Aligning yam market segments with breeding targets in Côte d'Ivoire: A value chain perspective

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Abstract

Yam is the leading non-cereal food crop in Côte d'Ivoire. With annual production about 8 million tons in 2023, it plays a strategic role in achieving national food security. However, the sector faces challenges: population growth, the emergence of competing cash crops such as cashew, emerging diseases, and climate change. Ensuring a year-round supply of quality yams to the market requires innovative approaches, grounded in a clear understanding of production systems, marketing structures, and market segmentation.

This study combines literature reviews and field survey data to (1) provide an overview of the yam sector and (2) analyze market structuring and flow dynamics.

Yam production in Côte d'Ivoire is concentrated in the central and northern regions. The former is dominated by late-maturing varieties, largely destined for subsistence consumption, while the northern region focuses on early-maturing varieties for commercial purposes. The yam market is supplied year-round with seven to eight main varieties, with Kponan being the most in demand. Distribution involves multiple stakeholders and follows four main types of supply chains, organized across three functional zones: the production (export) zone, the consumption (receiving) zone, and the redistribution (mixed) zone. Yam prices fluctuate according to seasonality, varietal quality, and the distance between production and consumption zones.

Yams are typically sold by weight or in heaps. One key finding from our survey-based study is that late-maturing varieties have more superior storage capacity than early-maturing ones. It is therefore recommended that breeders consider yam storage capacity as an additional key trait during hybrid selection. Hybrids with strong storage capacity, combined with appropriate agronomic practices, could help stabilize market supply while ensuring quality traits valued by consumers.

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Key Points

- Yam is the leading food crop in Côte d'Ivoire, with an annual production estimated at about 8 million tons, representing 35% of national agricultural output. It is grown throughout the country, with major production areas located in the center, southwest, northeast, and north. Yam is the second most consumed food in Côte d'Ivoire after rice and holds important cultural and social significance, with dedicated festivals and rituals.
- **Market segmentation:** The yam market in Cote d'Ivoire is segmented based on criteria such as maturity duration (early- and late-maturing types – early white varieties, late white varieties, late water yam varieties) and mode of consumption or consumer product type (e.g., pounded, boiled, fried, porridge). Kponan is the most preferred variety because it is suitable for all types of consumer products.
- **Challenges:** Yam market constraints at the farming level are low soil fertility, water scarcity and labor shortages, land pressure, and lower land availability for yam culture in favor of cash crops. Constraints related to marketing (by intermediaries) are postharvest losses mainly due to rotting and insect attacks, losses after purchase, sales failures, and high transportation cost due to poor road infrastructure, along with informal "taxes."
- **Trait requirements and quality standards:** Yam preferences change across the value chain. For producers and retailers, size, yield, and high storage capacity are the main quality traits sought; whereas, for consumers, preferences are good tuber shape, good skin appearance (no skin roughness, no presence of bumps), fresh tuber with dry matter, no discoloration during processing, absence of black spots on the flesh, mealiness of the boiled yam, dough smoothness and stretchability, and a pleasant aroma.

Introduction

Global yam production exceeds 88 million tons annually, with Nigeria, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, and Cameroon contributing 93% of total output (FAOSTAT 2023, consulted on 19 august 2025). Côte d'Ivoire ranks as the third-largest yam producer, following Nigeria and Ghana. Its annual yam production steadily increased from 4 million tons in 1999 to more than 7 million tons by 2019 (Ebah et al. 2023).

Yam is one of the most important non-cereal food crops in Côte d'Ivoire, playing a vital role in food security. It is commonly grown alongside other foods or cash crops, such as chili peppers, okra, eggplant, and tomatoes. Yam is a staple food in the rural areas of Côte d'Ivoire, while it is regarded as a premium food item in urban areas (Kouakou et al. 2019). Beyond its dietary importance, yam is also a major source of income for both farmers and traders (Doumbia et al. 2006; Mahyao et al. 2019).

The Ivorian yam market operates year-round, from June to May, and includes about 20 varieties (survey data). Despite national production gains and a well-established market structure, the sector faces numerous challenges: climate change, declining arable land due to population growth and urbanization, and shifts in agricultural priorities. The expansion of competing cash crops, particularly cashew, has contributed to the decline in yam productivity in regions such as Gbêkê and Poro. Quality problems, such as smaller tubers, black spots, and rapid postharvest decay, also affect market performance and consumer satisfaction (AIP, 2024; survey data).

