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**Towards Identifying the Physiological and Molecular
Basis of Drought Tolerance in Cassava
(*Manihot esculenta* Crantz)**



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Towards Identifying the Physiological and Molecular
Basis of Drought Tolerance in Cassava
(*Manihot esculenta* Crantz)

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Dedication:

*To
My husband Murori,
and children Makena and Muthomi*

Table of Contents

1. General Introduction	1
1.1. Background	1
1.2. Importance of cassava.....	3
1.4. Biology of cassava	5
1.5. Cassava ecology and physiology	6
1.5.1. Sensitivity of cassava stomata	7
1.5.2. Leaf retention and changes in leaf expansion rates	7
1.5.3. Osmotic adjustment	8
1.5.4. Accumulation of specific low molecular weight proteins	8
1.5.5. Absciscic acid (ABA) accumulation	8
1.5.6. Accumulation and utilization of non-structural carbohydrate reserves	9
1.6. Mechanisms of drought tolerance in plants	9
1.6.1. Drought escape.....	10
1.6.2. Dehydration avoidance	10
1.6.3. Dehydration tolerance.....	10
1.7. Cassava breeding and biotechnology	11
1.8. Rationale of the study	12
1.9. Objectives of the study.....	13
1.10. Thesis outline	14
2. Hardening of Cassava <i>In Vitro</i> Plantlets and Rapid Micro-propagation of Cassava Plants Through Nodal Cuttings.....	15
2.1. Introduction.....	16
2.2. Materials and methods	19
2.2.1. Sub-culturing (in-direct micro-propagation).....	19
2.2.2. Transplanting and hardening (direct micro-propagation)	19
2.2.3. Rapid micro-propagation	20
2.3. Results and discussion	22
2.4. Conclusions.....	24
3. Agronomic and Morphological Evaluation of Contrasting Cassava Germplasm Accessions under Drought Stress at Kiboko, Kenya	29
3.1. Introduction.....	30
3.2. Materials and methods	33
3.2.1. Study site.....	33
3.2.2. Climate.....	33
3.2.3. Germplasm and field planting.....	34
3.2.4. Traits	36
3.2.5. Statistical analysis	37
3.3. Results.....	40
3.3.1. Plant height	40
3.3.2. Leaf retention	41
3.3.3. Number of branching levels.....	44
3.3.4. Leaf length and width	44
3.3.5. Harvest traits	46
3.3.6. Relationship between traits	46
3.3.7. Heritability	47

3.4.	Discussion	51
3.5.	Conclusion	55
4.	Metabolites Analysis in African Cassava Germplasm Accessions Evaluated at Kiboko Research Station, Makindu, Kenya.....	57
4.1.	Introduction.....	58
4.2.	Materials and methods	61
4.2.1.	Plant materials and sample preparation	61
4.2.2.	Chromatography separation, ABA extraction and quantification.....	61
4.2.3.	Determination of sugar content.....	63
4.2.4.	Determination of protein content	64
4.2.5.	Determination of starch content.....	64
4.2.6.	Determination of amylose content in roots	64
4.2.7.	Generation of derived variables	65
4.2.8.	Statistical analysis	65
4.3.	Results.....	67
4.3.1.	Abscisic acid in cassava tissues	67
4.3.2.	Assimilates content in cassava tissue.....	68
4.3.3.	Relationship between traits	71
4.4.	Discussion	72
5.	Genetic Mapping in Cassava (<i>Manihot esculenta</i> Crantz) using SSR's and EST-derived SSR's.....	79
5.1.	Introduction.....	80
5.2.	Materials and methods	84
5.2.1.	Mapping populations	84
5.2.1.1.	Selection of contrasting parental accessions.....	84
5.2.1.2.	Generation of crosses between contrasting parents	84
5.2.1.3.	Segregating populations.....	86
5.2.2.	Marker analysis.....	86
5.2.2.1.	DNA isolation	86
5.2.2.2.	Optimization of primers and labeling of ESSR's	87
5.2.2.3.	Polymorphism screening and high throughput genotyping	88
5.2.2.4.	Data scoring and linkage analysis.....	89
5.3.	Results.....	92
5.3.1.	Labeling of ESSR's, polymorphism screen and marker segregation ..	92
5.3.2.	Map construction	93
5.3.3.	Female and male map comparison.....	95
5.4.	Discussion	97
5.4.1.	Labeling of ESSR's, polymorphism screen and marker segregation ..	97
5.4.2.	Map construction	100
5.4.3.	Comparison with other maps	101
5.4.4.	Female and male map comparison.....	102
6.	Summary.....	121
	References.....	125
	Acknowledgements	145
	Curriculum Vitae	147

