

By the end of the project, a lot had been realized in terms of shifting the gender roles perception and sharing of control and benefits of the sweet potato production.

For instance women promoters participated actively in the adoption, utilization and consumption of OFSP. Women participated in the marketing of the potato which is commonly perceived work for men and many men were seen supporting women in production and search for the vines.

“.....although many men assume that household food is the responsibility of women, they are mistaken, and the man tends to lose lots of money in buying food which in many cases is insufficient to meet the required diet needs and eventually extra money is paid in hospital. Now who is the total loser?” asked Erasto Musoke LC111 Chairperson Nakisunga sub county Mukono district

“When hunger hits the home, it does select that let me take on the woman. We are equally hit husband, wife and child that what attracted to participate in the potato project by the side of my wife..... Wakiso a male beneficiary from Tugezeeku farmers group Bulooa subcounty in Kamuli district

(Footnotes)

¹ Black, Robert, Morris, Saul, & Jennifer Bryce.
“Where and Why Are 10 Million Children Dying Every Year?”

The Lancet
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²

State of Food Insecurity in the World, 2008 FAO. “Food Security Statistics”.

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PREFACE

This publication is part of a series of publications VEDCO produces as part of her efforts of strengthening documentation and information sharing within the organization and with interested partners

VEDCO has been working with communities promoting household food security for years. The concept itself has evolved within VEDCO as new challenges and opportunities emerge. It has however remained complex therefore calling for complex approaches and strategies.

Food security is part of the big picture under the millennium Development Goal number one that aims at reducing Hunger and poverty by 2015. Although food is a basic human right, hunger has remained the most extreme form of poverty, where individuals or families cannot afford to meet their most basic need for food¹. Today 1.02 billion people across the world are hungry². Every day, almost 16,000 children die from hunger-related causes—one child every five seconds.

Right to food is where everyone is entitled to safe, nutritious and culturally acceptable food in sufficient quantities and qualities to sustain a health life with full human dignity. This right is guaranteed under the international law and reiterated by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights as “ the right to adequate food is realized when every man, woman and child alone or in a community with others have physical and economic access to adequate food or means for its procurement.”

The human need for food, food availability at the retail and household levels and its actual consumption and related consequences have largely been delinked in various food related development programmes. Issues concerning food flow beyond the farm gates, appreciation of nutritional needs and management of the food demands have been matters of little attention.

Project institution setting

This was also a great factor of success. The institutional structure within VEDCO and Harvest Plus in terms of roles and responsibilities played a great role in seeing progress of the project. The technical hierarchy provided great room for learning and support in terms of decision making

Gender

Gender was an integral part of the REU project. The project having focused on production and consumption of a staple, there were bigger chances of men getting out of the circles and benefits of the project.

The concept developed with a degree of gender sensitivity and consciousness, men were strategically involved in the project. On project initiation, men were the first target. This was based on assertions within the communities that OFSP deplete soil fertility. In this case the relevancy of men in the success of the project as major controllers of land was the basic option.

Secondly, it was realized that some men did not want their wives to be monitored or trained by men promoters, and others considered women meetings for gossips.

Women on the other side were not confident to take on responsibilities as group heads and promoters. This confidence and capacity gap was foreseen and strategies to beef it up were developed.

Sweet potatoes being one of the major staples in the project area, promoted with an added advantage of the nutrition value were of great value in terms of adoption. Analysis of the costs of food and treatment in cases of food insecurity and deficiency was a commendable approach to attract men for food security interventions.



FACTORS



Facilitating the potato chain strategy.

Although Sweet potato was a common food crop that is grown and consumed widely in the households within and outside the project area, there seemed to be de-links between the various players in its chain. This strategy saw an overwhelming support and linkage between various players in the chain. Health workers, community leaders, farmers, traders and researchers came and worked together to address health and food security issues.