Although the yam sector holds strong potential for value addition and regional trade, the lack of improved storage technologies, unstable prices, and weak transportation infrastructure limit its competitiveness. These strengths and weaknesses underscore the importance of looking into market segmentation and reorienting breeding priorities.

The last comprehensive study on the national yam market was conducted nearly two decades ago (Doumbia et al. 2006), focusing primarily on market flows. Our study seeks to provide updated insights into the yam sector and market in Côte d'Ivoire, covering the entire value chain – from production to commercialization, with a particular emphasis on the challenges and preferences of the various stakeholders. These insights are intended to support more strategic decisions, including refined market segmentation and improved alignment of breeding program targets (Target Product Profiles) with consumer and market needs.

Our team conducted a literature review to establish foundational information and data collection using a structured questionnaire to verify or update existing data. The survey was conducted in five key regions recognized for their importance in yam production, sales, and consumption: Hambol (Dabakala-Satama), Gbêkê (Bouakê), Béré (Tiéningboué), N'Zi (Kouassi-Kouassikro), and Abidjan District (Figure 1).

We individually interviewed a total of 384 producers, 396 traders, 290 processors, and 390 consumers. To gain deeper insights into their practices, attitudes, and knowledge, we held six focus group discussions (FGDs) with producers in the selected villages and held two FGDs in markets with traders to further explore their perspectives and experiences.

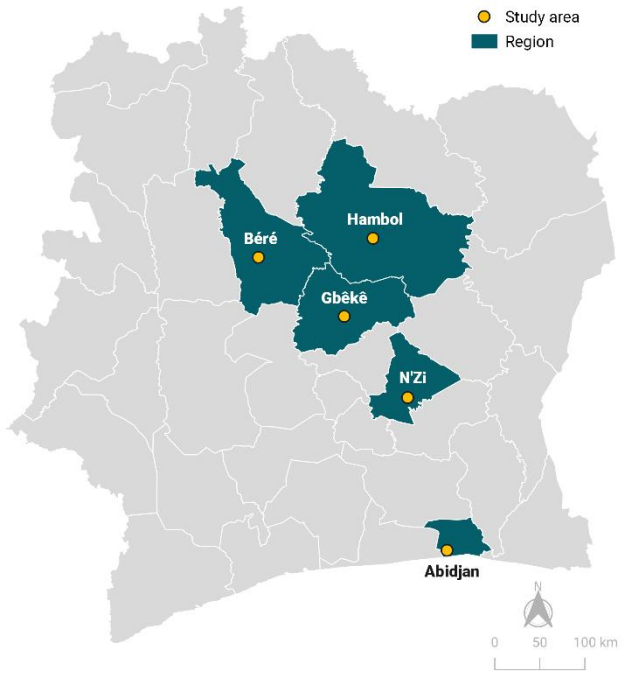

Figure 1. Study area.

Yam production in Côte d'Ivoire

Yam production areas in Côte d'Ivoire cover a total of 15 million hectares and are concentrated in the following regions: Bondoukou and Bouna – Gontougo and Boukani regions in the northeast; Kong, Ferké, Korhogo, Boundiali, and Odienné – Tchologo, Poro, and Bagoué regions in the north; Dabakala-Satama, Bouaké, and Kouassi-Kouassikro – Gbêkê, Hambol, N'Zi, and Béré regions in the center; and Zoukougbeu, Daloa, Gagnoa, and Oumé – Lôh-Djiboua Region in the center-west.

Yam cultivation involves direct seeding with staking, without the need for irrigation, and thrives in well-drained soils such as clayey, sandy, or gravelly types. Planting typically occurs from February to April, with annual harvests. Early-maturing varieties are harvested in June-July, while late-maturing varieties are harvested in November-December, with an estimated annual production of nearly 8 million tons (FAOSTAT, accessed on 9 June 2025).

