Isolation and culture of protoplasts of Côte d'Ivoire’s pearl millet (*Pennisetum glaucum* (L) R) varieties

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Original submitted in on 2nd July 2015. Published online at www.m.elewa.org on 31st August 2015

http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/jab.v92i1.6

ABSTRACT

**Objective:** Protoplasts are the ideal material for genetic transformation of plants. This requires that the protoplasts have the ability to regenerate whole plants. The objective of this study is to isolate protoplasts from cell suspensions and test their ability to regenerate embryogenic calli and plants.

**Methodology and results:** Protoplasts were isolated with different enzyme combinations, from cell suspensions of millet, *Pennisetum glaucum*. Obtaining callus from protoplasts was carried out on various media at various pH with different glucose concentrations. Approximately 13,106 protoplasts / g were isolated from cell suspensions. Calli were regenerated by culturing the protoplasts at pH 5.8, at a concentration of 0.7 M glucose in either the liquid medium or solid medium. The plating efficiency of protoplast is from 0.012 to 0.013 in solid medium containing 0.6% agarose. No plant has been regenerated from calli provided from protoplasts. All plant regeneration attempts resulted in the formation of globular structures. Cytological studies have shown that the calli derived from protoplasts are formed with 50% of multinucleate cells.

**Conclusion and application of results:** This study allowed isolating protoplasts, regenerating embryogenic calli from protoplasts of millet varieties of Côte d’Ivoire and highlighting one of the causes of the recalcitrance of the grass crop culture regeneration from provided protoplasts. This study will allow genetic transformation of millet varieties by using protoplasts.

INTRODUCTION

Protoplast culture is a key element in genetic engineering development such as somatic hybridization and gene transfer. However, the application of these techniques is possible if reproducible methods for plants regeneration from protoplasts are available. In cereals, the first calli from protoplasts were obtained with rice (Deka *et al.*, 1976), maize (Chourey *et al.*, 1981), sorghum (Choureay *et al.*, 1985) and wheat (Yasuyuki *et al.*, 1988). Plant regeneration from protoplasts was established in *Oryza sativa* L. (Datta *et al.*, 1990; Baset *et al.*, 1993); in *Zea maize* (Petersen *et al.*, 1992); in *Triticum aestivum* L. (Vasil *et al.*, 1990, Chang *et al.*, 1991); in *Hordeum vulgare* (Ziauddin, 1992); in *Sorghum vulgare* (Zhi-Ming *et al.*, 1990); in *Saccharum officinarum* L. (Srinivasan, 1986). Although the majority of these works have used cell suspension as the main source of protoplasts,
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Tiécoura et al. J. Appl. Biosci. isolated, cultures of pearl millet, Pennisetum glaucum, varieties of Côte d'Ivoire, the conditions of isolation, culture and plant regeneration from protoplasts.

Several other approaches have also been used to regenerate plants. Indeed, protoplasts have been regenerated from rice mesophyll (Gupta and Pattanayak, 1993) and from Tylophoraindica mesophyll (Thomas, 2009). Within the genus Pennisetum, Vasil et al. (1979) obtained calli from cell suspension protoplasts of P. americanum, and they regenerated plantlets. Calli and plantlets were also obtained respectively with protoplasts of P. squamulatum (Gupta et al., 1988) and protoplasts of P. purpureum Schum (Vasil et al., 1983). The conditions for protoplasts isolation of mésophyles of P. glaucum and P. purpureum were reported by Timbo De Oliveira et al. (2010). Unlike other grasses or cereals such as rice, where the experiments were reproducible, work on Pennisetum has not yet led to reproducible regeneration from protoplasts (Mtili, 1990). Except for the use of isolated protoplasts for the expression of foreign genes (Tiécoura et al., 2001), studies on protoplasts of pearl millet, Pennisetum glaucum, varieties of Côte d'Ivoire are scarce. In this work, we present protoplast culture assays of pearl millet, Pennisetum glaucum, varieties of Côte d'Ivoire, the conditions of isolation, culture and plant regeneration from protoplasts.

MATERIEL AND METHODS

Vegetable material: Protoplasts used, were derived from embryogenic cell suspensions obtained from embryogenic calli of NE (northeast) millet variety (Tiécoura et al., 2014a).

