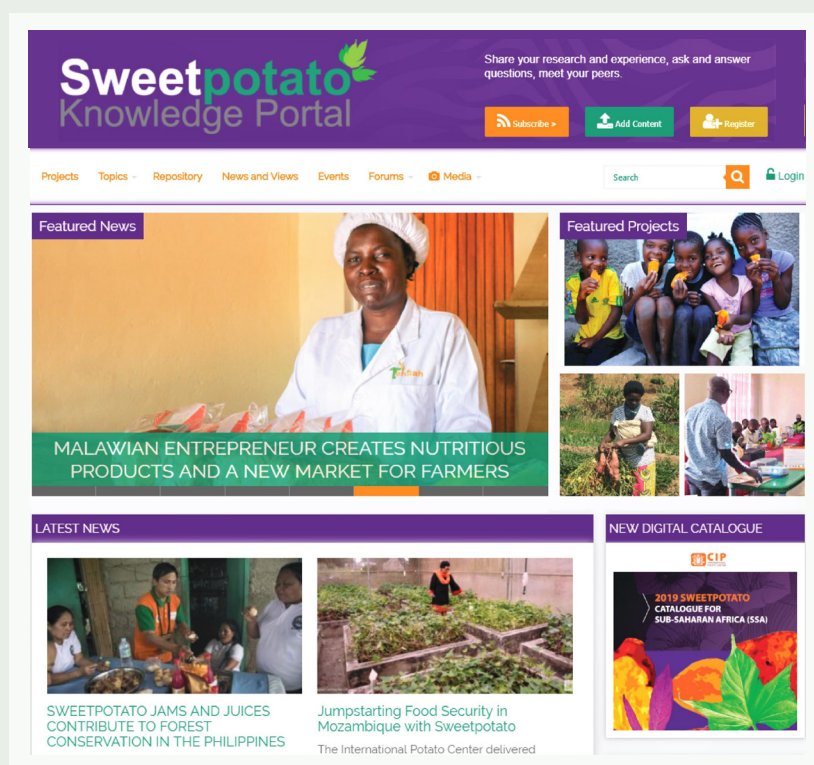


The Growth of the Sweetpotato Knowledge Portal and Social Media as Information Hubs



- Development and continuous improvement of a real time visual dashboard on the Sweetpotato Knowledge Portal (SPKP) is a tool for tracking progress

- Integration of the online Sweetpotato Variety Catalogue in 2019

- Increased number of registered users and sessions on the Portal since 2016

- Increased social media engagement on Facebook and Twitter



AUGUST
2019

Fig 1. The home page of the Sweetpotato Knowledge Portal

What was the problem?

The Sweetpotato Knowledge Portal (Fig. 1) was launched in December 2010 as a platform to harness and improve access to technical, scientific, local and development knowledge on sweetpotato across sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). A major challenge that all researchers face is getting their findings to the next users (development agents, private sector operators) and also to reach the final endusers (farmers, consumers).

Given the commitment under the Sweetpotato for Profit and Health Initiative to build a vibrant community of practice (CoP), we are also conscious that websites under the auspices of an organization would be less likely to attract contributions from other organizations. Hence, the challenge is to establish a platform where it is easy for all members of the CoP from different organizations to contribute and benefit.

What objectives did we set?

We set out to build a Sweetpotato Knowledge Portal to which any one could contribute, with the goal of providing a one-stop shop for information about all aspects of sweetpotato production and utilization and

