

# Sweetpotato Action for Security and Health in Africa



## Women are critical for achieving the vision

🕒 **Women and agriculture in Sub-Saharan Africa:** Women are at the center of agriculture in Sub-Saharan Africa. An estimated 60% to 80% of food crops in the region are produced by women. Urban migration, which involves men more than women, increases pressures on women, making them an even more critical part of food production system. Women are the gatekeepers of the family's nutrition and health – making them the vital link between improved agricultural production and improved well-being of children. Despite the predominant role of women in food and nutrition security in Sub-Saharan Africa, these fields remain dominated by men, and often dominated by crops that men control. The vast majority of agricultural extension workers in the region are men and extension systems are not engineered to address the specific needs of women farmers, and the crops that they tend to grow. Women's access to land, water, livestock and technology is far less than their male counterparts.

🕒 **Women and sweetpotatoes:** In most of Sub-Saharan Africa, sweetpotato is traditionally a “women's crop” – grown predominantly by women farmers, often on small plots. The crop offers numerous advantages – adaptability to marginal environments, flexibility in mixed farming systems, short maturation period, production of leaves that are often highly-valued in sauces, ease of preparation of fresh roots, suitability as a complementary food for infants and young children, great acceptance by children and women as a snack food and potential for sale to generate extra household income.

🕒 **The potential:** Investing in sweetpotato has great potential to improve women's incomes and the nutrition and health of families. Sweetpotato action for security and health in Africa will integrate gender analysis into our approaches to optimize impacts on women's and children's health and well-being. Strategies will include:

- Promotion of production and consumption of orange-fleshed



The Sweetpotato Action for Security and Health in Africa (SASHA) is a five-year initiative designed to improve the food security and livelihoods of poor families in Sub-Saharan Africa by exploiting the untapped potential of sweetpotato. It will develop the essential capacities, products, and methods to reposition sweetpotato in food economies of Sub-Saharan African countries to alleviate poverty and under-nutrition.

# Sweetpotato Action for Security and Health in Africa



• A women's group in Burkina Faso that grows orange-fleshed sweetpotato, and other crops rich in vitamins and minerals

sweetpotato (OFSP) varieties which have demonstrated impact on reducing Vitamin A deficiency, a leading cause of increased child mortality and blindness.

- Integration of women's concerns into breeding objectives for sweetpotato to ensure that new varieties include characteristics than women find desirable.
- Analysis of agriculture extension and seed systems to develop approaches that ensure adequate outreach to women.
- Development of approaches to improve women's access to markets for their sweetpotato production.
- Capitalizing on women's networks, such as micro-credit and micro-savings programs, to accelerate adoption of improved sweetpotato varieties and linking with initiatives that are already effective at reaching women farmers.
- Integration of behavior change communications to improve caring practices focusing on optimal infant and young children feeding and women's nutrition during pregnancy and lactation.

- Development of storage and processing techniques that increase availability of sweetpotato and reduce post-harvest losses.

• **The challenges:** As interest in sweetpotato grows and market demand increases, we anticipate more men will adopt sweetpotato production and there will be increased large-scale, intensive production systems for sweetpotato. This transition is important to increase overall availability of sweetpotato and overall food security. However such large-scale, intensive production systems usually have less involvement of women and as interest grows in sweetpotatoes, there is a risk of displacing women from the production systems. At the same time, focusing uniquely on women, and excluding men can backfire, leading to resentment and undermining women's ability to participate. The on-going gender analysis will inform strategies to optimize benefits for women and children, while meeting overall agricultural production objectives of the initiative.



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