

Maize research reduces poverty in west and central Africa

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An analysis of three and half decades of maize research in African farming communities finds big benefits. A multi-country study, in *Agricultural Economics*, reports the significant role international maize research plays in reducing poverty. It finds that since the mid-1990s, more than one million people per year have escaped poverty through the adoption of new maize varieties.

Key economic benefits from [maize](#) research are primarily the result of the productivity gains farmers experience after adopting modern varieties. While notably scant prior to the 1980s, the percentage of MVs found in a maize area grew from 5 % in the 1970s to 60% in 2005. The study results suggest that without research to maintain or increase maize yields, [poverty](#) in the region would be substantially worse.

For example, for every \$1 million invested in this type of research at The International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), at least 35,000 people were lifted out of poverty, reports author Arega Alene of IITA ("The Economic and Poverty Impacts of Maize Research in West and Central Africa").

Alene examines the relationship between variety performance and adoption patterns to estimate the benefits of maize research in West and Central [Africa](#) during the past three and half decades. Results are drawn from multiple surveys of research conducted between 1981 and 2005 by IITA, the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT), and the national agricultural research systems (NARS).

Social rates of return on public investments in maize research in the region were also considerable.

The countries surveyed account for about 85% of maize production in the region. Questionnaire surveys were conducted with managers, breeders, economists, and representatives of maize research institutes and seed production agencies.

Alene concludes that more must be done to enhance the impact of maize research. Affordability and accessibility for farmers to various complementary inputs, such as improved seed and fertilizer, are critical factors for sustainable poverty reduction.

More information: To view the abstract for this study article, please visit [www3.interscience.wiley.com/jo ... ct?CRETRY=1&SRETRY=0](http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/jo...ct?CRETRY=1&SRETRY=0)

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