

# Sweetpotato Action for Security and Health in Africa



## Building the evidence base for sweetpotato marketing in Nigeria

### What is the problem?

Nigeria is one of the largest producers of sweetpotato in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) with annual production estimated at 3.9 million metric tons per year. Despite this, the crop has received comparatively little attention in the country, perhaps because of low prioritization by the government due to a paucity of basic information on the potential of the crop. Yields remain particularly low. Little is currently known about existing or potential sweetpotato markets, the techniques of production, the roles of those involved as producers, processors or consumers, or general opinions relating to an understanding of the acceptability of the crop as a source of income and of nutrition. For this reason, sweetpotato is sometimes referred to as an “orphan crop”. Urgent research and support are required if sweetpotato is to significantly contribute to improved food security, nutrition, incomes and better lives in Nigeria. Nigeria is home to over 50% of West Africa’s population and is renowned for its consumption of yam and

cassava. Agro-processing of roots and tubers is much more common in West Africa than in East or Southern Africa. Several stakeholder consultations have confirmed that the greatest constraint to sweetpotato uptake in West Africa is its sweetness; hence, the commitment of the SASHA breeding component to developing high dry matter, non-sweet varieties that are easy to pound.

In spite of its oil wealth, 30% of children under five years of age in Nigeria are Vitamin A deficient. The introduction of new sweetpotato orange-fleshed varieties with high levels of beta-carotene (pro-Vitamin A) creates an opportunity to expand the production of this crop and better demonstrate its nutritional value and versatility. In recent times, Nigerian government policies have been employed to successfully promote crops such as cassava. The creation of a similar initiative for sweetpotato is both viable and advisable. For this to happen, new information and knowledge are urgently needed regarding existing marketing channels and the role of



The Sweetpotato Action for Security and Health in Africa (SASHA) is a five-year initiative designed to improve the food security and livelihoods of poor families in Sub-Saharan Africa by exploiting the untapped potential of sweetpotato. It will develop the essential capacities, products, and methods to reposition sweetpotato in food economies of Sub-Saharan African countries to alleviate poverty and under-nutrition.

the crop, potential new (or adapted) processing technologies, the economic viability of products and prospects for market expansion. Identified “best bets” of these options need to be tested in practical situations to learn lessons about developing viable value chains.

#### What do we want to achieve?

Improved markets, with greater availability of Vitamin A-rich sweetpotato products, would promote an increase in consumption of this crop and thus significantly contribute to the improved health of vulnerable children and women. We want to provide the evidence of where it would pay to invest in sweetpotato market development in Nigeria, paying attention that women in particular should benefit from any opportunity to improve family income.

#### Where are we going to work?

The project will work with “case study” value chains for sweetpotato in Kwara State (North Central Nigeria) with markets in Umudike, Zaria, Ibadan, Abeokuta, and Lagos States.

#### How are we going to make it happen?

The goal of unleashing the potential of sweetpotato in Nigeria relies on effective gathering and testing of new information and knowledge and using that information to influence policy makers. This will be achieved over a three-year period based on the following objectives:

- Using the most up-to-date national consumer budget surveys and other existing secondary information, we will identify key market and product issues as well as current

perceptions of sweetpotato.

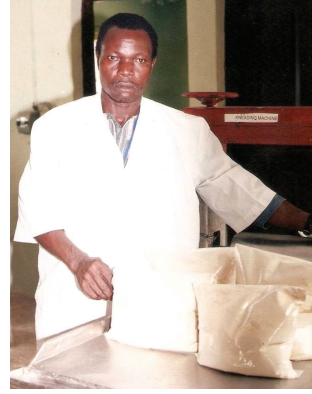
- We will investigate existing and potential processing technologies – their intended purpose, cost and sustainability – on a pilot scale, to prepare competitively priced products that meet the requirements of consumers and industry standards.
- At every stage in the value chain the economic viability of processing and margins will be modeled and assessed.
- “Best bet” processing options will be tested with those, especially women, involved in the value chains – the producers, processors and traders – on a case study basis to test the validity of the intervention and results broadly disseminated.

#### Who are we going to work with?

The project is a partnership involving the National Root Crop Research Institute (NRCRI), Umudike, Abia State, Nigeria; the University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (UNAAB) Ogun State, Nigeria; the Natural Resources Institute (NRI), University of Greenwich, Chatham Maritime, UK; Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria -Kaduna State, Nigeria; Federal Polytechnic Offa, Kwara, Nigeria, and the University of Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria, and Helen Keller International.

#### What’s next?

The expansion of this initial investigation into the development of sweetpotato markets could benefit the lives and livelihoods of possibly tens of thousands of Nigerian people interacting as producers, manufacturers, processors and consumers of this currently neglected, but potentially highly significant, crop.



Displaying sweetpotato flour at the Federal Polytechnic Food Technology Department (credit Akoroda, University of Ibadan)



Transporting sweetpotato to market by bicycle (credit J. Low, CIP)

**Contact**  
Dr. Keith Tomlins  
k.i.tomlins@greenwich.ac.uk  
or Dr. Jan Low  
j.low@cgiar.org