Importance of cocoyams (*Xanthosoma* sp.) in farming systems affected by banana Xanthomonas wilt in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo

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Background

Cocoyam (*Xanthosoma* sp) is widely grown, often intercropped with banana and plantain throughout eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Traditionally cocoyams are grown as a subsistence crop largely regarded as a safeguard against famine, with increased utility when other crops fail. Cocoyam grows well under the shade of banana plants with a maturity period of 9 to 11 months, after which roots can be harvested continuously. Corms are rich in starch while young leaves of some varieties are used as vegetables.

Status

In the past five years cocoyams have gained importance in east DRC following massive devastation of bananas by Xanthomonas wilt disease (BXW). Xanthomonas wilt causes total crop loss, reducing food security, income and ecological stability. After loss of banana, cocoyam has become a major source of food, while the broad canopy and roots reduce water erosion. However, due to the close association of banana and cocoyam, BXW occurrence is affecting cocoyam production in several ways shown below.

Conclusion

• Cocoyam has the greatest potential to provide short term food security and stabilize the environment in areas where bananas are destroyed by *Xanthomonas* wilt.
• Cocoyam needs more research input and policy support, as well as publicity to promote its food and cash value and develop solutions to current challenges, e.g. the increasing incidence of rot and wilt diseases.

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