



*Green Development Advocate (GDA), an NGO working on biodiversity conservation, is promoting use of pest-free traditionally recycled seeds as alternative for those who can't afford commercial seeds. Photo Credit: Elias Ngalame*

# Community seed exchange keeps farming alive in Cameroon villages

By Elias Ngalame

**C**OMMERCIAL seeds have been beyond the reach of most farmers around Campo Forest in Cameroon's South region due to the costs and difficulties finding transport to the stores in urban areas. Women farmers are especially disadvantaged given their low incomes.

"Access to these seeds is very challenging to grassroots rural women who don't only lack the means to buy them but face challenges getting transport to the formal outlets due to bad roads," said the chief of Malaba area.

However, efforts by Green Development Advocate (GDA), an NGO working on biodiversity conservation in the area, to help the communities living around Campo Forest solve their seeds problem are beginning to bear fruit.

GDA is promoting use of pest-free traditionally recycled seeds as alternative for those who can't afford commercial seeds.

GDA officials say they encourage the use of seeds obtained from informal sector like those sold at local markets or simply exchanged between family and friends.

They regularly organise seed fairs to encourage exchange and training programmes and equip farmers with the knowledge on preserving seeds.

"We promote seed exchange between communities and families and use of traditional recycled seeds," GDA programme manager Ekane Nkwelle said.

Farmers in Malaba, where adoption of pest-free recycled seeds is rising, are reporting improved harvests of cassava, egusi, groundnuts, cocoyams and other crops from their farms.

"We can say confidently that Malaba is leading in cassava production in this area since last year, We now supply cassava to the entire Campo Forest region thanks to our improved harvest," said the chief of Malaba said during a field visit by GDA officials and the media to assess the impact

of the assistance provided these communities in 2023.

Seed systems say community seed systems like the one being promoted by GDA can improve seed production and delivery to farmers in areas where formal seed systems are weak.

Human-wildlife conflict, however, remains a major concern for the communities living around Campo Forest.

Farmers complain about wild animals like elephants, guerrillas, and rodents destroying their crops.

"Our biggest problem here is the destruction of our crops by animals. Large areas of plantain and cassava farms are regularly destroyed by especially elephants. We are really helpless in this regard," the chief of Malaba said.

"Frequently we hear elephants trumpeting behind our houses at night. Here we don't travel on foot after 6pm because there's a high chance on encountering elephants on the way. It's really risky."