Genetic diversity in *Colocasia esculenta* and *Xanthosoma maffafa* in Togo, West Africa

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Key words: crop diversity, new cocoyam, SSR, taro, Togo.

Abstract: Taro and new cocoyam are root and leaf crops commonly grown in tropical to warm temperate regions. In Togo, they are neglected and underutilized. Here we report the genetic diversity of 26 accessions of taro and 101 accessions of new cocoyam. Analysis of simple sequence repeats revealed low polymorphic information content of 0.43 and 0.25 in taro and new cocoyam, respectively. PCA scatterplots and Neighbour Joining dendrograms based on the SSR data clustered accessions into groups that more-or-less correspond to morphological diversity in both species. AMOVA within and between morphological groups revealed greater variances within groups than between. This indicates weak genetic differentiation between morphological groups, particularly for taro. Genetic diversity was greater among taro cultivars. Taro has a longer history of introduction and dispersal in Africa, and has had more opportunity for multiple introduction and local cultivar development. Different strategies are suggested for future development of these crops in Togo and Africa. For taro, further studies of existing diversity and recent experimental introductions to Africa are likely to be rewarding. New cocoyam, a modern historical introduction, has spread widely in Africa with little genetic diversity. For this crop, international collaboration is needed to clarify taxonomy, and to introduce further cultivars for evaluation under local conditions in Africa.

1. Introduction

Root and tuber crops are important sources of food and income for household in rural areas of Africa. In sub-Saharan Africa, they provide...
about 20% of calories (Pinnstrup-Andersen et al.,
1999). Taro, *Colocasia esculenta* (L.) Schott and new
cocoym, *Xanthosoma* spp., are grown for food and
income generation at the household level. Both crops
are grown in tropical regions of Africa, Asia, Oceania
and America, and taro is also common in temperate
regions of Africa, Asia, and Oceania (Gonçalves, 2011;
Matthews, 2014; Onyeka, 2014; Grimaldi, 2016;
Matthews and Ghanem, 2021). Taro is considered an
ancient crop in Africa, with multiple likely routes of
introduction from Asia (Matthews, 2006; Fuller et al.,
2011; Chaîr et al., 2016; Grimaldi, 2016). New coco­
yam is known to have been introduced to Ghana in
1843 (Karikari, 1971), though earlier introduction fol­
lowing European contact with America has been sug­
gested (Bown, 2000).

Most parts of these plants (corms, side-corms,
stolons, petioles, leaf blades, and floral spathes) are
edible, the leaves and corms are also commonly used
as animal fodder in Asia (Coursey, 1984; Matthews,
2010; Mwenye et al., 2010; Masuno et al., 2012;
Matthews, 2014; Wada et al., 2017), and medicinal
uses are also known (Plowman, 1969; Ribeiro Pereira
et al., 2021). The specific parts eaten vary according
to cultivar attributes, local food knowledge, and cul-
tural or personal preferences. Both crops have great
potential for development in Africa and globally
(Okereke, 2020).

Under cultivation, clonal propagation is universal
for both taro and new cocoym. In a global survey of
taro, Chaîr et al. (2016) found the greatest genetic
diversity and the largest number of private alleles in
Asian cultivars, especially in India. Low genetic diver­
sity was found in western Africa, among diploid and
triploid cultivars, and also in southern Africa, where
triploid cultivars were dominant. Their observations
 correspond broadly to what is known about the
breeding of taro: flowering, fruiting and seed produc­
tion by wild and cultivated taros are common in trop­
ical regions of Asia and Oceania (Matthews, 2014),
but have not been observed in Africa despite occa­
sional reports of flowering (e.g. Traore, 2013).
Natural fruiting and seed production by new cocoy­
am has not been reported outside South America,
but sterile inflorescences are often produced (obser­
vation by authors), and induced flowering and exper­
imental crosses have been reported in Cameroon
(Onokpise et al., 1992).

Globally, taro has undergone genetic erosion due
to changes in cropping patterns, the spread of
improved varieties, and replacement by other crops
(Lakhanpaul et al., 2003; Matthews and Ghanem,
2021), including new cocoym (Coursey, 1984). The
acidity of taro (and resulting special care needed for
cooking) (Matthews, 2010), spread of taro leaf blight
(TLB) (Singh et al., 2012), and shortages of planting
materials are contributing factors. In order to identify
and preserve cultivars of economic value, maintain
living germplasm collections efficiently (without
excessive duplication), and provide baseline data for
future breeding programs, genetic diversity and mor­
phology must be assessed in cultivars of both
species.

