

What is Innovation Platform (IP)?

- IP is an approach that brings together actors from different stages of an agricultural value chain to collectively identify win-win solutions and take action after analyzing their socio-economic and environmental conditions in relation to their livelihoods and roles in the value chain.
- In Zambia, IP was used to demonstrate the importance of and share knowledge in using disease-free improved cassava varieties and management techniques as well as to encourage and expand their uptake.
- IP participants included farmers, traders, transporters, processors, industries, bankers, policy makers, traditional leaders, and landowners within the cassava value chain.



Figure 1: (clockwise, from top left) Stakeholders at Mungwi, Mpika, Mwinilunga, and Mbala districts during IP mobilization workshops

How were cassava IPs organized in Zambia?

- The main stages in establishing the IPs are: (1) mobilization through workshops; (2) identification of key constraints and opportunities; and (3) planning and implementation.
- IITA, with partners, began by conducting a number of on-farm trials that compared improved varieties using clean planting materials versus the local varieties involving mostly farmers, processors, and extension staff at district and camp levels.
- IITA then facilitated mobilization meetings within the communities to discuss the approach and the technologies to be tested.
- Stakeholders, primarily farmer-beneficiaries, were involved in participatory monitoring and evaluation of the deployed technologies throughout the learning cycle.



Fig. 2. Farmers with extension staff participating in the evaluation of new varieties in Serenje district.

Was the IP approach effective?

- From the introduction of IPs, more Zambian farmers have embraced the cultivation of cassava (maize is the main staple in the country).
- More than 1500 stakeholders have attended IP meetings.
- Cassava farmers liked the approach as it linked them with actual markets.
- For example, the IP from Mansa district has been linked to Zambia Breweries, a company that requires 1600 tons of dried cassava chips per month.
- An MoU has been signed involving 16 multi-disciplinary institutional stakeholders to commit to combine resources to increase the production and use of cassava flour and starch to promote the cassava industry.
- This network is working closely with the IPs established in the different districts to produce clean planting materials of improved varieties for increased production.
- Smallholder farmers have thus embraced clean seed production as a business. The 2015-16 planting season saw a marked increase in available planting material and seed production compared to the previous season in all districts.
- The main cassava-producing districts where IPs operate recorded increases in seed production ranging from 78% to about 93% in the 2015/2016 planting season (Figure 3).

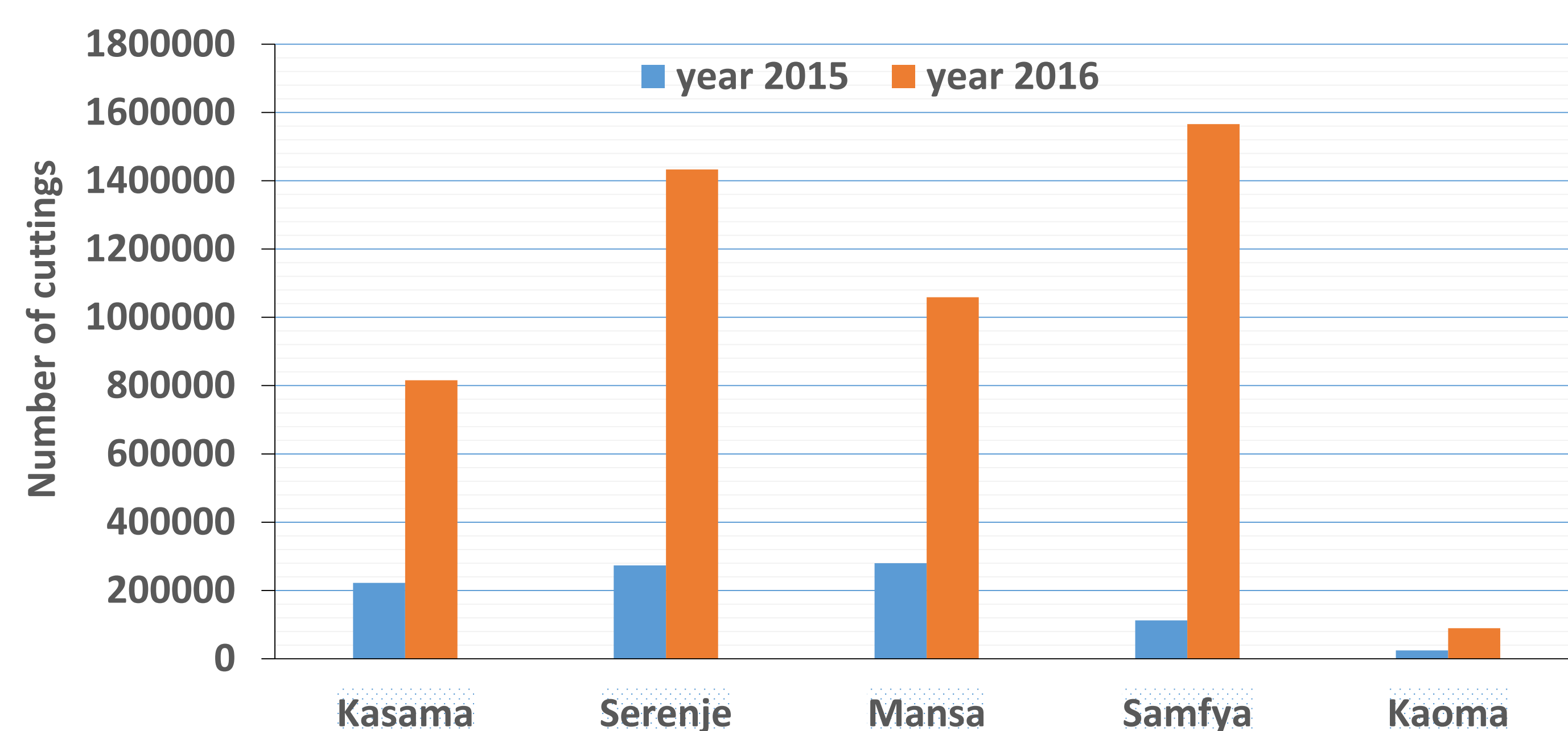


Figure 3: Trend in seed production increase across Kasama, Serenje, Mansa, Samfya, and Kaoma Districts in Zambia (2015 and 2016).

So, what's next for cassava IP in Zambia?

- Facilitate more training in cassava pest identification, good agronomic practices, and seed production, which can improve the quality of seed produced by farmers and, in turn, allow farmers access to more formal seed markets.
- Facilitate better access to foundation seed of improved cassava cultivars to help farmers wean away from using traditional low-yielding and disease-prone varieties.
- Facilitate capacity building of extension staff; to provide services such as on routine field inspections that ensure farmers comply to standards of seed production and seed certification.
- Provide an avenue to advocate for legislation that would strengthen Zambia's national seeds regulatory mechanisms to address seeds-related production issues such as the sale of uncertified planting materials.
- As way of scaling out, the Zambia farmers associations of cassava (ZANACA) is facilitating the process of bring stakeholders together.