

Feed the Future Malawi Improved Seed Systems and Technologies Project (MISST): Scaling Out Orange-Fleshed Sweetpotato

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Fig. 2 Community based OFSP planting material multiplication in Mangochi. (credit D. van Vugt)

Within the first two years, MISST enabled over 27,000 households to produce and consume pro-vitamin A rich orange-fleshed sweetpotato (OFSP) varieties. To increase access to clean planting material, we trained more than 40 commercial vine multipliers out of which 15 have actively started selling OFSP planting material, and helped to establish 65 Decentralized Vine Multiplication (DVM) sites. We built the capacity of private sector, government and NGO's to scale out OFSP technologies.



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What is the problem?

In rural Malawi, limited crop and food diversification results in consumption of diets that are lacking in essential micronutrients. Vitamin A deficiency is still a large problem, especially affecting women and children under the age of five. Households are often not aware that consuming OFSP is a proven and easy way to enhance their vitamin A status. Moreover, farmers who have heard about the nutritional benefits of the crop often struggle to access the planting material of improved varieties. Those with access to OFSP are often unaware of the various options for utilization at household level, or how best to store or market their freshly harvested roots.

What do we want to achieve?

We aim to provide 62,500 farmers with OFSP planting material. These farmers will gain hands-on experience with the cultivation of available varieties and knowledge on agronomic practices (Fig. 1). They will be aware of the importance of maintaining planting material over the different seasons and understand the nutritional benefits of the crop. Through participatory evaluation, we want to identify methods to store fresh roots over longer periods

of time, and scale out the most preferred and successful options. At least 20 commercial multipliers will be able to supply OFSP vines to large buyers and at least 200 community based vine multipliers will supply their surrounding communities with clean planting material. Through media involvement, field days and demonstrations, we will create more demand for both OFSP roots and vines.

Where are we working?

Project activities are implemented in the Feed the Future Zones of Influence in most Extension Planning Areas (EPAs) in seven districts in Malawi: Mchinji, Lilongwe, Dedza, Ntcheu, Balaka, Machinga and Mangochi.

Fig. 1 Farmer in Mchinji harvests his first OFSP roots. (credit S. Mbewe)



The Sweetpotato for Profit and Health Initiative (SPHI), launched in 2009, seeks to improve the lives of 10 million African households in 17 SSA countries by 2020 through providing access to improved varieties of sweetpotato and their diversified use.

Support for the establishment of the Platforms and the holding of CoP meetings is provided by the Sweetpotato Action for Security and Health in Africa (SASHA) Project, led by the International Potato Center with over 26 collaborating partners.

✦ How are we going to make it happen?

We are building the capacity of private sector, government and NGOs through trainings of trainers on all aspects of the sweetpotato value chain, including commercial and community based multiplication of planting material, on-farm variety demonstrations and evaluation by farmers, participatory evaluation of postharvest root storage technologies, nutritional messaging and recipe demonstrations as well as vine and root marketing. Partners will subsequently train others in their organization and roll out activities to the rural households they are supporting by integrating OFSP work in on-going projects. Much of the farmers' trainings take place around the 'Mother-Baby' demonstration plots (Fig. 2). On a mother plot, a host farmer demonstrates the six available OFSP varieties Zonden, Ana Akwanire, Kaphulira, Mathuthu, Kadyaubwerere and Chipika. Fifty farmers around the mother plot receive a bundle of planting material of one of the varieties to plant in their own garden as a baby plot. We also use media and drama to create more awareness on the benefits of OFSP. We organize stakeholder meetings to ensure quality production and distribution of perishable planting materials in response to droughts and floods.

✦ Who are we working with?

We work with the Department of Agricultural Research and Extension Services and the Department of Nutrition, HIV and AIDS. We also scale out OFSP activities with farmers' organizations such as National Smallholder Farmers' Association of Malawi (NASFAM) and Farmers Union of Malawi. International NGO partners include We Effect, Concern Worldwide and Welthungerhilfe, whereas national partners include the Catholic Development Commissions in Dedza and Zomba (ZARDD). We integrate part of our activities with other USAID-funded projects such as: DAI's Integrated Nutrition into Value Chains (INVC); Tetrattech's Protecting Ecosystems and Restoring Forests in Malawi (PERFORM); NJIRA, implemented by Project Concern International and Emmanuel International; and Fisheries Integration of Society and Habitats (FISH) implemented by Pact. We have also distributed planting material through World Vision and Inter-Aide in Lilongwe district.

✦ What have we achieved so far?

Over 27,000 direct beneficiaries received planting material and training on agronomic practices, vine conservation and nutrition messages by participating in the mother-baby variety demonstrations. More than 40 commercial vine multipliers received training on vine multiplication



■ Fig. 3 Training of trainers on root storage. (credit D. van Vugt)

and 15 have actively started selling OFSP planting material. Sixty-five DVM sites were established to provide clean planting material in the communities. More than 853 technical staff from ten project partners received training on mother-baby demonstrations, vine multiplication, postharvest and root storage (Fig. 3), marketing, nutrition and monitoring and evaluation. On-farm sweetpotato root storage evaluations were established in 25 sites in June-July 2016. We organized a large stakeholder meeting in July to estimate expected supply and demand for OFSP planting material.

✦ What's next?

We will engage and train more commercial vine multipliers and establish more community based vine multiplication sites. This will ensure sustainable supply of planting material and reduce the need to transport perishable planting material over long distances. We will continue scaling out the most promising OFSP varieties targeted to specific agro-ecological conditions and enhance awareness of the nutritious benefits and market potential of OFSP roots and vines through media. We will seek to engage partners that can help us strengthen our agriculture to nutrition linkages to ensure that farmers receiving nutrition messages also have access to planting material and understand agronomic practices, achieve good yields and receive maximum benefits from investing in crop diversification with OFSP.

CONTACT

Daniel van Vugt (CIP)
d.vanvugt@cgiar.org
Dr. Paul Demo (CIP)
p.demo@cgiar.org