The taxonomy of cultivated *Xanthosoma* species
and relationships with wild species are uncertain, and
historically there has been a tendency to use the
name *X. sagittifolium* for all cultivated *Xanthosoma*
(Giacometti and Leon, 1994; Castro, 2006; Quero-
García et al., 2010; Doungous et al., 2015). Although
*X. sagittifolium* is the name used in many previous
studies in Africa, the plant is most likely to be *X.
mafaffa* (Gonçalves, 2011). The taxonomy of culti­
ved *Xanthosoma* spp. in tropical America has been
revised by Croat and Delannay (2017). Various culti­
vated species of *Xanthosoma* are also circulating
internationally and may have reached Africa in the
modern historical period. These include *X. atrovirens*
C. Koch & Bouché (blackish green blades, and “blue”
wax on dark green petioles creating a dark purple or
black appearance), *X. robustum* (which can reach 4 m
in height, with tall above-ground stems) and *X. vio-
laceum* (with violet petiole tissue below a waxy sur­
fact) (Gonçalves, 2011). In addition to the 1843 intro­
duction of *Xanthosoma* (Karikari, 1971), an unsuc­
cessful attempt was made to introduce *X. brasiliensis*
from Puerto Rico in 1974 (Karikari, 1979). In Central
America, *X. mafaffa* cultivars vary in corm parenchy­
ma color (red or white), and those with red corms are
also tinged with red in the petiole, leaf sheath and
spathae (Gonçalves, 2011).

In Togo, a collection of taro and new cocoym cul­tivars from throughout the country was assembled,
and morphological groups were described in both
species (Bammite, 2018; Bammite et al., 2018 a, b).
However, data related to genetic diversity among
these crops, based on molecular tools such as SSR,
are lacking to enhance effective usage and conserva­
tion of these neglected species and develop a breed­ing
program to improve the quality of their
germplasm. This study aimed to assess simple
sequence repeat (SSR) diversity in the same collec­
tion of taro and new cocoym. Polymorphic SSR loci
have codominant alleles (repeat sequences of vary­ing
length, detected by PCR amplification), and been
used in many studies of taro (Devi, 2012; You et al., 2015) and other edible aroids (Suppl. Table S1), and in genetic linkage mapping of the taro nuclear genome (Quero-García et al., 2010; Soulard et al., 2017).

2. Materials and Methods

Plant materials

In 2016, cultivars of taro and new cocoyam were collected from 42 localities randomly selected across the five ecological zones of Togo (Fig. 1). At each village, farmers were invited to bring corms of different cultivars grown in their village. For each distinct cultivar recognized in group discussions, the local name was recorded and collected corm samples were planted at the Centre de Recherche Agronomique du Litoral (CRAL), an experimental farm of the Institut Togolais de Recherche Agronomique (ITRA) located at Davié, at latitude N 6°23’ and longitude E 1°12’ and at 88 m above sea level (Table S2). Accessions of both species were classified in a binary manner based on morphological characters that are easily observed in the field: taro accessions were identified as either dasheen (with large mother corms, and either stolons or side-corms; Pop1), or eddoe (with small mother corms, and few to many side-corms; Pop2); new cocoyam accessions were identified as either green (leaves entirely green; Pop1) or purple (petioles purple or pink to some extent; Pop2).

Morphological diversity in the same collection was previously analysed with reference to a wide range of agronomic and morphological characters (Bammite et al., 2018 b; Figs. S1-S3). Young leaf tissue from one plant from each of 26 accessions of taro and 101 accessions of new cocoyam was dried on silica gel and taken to the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) Bioscience Centre, Ibadan, Nigeria for DNA extraction and genotyping.

