



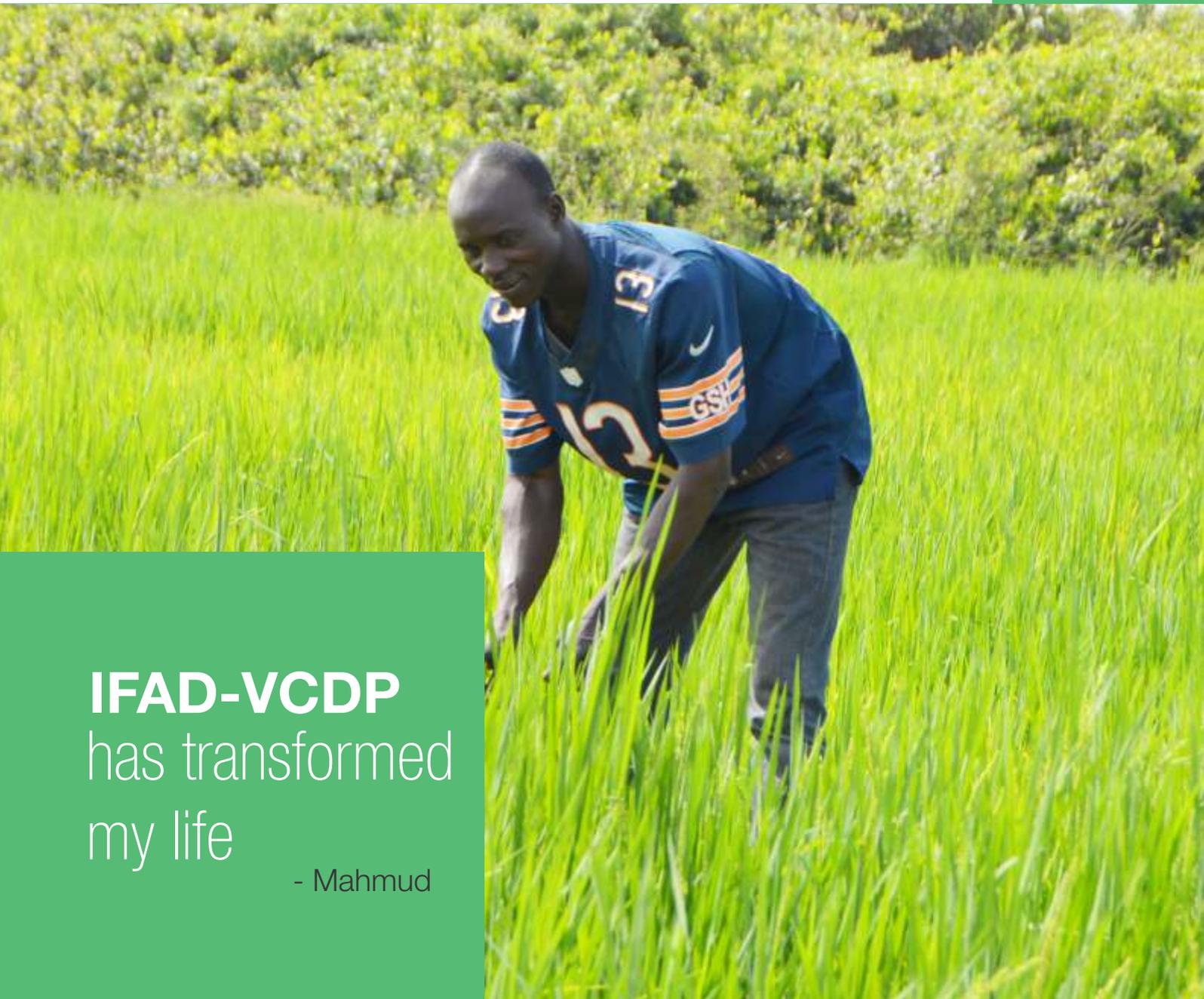
...Enhancing rice and cassava value chains for sustainable agricultural transformation.



Investing in rural people

Success Story

NIGER STATE



## IFAD-VCDP has transformed my life

- Mahmud

**Mahmud Suleiman** is 31, married to one wife and three children. He farms cassava, rice, sorghum and groundnut on four hectares of land. But his rice yield had never given him opportunity to pursue his dream until two years ago.

He farmed rice with his father. By age 11 he actively became a rice farmer, getting around 1.5 tons of rice at each harvest for his labour.

When the Value Chain Development Programme, funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development came for sensitization to get farmers to participate in the programme in his village of Gbakogi, Katcha Local Government Area of Niger State, he joined the 25-member Gbakogi Youth Cooperative.

