

Report of RAC Project Media Event 2014

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22nd August, 2014.

**REPORT OF THE RAC PROJECT MEDIA ENGAGEMENT MEETING HELD
ON
FRIDAY 22ND AUGUST, 2014
AT
THE JADE HOTEL, ABUJA.**

**THEME:
SENSITISATION OF THE MEDIA ON THE HEALTH – WEALTH BENEFITS
OF OFSP**

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Opening

The meeting which started by 10:45am was declared open by Mary Umoh (RAC Project Promotion Expert) by 10:45am. In her opening remark, she thanked the participants for honoring the invitation in spite of their tight schedules and the short notice. She informed participants that the HKI Country Director for Nigeria (Dr. Ima Chima) sends her apologies for her inability to be part of the media event due to another engagement of the office going on the same day (22nd, August, 2014) in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria.



She highlighted that the progress made so far in the promotion of OFSP in Nigeria wouldn't have been possible without the initiative and doggedness of HKI and CIP and the collaboration of various actors and agents both at the federal and at the states of the project implementation and above all the funding support of Bill and Melinda Gates foundation.. She informed participants that the media event is very critical to RAC Project, as participants (especially media) will be sensitized on the potentials OFSP as a food bio-fortified crop to fight under nutrition and food insecurity in Nigeria and thereby contributing to building their capacity on reporting the sector. She concluded by saying that, participants are expected to agree on modalities and approaches that will ensure effective media coverage and reportage of OFSP related activities across the country.

Workshop Objective

The presentation of the workshop objective was



facilitated by Mary Umoh, who explained that the rationale behind the meeting is to sensitise and provide members of the media with adequate information that would enable them to create content and report on the various aspects of OFSP such as nutritional, health and economic potentials thus raising awareness to the general public. Accordingly the objectives of the workshop aim to “...*build a synergy with the media such that media organization continues to integrate OFSP promotion into the various regular programmes within their various media outfits.*” This she explained could be done regularly by looking at various opportunities inherent in OFSP value chain and using the media to give crop the needed visibility and promotion. Specifically, the objectives of the media events include:

- To highlight the VAD situation in Nigeria, and the role that OFSP can play to improve the VAD situation in the country.
- Promote the visibility of OFSP and some of the success steps in RAC project.
- Promoting dialogue on OFSP and Nutrition
- To call for support from media to invest on the promotion of OFSP using existing media platforms
- Increasing understanding of OFSP as among dietary approach to address VAD

Some of the reactions that followed this presentation include:

- a. Why is it that the implementing partners of the project delayed a meeting as crucial as this (media event) towards the end of the project?
- b. A visit to some of the site where this potato cultivation would have also enriched our (media) understanding of what you are talking about, why is it that you people did not consider a kind of visit to practical sites for us as part of the meeting?
- c. Why is it that the programme is not talking to the media about the cultivation, and other values chains of orange fleshed-sweet potato (OFSP) in Nigeria?

The PE took time to respond to the issues raised by the participants following the presentation on the objectives of the workshop. Particularly, the PE informed participants that the delay in the conduct of the media event was due to the time demand of the project in the states of implementation. She went further to explain that the

programme had been planned severally and shifted severally as a result of pressure from the field. On site visit by media team, she explained that the one day approved for the meeting will not be enough to accommodate field visit as requested by the participants.

Presentation 1: Reaching the Agents of Change (RAC) Project Update on Advocacy Activities

This presentation was also delivered by Mary Umoh (PE) Helen Keller International (HKI). The paper gave a vivid explanation to the project background, implementing partners, countries of coverage, overall goal of the project and achievements so far.

In her explanation of the project background, the PE informed participants that whole story of OFSP will not be complete in Nigeria if we do not talk about RAC project which is the platform that OFSP to Nigeria in the first instance. As highlighted during her presentation, RAC project is a 3 years initiative that spanned from June 2011- May 2014 and funded by BMGF. She explained to participants that with the expiration of the project, RAC project secure addition 4 months extension to finalize some of the project activities that could not be carried out during the active phase of the project such as the media event.

On the project partners and roles, RAC Project PE as part of the presentation explained the roles played by HKI& CIP who are the



initiators and leading implementing agents of the project across the 5 countries of the project coverage. With regard to Nigeria, the paper highlights that the project overall goal is *“to influence the integration of OFSP into policies, plans and programmes and*

generate substantially increased investments and commitment to its dissemination and use as a means to combat vitamin A deficiency (VAD) and food insecurity in Nigeria”.