Factors that hindered/ facilitated success

Promotion of the value aspect of the potato

In many development interventions based on products, adopters are stimulated by market and not value. The approach of promoting the OFSP based on its value to combat VAD, stimulating growth among children and improving eye sight, was a success factor for the fast adoption of the potato. This also saw many interested players coming in to promote the potato

Taking of blood samples

Impact assessment of the project necessitated the taking of the blood sample by design of the project. Taking of blood samples in such a project which is more of agricultural based is not common in Africa. Its implementation was also not integrated right away in the project which caused lots of suspicion among the participating farmers. Although project workers labored to explain to the communities, it affected the project success at an extent

It is for such reasons that VEDCO with support from Harvest Plus sought to implement the Reaching End Users project specifically aiming at Promoting the consumption and absorption of Vitamin A through the Orange fleshed sweet potato in the district of Mukono and Kamuli in Uganda as small initiative case study projects

This publication has been developed as part of the various means of documenting the best

practices of the project and show case of concurrent integration of research in developing projects and promotion of food security focused on consumption and absorption of desired food nutrients to achieve food security in totality.

Let us draw lessons from the experiences of this project in terms of concept, approach, strategies against outcomes and impacts of the project and use the project as a case to develop more comprehensive food focused projects.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

CBO:	Community Based Organizations
CBS :	Central Broadcasting Services
CIP:	International Potato Centre
FADEP:	Food for Agriculture Development Programme – Eastern Uganda
IFPRI:	International Food Policy Research Institute
LG:	Local Government
MDD:	Music, Dance and Drama
NAADS:	National Agricultural Advisory Services
NARO:	National Agricultural Research Organization
NGO:	Non- Governmental Organizations
NRI:	Natural Resource Institute
OFSP:	Orange Fleshed Sweet Potato
REU:	Reaching End User
SOSPPA	Soroti Sweet Potato producers and Processors Association
USD:	United States Dollar
VAD:	Vitamin A Deficiency
VEDCO:	Volunteer Efforts for Development Concerns

people with in community. It strengthened the project interventions within the social systems of the community.

Radio

Information dissemination through radio is commonly done by experts based on the subject. In many cases such experts do not include farmers. The use of the Community based broadcasting approach to media that VEDCO uses was an opportunity given to farmers to lead radio discussions. This attracts many farmers as they listen to fellow farmers' hence quick adoption. Radios take messages far beyond project geographical areas. In such

projects whose demand cuts across communities, radio is more relevant as it offers more people beyond project area to benefit from the project.

Seed multiplication by farmers

It was observed by the end of the project that once farmers are given the right and timely information, they can still produce quality seed within the same ecological area where the seed is needed. Seed importation brings with itself lots of short comings. Farmers get seed late and diseases and pest also get an opportunity to cross borders besides failure of some seed to adapt to another ecological zone.



LESSONS

Key lessons learnt

Implementing a research development project

There has existed de-link between researchers, development practitioners and the communities. Researchers could bring in development practitioners at a later stage late indeed to build cohesiveness and the reverse is also true. This has on several occasions affected development compromising the quality of outcomes of interventions. The REU project saw these players starting work at ago which greatly solved challenges instantly. “the researchers were just by our side and every scientific challenge we would meet got attention

immediately. Secondly, it was easy to disseminate technologies to farmers as they were developed by the researchers because the researchers were with us all the time.....” Liz Apoo project coordinator Kamuli

Music dance and Drama

Although Drama proved to be one of the most enthusiastic tools used for information dissemination, mobilization and learning, a critical assessment of the social cultural systems of a particular community is important. For instance; in Kamuli, drama and music was such an easy tool to use as compared to Mukono. Communities in Kamuli do still have strong social music dance and Drama activities as compared to Mukono. It is better to use it in that particular community where it is accepted most. E.g. schools, women groups, church etc

The tool attracted so many people to the project. It was easy to bring on board all sorts of categories of



BACKGROUND

Background

Vitamin A is an essential nutrient needed in small amounts for normal functioning of the visual system, growth and development, maintenance of the epithelial cellular integrity, immune function and reproduction. Also known as retinol plays a vital role in strengthening our immune system, protecting us against common infections such as flu and winter vomiting.

Vitamin A also helps to maintain healthy skin and mucus linings such as inside the nose and the lungs. It boosts our immune system and reduces the risk of inflammation such as that associated with chest infections.

It is however recognized that the health of a larger number of preschool going age children, pregnant and lactating mothers is compromised by Vitamin A deficiency (VAD).The older generations tend to eat more eggs, milk and liver which are naturally rich in vitamin A

VAD is the leading cause of preventable blindness in children and increases the risk of disease and death from severe infections. In pregnant women VAD causes night blindness and may increase the risk of maternal mortality.

