In Uganda, CIP is testing seed business enterprise models for medium-scale multiplication to provide the link between upstream sources of clean planting materials (pre-basic seed) and new varieties and down-stream community-based vine multipliers (DVMs). After undertaking business skills training, 9 (8 male, 1 female) medium scale seed and root enterprises are operating small to medium seed businesses on a 40% cost share basis. In the past one year, the entrepreneurs have collectively sold a total of 1,403 bags of vines and 40 bags of roots earning about USD 9,600.

What do we want to achieve?
We want to test business models for medium-scale sweetpotato seed (and root) enterprises to determine if they can be commercially viable and act as an interface between the “formal” and decentralized seed systems.

Where and with whom are we working?
We are working in the Pader, Kitgum and Lamwo districts of northern Uganda with seed entrepreneurs. The seed entrepreneurs are linked to private tissue culture laboratories and NARIs as the sources of pre-basic seed. The entrepreneurs are also linked to NGOs promoting sweetpotato who act as down-stream markets for seed. The district local government extension workers offer technical backstopping to the multipliers and in some cases help in sourcing for seed markets.

How are we making it happen?
A CIP Rapid Market Assessment survey conducted in May 2016 showed that there is high demand for sweetpotato planting material in the target districts, as farmers source for vines as far as Gulu and Lira districts, greater than 100 kilometers away. Responding to this demand, seed and root entrepreneurs were selected in the target districts in collaboration with the district extension workers. Fifteen seed entrepreneurs were identified in Lamwo, Kitgum and Pader districts to start seed multiplication businesses to act as an interface between the “formal” and “informal” seed systems. The criteria used to select seed entrepreneurs were: availability of a permanent water source, availability of land (> two acres), willingness and ability to cost share, success in adopting new technologies, reputation in the community and access to the market. Having conducted a needs assessment, the seed entrepreneurs were trained in entrepreneur skills, marketing, preparation of business plans, sweetpotato agronomy and seed inspection.
What have we achieved?
In 2018, the entrepreneurs have revised their 2016 business plans, expanded their multiplication gardens and registered their umbrella Association, named the East Acholi Sweet Potato Vine Multipliers Association. To support marketing and as part of the cost-share agreement, promotional materials like branded tents and chairs were availed to the seed entrepreneurs. In addition, entrepreneurs held radio talk shows in the respective districts to create awareness on availability of vines and roots. The promotional materials carry messages like “Orange-fleshed sweetpotato vines and other sweetpotato vines available for sale”, “Come and buy quality vines from here”. The East Acholi Sweet Potato Growers Association is informing the people from the mentioned district and beyond that there are vines available for sale in different packaging for individuals, farmer groups and organizations. As a result of promotions, entrepreneurs have registered increased numbers of telephone calls enquiring about availability of vines and roots. The promotional materials carry messages like “Orange-fleshed sweetpotato vines and other sweetpotato vines available for sale”, “Come and buy quality vines from here”. The East Acholi Sweet Potato Growers Association is informing the people from the mentioned district and beyond that there are vines available for sale in different packaging for individuals, farmer groups and organizations. As a result of promotions, entrepreneurs have registered increased numbers of telephone calls enquiring about availability of vines and roots. The promotional materials carry messages like “Orange-fleshed sweetpotato vines and other sweetpotato vines available for sale”, “Come and buy quality vines from here”.

What’s next?
As part of strengthening the capacity of farmers active in the business, we need to conduct further training in the areas of marketing, book keeping/record keeping and financial management. We need to conduct a cost-benefit analysis among these seed entrepreneurs and carefully document successes and challenges of the seed production models, especially as sweetpotato seed inspection protocols are rolled out in Uganda.