

# Ghana's KNUST: Creating an Entrepreneurial Hub for Young Africans

As part of contribution to reposition sweetpotato in Ghana's food economy for health and wealth creation, KNUST in collaboration with its partners, encouraged more students to partake in the 3rd Edition of the Sweetpotato Training of Trainers (ToT) Course dubbed "Everything you need to know about sweetpotato". At the end of the 10-day training course, participants came up with innovative ideas for creating sweetpotato businesses. Three of the participants have already prepared fields for the establishment of OFSP farms while others are engaging key actors with the intention of creating and sustaining demand.



Fig 1. Participants cheerfully presenting product from their practical cooking session (Credit M Kane, Peace Corps, Senegal)

## What is the problem?

Over the years, the target audience for the sweetpotato ToT programs have been mainly national, non-governmental and individual implementing agencies to drive the uptake of sweetpotato. Even though the incidence of unemployment is soaring globally, especially among African youth, the involvement and empowerment of the youth to take active roles in sweetpotato value chain have been low. The nutritional and economic potential of sweetpotato, particularly the orange-fleshed sweetpotato, (OFSP) have not been fully exploited. The sweetpotato value chain presents several lucrative agro-processing and agribusiness opportunities that the youth can harness.

## What do we want to achieve?

The Entrepreneurial Hub aims to build the capacities of African youth to take up roles along the sweetpotato value chain for enhanced productivity, ultimately improving health and creating wealth (Fig. 1). Our goal is to promote the

consumption and utilization of sweetpotato, especially among the youth. The demand for sweetpotato should increase significantly through the collaborative efforts of the youth in making sweetpotato an everyday food choice. This would be achieved as the youth engage themselves in the commercial production of sweetpotato roots and leaves for food and manufacture added value sweetpotato-based products appealing to their peers (Fig. 2). A target of at least 100 youth entrepreneurs would develop innovative means of creating and sustaining demand for sweetpotato and sweetpotato products.



## Partners

- Kwame Nkrumah University of science and Technology (KNUST), Kumasi
- CSIR-Crops Research Institute (CSIR-CRI)
- International Potato Center (CIP)

Fig 2. The diversity of potential profitable OFSP products is enormous (Credit J. Low)





**Fig 3.** Participants having a discussion during the sweetpotato pest and disease field demonstration (Credit V. Abe-Inge, KNUST)

### Where are we working?

We are currently working at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) and the test field of the Crops Research Institute (CSIR-CRI) and the International Potato Center (CIP), Kumasi in Ghana.

### How are we making it happen?

The ToT course is a comprehensive program that provides learning in all aspects of the root and tuber value chain, including production, processing and marketing. The training spans across topics such as the origin and importance of sweetpotato, OFSP and nutrition, role of gender in the sweetpotato value chain, and basic training in product marketing, costing and other aspects of running a business. Participants are also equipped with hands-on skills in identifying sweetpotato varieties and their characteristics, sweetpotato production and crop management, sweetpotato pests and diseases (Fig. 3) and their management, selecting, preserving and multiplying sweetpotato planting materials as well as harvesting, processing and postharvest management.

Sweetpotato has several desirable sensorial attributes which include its sweet taste and unique flavour. Thus, participants are taught how to process sweetpotato roots and leaves into domestic and commercial products for utilization through practical cooking sessions. Some of the products include drinks, bakery products, complementary foods, crisps, yoghurt and *gari* (small roasted grains made from roots). Participants are also exposed to how to effectively plan a dissemination programme (Fig. 4), employ digital monitoring and evaluation tools, and how to train others on “Everything you need to know about sweetpotato”. To make the course fun, participants embark on a learning journey to some communities in Ghana where they interact, learn from and network with some successful sweetpotato farmers and processors in Ghana.

### What have we achieved so far?

Twelve youth have been trained in sweetpotato production, processing and marketing (Fig. 5). Participants were from Ghana, Senegal and Mozambique. Ten of these students received scholarships to be a part of the 3rd annual sweetpotato ToT course held from 16th to 27th July 2018. Three participants (two males and a female) have



**Fig 4.** Enoch, a young entrepreneur, facilitating a session (Credit Agyei-Agyemang Adubofour, KNUST)

begun their journey as young entrepreneurs by preparing fields for the establishment of OFSP farms while the others are engaging key actors with the intention of creating and sustaining demand. Prior to this training, a total of 51 individuals, from 13 countries in Africa, Asia and America, has received training at KNUST.

### Next steps

Future plans will mainly center on diversifying the means of advertising and attracting specific target audiences. The intention is to make the sweetpotato training program virtual in order to reach out to more youth both in Ghana and across Africa. This would be achieved through collaboration with interested stakeholders to raise the needed finance to develop and run the virtual option for the ToT course. Furthermore, the initiative of running tailor-made courses to meet the needs and demand of interested stakeholders would be adopted. A stronger post-course monitoring system will also be established to document the success stories and challenges of participants. We are confident that Ghana can become the preferred destination for practical entrepreneurial training in sweetpotato value chain development.



**Fig 5.** Group photograph of the participants and trainers at the 3rd Sweetpotato ToT in Ghana (Credit Agyei-Agyemang Adubofour, KNUST)

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