With regard to project achievements, the presentation listed some of the major achievements of the project implementation so far to include:

- Situation analysis conducted in 3 states of Benue, Nasarawa and Kwara
- On farm trials – 2 varietal release (including Mother’s Delight and King J)
- Advocates and stakeholders trained
- Advocacy strategy developed and implemented – investments, policy inclusion of OFSP, and demand creation.
- Implementation of small grant scheme
- Govt. buy in by investing on the rainbow project

On further partnership with the media, the paper advocates that the media event was planned to ensure the following:

- Wide scale promotion by the media to create demand for OFSP
- Highlight the importance of VIT A and the impacts of its deficiency.
- Media will help to dispel the myths around OFSP consumption.
- Media will educate the public on the potentials of OFSP for health, wealth, and food security.

She concluded the paper by soliciting for partnership with the media to support government and other stakeholders’ efforts in keeping OFSP at the front burner of Nigeria’s effort to curtail the challenges of VAD across the country. According to her, *“we (RAC Project) are calling on media to come and join us in the struggle to fight all forms of VAD and promote OFSP as a means of addressing the burden of VAD in Nigeria, creating wealth and empowering women”.*

Presentation 2: Overview of the Rainbow Project / Current Status of OFSP Production and Dissemination in Nigeria.

The second presentation of the workshop was delivered by Olapeju Phorbee (PhD), CIP Project Leader in Nigeria. The presentation was entitled Sweet Potato for Health and Wealth in Nigeria. In the presentation introduction, she highlighted that *“Sweetpotato is one the crops that has received little or no emphasis in Nigeria”*. Several reasons were elucidated in the paper for the low understanding of the potentials of the sweet potato in Nigeria, which include that:

- *Sweetpotato is not just starchy but also rich in some micronutrients-*
- *There are some varieties of sweetpotato that are bio-fortified with carotenoids and so rich in vitamin A called ‘Orange-fleshed sweetpotato, which can improve health of the people*
- *Sweetpotato has huge potentials in product development, both food and non-food for domestic and industrial uses that can improve livelihood and contribute to wealth of the people*
- Although Nigeria is known for production and consumption of yam and cassava, the country is still one of the largest producers of sweetpotato in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).

The paper also observed that

- ... investment in sweetpotato development and promotion has been minimal in Nigeria in spite of its potentials. A development which had resulted in the initiation of the *Reaching Agents of Change (RAC) in Nigeria saw these gaps in 2011-2014 and took up the challenge of raising advocates for OFSP as well as identifying, motivating and empowering agents of change and investors for OFSP.*

On some of the outputs of the RAC project, the presentation highlighted the followings:

- Establishment of OFSP advocates in the 3 covered states
- Multiplication of foundation materials at NRCRI and Nyanyan stations,
- The official release of two OFSP varieties, Mother’s Delight and King J.

- Collaboration with Agriculture and Rural Management Training Institute (ARMTI) to establish an annual 10-day training course on *everything you ever wanted to know about sweetpotato*.

The presenter acknowledged that the various achievements of the project was instrumentation in the FMARD sponsorship of the Rainbow Project Proposal as one of the key crops contributing to the achievement of the current ATA of the Minister.

With the main project objective being to “*Building of a community of practice that will effectively contribute to the reduction of food insecurity, malnutrition and poverty in Nigeria through leveraging the unexploited potentials of OFSP and Improving market opportunities for all types of sweetpotato*”. The project is developed to run on an annual roll on basis and in the first instance is being implemented in the following 6 states of Nassarawa, Benue, Ebonyi, Kaduna, Kwara and Osun states as well as the FCT on a partnership basis. Specifically, the implementing partners of the project include: NRCRI, Umudike, FUNAAB, HKI & Kwara Poly, Offa who played different roles to ensure effective delivery of the overall project objective.

