

Improving the Fertilizer Link in the Agriculture Value Chain

The harvests of Ames Gounhossou, a maize farmer in Togo, increased by eight times when she began mixing NPK, urea, and organic matter after a cover crop of mucuna. Gounhossou was previously unable to save her produce, but her farmer group now maintains a storage facility that holds 10 tons of grain. Stored grain serves as collateral for microcredit, because a bag of maize that brings \$7.50 at harvest can be sold later for about \$26.



“There are problems in moving from subsistence farming to commercial farming with higher production and added value,” says Robert Groot, Director of IFDC’s Africa Division. Inputs like fertilizer are expensive and often not available at the right moment, while farm product prices at harvest are often low.

IFDC has learned that combining the following five interlinked elements in a market-oriented program can improve farmers’ livelihoods:

- Demonstrate that fertilizer use is profitable.
- Develop the ability of fertilizer dealers to increase business and services.
- Strengthen commodity chains through linking farmers to input and product markets, thus adding value to agricultural products.
- Improve access to market information.
- Strengthen national and regional policies to encourage trade and investment.

IFDC has obtained funding from a variety of donors, including IFA, to promote integrated soil fertility management (ISFM) to improve both the efficiency and profitability of fertilizer use. As a result of pilot efforts in 16 regions of West Africa, more than 100,000 farm families in 2005 were using ISFM techniques that enhance soil fertility, fertilizer use efficiency, productivity, and income. The Dutch government recently agreed to provide funding to scale up to reach a million farm families, numbering about 10 million people.