The deficiency is a public health problem in more than half of all countries, especially in Africa and South-East Asia, hitting hardest young children and pregnant women in low-income countries like Uganda. It affects more than 127 million preschool children. Annually 250,000 and 500,000



preschool children go blind from this deficiency and about two thirds die within months of going blind.

It was against this background that VEDCO with support from Harvest Plus implemented the **Reaching End user project** aiming at Promoting the consumption and absorption of Vitamin A through the Orange fleshed sweet potato

Goals and objectives

The overall goal of the project was to identify the most cost effective strategy for farmer adoption and consumer acceptance of the conventionally bred Vitamin A rich sweet potato (orange fleshed sweet potato)

Specifically, the project aimed at;

1. Assessing the agronomic suitability of both existing and newly developed OFSP varieties under various agro ecological conditions in the

districts of project implementation.

2. Training selected farmers' groups and NGOs to multiply and avail sufficient volumes of OFSP planting materials to farmers in the pilot implementation areas.
3. Creating both awareness of OFSP nutrition benefits and promotes consumer demand for OFSP among rural and urban consumers.
4. Developing new OFSP products and create markets for them and
5. Working with various collaborator NGOs in the dissemination and promotion of OFSP as source of Vitamin A and document lessons learnt and best practices that can be scaled out to other parts of Sub Saharan Africa.

Regular meetings for the stakeholders to reflect share learning and review were also a strong strategy for stitching the stakeholders firmly together.

Scaling up / integrating project impacts & outcomes in other programs

VEDCO interventions in the REU project were a scale up themselves. For over 8 years VEDCO has been promoting the production and consumption of OFSP among her programme beneficiaries as a nutrient dense crop. The introduction of OFSP in VEDCO

can be traced way back in 2000 when VEDCO in partnership with Child Health development programme of Mulago hospital introduced the potato in the sub county of Nyimbwa Luwero district targeting women mothers and their children under five.

The REU project outcomes already rolled out to other areas of operation as VEDCO was among the key buyers of the vines distributing them to farmers especially in new areas such as Lira. OFSP is still a priority crop among the selected enterprises that VEDCO promotes for household food consumption and Income



product development component. Every component was headed by a specialist (an employee of Harvest Plus) who used to train field extensionists, who in turn trained promoters and farmer group representatives..



Seed systems component

This component also known as farmer Adoption focused on the production and dissemination of seed/ planting materials through both traditional and nontraditional channels and the agronomy of the crop

Demand creation component

This component aimed at increasing demand for the production and consumption of OFSP through awareness creation. Started with a systematic collection of data related to communication and information

flows among the target communities, the component generated a lot of understanding of the target communities and the behaviors, knowledge, channels of information flow, attitudes towards OFSP, nutrition and household hygiene and sanitation.

Market and product development component

The purpose of this component was to incorporate OFSP in the existing market chains and developing new market opportunities through market chain approaches.. The component was characterized by identification of the existing and potential consumer demands for the potato, understanding of the consumer preferences for varieties and processed products and analyzing the market chain to



PARTNERSHIP

Partnerships and stakeholder involvement

Stakeholders' involvement

The plight of the project was the plight of a number of stakeholders whose joint efforts are responsible for the success of the project. These included but not limited to The Local government, NGOs, Research institutions, community groups, CBOs and Religious leaders

Local Government

The project was with in various frameworks of poverty reduction and agricultural development. Specifically, the project contributed to the NAADS programme in the context of technology transfer and technology promotion. Where farmers do what they wish most and derive income then the government programme PPF is on route.

The seed system component provided vines to NAADS programme and NAADs was the chief buyer of vines in the project area thereby rolling out the project interventions beyond the project direct beneficiaries

Local government leaders and workers provided support in aspects of farmer mobilization and technical support to bridge a technical discrepancies which farmers had and were hesitant to reveal to project staff at the inception of the

Community groups.

The project entered the community through existing groups and this was a pivotal contribution of community groups to the success of the project. Group leaders mobilized group members as well as monitoring performance of the project interventions. The group approach enable VEDCO to swiftly



250-300 bags of vine seeds, at the prevailing price per bag 8,000/= during the project period, farmers participating in these areas realized an estimate of 2,000,000/= to 2,400,000/= in one season, under favourable weather conditions. “Nalongo Sekinguse of Katente parish in Mukono district who sold ¼ acre of rapidly multiplied vines and bought 2 calves.