DNA isolation and quantification

DNA was extracted using an optimized SDS protocol recommended by IITA Bioscience Centre (2017). About 100 mg of dry leaf tissue was put in a tube with two steel balls and reduced to powder using a SPEX Genogrinder-2000. Pre-heated extraction buffer (450 µl of 1M Tris-HCl, 0.5M EDTA, 5M NaCl, 20% SDS and 1% PVP) was added. Tubes were incubated at 65°C for 20 mins and inverted occasionally to homogenize each sample. Tubes were removed from bath, allowed to cool for two mins, then 200 µl of ice-cold 5M potassium acetate was added and the mixture incubated on ice for 20 mins to precipitate proteins. Tubes were then centrifuged at 3500 rpm for 10 mins, and each supernatant was transferred to a new labeled tube. A volume of 200 µl of 4% polyvinylpyrrolidone (PVP) was added to the supernatant and gently mixed. To precipitate and remove proteins and lipids, 45 µl of chloroform isooamylalcohol (24:1) was added, mixed gently and tubes were centrifuged at 3500 rpm for 15 mins. Each supernatant was transferred to a new tube, and a 2/3 volume of ice-cold isopropanol was added, mixed, and incubated in -80°C for 15 mins to precipitate the DNA. After centrifuging at 3500 rpm for 15 mins, the DNA pellet was washed by adding 400 µl of 70% ethanol, centrifugation at 3500 rpm for 15 mins, and decanting the supernatant until the last drop. The DNA pellet was air-dried then resuspended in 100 µl low salt TE buffer (10 mM Tris-HCl, 1 mM.
EDTA). A volume of 2 µl of RNase A (10 µg/ml) was added and incubated at 37°C for 40 mins. The quantity and quality of extracted DNA was checked using electrophoresis with 1% agarose gel, and a Nanodrop 8000 spectrophotometer, and the extracts were stored at -20°C until use.

**PCR amplification**

Initial testing was carried out with 47 primer pairs designed in previous SSR studies: 19 for *Amorphophallus paeoniifolius* (Santosa *et al.*, 2007), 11 for *C. esculenta* (Hu *et al.*, 2009.) and 17 for *X. sagittifolium* (Cathebras *et al.*, 2014) (Table S3). The 47 primer pairs were tested first with five samples from each target species to determine which pairs could amplify scorable DNA products in each species.

PCR amplification was performed in PCR mixture (25 µl) containing 2.5 µl of template DNA (20ng/µl), 2.5 µl of 10x NH4 PCR reaction buffer, 1 µl of 50mM MgCl2, 1 µl of 5 µM forward primer, 1 µl of 5 µM reverse primer, 0.2 µl of 5mM each dNTP, 0.1 µl of BIOTAQ DNA polymerase and 16.1 µl of water. The PCR program consisted of initial denaturation (94°C, 5 mins), 42 cycles each consisting of 20 s denaturation (93°C), 1 min annealing at temperatures ranging from 47 to 59°C (as recommended by the authors above; Table S3), and 2 mins elongation (72°C). Finally, an extension period of 10 mins was included. After PCR completion, the products were stored at 4°C until gel electrophoresis. Ten µl of each PCR product was electrophoresed alongside a 50 bp DNA ladder (New England Biolab) in polyacrylamide gel (10% InstaPAGE gel) at 110 V for one hour, and bands were visualized by silver staining (1L TBE 0,5X buffer + 500 µL of SafeView) for 3 mins. Amplified fragment sizes were determined by comparison to the 50 bp ladder, and bands were examined and recorded using the ENDURO™ Gel Documentation System.

**Data analysis**

Recorded gel images with PCR products were analysed using the Image Studio Lite Ver 5.2 software, generating binary matrix data for all accessions based on the band patterns observed at each SSR locus: presence of an amplified band was scored as “1”; absence was scored as “0”. Summary statistics for each locus were estimated using PowerMarker 3.25 software.

For statistical comparisons within each species, the binary classifications of morphotypes were used: taro - dasheen = Pop 1, eddoe = Pop2; new cocoyam - green = Pop1, purple = Pop2. GenAlex 6.5 software (Peekall and Smouse, 2006) was used to calculate the number of polymorphic loci (no. PL), the percentage of polymorphic loci (% PL), the observed number of alleles (Na), the effective number of alleles (Ne), average expected heterozygosity (He) (also known as Nei’s gene diversity, Nei, 1973), and Shannon’s information index (I) (a measure of genetic diversity suitable for codominant data). Analysis of molecular variance (AMOVA) was performed to evaluate the genetic variation within and among morphotype populations by using GenALEX version 6.503 (Peekall and Smouse, 2006), and PhiPT (the proportion of total genetic variance derived from variance between individuals among populations, i.e. an estimate of population genetic differentiation). Here, our $H_0 = n$ no genetic difference among populations, $H_1 = \text{there is genetic difference among populations,}$ and $p= \text{probability of an observed PHPT value } \leq$ than that observed by chance, if the null hypothesis (no genetic difference) is true.

