

Sweetpotato Alleviating Food Insecurity and Malnutrition in Ethiopia

The potential for exploiting synergies between emergency efforts and development projects was demonstrated by linking emergency implementing partners as buyers to trained farmer multipliers of quality planting material, with 60 million sweetpotato vines being distributed in the drought affected SNNP Region in Ethiopia.



Integrating OFSP into school feeding programs in Tigray (credit T. Haile)

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What do we want to achieve?

The project "Better Potato for a Better Life" (BPBL) is a four-year initiative, funded by USAID and implemented by the International Potato Center in collaboration with public and private partners. The project seeks to significantly improve food security and diet quality of 150,000 vulnerable households in two of Ethiopia's nine administrative regions i.e. Tigray and Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR) by September 2013. The second project titled "Alleviation of Food Insecurity and Malnutrition in Tigray, Ethiopia through Promotion of Potato and Orange fleshed Sweetpotato (OFSP)" is programmed to run for two years, and is being implemented in five food insecure districts in Tigray region. The project uses household health extension package workers, village level women development groups and science school clubs as well as agricultural extension workers to encourage women and children to consume OFSP and potato. The objectives of these two projects will be accomplished by:

- Improving vine multiplication and conservation techniques
- Introducing sweetpotato into food insecure lowlands where agronomic conditions for its production exist
- Developing and promoting OFSP to combat vitamin A deficiencies
- Promoting fodder and dual purpose sweetpotato varieties
- Promoting community understanding on the nutritional and health value of OFSP

and creating awareness about the need for adequate vitamin A intake

- Training of public and private actors

White-fleshed sweetpotatoes are commonly grown and consumed in SNNPR; however, it is a relatively new crop in the second intervention area (Tigray). In contrast, orange-fleshed sweetpotatoes are a relatively new crop to both regions. One of the key objectives of the project is to disseminate OFSP that can contribute towards the reduction of widespread vitamin A deficiency through its consumption. The changing of food habits is a challenging task, requiring a comprehensive strategy. For this, the project pursues a four-pronged approach:

1. Quality planting material is produced by the national research system, farmers and the private sector and distributed for the production of OFSP roots. Involved stakeholders are trained and receive technical backstopping. The OFSP producers will be linked to markets by establishing contact with wholesaler / retailers.
2. Two NGOs (Mums for Mums and Egna Legna), specialized in the promotion of new food products, apply participatory approaches to develop locally acceptable dishes and OFSP products that build upon existing food habits but include OFSP using mobile kitchens. This work is being scientifically supported through MSc level research carried out by a university partner (Hawassa University).





■ Marketing OFSP in Mekelle (credit T. Haile).

3. In villages and urban areas, OFSP will be promoted with the assistance of an advertising agency (billboards, radio spots), guiding interested consumers to orange-painted market stalls selling OFSP and providing recipes for the production of OFSP dishes.
4. In rural areas, promotional activities will involve radio spots, the establishment of sweetpotato clubs, especially at schools as well as training and awareness creation measures for farming families.

✦ Who are our partners and where are we working?

At present, the project collaborates with government agricultural extension personnel, NGO and private partner organizations (see margins) in the SNNPR and Tigray regions of Ethiopia (Fig. 1).

✦ What have we achieved so far?

As of March 2013, the BPBL project was able to reach over 214,650 needy households within three and a half years of the project life. Similarly, over 10,000 farmers were trained on sweetpotato agricultural practices such as vine multiplication, root production and utilization. With respect to promotional activities carried out by the Irish Aid nutrition project, over 680 extension agents, school teachers, women development groups' leaders and farmers received training on different sweetpotato food recipe preparation, nutritional value and agro-processing techniques of OFSP. Promotional activities using banners, flyers, brochures and mini media material reached over 60,000 people. Extensions of both projects are under negotiation.

The nutrition potential of OFSP is beginning to gain more official recognition in Ethiopia. Ethiopia is committed to the Scaling-Up Nutrition goals to significantly reduce chronic undernutrition among young children. In 2013, its National Nutrition Coordination Body specifically integrated nutrition-sensitive approaches into the National Nutrition Program, including OFSP.

✦ What have we learned so far?

Sweetpotato is ideally suited as a post-emergency rehabilitation crop. It is a hardy, drought resistant and "low maintenance" crop that is easy to grow even for inexperienced farmers. Large quantities of planting material can be transported at reasonable costs and will produce substantial amounts of food and feed within a short period of time (3 to 4 months).



■ Enjoying a cooking demonstration in Mekelle (credit M. Ashenafi).



■ Fig. 1. Map of Ethiopia showing the two project intervention regions (SNNPR and Tigray)

Development Partners:

- Bio-tech micropropagation plc
- Bureau of Agriculture and Rural Development (BoARD) in SNNPR
- Bureau of Agriculture and Rural Development (BoARD) in Tigray
- Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research (EIAR)
- Egna Legna, local NGO
- EZRA plc.
- GOAL Ethiopia, an Irish NGO
- Hawassa University
- Haramaya University
- Mekelle University
- Hawassa Green Wood plc.
- Muluneh plc.
- Mums for Mums, an Ethiopian NGO
- Southern Agricultural Research Institute (SARI)
- Tigray Agricultural Research Institute (TARI)
- Vita, an Irish NGO
- Wamole plc

Partners in the Disaster Risk Management Project for SNNPR:

- Catholic Relief Services (CRS)
- Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO)-Ethiopia,
- FHE
- GOAL Ethiopia
- World Vision Ethiopia,
- ChildFund'
- Concern Worldwide and
- IMC

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