Photo Courtesy of the International Potato Center

Helping Drought-Affected Farmers Regain Their Livelihoods

Ethiopia's 2015/2016 drought, exacerbated by the El Niño climatic event, devastated crops and negatively affected food security and nutrition conditions across the country, resulting in an estimated 10.2 million people in need of relief food assistance by December 2015. In Ethiopia's Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples (SNNP) Region, many farmers lost their crops, including traditional potato and sweet potato varieties—significantly reducing communities' access to nutritious food.

To restore families' livelihoods and increase their access to food, USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) supported the International Potato Center (CIP) to assist drought-affected farmers in SNNP to plant new crops, including orange-fleshed sweet potatoes, a vegetable high in Vitamin A.

With USAID/OFDA assistance, CIP provided sweet potato seeds to nearly 10,000 farmers and trained more than 11,300 men and women on various ways to cook the vitamin-rich vegetable.

The project also educated community members on orange-fleshed sweet potatoes' nutritional benefits, particularly for children and women of reproductive age.

"The orange-fleshed sweet potato gave me a high yield, and the Vitamin A [it contains] is medicine for me and my family," said Boca Bochie, a farmer from SNNP's Doya Dao community.

Farmers found such success with the crop that they began using irrigation techniques to grow it in larger quantities for sale in local markets. Some men in the communities even requested training from women on how to prepare leaves and roots of the vegetable—a significant change from traditional gender roles in the area.

Since it began the USAID/OFDA-supported program in June 2016, CIP has assisted more than 14,500 drought-affected farmers in SNNP to plant potatoes and sweet potatoes.

USAID/OFDA continues to build vulnerable households' resilience to drought through critical agriculture and livelihoods programs across Ethiopia, including SNNP.