Contribution to environmental sustainability and sustainable use of natural resources

Sweet potato production unlike some other crops, does not call for felling of trees. In addition among the vine conservation techniques promoted during the project included planting vines under tree shades, secondly potato mounds and ridges control water and soil erosion as they reduce water runoff while the vines provide soil cover hence reducing the impact of rain drops on the soil structure.



identify necessary partnership constraints and opportunities.

Working with GROUPS

The REU project was an integral part of VEDCO implemented strategy. VEDCO works with farming communities through existing groups and where there were no



groups, farmers are facilitated to form groups. In this particular project, members in some of the existing groups were less than 25 a required number so they recruited to a minimum of 25 members. Every group selected two farmers who worked as contact persons for the group during the implementation of the project. The selected farmers were also trained as promoters in the course of the project. The fact that this project was a research-development project, groups that

participated were clustered either as “controls”; these did not benefit from implementation activities directly, and “implementation groups” which were further clustered as model one and two. In the first year all model groups were allocated equal time and in year two contacts hours for model two were reduced. This was aiming at redeeming hours and resources for new groups recruited as well as checking whether these groups can progress with minimal follow up. The contact hours for model one however remained the same.

Nutrition and Agriculture promoters

These were the two farmers selected from each group and selection was based on agreed qualities that included willingness to Volunteer,



ability to read, write and express self and ability to devote time for others. In groups whose membership combined both men and women, agriculture and marketing promoters were men whereas women selected as nutrition promoters heavily influenced by the dynamics of the gender roles.

These were trained in a number of modules as desired skills dictated separately. In the processes, promoters requested to attend all trainings together so that they can back up each other during the training. In cases when one promoter was absent for the training, the affected group was represented by another group member. Regularly, trained promoters mobilized their respective group members and trained them following an agreed plan. They also monitored group activities using monitoring forms and reports that they presented to the Extensionist.

On a special occasion, these promoters were commissioned and openly handed over to the

community to serve beyond the project. They were facilitated with tools like bicycles, gumboots, training boards as a motivation at the same time to ease their work of training others. By the end of the project, the project had trained 556 Promoters and at least 65% were still active. The LG had engaged them in mobilizing communities for Government programmes such as Child days Plus.

The promoters in the same location conducted joint trainings of 2-3 groups. During these trainings Extensionists would do technical back stopping to ensure the right message is disseminated and that trainings conducted are practical. In order to support promoters in information dissemination, positive deviant mothers and influential persons to help other mothers to adopt recommended practices in nutrition and market link farmers to disseminate market information and link farmers to buyers were identified and empowered.

PROGRAM

Outputs/outcomes/impacts of the project/program

Farmer empowerment and involvement

The concept of groups and their performance gained recognition due to the use of MDD. They have been invited to perform during community events such as international women's day and Independence Day celebration at sub county and district level. This increased the popularity of the potato within and outside the project areas.

Contributed to democratization

Participating farmers especially promoters had their leadership skills and abilities enhanced. They are actively participating in leadership positions in their groups including women. Many of them are vying to stand for leadership in the coming political season 2011.

Increased Household Incomes

The potato has also got on the cash crop list for farmers in the two districts. Each of the 7000 direct project beneficiaries established at

least ½ acre of the potatoes yielding a total of 35,000 tones of fresh potatoes, which was worth Ug Shs 175,000(USD 87.5) per ton. The undertaking generated a gross income of USD 3,062,500 to the farmers by the end of the project from only the roots

Besides, sale of vines in areas has increased than ever before A number of households have benefited from the sale of vines either to NAADS in the sub county programme or individual farmers. An acre of vine seeds using the rapid multiplication technique produced



Farmers were also trained in nutrition aspects to prepare them for OFSP utilization and consumption. Some farmers' adoption was influenced by nutrition trainings.

Household sanitation and hygiene trainings also deemed necessary as Vitamin A absorption is hampered by illnesses that result from poor hygiene.

