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**“Mobilizing Science and Technology for Development: The
Case of the Cassava Biotechnology Network (CBN)”**

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ABSTRACT

Cassava is part of the daily meal of 600 million people in tropical regions and a cash crop that has the potential to get subsistence farmers out of poverty, particularly in Africa. It is regarded as the crop of last resort for millions of marginal farmers and their domestic animals in Africa because it grows on poor soils, is more resistant to crop failure, does not require any significant amount of input and allows for flexible harvesting (the roots can be left untouched in the soil for up to one year).

Despite its importance, cassava is a typical orphan crop that has not attracted significant private sector investments. Moreover, there are only a handful of advanced research institutes involved in cassava research worldwide. The Cassava Biotechnology Network (CBN) brings together, biotechnologists, geneticists, soil scientists, entomologists and social scientists (among others) from all over the world to help solve problems in cassava research, development and marketing.

This study investigates the challenges and opportunities CBN faces in dealing with the problems of cassava as a cash and food crop in Africa. A cross-national expert survey was conducted in October 2003 with stakeholders from the United States, Switzerland, Nigeria, Colombia and Brazil involved in cassava research, production, development and marketing. The results demonstrate that the modern tools of biotechnology are already addressing important problems in cassava subsistence agriculture and they provide new business opportunities for local entrepreneurs in developing countries. The study concludes that CBN's

flexible problem- and product-oriented approach managed to overcome mutual distrust among scientific disciplines (e.g. agro-ecologists vs. molecular biologists) and local political stakeholders (NGOs vs. business representatives) and consequently contributes to the successful mobilization of science and technology for rural development.