

Cassava Matters Success stories

Building an Economically Sustainable Integrated Cassava Seed System, Phase 2 (BASICS-II)

Farming and faith in action: A Reverend Sister's journey as a cassava seed entrepreneur



Rev. Sister Lilian Chibuiko on her cassava seed field.

A story about empowerment, transformation, and faith in action. Through her work in education and cassava farming, Reverend Sister Lilian Chibuiko is using proceeds from the cassava seed business to shape the future of farmers and school children in her community.

Rev. Sister Lilian Ifeoma Chibuiko serves as the principal of Mercy Technical High School in Umukolo, Esiala Ngwa North Local Government, Abia State,

Nigeria. Her dedication to education is just one aspect of her inspiring life. Beyond the school walls, Sister Lilian is a cassava farmer, an occupation she has used to effect positive change in her community.

Sister Lilian's journey into the cassava seed business began in 2018 when a strategic visit from the National Root Crops Research Institute (NRCRI), under the BASICS-II project, introduced her to the world of cassava cultivation. The team visited her community to sensitize farmers about new and improved cassava farming technologies and invited them to a training on cassava seed entrepreneurship at the institute in Umudike.

Inspired by the testimonies of other farmers, Sister Lilian decided to join the training, which soon motivated her to start her own cassava seed business. "I started with just one hectare," she recalls, "but as I gained more knowledge, I expanded. By the following year, I had two hectares. Now, I have four hectares of cassava, and I'm helping others do the same."

In the years that followed, Sister Lilian's cassava seed business flourished. In 2023 alone, she cultivated four hectares and sold 2,000 bundles of cassava stems at N1,500 per bundle. But it wasn't just the size of her farm that changed. Through continuous training and networking with other cassava seed entrepreneurs, the Reverend Sister became an important figure in her community's cassava farming network.

On why she is an important source of quality stems in the community and beyond, despite the presence of some agrodealers selling stems, Sister



Rev. Sister Lilian Chibuiko sits in front of her office block at Mercy Technical High School in Umukolo, Esiala Ngwa North Local Government, Abia State, Nigeria

Lilian explains: “My cassava stems are certified,” and that is the key difference between my cassava stems and those sold by roadside dealers. As a commercial seed entrepreneur certified by the National Agricultural Seed Council, I plant foundation seeds, which I get from Umudike Seeds and I sell certified stems to farmers who want better quality and higher yields. This commitment to quality has earned me the trust of local farmers”.

The financial benefits of the seed business were quite huge, but as a Reverend Sister, her satisfaction comes less from smiling to the bank and more from having resources for charity in the form of developing Mercy Technical High School, where she is the principal. For instance, in 2024, profits from her cassava seed farm were channeled to the roofing of a new laboratory building in the school.

“I am grateful because the cassava seed business has helped me touch people’s lives as well as that of my family,” she says. “For instance, I was able to support my family to bury my brother, who died recently. I am able to help people when they come for help. There is nothing more satisfying than that.”



Revd. Sister Lilian Chibuiko shows off another portion of her cassava seed field.

Sister Lilian, however, notes that the journey albeit successful, has not been without challenges. She recalls how difficult it was to network with other farmers and seed entrepreneurs in the beginning, but she later leveraged the connections. “One of such connections helped me get the support of a colleague who brought a tractor to work on my farm, and it made a lot of difference,” she recounts.

Looking into the future, Sister Lilian has big plans. One of them is growing the community of cassava seed entrepreneurs in her local government. “I’ve started expanding to the community up to Okigwe, she reveals. “I’ve already scheduled a training for many people who are interested and eager to learn. I am also aiming to increase my farm size to over 10 hectares by 2025.”



Revd Sister Lilian Chibuiko with members of her staff at Mercy Technical School as well as BASICS-II team members.

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