Protoplast isolation: Isolation of protoplasts was performed using the methods of Potrykus (1977) and Shillito (1983) with some modifications: After centrifugation of cell suspension at 160xg / 2-3min, the pellet was weighed to determine the mass of fresh material. The pellet was suspended in protoplast culture medium containing different enzymes: Cellulase "Onozuka" RS (1-4%), R-10 maceroyzyme (Yakult Honsha Co. Tokyo) (0.5 to 1%), pectolyase Y -23 (SeishinPharmaceutical Co. Tokyo) (0.2 to 0.5%), MES (Boehringer) (0.5%), mannitol and CaCl2 (0.25M).

Protoplasts were incubated in 25ml before being counted. Viable protoplasts, after being counted, were taken up in fresh medium with glucose reduced by half. After one week, the sugar concentration was reduced to the concentration of the culture medium of the cell suspension (0.1 M) to allow microcalli to develop. The microcalli that appear were transferred on solid media MS or N6.

• Culture in solid medium (Sea plate, FMC BioProduction, USA): The washed protoplasts were taken up by the culture medium (twice in concentration) at a concentration of 10^6 / 500µl. To one volume of protoplasts was added a volume of agarose (twice in concentration). The gently homogenized mixture was placed in the Petri dish forming an agarose "pancake" that is grown with or without feeder cells.

• Culture without feeder cells (Potrykus, 1977, Shillito, 1983): The "pancake" was grown without culture medium or immersed in the culture medium and cultivated on a rotating table at 45 rpm / min. After 7 to 10 days, the cakes, dry or not, were immersed in the culture medium with reduced sugar concentration in half. At the second week, the "pancake" was immersed in the medium of normal cell culture. One or two weeks later, the "pancake" was placed on the solid medium. Developing microcalli was transferred on the solid medium.

• Culture with feeder cells: the "nursing" method (Petersen et al., 1992, Kamo et al., 1987): The "pancake" was immersed in a culture medium containing feeder cells (1 volume of growth medium, double concentration of sugar and 1 volume of cell suspension) and cultivated on rotating table. After a week, fresh medium with reduced sugar concentration in half was
used. In the case of the submerged culture, 80% of feeder cells were removed. After one or two weeks of culture, the "pancake" was washed several times with distilled water and then transferred to solid medium MS or N6.

Plants regeneration: For regeneration, the MS medium (0.5 / 2) was used (Tiécoura et al., 2014b). Calli derived from protoplasts grown in liquid or solid media were used to regenerate plants. Before transferring to the regeneration medium, the calli were cultured for 1-8 weeks on different maintenance media (Table 3).

Calli cytogenetic study: DAPI test (Coleman et al., 1985): The test uses two fluorochromes, mithramycin and 4, 6-Diamidino-2-phenylindole. They bind to DNA and used to locate the core in the dividing cells.

RESULTS

Enzyme combination protoplast isolation: Three days after subculture, the cell suspension was digested with one of three combinations of enzymes for 1 to 6 hours. Table 1 shows the rates of cells having a complete digestion for a given protoplast, with their embryogenic characters, as observed on figure 4A. After one hour of digestion, all the protoplasts isolated (100%) still exhibit wall pieces. For the enzyme combination (1, 0.5, 0.2), about 6 hours are required to have about 80% protoplasts. For the enzyme combinations (2, 0.5, 0.2) and (4, 1, 0.5), four hours of digestion were required to have about 90% protoplasts. The second enzyme combination (2, 0.5 and 0.2) is used for the further isolation of protoplasts after digestion of at least 4 hours.

**Table 1: Evolution of completely digested cell rate (%) according to the enzyme combination and the incubation time**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enzyme combination</th>
<th>Time of incubation (hours)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ce %</td>
<td>Ma %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ce = cellulase; Ma = macerozyme; Pe = pectoliase

Age of subculture and protoplasts isolation: The subcultures of 1 to 6 days were used to isolate the protoplasts. Figure 1 shows the yields of protoplasts expressed as X10^6 per gram of fresh weight (X 10^6 x g^-1 FW). Protoplasts yield varies with subculture times. At the first day, protoplasts yield is of 7.10^6/g FW. It increases and reaches a peak at the third day (14.10^6/g FW) and then decrease to reach its lowest value (0.07.10^6/g FW) at the 6th day.

Viability of protoplasts: Xia culture media at 0.6M or 0.7M glucose were prepared at different pH. The viability rate and the rate of protoplasts with embryogenic characters were estimated after a week of culture. The results are in Table 2.