Principal Coordinate Analysis (PCA) was carried out using the GenALEX version 6.503 (Peekall and Smouse, 2006). The genetic distance matrix was constructed by calculating the shared allele distance for each pair of individuals in PowerMarker version 3.25. From this matrix, a neighbour joining (NJ) tree was constructed using Nei’s genetic distances (Nei *et al.*, 1983) in the same software.

### 3. Results

In the initial test with five samples of each target species, only 27 of 47 SSR primer pairs, amplified and gave polymorphic, scorable bands (Fig. 2; Table S3):
two from *Amorphophallus* amplified both target species, 11 from *C. esculenta* amplified only *C. esculenta* and 14 from *X. sagittifolium* amplified only *X. mafaffa*. The resulting measures of diversity for each species are shown in Tables 1 and 4, and are summarised below.

Among 26 accessions of taro, 33 alleles were observed at 13 loci, an average of 3.15 alleles per locus (loci are hereafter identified by the primer code names). The frequency of major alleles ranged from 0.38 for locus HK7 to 0.88 for HK5, with an average of 0.62. Nei’s gene diversity ranged from 0.21 for HK7 to 0.71 for HK5, with an average of 0.49. Polymorphic information content (PIC) values ranged from 0.20 to 0.65 with an average of 0.43. The primers HK35, HK26, HK38, Ampa9, HK7 with PIC values ≥ 0.5 were most discriminating (Table 1). The percentages of polymorphic loci for each morphotype of taro were 82% (dasheen, Pop1) and 58% (eddoe, Pop2), with an average of 70% (rounded figures). The numbers of different (Na) and effective (Ne) alleles, Shanons Information Index (I), and Nei’s gene diversity (He) were all higher in dasheen and lower in eddoe (Table 2).

Table 1 - Taro: Frequency of major alleles, number of alleles, Nei’s genetic diversity, and polymorphism information content (PIC) for 13 primers applied to 26 accessions (Togo collection)

| Locus | Freq. major alleles | No. alleles | Genetic diversity | PIC |
|-------|---------------------|-------------|-------------------|-----|
| HK5   | 0.88                | 3           | 0.21              | 0.2 |
| Ampa15| 0.85                | 3           | 0.27              | 0.26|
| HK25  | 0.77                | 2           | 0.36              | 0.29|
| HK31  | 0.65                | 2           | 0.45              | 0.35|
| HK29  | 0.65                | 3           | 0.48              | 0.39|
| AC3   | 0.5                 | 3           | 0.54              | 0.43|
| HK22  | 0.65                | 3           | 0.51              | 0.45|
| HK34  | 0.65                | 3           | 0.51              | 0.45|
| HK35  | 0.65                | 4           | 0.52              | 0.48|
| HK26  | 0.54                | 3           | 0.59              | 0.52|
| HK38  | 0.42                | 3           | 0.64              | 0.56|
| Ampa9 | 0.42                | 5           | 0.66              | 0.59|
| HK7   | 0.38                | 4           | 0.71              | 0.65|
| Mean  | 0.62                | 3.15        | 0.49              | 0.43|

Table 2A - Taro: Statistical measures of genetic diversity in the dasheen and eddoe populations (Togo collection)

|          | N  | Na  | Ne  | I   | He  | %P  |
|----------|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Pop1 (dasheen) | 15 | 1.758 | 1.546 | 0.451 | 0.307 | 82 |
| Pop2 (eddoe)   | 11 | 1.364 | 1.234 | 0.251 | 0.156 | 58 |
| Mean           | 15 | 1.561 | 1.396 | 0.351 | 0.231 | 70 |
| SE             | 0.089 | 0.045 | 0.033 | 0.024 |       | 12 |

N = no. accessions (test population), Na = no. of different alleles, Ne = no. of effective alleles, I = Shanons Information Index, He = Nei’s gene diversity, %P = percentage of polymorphic loci (rounded figures)

