Developing integrated value chains to enhance rural smallholder incomes and food security year-round

DIVERSIFY Malawi

This project aimed at building sustainable livelihoods among 3,000 poor, rural households in Balaka, Chiradzulu, and Thyolo districts in southern Malawi by boosting sweetpotato production, strengthening value chains, and creating better market access.

Background

While cereals (principally maize) are the most common food crops grown throughout sub-Saharan Africa, sweetpotato is also popular and could make a much greater contribution to food security and nutrition. Sweetpotato is highly efficient in transforming water into calories, has a short maturity period, and can be harvested during the ‘hunger months’ before the cereals ripen.

Orange-fleshed sweetpotato also provides a rich source of vitamin A, a nutrient that is particularly important for healthy growth in children and pregnant mothers. Although Malawi is the largest producer of orange-fleshed sweetpotato in southern Africa, current sweetpotato livelihood development efforts are limited by knowledge gaps, weak market linkages, and a shortage of quality planting materials for improved varieties, which is in part due to a lack of formal seed quality standards, prolonged dry season, and limited root storage capacity.

This project blended different skills, knowledge and expertise to form a unique partnership comprising NGOs, government, research, technical advisory services and the private sector. The partners sought to build commercially viable, nutrition-sensitive agribusiness value chains based largely on sweetpotato and pigeon pea. Pigeon pea was already grown widely in Malawi and contributed significantly to household nutrition. It was (and continues to be) an effective climate-adaptation crop that improves soil fertility and can generate significant profits when farmers can access secure markets.

In addition to the International Potato Center (CIP), the implementing partners included the community development organization United Purpose (which has longstanding field presence in the target districts), Imani Consultants Ltd (value chain development expertise), and the Mothers Holding Company (producers of ‘Bakers Pride’, Malawi’s most popular bread). The project was developed to align with the Malawi national growth and development strategy.

Objectives

- To contribute to poverty reduction and build sustainable livelihoods among smallholders in Malawi
- To improve the livelihoods of 3,000 rural households in Balaka, Chiradzulu and Thyolo districts in southern Malawi through increased, diversified production, stronger value chains, and better market access.

Approach

The approach was built upon on a successful project conducted in Kenya, where CIP worked with a supermarket chain to introduce orange sweetpotato-puree bread. In addition to producing a more nutritious product and achieving high consumer acceptance, sweetpotato was used to replace costly imported bread flour to reduce production costs.

The first stage involved forming groups of farmers and local communities to deliver the necessary technical training and inputs to support sustainable sweetpotato and pigeon pea production. Beneficiary farmer training was delivered through local agricultural extension workers and lead farmers—based around farmer-field days and
on-farm demonstrations. These farmers also received training in business management, quality control and leadership, with a strong emphasis on creating women and youth entrepreneurs. The community groups also provided a useful vehicle through which to deliver messages about better family nutrition, women’s rights, sexual and reproductive health, etc.

The team also identified, developed and implemented viable gender-sensitive agri-business and processing opportunities among these communities. This work focused on supporting the multiplication of sweetpotato planting materials through building local enterprises, securing financial loans and linking farmers with buyers. Teams also supported value-addition activities, such as production of sweetpotato chips and other cooked products for sale locally. Bakeries were encouraged and helped to conduct feasibility and profitability studies, develop recipes and marketing plans, consult with consumers and procure the necessary machinery.

### Expected outcomes/ achievements to date

By June 2020, the target farmers had increased crop yields and profits based on more diversified and resilient production systems. Several leading processors are engaged in developing and launching community and commercially processed orange-fleshed sweetpotato-based products.

In August 2019, the commercial production of Bakers Gold bread started. In the first three months, up to 84,000 loaves were produced and sold per month. Community members have also started to prepare a number of sweetpotato-based dishes—including chips, flitters and mandazi—for sale in their local neighborhoods.

This project is expected to drive the procurement of sweetpotato roots from smallholders, who will benefit from having an assured market for their produce. The sales of pigeon pea will also be assured through signing of contracts with processors and exporters.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key outcomes</th>
<th>Targets</th>
<th>Achievements to date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Households with improved livelihoods (direct beneficiaries)</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>4,102</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improvement in agricultural productivity</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>90%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proportion of farmers having more than nine food-secure months per year</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>60%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increase in household incomes (some individuals)</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>40%</td>
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### Duration

January 2017–June 2020

### Budget

EUR 2.5 million

### Contact

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