Two main types of yams are cultivated in Côte d'Ivoire. Water yam (*Dioscorea alata*) varieties, typically late-maturing varieties, are mostly grown on plateaus and upper slopes, and harvested only once a year. White yam (*D. cayenensis-rotundata*), which can be either early- or late-maturing, are mostly grown on lower slopes (Dibi et al. 2020). The central regions (Gbêkê, N'Zi, Béré) are better suited for late-maturing varieties. Table 1 presents the common yam varieties cultivated in Côte d'Ivoire

Table 1. Yam varieties produced in Côte d'Ivoire according to the region.

Type	Production environment	Maturity	Common varieties
White yam (*Dioscorea cayenensis-rotundata*)	• Lower slopes • Northeast and north for the first production • Center region for the second production	Early-maturing, harvested twice a year	Kponan (Wacrou), Assawa, Koudjan, Lokpa, Pahinte, Kpassadjo, Trela, Logobre, Kangba, Kplakpagnon, and Yam-Ci (R3)
White yam (*D. cayenensis-rotundata*)	• Lower slopes • Center and north region	Late-maturing, harvested once a year	Krenglé
Water yam (*D. alata*)	• Plateaus and upper slopes • Center and north region	Late-maturing	Bètè bètè, Florido, Cameroun, C18 (Anader), Dahomin, Alata 6, Alata 7, Taba

Yam Market Segments and Target Product Profile

The yam market in Côte d'Ivoire can be segmented according to different factors, the most important being growth duration and consumer product type. Based on growth duration, yam varieties can be grouped into three: early white yam, intermediate/late white yam, and water yam. Table 2 summarizes some traits of these groups.

Yam value chain

The yam value chain in Côte d'Ivoire involves several actors: farmers, intermediaries, buyers, retailers, wholesalers, rural markets, wholesale markets, public authorities, transporters, processors, and consumers (Figure 2).

Table 2: Basic traits of the yam market segments in Côte d'Ivoire as described in the Global Market Intelligence Platform (www.glomip.cgiar.org, accessed July 5, 2025) and updated based on survey data.

Basic traits \ Segments		Early-maturing white yam	Intermediate/late-maturing white yam	Water yam
Agronomic traits	Fresh tuber yield (t/ha)	~10-15	~20	~20
Physiological traits	Tuber shelf-life (months)	1-3	3-5	8-12
Visual quality traits	Oxidative browning	Less	Less	Moderate to high
	Tuber skin appearance (striped skin)	High	High	Less to moderate
Quality analytical	Tuber dry matter (%)	≥30	≥30	≥20
	Boiled yam quality	Good: very mealy	Good: mealy	Good: soft
	Dough smoothness	Very smooth and soft	Smooth	Moderately smooth to coarse
	Dough stretchability	Very stretchable	Highly stretchable	Low to moderately stretchable
	Dough stickiness	Low	Low to moderate	Moderate to high
Market share (%)	-	30-40	10	50-60
Current dominant variety	-	Kponan, Assawa	Krenglé	Bètè bètè, Florido

Figure 2. Simplified yam distribution chain in Côte d'Ivoire.

In the study area, at least 32% of the producers cultivate three yam varieties simultaneously, while fewer than 10% grow more than four varieties in a single year. Seed sourcing is largely informal, with under 1% of the producers obtaining seeds from certified suppliers or research institutions. For each variety, more than 70% of the producers rely exclusively on personal reserves, while 29% supplement their stock with seeds from other producers or local markets.

Producers' yield assessments varied by region. In Béré, yields are average to good; in Hambol, yields are very good to medium. In contrast, 58.3% of the producers in N'Zi considered their yields average to good, while 40.7% considered them poor to very poor. Gbêkê noted a 38.6% decline in productivity in recent years, partly attributed to climate change, soil infertility, and insect infestations (AIP 2024; personal communication from Dr. Kouakou Amani).

Some 72% of the producers cultivate yams for both market sales and self-consumption. Another 27% grow yams solely for household use and only 1% produce exclusively for commercial sale (Figure 3). The yam marketing channels are distributed as follows (n = 384 respondents):

- 40.1 % of producers, particularly in the Béré Region, sell at the farm gate.
- 41.6 % of producers sell at local markets, either in their village or in the production commune.
- 17.4 % of producers sell in other markets within their department.
- 0.9 % of producers sell in markets outside their department.

