

Innovation of the Week: Getting the most from crops, in the field and at the market

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In Cameroon, one of the foods that grows best is cassava. But farmers struggle with low yields because of pests and diseases that damage crops, making each harvest much more labor intensive than they are worth. “Farmers are spending more on planting materials and field maintenance to grow cassava and they are unable to make profit from the poor harvests,” says Emmanuel Njukwe, Chief of Service for the Crop Improvement and Utilization Unit at [The International Institute of Tropical Agriculture \(IITA\)](#). “They are fighting an expensive battle against pests and diseases.”

To help make the battle a little less labor intensive and financially costly, IITA, in partnership with the Cameroon Government National Program for Roots and Tuber Development (PNDRT), is developing and introducing improved varieties of cassava with resistance to major pests and diseases to increase production. IITA and PNDRT are also training farmers in post-harvest processing techniques to improve quality and add value to products farmers have to sell and connecting those farmers to high-paying enterprises and markets.

“Once we identify varieties of cassava that we think will benefit local growers,” says Emmanuel, “we work closely with farmers to identify and select the new varieties and ensure that the new varieties meet farmers’ needs.” Groups of farmers participating in a field test of a new IITA cassava variety compare the new variety with their best local variety. “The farmers then pick the variety they like best,” continues Emmanuel. “They tell us what they like and don’t like and then we help train them to get the most out of those varieties, in the field and at the market.”

One of the farmers groups that received training and materials from IITA and government extension officers to process cassava into flour is now connected to a bakery that use the flour to make cakes. Being able to grow and process cassava as a group, explains Emmanuel, helps reduce production costs for individual farmers. Says Emmanuel, “when we train the farmers to process their crop it makes it easier for them to transport and store the product, and to sell to larger consumers like a business to improve their livelihoods.”

IITA encourages the farmers’ groups to specialize in different processing options or storage techniques and then encourages them to work together. Farmers who specialize in processing cassava into flour, for example, can reach out to another farmers group that specializes in storage and utilization for support and services. In this way, the farmers groups can create financially beneficial links to each other, in addition to the links to the market that IITA also helps to cultivate.

“The model we want to use is to promote the smallholder farmers,” continues Emmanuel. “Right now, many farmers do not earn high income from cassava production. But the potentials are

there to change all of that. We give them the information, the training, and the crop varieties they need to do that. But we do it with the help of the farmers, in every step of the process.”

To read more about how farmers are improving their income and livelihoods through improved crops and processing, see: [Bringing Inputs to Farmers](#), [ECOVA MALI: Building Home Grown Knowledge](#), [New Frontier Farmers and Processor Group: Reviving Farmland and Improving Livelihoods](#), [The Abooman Women’s Group: Working together to Improve Livelihoods](#), [It’s All About the Process](#), [Turning the Catch of the Day into Improved Livelihoods](#) and [Transforming Crops into Products](#).