



REGIONAL FOOD SECURITY PROJECT: IMPROVING FOOD SECURITY AND ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT FOR SMALLHOLDER FARMERS IN MALAWI

FINAL EVALUATION REPORT



PARTNER: UNITED PURPOSE MALAWI

Project Synopsis

The project is a continuation of the global 'Potato Coalition Program' of which AOP is a consortium partner. The consortium comprises international NGOs United Purpose, Vita, AOP and the International Potato Centre; agricultural research agencies in Ireland, Ethiopia, Malawi, and Mozambique; the private sector; and universities in Europe and Africa.

In this phase of the project, in Malawi, the project focussed on supporting Orange Fleshed Sweet Potato (OFSP) farmers through capacity building to enhance their production both in terms of quality and quantity, and to provide a market linkage to a reliable and sustainable market for their products.

Evaluation Key Findings

- Project activities are relevant to key problems faced by farmers in the target areas.
- The project focuses on areas that align to the objectives of the national agricultural, nutrition and gender policies, and the country's long-term development aspirations.
- The project complements other projects in Balaka District.
- Very few organizations in the district focused on processing of OFSP, and the lessons from the AOP project were tested in Farmer Field Schools established by Government extension workers. The project was implemented using the existing national extension system structures and government extension workers.
- Project resources were made available and on time to support implementation of training. Project resources also supported on-farm activities, cooking demonstrations, and field days.
- The use of lead farmers helped dissemination of information delivered by the project.
- The project represents value for money because less money was spent to deliver extension services to farmers.
- The project did less well on the number of farmers reached in the target areas; sufficiency of training and number of farmers trained; and delivery timelines, including in some instances, the non-delivery of supporting equipment and tools.
- The project successfully delivered training in cooperative management; crop diversification; seed multiplication; planting patterns; pest and disease management; storage; marketing; processing; irrigation (basin and bucket); and VSLs.
- Farmers applied the lessons from training in seed multiplication; irrigation; improved OFSP varieties; planting patterns; and storage.
- The application of lessons related to marketing, processing and business skills pertaining to VSLs lagged.
- Adoption of OFSP was 73% in the rainy season and 55% under irrigation. Farmers sold over half of what they produced. 83% sold their produce at farmgate prices.
- Membership of VSLs was 75% for females and 10% for males. VSLs assisted 94% of households to access loans.
- The production of OFSP has assisted farmers to offset food and income deficits.
- The project did well in mainstreaming gender in its activities and disseminating gender equality messages to communities, contributing to increased participation of women and youth in OFSP-related activities and leadership of farmer organizations.
- Decisions on household chores and management remain with women (75%); decisions related to other economic activities are done jointly or by men.

- Women and the elderly are burdened by some of the OFSP production and processing activities.
- Sustainability of project interventions is assured because of community ownership of OFSP activities; establishment of farmer organisations; linking OFSP groups to financial services; increasing demand for OFSP-related activities; training of lead farmers and extension workers; and the adoption of a business mindset in the management of OFSP groups.

Evaluator's Recommendations

- Intensify training on OFSP processing;
- Support local artisans to construct baking ovens;
- Introduce training on food safety;
- Upgrade training content on financial and business management, and marketing skills in VSLs;
- Support local seed multiplication including backyard gardens;
- Provide training on governance of cooperative societies and increase their capacity to mobilise financial capital;
- Increase number of bakeries within villages and access to irrigation equipment to reduce burden experienced by women; and
- Invest in awareness campaigns to increase participation of men in VSLs.

The evaluators made the following recommendations to government: include capacity building of extension workers and lead farmers on OFSP value addition and marketing, and governance of business-oriented farmer organisations; integrate OFSP promotion activities into local action plans and national programmes, and support farmer organizations to meet food safety and quality standards as required by national regulatory authorities.

The evaluators also made recommendations to farmers to conduct regular briefing and training sessions to update members on developments related to OFSP; strengthen revolving fund initiatives within the farmer groups to increase farmer access to inputs and equipment; conduct market research to establish acceptance and demand for OFSP products; and establish mechanisms for ensuring transparency on processes, procedures, transactions, and decision making in farmer organisations.

Evaluator's Conclusion

This mid-term evaluation sought to establish the relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, inclusiveness, and sustainability of the project on Improving Food Security and Economic Empowerment for Smallholder Farmers in Malawi that is being implemented in Balaka district, with support from the AOP. Overall, the project was found to be relevant, coherent, efficient, effective, impactful, inclusive, and sustainable. Some small areas for improvement and refinement have been suggested.