

Farmer to farmer cassava varietal selection and breeding: The Domasi experience

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Abstract. In the year 2001 there was a national initiative to enhance the economic role of cassava in Malawi. Stakeholders ranging from farmers to entrepreneurs were invited to attend a symposium that provided impetus for nationally promoting the much-neglected cassava. For the resource poor-farmers this initiative could not have come at a more inappropriate time. There was a severe shortage of cassava planting material and some of the preferred varieties were extinct or at the verge of extinction due to pre-emptive harvesting and diseases. For decades, farmers in Domasi had neglected their cassava due to the generous fertiliser subsidies that had up until the early nineties provided high yields of maize. The decline in fertiliser subsidies forced farmers in Domasi to turn to their “old trusted crop”, cassava. Unfortunately, cassava planting material was/is in short supply food shortage a recurrent problem further compounding the situation. Farmers started mobilizing themselves into clubs in order to secure extra income or food production. Through the active involvement of the chiefs, local society and a Christian community based local NGO the farmers in Domasi have together with researchers and farmers from Mulanje introduced “new” local varieties to the area. The 17 varieties are currently under cassava club farmer field experimental condition. In this paper we present the process of forming cassava clubs and an exchange visit with other cassava farmers in Mulanje district that has enabled the Domasi community to breed 17 locally adapted varieties within one year. The paper discusses mechanisms for improving the co-operation between resource-poor farmer’s and formal agricultural research and extension services.