Table 2B - Taro: Summary analysis of molecular variation (AMOVA) in the dasheen and eddoe populations (Togo collection)

|          | df | SS   | MS   | Est. var. | % var | PhiPT | p value |
|----------|----|------|------|----------|-------|-------|---------|
| Between pops | 1  | 15.962 | 15.962 | 0.915   | 17%   | 0.174 | 0.014   |
| Within pops   | 24 | 104.23 | 4.343 | 4.343   | 83%   |       |         |
| Total         | 25 | 120.192 | -    | 5.258   | 100%  |       |         |

df = degrees of freedom, SS = sum of squares, MS = mean sum of squares, Est. var. = estimated variance, % var = percentage of variation, PhiPT = proportion of total genetic variance derived from variance between individuals among populations, p = probability value for PhiPT.
Among the 101 accessions of new cocoyam, 48 alleles were observed at 16 loci, an average of 3.0 alleles per locus. The frequency of major alleles ranged from 0.47 for Ampa9 to 0.97 for Ampa15, with an average of 0.83. Nei’s gene diversity (He) ranged from 0.06 for Ampa9 to 0.67 for Ampa15, with an average of 0.28. PIC values ranged from 0.06 to 0.62, with an average of 0.25. Only the Ampa9 locus gave a PIC value greater than 0.5 (Table 3).

The percentages of polymorphic loci for each morphotype of new cocoyam were 74% (green, Pop1) and 94% (purple, Pop2) and with an average of 84% (rounded figures). A lower number of different alleles was recorded in the green population (Na = 1.74, n = 23) and a higher number in the purple population (Na = 1.87, n = 78), but the number of effective alleles (Ne) and other measures of diversity (I, He) were higher in the green population (Table 4).

**Cluster analysis and structuring of genetic diversity**

Analysis of molecular variance (AMOVA) gave percentages of molecular variance of 83% within and 17% between the dasheen and eddoe populations of taro, indicating weak differentiation overall (Table 2). For new cocoyam, the percentages of molecular variance were 64% within and 36% between the green and purple population (Table 4). The probability value (p) for PhiPT is higher in taro (0.014) than in new cocoyam (0.001) providing for taro a weaker rejection of the $H_0$ of no genetic difference between populations.

The first and second coordinates of the PCA scatter plot (Fig. 3) represent, respectively, 48% and 16% (in total 64%; rounded figures) of the detected variability among taro accessions. For cocoyam accessions, the coordinates represented 41% and 13% (in total 54%) (Fig. 4). Some dasheen taros formed a distinct group along the first coordinate, but apart from

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**Table 3** - New cocoyam: Frequency of major alleles, number of alleles, Nei’s genetic diversity, and polymorphism information content (PIC) for 16 primers applied to 101 accessions (Togo collection)

| # | Locus | Freq. major alleles | No. of alleles | Genetic Diversity | PIC |
|---|-------|---------------------|----------------|-------------------|-----|
| 1 | Ampa15 | 0.97 | 3 | 0.06 | 0.06 |
| 2 | mXsCIR1 | 0.95 | 2 | 0.09 | 0.09 |
| 3 | mXsCIR1 | 0.94 | 2 | 0.11 | 0.11 |
| 4 | mXsCIR0 | 0.89 | 2 | 0.19 | 0.18 |
| 5 | mXsCIR1 | 0.87 | 3 | 0.23 | 0.21 |
| 6 | mXsCIR1 | 0.87 | 3 | 0.23 | 0.21 |
| 7 | mXsCIR1 | 0.85 | 3 | 0.26 | 0.23 |
| 8 | mXsCIR2 | 0.86 | 3 | 0.25 | 0.23 |
| 9 | mXsCIR2 | 0.85 | 3 | 0.26 | 0.23 |
| 10 | mXsCIR2 | 0.84 | 3 | 0.27 | 0.24 |
| 11 | mXsCIR1 | 0.83 | 3 | 0.29 | 0.27 |
| 12 | mXsCIR2 | 0.79 | 3 | 0.35 | 0.32 |
| 13 | mXsCIR0 | 0.76 | 4 | 0.39 | 0.35 |
| 14 | mXsCIR2 | 0.77 | 4 | 0.38 | 0.35 |
| 15 | mXsCIR1 | 0.76 | 3 | 0.39 | 0.35 |
| 16 | Ampa9 | 0.47 | 4 | 0.67 | 0.62 |
| **Means** | | | | 0.28 | 0.25 |

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**Table 4A** - New cocoyam: Statistical measures of genetic diversity in the green and purple populations (Togo collection)

| N | Na | Ne | I | He | %P |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pop1 (green) | 23 | 1.742 | 1.532 | 0.418 | 0.287 | 74 |
| Pop2 (purple) | 78 | 1.871 | 1.176 | 0.23 | 0.128 | 94 |
| Mean | 1.806 | 1.354 | 0.324 | 0.208 | 84 |
| SE | 0.06 | 0.05 | 0.033 | 0.024 | 10 |

N = no. accessions tested, Na = average no. of alleles observed per locus, Ne = no. of effective alleles, $I$ = Shannon’s Information Index, He = Nei’s gene diversity, %P = percentage of polymorphic loci (rounded figures).