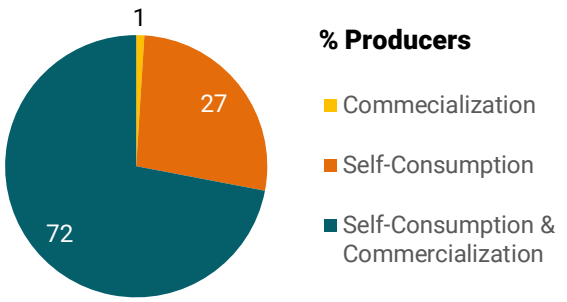

Figure 3. Main reasons for growing yam.

A majority of the producers sell their harvest to wholesalers or intermediaries (56.7%), followed by retailers (34.0%) and direct consumers (7.8%). Only 0.7% of the producers act as retailers themselves, and 0.8% sell directly to processors (Figure 4).

Wholesalers typically supply semi-wholesalers in urban areas, who then distribute to retailers, consumers, and other buyers. This forms a structured yam market circuit in Côte d'Ivoire that extends from rural production zones to peri-urban and urban markets across the country, with some distribution reaching regional and international markets. This distribution system involves a network of stakeholders, often with multiple intermediaries between producers and end consumers. Each intermediary adds a profit margin, contributing to price increases in urban markets. The greater the number of intermediaries, the higher the final price of yams for consumers.

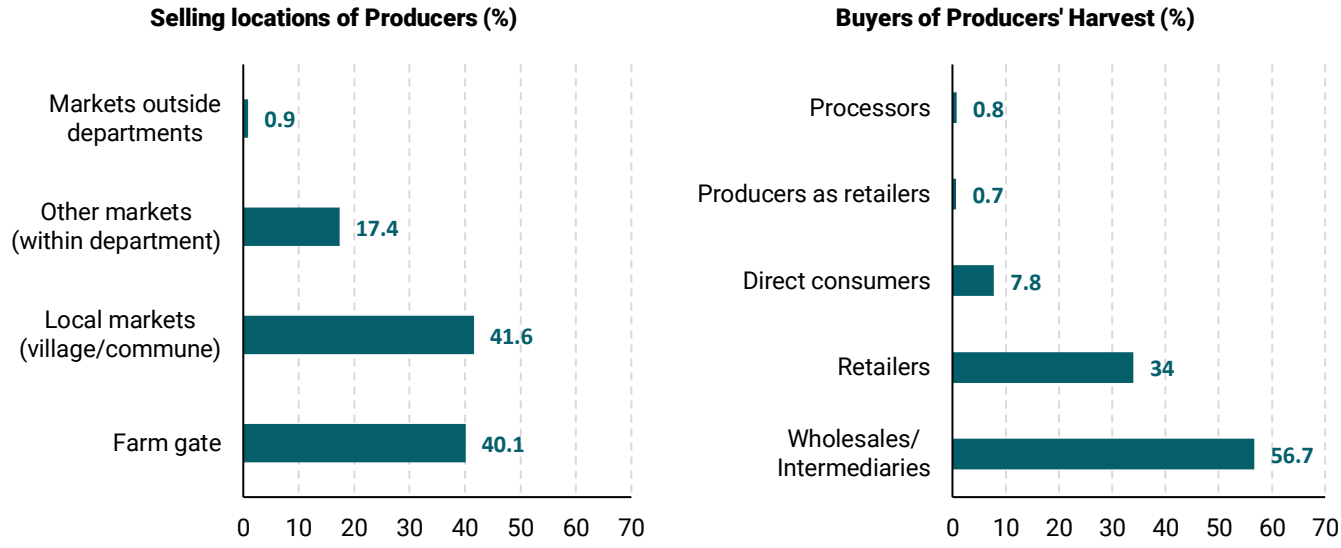

Figure 4. Yam selling site and actors involved.

About 20 yam varieties were identified in the markets during the survey. Five of these – Krenglé, Bètè bètè, Kponan, Florido (also known as Americain), and Assawa – are sold by approximately 50% of the traders. Cameroun and Kpassadjo (potato yam) are sold by 10% of the traders, while Anader, Pahinte, and Lokpa are sold by fewer than 5% of the vendors in the surveyed regions. Wholesalers report a steady increase in the production of late-maturing varieties in the northeast, particularly Florido, which has seen growing popularity.

