

Root and Tuber Crops for Agricultural Transformation in Malawi (RTC-ACTION Malawi)

Given the successful completion of CIP-led potato and sweetpotato projects financed by Irish Aid from 2007 through 2015, a new project has been designed that continues developing potato, orange-fleshed sweetpotato and cassava production and marketing systems all under one five-year project: Root and Tuber Crops for Agricultural Transformation in Malawi (RTC-Action Malawi). A major public launch event was held on 26 September 2016.

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Fig. 1 Women involved in vine multiplication for wider dissemination of OFSP varieties in Malawi (credit J. Sayles)



What is the problem?

Malawi, along with many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, struggles against extreme poverty and high levels of malnutrition pervasive in rural communities. More than 70% of the 18 million residents live below the poverty line and rely on agriculture for sustenance and incomes. One of the key challenges facing agriculture development in the country is low productivity due to lack of improved planting materials among others. Further, malnutrition is also prevalent in women as well as young children. An estimated 800,000 children under five years of age are undernourished and a million are estimated to suffer from Vitamin A deficiency (VAD). There is need for an integrated nutrition-agriculture development approach to concurrently address low agricultural productivity and malnutrition challenges for improving the livelihoods of vulnerable households in Malawi.

In the previous Rooting Out Hunger project, much progress was made in sensitizing people living in Southern Malawi to the benefits of orange-fleshed sweetpotatoes (OFSP). Over 70,000 households were provided with vitamin A rich OFSP and there was good collaboration with several projects and partners promoting improved child feeding and household dietary practices (Fig. 1). But much remains to be done. Five new varieties of OFSP were released and need to be disseminated and new districts brought on board. Both pre-basic, basic, and community-level seed multiplication efforts need to be strengthened and made more

sustainable. Value chains for OFSP processed products are still in their infancy and need technical backstopping and increased support to build demand. Most critically, there are still very small numbers of trained public and private sector research and extension personnel knowledgeable about managing and exploiting root and tuber crops to their full advantage.



What do we want to achieve?

In order to support government's efforts in addressing this challenge, Irish Aid Malawi focuses on supporting innovative ideas on improving the availability of planting materials. Root and tuber crops are being targeted because of their strong resilience to climatic changes, their contribution to food security, nutrition and incomes.

The five-year (April 2015-March 2021) RTC-ACTION program, financed by Irish Aid for 8.9 million Euros, is designed as a national research and development program with technical coordination by CIP and close ties to the Root and Tuber Crops Development Trust (RTCDT) for stakeholder engagement. The goal of RTC-ACTION Malawi (Fig. 2) is to increase the contributions of root and tuber crops (RTC) to food security, nutrition, and incomes in Malawi. The project will do this by harnessing advances in RTC research and development and scale them up through potato, sweetpotato, and cassava value chains to meet the demand by farmers, consumers, processors, and traders in Malawi. The project will also provide technical capacity, and implementation support to the national RTCDT to coordinate stakeholders for increased investments and continued innovation in RTC value chains. The project is expected to reach at least 120,000 direct beneficiaries.



Where are we working?

OFSP activities are targeting the districts of Phalombe, Mulanje, Thyolo, Chiradzulu, Mwanza, Neno, Zomba, Nsanje, Chikwawa, and Blantyre. The districts slated for potato activities are: Dedza, Mchinji, Ntcheu, Ntchisi, Neno, Dowa, Mzimba South, Lilongwe and Kasungu.



