Enhancing national food security through cassava and sweet potatoes access

Farm Concern International (FCI) successfully implemented a Cassava Village Processing Project (CVPP) in three years in Kenya and Tanzania. This project involved 54,000 farmers in 214 commercial villages and increased yields per acre to 9MT up from 5MT. The project also enabled village based seed multipliers to produce a total of 40,013,000 improved cassava cuttings. In the process, smallholder farmers in the Commercial Villages (CVs) gained revenues of up to USD 26,622,623.2 (KES 2,644,600,000) from cassava-related trade.

The CVPP project generated frontline evidence of the huge market potential for cassava as a mainstream raw material in leading food, animal feed and industrial market segments in East Africa.

This tremendous success created the need to scale up the project to target more farmers as well as to include sweet potato value chain. This in turn led to a new three-year project, titled Expanded-Cassava Village Processing Project (E-CVPP), with the aim of increasing smallholder farmers’ productivity and market access for cassava and sweet potatoes in the target areas of Kenya and Tanzania. The project is funded by Alliance for Green Africa Revolution (AGRA).

Significance of the Project

The Ministry of Agriculture, through National Policy on Cassava Industry 2007, have indicated that the production levels of cassava in Kenya do not sustain the demand for both food and industrial use. On the other hand, sweet potato is an important food security crop for many Kenyans, whose staple diet is based on cereals particularly maize.

Although traditionally, sweet potato has been regarded as a subsistence crop, it is increasingly being produced for commercial purposes. It is mainly consumed fresh with little processing. In 2011, the total hectares under this crop were about 61,902 producing 759,471MT, with marginal changes in hectares from year to year (FAOSTAT, 2013). It is against this
background that E-CVPP intends to align cassava and sweet potato production and market linkages to meet this increasing demand.

In implementing the E-CVPP project, the production of cassava value chain will absorb some of the pressure on the maize value chain such as animal feed manufacturers, and, eventually, free maize for human consumption.

Given that maize production has steadily declined due to factors such as climatic change, promoting cassava and sweet potato production will not only earn the farmers income, but it will also contribute towards national food security.

These crops are resistant to harsh climatic conditions compared to maize and can thrive in many parts of the country. The government may need to include processed cassava and sweet potatoes in the national food reserves. The over 75,000 farmers mobilized through this project will guarantee the reliable infrastructure required to facilitate such a trade.