According to the presenter within the short time of the project implementation, some achievements have been made, including: signing of sub-agreement by implementing partners, office set – up, vine multiplication, conduct of several stakeholders meetings and workshops (including trainings), vine dissemination and monitoring (including state familiarization visits). Other major achievements highlighted during the meeting included:

- Held partners meeting in April to develop and ratify budgets, meet and familiarize with partners
- Site selection for demonstration plots
- Triple ‘S’ study set up
- Initiation of irrigation pumps at the 2 research stations in Nyanyan and Umudike
- Setting up of storage study experiment
- Setting up of on-farm trails

With regard to constraints / challenges, they included:

- Initial constraints, which led to delays in finalizing all documentation to the signing of sub-agreement and fund release to the partners.
- CIP strict adherence to financial and MoU regulations on fund transfer to the country office and partners.
- CIP Abuja having to spend considerable time backstopping the partners' development of work plan and budget to ensure effective utilization of allocated resources and final project deliveries.
- Effective communication and early report by the ADPs
- Seasonality of OFSP, which slows down or suspend some of the laid down activities of the project until harvesting period when roots will be available.

Moving forward, the paper articulated the followings as the next steps for the Rainbow Project:

- Sensitization
- Aggressive advocacy
- Farmers' adoption
- Consumers acceptance
- Market linkages

The presenter concluded the session, by explaining that the Rainbow project will need the experiences and strategies (especially in working with the media) to build on.

Participants' reaction to the presentation bothered on the need for Rainbow Project to build on the experiences of RAC Project in working with the media. This it was agreed can only be achieved by making deliberate effort to ensure the utilization of the media to showcase and promote the activities of the project beyond what was experienced during the implementation of the RAC project in Nigeria.

In the view of one of the participants, working with the media is not just easy, but if Rainbow Project can invest and involve the media in seminars and demonstration meetings to promote and showcase the various options and value chains of the OFSP, the task of promoting and creating public awareness on OFSP will be better enhanced in Nigeria.

Presentation 3: VITAMIN A: The Nigerian Story

This paper was presented by Hadizat Ibrahim a Nutritionist and Media Consultant and one of the facilitators of the workshop. The presentation was structured along the main outlines of: Introduction; Vitamins A deficiency: the figures; Vitamin A: What, How Much, Why? The Need for Action, and The HKI / RAC Factor.



The presented started the presentation by stressing that *the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that as many as 140 million children, especially in Africa and Southeast Asia, suffer from Vitamin A deficiency (VAD). Pregnant women, 7 million! That each year, it is estimated that 670,000 children will die from Vitamin A deficiency VAD and 350 000 will go blind! And that nearly 600 000 women die from childbirth-related causes each year, the vast majority of them from complications which could be reduced through better nutrition, including provision of vitamin A.* With regard to Nigeria, the presented noted that, *30% of children under 5 are said to be vitamin A deficient!!! That an estimated 861,000 Nigerian children die before the age of 5; one-third attributable to undernutrition. That 80,000 children are prone to die annually from Vitamin A deficiency related ailments. And that WHO has identified Nigeria as one of the Category One Countries with the highest risk of Viatmin A deficiency in the world.*

The paper went further to explain what Vitamin A is and the various food sources of Vitamin A. It also went on to discuss why we need Vitamin A and the consequences of not having sufficient Vitamin A in our body (especially for the under 5 and other growing children). Among the reasons why we need Vitamin A, according to the presenter were the followings:

- Required for maintenance of epithelial cells and mucous membranes, and skin.
- Helps the body's immune system function and resistance to infections.
- Ensures good vision.
- Needed for bone growth.

While on the other hand, the consequences of not having sufficient Vitamin A include:

- Growth faltering characterized by loss of body weight as a result of loss of appetite.
- Increased number, duration and severity of infections.
- Visual disturbances.
- Death.

On the HKI / RAC Factor, the presenter emphasized that the OFSP being promoted through RAC project have many advantages which includes: High nutritional value, High yield, Can thrive in different growing conditions, High adoption rate, can be a source of income generating opportunities as well as a crop for women empowerment.

In her conclusion, the presenter called on various actors to join forces with stakeholders in the fight against VAD in Nigeria. In particular, she identified the following as having key roles in the effort - Government, NGOs, Media, Food industry, Farmers, Women and all the participants of the RAC Project Media Event.

Presentation 4: OFSP for Food and Nutrition Security – How it fits into Agricultural Transformation Agenda. Sweet Potato Desk Officer at FMARD

The FMARD Desk Officer on Sweet Potato (Mr. Ayeni) in a his short talk made instead of the presentation built for the Ministry, informed participants that the effort of the RAC project have resulted in OFSP and indeed the entire potato family being key in the Agricultural Transformation Agenda. According to him, *“now, we are no longer talking of just Sweet Potato but the larger Potato family because we are also integrating Irish Potato in this case”*. This development he further explained will go a long way in boosting the nation food security effort, which government is working to sustain.



