

# Promote Food-based Approaches to Combat Vitamin A Deficiency in Africa

Vitamin A deficiency (VAD), a serious public health problem in Africa, is the result of inadequate dietary intake of vitamin A rich foods and frequent infections. The problem affects an estimated 43% of pre-school aged children. Vitamin A deficiency weakens the immune system, increases the risk of disease and death, and causes visual impairment in children and night blindness in pregnant women and children.

A wide variety of vitamin A rich foods such as dark green leafy vegetables, mangoes, papaya, pumpkin and orange-fleshed sweetpotato that can prevent VAD are readily available in Africa.

Vulnerable households are often deficient in vitamin A due to lack of awareness of the importance of a diversified diet, high cost of some vitamin A rich foods and high disease load, especially among young children.

## A call to action

- Adopt a holistic approach to combating VAD that combines vitamin A supplementation and food-based approaches such as fortification and dietary diversification
- Formulate and implement policies that support food-based approaches for increased vitamin A intake
- Invest in vitamin A- rich bio-fortified crops. For example, one small root (150g) of orange-fleshed sweetpotato can meet the daily recommended allowance for vitamin A for young children
- Promote awareness for growing nutritious crops and consuming a diversified diet



Photo Credit: HKI

Reaching Agents of Change (RAC) Project advocates for increased investment in orange-fleshed sweetpotato food-based approaches to combat vitamin A deficiency (VAD) among children less than five years old and their mothers. RAC also builds institutional capacity to design and implement gender sensitive projects to ensure wide access and utilization of orange-fleshed sweetpotato in selected African Countries. Its efforts contribute to the broader Sweetpotato for Profit and Health Initiative (SPHI) which aims to improve the lives of 10 million African families by 2020.

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