



# Community Perceptions and Sustainable Promotion of Bio-fortified Orange Sweet Potatoes and High Iron Beans: Experiences from Mbarara District in South West Uganda

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## Background

- Bio-fortification of staple crops is a proposed strategy to address micronutrient malnutrition due to insufficient intake of vitamin A, iron, zinc, and folate but integration of bio-fortified crops in the community needs to attend to context specific cultural concerns.
- In addition there is limited evidence on the impact and investment viability in the promotion of bio-fortified crops
- In south west Uganda, the Maternal Newborn and Child Health Institute (MNCHI) through Healthy Child Uganda (HCU) with support from HarvestPlus have supported 3,550 direct and 7,100 indirect farmers with planting materials in form of orange sweet potato (OSP) vines and high iron beans (HIB) from 2013.
- The programme also supported 20 schools to establish school gardens to improve nutrition under the school feeding program
- Demonstration gardens were set up at the Health centers and farmers received training in nutrition and agronomy.

## Objective

To assess community perceptions towards OSPs, HIBs and their sustainable promotion through community health workers for improved maternal and child nutrition in Mbarara District.

## Methods

- This was a case study design employing Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews to gain insight on the perceptions of promoting and sustaining OSPs and HIBs through community health workers in Mbarara District.
- Data were collected from farmers and community health workers. We conducted four (4) FGDs with farmers and four (4) FGDs with community health workers each comprising of 8 participants
- Also, nine (9) in depth interviews were conducted with local leaders, community health workers' trainers, district chairpersons and local council members
- The study focused on Kinoni sub county in Mbarara District, south western Uganda, where the intervention to promote Orange sweet potatoes and high iron beans had been implemented.
- Data was thematically analysed to identify relevant themes

## Results

- Community members perceive orange Sweet potatoes and high iron beans to be highly nutritious, make their children grow healthy and make their children perform better at school.

*"When we got those beans and potatoes our children became good (healthy) and we were no longer having children with brown hair, those who suffer from kwashiorkor, so we were encouraged and we planted more of these beans and sweet potatoes. We saw that the VHTs had brought for us a precious thing that we did not know in the village"- (Farmer, Kongoro parish)*

*"..... beans add blood in the children's bodies and that the potatoes cure kwashiorkor, and that the child studies and gets a lot of knowledge ... that is what brought about happiness" (Farmer . Kongoro, parish )*



## Results

- Community members reported that OSPs and HIBs' yields are higher than the indigenous crops; thus enabling household to sell, earn income and keep a surplus for home consumption.

*"When the beans and the potato vines came, VHTs called us and they supplied them to us and we planted them. When we planted them, especially the beans, those beans yielded a lot and the same applies to potatoes." (Farmer Nyakabare)*

- Community members perceive OSPs and HIBs to be both a source of medicine. Children and pregnant mothers who feed on them do not need to go to hospital for treatment.

*"when you eat them you cannot feel pain in the eyes and the eyes can see well (meaning a clear sight) so, ever since we started preparing them for children and they ate them even the one who were complaining about the eyes you can't hear them complaining any more" (Farmer Rweibogo).*

- Participants perceive community health workers as sustainable promoters due to their strong network in the community essential for mobilization; reached every farmer for information about the upcoming crops, the venue, where to pick them and the time to pick them; and associated with regular follow up and monitoring which created a sense of responsibility among the beneficiaries.

*"The VHT's always told us when the seedlings were being brought hat they are going to the facility or any other place so that we would go and pick them on time and plant them. Another thing the VHTs supplied and explained to the famers what to do other than other transporters and organizations who do not give appropriate information." (Farmer Kangoro)*



## Conclusion

Community members hold these crops in high esteem due to the perceived nutritional, income, medicinal and high yield benefits. Despite this, the mechanisms through which these crops are promoted need to involve community health workers to benefit everybody in the community.

## References

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