



WOMEN OF KANKANDI, NIGER - Call for help to preserve their flavourful and productive sesame variety, *Lamti Bi*

"The *Lamti Bi* seed is one of the condiments that make people want to eat food in the absence of appetite."

Harouna Adamou, farmer from the rural commune of Kankandi.

The success story

In Niger, demographic growth, poverty and climate change weigh heavily on the living conditions of agricultural producers. The rural commune of Kankandi is situated in the Dosso region of Niger, which is located in the Sahel region. This commune, like the other communes in the agricultural zone, is already experiencing the negative effects of climate change. Agriculture and livestock breeding are the two main economic activities of the commune, as they alone occupy the entire active population. However, these activities may not result in the prosperity and well-being that people desire, due to the many constraints that they must battle.

These constraints include climatic uncertainties, household poverty, soil degradation and pest attacks. Often, the solutions proposed by stakeholders in terms of agricultural production (chemical fertilisation, improved¹ seeds, phytosanitary treatment, etc.) are not adapted to the constraints faced by producers. Indeed, these imposed solutions degrade the productive potential of agro-systems and disrupt important

social structures such as farmer managed seed systems.



¹ Improved varieties are bred for industrial agricultural systems. They have reduced genetic base compared with the high variability present in the genetic materials farmed traditionally.

Despite the many constraints, producers are not discouraged and continue to cultivate their crops every year. In the rural commune of Kankandi, sesame is one of the priority crops along with cowpea. This study highlights local sesame seeds, particularly *Lamti Bi*, which is the most coveted in the Kankandi area. Women are the main producers and they like this variety because of its outstanding taste and aroma. It is an important source of income for women and an important condiment in traditional cooking that confers cultural identity and pride.

According to producer Soumana Oumarou, the conservation of the *Lamti Bi* variety does not require much effort. The seed is preserved after mowing the stalks bearing the capsules by drying them, generally on the roofs of houses or sheds or even in the courtyards of houses. During this post-harvest period, the seeds can be stored for several months or even several years in a dry and airy place in airtight bags or in the attic. Each year producers make a mass selection and put aside a certain quantity of seeds for the next season. This maintains the sustainability of their seed as well as their own autonomy in their production efforts. Farmers continue to multiply this local variety with little support from the state and its partners. It is within this context that SwissAid supports the producers' organisations of Kankandi through the Crop4Seed project, which highlights the peasant seed system as an option for agro-ecological intensification aimed at the preservation and reconstitution of peasant seeds.



Figure 1: A= Photo of *Lamti Bi* sesame flowers in the commune of Kankandi.



Figure 1: B= Photo of *Lamti Bi* sesame capsules/fruits in the commune of Kankandi.

The many virtues of local sesame according to farmers' experience

The local sesame variety *Lamti Bi* is a variety with a production cycle of 2.5 to 3 months. It is a sesame variety that has always been grown in the Kankandi area. The stem can be up to one metre long. The leaves are generally elongated. The flowers are whitish in colour and the capsules are elongated. It is very productive. According to Harouna Adamou, a farmer in the area, "the best yields of *Lamti Bi* seed are obtained when it is sown after three useful rains". Yields are between 400 and 500 kg/ha in a good rainfall year and 300 kg/ha in a bad rainfall year. However, yields can reach 600 and 800 kg/ha when production is high.

In the Kankandi area, *Lamti Bi* seed is grown largely by women in homes and fields as a pure crop or in combination with millet, cowpea and sorrel. They report that sandy soils are the most favourable for *Lamti Bi* production, while crusty soils are an obstacle. Its straw is used for mulching by producers in the erosion burrows on their agricultural plots.

The women of Kankandi are attached to this variety of sesame because it has consistently proven to be reliable and productive over the years. Their preference for this variety, which gives them economic satisfaction, is a result of their cultivation habits. They are reluctant to change varieties because they are afraid to take the risk of losing a whole season by growing new varieties

to which they are not accustomed. For the farmer, the loss must be natural, lack of rain, locust attack, etc., but never due to a choice of seed.

