

# Training Taking Root

Eugene Ekinyu is a smallholder farmer. He lives in Kyere sub-county of Soroti District in north-eastern Uganda, and sweet potato is one of the crops he has struggled to grow. Together he and his wife would clear and prepare an area of their field ready to plant any planting materials he managed to find sprouting from old roots when the rains started. But often they were infested with viruses and the crop still took many months to mature, by which time the rains had finished, the soil had cracked and the weevils were eating their sweet potato roots. They sold what they could but often at a low price as everyone was selling at the same time – so they would process some into dried chips and store for food later in the year. When he heard that a farmer field school (FFS) on sweet potato was starting, he volunteered to mobilise willing fellow farmers.



Eugene checks on a new sweet potato variety

Planning and field activities got underway and the Abuket FFS group members accessed and tested new sweet potato varieties against local varieties. They learnt about the benefits of eating orange-fleshed sweet potato with its high in beta-carotene content – so important to the nutrition of their often vitamin A deficient young children, and pregnant or nursing women. Abuket FFS went even further and formed two groups – one acting as specialised producers of sweet potato roots, the other as the processors and marketers of the dried chips. They linked to large-scale millers in Kampala and started to supply them on a regular basis. They continued to experiment with different ways of drying and marketing their chips, linking with local

*Through testing, observing and experimenting, Abuket FFS members learnt how to:*

- *Rapidly multiply planting material and conserve it during the dry season to prevent the shortage normally experienced at the onset of the rains, some even sold vines to other farmers*
- *Recognise the symptoms of different diseases, pests and nutrient deficiencies and devised and compared ways of managing them.*
- *Keep farm records and use the data to make more informed decisions*
- *Process sweet potato roots into flour, mandazis, chapattis, cakes, juice, crisps and even soap*

government to supply sweet potato to school feeding programmes and internally displaced persons camps, and they continued to learn! This year Eugene will also facilitate a sweet potato FFS.

Abuket FFS was just one of the 18 sweet potato FFS, funded by FAO and CPP, which took place in north-eastern Uganda and west Kenya during 2002–03 and 2003–04. Six of these were farmer facilitated and 322 of the 492 participants were women. Additional spin-off activities in Tanzania led to four extension facilitated sweet potato FFS with a further 92 participants. A sweet potato learning curriculum, learning activities, technical manual and a

training of trainers course were developed, field tested and refined over two seasons. In response to the demand that has been stimulated for similar activities throughout the region, the project is now supporting other organisations that are adopting and promoting the approach more widely.



Data analysis – Undugu FFS, Busia, Kenya



Sweet potato delicacies

**R8167:** Promotion of sustainable sweet potato production and post-harvest management through farmer field schools in East Africa

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