Ugandan School Children Contributing to the Health of their Nation

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In Uganda, between June 2015 and July 2018, the International Potato Center (CIP) worked with the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) in the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) to develop four supplementary readers with orange-fleshed sweetpotatoes as a major theme for primary school children. These were introduced successfully into 56 schools in Uganda.

Fig 1. A teacher in Uganda holds some of the OFSP books developed CIP and NCDC (Credit V. Atakos)

What is the problem?

Vitamin A deficiency (VAD) persists in Uganda at the rate of 33 percent among children under 5 years of age. If this VAD prevalence continues, Uganda expects 221,430 deaths due to VAD between 2013 and 2025, which translates into 51 deaths per day. However, if the nutrition situation improves, the VAD burden could be drastically reduced to 60,923 (i.e. 14 deaths per day) over the same period. VAD is associated with increased risk of mortality and severity of diarrhea among children, blindness, anemia, and night blindness among pregnant women. Additional strategies are needed to complement efforts of high-dose vitamin A capsule distribution, and fortification of vegetable oil and fats to drastically reduce VAD.

What do we want to achieve?

Specific objectives of the component are to:

i. develop and disseminate supplementary curriculum materials (books) for the specific integration of OFSP content into the national primary school curriculum (Fig. 1)
ii. create awareness in children, teachers and community members on the importance of OFSP
iii. develop a positive attitude in children, teachers and members of the school community towards growing and eating OFSP

Where are we working?

The International Potato Center (CIP) is one of nine partners who worked on the project, "Fast-Tracking the access to improved varieties of

Partners

- National Curriculum Development Center (NCDC)
- Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES)
- National Crops Resources Research Institute (NaCRRI)
- International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) Uganda and East Africa Regional Hub
- IDinsighta
- Makerere University
- Sokoine University of Agriculture (SUA)
- Lake Zone Agricultural Research and Development Institute (LZARDI)
- Mikocheni Agricultural Research Institute (MARI)
- Agricultural Non-State Actor Forum (ANSAF)

Fig 2. Using books on orange-fleshed sweetpotato in a primary school class, Uganda (Credit V. Atakos)

root crops by smallholder farmers: the case of sweetpotato and cassava" project (herein Fast-track) implemented in Uganda and Tanzania, June 2015 to July 2018.

How are we making it happen?

The Sugarcane Research Institute, Kibaha, Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security, and Cooperatives in Tanzania led the project. The project had five components: 1) Seed acquisition and agronomy; in Uganda this component was led by the National Agricultural Organization (NARO)/National Crops Resources Research Institute (NaCRRI) 2) Nutrition and gender; was led by Makerere University 3) Communication, policy, and advocacy focused on integration of OFSP in the primary school curriculum led by CIP 4) Monitoring and evaluation and cost effectiveness of the approach and 5) Partnership and governance; the last two components were led in Uganda by the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA). The project was implemented in three districts in Uganda (Kamuli, Mukono, and Wakiso), in 56 schools, which included five control schools in each district. A control school received no OFSP readers.

What have we achieved so far?

CIP collaborated with NCDC to integrate OFSP in the primary school curriculum of Uganda. This process involved development, alpha testing, approval and pilot testing. The approval was in four stages, a) Quality Assurance (10 Curriculum Specialists); b) Academic Steering Board [24-four members drawn from: Governing Council (8); NCDC (6); Uganda National Examinations Board (2); Directorate of Education Standards (2); Teacher Education (2); Subject matter specialists (2) and Pedagogy specialists (2)]; c) NCDC Governing Council (38 member council comprising senior educationists, academicians, and Chief Executive Officers of corporate organizations; d) MoES - Basic Education Working Group (35 member committee drawn from development partners, senior ministry of education officials, curriculum specialists, examination officials, and teacher educators.
This process involved development, alpha testing, approval and pilot testing. Four curriculum supplementary materials (titles/books) were developed:

1. Orange Fleshed Sweet Potato, Teacher's Manual for Primary (P) classes P.1 – P.3; each school got 2 copies;
2. A visit to the Orange Fleshed Sweet Potato Farm, (reader for P.4); 20 copies per school, meant to be in a ratio of one book to three pupils;
3. Monica Grows Orange Fleshed Sweet Potato (reader for P. 5): 20 copies per school, meant to be in a ratio of one book to three pupils;
4. Orange Fleshed Sweet Potato – Play Book (upper primary): 20 copies per school, meant to be in a ratio of one book to three pupils (Fig. 3).

Teachers were oriented to the task and each science teacher got a set of all the four books. Schools received vine cuttings from NaCRRI which pupils grew and took some home. In the 56 schools, the science teachers know how to schedule the use of the books among the pupils during school days.

What are the next steps?

The next steps will be to raise the resources to print the OFSP school books for 23,000 primary schools in Uganda; distributing the books to the schools; orienting science teachers from all the schools; monitoring implementation of the curriculum; and conducting impact evaluation and dissemination of the findings.

Fig 3. A pupil in Uganda shows off his OFSP playbook (Credit V. Atakos)

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