The cultivation and consumption of sweetpotato can improve the diets and boost incomes of vulnerable families in Mozambique. To encourage more smallholders to grow sweetpotato, the project provided high quality planting material and offered training in growing, harvesting and storage methods. It also offered support in selling and marketing crops as well as training and nutrition and preparing sweetpotato.

ACHIEVEMENTS  Outcomes by May 2019

Poverty and malnutrition continue to constrain economic and social development in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in rural areas where people rely on agriculture for their food and livelihoods. The World Food Program estimates that a quarter of the Mozambican population experiences acute food insecurity at times throughout the year, while almost half (44%) of children under the age of five suffer from chronic malnutrition.

The cultivation and consumption of sweetpotato can improve the lives of vulnerable families. Orange-fleshed sweetpotato (OFSP) contains a high concentration of pro-vitamin A in roots and leaves and is a cost-effective way of providing other vital nutrients. Growing and selling OFSP also boosts rural incomes. Compared to many other crops, sweetpotato is easy to grow, produces large amounts of food in a relatively short period of time and with relatively little labor, and tolerates occasional dry spells and less fertile soils. Sweetpotato is widely grown in Mozambique, which suffers from frequent localized droughts and sporadic floods; yet 15 years ago, few farmers grew nutritious orange-fleshed varieties.

Objectives

Funded by the United States Agency for International Development, the Feed the Future Viable Sweetpotato Technologies in Africa–Mozambique (VISTA) is a technology dissemination project that aims to improve the food security, nutrition and incomes of smallholder farmers through OFSP. The project builds and strengthens sweetpotato seed systems to enable farmer access to quality OFSP planting material, improves the nutrition knowledge of caregivers, and promotes the household...
consumption, processing and commercialization of OFSP. The scaling-up activities under VISTA use drought-tolerant, pro-vitamin A OFSP varieties developed by the International Potato Center (CIP) and partners, and have been strengthened by lessons learned from related programs for biofortified crops. The project seeks to increase:

- OFSP production through use of high-yielding, locally-adapted varieties, quality planting material and sustainable agricultural practices.
- OFSP consumption by children under 5 years and women of reproductive age in households vulnerable to malnutrition.
- Agricultural incomes from sales of OFSP roots, vines, leaves, and processed products in local and urban markets and for commercial processing.

**Approach**

Working closely with the Agricultural Research Institute of Mozambique (IIAM) and the national agriculture and health extension systems, the project aimed to increase the number of farmers growing OFSP and the area under cultivation. Limited availability of quality planting materials is a major bottleneck constraining farmer adoption of improved sweetpotato varieties—exacerbated by severe drought in northern Mozambique—so ensuring farmer access to planting materials at the start of each rainy season was a project priority. Disease-free planting material of improved varieties was distributed to trained decentralized vine multipliers, who used net tunnels and other proven vine conservation technologies to produce quality planting material and marketed it to farmers. Farmer-led demonstrations spread knowledge of sweetpotato agronomy and vine conservation—to ensure widespread uptake and continued production. Increasing access to improved sweetpotato varieties went hand in hand with nutrition education for caregivers and training for government and NGO field staff on OFSP’s nutritional benefits. VISTA also provided training for farmers and traders in best practices for handling, packaging, and transporting fresh sweetpotatoes and leaves. The project also promoted the production and use of OFSP puree, providing technical and management support for local bakeries. As a substitute for 45% of the wheat flour in baked goods, OFSP puree can reduce reliance on imported flour while increasing vitamin A consumption.

**Achievements**

VISTA increased demand for OFSP and processed products through consumer awareness campaigns and promotion of healthier diets. Based on a 2018 market assessment, a promotional campaign was undertaken at the main markets for each of the top sweetpotato production districts. Market day events included cooking demonstrations of OFSP recipes to build consumer demand and the participation of farmers and traders to facilitate market linkages.

A 2018 survey covering a sample of 1,540 households in 15 districts—including 260 visited during the 2015 baseline study—found that 39% of households surveyed in 2015 produced their own OFSP vines for planting each season, meaning they didn’t need planting material from the project. Caregivers in project beneficiary households had a higher knowledge of nutrition, and both children and caregivers were more food secure and consumed more diversified diets with significantly more vitamin A-rich foods (primarily OFSP) than non-project households.

To ensure sustainability of OFSP production and dissemination, the project worked closely with three IIAM agronomists on the multiplication of sweetpotato planting material and with one IIAM nutritionist who helped disseminate nutrition knowledge to communities. IIAM staff now lead these processes.

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