

# Credit for success: **seed-yam** production systems



By promoting micro-credit schemes and market improvements, policy makers can help farmers to improve their yam yields—and their incomes.

Yams are an important and valued food in West and Central Africa. Yet every year it is harder for yam producers to keep up with demand. Their problems include poor soils, pests and diseases and—above all—lack of capital.

Simple, low-cost ways for farmers to produce 'clean' (pest-and disease-free) planting material for their yam crops exist. Yet while many farmers are aware of these techniques, they are hesitant to get involved in seed-yam production because of the investment this implies, and the time it takes for them to see returns.

## What are the limiting factors?

Farmers traditionally use yam tubers or pieces of them to plant their yam crops. This material accounts for as much as 70 percent of growers' costs and leads to a high price for yams on the market. This puts this culturally and nutritionally important crop out of the reach of many people for a good part of the year.

In addition, pests and diseases have taken hold throughout the African 'yam belt.' And, ever more intensive farming designed to meet growing demand is making the problem worse, reducing harvests and driving prices even higher.

## Producing disease-free material

By using the 'minisett' method to produce high-quality planting material, farmers can multiply their yields, harvesting two to four times more yams than they can from poor-quality planting material. Production of clean seed-yams also opens up important business opportunities for farmers and their communities.

But, the system has one major drawback: it takes two seasons to produce the clean seed-yams. To make this affordable, farmers need access to pesticides, an open market for seed-yam, and financial services to support this as a business venture. By supporting the development of these systems, policy makers can help to improve nutrition and incomes in their regions.



Above: Improved seed-yam production systems will mean more food and better opportunities for children like these in the future. Women are particularly active in the marketing of yam and yam products. Photos: (left) B. Siderman-Wolter and (right) D. Coyne

## Policy action needed to boost clean seed-yam production

- Support the development of seed-yam producer associations
- Support development of the market for seed-yam
- Develop a certification scheme so that clean and healthy seed-yam can achieve a premium in the market
- Promote efforts to provide the required fungicide and pesticide mixtures in an affordable pre-packaged form
- Improve micro-credit schemes to widen access to cash, ensure reasonable interest rates and lower transaction costs
- Improve road access to production areas

For more information on the minisett system, contact Research into Use at [riuinfo@nrint.co.uk](mailto:riuinfo@nrint.co.uk) or Dr Lawrence Kenyon, [l.kenyon@gre.ac.uk](mailto:l.kenyon@gre.ac.uk). To learn about experiences with micro-credit systems and markets, contact Sr Nora McNamara, [noramc2006@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:noramc2006@yahoo.co.uk). In all cases, please copy emails to [riuinfo@nrint.co.uk](mailto:riuinfo@nrint.co.uk). See also Research into Use Pocket Guide No. 6: "Giving seed-yams the credit they deserve".

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Photo: S. Mann

## What is the purpose of this brief?

This Policy Brief was produced to show that complex subjects can be explained very quickly and simply to busy policy makers. It is part of a series that showcases proven technologies, policies and new approaches in order to demonstrate the importance of high-quality scientific communication.

Through its Policy Brief and Pocket Guide series, Research into Use aims to encourage partners in both the developed and developing worlds to invest more in their communication efforts. Only in this way will useful technologies be widely adopted, helping the people that they were intended to help and contributing to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

## What is Research into Use?

The Research into Use Programme aims to do exactly what its name says—to get research findings into use by resource-poor farmers in the developing world. The natural resources research programmes funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) produced many significant findings over their 11 year existence. Research into Use is working to put these results into practice—in order to reduce poverty on a very broad scale in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

A key part of this work will involve helping partners to better understand how the promotion and widespread use of such research will help to cut poverty and boost economic growth.

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