The fact that farmers only derive livelihoods through sell of their produce, the questions on marketing surfaced right at the inception of the project. In response, market tailored trainings were conducted not only to guarantee market but to let farmers appreciate their role in the market chain and promotion of OFSP

Participatory market chain development

Under this intervention, different sweet potato market chain actors were brought to work together in marketing. It involved understating the constraining factors of each player, building trust in one another and working together to improve production, marketing and consumption of OFSP. This included discussing and agreeing

on the variety preferences, production trends, pricing systems, packaging of fresh roots and processed products, grading and sorting and increasing shelf life.

Four steps were involved; Step I: identification of different sweet potato market chain actors, i.e. producers, processors, market link farmers, wholesalers and retailers. This step also involved developing the sweet potato market chain actors' data base.

Step II: contacting the different chain actors and explained to them the importance of a market linkage. Step III: conducting a workshop for all the chain actors in the respective districts and facilitating them to regularly meet and discuss linkage strengthening. .

Step iv: Facilitating initial trade-farmer visits.



ACTIONS

Communication activities

Communication was such a critical aspect of the project. It is by communication that adoption and demand for the crop was greatly created.

Communication tools targeting different communities were developed and used. They included drama, field days, radio messages on popular local radios, Songs, poems, wall murals and exhibitions. In addition, promotional materials such as T-shirts, capes, brochures, Aprons, Scuffs, marketing boards and painting of kiosks were developed and disseminated

Music, Dance and Drama

Drama groups were mobilized within the benefiting groups. They composed, rehearsed and performed songs and drama in line with thematic areas in a bid to promote key project interventions. Rehearsals for these performances were part of the scheduled project activities that participating groups

Actions taken while implementing the project.

developed and implemented at their ease

Farmer field days

These are designated days agreed upon with farmers as a show case.

On this day the project beneficiaries open up to the general public to share their experiences, benefits, lessons learnt and prospects of the project.



Exhibitions, demonstrations, music dance, drama and poems are the major items of the day's agenda. It is teaching and learning day.

Initially drama shows and field days were organized at a central place for 2-3 parishes. However, the turn up and performances were not

always as expected due to long distances that participants and day goers had to walk was rather long. The strategy was changed and these events were subsequently conducted at parish level. These events also earned exhibitors income as they sold off show items to revelers.

Community mobilization approach was also changed, instead of relying on promoters, church leaders; school teachers on assembly and mobile public address system were used. As a result drama shows and field days were abundantly attended resulting in high demand for the vines

“We feel respected and regarded as important people in the community when people assemble to listen to us.....” Excited Monica Mayanja from Tugezeeku drama group expressed

Radio

Popular radio station listened to by particular project communities were selected together with farmers. In Mukono, farmers opted for CBS radio and Victoria FM was the choice for those in Kamuli. Other



radio stations such as Prime Radio one of the Christian radio stations in the country donated free airtime and several radio talk shows were conducted.

Radio messages and radio programmes were conducted on these radio stations in local languages of Lusoga for Kamuli and Luganda for Mukono. Prior the messages and programme content was developed with farmers. Field visits were conducted for the radio to come close to the farming communities. The radio field day was an experience sharing day

farmers exchanging ideas with the radio people. Their experiences were recorded; produced and formed the basis of discussion during the radio talk shows

Brochures, Marketing boards, painting of kiosks, messages in scripted T-shirts, exhibitions boosted the above tools in spreading the gospel of OFSP and its benefits

“Once my kiosk was printed, many people within and outside this community were attracted to stop and buy potatoes ...” reported one trader in Kisoga Mukono district ‘My T-shirt earned me a brand name -Maama kipaapaali that has attracted many buyers for the potatoes. Am proud and my business is now popular” one female trader in Gaba was heard posing

Today, OFSP is being referred to as “lumonde wa vitamin” literally meaning vitamin a rich sweet potato.

Training

Integration approach was used and Farmers were trained in agronomy, nutrition, market and product

development aspects to meet project activities as well as farmers’ expectations. This was based on the



fact that farmers have been growing sweet potato over the years on either mounds or ridges. The size of mounds and number of vines per mound varied from community to community. In addition, the sweet potato is considered a hardy crop planted late in the season, diseases and pests were rarely controlled saved for monkeys, wild and domestic animals also affected the yields.

Training in agronomy, pests and disease management was intended to disseminate the recommended practices and to awaken farmers so that sweet potato like any other crop is managed well to realize better yields