He had one hectare of land with the cooperative and access to at least three improved rice varieties introduced under the IFAD assisted programme.



continue to build my house. I have started it, and it is close to roofing level.

“When I started, I bought 40 bags of cement at N2,800 each for making blocks, I paid N20,000 for labourers to remove blocks, N7,000 for water, N52,000 to the bricklayer for his work. It is all written on record. All this money is from rice,” Mahmud said.

He still plants one crop of rice each year, because his community doesn't have a dam to support irrigation or tube wells from where he can pump water onto his farm.

“This year I planted my own one hectare and I expect up to 6.5 tons at harvest,” he said.

It will be his second year of harvest from growing rice using improved seeds.

“They brought varieties like Faro 44, Faro 57 and Faro 52. We used Faro 44 and saw our yield increase exponentially,” Mahmud said.

“The local variety takes longer time to mature than Faro 44. Before, we get 1.5 tons from one hectare. But in 2015, when we tried it, we got almost 4 tons from each hectare.”

The harvest rapidly increased his income that year and helped him start chasing his dreams.

“I made more money from the harvest, I bought a motorcycle worth N250,000 and started building my house,” he said. It is a nine-bedroom home where he wants to live with his wife and five children. He keeps back some bags of rice for his family use. Others he sells off to Onyx Rice Mill.

“Last year [2016], I harvested almost 6.0 tons. I sold 4.5 tons and bought building materials to

have changed my life. IFAD took me for trainings in good agronomic practice, and I made something meaningful of myself.

“IFAD assists us with inputs fertilisers seeds, but it won't always be there. I know about good practice in farming, transplanting, good seed varieties, fertiliser, water management, where to sell. If IFAD is not there tomorrow, since I have got knowledge from IFAD, I will continue doing my work,” he said.

And it is work and knowledge he wants to pass on to his children, if they decide to follow in his footsteps and turn to agriculture.

“When my child grows up and wants to be a farmer like me, I will teach him what I learnt from IFAD—tell him what our fathers taught us and what IFAD taught us, and which one is better.”

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## Camping to **SAVE HARVEST** and **ADD VALUE**

On land the size of a quarter of a football pitch, men, women and children work as a colony. Young men numbering up to 45 dig the ground, lobbing huge tubers of cassava into a van. The van lumbers to base where a batch of women peels the tubers; another batch washes and sends the tubers to mill. Every stage of the process is manned by a fresh batch of hands. Almost last, 18 women sit in front of burning hearths, stirring and sifting the final product - hot yellow garri.

It's a concentration work camp—that is how cassava growers of Zakeya cooperative in Kataeregi, Katcha local government area of Niger state have resolved to rescue their harvest from ruin.

When rains washed out a bridge linking them to other villages, the off-taker committed to buying their produce via a market linkage agreement facilitated by the Value Chain Development Programme had difficulty coming across.

Zakeya cooperative had 30 hectares of land cultivated with cassava out of a total 50: it had to sell its harvest, save cost or face ruin.

“What we want to avoid is much expenses,” said Silas Yisa, who chairs the cooperative of 20 members.

“We would have taken it to Bida to process. But if we transfer cassava, a pickup from here to Bida is N8,000 for transport. You have to get diggers and loaders and pay all of them. At the cooperative, we met and thought to bring every processing stage to the farm and do everything here.”

They even sleep there. One set of women and children cook in communal pots for everyone. And they will be there for at least a week until the first batch of harvest is processed, return to their homes for a week of rest and then head back to the farm work camp.

Deborah Paul leads the women in cooking. She also shares out tasks to different groups of women from different surrounding villages who have come to join the camp.

On their first day of communal work, the camp produced 12 bags of garri [each 50kg], working day and night. The next day, the men set up a strip of electric cable connected to a power generator to light up the camp so men can work by night. Their task is to man the jack presses to dewater the ground cassava. By morning the women begin frying.

“After this, they have to go take a rest,” Simon Jiya, who leads the 45 young men digging the ground and uprooting cassava tubers.

“They can't stay here for a month. We have to be very careful about frying garri. It involves money. We have to raise some money for another camp work before you can call them back.”

It will be work all over, but their harvest would be safe.

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## Meeting the challenge of improved seeds for planting

Ismaila Reza is running a business that's helping his community of Bankogi Gwari in Wushishi local government area of Niger state overcome the challenge of getting improved-quality rice seeds for planting.

The 28-year-old is one of a few rice seed entrepreneurs catering to the community's need for improved rice seeds to push out use of old, lower quality rice seeds from the market.

“Our main challenge is seed,” said Reza.

“IFAD gave me opportunity to produce seeds for my community and the local government areas. Not even just Wushishi. The entire Niger state has challenge of rice seeds.”

