

Using evidence to inform the scale-up of biofortified orange sweet potato in Uganda

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Highlights

Evidence impact

- The impact evaluation findings informed USAID's decision to fund the scale-up of HarvestPlus' biofortification project in Uganda.
- The evidence has also informed HarvestPlus' approach to working with farmers' groups.
- HarvestPlus commissioned a third impact evaluation to identify the most cost-effective strategy for distributing vitamin A-rich orange sweet potato and iron-fortified beans amongst farmers.

Factors that contributed to impact

- Impact evaluation evidence was proof for donors that biofortification worked.
- There was strong partnership between research and implementation teams.
- HarvestPlus used evidence to champion the cause of biofortification.

Evidence use brief

Using evidence to inform the scale-up and adoption of biofortified orange sweet potato in Uganda

This brief analyses how and why the evidence from these impact evaluations generated credible evidence to help build a case with donors for scaling up the project in Uganda.

Impact evaluation details

Title: [Sustainability of impact: dimensions of decline and persistence in adopting a b...](#)

Authors: Scott McNiven, Daniel O Gilligan and Christine Hotz

Status : Completed April 2015



Context

Deficiencies of micronutrients such as vitamin A, zinc and iron can cause diseases or exacerbate them. More than two billion people suffer from micronutrient malnutrition, known colloquially as hidden hunger. In Uganda, vitamin A deficiency is a health challenge affecting an estimated 28 per cent of preschool children.

The international organisation HarvestPlus has been promoting biofortified staple crops to improve the diets of people living in poverty. HarvestPlus is jointly administered by the International Center for Tropical Agriculture and the International Food Policy Research Institute. Between 2007 and 2009, HarvestPlus and its NGO partners distributed biofortified orange sweet potato (OSP) to households in three districts. They also provided nutritional training on the benefits of consuming vitamin A-enriched OSP, particularly for women and children. Research teams, led by the International Food Policy Research Institute, carried out two impact evaluations to assess OSP's health impacts and farmers' sustained adoption of it. The

collaboration between the research and implementation teams ensured evidence would inform HarvestPlus's evolving programming.

Evidence

The first impact evaluation, completed in 2010, found that the vitamin A status of deficient children improved after they consumed OSP. The second impact evaluation, which was supported by 3ie and completed in 2015, showed that four years after HarvestPlus distributed OSP, farmers' adoption and cultivation of it had stabilised, at approximately 50 per cent, in two out of three districts. Promoting OSP cultivation was likely to be more sustainable and cost-effective in communities where the conventional sweet potato was already a major crop. The areas that showed sustained adoption had a comparative advantage for both growing the crop and consuming it.

Evidence impacts

Changed HarvestPlus' distribution approach

The evidence informed USAID's decision to scale up distribution of OSP as part of its Developing and Delivering Biofortified Crops activity. The project was funded through the US government's Feed the Future initiative. With this additional support, HarvestPlus distributed OSP and iron-fortified beans amongst 409,711 households in 13 districts between 2012 and 2016. This was a big jump from 2007, when OSP had been distributed amongst 10,000 households in three districts.

The impact evaluation evidence has also informed HarvestPlus's approach to working with farmers' groups and getting them to share biofortified OSP vines with other farmers. The diffusion and social network approach, explored in the impact evaluations, has offered HarvestPlus an effective way of distributing these vines widely. The results have also offered some important pointers for HarvestPlus on potential criteria for targeting the intervention in different areas.

Informing HarvestPlus's later evaluations

Global advocacy that is grounded in research has helped HarvestPlus champion the cause of biofortification. HarvestPlus decided to commission another impact evaluation to compare different cost-effectiveness strategies for promoting the sustained distribution and adoption of biofortified crops as part of this scaled-up version of the project.

'As someone who is involved in in-house research as well as implementation, my job was to translate English into English – because the language that implementers speak is different from the language that researchers speak. Researchers want to do things one way and implementers want to do them another way. You have to learn to make those trade-offs and compromises.' – Anna-Marie Ball, head of Africa Strategic Alliances, HarvestPlus

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