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Reaching Agents of Change (RAC) Project

Through its advocacy efforts since 2011, RAC has generated new investments for promoting orange-fleshed sweetpotato (OFSP) worth 11.4 million USD. RAC has also built institutional capacity to design and implement gender-sensitive projects to ensure wide access and utilization of vitamin A rich OFSP in five selected African countries (Mozambique, Tanzania, Nigeria, Ghana, and Burkina Faso).



Figure 1: Participants of the VITAA Workshop (credit Rosalia Katana).

✦ What is the problem?

Governments are inadequately aware about the extent of the vitamin A problem and the potential of vitamin A rich orange-fleshed sweetpotato (OFSP) to contribute to its solutions. In addition, organizations that do want to work on sweetpotato often lack adequate technical knowledge. The Reaching Agents of Change (RAC) project is a unique effort to strengthen advocacy and technical capacity for successful nutrition interventions using OFSP.

✦ What do we want to achieve?

Through development of strong advocacy efforts at country level through a strategy of identifying and training a cadre of African advocates, RAC is **generating new investments** by governments, donors, and NGOs to scale up adoption of OFSP in the five target countries as a tool to combat vitamin A deficiency (VAD) and improve food security. By 2014, we aim to help mobilize at least \$18 million devoted to OFSP programmes in the five target countries.

The project's Regional Advocacy Advisor and a cadre of OFSP ambassadors are leading efforts to **ensure that OFSP is included as an integral part of strategies that address food insecurity and malnutrition at regional and sub-regional levels in Sub-Saharan Africa**. Efforts target policy makers in regional and sub-regional bodies such as the African Union (AU), the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture

Development Programme (CAADP) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

RAC is **building the capacity of national implementing agencies to design and implement technically strong, gender-sensitive and cost-effective programs that drive uptake of OFSP**. The foundation of this effort is the establishment of a 10 day "Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Sweetpotato" course in Mozambique, Tanzania, and Nigeria in collaboration with local institutions committed to conducting the course on an annual basis.

✦ What have we achieved so far?

Major accomplishments to date include:

1. Through advocacy and awareness raising efforts, RAC has generated \$US 11.4 million in new investments from governments, donors, NGOs, private sector to scale up adoption of OFSP in the three principal countries.
2. A team of 54 African advocates have been trained to influence leaders in agriculture, nutrition and health fields on the importance of OFSP in combating vitamin A deficiency (VAD), improving food security and creating favourable policy environments for food-based interventions.

So far:

- A regional situation analysis has been carried out, leading to the identification of partners to facilitate policy advocacy and resource mobilization for OFSP;
- Advocacy strategies for Mozambique, Nigeria and Tanzania have been developed and are being implemented, focusing on demand creation for OFSP, policy change and resource mobilization;
- An OFSP Advocacy Stakeholders' workshop has been conducted in Ghana;
- RAC's participation at regional and national for a has helped integrate OFSP into a number of



important documents, such as in food security and nutrition assessments in Mozambique; in the National Agriculture Policy of Tanzania; and in Nigeria, lobbying by SASHA and RAC has led to the inclusion of OFSP as a priority crop in the agricultural transformation agenda;

- At regional level, RAC participated in the development of the Regional Agriculture Policy for the SADC Region, which was approved by the Ministers of Agriculture in June 2013, and will be involved in the development of the regional agriculture strategy, where there is the opportunity for including food-based approaches for addressing VAD.
- 3. RAC convened a multi-stakeholder workshop to establish a revitalized Vitamin A for Africa (VITAA) platform (Fig. 1). The platform purpose has been reformulated to share best practices concerning effective advocacy techniques and lessons learned on how to influence regional and national policies and strategies around food-based approaches to VAD (beyond the focus on OFSP).
- 4. RAC has been building the capacity of national institutions and individuals, to design and implement gender-sensitive, technically strong, cost-effective programmes that drive the uptake of OFSP. Three partner training institutions have been identified to host and run the annual 10 day training of trainers (ToT) sweetpotato courses -- the University of Eduardo Mondlane (UEM) in Mozambique, the Agricultural and Rural Management Training Institute (ARMTI) in Nigeria and Sokoine University of Agriculture (SUA) in Tanzania. The first set of 10-day ToT courses were successfully conducted and 74 secondary trainers drawn from research, extension, agribusiness, education institutions, NGOs, private companies and producer associations in agriculture, health



■ **Figure 2:** Field work during ToT course in Nigeria (credit Jonathan Mkumbira).

and nutrition sectors were trained (Fig. 2). In turn, these trainers have held thirteen shorter courses (maximum 5-days) and 812 tertiary facilitators have been trained. The second rounds of courses for 2013, led by the local partners, have been successfully completed for Mozambique and Tanzania. Figure 3 shows how the ToT process works to build up a cadre of trained change agents and farmers.

- 5. RAC has developed the “Engendered OFSP project planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation” learning toolkit and three learning workshops were held in 2012/2013. The technical capacity of 48 African agencies has been strengthened.
- 6. RAC partially supported on-farm trials in Nigeria and Tanzania to facilitate collection of data to expedite release of OFSP varieties. Two varieties have so far been officially released in Nigeria.
- 7. Substantial progress has been made in establishing and distributing clean planting material. So far, RAC has helped establish and maintain 5.5 ha of OFSP quality foundation vines in the three principal countries and more than 1,225,836 cuttings have been distributed to small-scale farmers.

Advocate for Investing in OFSP for Health and Wealth

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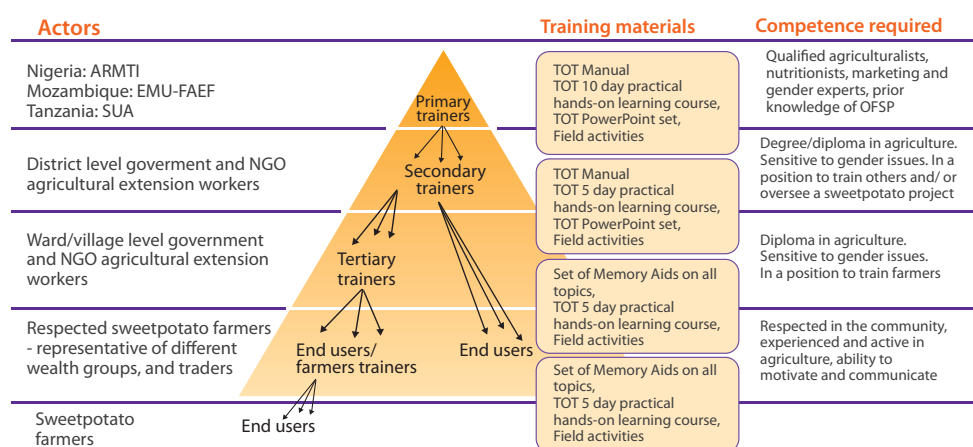
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■ **Figure 3.** The RAC project's ToT training pyramid