IFAD is the International Fund for Agricultural Development, which funds the Value Chain Development Programme (VCDP) to improve agricultural value chain in Niger and five other states.

“What we used to plant is paddy, not seed. But now we have good certified seeds that perform well,” said Reza.

That meant switching from 'Washagi', the common rice variety previously grown by farmers in the community, to Faro rice varieties 44, and 52.

Reza joined Nasara Gwari Bankogi cooperative, which enabled him to get training by AfricaRice under IFAD –VCDP to become a rice seed entrepreneur.



On his farm in Bankogi, he chose a portion protected from cattle intrusion to make his nursery bed. Each planting season, he hires at least 10 hands to help with field work, and pays them N1,000 for six-hour work.

He got his improved breeder seeds from the National Crop Research Institute at a 50% subsidy, seeded 7kg of Faro 52, then transplanted, making sure to stick to required spacing of 20cm by 20cm.

“I applied NPK and allowed it to tiller. I sprayed my selective herbicides and now insecticide to prevent insects from attacking the grains,” said Reza.

He expects to harvest — and packaging them is next.

IFAD buys seeds off Reza to sell as foundation seeds to rice growers across the region.

“Now I am the supplier. I don't produce paddy anymore, I produce seeds now. It wasn't a mistake shifting to seed production. Our challenge is seed,” said Reza.

“I am making more from producing seed than paddy. I harvested 2.9 tons from 0.5 hectares and earned N1.1 million because I sold each kg at N400.

“I live in my family house, but with this money I have started my own building. I sent my two children and two siblings to private school and bought a motorcycle.

“For now, I am contributing more to the family. I am not the head of the household, but I feel better than before. Previously I have the intention of contributing, but I never had the means. But with the coming of IFAD, I have full hope of doing anything to help my family and community.”

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# Market linkage changed my life

-Mohammed



Mohammed Ndagi, 50, has grown cassava nearly all his life but never had the sort of success he prayed for. The key to his success was a ready market to sell off his harvest produce.

He has three wives, 15 children and grew rice and cassava on 15 hectares of land along Lemu road in Ndakama, Bida local government area of Niger state. But the payoff wasn't commensurate with the effort he put into the land.

"I have planted cassava for almost 40 years. It looked as if I haven't made any achievement," he said of his past life. There was no method or plan to upgrade or make tangible return or output."  
"Sure, I have wives and children. I feed them and clothe them. But I was not rich. All what I produced ended in consumption. I didn't have a car, not even a fine house."

“You have a very large farm and at the end of the day you can't achieve much. It is a waste of your time and resources” said Ndagi.

That changed with the intervention of the Value Chain Development Programme, assisted by the International Fund for Agricultural Development. One of its objectives is to help farmers increase their productivity and provide a ready market for produce, right on the farm.

Ndagi is among 25 cassava growers in Ndakama who formed the Ndakama cooperative in Bida—putting them in line to get improved cassava variety TME 419. “Marketing of our produce was a big challenge to us. We produced and nobody bought. Some got wasted, others were eaten by animals. No matter how much you produce, when there is no one to buy it, at the end of the day, it is a waste,” said Ndagi.

The change has been gradual in the last six years, with extension services reaching farmers in his community to teach them to change their “olden practice to new methods of doing things”, he said.

“Not that we weren't getting harvest, but we needed to increase in quantity and getting links to market which was our critical challenge in the last six years.”

With good agronomic practice, his cassava yield has increased, and he sells it off to off takers brought to his community through VCDP intervention.

“It was one of the things that got customers coming. The old varieties are still there but they are fading away. I have some still but only for comparison,” said Ndagi.

“If you follow the right practice, plant at the right time, keep proper spacing, weed and fertilise at the right time, when you uproot one cassava stem, you will shout. The variety from IFAD, you will think it is yam.”

Ndagi didn't just have the right product for a market; he also had a ready market for his produce.

“It has upgraded me. It changed me from poverty to grace,” he said. “I don't regret my years of farming, when I look at what I have achieved.”

“Come to my home. I have built a new house, a four-bedroom house. I have a car. I even married a new wife.” He took on a new third wife, after his wife passed away months ago.

He is proud to show off his children and emphasises how well-fed they look. Their diet has changed for the better since the family's income began improving.

The profit from his produce has helped him upgrade his cassava processing business.

“What I produce cannot feed my processing mill. Sometimes nine or 10 people a day come with truckloads of cassava for milling,” he boasted.

Some of his profit is put away to buy stems for future planting seasons. And he also gifts some tubers to neighbours. Growing cassava has never been better, and Ndagi is proud to show it off.



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