**Table 4B** - New cocoyam: Summary analysis of molecular variation (AMOVA) in the green and purple populations (Togo collection)

| Source | df | SS | MS | Est. var. | % var. | PhiPT | p value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Between pops | 1 | 54,566 | 54,566 | 1.463 | 36% | 0.36 | 0.001 |
| Within pops | 99 | 257,255 | 2.599 | 2.599 | 64% | | |
| Total | 100 | 311,822 | - | 4.061 | 100% | | |
this, there is no clear separation of dasheen and eddoe accessions overall in the SSR data. In contrast, the green and purple new cocoyam formed very distinct groups along the first PCA coordinate. These relationships between SSR diversity in PCA scatter-plot and simple morphotype classification are mirrored in the NJ dendrograms.

The NJ dendrogram of SSR diversity in taro (Fig. 5) revealed one larger cluster (C1) that includes a mix of dasheen (7 accessions) and eddoe types (10 accessions), and a two clusters (C2, C3) that include dasheen types only (9 accessions). The accessions in C3 were all dasheen types, from wet, flooded environments, with purple petiole and petiole junction, and generally producing many stolons (see Discussion and Conclusions) (Fig. S1A, Fig. S2).

The NJ dendrogram of SSR diversity in new cocoyam revealed two large clusters (C1 and C2) (Fig. 6) that largely correspond to the green and purple morphotypes of this species (13 and 88 accessions in each category; and many identical haplotypes).

With regard to the more specific morphological groups previously reported, C1 includes mostly G1, and C2 includes a mix of mostly G2 and G3 (purple morphotypes; Fig. S3).

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The present SSR results indicate few duplicate accessions in the smaller collection of taro (Fig. 5) and many apparent duplicates in the larger collection of X. mafaffa (Fig. 6). Qualitative and quantitative traits for morphological and agronomic characters of taro and new cocoyam were previously recorded and analysed by Bammite et al. (2018b). Thirty-eight characters were selected from the descriptor list of IPGRI (1999) for C. esculenta and 28 from the descriptor list of IBPGR (1989) for X. sagittifolium. Based on these detailed observations, morphological groups within each species were identified using UPGMA analysis (Fig. S1). Although these groups (G1-
G4 in taro, G1-G3 in new cocoyam) do not always correspond as expected to the single-character categories used in the present study (corm size and shape in taro, plant colour in new cocoyam) (Figs. S2 and S3), congruences are apparent between SSR genetic diversity and morphological diversity, however the latter is defined. Complete correspondence between single-character and multi-character classifications is not expected, but future studies of morphological diversity can be improved by ensuring greater uniformity in the planting materials used.

Ahmed et al. (2020) found that the dasheen/eddoe classification corresponds to two distinct evolutionary lineages within *C. esculenta*, and suggested that the existence of many intermediate or mixed morphotypes may reflect hybridisation between these lineages. In Togo, SSR cluster C1 includes both dasheen and eddoe forms, consistent with the suggestion of mixing (hybridisation) between eddoe and dasheen lineages (see also Lakhanpaul *et al.*, 2003). Clusters C2 and C3 corresponded entirely to dasheen forms with large mother corms and either stolons or side-corms. The three accessions in C2 had morphological above-ground traits similar to those typical of eddoe in the Togo collection (large pendant or drooping leaves) and underground morphological traits of dasheen type (G2, with large central corm with small side-corms). These accessions were collected in home gardens of farmers from Kabyè ethnic group in the ecologic zone IV (southern Togo Mountains) (Fig. 1). They reported having introduced them from ecological zone II (northern Togo Mountains), which is consistent with the report by Ern (1979) of an expansion of banana, cassava and taro production on steep slopes in Zone IV by Kabyè settlers from the north.

