# Strengthening the Sweetpotato
## Community of Practice

The 5th Annual Sweetpotato for Profit and Health Initiative (SPHI) Technical meeting celebrated the achievements of the first five year phase. Since then, three additional Community of Practice (CoP) technical working groups began holding meetings annually to improve the SPHI's capacity strengthening effort as its membership expands.

◀ Participants at 2015 Annual SPHI meeting held in Nairobi, Kenya

## What is the problem?
The number of researchers and practitioners working on sweetpotato in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is growing but dispersed widely. We want to ensure that sweetpotato specialists can access and debate key issues and share experiences across disciplines and countries.

## What do we want to achieve?
We want to see a growing and vibrant CoP, with sweetpotato researchers, development agents, farmers and consumers able to obtain and apply sweetpotato knowledge effectively. Sweetpotato Support Platforms (SSPs) at the sub-regional level (East and Central Africa; Southern Africa; West Africa), started in 2010, will continue to support breeding and germplasm exchange. Each of four technical groups will meet at least once annually, with venues rotating throughout the SSA region. We would like each CoP to have a core group of at least 15 members that always attend. Each CoP will develop gender-sensitive protocols and standardized methods of data collection whenever practicable.

We will continue to support increasing breeding capacity to ensure continuous production of high yielding, disease-resistant, nutritious varieties adapted to local agro-climatic conditions and consumer preferences. The scope of the Breeding CoP group is being expanded to include more research concerning marker-assisted breeding and sweetpotato genomics. Developments in genomics, which involves high-throughput DNA sequencing coupled to new analytical tools to identify genes associated with key traits, promise to make sweetpotato breeding much more efficient.

## Where are we working?
SSPs have been established within each major sub-region of SSA. For East and Central Africa, the SSP is hosted at the National Crops Resources Research Institute (NaCRRI) in Uganda and the Kenyan Plant Health Inspection Service (KEPHIS). For Southern Africa, the SSP is based at the Agrarian Research Institute of Mozambique (IIAM) in Maputo. The West Africa platform is located at the Crops Research Institute (CRI) in Kumasi, Ghana. CoP groups are currently targeting the 17 SPHI countries.

## How are we making it happen?
**Community of Practice for SpeedBreeders and Sweetpotato Support Platforms.** Building the next generation of breeders is core to this effort. Working in close collaboration with the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), CIP breeders based at each SSP backstop national program breeders in 14 SSA countries and co-supervise PhD candidate breeders. Annual *Sweetpotato Speedbreeders'* meetings are held to learn the latest methods and share findings. Our goal is to have 14 national programs using the *CloneSelector* Excel-based program to record and analyze their sweetpotato trial data. In 2015, researchers linked to the new *Genomic Tools for Sweetpotato Improvement* project, led by North Carolina State University (NCSU), began attending the annual *Speedbreeders* CoP and will be providing training opportunities for breeders in the coming years.

**Three new communities of practice.** Three new CoPs have been established since 2014: 1) Seed Systems and Crop Management, 2) Marketing, Processing, and Utilization, and 3) Monitoring,

Learning and Evaluation. These CoP groups are sharing information among themselves, identifying research gaps and networking to resolve common problems and develop joint projects. In addition, internet-based discussion fora will enable follow-up on key topics identified at the annual gathering.

The annual SPHI technical meeting will continue to be held. Membership of the SPHI effort is expanding, with more organizations joining the *Coalition of the Willing* that is committed to reaching 10 million African households by 2020 with improved sweetpotato varieties and their diversified use.

### What have we achieved since June 2014?
In September 2014, the SPHI held its largest annual meeting ever, with 19 sweetpotato projects represented, 8 of which were not led by the International Potato Center. The major theme of the meeting was *Celebrating the Achievements of SASHA*

*Phase 1*. Information disseminated included 27 update briefs for projects under the SPHI umbrella and a special folder with 13 briefs on research findings covering the past five years. A half-day exhibition was hosted with 20 exhibition booths demonstrating achievements to date in 11 SSA countries.

As of 1 July 2015, the Sweetpotato Knowledge Portal had 635 registered users and 7,326 content items. Between June 2014 and July 2015, the site registered 16,721 visits. The Sweetpotato Knowledge Portal is being re-designed and improved. It is being migrated to a platform (WordPress) that should permit users to upload their contributions more easily.

Table 1 summarizes the dates, venues, and gender of participants attending the CoP meetings during the past year. Evaluations of these meetings revealed that participants liked the new approach.



The Reaching Agents of Change project won the best exhibition booth prize at the SPHI meeting (credit S. Quinn)

### Table 1. SPHI Community of Practice Meetings in 2015

| CoP Meeting | Co-lead by | Date (2015) | Venue | No. of Women | No. of Men |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Breeding and Genomics | Robert Mwanga (CIP, Uganda), Craig Yencho (NCSU, USA) | 2-5 June | Mukono, Uganda | 11 | 29 |
| Seed Systems and Crop Management | Jean Ndirigue (RAB, Rwanda), Gorrettie Ssemakula (NaCRRI, Uganda), Jude Njoku (NRCRI, Nigeria) | 28-29 April | Kigali, Rwanda | 16 | 24 |
| Marketing, Processing and Utilization | Francis Amagloh (UDS, Ghana), Madjaliwa Nzamwita (RAB, Rwanda) | 20-21 May | Nairobi, Kenya | 13 | 20 |
| Monitoring, Learning and Evaluation | Julius Okello (CIP, Uganda), Ignatius Abaijuku (HarvestPlus, Uganda) | 3-4 March | Nairobi, Kenya | 2 | 14 |

In addition, 16 participants attended a two week course, taught by an expert from the US Bureau of Census, on how to collect Survey Data using the CSPro data entry program adapted for Android tablets.



The Learning Journey approach in use in Rwanda by Seed System CoP participants (credit C. Bukania)

### SASHA
Sweetpotato Action for Security and Health in Africa

Led by CIP, the ten year Sweetpotato Action for Security and Health in Africa (SASHA) project is designed to improve the food security and health of poor families in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) by exploiting the untapped potential of sweetpotato.

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