

# Preface

---

In the relatively short time since cassava arrived from South America, it has been introduced into all the tropical countries of Africa and Asia. In at least some parts of many of these countries, it is the main source of nutritional calories for the rural population. The epidemic of cassava mosaic disease in Uganda during the 1990s has focused attention on the reliance on cassava, of much of the rural population in northern Uganda and the neighbouring countries, now threatened by the epidemic.

In addition to its use as a food crop for local consumption, in some parts of the world cassava is widely used in processed foods. If new markets can be created for these products, as is happening in South America and to some extent in parts of Asia, cassava may increasingly be perceived as a cash crop with the potential to improve living standards for rural communities in the tropics which depend on agriculture for their livelihood.

Cassava can be very easily propagated and its capacity to produce some yield in a wide range of environments and under conditions of low rainfall and poor soil makes it an excellent subsistence crop. The increases in cassava cultivation that have been seen in Africa during the last decade of the 20th century may have been a response to declining soil fertility. It is almost certain that this, combined with the increased cost of fertilizer brought about by withdrawal of subsidies on agricultural inputs under structural adjustment policies, created the demand for the fourfold increase in cassava production reported in Malawi, for instance, during the 1990s. Although cassava can produce some yield under adverse conditions and with low levels of management, the increased yields that will be required to meet the expected population growth in the coming decades, particularly in Africa, will require a higher standard of agricultural management.

Alone among the world's major crops there, was until now, no monograph on cassava covering all the areas where it is grown. This is all the more surprising in view of its worldwide distribution and increasing importance in Africa as a food security crop. This then was the motivation in 1996 that brought the editors together to begin work on the book.

The global mandate for cassava research and breeding is divided between CIAT, Colombia and IITA, Nigeria. Several of the book's contributors are members, or, former members of one or, other of those international centres. The other contributors represent advanced research institutes or universities, with long histories of involvement in cassava research. The 15 chapters together provide

a comprehensive review of cassava that will be a valuable resource for researchers, extensionists and students of tropical agriculture.

Rory Hillocks, Mike Thresh and Tony Bellotti  
December 2000