

# 'I did not go to school. But now I have money to buy high heels'



 **Adekunmbi Saratat**  
CASSAVA FARMER

Growing up, life was not easy at all for Adekunmbi Saratat. Her father had many wives and children and could not afford to take them all to school. She attended classes for a few years and then she was told that she needed to make her own way without an education. She was devastated.

“When I was a child, we were told that only the girls who went to school would get jobs and be able to buy high heels. Those who did not would have to wear slippers for the rest of their lives. Because I was dropping out of school, I was sure that I would never wear high heels. Slippers were my fate,” says Adekunmbi.

She worked at various odd jobs to support herself and eventually found her way to farming, beginning with a few hectares in Ado Awaye in Oyo State, south-western Nigeria. Farming was a great challenge, says Adenkunmbi. “I would plant 6,000 stems of cassava on each hectare, but production was poor. I could not find labor for the farm, nor could I afford pesticides. In the end, there was nowhere to sell what I produced, so I would end up giving it to the gari processors at a throw-away price, sometimes getting nothing at all. It was very discouraging.”

For 13 years, she tried her hand at maize, yams, melon and cassava. Then in 2017, with the support of IDH (the Sustainable Trade Initiative), Psaltry International began contracting farmers to produce cassava for its processing



**Cassava being offloaded at the processing plant of Psaltry International. Every day the factory processes 400 tons of cassava grown by small-holder farmers on contract, minimizing loss after the crop is harvested.**

plant in Ado Awaye. IDH had been charged with finding a solution to challenges of post-harvest losses in cassava farming in Nigeria as part of the Rockefeller Foundation's Yieldwise program. The model promoted industrialization of cassava production to facilitate quick processing of the crop, which has a very short shelf life once harvested; thus providing a ready market for the farmers, and ensuring a steady supply of raw produce for the processor. The arrangement included mechanization of farming, training of farmers on use of fertilizers and pesticides, and introduction of improved varieties of cassava.

Adenkunmbi became an outgrower for Psaltry, a decision she does not regret. "I learnt that I needed to plant 12,500 stems on each hectare. and when it was time to harvest, I had a bumper crop for which I did not need to struggle to find a market.



**The contract arrangement with Psaltry International has transformed life for Adekunmbi Saratat and other women farmers in Ado Awaye through access to credit facilities and a ready market.**

Rockefeller Foundation's YieldWise initiative was launched in 2016 with the goal of reducing post-harvest loss in select countries and value chains by up to 50 percent. More than 40 percent of fruits and vegetables in developing regions spoil before they can be consumed.

Using a multi-pronged strategy, YieldWise sought to improve millions of rural lives by increasing incomes, increasing the availability of food and protecting finite environmental resources.

The initiative targeted tomato and cassava production in Nigeria, mangoes in Kenya and maize in Tanzania.

YieldWise Initiative in the cassava value chain in Nigeria is implemented by IDH. IDH, The Sustainable Trade Initiative brings governments, companies, CSOs and financiers together in action driven coalitions.



**Yemisi Iranloye, CEO of Psaltry International**

Yemisi Iranloye, CEO of Psaltry International, finds a great deal of satisfaction in the inclusive model, which puts the small-holder farmers at the center of her business and has transformed lives. "I feel fulfilled that I am able to touch the lives of people. Economically, farmers are much better off, and there are also social changes: fewer girls are getting married early because they want to go to school and be like me. Yemisi is particularly keen on supporting women, and makes loans available for them to increase their farming activities. Women like Adenkunmbi, who now has 20 hectares under cassava.

"Working with Psaltry has made a great difference in our community, and especially for the women. Our farms and our families are thriving. We are grateful," she says. "I enjoy farming now; it is no longer frustrating. I have money to take my six children to good schools, both the boys and the girls. If I had not taken them to school, my daughters would probably have babies."

"And look at how my life has turned out!" she adds. "I have increased the land that I farm so I expect to be earning much more. I have built an eight-room house and I own a chemist. I did not go to school, but because of cassava, I can afford to buy high-heeled shoes."