What was the problem?
Culturally in Western Kenya, sweetpotato is cultivated for food security rather than for commercial purpose. It is particularly grown in the short rains between September and November for the crop to be used between February to April, when household stocks of maize and beans are low. OFSP varieties (Kabode and Vita) were introduced to these household to improve nutrition status and improve on income from sale of surplus produce. However, households grew sweetpotato on small plots (mostly less than a ¼ acre) with planting material shared among neighbors, friends and family. Production is essentially rain-fed, as such planting and harvesting is done at the same time leading to a glut on the market and lack of roots next season. These practices impeded commercialization of sweetpotato value chain. Baseline findings indicated high knowledge of Vitamin A among households. However, consumption of vitamin A-rich foods among women of reproductive age and children 6-23 months old was very low.

What objectives did we set?
The Accelerated Value Chain Development (AVCD) Program’s OFSP value chain component was a three-year USAID funded (October 2015 - December 2018) effort under the Feed the Future initiative implemented by International Potato Center (CIP) with the following objectives:
1. Increase productivity and production of OFSP among 65,000 smallholder households
2. Improve nutrition knowledge and practice at household level through OFSP utilization
3. Improve storage and marketing of fresh OFSP roots

Where did we work?
The project was implemented in four counties of Western Kenya covering Bungoma, Busia, Homa Bay and Migori with Nairobi, Kenya’s capital, as the main center for marketing roots.

What did we achieve?
• Through contract farming, about 160 tons of OFSP roots worth USD 22,400 were produced in 2018.
• Fresh orange-fleshed sweetpotato (OFSP) roots were introduced to both urban and local markets through traders’ orientation, free samples and cooking demonstrations.
• In 2018, farmers linked to the project supplied roots worth USD 11,760, doubling the quantity supplied in 2017 by Organi Limited farmers.
• Mean dietary diversity score for women of reproductive age and children 6-23 months of aged increased by 16.7% and 14.6%, respectively, between baseline and endline.

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Where there any key challenges or lessons learned?

- It emerged that some bakeries produce low-cost bread, trading at about 0.4 USD/loaf for competitiveness and to attract consumers into puree-based products. This shows there is need to lower the cost of the puree from the current USD 0.65 per kg thus calling for further discussions regarding pricing of the puree.

- A market trial indicated that brokers, who determine varieties traded in the market had a negative attitude towards OFSP. This is because of previous experience where it did not sell as fast as the other varieties. Therefore, brokers need a targeted forum of engagement to address their concerns about OFSP.

- The demand for roots for processing or the fresh root market is instrumental in commercialization of the whole value chain. Contracting farmers to supply roots or at least some sort of written Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) helps build trust among the parties.

- Behavior change activities among targeted households must be implemented consistently over a period for one to realize adoption. One-off activities will not realize the desired change. This explains why consumption of Vitamin A rich foods is lower than desired.

What’s next?

As part of exit strategy, the project collaborated with other organizations in the region promoting sweetpotato production. The 43 project DVMs were linked to the Global Alliance for Nutrition (GAIN) effort which is on-going. Trained health workers and community health volunteers were handed on to CRS Mwendo project. Commercial farmer groups were linked to RTI International and other financial institutions; for instance, a women group in Bungoma involved in OFSP root processing received a USD 50,000 grant from the USAID funded Kenya Crops and Dairy Market Systems Project.

Several contact points were also made during the three years to create OFSP interest at various levels. These platforms will continue to be explored to finally yield markets for OFSP farmers soon. The biggest challenge was logistics around procuring puree and pricing. As a project we recommend new OFSP projects to leverage on these trained bakers by working on puree pricing, through improved efficiencies in the factory operation.

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