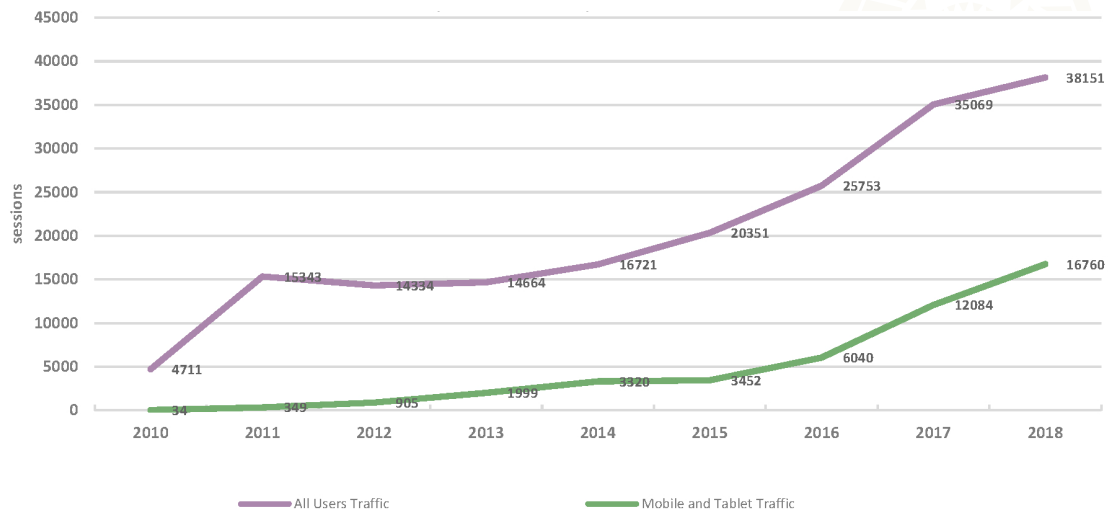
relevant training materials. It was also to be a site where users could learn about upcoming events, locate where to get planting material and find expert advice.

The Portal was also intended to link stakeholders from research with policy makers, development agents and private sector operators, farmers, consumers and students. Through the Portal, we hope to support innovation, diffusion and adoption of new technologies and best practices that are required to drive sustainable sweetpotato production and utilization.

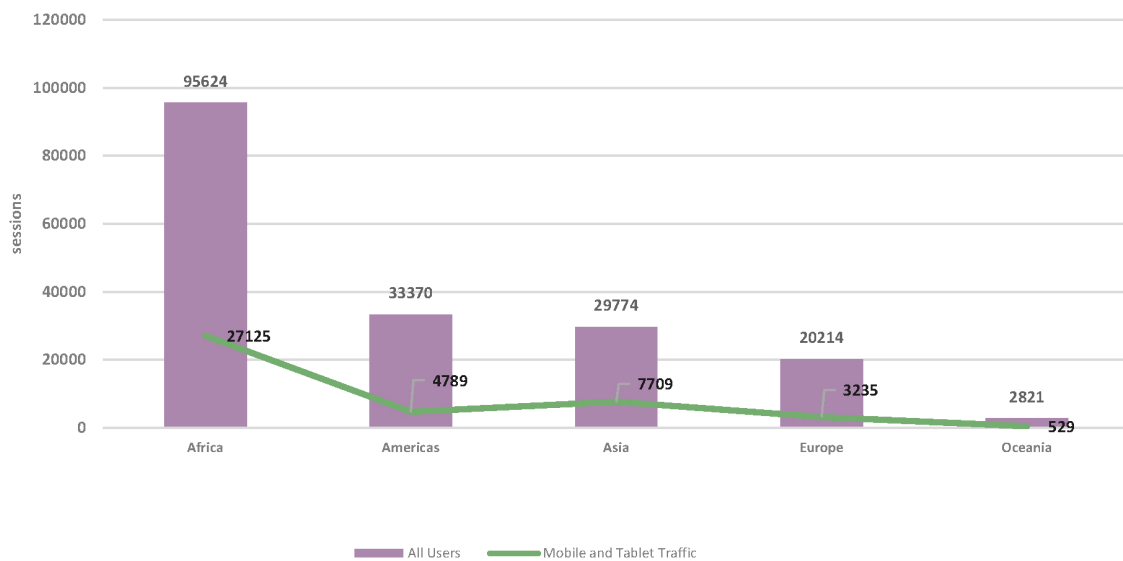
How did we make it happen?

