

Climate change to further spread cassava disease

Cassava is one of the major food crops in Uganda. Cassava flour is usually mixed with millet flour to prepare what we commonly refer to here as *kalo*. It is used to make pancakes. It is also taken as porridge. Some people boil or steam the tubers and eat them along with beans or groundnut soup. Cassava is also fried and taken with tea or coffee.

It is a material for brewing beer. It is food with a lot of health benefits, according to Healthline, including preventing cardiovascular disease, improving energy and mood, helping to manage diabetes, promoting skin, nail and hair health, improving digestion, strengthening the immune system, aiding weight loss, and preventing some types of cancer. (<https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/healthiest-flour>)

However Climate Change is set to worsen the spread of cassava brown streak disease (CBSD) which is wiping out entire cassava harvests in many parts of Africa, according to an online publication, Nature Africa, dated March 2, in the article titled: "Cassava crops under a spreading viral threat", authored by Maina Waruru.

It says, "Cassava, a staple for more than 300 million people in Africa, may be expanding its climatic range, but so is one of its most destructive viral diseases."

Estimates indicate that more than a third of the continent's cropland is now at risk.

"A study by scientists affiliated with Stellenbosch University in South Africa, indicates that CBSD is shifting westwards from its strongholds in coastal Tanzania and Mozambique towards central Africa," says the publication.

"Warmer and more humid conditions linked to climate change have allowed the whitefly — *Bemisia tabaci*, the virus vector, to expand to higher altitudes beyond the previous ceiling of around 1,000 metres above sea level, and researchers note that the insects are increasingly adapted to cassava growing zones across the Great Lakes region."

It adds that since cassava is propagated through stem cuttings rather than true seeds, infected planting material remains a major driver of CBSD spread across regions.

Of special interest to us here is that the article mentions Uganda as part of the names of the viruses involved in the deadly mischief. It says, "CBSD is caused by Brown Streak Virus (BSV) and Uganda Brown Streak Virus (UBSV), both members of the family Potyviridae and genus Impomovirus. It results in yellowing and distortion of leaves, stunted growth, root necrosis, and the tuber becoming unfit for consumption."