

A FIPS-Africa Cocoa *Wakala* becomes a local celebrity with his agricultural extension radio show

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FIPS-Africa, with support from Irish Aid, has established a network of Village-based Agricultural Advisors in Kyela district to demonstrate improved cocoa farming methods to local farmers. These '*Wakala*' (the Swahili word for agent) are typically hard-working, young farmers who are keen to help their community, while also earning money. The *Wakala* are contracted by FIPS-Africa to demonstrate cocoa tree pruning to 50 farmers every month. FIPS-Africa also supplies *Wakala* with packs of improved seed and fertilizer, which they sell to farmers. Farmers benefit as they can buy farm inputs more cheaply than if they had to travel to an agrodealer, and they now receive advice from the *Wakala* on how to use the inputs at the same time.

Sharif Mwamatandala is one of the 100 *Wakala* working for FIPS-Africa in Kyela district. Before he joined FIPS-Africa, Sharif was a little-known carpenter in Kikusya village, Itope ward. Today he is a famous person in Kyela district as he hosts a radio show on Kyela FM.



Image: Sharif Mwamatandala demonstrating how to clear dead plant material from around the cocoa tree. The tree is producing many healthy pods, a huge improvement on the situation when FIPS-Africa first came to Kyela. Kikusya village, Itope ward.: 514m, S09.53240, E033.80653

Working closely with the local government, FIPS-Africa recruited the *Wakalas* and trained them to prune and clean cocoa trees to improve their productivity. After this training, Sharif has managed to treble his cocoa production and has managed to build a house with the profit from cocoa sales! Two years ago he used to get Tshs. 700,000 (411 USD) a year while now he gets Tshs. 1.6 million (941 USD). "When I started to practise what I preach in the villages, my cocoa production shot up", says Sharif.

In December 2010, Sharif was invited by Kyela FM to host a farmer's show once every week. He slowly rose from a little-known carpenter to a radio development programme celebrity. His show is popular because it covers diverse issues related to crop production. He usually hosts experts in specific areas of production depending on the subject of discussion. Having a background of being a FIPS-Africa *Wakala* helps a great deal; he can talk about poultry vaccination, cocoa pruning and cleaning, rice farming and maize production with authority.

Cocoa tree pruning is not a novel technology: the older people in Kyela remember being told to prune when cocoa was first introduced to Kyela in the 1960s. However, in the absence of extension services, the practice was not passed on to younger generations. The older farmers are grateful that FIPS-Africa has reminded them about this traditional practice, as well as educating the younger people!

Irish Aid's support has enabled thousands of farmers in Kyela to learn about improved cocoa management methods. Sharif says most farmers in his village now understand the importance of pruning cocoa. He is pleased that, after he demonstrated the technique, some farmers are pruning their own trees themselves. Other farmers prefer to hire his services as a professional.

Mrs. Sofia Mwambene is one of the many beneficiaries of Sharif's extension work. Before her plantation was pruned, the mother of nine harvested only 1 kg of cocoa beans a week. Her income from this meagre harvest was less than \$2 a week. Sofia says her harvest was poor because her fruits would only develop to maturity on top of the trees. Pruning the trees allows more light and air to reach the base of the tree, so fruits now develop all the way up the tree from the ground.

Today she harvests 7 kg a week and most of her plants start fruiting at the bottom of the tree just some inches above the ground. "I never knew such simple technology would bring much difference in my cocoa production. I wonder where FIPS-Africa was all this time. There are other players in cocoa development but they hardly get time to teach us how to prune," she says.



Image: Sofia Mwambene proudly shows the increased number of pods on one of her trees; Kikusya village, Itope ward.; 526m,S09.56261, E033.81182