Annex 2

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Nurturing a sustainable seed system for sweetpotato in Malawi: A learning process

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Abstract

Maintaining good calorie intake has proved to be a challenge due to variable weather conditions, declining soil fertility, landholding size and high level of poverty in most Sub-Sahara African countries. Sweetpotato is an important crop in Malawi with a high potential to contribute to the country's food and nutritional basket. Zondeni, a land race and an orange-fleshed sweetpotato (OFSP) variety recommended in 2008 is to provide adequate beta-carotene, a precursor for vitamin A (1). Availability and access to disease free vines of the newly released variety by farmers is a challenge for increased adoption and exploitation. To promote the production and consumption of OFSP, CIP in partnership with relevant Government departments and NGOs instituted a 4.5 year program in October 2009. The entry point was the development of a low-cost and viable disease-free vine multiplication system to farmers. A "1, 2, 3 multiplication system" was adopted and implemented. In year 1, 2 hectares of Zondeni was established at Bvumbwe research station as a primary source of disease free vines and 133 secondary and tertiary decentralized vine multiplications in Dedza, Zomba, Phalombe and Chikhwawa districts. The "1, 2, 3 system" of 7.7 ha produced 6.9 million 30 cm long vine cuttings potentially serves 23,000 households (300 cuttings each). A total of 7,097 vulnerable households were subsidized to get vines from multipliers. Realizing the high demand for OFSP vines multipliers opted to sell their vines at market value and could earn more revenue providing an incentive for a sustainable low-input system for sweetpotato vine multiplication. Massive vine distribution of improved planting material through low-input 'seed' systems may provide the foundation for increased per

capita consumption of sweetpotato in Malawi and therefore improving the livelihood of rural poor through increased food and nutrition security and cash incomes.

1 Chipungu et al 2010. Roots Newsletter, SARRNET 12 (2): 9-10