Lamti Bi sesame is the flavour of choice in Kankandi

The tradition of sowing this variety is that all girls are trained to learn how to cook sesame with onion leaves. This combination is an identity in the area and it is this combination that confers many types of flavours in the foods. The *Lamti Bi* variety is deeply rooted in the culture and eating habits of the Kankandi people. Women use it in a variety of ways. In the recipes of grandmothers, the *Lamti Bi* variety occupies a place of choice because it flavours the sauces. The seed of the local variety of sesame *Lamti Bi* is especially renowned for its organoleptic qualities, notably its taste and smell. This is why Amadou Oumarou, a producer in the area, says that the people affectionately call this seed “Mafé Gandjo” in the Zarma vernacular, which means “lever or guarantor of a good sauce”. The *Lamti Bi* seed is one of the condiments that make people want to eat food in the absence of appetite, as Harouna Adamou recalls. The leaves and seeds are used to prepare various types of sauce.

Lamti Bi is resilient under climate change

The experience of local producers is that *Lamti Bi* is more resistant to water stress, soil poverty and the effects of climate change compared to the improved varieties brought in by some development projects. It is resistant to pest pressure, apart from a caterpillar (*Antarigastra catalaunalis*) that attacks it during the emergence phase. According to Soumana Oumarou, *Lamti Bi* seed is ancestrally used to control the parasitic pressure of *Striga hermonthica* and *Striga gesnerioides* on millet and cowpea respectively, even if he does not know the protection mechanism.

Lamti Bi is being neglected

This seed is coveted for its taste, aroma and cultural identity, making it attractive on the market. According to the producers, the price per kg varies between 500 and 800 FCFA. The producers claim that its cultivation is increasingly being abandoned. They urge SwissAid to act by sensitising the farmers on the economic importance of this seed, but also and above all, to train them in the processing of sesame oil. These are the solutions they have advanced to scale up of the cultivation of this seed and ensure that future generations have the benefit of its many virtues.

Key lesson

This case study revealed why this farmer variety of sesame seed *Lamti Bi* is an important variety in the Kankandi area. It is deeply rooted in the food habits of the population and plays an important role in food security. This seed is mainly cultivated by women, which guarantees their financial autonomy and participation in family expenses.

It is by far the most preferred variety by the population compared to improved seeds. Despite these achievements, there is little interest in this sector and an important agricultural resource may disappear, continuing the trend of dwindling agrobiodiversity. Further research into farmers' knowledge and preferences regarding the seed they would like to cultivate is necessary. The state and development partners are called upon to base their decisions regarding policy and development strategies on the desires, knowledge and practices of farmers.



CROPS4HD

This document is an output of the CROPS4HD project (www.crops4hd.org): a consortium of SWISSAID, FiBL, and AFSA supported by the SDC and LED. CROPS4HD has three major components: production, market and policy advocacy.

AFSA, which is responsible for advocacy, is a broad alliance of civil society actors involved in

the fight for food sovereignty and agroecology in Africa. Its members represent small-scale farmers, pastoralists, hunters/gatherers, indigenous peoples, faith-based organisations and environmentalists from across Africa. It is a network of networks, currently with 37 members operating in 50 African countries.

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About Raya Karkara

Raya Karkara is a multi-stakeholder agroecology platform in Niger. "Raya Karkara was set up to strengthen the synergy between the players involved in agroecology. Its mission is to work towards the emergence of a strong and enlightened social movement for the promotion of agroecology, with a view to the effective realisation of the right to food and food sovereignty at national, regional and international levels. It is committed to supporting family farming, capitalising on experiences, sharing them and creating the synergies and alliances needed for effective and appropriate dissemination.



WHO IS AFSA?

AFSA brings small-scale farmers, pastoralists, fisherfolk, indigenous peoples, faith groups, consumers, youth and activists from across the continent of Africa to create a united and louder voice for food sovereignty.

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