



**SPHI Seed System Community of Practice
Summary of Discussion Topic**

Title: TOPIC 8-Sweetpotato seed system enterprise models & competitiveness

1. Summary of participation statistics

Table 1 shows the summary of participation statistics under this topic.

Duration	Lead discussant; institution & country	No. of contributions	No. of unique respondents	No. & type of institutions	No. of countries
28 days 11 th Nov-8 th Dec 2015	Antony Masinde - Farm Concern International	35	18 (14 male, 4 female)	NARIs (1), CIP (10), Other CG (1), Private sector (1), University (3), Foundation (1), NGO (1)	11

2. Introduction

The aim in this topic is to share experiences on business models that have been used to bring competitiveness into sweetpotato seed enterprises, both in formal and informal seed systems. The focus is to examine different ways of forecasting demand for planting materials and how this injects or enhances competitiveness in the sweetpotato seed enterprises. The lead discussant observed that experiences suggest that seed demand forecasting in the formal systems is well organized and enables adequate planning for seed production to meet requirements at the onset of rains. Whereas the informal systems seem to have no discernable system for estimating demand for planting materials in the coming season and to plan supply at village level. This is seen to be a major constraint to commercialization of informal seed enterprises and is the key cause for inadequate planting materials at the start of the rain season. Thus, the focus of the discussion was intended to address “how smallholder-led seed enterprises address demand forecasting and production planning for effective competitiveness”. As in most topics, the lead discussant posted some questions, which sought to: clarify demand estimation as a way of assuring vine multipliers of the expected demand for planting materials and how forecasted demand could be used to schedule production of planting materials, and tools/methodologies to use to forecast demand. The topic attracted 35 contributions from 18 respondents, and was moderated by Antony Maside of Farm Concern International (full statistics on table 1). This summary highlights the key points, any areas of consensus or disagreement, and any ideas suggested that members could consider to try/test in their work to further learning and inform development /practice in sweetpotato seed system.

3. Key points and areas of consensus/disagreement.

The following seem to be the key discussion areas:

- Two distinct model seed enterprises were contrasted focusing on ability to forecast/project demand for planting materials and its effect on transiting to a commercial viable formal sector seed enterprise.
- All were agreed that farmers source most of their sweetpotato seed (up to 99%) from own fields and through their networks, which include informal private suppliers (multipliers and traders). With this scenario, it was argued that a corresponding investment support (type not specified) should be directed to these systems to drive them to commercialization.
- Focus should be on understanding demand in the dominant seed system (informal seed system):- how the informal enterprises (local multipliers and traders) estimate local seasonal demand for planting

materials, how the plan production to supply it (e.g. what can be learnt from Uganda and Tanzania experience on how private multipliers estimate seasonal demand for vines and plan their production).

- Related to the preceding point is the view that demand forecasting should start from the farmers instead of from institutional buyers (public, NGOs, projects, etc.)
- Among areas where there was some agreement:
 - That the formal institutional-buyer derived enterprise and its demand forecasting approach has a role in the sweetpotato seed systems, which include deployment of improved varieties, stimulating demand for clean planting materials, and perhaps create demand for these from local multipliers. Also, it would be useful to document the institutional market (who is buying what, how much, the prices, from whom (producers) and how production decisions are made
 - Building a viable commercial seed enterprise building on local vine multipliers and traders will take time and will require examining and getting the market for roots moving to levels where it stimulates demand from root growers for planting materials from multipliers. Both the building of the supply of vines and market for roots should move in tandem, i.e. to invest in activities that build the value chain to a critical point (demand for roots pulling demand for vines). Rwanda experience was used for illustration-that there is now stiff competition for the available vines but still inadequate material to meet demand.
 - Perception of growth in profitability (in vine production - supported by a thriving root production activity) is a key variable in commercializing the seed sector; that it will attract some larger multipliers, become more competitive (and perhaps in future supported by quality standards e.g. QDS).
 - That the formal system is not likely to disappear soon. Rather, both systems are important (can perhaps continue to work together) in disseminating modern varieties and use of quality planting materials.
- There seems to be concerns about the appropriate pathway to a commercial sweetpotato seed enterprise and whether even a fully commercial seed system would be compatible with social objectives (delivery of better nutrition through OFSP). For example, a suggestion to consider a ‘hybrid-like’ sweetpotato variety, whose performance significantly declines unless farmers use clean planting material could be a pathway to commercializing the seed system similar to maize sector. However, concern was raised that it would likely result in situations of extreme vulnerability for smallholders who depend on this crop for food security, especially if there are not many resistant varieties.
- By and large, contributors seem to agree that a theory of change was needed that integrates social and commercial objectives in the work towards strengthened seed systems by adding diverse dimensions along the value chain. In other words, a theory of change that is not entirely driven by the market but one that also provides a pathway to OFSP-derived improvement in Vitamin A nutrition especially for the vulnerable.

Toward the end, there was a call for more efforts to demonstrate to farmers the benefits/importance of using clean planting materials. Some publications on yield loss and decline in profit margins, from recycled planting materials were posted.

4. Status on suggested follow up actions on emerged ideas or techniques (to updated at CoP meeting)

No ideas or insights for further action were identified from the contributions. Any that came up since then can be noted during the CoP meeting and inserted into Table 2.

Table 2: status of suggested follow up actions on ideas or techniques

Suggested idea for action	Follow up action taken	Where (country) & institution	Feedback to CoP

