Value Chain Analysis for Orange-fleshed Sweetpotato in Malawi

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Sweetpotato remains a very important calorific and economic value chain commodity for the majority of Malawian farmers. While there have been efforts to improve productivity through the introduction of improved varieties, a big gap exists in knowledge of the value chain characteristics and linkages. Orange-fleshed Sweetpotato (OFSP) remains an obscure sub-sector as very little information existed about the value chain activities in Malawi. We applied a root and vine value chain mapping and analysis approach to analyze the value chain and functions of actors, distribution channels, the planting material supply system and associated constraints and opportunities. Specific actor surveys, focus group discussions, key stakeholder informant interviews and market observations were implemented with a total of 877 participants in seven districts in Central and Southern Malawi. Results reveal that on average producers market about 74% of their production in informal fresh root markets such as homesteads, community markets or the roadside. Only about 1% finds its way into commercial or industrial processors (mainly Universal Industries Ltd and CN&F Ltd) due to the underdeveloped product base from OFSP and unclear market for its products. Main road side markets and urban outlets provide premium prices for fresh roots for middle traders, retailers and hawkers. In terms of price differentials for different actors, primary producers received an average of USD 0.23 kg^{-1} from collecting traders or aggregators who sold to wholesalers for USD 0.28 kg^{-1}. Retailers acquired sweetpotato from wholesalers at USD 0.32 kg^{-1} and marketed to urban consumers or road side consumers for an average of USD 0.45 kg^{-1}. In spite of varietal mixing at the retail outlets, white-fleshed, yellow-fleshed and orange-fleshed varieties were sold in proportions of 28%, 37% and 35% respectively. There is no discernible price gradient for sweetpotato flesh colour in these markets. It was discovered that smallholder producers normally do not procure planting material but conserve their vines or source them from other farmers. Supply response for commercial vine multipliers depends largely on the ad hoc demand by NGOs for relief programs. Existing multipliers have limited access to clean planting material for multiplication and need training on producing disease free planting material. Root production is challenged by limited access to inputs and physical infrastructure for bulking roots, perishability of the roots, limited access to market information and the seasonality of the crop. An alternative opportunity to explore for producers can be diversification in mixed sweetpotato-livestock systems. There are opportunities for additional commercial processing of OFSP into flour, juice, body cleaner, dried chips, biscuits, crisps and sweet-beer. Strengthening the value chain in Malawi requires an approach that combines 1) dissemination of OFSP information and extension services to men and women farmers, 2) investments in vine multiplication and dissemination, 3) enhancing nutrition knowledge on the benefits of OFSP, 4) providing business development support for scalable processed products and 5) train traders, wholesalers and retailers on the segregation of orange-fleshed roots in the markets.

Keywords: Vine Marketing, Root Markets, Distribution Channels, Value Chain Actors, Processing.

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