



© I. Corthier

Root and tuber crops availability calendar for selected districts of Malawi

Introduction

Roots and tubers (RTs) have great potential to support food and nutrition security and build resilient livelihoods among Malawians. However, like any other food crop, seasonality is one of the key factors affecting their availability and therefore reduced effective contribution to the food basket. This seasonality leads to marked variation in the quantity and quality in markets and associated price swings. Currently, there is little commercial processing of RTs into dried chips[©] or flour, which could be stored for year-round consumption

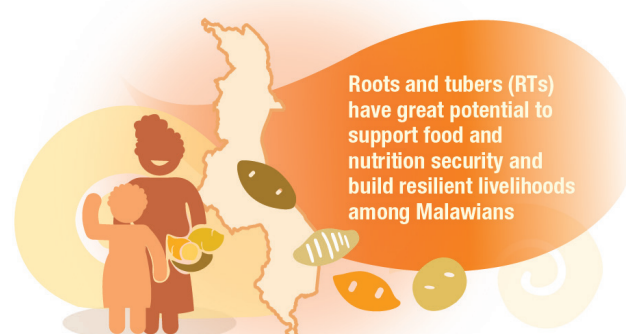
Seasonality of food is a perennial problem in Malawi which necessitates the use of a Seasonal Food Availability Calendar (SFAC) as a key tool to guide the use of available foods to improve dietary intake. The SFAC is a visual expression of year-round food availability expressed in months and/or seasons in a year.

An analysis of the availability of roots (sweetpotato and cassava) and tubers (potato) and other minor roots and tubers (MRTs) – primarily air and ground yams, cocoyam and the livingstoneLivingstone potato – was conducted in 10 districts of Malawi to assess their complementarity in terms of availability. The International Potato Center (CIP) facilitated the analysis as part of its ‘Root and Tuber Crops for Agricultural Transformation in Malawi’ project, funded by the Government of Ireland through the Malawi Embassy. CIP worked with nutritionists at the district level, including participation from some key members of the District Nutrition Coordination Committees. The analysis was performed to understand the availability calendar of RTs and MRTs for use in food

preparation and diet diversification. The knowledge on seasonal availability facilitates post-harvest processing for storage to prolong the period for which they can be marketed and/or used.

Integrating RTs and MRTs into sustainable and balanced meals among communities

The SFAC of RTs and MRTs reveals some complementarity among each other in terms of availability in some months and districts in form of fresh produce. However, scientists and relevant stakeholders should jointly work to ensure more relay complementarity over months of availability. In Malawi, these same months of RT and MRT availability are also largely same months of maize, the staple food crop. Efficient utilization of RTs and MRTs in times of abundance will prolong the availability of maize which can be stored for later use at household level. Different recipes for RTs and MRTs have been developed and made available to local households. Sweetpotato and cassava leaves are also important vegetables, especially during the dry season.



Roots and tubers (RTs) have great potential to support food and nutrition security and build resilient livelihoods among Malawians

