

Quality Diets for Better Health (QDBH)

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Locally adapted Orange-Fleshed Sweetpotato varieties, nutrition education and infant feeding tools are tested to address malnutrition in Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR), Ethiopia. This year baseline studies and formative research were completed and the first 26 Healthy Living Clubs set up and activities implemented with 1,117 participants.



Fig 1. Preparing bundles for dissemination at Mr. Girma's multiplication site, Dongoro Morocho, Aleta Chuko (Credit: R. Brouwer)

What is the problem?

Malnutrition and vitamin A deficiency are widespread in Ethiopia. Prevalence of stunting among children under 5 is 38%. A diet built around only a few staples means that many people have an insufficient intake of micronutrients. Complementary feeding practices for infants and young children are often deficient in frequency, quantity and nutrient density. Only 7% of infants 6-23 months of age meet the criteria for a minimum acceptable diet (EDHS 2016).

What do we want to achieve?

The project started in January 2017. By 2020, it will support 15,000 rural households (15,000 mothers and 10,000 fathers of young children) to improve their infant feeding practices and diets after receiving OFSP vines (Fig 1) and training in farming and nutrition. Over 61,000 urban consumers will have access to OFSP

roots and at least three different OFSP based products. At least one private sector operator will be engaged in OFSP value addition.

Where are we working?

The project is financed by the European Union. It works in four woredas (districts) in the Sidama and Gedeo zones in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR) in Ethiopia: Dilla Zuria, Kochere and Wonago in Gedeo and Aleta Chuko in Sidama. Farming is dominated by perennial enset (basic staple), coffee and khat (important cash crops); the average holding has 0.47 ha.

How are we making it happen?

The project tests the combination of a specific agriculture-nutrition-market based approach supported by formative research. OFSP roots and leaves are promoted to achieve dietary diversity and increase the intake of vitamin A by young children and their households. It will evaluate the use of feeding toolkits combined with nutrition training of mothers and fathers in "Healthy Living Clubs" (HLCs) to ensure that parents give their children enough nutritious food. Value chain development is expected to generate additional income and initiate a flow of OFSP roots and leaves and derived products to urban consumers. The feeding toolkit is designed to help mothers provide the appropriate number, size and consistency of servings to their children (Fig 2).



Fig 2. Message on health card for how to use feeding bowl to guide amounts to give 6 to 8 month old child



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- People in Need (PIN)
- Rollins School of Public Health (Emory University)
- Southern Agricultural Research Institute (SARI)
- University of Hawassa (UH)
- Ethiopian governmental agricultural, health and market development agencies



Fig 3. Vine multiplication site, Jara Farm. (Credit: R. Brouwer)

For training and capacity building the Southern Agricultural Research Institute (SARI), the University of Hawassa, and the Agricultural Technical and Vocational Education and Training (ATVET) College in Sodo are the main partners. During the first year, seven new varieties were evaluated through participatory appraisals and 1104 baby-trials. After one year, two varieties were dropped. Formative research on gender, nutrition and the sweetpotato commodity chain has provided the key inputs to agricultural and nutrition health trainings led by local agricultural (DA) and health extension workers (HEW) and health development army (HDA) volunteers and interventions in the value chain.

By the end of the project, we want to see OFSP integrated into government agriculture and health programs in SNNPR, with ATVET Sodo having incorporated OFSP in their training programs for extension personnel.

What have we achieved and learned so far?

Stakeholder meeting: In March and June 2018 stakeholder meetings at the zonal and regional levels brought together 146 representatives from kebeles, woreda, zonal and regional agencies to assess the project's performance. Stakeholders were satisfied with the project's technology and training packages and urged rapid release of the OFSP varieties under evaluation.

Vine multiplication and baby-trials: This year vines were obtained from one large-scale multiplier (Fig 3), SARI's Hawassa research station and from 48 demonstration/multiplication sites in 24 kebeles at farmer training centers (FTCs) and private farmers. Some of the material came from HLC targeted Triple S demonstration trials. Water-constrained FTCs have received investments in rainwater harvesting (Fig 4) and pumping equipment for supplementary irrigation. At the end of August 2018, 2,880 new baby-trials started evaluating the five remaining varieties.



Fig 4. Construction of rainwater harvesting installation at Gure FTC (Credit: R. Brouwer)

Training of Trainers (TOT): *The Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Sweetpotato* TOT was organized for the second time to allow for an early scaling out of OFSP knowledge and awareness into additional woredas, zones and regions and to stimulate institutionalization at the Sodo ATVET. The 33 participants were sponsored by EU-QDBH and Irish Aid.

HLCs: HEW and HDA volunteers have been trained in HLC curriculum to run the HLC nutrition trainings. Over 2017/2018, they ran eight training sessions of 26 HLCs with 778 member-households. The 8 sessions were attended by on average 1,117 persons of which 46% were men.

Cross-sectional baseline: In December 2017, 1,451 households in 26 kebeles were interviewed to obtain the project's baseline dataset. The results show differences between the three woredas regarding livelihoods and sweetpotato farming. Low dietary diversity, medium food insecurity, lack of vitamin A rich foods in the diet are common features.

Longitudinal study: The dissemination of OFSP is integrated with nutrition training in HLC. Since late 2017, 605 households, HLC members and a control group, are followed to evaluate the impact of OFSP, nutrition training and the Healthy Baby Toolkit on their dietary practices and the development of their children.

What are the next steps?

The release of locally adapted, high dry-matter and drought tolerant OFSP varieties expected for next year will kick off their rapid dissemination among farmers. Study outcomes will provide guidelines to farmers, direct value chain development and increase the effectiveness of the project's strategy for dietary improvement and the reduction of vitamin A deficiency. Lessons learned will support out-scaling into new areas at the end of the project.

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