



Helen Keller
INTERNATIONAL

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Updates from Helen Keller International's efforts in OFSP dissemination

A multi-sectoral approach is key for large scale dissemination and adoption of orange-fleshed sweetpotato (OFSP) and harnessing its nutritional potential. This requires creating demand for OFSP by communicating the nutritional and agronomic advantages, while at the same time providing training on the cultivation, storage and processing.



Fig. 1 Beneficiary from Côte d'Ivoire with fresh OFSP root of impressive size. (credit HKI Côte d'Ivoire)

What is the problem?

Malnutrition and Vitamin A deficiency (VAD) are widespread throughout the developing world. An estimated 44% of pre-school age children in Africa are vitamin A deficient, which prevents them from growing and developing normally and staying healthy.

What do we want to achieve?

In addition to vitamin A supplementation of infants and young children at 6-month intervals and fortification of foods with vitamin A, increasing the intake through the production of vitamin A-rich foods can make a real difference in combating VAD. Helen Keller International (HKI) promotes the production

Fig. 2 Vine multiplication tunnel at the national agriculture research center in Cote d'Ivoire (credit HKI).



and consumption of nutrient-rich foods and good nutrition and hygiene practices to poor populations in Africa and Asia through its Enhanced Homestead Food Production (EHFP) program, whose goal is to improve the nutritional status of women and children. Orange-fleshed sweetpotato (OFSP) is an essential part of this program, because it packs record quantities of vitamin A, vitamin C and calories. This makes it a useful power food for women and young children, who are the most vulnerable to malnutrition in general and VAD, in particular. However, OFSP is not always in people's food habits in Africa and people often know and prefer white-fleshed sweetpotato, which does not have the nutritional benefits of OFSP. Thus, the goal is to create demand for OFSP, test and introduce improved varieties (Fig. 2), cultivation, and processing and storage practices. Additionally, HKI aims to build local capacity to disseminate OFSP production and consumption on a large scale (Fig. 3).

Where are we working?

In Africa, HKI is, or has been promoting OFSP as a component of the EHFP program in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Tanzania.



How are we going to make it happen?

We are building the evidence for the efficiency of food-based interventions and OFSP to fight malnutrition, advocate with governments and strategic partners to adopt national policies and programs in favor of such interventions and building their capacity to implement and monitor such programs.

Who are we working with?

We are working with governments, particularly the ministry of agriculture and the ministry of health. In places where we implement projects, we work with regional and district level authorities and local partners (local or national non-governmental organizations or other community based organizations and private sector).

What have we achieved so far?

In the last five years, HKI has reached 14,500 direct beneficiaries and about 165,000 indirect beneficiaries with about 1,375,000 improved OFSP vines. In most cases, this distribution to direct beneficiaries was accompanied by training on techniques for cultivation, storage and processing (Fig. 3 & 4) and social behavior change communication for good nutrition and hygiene practices. Additionally, we have generated research results that built the evidence base for food-based approaches to combat malnutrition in collaboration with the International Food and Policy Research Institute.

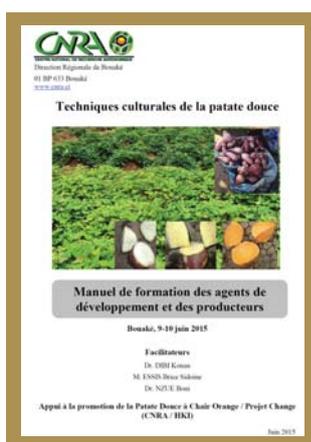


Fig. 3 Manual for sweetpotato developed in collaboration with HKI. (credit HKI Mozambique)

What's next?

The next step will be to scale up OFSP production and consumption and the EHFP program as a whole to a large number of beneficiaries, in close collaboration with governments and strategic partners in countries where experiences with the program already exist. In other countries, HKI will explore opportunities for extending the program and further increasing the reach of OFSP dissemination. There are also great opportunities to market OFSP as a special food for children and as an ingredient for processed, nutritious foods, with promising experiences from Burkina Faso. OFSP will continue to play a key role in HKI's nutrition sensitive agriculture approach and through past and current field and advocacy activities continues to experience increased demand and recognition.

Fig. 4 Improved processing techniques are shown and tasted in culinary demonstrations in Mozambique. (credit HKI Mozambique)



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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