Three types of zones exist for yam distribution in Côte d'Ivoire: export zones, mixed zones, and receiving zones (Figure 5). Mixed zones function as both a receiving and redistributing zone, while receiving zones are usually urban centers located outside the main production areas. Table 3 shows the regions, markets, and varieties in each zone.

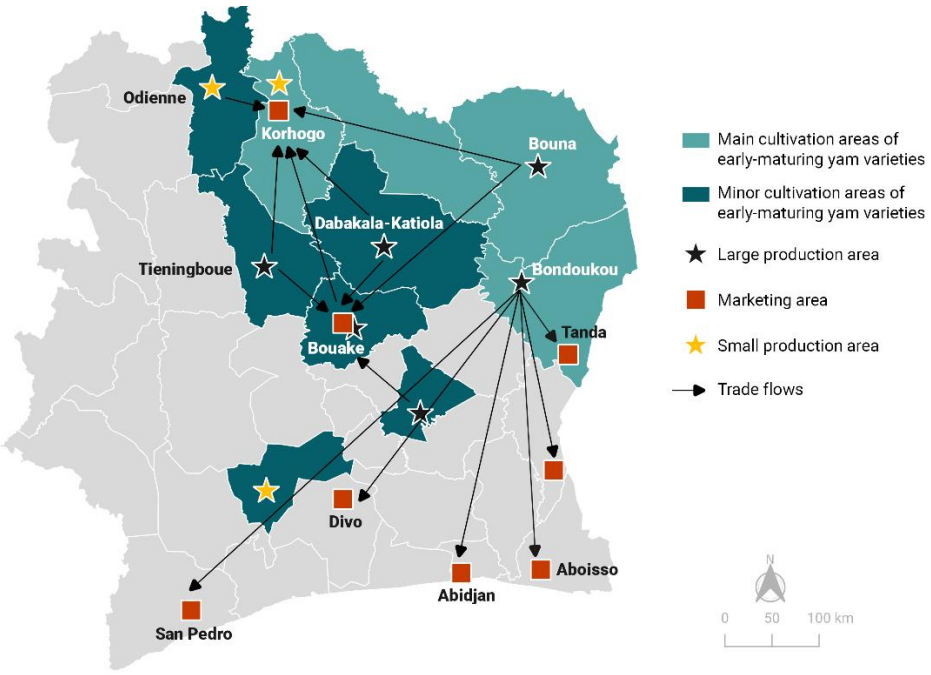

Figure 5. Production and marketing regions and commercial flow of yams.

Table 3. Production area linked to sales areas and varieties sold.

Type	Region	Primary market	Secondary market	Varieties
Net export zone	Bouna, Bondoukou	Abidjan	Bouaké, Tanda, Abengourou, Aboisso, Divo, San-Pédro	Kponan, Pahinte, Assawa, Krenglé, Florido, and Kpassadjo (potato yam)
	Dabakala-Satama-Kong	Bouaké and Korhogo		Krenglé, Wacrou, Kouba, Cameroun, Florido, R3 (Yam-CI), and Bete-bete, with Kponan and Pahinte playing secondary roles
	Tieningboue-Mankono	Dikodougou, Korhogo, and Bouaké		
	Boundiali-Odienné	Korhogo, Man, Daloa		
Type	**Region**	**Supply area**	**Market area**	**Varieties**
Mixed zones	Bouaké	Tieningboue, Kouassi-Kouassikro, Beoumi, Dabakala, Satama, Bouna, Bondoukou Ghana	Korhogo, San-Pédro, Mali, Daloa, Abidjan	Kponan, Assawa, Krenglé, Florido, Bètè bètè, and Kpassadjo
	Gagnoa, Oumé	Bouaké	Abidjan	Florido, Cameroun, and Bètè bètè
Type	**Region**	**Supply area**		**Varieties**
Consumption zones	Abidjan, Yamoussoukro, Abengourou, Divo, Aboisso, and San-Pédro	Bouna, Bondoukou, Bouaké		Florido, Cameroun, and Bètè bètè

Yams from Bouaké, Odienné, and Kong are exported to Mali, from where they are further distributed to other subregional markets. The most commonly exported varieties are Florido and Kpassadjo (potato yam), as they align with the dietary preferences of neighboring countries, where yams are typically boiled and/or fried. Additionally, Florido is less in demand in urban areas of Côte d'Ivoire, contributing to its availability for export. However, export volumes remain limited because of logistical and storage challenges (survey data, 2024).