List of Tables

Table 1.1.	World utilization patterns of cassava.	4
Table 2.1.	Putative drought-tolerant and drought-susceptible African cassava germplasm accessions obtained from the IITA, Nigeria.	23
Table 2.2.	Cost comparison of direct and in-direct methods of micro-propagating putative drought-tolerant and drought-susceptible cassava germplasm accessions.	25
Table 3.1.	Physical soil characteristics of Kiboko Research Station, Makindu, Kenya.	33
Table 3.2.	Putative drought-tolerant and drought-susceptible African cassava accessions utilized for field evaluation at Kiboko Research Station.	36
Table 3.3.	Agronomic and morphological traits studied when evaluating putative drought-tolerant and drought-susceptible cassava accessions	39
Table 3.4.	Responses to water stress of 31 cassava accessions at harvest	40
Table 3.5.	Mean plant height of 31 cassava germplasm accessions evaluated at Kiboko Research Station, during different stress phases.	43
Table 3.6.	Analysis of variance of 31 cassava accessions evaluated at Kiboko Research Station, Makindu, Kenya.	44
Table 3.7.	Means of yield traits at harvest of 31 cassava germplasm accessions evaluated at Kiboko Research Station under well-watered and water-stressed treatments.	48
Table 3.8.	Spearman's rank correlation coefficient between traits assessed for 31 cassava accessions evaluated at Kiboko Research Station, Makindu, Kenya.	49
Table 3.9.	Spearman's rank correlation coefficient for individual treatments for 31 cassava accessions evaluated at Kiboko Research Station, Makindu, Kenya	50
Table 4.1.	Analysis of variance of 31 cassava germplasm accessions evaluated at Kiboko Research Station.	68
Table 4.2.	Spearman's rank correlation coefficient for the various metabolic traits evaluated for 31 cassava accessions at Kiboko Research Station.	71
Table 5.1.	Population name, cross name and status of cassava germplasm accessions used in the generation of segregating populations.	85

Table 5.2. Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) optimization conditions developed by IITA-BecA, Nairobi.	88
Table 5.3. Properties of dyes used for fluorescent labeling of ESSR markers.	89
Table 5.4. Segregation types of markers mapped in the progeny of accessions.	93
Table 5.5. Details of the cassava female (COL 1734) and male (BRA 1149) genetic maps.	96
Table 5.6. Number of allelic bridges identified between the female and male genetic maps of cassava derived from a cross between a drought-tolerant and a drought-susceptible accession.	96

List of Figures

Figure 1.1. Countries affected by drought in Africa	2
Figure 1.2. Research institutions and universities involved in the Generation Challenge Program (GCP) and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) project.	3
Figure 2.1. Average ratings of the importance of problems in cassava subsistence agriculture in Africa.	18
Figure 2.3. Direct and in-direct micro-propagation increase rates of drought-tolerant and drought-susceptible African cassava accessions.	22
Figure 2.4. Accumulated number of plantlets produced from drought-tolerant and drought-susceptible cassava accessions.	24
Figure 2.2. A step by step protocol for hardening and rapid micro-propagation of cassava germplasm accessions through nodal cuttings.	26
Figure 3.1. Elements of climate at Kiboko Research Station.	35
Figure 3.2. Mean plant heights of 31 cassava accessions at different stress phase.	41
Figure 3.3. Estimated mean percentage leaf retention of 31 cassava accessions at different stress phases.	42
Figure 3.4. Estimated mean percentage leaf retention of 31 cassava accessions at harvest.	42
Figure 3.5. Mean number of branching levels of 31 cassava accessions at different stress phases.	45
Figure 3.6. Mean leaf size of 31 cassava accessions at different stress phases.	45
Figure 3.7. Mean yield parameters of 31 cassava accessions evaluated at Kiboko Research Station, Makindu, Kenya	47
Figure 4.1. Absciscic acid concentration in 31 cassava germplasm accessions evaluated at Kiboko Research Station	67
Figure 4.2. Glucose concentration in 31 cassava germplasm accessions evaluated at Kiboko Research Station.	68
Figure 4.3. Sucrose concentration in 31 cassava germplasm accessions evaluated at Kiboko Research Station.	69
Figure 4.4. Starch concentration in 31 cassava germplasm accessions evaluated at Kiboko Research Station.	70

