

# Scaling Up Sweetpotato Through Agriculture and Nutrition in Rwanda

AUGUST 2014



RAB technicians help manage quality planting material supply (credit J. Low)

## What is the problem?

Rwanda has greatly increased its investment in agriculture resulting in annual agriculture growth averaging over 6 percent since 2007. This investment is targeted at five crops mainly maize, rice, beans, banana, and potato, while the role of sweetpotato for rural food security is also widely recognized. Despite the gains made, however, levels of chronic malnutrition remain high. The government of Rwanda, therefore, is promoting the development and utilization of biofortified crops, including biofortified orange-fleshed sweetpotato (OFSP), through partnerships between research, extension, and commerce. In this context, SUSTAIN Rwanda has been designed together with the Rwanda Bureau of Agriculture (RAB) to disseminate OFSP technologies to smallholder farmers and link these farmers to markets for fresh roots as well as commercial processors. This design takes into account the limited availability of land and the often marginal location of vulnerable households. Secondly, SUSTAIN Rwanda seeks to integrate its nutrition messages and support activities with the Ministry of Health's programs to reduce malnutrition through a combination of crop diversification and supplementation programs.

## What do we set out to achieve?

Orange Flesh Sweetpotato (OFSP) have a huge potential for improving vitamin A status among young children and strengthening livelihoods in Rwanda. Biofortified, vitamin A rich OFSP varieties are an effective tool for reducing vitamin A deficiency (VAD) among children under five years of age, the group most at risk of VAD. CIP work under SASHA project has shown that through effective private public partnerships we can build a sweetpotato value chain that is pro-poor and pro-women. SUSTAIN project intend to scale up the development of a OFSP seed system, link the beneficiaries to the market through effective partnerships and integrate agriculture-nutrition-health linkages to deliver OFSP to various segments of the Rwanda households. We intend to reach 50,000 direct beneficiaries and 250,000 indirect beneficiaries by 2018. Our goal is to reach smallholder households with appropriate nutrition information and counselling for infant and young children among farming communities in selected districts. The project also aims to contribute to improved nutrition through dietary diversity and behavior change related to the use and consumption of OFSP at the household level and community as a whole.



SUSTAIN is a 5-year partnership (2013-2018), coordinated by CIP and financed by the UK Department for International Development, to scale up the nutrition benefits of biofortified orange-fleshed sweetpotato (OFSP). The goal is to reach 1.2 million households with under-5 year old children in Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique and Rwanda. SUSTAIN supports integrated interventions in agriculture, nutrition, utilization and marketing to strengthen production and consumption of OFSP. SUSTAIN emphasizes rigorous measurement and evaluation in order to assess the scalability of these interventions and contribute to global evidence on achieving large scale nutrition outcomes through biofortified crops.



Mandazi are a popular product that anyone can make (credit K. Sindi)



Agricultural fairs are a popular way for farmer cooperatives to promote OFSP (credit K. Sindi)

### Where we will be working?

The past sweetpotato value chain project worked in four districts namely Gakenke, Rulindo, Kamonyi, and Muhanga. SUSTAIN project will continue working in the same four district but also expand to four other districts namely, Gicumbi, Ruhango, Kayonza, and Rwamagana.

### How are we making it happen?

The project will provide training to key local partners who will work with smallholder farmers at the village level as well as households with children under 5 years of age who will receive specific information on nutrition and how best to use OFSP to increase the variety of the diet while at the same time increasing their vitamin status. For households with pregnant, lactating and children under 2 years of age, the first 1000 days approach will be emphasized and promoted. Particularly, OFSP will be promoted as a complementary feed, during pregnancy, and lactation periods as a major source of bioavailable vitamin A that can supply daily vitamin A requirements. Some of these households will then be linked to the market through OFSP value addition activities to improve their household incomes.

### What have we achieved?

Project implementation planning meetings with our local partners were held to discuss work plans, funding and implementation strategies for activities related to SUSTAIN. We have also translated and are currently reviewing counselling cards that will be used for training on appropriate nutrition for pregnant and lactating women as well as children under 5 years of age. We have integrated messaging on OFSP planting, maintenance, harvesting, storage, and consumption. Initial visits have been made to the north and southern regions of the country to familiarize and understand the nutrition activities that are being implemented on the ground related to the first 1000 days approach.

#### Key Partners

Rwanda Agriculture Board (RAB)  
Young Women Christian Association (YWCA)  
IMBARAGA Farmers Syndicate