

How FIPS-Africa's training on cocoa tree management has changed my life

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Cocoa is the most important cash crop for small-holder farmers in Kyela district, southern Tanzania. The high-quality organic cocoa that they produce fetches a premium on the world market. Yet many Kyela farmers are struggling to earn enough to adequately feed and look after their families. When FIPS-Africa first started work in Kyela in November 2010, farmers were facing severe challenges of pests, diseases and poor crop management.

With support from Irish Aid, FIPS-Africa is working in 100 villages in Kyela to promote simple and inexpensive ways for farmers to control pests and diseases – without losing their valuable organic certification. These include pruning the trees to let in air and light, removing diseased pods and clearing rotting plant material from the base of the tree. The results can be life-changing. One of the examples of the many beneficiaries is young farmer, Nsajigwa Joseph. Since he adopted the phytosanitary measures promoted by FIPS-Africa, his yields have more than trebled.



Image: Nsajigwa Joseph displays his cocoa harvest. Mbulu village, Ipande Ward. 511m, S09.48982, E033.81251

An orphan since the age of 12, Nsajigwa struggled to manage his three-quarter acre cocoa plantation. “My parents died in 1994 before I started going to school and for a long time I have never known happiness. The cocoa plantation was our only source of income. When my parents died, my relatives would occasionally take care of the cocoa”, explains Nsajigwa. As a result, his yields were half that of neighbouring farmers.

FIPS-Africa started to promote pruning and cleaning in his village in March 2011. FIPS-Africa's innovative method uses local farmers as agents (*Wakala*) to advise farmers and demonstrate the phytosanitary measures. Nsajigwa is one of 400 farmers being served by FIPS-Africa's *Wakala* in Mbulu village, Ipande ward.

FIPS-Africa's *Wakala*, Mr. Smart Mwangalaba, pruned Nsajigwa's trees in January 2011. Two months later, Nsajigwa noticed his trees flowering from just above the ground, whereas before they would only flower on the upper branches.

Nsajigwa was excited because each flower gave rise to a cocoa pod. “I thought the flowers would fall off or rot before maturity as is common in the village but this time they all developed to maturity. When my neighbours noticed the difference they also requested the *Wakala* to demonstrate pruning on their trees before the next flowering season in October,” says Nsajigwa.

Nsajigwa really saw the benefits of cocoa pruning when the harvesting season started in July 2011. Whereas before he got only 100 kg of pods in a month, he began to harvest that same amount in a week! The young farmer sold the pods for Tshs. 2,200 (about \$1.40) per kg and deposited the money in the bank. By the end of the harvesting season in August 2011, he had raised Tshs. 1,760,000 (\$1,170) from selling 800 kg!

With the proceeds, Nsajigwa built a two bedroom brick house, paid his own school fees and used the rest of the money to take care of his mentally ill sister. He is now planning to purchase another plot of land in a neighbouring village from the money he will get from his harvest this season.