Relating to the Rainbow Project, he explained that the project is a critical initiative towards boosting Nigeria's potato cultivation, processing and consumption for health and wealth. The project in his words *“is a unique arrangement and partnership between government; ministries, department and agencies (MDAs); and international development partners in the area of OFSP promotion the major success of which to being attributed to RAC*

Project implementation in Nigeria”. He went further to highlight that, *“although the major thrust of the Rainbow project is on VAD but the expectation from the ministry is how many lives has been touched by the intervention and how many jobs had been created, therein”*. He concluded his talk by stating that in all the states of the project, gains are being made as a result of the Rainbow Project implementation apart from Ebonyi state where the project is yet to find its real footing. Although the Rainbow

project team is working hard to resolve the issues undermining the quick take off of the project in the state.

With regard to value chain addition, Mr. Ayeni informed participants that FUNAAB & Offa are working round the clock on the product different value chain and very soon they will be coming out with result on how the ordinary people will be engaged in the value chain processes of OFSP and indeed the various species of potato in Nigeria. He thanked RAC Project for organizing the media event and particularly for using the meeting to midwife the much needed partnership between the Rainbow project and the media community.

Several reactions were raised by participants following his intervention and the earlier presentation of Dr. Phobee with regard to the implementation of the Rainbow Project. Particularly, a participant sought clarification on how all stakeholders (NPFS, different Departments and Agencies within the ministry as well as state level actor – ADPs, SMARD, SMOH and RAC project Advocates, etc) will work together as a group for the achievement of greater impact?

In Mr Ayeni's response, he stated that the Rainbow project is working based on the document behind the project, following project design; CIP is at the lead of all implementation coordination while other stakeholders have different roles to play. He went further to explain that what the FMARD is currently doing on the project is to support the effective implementation of the project and that the only way is open to bring in new actors into the project is through the DVMs. Specifically, whatever the Ministry is doing is through the Programme Manager who is from CIP and not from the ministry. He explained that all hope is not lost as the FMARD have contacted their legal team to advise us on how the guiding document can be amended to accommodate emerging issues in the sector today. Through this amendment, the concerns of states and other implementing agents in the project can be addressed and all carried along effectively in the project implementation.

To achieve the above, the project subsequent year proposal and budget need to be expanded so it could take care of the various contributions of stakeholders and agents working in the OFSP sector in Nigeria. He acknowledged that the call for the expansion of the project to other states of the country as was raised by some participants is genuine but that could only be achieved based on the outcome of the current intervention.

On the status report of OFSP production in Ebonyi state which was challenged by one of the POFAN representation, the Rainbow Project Manager, clarified that the result she shared was based on the monitoring report from Rainbow Project implementation so far and not covering the entire Sweet Potato production in states of the federation per se. put in her words *“the report we shared is specific to Rainbow Project and that is what we have reported and any other thing happening in the state is outside our (Rainbow Project) coverage and focus. Because we are not responsible for the result you as POFAN have in states outside our coverage”*.

She appealed to stakeholders to rally round the Rainbow Project for the good of all, explaining that “the challenge the project is experiencing in carrying everybody along as they anticipated is that programme design is different, from implementation and the gaps in project designs are only identified during implementation”. She concluded by appealing that they should not abandon the process in their various state simply because you were not invited for one meeting of the other.

Group Work on Involvement of Media

The conclusion of various presentations of the workshop was followed with the sharing of participants into two small groups to brainstorm for presentation to the plenary on ways to deepen the involvement of the media in the promotion of OFSP in Nigeria beyond the RAC Project. Specifically, the groups were divided along the bias of agriculture and nutrition. The session which lasted for one hour was followed with presentation at the plenary.

Group 1: Agriculture:

On concern of the highly perishable nature of OFSP, the following solutions were proffered:

- Value addition
- OFSP Recipes to be develop by ADP, WIA
- Dissemination of Message through media
- Collaborate with ADPs to disseminate message during Monthly technical review meetings.
- Documentary in key languages.



