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MOZAMBIQUE

SUCCESS STORY

Innovations Help Tree Nurseries Thrive

New crops and planting methods revitalize farms in rural Mozambique



Photo: USAID/Melissa Thompson

In rural Mozambique, Manuel Capena, left, and Carlitos Manuel inspect a cashew plant grown using a method they developed.

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Like most rural Mozambicans, Carlitos Manuel and Manuel Capena spent their lives as subsistence farmers, struggling to grow enough food to feed their families. Even after Mozambique's 16-year civil war ended in 1992, government services never reached their village of Mualua in Zambezia Province — a place so remote that the residents themselves had to clear a dirt road to link it to the outside world. Lacking the resources to modernize their farms, Carlitos and Manuel used old, inefficient methods to sow familiar crops, such as corn and peanuts, even though Mozambique had been the world's leading supplier of cashews until the 1970s.

USAID has reached more than 200,000 rural families with a program that aims to help small farmers produce more food, increase household incomes and reduce malnutrition. In Mualua, technicians showed farmers how to improve yields and diversify their food supply with nutritious crops like orange-fleshed sweet potato. USAID also sent Manuel to attend a course at a tree nursery to learn plant-grafting techniques that would produce high-quality cashew and citrus trees — potentially lucrative sources of income for small farmers.

After his training, Carlitos worked with Manuel to start a community nursery — one of 212 created in Zambezia Province in recent years. With the improved planting materials provided by USAID, the nurseries produce tree seedlings that village farmers are now using to start their own cashew and citrus crops. To eliminate theft of the seedlings, Manuel and Carlitos began experimenting with a new planting method, which set the trees directly in the ground, eliminating the need for costly and hard-to-find plastic bags. The method not only worked, it used less water, cost less and had a higher plant survival rate.

With USAID's help, 7,500 area farmers are now raising cashew and citrus trees. In 2004, Mualua farmers planted 4,000 cashew seedlings without plastic bags and had a 90-percent survival rate. They also advise other villages on the new planting method. The Mualua farmers have also improved yields of their other crops and now market them together in bulk, giving them additional bargaining power. "We already are earning more by selling our traditional crops like corn as a group, and we plan to earn a lot of money in the future with fruit and cashews," says Carlitos.