Orange-fleshed Sweetpotato is a critical component of the Kenya Accelerated Value Chain Development (AVCD) Program

At the end of its second year, 47 decentralized vine multipliers are operational and a total of 36,13 households have been reached with structured nutrition education that integrates essential messages for Maternal and Infant and Young Child Nutrition. Progress has been made in initiating fresh root and processed product value chains.

What is the problem?
Vitamin A deficiency (VAD) is a significant public health problem in Kenya affecting approximately 84% of children under 5 years and roughly 39% of women. While the orange-fleshed sweetpotato (OFSP) has the potential to contribute to reduction of vitamin A, food security and income, its production in Western Kenya remains marginal for various reasons: socio-cultural negative perceptions about the crop, often referring to it as woman’s crop and food for the poor; undeveloped seed systems; non-existence of long term storage facilities and inadequate market access.

What do we want to achieve?
As part of the Kenya Accelerated Value Chain Development (AVCD) Program, the sweetpotato component will use CIP’s Integrated Agriculture-Nutrition-Marketing Approach to Increase productivity, production and consumption of OFSP among 65,000 smallholder households over three years (October 2015- September 2018). Of these, 30,000 households will participate in root storage and marketing.

Specific achievements will include:
1. We will disseminate at least 3 best-bet technologies that have been developed by CIP and its partners for improved seed systems. At least 5 vitamin A rich varieties of OFSP will be evaluated by farmers. At least 40 vine multipliers will be mentored to conduct vine multiplication as a business. Specific effort will be made to reach women and children under 5 years who are most vulnerable to vitamin A deficiency.
2. The existing health structures will be strengthened to integrate strong messaging and activities on maternal, infant and young child feeding practices with focus on vitamin A and OFSP. There will be capacity building of healthcare providers for increased uptake of Agriculture-Nutrition linkages for improved nutrition, focusing on the first 1000 days of life. OFSP will be prepared in varied ways and integrated into common household dishes; these will be analyzed at the CIP Food and Nutrition Evaluation Laboratory (FANEL) at ILRI’s Biosciences (BecA) Eastern and Central Africa (BECA) lab in Nairobi.
3. We will improve storability of OFSP to assure all-year-round availability for trading either at formal or informal markets. Farmer’s gross margins will be improved through trainings on good agronomic practices, collective action in production and marketing, and use of ICT platforms to access market information and contractual linkages between farmers and buyers.

Where are we working and with whom?
We work in two sub-counties each in Homa Bay, Migori, Bungoma and Busia Counties. CIP is partnering with Farm Concern International in enhancing collective action both at production and marketing level of OFSP so farmers can benefit from economies of scale. The Natural Resources Institute of the UK leads activities on establishment of OFSP
root storage facilities in support of year-round availability of OFSP. Existing structures at county level (Fig. 1) within the
government departments of Agriculture, Nutrition, Public
Health, Education and Administration will be utilized to
promote agriculture-nutrition linkages for improved
nutrition and behavior change towards increased
production, consumption and marketing of OFSP.

What we have achieved so far?
The project finds itself in a catch-22 situation whereby neither
the root producers nor the traders are willing to take up the
first business risk to invest in the value chain. However, this is
gradually changing as 129 farmers have already initiated
planting of at least 0.25 acres each for marketing. Fresh root
traders have also been persuaded to integrate OFSP alongside
normal sales of the white- and the yellow-fleshed varieties.
Traders from 11 leading sweetpotato markets in Nairobi have
also expressed willingness to trade in OFSP. The Nairobi
market is a key market as indicated by the 2015 value chain
analysis that documented how sweetpotato from Western
Kenya is marketed. The project will play a facilitative role to
motivate players in the value chain to embrace OFSP as a
commercial crop.

In addition to attracting fresh root traders, the project has
initiated sale of OFSP bakery products by 10 Naivas
supermarkets located within Nairobi and its environs (Fig. 3).
Tesa supermarket, which has 5 branches in Busia and Bungoma
Counties have also initiated OFSP bakery products. This value
chain is anticipated to create a pull force for production.

What next?
The focus during 2017/2018 project year, the last year of the
project, will be to operationalize fresh root marketing
following various value chains, such as restaurants, bakeries
and fresh roots. This will create the much-needed pull force
to sustain production at the farm level. Focus will also be to
ensure the operationalization of root storage facilities to
allow for either short or long term root storage required to
support the various value chains throughout the year.

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