



Cassava production and climate change adaptation in southeast Zimbabwe



The GoZ-UNDP/GEF: **Coping with Drought and Climate Change project** is working with small-holder farmers in Chiredzi district to demonstrate the potential of Cassava (*Manihol esculenta Crantz*) production in drought risk management and climate change adaptation. Demonstration plots have been established in four sites across Matibi II communal lands of Chiredzi district.

Background

Cassava is an important food crop in the tropics, accounting for about 30% of all staple foods produced in sub-Saharan Africa (FAO, 1986). In Zimbabwe cassava production is negligible and has not been the focus of agriculture policy. However, because of economic challenges, declining soil fertility and worsening drought situations, cassava is becoming increasingly important in the food basket and as a buffer against drought shocks.

Cassava has a number of attributes that make it attractive as a crop to promote under any climate change adaptation strategy for southeast Zimbabwe. Southeast Zimbabwe is inherently dry (annual rainfall ranges from 400 – 600 mm) and annual evaporation exceeds 1800 mm. For small-holder farmers with limited resources, cassava provides an excellent insurance against famine.

- Once established, the crop is not easily affected by dry spells and drought.
- Tubers can be left in the ground (unharvested) for long periods as a food reserve.
- The crop is well adapted to multispecies agricultural systems.
- Because of its extensive root system, Cassava can grow in soils too impoverished to support other crops with yields of fresh tuberous roots upto 5-6 t/ha. Under good management yields can be as high as 40-60 t/ha of tuberous roots.
- Cassava tubers can be value added to produce a range of products including livestock feed.

Partners and collaborators

Chiredzi Research Station and the Department of Agriculture, technical and extension services (Agritex) are key partners in this initiative. A strong working relationship has been developed between these institutions and the participating farmers.

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