**Table 2: viability of the protoplasts according to the pH and the glucose concentration**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>[glucose]</th>
<th>Protoplasts</th>
<th>5.2</th>
<th>5.4</th>
<th>5.6</th>
<th>5.8</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.6M</td>
<td>viability</td>
<td>±</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E C</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>±</td>
<td>±</td>
<td>±</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.7M</td>
<td>viability</td>
<td>±</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E C</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>±</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>++</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

EC = embryogenic characters; - = 0%; ± = 50%; ++ = >80%
The viability of protoplasts was observed as shown on the figure 4 B. At pH5.2, the viability of protoplasts is 50% whatever the concentration of glucose. For the other pH, it is >80% whatever the concentration of glucose. For embryogenic character of protoplasts at glucose 0.6M, protoplasts are not viable (0% of viability) with pH5.2 and pH5.4. For the other PH, 50% of protoplasts are viable at glucose 0.6M. With glucose 0.7M, 0% of protoplasts retain their embryogenic character at pH5.2. This rate is 50% at pH5.4 to over 80% for pH5.6.

Kinetics of the first cell divisions: Fractions 1.10⁶ protoplasts are cultured in the medium supplemented Xia 2.4-D (2mg / l). The medium is either liquid or solid (agarose 0.6%). The rate of cell divisions based on the culture time is presented in Figure 2. The first divisions of protoplasts are observed until the fourth day (5-15%) (Figure 4C). From 10 to 30% after the first week of culture in liquid or solid respectively, the number of divisions increases rapidly to reach 70 to 80% in the second week of culture in liquid or solid respectively. However, almost 20 to 30% of the protoplasts cultured in solid or liquid medium respectively do not divided. In the liquid medium, 5-10% of these protoplasts merged and failed. The fusion process is reduced in the solid culture.

Calli from protoplasts culture: Fractions 1.10⁶ protoplasts are cultured in the medium supplemented Xia 2.4-D (2mg / l). The medium is solid with agarose 0.6% or agarose 1.2%. Average of calli developed by culture according to agarose concentration is shown in Figure 3. On media containing 0.6% agarose, MS gives approximately 120 calli per culture and N6 140 calli by culture of 1.10⁶ protoplasts. With 1.2% agarose, the average observed was 40 and 50 calli respectively on MS and N6. The plating efficiency varies from 0.012 to 0.014 protoplasts for 0.6% of agarose and 0.004-0.005 protoplasts for 1.2% agarose.

Plant regeneration from calli derived from protoplasts: Cultivated calli (1 to 8 weeks) are transferred to the MS regeneration medium (0.5, 2). The morphology and the ability of calli to regenerate plants are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Plant regeneration tests with calli derived from protoplasts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Maintenance media</th>
<th>Calli morphology</th>
<th>Regeneration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>MS(1-1-2.5)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>N6(1-100-25)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>MS(5)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>MS(2.5)+AgNO₃(58.9µM)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>MS(0)+ABA(0.2)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>MS(1-1-2.5)+AgNO₃</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>(1-0-0)+AgNO₃</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>N6(0)+ABA(0.2)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>X+ coal (0.5%)</td>
<td>+ +</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

X = any culture medium mentioned above / - = wet and less globular cal / + = less humid and globular cal / ++ = dry and globular cal / -- = no regenerated plants
Nine culture media were used to strengthen the callies before regeneration. The media 1, 2 and 3 gave wet calli regardless globular and non-embryogenic. The media 4 to 8, respectively characterized by the presence of silver nitrate AgNO₃ and abscisic acid (ABA) present relatively globular and less wet calli and do not produce plants. The action of coal, leads to globular and dry embryoids (figure 4H) but do not either give plants. Binocular observations show not-compact and snowy globular embryoids where hairs could be observed. Cytogenetic studies of the calli have shown that several cells are without core and other more cells are with several cores (figure 4I-J).
DISCUSSION