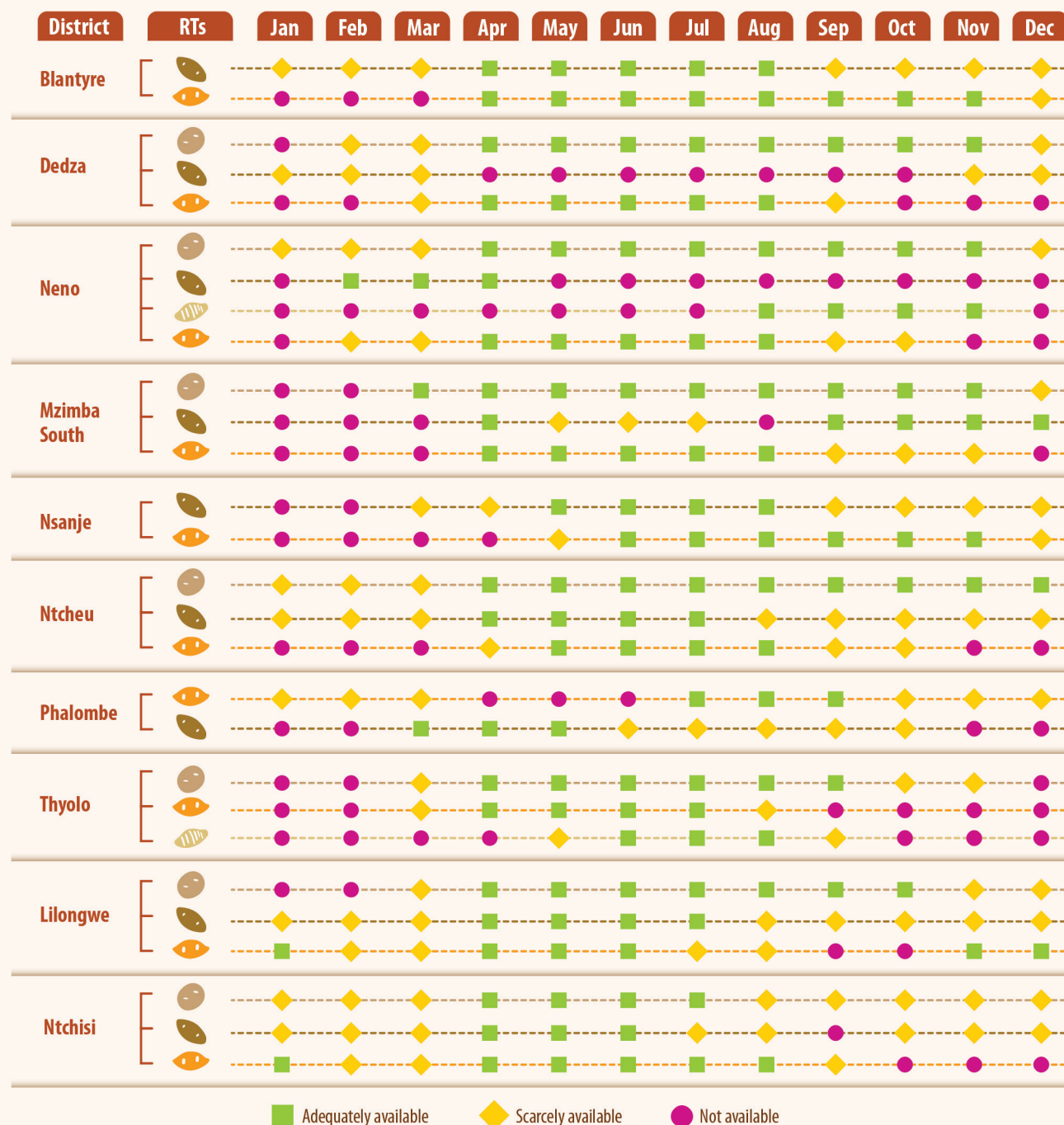
Conclusion

RTs and MRTs contribute to the availability of staple food supply for consumption and market sales. They also contribute to the diversification of staple food groups and nutrients. The basis for improved RT and MRT use in Malawi is formed by improving effective seed systems for increased

productivity; intensive nutrition education and behavior change campaigns; promotion and demonstration on cooking, processing and preservation techniques; linking producers to markets; and supporting institutionalization of policies promoting nutrition-sensitive agriculture.

SEASONAL AVAILABILITY CALENDAR OF RTs IN SELECTED DISTRICTS OF MALAWI

Potato Cassava Sweetpotato Cocoyam



In support of the Government of Malawi's commitment to diversify and transform the country's agriculture into a sustainable and economically viable sector, CIP has implemented a project that aims to increase the contributions of root and tuber crops to the food security, nutrition, and incomes of Malawians by harnessing advances in R&D and scaling to meet the demand by farmers, consumers, processors, and traders in Malawi. Generous support for this project was provided by the Government of Ireland through the Malawi Embassy.

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Acknowledgement: District nutrition staff and nutrition coordinating committee members for their contribution to the calendar development



Ireland

CIP thanks all donors and organizations that globally support its work through their contributions to the CGIAR Trust Fund. <https://www.cgiar.org/funders/>



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