On Platforms for Effective Engagement of the Media, the following were suggested:

- Food exhibition to showcase various value chains to be covered by the media
- Media to participate in young farmers association activities to encourage them to participate in the cultivation of OFSP as part of the school gardening system.
- Advocating for media collaboration in OFSP promotion beyond RAC & Rainbow projects
- Advocating for integration of OFSP activities into existing media programs
- Media coverage of OFSP Stakeholders meeting (forum on OFSP to be organized quarterly to be

Group 2: Nutrition:

The group addressed concerns specific to media collaboration for OFSP promotion and sensitization, under which the following were identified by the group:

- OFSP Advocates to conduct regular visit to all media outfits in each states (especially the privately owned stations) at least quarterly to solicit support for the promotion of OFSP.
- Media to give airtime to stakeholders to talk on OFSP in different languages and media outfits from time to time

- Advocates to collaborate with programme presenters to secure access to radio programmes (especially in Agric, & health programs)
- Deployment of Social media for OFSP promotion (networking to send bulk SMS to the population from time to time)
- Request for every opportunity on OFSP and seek opportunities for media collaboration as a means of promoting OFSP / showcasing OFSP
- Courtesy call to NUJ and NAWOJ chairpersons in the various project states to solicit for support in the area of OFSP advocacy and promotion.
- Ensure that any activity carried out the media are included and the media must ensure that the media that participate in are aired
- Advocacy visit / courtesy call to the DGs and top managers of media outfits is also essential in selling projects to media outfits (tell them what is expected from them, their support in the area of production, airing, programming, etc). This kind of advocacy will help to buy air / media time from media outfits at reduced cost in this case.
- Occasional visits by advocates to such stakeholders as market women, farmers and other stakeholders who have access and influence on the media in the states

Closing:

In her closing remarks, Mary Umoh, reiterated that the issues and recommendations coming from the meeting and particularly on media engagement as presented by the two groups as good as they are all cannot be implemented by RAC or Rainbow Project so to say, She explained that the major responsibility for implementing these recommendations best rest with the advocates in the states and that is the major reason why this interface between them and the media was put in place in the first place.

On the way forward, she explained that advocates and stakeholders from the states should see this projects (RAC & Rainbow) as a state level projects. She advised advocates not to build so much on funded platforms such as RAC and Rainbow because they will come

and go but the advocates will continue to exist and live in the state. According to her, “while we have our primary assignments and schedules at our various places of work, we should use every available opportunity to promote OFSP and at such occasion we should find ways to promote OFSP in that wise. We must think out of the box to create the needed opportunity”.

On the media, she explained that the media will to a large extent depend on you the advocates for creating all the needed contents that will be needed to create effective OFSP promotion and advocacy in the states.

With regard to institutionalization, she informed participants that RAC project is interested in institutionalizing OFSP in the different project states to make sure the OFSP is constantly on the top Agenda. She pleaded with stakeholders that they should continue to work to make sure that all level of farmers integrates OFSP into their various farm activities. This she opined is critical, as it provides opportunities to put more food on our table and not opportunity for competition as is currently being perceived by some actors. On the concern raised by participants relating to the next step for RAC project, the PE informed participants that the RAC Project is hopeful that HKI and partners will be coming up with similar or a scale up of the RAC project in the future but till then we will all keep our fingers cross. And for the end of project workshop built for 11th September, 2014, she informed participants that management is working hard to give the event all the needed publicity by engaging the media in the meeting.

In conclusion, she thanked all the participants for making it to the meeting and for staying to the end in spite of their various tight schedules. She charged them to all keep the flag flying high in their different states even as RAC project transits to a close. According to her, even if we have not been able to achieve all that we (RAC Project) anticipated to achieve, within the limited and challenging time that we found ourselves, we (RAC Project) takes solace in the fact that even if nothing happens again, the Rainbow Project is here to continue to work from where we stopped.

In his own closing remark on behalf of the all the RAC advocates, Chief Okafor (the National Chairman of POFAN), thanked RAC Project Team (HKI & CIP) for all their immeasurable contributions in the struggle against VAD in Nigeria using food based approach and for promoting OFSP to the current position that it occupy's in the country within the shortest life span of the project. To his colleagues RAC advocates and POFAN members, he has this to say “this work has just started, and it wouldn't have been our wish that the project come to close now”. He also explained that across different states of the country POFAN members are already using their platform to promote OFSP at various levels, promising that they will not relent in their efforts.

For the Editor of Food Farm News who spoke on behalf of the media communities who had been supporting the OFSP agenda in Nigeria and the effort to deal with VAD for every child in the country. He concluded by stressing that they (the media) will be giving their support to the issues agreed upon during the workshop to the extents possible within their scope of operation and coverage.

The meeting came to a close by 5:17pm.