Yam consumption in Côte d'Ivoire

Yams are a staple food for yam-producing populations and their consumption has spread across Côte d'Ivoire. They are prepared and eaten in various forms: boiled, pounded, fried, roasted, or in stews – and are commonly served with sauces, with or without animal protein. These dishes are widely available in households, restaurants, and roadside stalls.

Consumption is higher during the peak season, when prices are more affordable, and declines during the off-season, when only 29% of the respondents report eating yams. In rural production areas, the most common preparation method is pounding, followed by boiling. In contrast, urban consumers favor boiled yams (43% of consumers), followed by pounded (40%), fried (11%), and yam-based stews (6%).

An analysis of consumer types among processors reveals that, apart from pounded yam, which is primarily consumed by adults and young people, all age groups consume the various yam-based products at nearly the same frequency (Figures 6 and 7).

Each yam dish requires specific characteristics or quality criteria in the tubers, and consumer preferences vary accordingly. Table 4 summarizes the key traits consumers seek for each dish or group of dishes. Consumers report that the main factors guiding their purchasing decisions are the quality of the final dish (28.3%) and the ease of processing the yam variety (21.9%). Other important considerations are tuber appearance (20%), shape (10.7%), storage ability (10.1%), and size (9%). According to traders, consumer choices are mainly influenced by price and the intended dish to be prepared (over 90%), followed by the shape and size of the tubers.

In urban areas, yam consumption is primarily driven by cultural habits (70.2%). About 28% of consumers are motivated by social proximity or discovery, while 1.8% cite social mimicry. This strong cultural attachment explains the loyalty to specific varieties. However, consumers are open to adopting new varieties if these closely resemble their preferred traditional varieties or if they offer superior qualities.

Among the varieties available in markets, Kponan is the most popular because it works well for all types of dishes (boiled, pounded, fried, roasted, etc.). Its slightly sweet taste and crumbly, melting texture when cooked make it appealing to all age groups, thus contributing to increased demand and high market prices. Pahinte, a substitute for Kponan due to its similar physical and organoleptic properties, is also well received in urban areas. Traders often remove its skin hairs to make it visually indistinguishable from Kponan, thus allowing it to be sold at the same price. However, Pahinte is slightly less sweet and less crumbly.

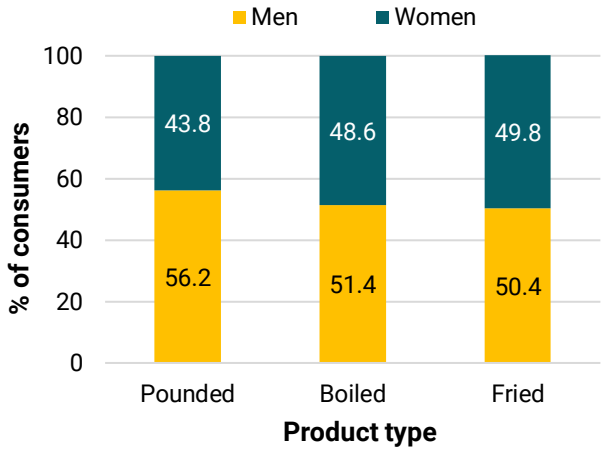

Figure 6. Gender distribution of yam consumers per product type as reported by processors.

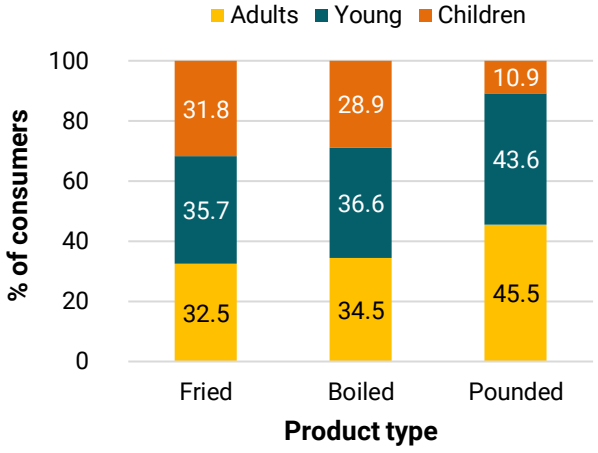

Figure 7. Age group distribution of yam consumers per product type as reported by processors.

