



# FEEDBACK ON *Cassava project*

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*On 2 June 2022, the NAMC's Markets and Economic Research Centre hosted a workshop seminar on Cassava. The purpose of the seminar was to provide a status update on the progress of the Cassava project.*

According to the Agricultural Research Council (ARC), cassava is a woody plant with erect stems and spirally arranged leaves with petioles of approximately up to 30 cm in length.

"It was introduced to Africa by the Portuguese traders through their trade with the African coasts and nearby islands. Africans then further diffused it and now it is found in most parts of Africa. Africans adopted it for several reasons: it is possible to cultivate it in shifting systems, it gives flexible harvest and it is drought resistant."

In Africa, cassava is consumed in different countries like Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Ghana, Mozambique and Congo. In Ghana and Nigeria cassava is produced as a cash crop for urban consumption and its availability in a convenient food form such as gari, it played a major role in the per capita cassava consumption.

Cassava is not fully utilized in South Africa and it is a novice agricultural product. Despite cassava's importance, it is underutilised and its value chain is under developed in South Africa. According to Dr Moses Lubinga, Senior Economist specializing in trade, gave assurance that efforts to develop research projects and facilitate dialogue on the crop have been running but there was still limited knowledge about the cassava value chain and the derived products.

Currently, the crop is largely cultivated by subsistence farmers in rural areas because of its tolerance towards adverse conditions.

The Cassava Project Seminar objectives was to create awareness on the project and share necessary information, especially on how Cassava contributes towards transformation in rural areas and job creation amongst other things.

"In a sense, cassava has created business opportunities like production of phytosanitary approved planting materials, production of cassava tubers, agro-processing, transportation/ logistics, education & training to enhance the capacity of the people as well as designing and developing innovative financial packages that accommodate both the commercial & emerging value chain actors" said Dr Lubinga.

Although cassava is a starch, grown for industrial purposes, it is one of the imported agricultural products in South Africa.

Locally, the volume of cassava tubers and cassava flour has shown an upward trend. Dr Lubinga squashed perceptions about cassava replacing other local starch.

"This project aims to awareness to the consumers about Cassava, but it does not necessarily mean they have to switch from their staple food but rather to give them diverse options" he added. While in KZN, the cassava team also observed that for some people cassava was a source of income, as some sold cassava leaves to bake bread, grills chips etc.

In conclusion, cassava was good for food security and there were plans to expand it to other provinces. The Cassava project is funded through the Technology Innovation Agency programme Agricultural Bio Economy Innovation Partnership Programme.

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