The observation of two major SSR clusters in new cocoyam (C1-C2) suggests that more than one species of *Xanthosoma* is present in Togo, not just *X. mafaffa* (Bammite *et al.*, 2018a, b). A survey of Amplified Fragment Length Polymorphism (AFLP) in new cocoyam in Ethiopia also revealed two major clusters (Wada *et al.*, 2018). The existence of such distinct lineages and the general uncertainty of identification of *Xanthosoma* species suggest an urgent need for direct and detailed comparisons between cultivated *Xanthosoma* spp. in Africa, and the wild and cultivated species of *Xanthosoma* in tropical America.

For both species, the Neighbour Joining analysis of SSR allelic diversity at a small number of loci provides tree diagrams in which terminal branching (near tree tips) is not a reliable indicator of phylogeny. Much of the “within population” variation in both species may reflect somatic mutation within clonal cultivar lineages. The small numbers of loci analysed here (13 in taro, 14 in new cocoyam) make it inherently difficult to distinguish clones with certainty, as there are 14 chromosomes in the haploid complement of *C. esculenta* (Coates *et al.*, 1988; Cusimano *et al.*, 2012), and 13 in *Xanthosoma* spp. (Cusimano *et al.*, 2012; Wada *et al.*, 2018) giving rounded averages of just 0.9 loci (taro) and 1.1 loci (new cocoyam).
sampled per chromosome. For taro, actual coverage is less than 0.9 loci/chromosome, as two HK loci have been mapped to one linkage group and chromosome (Table S4). Although Chaïr et al. (2016) introduced a method to estimate clonality based on just 11 loci, the same research group also employed a much more robust method using Diversity Array Technology (DArT™) to screen polymorphic loci (possibly thousands) across the entire taro genome (Vandenbrouke et al., 2016). By combining the latter method with a detailed survey of morphological diversity in an assemblage of Vanuatu cultivars, Vandenbrouke et al. (2016) could unequivocally identify clonal lineages within which somatic mutation has produced distinct phenotypes that are recognised, selected, and maintained by farmers. Most recently, Soulard et al. (2017) have mapped polymorphic SNP and SSR loci across the entire taro nuclear genome, while Yin et al. (2021) have published nearly complete sequences for all 14 chromosomes in taro.

Somatic mutation may explain some of the morphological and genetic diversity found in taro in Togo and Africa generally, but spontaneous breeding among diploid cultivars in Africa may also be involved. The chromosome numbers of Togo cultivars have not been studied, but triploid taros are widespread and common in Africa (Chair et al., 2016) and the neighbouring country of Burkina Faso (Traore, 2013), and can be assumed to be inherently sterile because they are triploids. The eddoe-type taros (C. esculenta var. antiquorum) in Togo are likely to be triploids, as this morphotype is generally triploid in neighbouring Burkina Faso (Traore, 2013) and eastern Asia (Plucknett, 1983; Matthews, 2014; Wang et al., 2020), but this cannot be assumed - if the diploid (fertile) progenitors of triploid eddoe cultivars still exist, some might share the eddoe mor-

Table 5 - Sample size (n) and number of alleles at SSR loci in Taro, in four different studies using the HK primer series designed by Hu et al. (2009)

| Locus | Hu et al. (2009), n=30, China | Hunt et al. (2013), n=42–49, Australia & PNG (two wild populations) | Chair et al. (2016), n=321 (19 countries excl. China) | Present study n=26, Togo |
|-------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| HK5   | 6                             | 10                                                            | -                                                      | 3                       |
| HK7   | 4                             | 2                                                             | 12                                                     | 4                       |
| HK22  | 3                             | -                                                             | 18                                                     | 3                       |
| HK26  | 5                             | 8                                                             | 28                                                     | 3                       |
| HK31  | 3                             | 4                                                             | -                                                      | 2                       |
| HK34  | 3                             | 9                                                             | -                                                      | 3                       |
| HK35  | 3                             | 11                                                            | -                                                      | 4                       |

(-) = loci not studied
tested, and the relatively low genetic diversity of taro in Africa generally (Chaïr et al., 2016). Nevertheless, the overall diversity of taro in Togo, and in the neighbouring countries of Ghana and Burkina Faso (Traore, 2013) does suggest a complex history of the crop in the region, and in Africa.

