Projected impacts

The SASHA project seeks to directly improve the food security and livelihoods of at least 150,000 families in Sub-Saharan Africa in five years and provide the evidence base for effective delivery systems to reach many more. Moreover, given widespread, informal farmer-to-farmer sharing of vines for planting, the number of direct plus indirect beneficiaries is likely to exceed 1 million families.

As part of a broader, long-term, multi-donor Sweetpotato for Profit and Health Initiative, it is expected that the SASHA project will set the groundwork for improving the lives of 10 million Sub-Saharan households in 10 years.

SASHA is a project of the International Potato Center (known by its Spanish acronym CIP).

Major funding for the project has been provided by the **Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation**

Sweetpotato Action for Security and **Health** in **Africa**

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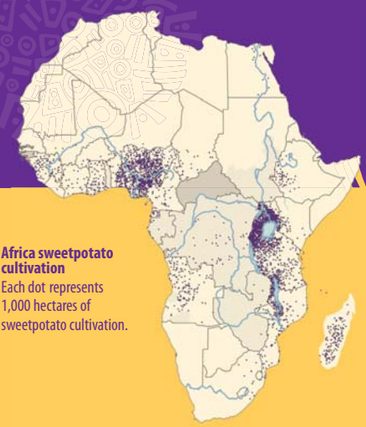
SASHA

Sweetpotato Action for Security and **Health** in **Africa**

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 undernutrition.



Africa sweetpotato cultivation
Each dot represents 1,000 hectares of sweetpotato cultivation.

Untapped potential

Sweetpotato is the 3rd most important food crop in terms of production in seven Eastern and Central African countries – outranking cassava and maize. It ranks 4th in importance in the six targeted Southern African countries, and 8th among the four targeted countries in West Africa.

Sweetpotato requires fewer inputs and less labor than other staple crops. It tolerates marginal growing conditions, such as dry spells or poor soil. Sweetpotato provides more edible energy per hectare per day than wheat, rice, or cassava. Its ability to produce better yields in poor conditions with less labor makes sweetpotato particularly suitable as a crop for households threatened by migration, civil disorder, or diseases such as AIDS. In addition, sweetpotato is very versatile. The vines provide a high-protein, medium-energy animal feed. It has a reputation as a classic food security crop — the one that the family relies on when the maize fails.

The potential of sweetpotato has remained largely untapped in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly compared to grains and cash crops, and even compared to other root crops, such as cassava. Increased investment could significantly boost yields, increase market potential, and reverse sweetpotato's image as a poor person's food.

Health benefits

All sweetpotatoes are good sources of carbohydrates, fiber and many micronutrients. Orange-fleshed varieties are also very rich in beta-carotene, the precursor to vitamin A. As a result, sweetpotato is well placed to address both undernutrition and micro-nutrient malnutrition. The more widespread consumption of orange-fleshed sweetpotato can significantly impact Vitamin A deficiency, which threatens an estimated 43 million children under age 5 in Sub-Saharan Africa, and contributes to significant rates of blindness, disease, and premature death in children and pregnant women. Only 125 grams of most orange-fleshed sweetpotato varieties can supply the recommended daily allowance of vitamin A for children and non-lactating women.

Improving lives for women

Women are the main producers of sweetpotato, but the extent of their control over the benefits from selling the crop varies in different social and economic settings. SASHA will focus on women as producers and guardians of family nutrition, with special attention to their needs and preferences. The project includes an African gender specialist and will integrate strategies to ensure that women have a full voice in project interventions and gain equitably from them.

Program components

1 IMPROVED QUALITY AND RANGE OF AVAILABLE VARIETIES
The focus of this component is on breeding a wide range of varieties with the combinations of traits suited to agro-ecological conditions and to consumer and producer demands. The point is to create an integrated breeding system akin to the one that exists for cereal breeding, but focused on the producer and consumer preferences of resource-poor women and children.

2 BREEDING WEEVIL-RESISTANT SWEETPOTATOES
This component draws on biotechnology to develop weevil-resistant sweetpotato varieties for Sub-Saharan Africa. Sweetpotato weevils are the most important sweetpotato pest in the world – responsible for crop losses ranging from 60 to nearly 100% during pronounced drought. This situation may be critical during dry periods when sweetpotato is sometimes the only food available. With climate change predictions of an expanding dry season in Sub-Saharan Africa, the urgency of developing resistance to weevils will likely intensify.

3 DEVELOPING SUSTAINABLE SEED SYSTEMS
The access to and maintenance of quality planting material is a struggle for smallholder farmers. This component involves developing and testing strategies to ensure effective multiplication, dissemination, and exchange of disease-free vines from which new plants will be propagated. It involves strategies to more efficiently link farmers with public sector distribution programs and integrate those with for-profit nurseries. It will examine which strategies assure women the best access to vines and whether women are as successful as men at commercially-oriented vine production.

4 PROOF-OF-CONCEPT PROJECTS
This series of projects will examine broader institutional or market level issues affecting crop production, markets, potential market expansion (e.g., use of sweetpotato as animal feed), and scalable approaches for improving nutrition with sweetpotato. These projects will evaluate options that influence the capacity to scale up and achieve the outcomes on poverty and nutrition that are planned for the years following SASHA, in the longer, ten-year initiative.

5 SWEETPOTATO SUPPORT PLATFORMS AND CAPACITY STRENGTHENING
Three sub-regional support platforms, based in strong national research programs, will be established to provide the organizational and management structure for developing long-term breeding skills and capacity in Africa, for Africa. They will be located in each of three sub-regions: Ghana, for West Africa; Mozambique, for Southern Africa; and Uganda, for East and Central Africa.