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## EARNING MONEY FROM WEEDS

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Striga is a nasty, parasitic weed that sucks the life out of cereal crops. Farmers in Mali had no idea how to control it, and often watched helplessly as it destroyed their millet and sorghum crops.

That began to change in 2012 when farmers all over Mali began to watch ten farmer-to-farmer videos on how to fight Striga.

Striga biology is unusual. The plant germinates and attaches itself to the roots of the cereal crop. The Striga grows underground for a long time.

After the farmers have finished weeding their crop, the Striga suddenly appears. Its seeds are so small that most people never notice them.

After they watched the videos in 2012, farmers in Mali understood that key to controlling Striga is to hand pull each of the flowering plants, before it sets seed. This is best handled by the whole community.

After watching the videos, farmers from the Tominian Circle Farmers' Union (UACT) in the Ségou region of Mali decided to implement a community day for uprooting Striga while it was flowering.

On this special day, the whole community comes together to go through the whole village to uproot the Striga.

The day is organised each year between September and October, when all the farmers are at home waiting for the next harvest. Each village times their community day to fall when the Striga is in flower.

Uprooting Striga has become a very popular and well appreciated activity wherever the Tominian farmers' union has promoted the videos.

One group of women in the north-eastern village of Daga have their own story. Despite efforts to combat Striga, the farmers were not yet managing it.



At work uprooting Striga.





Women are often able to profit from a DVD.

To limit the damage caused by Striga, the women of Daga organised themselves into a group to sell their services to pull the Striga from farmers' fields.

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Called the "Striga Uprooting Group", their main activity is to uproot striga. All village women participate in this service provider group whose work has become a new income-generating activity for them. At the time of flowering and when their services are requested by farmers, the group passes through their fields to uproot the weed for a sum of between 2,500 to 5,000 CFA (\$4 to \$8) per hectare depending on how badly the field is infested.

Almost 2 years after viewing the videos, this group's Striga uprooting services remain in high demand.

As witnessed by the president of the group: "We are unable to satisfy all the demands of the village. We earn good money by uprooting Striga. The money we gain has helped to pay for school books and pens for our children. Uprooting Striga is our own business and provides our women's group with a source of income."

Videos not only help rural people to try technical innovations, but social innovations as well.

The Striga videos were not intended to inspire women to organise themselves into money-making groups. But the videos do show people working in groups to pull Striga up by the roots. The women in Daga simply applied this new idea creatively to start a new social group.

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