



Helen Keller
INTERNATIONAL

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Helen Keller International (HKI)

OFSP Update – Africa Region

Across six countries in Africa, HKI is working in partnership to support orange-fleshed sweetpotato (OFSP) development, production, and consumption as part of an integrated nutrition-sensitive agriculture approach. We have achieved numerous successes and continue to search for new ways to innovatively support the growth of OFSP.



Fig. 1 Women receiving OFSP vines from DVM Vasco Antonio Jequessene in Changara district, Tete province (credit F. R. Lhongo)



What is the problem?

Despite impressive gains, much of Africa still suffers from malnutrition, including protein-energy deficiency as well as deficiencies in micronutrients: the World Health Organization cites that 48% of children aged 6 to 59 months in Sub-Saharan Africa were vitamin A deficient in 2013. This manifests in some form in all 12 countries where HKI works. For example, child stunting rates are 34.6% in Burkina Faso, 38.3% in Mali, and 42.6% in Mozambique. As such, HKI has long been dedicated to addressing malnutrition through nutrition-specific interventions, such as provision of vitamin A supplementation, as well as nutrition-sensitive ones. Interventions may be more sustainable if embedded within the food production system through vitamin-rich crops such as OFSP, which can also contribute to food security and livelihoods.

What do we want to achieve?

We are working across our countries to promote the development, production, and consumption of OFSP as part of a nutritious diet supported by good nutrition, health, and hygiene practices to lighten the burden of malnutrition across the continent. We aim to achieve increased production and consumption of OFSP at individual and community levels, greater integration of OFSP into agricultural value chains to achieve broader impact, and increased policy support and funding for OFSP to ensure sustainability.

Where and with whom are we working?

We currently have projects involving OFSP, either alone or as part of a broader set of agriculture/ livelihoods interventions, in six countries: Senegal, Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Mozambique, and Sierra Leone. We work with national and sub-national governments (Ministries of health and agriculture as well as other actors, such as those in the water and sanitation and education sectors) in each country, as well as local and international NGOs, community volunteers, national research institutes, and the International Potato Center (CIP).

How are we making it happen?

We focus on capacity building at all levels – government, NGO partners, vine multipliers, community volunteers, and farmers themselves – usually through cascade trainings implemented with partners. We aim to train both those in the agriculture and the health sectors, to support a better integration of agriculture and nutrition. In addition, we work with partners to identify and distribute vines of improved, locally appropriate varieties to vine multipliers and farmers. (Fig. 1). We develop integrated gender-sensitive behavior change communication (BCC) strategies, using multiple channels, to encourage consumption, particularly by women and young children (Fig. 2). To complement the consumption of OFSP, we provide BCC on other important nutrition and



Fig. 2 Children across SSA love eating OFSP, even raw (credit B. Rakotoarisoa)

hygiene topics through the “Essential Nutrition and Hygiene Actions” framework.

What have we achieved so far

Through our AGRANDIS project in Burkina Faso and Mozambique, we’ve provided vines to over 25,000 people, most of whom are cultivating for the first time (Fig. 3). We’ve built broad networks of decentralized vine multipliers (DVMs), creating locally available sources of cuttings and supporting these individuals to make OFSP vines a new livelihood—netting them as much as \$1,000 in additional annual income—well above Burkina Faso’s GDP per capita! Simultaneously, we have reached several thousand parents of young children

with nutrition-related BCC through group discussions, home visits, and mass events, such as theatrical performances. In Sierra Leone, we’ve identified promising new varieties of OFSP. In Mali, we’ve integrated OFSP into a much larger USAID-funded livelihoods, nutrition, health, and governance project, while in Côte d’Ivoire we are promoting and offering training related to OFSP as part of a more targeted nutrition-sensitive agriculture project. In Senegal, we’ve innovated in the BCC space by working to create two community-led videos as part of the SPRING project, which showcase the advantages of OFSP, including the different delicious dishes that can be made using the crop.

What’s next?

In addition to continuing the above activities to support production and consumption, we will aim to strengthen the OFSP value chain in Burkina Faso and transfer more responsibilities for OFSP promotion and production to community-level partners in Senegal. In Côte d’Ivoire and Senegal, we will undertake post-project evaluations of two projects that ended in 2016 to understand the sustainability of their interventions, including OFSP. Across all our countries, we will seek new opportunities to promote the growth of OFSP as a key crop for nutrition as well as livelihoods.



Fig. 3 Project beneficiaries watering a sweetpotato field in the Eastern part of Burkina Faso. (credit O. Veramba)

List of strategic partners for OFSP dissemination

Ministries of Agriculture and Health of Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Tanzania; International Potato Center (CIP); Centre National de Recherche Agronomique (CNRA), Côte d’Ivoire; Institut National de l’Environnement et de Recherches Agricoles (INERA), Burkina Faso; Institut Sénégalais de Recherche Agronomique (ISRA), Senegal; Agence Nationale d’Appui au Développement Rural (ANADER), Côte d’Ivoire.

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