

Women Farmer Organizations Assume Active Role in Cowpea Seed Multiplication in Burkina Faso

Sufficient production of improved varieties of cowpea seed for smallholder farmers to plant at an affordable price is a major constraint to enhancing farmer adoption of the improved varieties necessary to increase grain productivity.

In Burkina Faso, the Institut de l'Environnement et de Recherches Agricoles (INERA) is promoting the production of Quality Declared cowpea seed by farmer organizations, many comprised solely of women, to ensure new cowpea varieties are available for dissemination to smallholder farmers in Burkina Faso's remote cowpea regions.

Numerous cowpea varieties have been bred and released by INERA since 2002 through collaborative research projects between INERA cowpea breeder Dr. Issa Drabo and Drs. Phil Roberts and Jeff Ehlers at the University of California, Riverside, owing to financial support from USAID through the Bean/Cowpea and Dry Grain Pulses CRSPs as well as the Legume Innovation Lab. The improved cowpea varieties (Gourgou, Komcalle, Tiligre, and Nafi) produce large white seeds that receive a premium price from grain traders because of their demand in regional markets and are preferred by farmers because of their resistance to *Striga*.

Within the village of Diouroun near the city of Tougan, six unions of women producers (167 members) are multiplying varieties of cowpea seed preferred by local farmers. Dr. Clementine Dabire, Legume Innovation Lab PI, has provided these women with the



Ramata LALLÉ, president of the *Yibunu* women's organization in Bonou village

technical assistance necessary to ensure disease-free seed production practices, including the crucial control of insect pests that reduce yields and serve as vectors of diseases (e.g., viruses) that are passed from one generation to another via the harvested seed. These women have discovered that they can effectively produce quality, disease-free cowpea seed as a reliable source of income.

The largest and oldest cowpea seed producing farmer organization in Burkina Faso is *Association SONG KOADBA* in Donsin, Oubritenga Province, which has produced Quality Declared Seed (similar in quality to Certified Seed) for approximately 25 years for its 6,700 member farmers, 2,400 of whom are women.

According to KAGAMBEGA Antoine, the organization's technical director, "Two leader farmers in each community are assigned the responsibility of cowpea seed multiplication. These farmers receive training on seed production practices from INERA staff, made possible with USAID support through the Legume Innovation Lab."

Secrets to *SONG KOADBA*'s sustainability and success are its annual priority access to Foundation Seed of the new cowpea varieties with high yield potential from INERA and its ability to sell Quality Declared



Two leaders of women's cowpea seed producers' unions give a presentation on seed multiplication in Diouroun.

seed to member farmers at a fixed price that is near the market price for cowpea grain. In return, INERA receives help in multilocation, on-farm testing of its advanced breeding lines to inform variety release decisions. INERA's experience in Burkina Faso indicates that informal, community-based seed systems can effectively produce quality cowpea seed in sufficient quantities at affordable prices to meet smallholder farmers' needs.

INERA's commitment to outreach, particularly to women-farmer organizations, and to extending productivity-enhancing technologies to smallholder farmers demonstrates a vision for scaling-up technologies and impact that extends beyond the research lab bench.