The Sweetpotato Knowledge Portal was first developed in an operating system named Plone and was launched in 2010. Anyone could add information to the Portal. By 2014, we recognized that submitted documents were occasionally misclassified because there was no clearinghouse to help index and manage the submissions. In addition, it was decided for long-term maintenance, the widely used Word Press operating system would be easier to support. Thus, in 2016 the Knowledge Portal underwent a major renovation undertaken by Agriculture Learning and Impacts (ALINe), a consulting firm contracted by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF)

**Fig. 2 Sweetpotato Knowledge Portal Sessions
Jul 1, 2010 - Jun 30, 2019**



**Fig. 3 Sweetpotato Knowledge Portal Sessions by Continent
Jul 1, 2010 - Jun 30, 2019**



to redesign the portal. While anyone who registered could still upload documents, a CIP communications specialist now assists in assuring its placement on the Portal. During the past five years, efforts have been made to increase registration, ownership and engagement from registered users as well as unregistered users.

What have we achieved?

As of July 2019, the Portal has 805 registered users, and about 3,000 content items. The content items are divided into news and features, events, project initiatives, files, and external links to resources published elsewhere. Files

make up the bulk of the content items. These files are made up of reports, presentations, and publications on various sweetpotato initiatives. Since 2016, the news and features being submitted to the portal increased threefold. During the past year (July 2018-June 2019), a news and features item published on the portal received an average of 80 unique page views.

Since the redesign, annual traffic (measured by number of sessions) to the portal has almost doubled. The number of visits from tablets and mobile devices has almost quadrupled (Fig. 2). In the annual period ending June 2019, access to the portal using mobile devices stood

Fig. 4 Facebook Followers by Age
Jun 15, 2015 - Aug 15, 2019

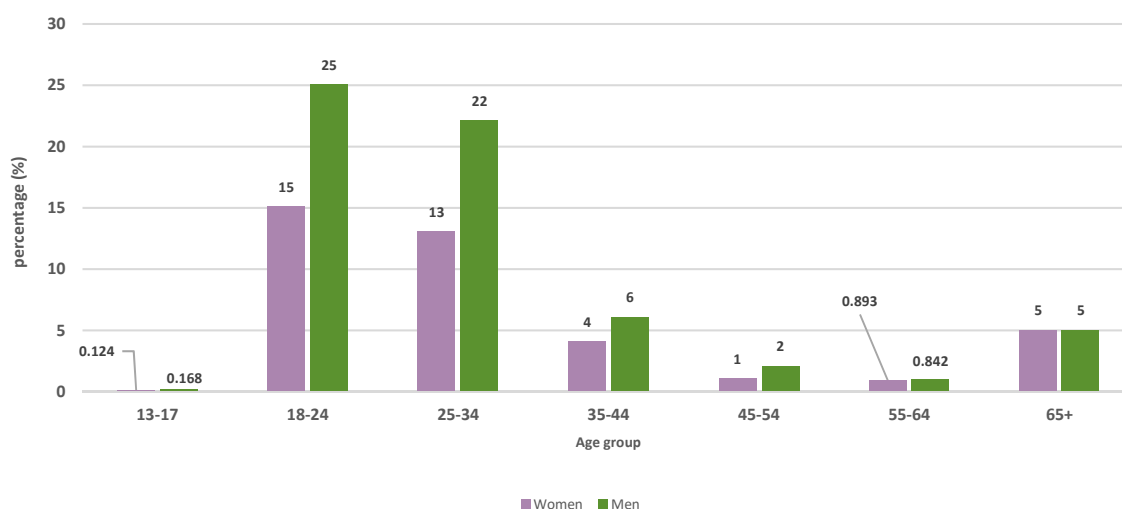
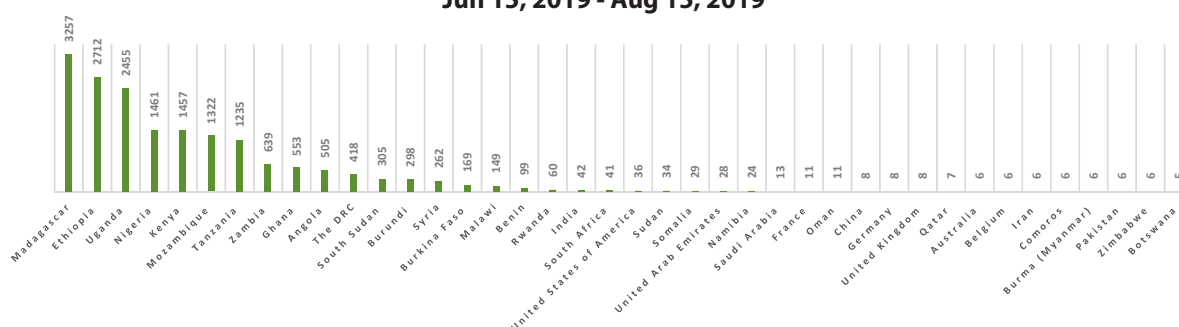


