Strategies for improving cassava production in the drylands of eastern Kenya

Introduction
Cassava is an important food crop and source of carbohydrate in the drylands of eastern Kenya. Production is low due to inadequate soil moisture and lack of knowledge on improved technologies. This leaflet provides guidelines on improving production.

If recommended production practices are followed, there is a potential of producing 30-45 t/ha (2.5 acres)

Appropriate soils for growing cassava
- Cassava can be grown in many different soil types. It performs well on deep and light soils which permit expansion of the roots
- It is tolerant to poor soils
- However, fertility can be improved by use of manure or inorganic fertilisers
- Light sandy loam soils, which are prevalent in this region, but without excessive fertility, would be good. Too high fertility results in excessive vegetative growth with no expansion of roots
- Stony, saline or soils with hardpan are unsuitable for production

Land preparation
- Proper land preparation is important for high yields
- Plough before onset of rains with ox-plough or hand-hoe 25 cm deep
- After ploughing, the land can be left flat, or made into mounts, furrows or ridges depending on soil type

Seed preparation and time and methods of planting
- Cuttings for planting can be prepared from mature plants more than 8 months old
- Use hardwood or semi-mature part of the stem
- However, too hard part and soft green top parts of the stem are not suitable for planting
- The stem is cut into 15-20 cm planting seeds using a sharp tool
- Cuttings can be planted in different methods depending on soil type
Harvesting

- The time of harvesting depends mainly on type of cultivar
- Most cultivars are harvested after 8-16 months after planting

Planting and cultivation

- It can be harvested by
  - uncovering the tubers using a hand-hoe and removing roots as they are arranged without injuring others for home consumption
  - uncovering the whole plant especially when needed for marketing or processing
- Stems can be prepared for planting as indicated above but if not, they can be preserved until the time of planting
- For preservation, stems should be tied into bundles and stored upright under shade. The base of the stems should be inserted in soil. Water may be applied to prevent them from drying
- The stems can be stored this way for up to 8 weeks