Among published studies of SSR diversity in taro (Table S1), no two studies have used the same methods to collect, maintain and test plants, and no standard set of primer pairs and target loci has emerged. Crucially, different sample sets differ in whether they represent initial collections created to assess diversity in possibly-identical cultivars from different locations (as in the present study), or later-stage collections in which apparent duplicates have been removed. Observed diversity depends on how plants are collected, how many are collected, and how each collection is maintained over time. Taro and new cocoyam collections are constructed “populations” of clones, not random samples from freely breeding populations. For all of these reasons, we do not compare our statistical estimates (calculated data) with those of other small-scale studies. In the near future, new techniques for large-scale and low-cost DNA sequencing may allow more accurate, comprehensive and direct comparison of genotypes in different cultivar assemblages. Already for taro, public databases contain records of thousands of SSR and SNP (single nucleotide polymorphism) loci revealed by whole-genome and transcriptome studies (Liu et al., 2015; You et al., 2015; Helmkampf et al., 2017; Soulard et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2020), and a draft sequence for all 14 chromosomes has been published (Yin et al., 2021).

In the Togo collection, flowering occurred among accessions of both species, but fruiting and seed production were not observed. Togo has a tropical savannah climate, with distinct wet and dry seasons, and annual rainfall ranging from around 800 mm to 1,600 mm (Djaman et al., 2017). In Burkina Faso, in the same general climate zone, but further Northwest, most taro is mostly grown in provinces with annual rainfall ranging from around 700 mm to 1,100 mm, near Togo (Traore, 2013). Although conditions during the wet season in Togo (April to October) might be suitable for breeding by taro, dry and windy conditions during the winter harmattan (Ern, 1979) would be fatal for unprotected seedlings. These are very different circumstances from those in the natural range of taro, in the tropical rainforest zone of Asia and the western Pacific, where wild breeding populations are found (Matthews, 1991; Hunt et al., 2013; Matthews, 2014). Togo itself lies in a dry savannah corridor (the Dahomey Gap) flanked by tropical rainforest (the Upper and Lower Guinean Forests) where spontaneous breeding by taro may be possible. Breeding and selection of taro cultivars in these nearby forest regions might have contributed to some of the diversity found in Togo.

Different strategies are suggested here for future development of taro and new cocoyam in Togo. For taro, it will be rewarding to study the existing range of eddoe and dasheen cultivars further, and to make experimental introductions of new cultivars from outside Africa, following the example of Ouedraogo et al. (2018). Efforts will be needed to produce disease-free stocks of existing cultivars so that fair comparisons can be made with newly-introduced plants that are disease free. New cocoyam, a relatively modern historical introduction, has spread widely in Africa, and a lack of diversity is clear among the accessions collected in Togo. International collaboration is needed to identify and introduce new cultivars for evaluation under local conditions. This will be difficult, as there are no international breeding programmes for the crop, and little is known about the origins and diversity of cultivated Xanthosoma species in Central and South America. Xanthosoma spp. are even more neglected as orphan crops than taro (Matthews and Ghanem, 2021).

Together, taro and new cocoyam offer a range of cultivars suitable for cultivation in wetland to dryland environments. Agriculture in Togo is predominantly rainfed and often experiences both flooding and drought (Djaman et al., 2017). In seasons and locations when water is abundant, the flooding tolerance of dasheen taro (Onwueme, 1999) is a positive attribute that can enhance the food security of farmers working in riverine flood plains. When irrigation is provided, very good yields of taro can be expected in otherwise dry environments: this is shown by the success of taro as an irrigated summer crop in the eastern Mediterranean (Matthews, 2006), a region with long dry summers and relatively little annual rainfall (approx. 400 mm per year in the main agricultural districts of Cyprus). Over the last 50 years, climate change has been very obvious throughout Togo, with the wet season becoming 1-2 months shorter (Djaman et al., 2017; Gadédjisso-Tossou, 2018). During the period 1961-2001, for example, annual precipitation decreased at 80% of weather stations across the country (Djaman et al., 2017).
Under these circumstances, maintaining or expanding the cultivation of taro and new cocoyam may come to depend on the success or otherwise of efforts to improve methods for water storage, conservation and irrigation in Togo.

Acknowledgements

The authors greatly appreciate the International Foundation for Science (IFS Research Grant No. C/5866-2, 2020-2023) for providing research funds. The contribution by Matthews was partly funded by JSPS Kakenhi No. 17H04614 (2017–2020). Thanks also to E. Tabuchi, Osaka, for assistance with figures and tables.

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