This study data indicates that enzyme combination that is effective is 2% (w / v) cellulase, 0.5% macerozyme and 0.2 % (w/v) pectoliase. With Musa spp, Assani et al. (2001) used the combination of 2% (w / v) cellulase, 0.5% Macerozyme, 0.25% (w / v) hemicellulase and 0.25% (w / v) Pectolyase. However, with Musa spp, Cavendish Subgroup AAA, Assani et al. (2005) used an enzyme combination composed of 1.5% (w / v) cellulase and 0.15% (w / v) pectolyase. Enzymes are substances that can digest cellulose and pectic substances of the cell wall and release the protoplasts. The composition in cellulose and pectic substances of cells are species dependant (Wertz, 2011). This explains the differences in enzyme combinations. The first protoplasts were released after 4 hours of incubation. Although this time is usually not determined, it is nevertheless important for protoplasts culture. Thus, for P. glaucum, cells were generally left for 12 hours in the enzyme solution (Xia et al., 1992). For Banana, 15 to 17h of digestion or 12 to 14 hours of digestion were requested (Assani et al., 2001; 2005). For Kappaphycus, 4 hours of digestion were requested with 20% abalone enzyme and 12% of cellulose (Zhang Si et al., 2014). Enzyme combinations are also a function of the pectocellulose composition in the walls. This diversity in the enzyme composition reflects the complexity of cell wall composition (Wertz, 2011). Hence, it is necessary to reduce the digestion time to avoid the possible toxicity and effect of the enzyme on protoplasts viability (Raoudha, 2001). An accumulation of these substances in the protoplast may affect survival. The variation of the...
The best for protoplasts viability and embryogenic concentration of the glucose and a pH of 5.6 seem to be cell walls diversity. For the viability of protoplasts, 0.7M yield of protoplasts confirms the species dependence of similar to those observed in most of the grasses (Mtili, 1990). In solid culture. In both solid and liquid medium, calli were obtained from the protoplasts culture. The production of protoplasts on solid cultures reported in this study presents a great variability in the number of calli obtained. This was the case with the protoplasts cultures of mesophyll Oryza sativa (Gupta et al., 1993) where 140-250 callies were obtained per culture. For Saccharum officinarum, 20 to 72 callies have been reported (Taylor et al., 1992). The concentration of agarose seemed to influence the efficacy of the spreading protoplasts. A concentration of 0.6% appear to be more appropriate than 1.2%, since the concentration 1.2% seems to reduce the diffusion of the culture medium nutrients or the metabolites arising from the feeder cells; these metabolites promote calli protoplasts. Nevertheless, the plating efficiency of protoplast values obtained in the present study remain low (0.012 to 0.013) compared to these obtained with other species: for Zea mays, with 0.6 or 1.2% agarose, the efficiency is 0.25 (Choure et al., 1981) and 0.8 with 0.4% agarose (Kamo et al., 1987). For Triticum aestivum L., with 1.2% agarose, the efficiency is 0.02 to 0.11 (Kasem et al., 1993). With 2.5% agarose, the plating efficiency of protoplasts is estimated from 1 to 9.8 with Oryza sativa (Kyoziuka et al., 1987). Here, it is established that the agarose effect depends on the species. Plants were no regenerated from calli protoplasts. Despite the action of AgNO₃, ABA and activated coal leading to drier callies and observation of hair on the surface of callies, true embryos could not be regenerated; hence the absence of plants. The main action of Abscisic acid was to allow proper maturation of embryos germinating. In our case, there were no true embryos; only snow globular embryoids structures appeared. Factors that may explain the non-regeneration of plants from calli protoplasts are numerous. From the cell suspension to obtained protoplasts calli, it takes at least three months. It is established that after three months, plant regeneration rate from liquid culture, drops to 10% (Tiécoura 2014b). This time could not be reduced and could explain why the calli was unable to develop real embryos despite the use of different media. This recalcitrance of graminea was previously reported with Pennisetum americanum (Mtili, 1990) and with Sorghum bicolor (Ishak, 1992) despite previous reports of the regeneration of protoplasts from these cereals (Vasil et al., 1980; Zhi-Ming et al., 1990). Regenerative capacity can also depend on the species, varieties and genotypes (Vasil et al., 1980). We believe that graminea cell totipotency (see differentiation and dedifferentiation of Poaceae plant cell) is challenging. In the case of Pennisetum glaucum, a mitotic disorder can affect totipotency. The possible multi nucleated cells observed may suggest that the calli from protoplasts is a chimeric cell. The chimeric cell behaviour would lead to a possible carcinogenic response of calli, leading to the lost of their
ability to differentiate into regenerative plants embryos. Finally, genes methylation in cells culture may be a factor promoting uncontrolled proliferation blocking cell differentiation in graminea.

CONCLUSION
Protoplasts of millet varieties of Côte d'Ivoire can be isolated, cultured and regenerated in calli. In spite of this multitude of culture media of calli, no calli transferred on medium of regeneration can give plants. The non-regenerating of plants reveals that further studies need to be conducted to better understand the totipotency, to provide solutions to the recalcitrance of graminea relative to plant regeneration from protoplasts. Understanding of this totipotency could provide less expensive ways to improve graminea in general and in particular the Ivorian millet.

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Tiécoura et al. *J. Appl. Biosci.* Isolation and culture of protoplasts of Côte d'Ivoire's pearl millet (*Pennisetum glaucum* (L) R) varieties.