Fig. 5 Facebook Followers by Country
Jun 15, 2019 - Aug 15, 2019



at 28.66%. The Portal was primarily meant to cater for the sweetpotato community of practice in the 17 SSA countries targeted under the Sweetpotato for Profit and Health Initiative (SPHI), but usage statistics show that the Portal users originate from all over the world (Fig. 3).

In addition, we have invested in an increased social media presence by having a Facebook and Twitter sites since 2015. As of July 2019, our Facebook site had 17,838 followers and with 838 followers on Twitter. Facebook is attracting many youth—40% of all users (Fig. 4). The top three countries by number of followers on Facebook are Madagascar (3,257), Ethiopia (2,712) and Uganda (1461) (Fig. 5). Kenya has the highest number of followers on the Twitter page at 27%, followed by United States (12%) and Nigeria (10%).

Since June 2016, a monthly E-Digest has been going out to members subscribed to the sweetpotato portal email list. The E-Digest contains a summary of new content items on the Portal, relevant announcements and upcoming events. Usually, great effort goes into putting together the monthly publication, and 39

editions have gone out since inception (as of August 2019). Unfortunately, subscription rates to the monthly publication have remained at an average of 1,721 people over that period, with an average open rate of 20%.

In 2017, an interactive dashboard was incorporated on the Portal. The dashboard provides a visual representation in a quick, interactive and easy way to follow progress on a key SPHI indicators, that are updated each six months. The first is the number of beneficiaries reached with improved sweetpotato varieties by country and by organization supplying the vines. The second is number and location of sweetpotato vine multipliers in sub-Saharan Africa. Finally, there is a dashboard in which the number of released varieties having key traits can be shown by country.

In 2018/2019, the first on-line sub-Saharan Africa Sweetpotato Variety Catalogue was developed and integrated into the Portal. Varieties can be searched by desired trait and/or country and downloaded individually, or the entire catalogue can be downloaded. The previous two previous editions of the catalogue

were print-based and are available on the portal as downloadable files.

Finally, management of multimedia content has improved overtime with the opening of dedicated YouTube and Flickr accounts to host Sweetpotato Knowledge multimedia content. The two accounts are linked to the Portal. Four new videos documenting sweetpotato innovations are now published on the YouTube channel. The videos have also been disseminated widely on social media as well as shared with partners who use them for training purposes. The Flickr account is an archive for photos from meetings and events. All content on the YouTube and Flickr accounts is publicly available to both registered and unregistered members of the Portal.

What are the lessons learned?

Whereas traffic to the sweetpotato portal has almost doubled since 2016, the number of registered users has remained largely the same. This might be pointing to a need to simplify the Sweetpotato Knowledge Portal registration and login process. There is high engagement and readership on the portal when we publish beneficiary stories. However, it has been difficult to get users outside CIP to submit their stories. There is, therefore, a need to develop a content calendar for our partners and colleagues. Hopefully, this will help increase the number

and diversity of the stories that we publish on the portal. Videos have proved to be a great way of communicating project achievements and progress. Moreover, external users and partners are employing them as training aids and more should be produced. All content on the portal is user generated. But to help improve quality, we particularly need to share guidelines on how to take good quality pictures. Finally, there is a need to improve the analytics systems on the Portal to better understand our audience. For example, Facebook analytics on the sweetpotato page show data on the age groups of the users, something we do not have for those accessing the Portal.

What are the next steps?

In our effort to improve user experience on the Sweetpotato Knowledge Portal, we are going to upgrade some of the key features based on feedback from a portal user survey conducted in July 2019. We will be looking at improving the way content gets uploaded on the portal, simplifying the registration and log in process and improving the search function on the website. We will also improve our analytics system to better capture key metadata on users downloading content from the portal. We are going to explore new communication strategies such as the use of animation and info-graphics to better communicate achievements made by members of the community of practice.

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