Figure 4.5. The effect of drought stress imposed on 31 cassava germplasm accessions evaluated at Kiboko Research Station.	70
Figure 5.1. Location of four representative locations of Brazil's semi-arid Northeast where field evaluations of drought-tolerant and drought-susceptible cassava accessions were performed.	85
Figure 5.2. Category of polymorphic markers observed during parental screen in cassava germplasm accessions.	91
Figure 5.3. Female genetic map of cassava derived from a cross between a drought-tolerant and a drought-susceptible accession.	94
Figure 5.4. Male genetic map of cassava derived from a cross between a drought-tolerant and a drought-susceptible accession.	95

List of Appendices

Appendix 4.1 Means of metabolites in 31 cassava germplasm accessions evaluated at Kiboko Research Station, Makindu, Kenya under well-watered and water-stressed treatments.	76
Appendix 5.1. Contrasting cassava germplasm accessions evaluated in Northeast Brazil for the identification of mapping population parentals with wide diversity for drought tolerance.	104
Appendix 5.2. Features of fluorescent labeled cassava loci screened for parental survey; their primer pairs, type of repeat and their fragment sizes in bp in the two parents.	106

Acronyms and Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Description
ABA	Absciscic acid
ABI	Applied Biosystems
AGB	above-ground fresh-biomass
ANOVA	Analysis of variance
BecA	Biosciences for eastern and central Africa
BMZ	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
bp	base pair
CBSD	cassava brown streak disease
CE	capillary electrophoresis
CEC	Cation Exchange Capacity
CIAT	International Center for Tropical Agriculture
cM	centiMorgan
CMD	cassava mosaic disease
COSCA	Collaborative Study of Cassava in Africa
CP	cross pollinated
DAP	days after planting
DDPSC	Donald Danforth Plant Science Center
DM	dry matter content
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic Acid
dNTPs	Deoxynucleotide Triphosphates
EDTA	Ethylene Diamine Tetra-acetic Acid
Embrapa	Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation
ESSR	Expressed Simple Sequence Repeat
ETH	Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich
GAUG	Georg-August University Goettingen
GCP	Generation Challenge Program
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HI	harvest index
HLS	height of leafless stem

Abbreviation	Description
HPS	height of primary stem
HSS	height of secondary stem
IITA	International Institute of Tropical Agriculture
IPGRI	International Plant Genetic Resources Institute
KARI	Kenya Agricultural Research Institute
LG	linkage group
LL	length of expanded leaf
LOD	logarithm of odds
LR	leaf retention
LW	width of expanded leaf
MAB	marker-assisted breeding
NARS	National Research Systems
NBL	number of branching levels
NPK	nitrogen phosphorous potassium
NPS	number of primary stems
NSR	number of storage roots
PCR	Polymerase Chain Reaction
QTL	quantitative trait loci
REC	recombination frequency
rfu	relative fluorescent units
SD	stem diameter
SRFW	storage root fresh weight
SSA	Sub-saharan Africa
SSR	Simple Sequence Repeat
TBE	Tris Borate EDTA
TE	Tris EDTA
Wa	weight in air
Ww	weight in water
ZIL	Swiss Center for International Agriculture

1. General Introduction

1.1. Background

In the 21st century, the world population is increasing at a high rate. The population is faced with a crisis that defines human development and links today and tomorrow. This crisis is climate change. Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries, which are more prominent in increasing human population, are more vulnerable to climate change. This is because, they are located in the hot tropical regions, and they highly depend on climate-sensitive sectors such as agriculture, forestry and tourism. In addition, SSA countries not only have high poverty rates, but also limited financial, institutional and human capacity to adapt to climate change (Thomas and Twyman, 2005).

Agriculture is the backbone of most countries in Africa. More than eighty percent of agriculture in SSA is rain-fed. The sector contributes about 30 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 30 percent of the total export value. Ninety five percent of the population depends on agriculture for its livelihood (Kaushik, 2008). In the past years, many African countries have experienced erratic droughts and declines in water supply. These have aggravated food shortages on the continent. Some countries like Kenya have declared food shortage a national disaster. Recent prediction estimates that, by the year 2050, at least one in every 4 people is likely to live in a water-deficient area (UNFPA, 1999; FAO, 2004).

Water-stress occurs ubiquitously during the growing season of many plants, and has intense negative impacts on agricultural productivity. For example, in maize a mild drought of 4 days at the flowering and silking phase of development can result in up to a 50% decrease in grain yield (Wang et al., 2005). In order to take the right turn towards a more sustainable food security situation in Africa, dramatic yield increases in the large regions susceptible to drought need to be ensured (Figure 1.1). Genetic enhancement of crops for drought tolerance appears to represent the best and most cost-effective route for ensuring sustainable and increased crop yields in the harsh SSA climate, where timing and amount of rain is often unreliable. Such genetic enhancement can be achieved by applying plant breeding techniques together with biotechnology methods. To utilize such techniques fully, there is a need to

understand the molecular and physiological basis of drought tolerance and susceptibility.