Krenglé is known locally as a high-quality yam and is sold at a premium price. It is suitable for all dishes, especially foutou (pounded yam). In the central region, it is often used in restaurants to enhance the texture of foutou made from Bètè bètè, as the latter results in a less elastic and too soft foutou, particularly in the first months of storage.

Florido and Bètè bètè are widely consumed in the central region. Florido is extensively exported to neighboring countries such as Mali and is also used in correctional centers. Late-season varieties, such as those from species *D. alata*, have the advantage of being able to be stored for longer periods, unlike the white yam varieties.

Regarding culinary use, late-season *D. alata* varieties are particularly suited for porridge. After extended storage, they can also be used for foutou. However, a variety of *D. alata*, known as N'Za, is said to no longer produce high-quality tubers in several areas of the center region, as the tubers often have many black spots at harvest.

Constraints faced by different stakeholders

According to the respondents interviewed, producers face problems such as water scarcity (lack of rainfall), insect and rodent attacks, insufficient soil fertility, and labor shortages. Traders, processors, and consumers encounter similar challenges. For traders, these include the rotting of fresh tubers during storage, transportation costs, and market slowdowns. For consumers, challenges include preservation (39%), the high cost of tubers (36%), the unavailability of certain varieties (20%), and tuber quality (Figure 8).

Table 5. Characteristics of yam tubers for different end-products.

Dishes	Tuber characteristics/ processing	Cooked product characteristics	Preferred varieties	Consumers in urban areas (%)
Pounded yam	• Striped skin with occasional small bumps • Flesh less watery when cut (hard and dry) • Second yellow skin (when scratched with a finger) • Absence of black spots on the flesh • Medium-sized tuber • No discoloration after cutting • Washing water non-slippery, and broth is thick and milky • The cooked yam is very crumbly and remains white after cooking • When pounded, the yam easily crushes with a powdery texture and forms a mass easily	• Stretchy smooth, moldable dough • Easy to chew and to swallow dough • Attractive white/cream color • Pleasant aroma	Kponan, Krenglé, Assawa	40
Boiled yam	• Often striped skin with occasional small bumps • Absence of black spots on the flesh • Medium-sized tuber • No discoloration after cutting and cooking • Pleasant aroma	• Pleasant aroma • Soft, mealy, slightly sweet	Kponan, Assawa, Bètè bètè, Florido, Krenglé, Kpassadjo	43
Fried yam		• Pleasant aroma • Crispy on the outside and soft and crumbly on the inside		11
Yam stew		• Pleasant aroma • Soft cooked product		6

