

Insights from the Field



Mr. Alade and
Dr. Njoku in
the OFSP farm



Dissemination of Orange-Fleshed Sweetpotato (OFSP) Taking Shape in Nigeria

The journey from Ilorin town (one of the largest cities in Nigeria and the capital of Kwara State) to Agbamu, a remote agricultural village, takes us about one hour.

We finally branch off the main tarmac onto a narrow track overgrown on both sides with thick shrubs and marshy grass. Being mid-morning, we occasionally come across curious on-looking farmers carrying hoes and fresh produce from their farms. Children merrily follow our slow moving vehicle, singing and chanting in the local dialect -- Yoruba. We finally arrive in the homestead of Mr. Saka Alade, a 47 year old, masculine 6 feet tall farmer clad in a greyish spotted *agbada*. After exchanging a few pleasantries and explaining the nature of the visit, the farmer leads us to his farm, bountiful with sweetpotato. "I planted this crop on the 1st of June, 2013; the vines and the roots are now ready for harvesting" explains Mr. Alade. I am excited about this variety of sweetpotato because unlike the white-fleshed sweetpotato, the future of Orange-Fleshed Sweetpotato (OFSP) in this country is bright due to its nutritional benefits. I anticipate that many people are going to learn about OFSP and will soon come flocking here looking for vines and roots. I will make money out of this quarter hectare piece of land!" he quips.

¹ The Reaching Agents of Change (RAC) project is a 3-year initiative implemented by the International Potato Center (CIP) and Helen Keller International (HKI). The development goal of RAC is to increase the rates of vitamin A intake in targeted beneficiary countries (primarily Tanzania, Mozambique, Nigeria, and to a lesser extent Ghana and Burkina Faso). RAC aims to generate new investments to scale up adoption of orange-fleshed sweetpotato (OFSP), which is rich in pro-vitamin A. The RAC initiative focuses on capacity strengthening for sustainable up-scaling / out-scaling of OFSP by focusing on policies, resource mobilization, capacity for seed multiplication and distribution - taking a value chain approach.

These materials will support a new Sweetpotato for Health and Wealth in Nigeria, financed by the Nigerian government, which intends to reach a total of 102,000 households in Nigeria with OFSP by December 2017.

@ October 2013.
Story and photos by Godfrey Mulongo

My vision...

"I see tremendous increase in cultivation and consumption of OFSP in Nigeria in the next five years. I will be happy to witness VAD amongst children under-five drop to 12% by 2016, and women empowered as a result of better incomes through the OFSP value chain." Says Dr. Njoku

Mr. Alade is one of the seventeen decentralized vine multipliers (DVMs) in Nigeria who have been subcontracted by the Reaching Agents of Change (RAC¹) Project to multiply OFSP seed. "Right now we have about 4.25 hectares under the management of the DVMs. In addition to these, we have 4.8 hectares under primary seed plots" asserts Dr. Jude Njoku, the RAC National Agronomist for Nigeria. "The vines from these plots will be distributed to 3,000 households and an additional 30 second tier DVMs this year. The selection of beneficiary households will be facilitated by Helen Keller International (HKI) through the Young Child and Infant Program. The OFSP advocates will also play a key role in identifying households with children vulnerable or already suffering from vitamin A deficiency (VAD)".

Mr. Joseph Adu, the Director of Extension Services for Kwara State, is very optimistic about the future prospects of OFSP to combat VAD in the state. "I personally often visit the DVMs to monitor their progress because I do not want the OFSP project to fail. The rural communities in my area of jurisdiction are among the most affected by VAD and I see OFSP as an inexpensive and sustainable solution to this problem....I will continue to encourage households to grow this crop for consumption and for income generation" posits Mr. Adu.

Dr. Jude Njoku further explains that OFSP is a relatively new crop in Nigeria, notwithstanding the long history of sweetpotato production in the country. "Our first priority in RAC was to collaborate with other stakeholders to release an OFSP variety in the country. The first variety was released in December 2012 and the second one in June 2013. We are therefore grateful to organizations and scientists who helped us achieve this feat, especially the staff at the National Root Crops Research Institute, Umudike", says Dr. Njoku.

Asked how RAC has managed to establish the 8.8 hectares under OFSP in such a short period, Dr. Njoku explains "we decided to skip secondary multipliers and

went straight to DVMs to shorten the chain in order to reach as many households as possible in a short span of time.

However, we are doing this in stages: after the first/primary tier DVMs, we will select the second tier DVMs, who will be double the number of the current primary farmers especially now that we have adequate vines. For instance, we are expecting at least 125,000 cuttings from Mr. Alade whom we initially gave 12,500 vines. Therefore at the ratio of 1:10, we expect to multiply 3.78 hectares of 2nd tier DVMs from Mr. Alade's 0.25 hectare of land".

"I accepted to adopt OFSP out of curiosity; the colour was quite appealing and there was a lot of talk in the village about its nutritional and economic benefits. Also, unlike the local sweetpotato varieties, this season I did not need to apply any chemicals on this variety that was provided by RAC. It is more tolerant to pests and diseases than my local sweetpotato that have always been a menace to farmers. OFSP is a new innovation and I like it!" Says Mr. Alade



Mr. Alade showing off OFSP roots and vines from his farm