Cassava - A New Image

Recognizing the potential of cassava as the ‘poverty and drought fighter’ crop in Africa, the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) and Farm Concern International have launched a 3 year program that will help 30,000 small holder farmers in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania increase cassava for food and industrial use by processing it at village level.

The first of its kind in this region, the project dubbed “Cassava Village Processing Project” (CVPP) will unlock potential for increased incomes for small holder farmers beyond food usage by means of a model where out of each land portion under cassava cultivation, an estimated one eighth of the produce will be dedicated to home consumption while a ¼ to ½ will go to industrial use.

In the initial phase, communities will be mobilised to set up 120 village processing units, which will be called ‘commercial villages’ that will graduate farmers into cassava commercial producers and semi-processors who will be linked to animal feeds manufacturers.

Although cassava is a drought resistant crop and can grow in soils of low fertility, its high perishability and bulkiness limits transportation and mass market utilization, confining it to markets around the villages where it is produced. Village-based value addition will address this challenge by drastically improving supply chain management, post harvest management and prolonged storage.

“We always thought that Cassava is a worthless crop and a sign of poverty. However, with this new approach, we feel that this will be a turnaround for our villages where we will
earn some money from selling cassava!” said Everlyne Oswat, Chairlady, Moyo Safi Women Group, Busia, Kenya.

“This project will begin the first step of progressively expanding the role of cassava from being just a staple food for human consumption in this region, to an efficient industrial crop like it is in developing economies of Asia, Latin America, and other African countries” said Mrs Anne Mbaabu, Markets Director, AGRA.

**Why Cassava Now?**

Maize, the traditional source of carbohydrate for animal feeds and human food, has not performed to its maximum potential due to low productivity and changing weather patterns in the three countries. Connecting cassava farmers to feed manufacturers will provide a reliable source of raw materials to the feed industry since the crop is available throughout the year. Feed manufacturers need consistent quality supply to maintain the feed formula and stabilize feeds prices.

“Our members have been looking for reliable quality and consistent supply of alternative carbohydrate sources. Pressure on maize is forcing us to think of partial substitutes – cassava chips will fill this gap. Our members are eagerly waiting to start buying from farmers” says Mr. Martin Kinoti, Secretary General of Association of Kenya Feeds Manufacturers (AKEFEMA).

Although the use of cassava in the feed industry is relatively new in this region, research has shown that the use of cassava as a substitute for maize can reduce the cost of feed by 20-30% (IFAD-FAO).

**Access to Improved varieties**
“For the first time, new varieties improved through support from AGRA and its partners will be put in farmers’ hands for commercialisation within an organised market linkage system offered by CVPP,” said Dr Namanga Ngongi, President AGRA.

“Some of the new cassava varieties developed by local scientists are higher yielding, resistant to the Cassava Mosaic virus, which has been a major challenge in the region, others are resistant to drought, while others have low cyanide levels,” added Ngongi.

Under this project, ‘Commercial Villages’ will be mobilized to manage village saving schemes. Farmers will also be linked to financial institutions that offer credit for purchase of improved seeds. In this regard, AGRA has already partnered with Equity bank in Kenya, Standard bank in both Tanzania and Uganda and National Micro-finance Bank in Tanzania to unlock credit for small holder farmers and agribusinesses working along staple food value chains.

Commercialisation of Cassava for non-food ventures has not offered a high enough price for farmers in the past due to low yields occasioned by poor performing varieties. This linkage will specifically facilitate access to high yielding and disease tolerant varieties to the commercial villages.

**Building a new Image for Cassava**

The project will embark on a major image building initiative among both urban and rural consumers, a majority of whom regard cassava as a "poor man's" food. Agribusinesses and others along the value chain will be involved to exploit its various uses. Cassava has potential for use in animal feed, adhesives (glue), bio-fuels, glucose syrup production and starch in food and non-food industries, products which are cardinal to transforming it. Diversification of utilization will offer a long awaited industrial pull for cassava.
Processing has been central to any strategy for expanded marketing of cassava. Southern, Central, and East Africans can learn from the cassava mechanization and processing technology that has been used in other countries.

In developing countries like Brazil, cassava is the main driving force for the dairy and beef industry and the energy sector; in Thailand, cassava is the main foreign cash earner - the country exports all the cassava required for animal feed in the European Union. The country also takes the African export quota because none of the African countries exports significant volumes.

Farm Concern international has developed a smallholder commercialization approach, Commercial Village Models through which social communities will be evolved to Commercial Villages, village owned business units. These Commercial villages offer the economies of scale attractive to buyers while Commercial Village Savings Schemes will enhance collective access to inputs, productive assets and offer village cash cushion. - Agra-Alliance

August 2010