

## Disease-resistant cassava could help safeguard against starvation in developing countries

[Ismail] Rabbi, a geneticist at the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) in Ibadan, Nigeria, and his colleagues are on a mission to improve cassava (*Manihot esculenta*). Also known as yuca or manioc, its starchy roots provide food and income to more than 800 million people worldwide. In Africa, where consumption is highest, cassava plants bear smaller yields than their cousins in Asia and South America. But African varieties tend to be more tolerant of blights, such as the deadly cassava mosaic disease now spreading across Asia.

In November, Rabbi shipped five varieties of African cassava that resist the disease to Thailand, the world's largest cassava exporter. He and his colleagues...are using genomic data to identify useful traits for breeding cassava varieties that will suit the world's needs — safeguarding against starvation as the climate warms, populations grow and viruses spread.

When the African plants reach Thailand, scientists there will cross them with cassava varieties adapted to Asia. Then they will screen the resulting offspring for genetic markers that Rabbi and his colleagues use to predict a plant's resistance to mosaic viruses, along with 12 other traits — such as leaf color and the amount of edible starch in each root.

**Read full, original article:** [How African scientists are improving cassava to help feed the world](#)