DONATA

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

July 2008 - March 2013: Funded through the Association for
Strengthening Agricultural Research in East and Central Africa (ASARECA) and the
African Development Bank

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 (NARI), 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 innovations systems into operational models in a context of limited policy support, infrastructure 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 public general on the importance of OFSP.

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.

What was achieved?
The IPTAs have been successful in enabling the validation, promotion and dissemination of technologies, innovations and information for OFSP. An estimated 115,445 individuals and institutions have applied OFSP technologies and innovations and participated in capacity strengthening activities or information dissemination activities. An additional estimated 15,000 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 scope and increasing the number of stakeholders reached, thus contributing to the purpose and goal level of the project. Other pathways which the IPTA 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 varieties. 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).

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What have we learnt?

(i) 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:

(a) 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.
(b) The media have the capacity to play an instrumental role in sensitizing farmers and the general public on the importance of OFSP.
(c) While farmers are now buying seed, vine multiplication business models that are likely to succeed will either be mixed livelihood or social enterprise models.
(d) The production of OFSP processed products and snacks will still require additional support to improve food hygiene to be eligible for quality certification.
(e) OFSP has contributed to the improved health of vulnerable groups e.g. children and people living with HIV.
(f) 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.

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

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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 15,000 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).

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