

Emergency Response with Potato and Sweetpotato among drought-affected farmers in SNNPR, Ethiopia

The Emergency potato and sweetpotato seed support enabled farmers in the Southern Nations Nationalities and People's Region (SNNPR) to restore the varieties they lost to a severe drought in 2015/2017, and improve household food and nutrition security. From June 2016 to June 2018, 13,000 direct beneficiary farmers and over 5,500 indirect beneficiary farmers got orange-fleshed sweetpotato (OFSP) vine cuttings, produced over 5,000 metric tons of OFSP roots, and trained 133 crop and nutrition experts and 37,651 farmers on sweetpotato agronomy and nutrition.

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Fig. 1 Training of woreda agricultural experts and development agents (Credit M. Hadush)

What is the problem?

In 2015, Ethiopia experienced the worst drought in over five decades, exacerbated by El Niño which lingered up to 2017. It caused significant crop and livestock losses, negatively affecting food security and nutrition conditions across the country. Nationwide, it left an estimated 15 million Ethiopians in 2016 and 7.9 million Ethiopians in 2018 requiring food assistance. The SNNPR was one of the regions worst affected by the drought and farmers lost their crops, including the most preferred potato and sweetpotato varieties—communities' access to nutritious food was reduced. The region already faces deeply entrenched malnutrition with 38.6% stunted, 6.0% wasted and 21.1% underweight children under five. To restore the lost varieties and improve food and nutrition security of communities, the USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) supported CIP to assist drought-affected farmers in SNNPR with sweetpotato and potato seed with a total funding of US\$1.3 million.

What do we want to achieve?

The overall goal of the project is to contribute to improving food and nutrition security of drought-affected farm households through providing immediate access to seed potato and sweetpotato planting material of productive and locally adapted varieties. The project began in June 2016 and ran up to June 2018. The objective was to support 19,500 drought-affected potato and sweetpotato farmers in SNNPR through provision of emergency seed potato and sweetpotato planting material and training on production, and postharvest technologies and nutrition. This would contribute to improving food and nutrition security of about 117,000 people.

Where are we working?

The project was implemented in the SNNPR in six potato and seven sweetpotato woredas (districts) and 98 kebeles (villages), of which 65 are potato and 33 are sweetpotato kebeles.

How are we making it happen?

We sought to achieve the goal and objective of the project through emergency seed supply of potato and sweetpotato, and farmer training and awareness creation by working very closely with the key partner, Regional Bureau of Agriculture and Natural Resources Development (RBoANRD)—SNNPR. The roles of the partner included:

- Training of woreda agricultural experts and development agents on potato and sweetpotato agronomy, seed management, integrated pest management (IPM), Triple S, and postharvest technologies using a training of trainers' approach



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Partners:

- Regional Bureau of Agriculture and Natural Resources Development (RBoANRD), SNNPR
- Southern Agricultural Research Institute (SARI)
- Regional Bureau of Health (RBoH), SNNPR
- Hawassa University





Fig. 2 Cooking demonstration during a nutrition training
(Credit L. Berga)

- Participation in the training of woreda health experts (WHE), rural women extension (RWE) experts, and health extension workers (HEW) on nutrition
- Assignment of regional and woreda level focal persons to ensure timely implementation of activities
- Cascading of knowledge acquired by experts to beneficiary farmers and provide technical backstopping
- Design and implementation of monitoring and evaluation activities

We also collaborated with the Bureau of Health and, Hawassa University on nutrition training and exposing graduate students to the community's way of utilizing OFSP, and with Southern Agricultural Research Institute (SARI) on planting material.

What have we achieved so far?

At least 18,500 farmers received quality planting material of Kulfo (OFSP) and Awassa-83 (white-fleshed) varieties. They restored what they had lost and got high root yields, averaging 30.1 mt/ha for 'Awassa 83' and 23.3 mt/ha for 'Kulfo'. Foundation seed of Kulfo was given to two cooperatives with a membership of 29 farmers and 74 farmers organized in 10 groups in 10 kebeles to renew their planting material and sell vines to the communities going forward. Forty-four agricultural experts (38 M; 6 F) and 23,984 farmers (17,202 M; 6,782 F) were trained on sweetpotato agronomy, Triple S and post-harvest handling through a ToT approach. Similarly, 89 experts (14 M; 75 F) were trained on OFSP nutrition ToT. Nutrition education including preparation of OFSP roots and leaves either alone or in mixture with traditional foods, was given to 13,667 farmers (1,403 M and 12,265 F). Most of these farmers have started eating sweetpotato leaves for the first time,

contributing to improved food security. Direct beneficiary farmers produced about 8,800 mt of roots, of which about 4,000 mt was OFSP and indirect farmers produced over 12,000 mt of OFSP. Farmers add OFSP roots to their traditional foods and claim that the food has become more attractive to adults and children alike because of the orange color. Initially, farmers did not want to plant OFSP on fertile parts of their plots, but after seeing the benefits, they started growing it under irrigation and near homesteads to give it the maximum care and protection. For continued farmer training, a manual on sweetpotato production and postharvest technologies was prepared and distributed to farmers.

What's next?

As a follow-up to this well-received effort, we were awarded a new US 1.5 million project from OFDA/USAID entitled *Gender-sensitive Emergency Response with Potato and Sweetpotato Among Drought-affected Farmers in SNNP and Amhara Regions, Ethiopia*. In the new kebeles in SNNPR and in Amhara region, similar objectives will be pursued to help farmers attain planting material of productive potato and sweetpotato varieties and improve food and nutrition security of drought affected people. One of the major achievements was using OFSP leaves as a vegetable; this will be promoted together with consumption of roots. In project kebeles, drought is a major constraint so emphasis will be given to multiplying sweetpotato vines using irrigation and conserving planting material from season to season using the Triple S Method, that is Storage in Sand and Sprouting. The project has been using the 'Kulfo' variety that has low dry matter and not appreciated by adults when eaten alone but loved by children. However, the EU project in collaboration with SARI is soon releasing high dry matter OFSP varieties. The new varieties will be multiplied and introduced to farmers in both regions.



Fig. 3 Triple S training (Credit M. Hadush)