In order to improve the understanding of drought tolerance mechanisms in cassava (*Manihot esculenta* Crantz), one of the most important drought-tolerant crops, a multi-disciplinary project, funded by the Generation Challenge Program (GCP) and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), “Identifying the physiological and genetic traits that make cassava one of the most drought tolerant crops” was initiated. The project was implemented by several research institutions in collaboration with universities (Figure 1.2). The research presented here has been undertaken within this project.

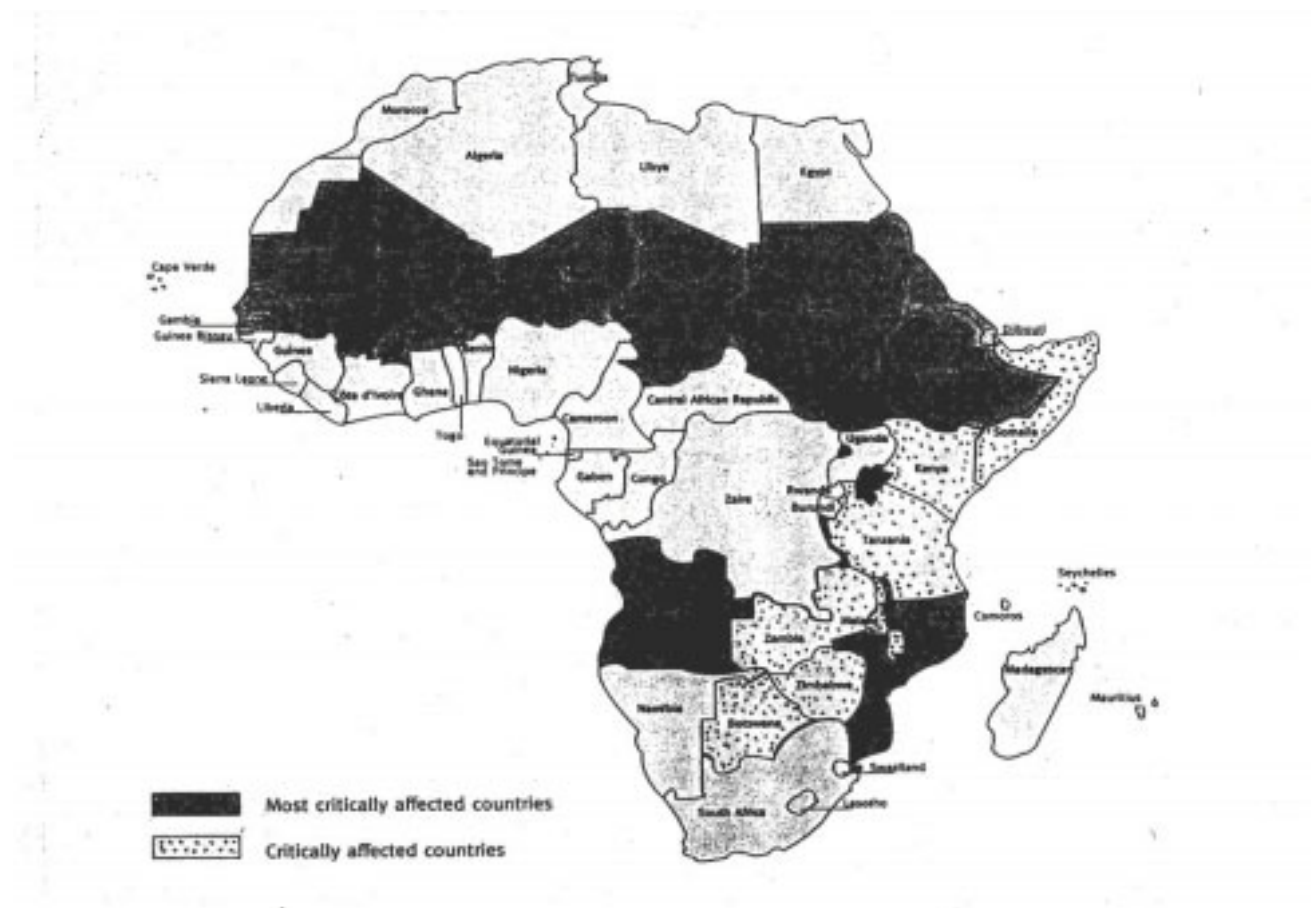


Figure 1.1. Countries affected by drought in Africa.
Source: Moustafa et al. (2002)