farmers were mobilized into groups and were trained in prevention and mitigation to prepare them for an effective response to cassava related diseases. They also received clean vegetative planting materials.

Over 300 hectares of nuclei multiplication gardens were established to supply smallholder farmers with planting materials. The varieties utilized are resistant to Cassava Mosaic Disease (CMB) and tolerant to Cassava Brown Streak Disease (CBSD).

The project covers Kitgum, Lamwo, Gulu, Agago and Pader districts of northern Uganda.

**Key achievements to date**

- 332 hectares of primary multiplication gardens established
- 140 farmer field school groups (3,656 beneficiaries with 57% female) formed and trained in integrated crop management of cassava.
- A total of 10,000 bags of cassava cuttings, equivalent to six million cuttings, distributed to 6,753 households after multiplication.
- 86 extension staff trained in disease identification
- Awareness campaigns on cassava diseases conducted through radio talk shows and sensitization materials developed with the support of the National Agricultural Research Organization (NARO)
- A National Cassava Coordinating Committee (NCCC) to enhance coordination of stakeholders and exchange of information established under the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries. The committee developed a cassava strategy and policy that guide stakeholders in the cassava subsector.

Although the consumption of cassava in northern Uganda reduced during the 20 years of war and displacement, the crop is now back in the diet of the resettled communities, thanks to the efforts of FAO, Government of Uganda, development partners and smallholder farmers, who are at the centre of multiplication and distribution of clean planting materials.
Impact

- Increased availability of clean planting materials resistant to CMD and tolerant to CBSD in beneficiary districts
- Improved food security and income of the households participating in cassava multiplication from the tuberous root harvest
- Reduced incidence of CBSD in northern Uganda due to extensive multiplication of disease tolerant varieties and limited movement of external materials into the districts
- The project built capacity of farming households, extension workers and general public through creating awareness on cassava diseases, enhanced skills to identify the diseases, and increased expertise in quality cassava planting material multiplication and quality control
- Improved coordination of cassava initiatives in the country as a result of establishment of the NCCC
- Capacity in cassava disease surveillance built and scientific knowledge about the diseases collected.

Future Action

- Cassava value chain development with focus on processing/value addition and industrial use of cassava starch.
- Expansion of the multiplication of CBSD tolerant varieties to cover more cassava growing districts.
- Support to CBSD surveillance in the entire country.
- Strengthening of the National Cassava Coordination Committee (NCCC), including finalizing the cassava policy and strategy.

Members of Tiching Ber farmer field school group in Kitgum district profess to the importance of cassava during the post-war return process. When they returned home to Kaliro village in 2007, food was hard to come by. Without proper storage facilities and post harvest handling techniques, cereals alone could not take them through the hunger period. “The best option was cassava because it can be stored under the ground and can withstand drought. But the planting materials were not available. The few cassava stems that were in the community had succumbed to disease,” says Maria Aketch, a member.

The group members were provided with disease-free cassava cuttings. They now have 15 hectares of improved MM4271, a disease resistant variety from which members and other people in the community get cuttings to establish their own fields. Besides selling the cuttings, members also sell cassava tubers. Irene Adong, a member of the group, sells tubers, flour and cassava chips. “I can now provide school and medical fees for my children,” she said.

In 2012, members of Rwot Omiyo farmer field school in Labong Amida Sub County, Kitgum district, sold cassava cuttings worth UGX 2 million. They used part of the proceeds to purchase ox ploughs and oxen that are helping them open more land for cultivation.

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