

Which pathways for thriving tuber value chains in West Africa

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Abstract: *The agroecological transition influencing food systems in Africa is mainly studied at farm level, while it is affected by changes in markets, processing and trade. This is the reason of the focus of this paper on a few cases of agricultural growth-poles and small-scale enterprise clusters in the root and tuber sector. Yam value chains and clusters have been suffering from a lack of interest from policy makers and research. Cassava as a pillar of an “African green Revolution” has benefited from more support and innovation and has been recently promoted as a raw material for starch and ethanol industries. Small scale clusters expanded, diversified their processing, and their performances improved at a slow but steady pace, so that they still meet a growing regional consumers’ demand for a range of cassava derived food. In parallel, African States attract large-scale processing industries through massive public investments into chosen production areas, turning these into “growth poles”. Large-scale plants set up their own farms coupled with out-grower schemes and are expected to attract secondary industries as well. Several development approaches promote more patient upgrading of the existing small-scale clusters. Innovative private or social enterprises engage in segments, where they do not compete with existing small processing and farming units and add additional value or open new markets to the cluster products. This third way may not be so spectacular, but it is more flexible and less disruptive than growth poles. Ultimately, large industries may get the required supply and consumers, new and more convenient food products. Lessons should be driven from systematic comparisons of on-going initiatives on their outcomes on transition pathways towards sustainable food systems.*

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