Funding support

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has committed to providing two-thirds of the support needed for Phase I of the Initiative, under the Sweetpotato Action for Security and Health in Africa (SASHA) project. The initiative is also receiving support from ASAICA, the sub-regional research organization for East and Central Africa and complementary support for national breeding programs from the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA).

Additional support is being sought from USAID, Irish Aid, CCAFS, and other donors with a long-standing interest in combating poverty and malnutrition through food-based approaches in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The SPH! is the outcome of a comprehensive consultative process initiated by the International Potato Center (known by its Spanish acronym, CIP).

International Potato Center (CIP)
CIP Headquarters
Arequipa - 1534, Lima 12, Peru
Sub-Saharan Africa
Regional Office: PO Box 25171
Nairobi 00803, Kenya
Contact: Jan Low, SPH! coordinator and SASHA Project Leader
Email: jlow@cip.int
Website: www.sphato.org
**What is SPHI?**

The Sweetpotato for Profit and Health Initiative (SPHI) is a 10-year, multi-donor initiative that seeks to reduce child malnutrition and improve smallholder incomes through the effective production and expanded use of sweetpotato. It aims to build consumer awareness of sweetpotato’s nutritional benefits, encourage its use, and increase market opportunities, especially in expanding urban markets of Sub-Saharan Africa.

**Repositioning sweetpotato in African food economies**

SPHI has a vision of boosting the profit and position of sweetpotato in the food economies of Sub-Saharan Africa. Several areas of focus will help tap more fully into sweetpotato’s potential, including:

- Expanding market opportunities for sweetpotato, including processed products such as bread, chips, or pasty. Different cultivars adapted to consumer preferences and to use as anti-flood
- Responding to a growing urban food market with products that adapt urban tastes and promote the image of sweetpotato as a healthy food (for example, chips)
- Increasing access to quality planting materials that is disease-free and resistant to drought such as drought or insect infestations
- Building capacity for effective sweetpotato research and development programs. Broadening the dissemination and consumption of high-quality research is a highly-effective food-based approach to combating vitamin A and other nutritional deficiencies, which among young children is widespread in Sub-Saharan Africa
- Boosting the yield, control over resources, and income-generating potential to producers, most of whom are smallholder women farmers

**What are we waiting for?**

Sweetpotatoes are the third most important food crop in terms of production in East Africa and the fourth most important food crop in Southern Africa. But there has been a lack of investment to improve sweetpotato varieties and expand market potential, or redress its negative perception as a poor person’s food.

**Projected impacts**

At the end of 10 years, SPHI is expected to improve the lives of 10 million households in 10 years. It also aims to achieve an annual value of $241 million in additional production in 17 African countries. The vast majority of beneficiaries will be non-commercially oriented producers, mostly women and their families. Capacity in the sweetpotato community of practice will be significantly strengthened through the presence of strong support platforms. The organizational structure of the SPHI is shown in additional page.

**A two-phased approach**

Phase 1 of SPHI has a heavy emphasis on breeding. It seeks to build an integrated breeding system to significantly boost yields, and explicitly address the priorities of resource-poor women and children, as both producers and consumers. Other components of Phase 1 address increased consumption of orange-fleshed sweetpotato to combat Vitamin A deficiency, the testing of delivery systems that can potentially be scaled up for greater impact, and the establishment of improved breeding capacity in Africa, for Africa. Phase 1 focuses more resources on broad dissemination of the technologies developed in Phase 1.

**Areas for further investment in the SPHI**

Many components of the SPHI remain unfunded, for example:

1. **PROOF-OF-CONCEPT PROJECTS**: These are demonstration projects with strong research components to build the evidence base for sweetpotato impact. Potential efforts include linking orange-fleshed sweetpotato to school feeding programs in Ghana, integrating an already-developed test bed into school feeding programs using sweetpotato into the Ugandan school system, and building an effective delivery system for producing sweetpotato by-products with a large agro-processing firm in Malawi.

2. **CROP MANAGEMENT**: With good varieties and clean planting material, farmers can double yields under good managed conditions. We will add improved agronomic practices, crop management, and water management we could triple yields. In such Africa, where irrigation and fertilization is used, yields of 60-70 tons/ha are attainable. This is a completely underexplored area regarding smallholder farmers in the varied agro-ecologies of Sub-Saharan Africa. We believe that crop management research should be undertaken in areas where sweetpotato marketing occurs as farmers are willing to invest more when there is an outlet for their yields and production.

3. **MONITORING, AREA EXPANSION AND THE CHANGING ROLE OF SWEETPOTATO**: One of the reasons for underinvestments in sweetpotato is the lack of quality statistics for crops harvested in Sub-Saharan Africa, such as cassava and sweetpotato. The result is difficulty presenting hard evidence to policy makers. To promote scaling up, we have a plan that shows it is possible to distinguish sweetpotato from other crops, and hence obtain rapid improved estimates of the amount of land under sweetpotato production. Expanded use of this tool would broaden the impact of disease, climate change, and food security. It would also make it easier for sweetpotato increasingly being discussed in African food systems.

4. **CAPACITY STRENGTHENING**: Technical support platforms based in leading national programs in Uganda, Mozambique, and Malawi, and most effectively, serve as resource and training centers for both research and development stakeholders. Additional funding is required to support core development and extension, capacity development, and the development of learning and promotional materials. The ultimate goal is to establish a vibrant sweetpotato community of practice.

5. **ADVOCACY, DEMAND CREATION, AND EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP**: The vision is to bring the dominant image of sweetpotato on the continent as being a poor person’s crop to one of a healthy crop for all. We look at all land need to be reached as well as those in the agriculture, health, and education sectors. Experience in Mozambique and Uganda and the demand creation campaigns to create awareness of the health benefits of orange-fleshed sweetpotato. As all are well done in partnership, we need to access the effectiveness of different types of partnerships in which we engage to enable lessons learned to be passed and improvements to be made.

6. **LARGER-SCALE DISSEMINATION**: Before we can engage in large-scale dissemination, we must have the right varieties in place and the appropriate delivery system to gain the acceptance and agro-ecological conditions of the country. At different points in time during the first five years, plan expect it to have the appropriate varieties for moving forward on a largescale, and at least one additional品种. All of these programs will closely monitor distribution and assess uptake. Those focused on large-scale sweetpotato need to include a nutrition component.