What do we want to achieve?

The project “Better Potato for a Better Life” (BPBL) is a four-year initiative, funded by USAID and implemented by the International Potato Center in collaboration with public and private partners. The project seeks to significantly improve food security and diet quality of 150,000 vulnerable households in two of Ethiopia’s nine administrative regions: Tigray and Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR) by September 2013. The second project titled “Alleviation of Food Insecurity and Malnutrition in Tigray, Ethiopia through Promotion of Potato and Orange-flushed Sweetpotato (OFSP)” is programmed to run for two years, and is being implemented in five food insecure districts in Tigray region. The project uses household health extension package workers, village level women development groups and science school clubs as buyers to trained farmer multipliers of sweetpotato vines being distributed in the drought affected SNNPR Region in Ethiopia.

The objectives of these two projects are to encourage women and children to consume sweetpotato vines being distributed in the drought affected SNNPR Region in Ethiopia.

What have we achieved so far?

As of March 2013, the BPBL project was able to reach 214,650 needy households within three and a half years of the project life. Similarly, over 10,000 farmers were trained on sweetpotato agricultural practices such as vine multiplication, root production and utilization. With respect to promotional activities carried out by the Irish Aid nutrition project, over 680 extension agents, school teachers, women development groups’ leaders and farmers received training on different sweetpotato food recipe preparation, nutritional value and agro-processing techniques of OFSP. Promotional activities using banners, flyers, brochures and mini media material reached over 10,000 people. Extensions of both projects are under negotiation.

The nutrition potential of OFSP is beginning to gain more official recognition in Ethiopia. Ethiopia is committed to the Scaling-Up Nutrition goals to significantly reduce chronic undernutrition among young children. In 2013, its National Nutrition Coordination Body specifically integrated nutrition-sensitive approaches into the National Nutrition Program, including OFSP.

What have we learned so far?

Sweetpotato is ideally suited as a post-emergency rehabilitation crop. It is a hardly, drought resistant and “low maintenance” crop that is easy to grow even for inexperienced farmers. Large quantities of planting material can be transported at reasonable costs and will produce substantial amounts of food and feed within a short period of time (3 to 4 months).

Integrating OFSP with school feeding programs in Tigray (credit T. Hole).
Sweetpotato Alleviating Food Insecurity and Malnutrition in Ethiopia

The potential for exploiting synergies between emergency efforts and development projects was demonstrated by linking emergency implementing partners as buyers to trained farmer multipliers of quality planting material, with 60 million sweetpotato vines being distributed in the drought affected SNNP Region in Ethiopia.

What do we want to achieve?

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• Improving vine multiplication and conservation techniques
• Introducing sweetpotato into food insecure lowlands where agronomic conditions for its production exist
• Developing and promoting OFSP to combat vitamin A deficiencies
• Promoting queen and dual purpose sweetpotato varieties
• Promoting community understanding on the nutritional and health value of OFSP and creating awareness about the need for adequate vitamin A intake
• Training of public and private actors

White-fleshed sweetpotatoes are commonly grown and consumed in SNNP; however, it is a relatively new crop in the second intervention area (Tigray). In contrast, orange-fleshed sweetpotatoes are a relatively new crop to both regions. One of the key objectives of the project is to disseminate OFSP that can contribute to the reduction of widespread vitamin A deficiency through its consumption. The changing of food habits is a challenging task, requiring a comprehensive strategy. For this, the project pursues a four-pronged approach:

1. Quality planting material is produced by the national research system, farmers and the private sector and distributed for the production of OFSP roots. Involved stakeholders are trained and receive technical backstopping. The OFSP producers will be linked to markets by establishing contact with wholesale / retailers.

2. Two NGOs (Mums for Mums and Ejiga Legna), specialized in the promotion of new food products, apply participatory approaches to develop locally acceptable dishes and OFSP products that build upon existing food habits but include OFSP using mobile kitchens. This work is being scientifically supported through MSc level research carried out by a university partner (Hawassa University).

3. In villages and urban areas, OFSP will be promoted with the assistance of an advertising agency (Billboards, radio spots), guiding interested consumers to orange-painted market stalls selling OFSP and providing recipes for the production of OFSP dishes.

4. In rural areas, promotional activities will involve radio spots, the establishment of sweetpotato clubs, especially at schools as well as training and awareness creation measures for farming families.

Who are our partners and where are we working?

At present, the project collaborates with government agricultural extension personnel, NGO and partner private organizations (see margins) in the SNNP and Tigray regions of Ethiopia (Fig. 1).

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Visit the Sweetpotato Knowledge Portal www.sweetpotatoknowledge.org

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