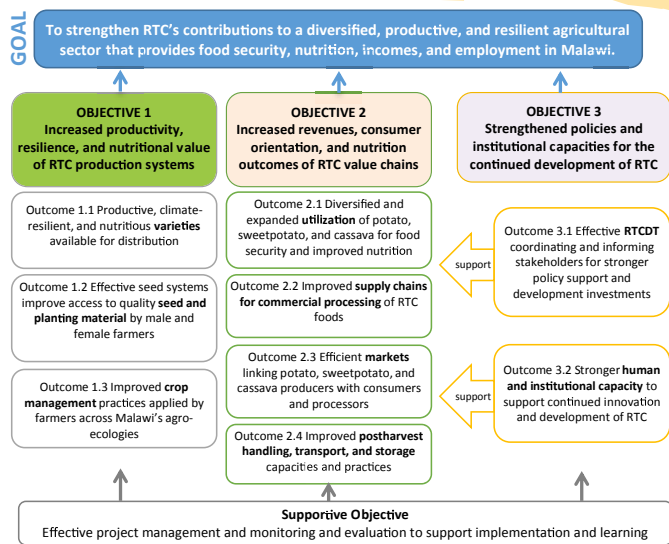


Fig. 2 Root and Tuber Crops for Agricultural Transformation in Malawi (RTC-ACTION Malawi) Project goal, objectives, and expected outcomes.

How are we going to make it happen?

In partnership with various key stakeholders the project will work to harness advances in RTC research and development and scale them up through potato, sweetpotato, and cassava value chains to meet the demand by farmers, consumers, processors, and traders in Malawi. The project will also provide technical, capacity, and implementation support to the national Root and Tuber Crops Development Trust (RTCDT) to coordinate stakeholders for increased investments and continued innovation in RTC value chains.

Who are we working with?

The International Potato Center (CIP) engages with a number of international NGOs, national NGOs, and government partners as well as collaborating with on-going projects operating in similar regions of Malawi. For sweetpotato as well as potato, DARS leads the breeding research and germplasm maintenance of foundation material at the Bvumbwe Research Station (Fig 3). Major implementing partners working in the Southern Region that have incorporated OFSP into their on-going projects for 2015 include: Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Concern Worldwide (CWW), Sustainable Rural Community Development Organization (SRCDO), Department of Agricultural Research Services (DARS), Department of Agricultural Extension Services (DAES), the Catholic Development Commission (CADECOM), and Concern Universal (CU). Universal Industries is a private processing company invested in developing commercial products for

Fig. 3 High quality sweetpotato vines in a screen house at Bvumbwe Research Station (credit J. Sayles)



all three RTCs that include OFSP and potato crisps, OFSP and cassava biscuits, high quality cassava flour, and OFSP puree; all of which promote national expansion of nutritive foods comprised of roots and tubers.

What have we achieved so far?

In addition to building up the supply of quality planting material for the coming 2016 rainy season, and initiating the project in additional new districts, a major public launch event was held on 26th of September 2016. The launch highlighted two new Irish Aid funded projects, the Malawi Seed Industry Development Project-Phase II (MSIDPII), led by the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics ICRISAT, and the Root and Tuber Crops for Agricultural Transformation in Malawi (RTC-ACTION Malawi), led by CIP. The Honorable Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development of Malawi, Dr. George Chaponda, was the guest of honor at the event held at Chitedze Research station where he jointly cut the ribbon with the Ambassador of Ireland to Malawi, her Excellency Áine Hearn and visited exhibition booths (Fig. 4). Over 150 participants from the private and public sector, NGOs, and farmer's organizations were also in attendance.

The launch aimed to create public awareness to generate more demand for farmer benefitting technologies and develop interest and attract more interested parties to participate at different stages of the respective crop value chains.

What's next?

For the 2016/17 season, we will hold a project inception workplan meeting on the 25th and 26th October 2016 to orient all partners coming from the 19 districts (9 for potato and 10 for OFSP) to have a clear understanding of their roles in the RTC project. By the end of the meeting, each partner will have their work plans to reach their share of the 2016/17 project target of 24,00 beneficiaries of OFSP vines, potato seed, nutritional messages and extension workers trained. Secondly, deliberate efforts will be worked out together with partners to ensure consistent OFSP root supply and quality to agro-processors such as Universal Industries, who have complained about the challenge of such a supply. This is an opportunity to create reliable markets for OFSP producers in areas near processors.

Fig. 4 Jean Pankuku (left) of Universal Industries Ltd showcasing value added products from RTC including to the guests of honour, the Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development, Hon. Dr. George Chaponda (second from right) and Ambassador of Ireland to Malawi, her Excellency Áine Hearn (far right)

