

## Women Farmer Organizations Assume Active Role in Cowpea Seed Multiplication in Burkina Faso

Production of quality seed of improved varieties of cowpea and rural smallholder farmer access to such quality seed at affordable prices are major constraints to enhancing farmer adoption of the improved varieties necessary to increase on-farm grain legume productivity.

In Burkina Faso, the Institut de l'Environnement et de Recherches Agricoles (INERA) is promoting the production of Quality Declared cowpea seed by farmer organizations, many comprised solely of women, to ensure that new, improved cowpea varieties are being disseminated to smallholder farmers for planting in remote cowpea regions of the country.

Numerous cowpea varieties have been bred and released by INERA since 2002 through collaborative research projects between INERA cowpea breeder Dr. Issa Drabo and scientists at the University of California, Riverside (Drs. Phil Roberts, PI, and Jeff Ehlers, U.S. collaborator, *Genetic Improvement of Cowpea to Overcome Drought and Biotic Constraints to Grain Productivity*), owing to financial support from USAID through the Bean/Cowpea and Dry Grain Pulses CRSPs as well as the current Legume Innovation Lab. The new, improved cowpea varieties (e.g., Gourgou, Komcalle, Tiligre, and Nafi) produce large white seeds that receive a premium price from grain traders because of their demand in regional markets and are preferred by farmers because of their resistance to *Striga*, a parasitic weed that attacks cowpea in West Africa.



Ramata LALLÉ, president of the two-year old *Yibunu* women's organization in Bonou village, a subgroup of the *Association YIYÉ des femmes du Sourou*

Within the village of Diouroun near the city of Tougan, six unions of women producers (167 total members) are multiplying varieties of cowpea seed preferred by local farmers. Dr. Clementine Dabire, INERA entomologist and extension specialist and Legume Innovation Lab PI, has provided these women with the technical assistance necessary to ensure good, healthy seed production practices. A major challenge to disease-free seed production is the control of insect pests that not only reduce yields but serve as vectors of diseases (e.g., viruses) that can be passed from one generation to another via the harvested seed. These women have discovered that they can effectively produce quality, disease-free cowpea seed as a reliable source of income.

Ramata LALLÉ, president of the two-year old *Yibunu* women's organization in Bonou village, a subgroup of the *Association YIYÉ des femmes du Sourou*, recently asked the village chief that

additional land be allocated to women to produce more cowpea seed, for which local farmer demand is high.

The largest and longest functioning cowpea seed producing farmer organization in Burkina Faso is *Association SONG KOADBA*, located in Donsin, Oubritenga Province. This organization has been producing Quality Declared Seed (similar in quality to Certified Seed) for approximately 25 years for its 6,700 member farmers, 2,400 of whom are women. According to KAGAMBEGA Antoine, the organization's technical director, two leader farmers in each community are assigned the responsibility of cowpea seed multiplication. These farmers then receive training on seed production practices from INERA staff, made possible with USAID support through the CRSPs and the Legume Innovation Lab. In return, INERA receives help in multilocation, on-farm testing of its advanced breeding lines to inform variety release decisions. Secrets to the organization's sustainability and success are (1) the organization's priority access each year to Foundation Seed of the new cowpea varieties with high yield potential from INERA, which enables the farmers to be competitive, and (2) the organization's ability to sell the Quality Declared Seed to member farmers at a fixed price (600 CFA), which is near market price for grain.

The experience of INERA in Burkina Faso indicates that informal, community-based seed systems can effectively produce quality cowpea seed in sufficient quantities at affordable prices to meet the needs of smallholder farmers. Due to the increased management requirements of seed production on limited land area, seed production is an ideal, income-generating enterprise for women farmers.

INERA is to be commended for its commitment to outreach, in particular to women-farmer organizations, and to extending productivity-enhancing technologies to smallholder farmers. Their institution's example demonstrates a vision for scaling-up technologies and impact that extends beyond the research lab bench.