

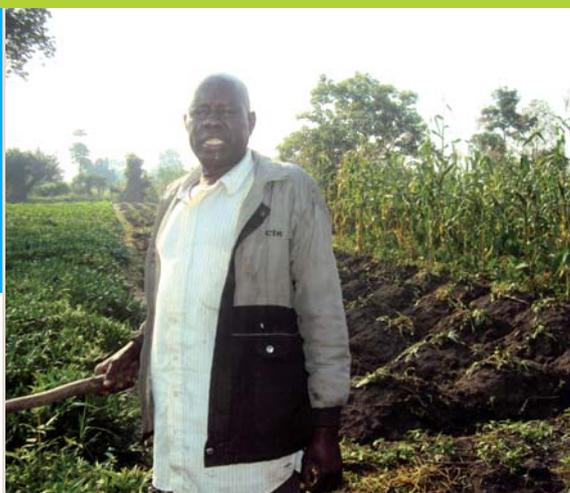
DONATA Enhanced uptake and adoption of orange-fleshed sweetpotato (OFSP) technologies in East Africa

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The **DONATA project** was successfully implemented in 5 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda and Uganda) to improve livelihoods and increase economic growth for resource poor farmers. DONATA worked through multi-stakeholder platforms including National Agriculture Research Institutes (NARIs), non-governmental organizations, community based organizations, farmer organizations, private sector, public sector extension agents and universities.

Can Innovation Platforms contribute to the scaling up of OFSP technologies?

The project approach was based on the establishment of multi-stakeholder platforms referred to as Innovation Platforms for Technology Adoption (IPTAs). These acted as an institutional mechanism to bring together different stakeholders for the scaling out and up of OFSP technologies along the value chain. Members of the IPTAs worked together at district level to increase production, consumption and marketing of pro-vitamin A-rich orange-fleshed sweetpotato (OFSP) fresh roots, planting material (vines) and processed products. These partnerships were gradually consolidated into twenty functioning IPTAs that successfully promoted and disseminated OFSP technologies and innovations within and beyond the project areas across the five countries. When the project started there was little experience and practical guidance on how to translate the theory and concepts of innovations systems into operational models in a context of limited policy support, infrastructure and communications. The combination of training on technical topics, provision of soft skills and access to a range of technologies came together to contribute to strengthened capacities among both different types of value chain actors and the IPTA as a whole. At the IPTA level this can be seen in the different ways the IPTAs responded to their local conditions, evolved and matured.



➤ **Otim Jacob**, showing how customers for vines from his multiplication plot can also see the performance of different varieties in his demo plot. Atek, Kole District, Uganda. (credit Margaret McEwan).

What was achieved?

The IPTAs have been successful in enabling the validation, promotion and dissemination of technologies, innovations and information for OFSP. An estimated 115,145 individuals and institutions have applied OFSP technologies and innovations and participated in capacity strengthening activities or information dissemination activities. An additional estimated 515,000 radio listeners have accessed information about OFSP technologies. The IPTA approach provided added value through stimulating the piloting of novel uptake pathways, and expanding the type and increasing the number, of stakeholders reached, thus contributing to the purpose and goal level of the project. Other pathways which the IPTAs tried included schools, health facilities, prisons and churches. Moreover, the usefulness of this approach is demonstrated through the adoption of innovative platform approach for other programmes and commodities by ASARECA and the Kenya Agriculture Research Institute (KARI).

In the past, farmers who were interested in planting OFSP could not access seed of the varieties of their choice. The IPTAs have played a key role in establishing and supporting networks of seed multipliers at the secondary multiplier level who are linked to the primary multiplier level to obtain clean material and new varieties and root producers to provide a market for their

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The Sweetpotato for Profit and Health Initiative (SPHI) is a ten-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 seeks to reposition sweetpotato in food economies of Sub-Saharan African countries to alleviate poverty and under-nutrition in 10 million African families in 10 years.

vine production. Since the IPTAs were made up of different actors in the OFSP value chain, it is now possible for the different players to know what is going on in the seed system and sources of planting material. The initial focus of the project on supporting a three tiered decentralised approach for seed multiplication has contributed to a major shift in sweetpotato production systems in the areas where the project was operational in Kenya and Tanzania. Farmers can now access sufficient quantities of quality planting material at the beginning of the short rains (September-October). This means that the short rains can be used for root production whereas previously the short rains were used to produce planting material for root production in the long rains (February/March to May/June).

✦ What have we learnt?

The IPTAs have added value to the dissemination and uptake of technologies by: (i) enabling the sharing of resources among stakeholders i.e. funds, transport, skills and expertise; and (ii) improving access to information among actors in the platform.

The key lessons learnt include:

- (i) IPTAs must have the capacity to be dynamic and flexible when responding to changing needs in the value chain, and thus managing shifting composition and membership.
- (ii) The media have the capacity to play an instrumental role in sensitizing farmers and the general public on the importance of OFSP.

- (iii) While farmers are now buying seed, vine multiplication business models that are likely to succeed will either be mixed livelihood or social enterprise models.
- (iv) The production of OFSP processed products and snacks will still require additional support to improve food hygiene to be eligible for quality certification.
- (v) OFSP has contributed to the improved health of vulnerable groups e.g. children and people living with HIV.
- (vi) There has been limited success in linking into nodes of the value chain which work at the national level. The exception to this has been in Kenya, where a national sweetpotato platform has been established by KARI.

While, so soon after project completion, it is not possible to say how sustainable the IPTAs will be –the predictors of longer term success relate to the ability to: manage internal membership turnover; scan the wider horizon for new opportunities for OFSP and to bring in new partners as necessary and ensure high quality facilitation and visionary leadership. Other opportunities with appropriate crop and livelihood combinations are being sought which would benefit from using an innovation platform approach to bring benefits to a larger and more diversified group of stakeholders.



■ Sign indicating that the Atek farmers group has clean vines for sale.



■ OFSP flour processed by Upendo Group at Usagara Processing Unit, Lake Zone, Tanzania.

Mega FM: a powerful ally in the Gulu IPTA

In Gulu, northern Uganda, the most effective pathway in stimulating uptake and adoption of OFSP was the radio programme on the Mega FM station. As a member of the IPTA, the radio station nested the OFSP promotion within its one-hour weekly "Farmers World" Program. Two-way synergies developed with the programme presenter convincing the station management that promotion of OFSP through not only radio programmes, and phone-ins, but also through sponsoring promotion events, would bring even more listeners to the station. The programme served both as a source of information on OFSP for prospective customers and a centrally located delivery point of seed for buyers. In this way, seed producers were able to access markets beyond their farm gate.

The partnership proved very cost-effective. An hour of commercial radio air time costs about \$400, and by partnering, the project only needed to spend on minor logistics such as transportation for the panellists, around \$100. Mega FM Radio has a broad geographic coverage which includes the whole of northern Uganda (the project area) and parts of Southern Sudan. This had the advantage of increasing the scope of awareness on OFSP beyond pilot project districts in the sub-region quite inexpensively. The OFSP radio programs included live shows and airing of field recordings, and these promotional materials continue to feature prominently on the "Farmers World" Program. The use of English and the local language, direct listener feedback, outreach (particularly to marginalised populations in isolated areas), provided opportunities to identify new pathways for technology uptake.

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