



An International Center
for Soil Fertility and
Agricultural Development

Success Story

Elisabeth Robert—Profile of a Transformed Life

A woman farmer—Elisabeth Robert from the small village of Ahohoue, Benin, joined the Integrated Soil Fertility Management (ISFM) project to learn about new technologies that improve soil productivity and to purchase fertilizer on credit. Elisabeth applies a rotation of maize and cowpeas on her eight fields. Maize, sometimes intercropped with cassava, is grown during the first ‘long’ rainy season; cowpeas are cultivated in the ‘short’ season thereafter. Instead of cowpeas she occasionally grows a cover crop of mucuna, which produces a lot of biomass that she recycles into the soil just before the next season. The cover crop also kills the weeds. Every year she decides on which field she will grow mucuna to improve or as she says to ‘revive’ the soil. Elisabeth is not so much affected by land insecurity. She owns most of the fields. Only two fields are rented. The owners however cannot take the rented land away after they see that it is productive. Elisabeth can farm on these fields during a well-defined period, expressed either in years or in terms of the length of the oil palm trunks. These periods vary generally between 5 and 15 years. She therefore is not so much upset to return rented land to its owner since she sees for herself how quickly the results occur. Elisabeth has learned a lot from working in the ISFM project, from the experiments she carries out, and from the exchange of experiences and ideas among the participating farmers. The support of the extension agent living in the village has also been important, in particular at the start of Elisabeth’s involvement in the project. She always makes a profit unless the rainfall is catastrophic. Normal years are always profitable. She feels better about herself; she now has a “say” in family matters. Her work has changed the lives of her family. Elisabeth has benefited from IFDC’s ISFM project; with the profits from her farm, she has built two small houses, bought two bicycles and more clothes, and is now able to educate her four children.