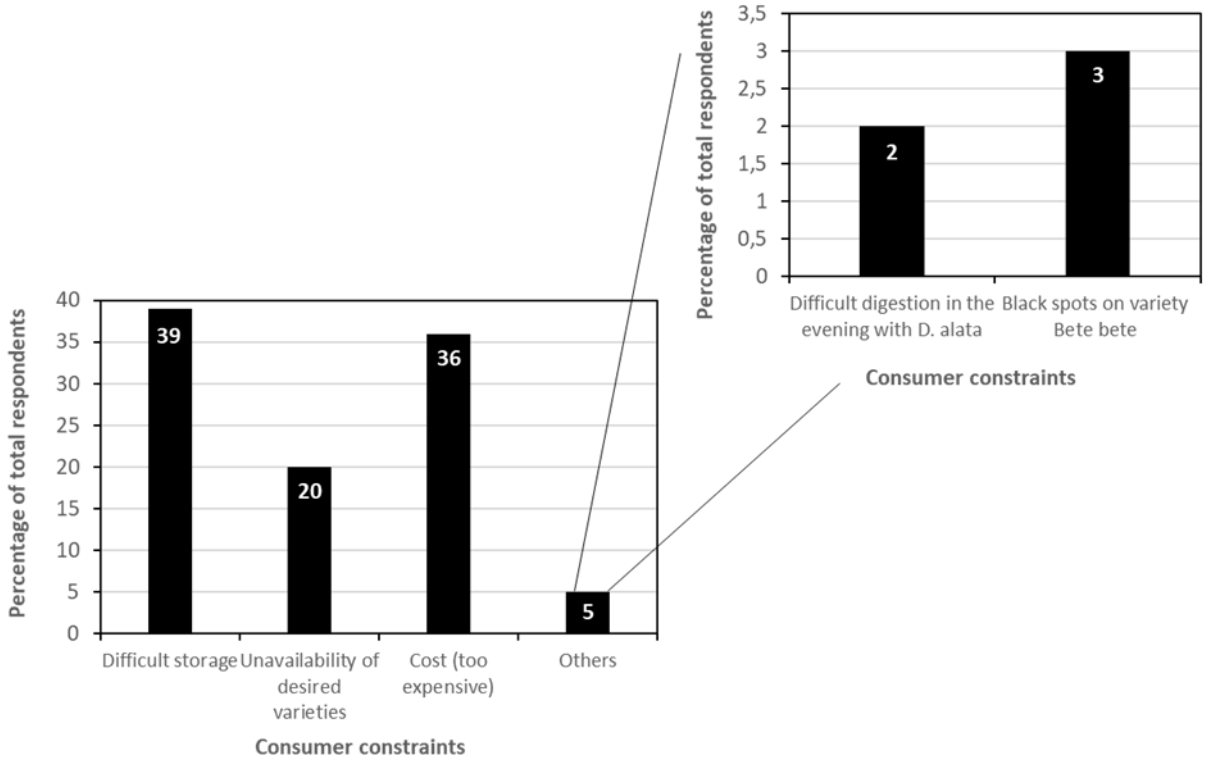

Figure 8: Consumer constraints.

Conclusions

The objective of this brief was to review yam market segmentation in Côte d'Ivoire. The findings provide a decision-making tool to recommend new or revised market segments for yam and TPPs, based on evidence from literature and focus group discussions.

The yam TPP database (https://glomip.cgiar.org/target-product-profiles) highlights key quality traits that should be improved (i.e. yield, disease resistance), maintained (i.e., processing ability), or introduced (i.e., nutritional content). While these remain important, our study emphasizes the need to reconsider storage capacity as a priority trait. Storage strongly influences the entire value chain, including the quality of ready-to-eat products. We propose that, rather than being treated as a "nice-to-have" trait, storage should be targeted for improvement in early-maturing yam segments.

Late-maturing varieties, particularly water yam, demonstrate superior storage performance compared to early-maturing types, even though the latter are more valued for eating quality. Breeding hybrids that combine strong storage potential with desirable texture and elasticity, supported by good agronomic practices, would stabilize supply beyond the early harvest period and better meet consumer expectations.

Two additional traits also merit attention: the stretchability of dough prepared from water yam and the occurrence of brown spots. These traits should be maintained in white yam (both early- and late-maturing) segments but improved in water yam.

The value chain analysis further revealed both strengths and constraints. Côte d'Ivoire benefits from a well-established yam market, varietal diversity, and strong regional trade prospects. Yet the sector faces challenges such as price volatility, high transport costs, limited preservation technologies, declining soil fertility, and competition with crops like cashew. Opportunities lie in processing high-quality but perishable yams into products such as instant flour, frozen yam, or canned yam, which could open new markets and reduce postharvest losses. However, threats from pests, diseases, and urban expansion require both breeding innovations and supportive public policies.

In conclusion, strengthening yam market segmentation and aligning breeding priorities with storage, processing, and consumer preferences are crucial for improving the resilience and competitiveness of Côte d'Ivoire's yam sector. Such an approach would enhance value addition, increase incomes along the value chain, and secure yam's role as a key staple in national and regional markets.

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About this series

The Market Intelligence Brief offers evidence-based insights into the potential for increased impact towards the CGIAR Impact Areas from investments in crop breeding and seed systems development. This peer reviewed series brings together voices from diverse fields, including marketing and agribusiness, gender, plant sciences and climate change to inform debates on future priorities and investments by CGIAR, NARS, the private sector and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). This series is a collaborative effort of CGIAR centers and partners working on CGIAR Market Intelligence.

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