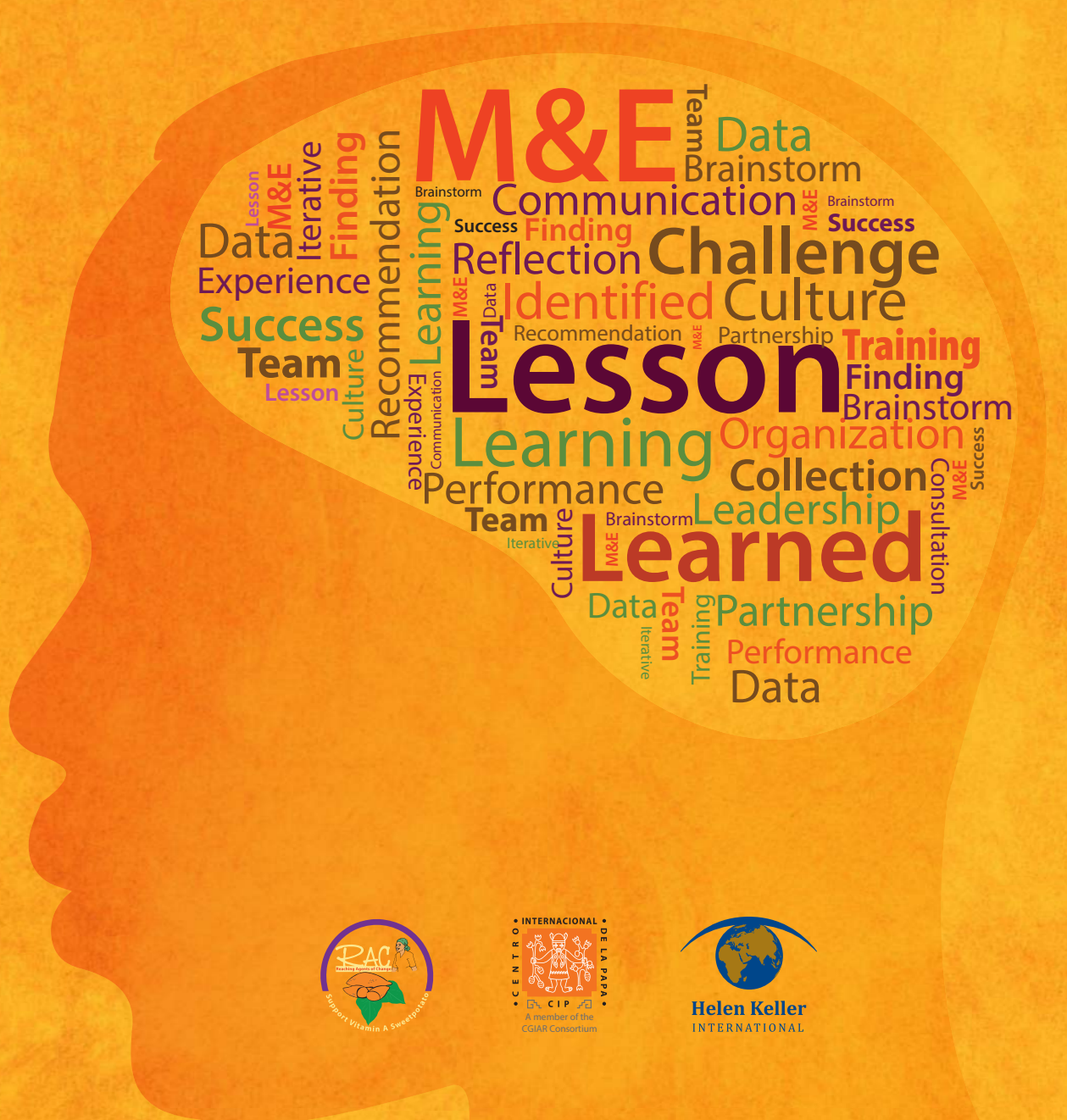


Learning the Smart Way: Lessons Learned by the Reaching Agents of Change Project



M&E **Lesson** **Learned** **Learning** **Challenge** **Reflection** **Identified** **Team** **Communication** **Success** **Finding** **Iteration** **Recommendation** **Brainstorm** **Data** **Culture** **Training** **Organization** **Collection** **Leadership** **Partnership** **Performance** **Team** **Lesson** **Experience** **Success** **Lesson** **Culture** **Communication** **Experience** **Lesson** **M&E** **Brainstorm** **Success** **Finding** **Brainstorm** **Team** **Brainstorm** **Communication** **Success** **M&E** **Brainstorm** **Success** **Finding** **Challenge** **Reflection** **Identified** **Culture** **Training** **Finding** **Brainstorm** **Organization** **Success** **Collection** **Leadership** **Partnership** **Performance** **Team** **Brainstorm** **M&E** **Culture** **Iteration** **Team** **Brainstorm** **Partnership** **Performance** **Lesson** **Experience** **Success** **Lesson** **Culture** **Communication** **Experience** **Lesson**



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Preface

The Reaching Agents of Change (RAC) project was a thrilling but too short an adventure for all involved. Designed as a pilot, RAC nonetheless had ambitious goals and objectives worthy of a much longer project. From its inception, when we designed the project and wrote the proposal, we knew that we would learn many lessons along the way. We created a design that would allow us to monitor and evaluate the project's progress in close to real time, and systems that would allow us to learn valuable lessons when they emerged.

While the lesson learning process was envisaged from project inception, the idea for this booklet came close to the end of the project, when it became clear that many of the lessons we had learned and the recommendations we wanted to make had resonance beyond the scope of our small project. What we learned about advocacy for food-based approaches, the timing of advocacy efforts and the introduction of new varieties could apply to any agriculture project in the world. The lessons on project design similarly are replicable. Above all, the lessons about monitoring and evaluation design and systematic documentation of the implementation process and their role in informing the management of the project are of universal utility.

All our national project teams were asked to write up the lessons they had learned, and a joint meeting was held 26–30 May 2014 in Mozambique to ensure that everyone used the same definitions and drew out the important truths from their lessons. The RAC team worked to compile all the lessons learned and synthesize them into this booklet, a job that I am sure you will agree they have done with aplomb.

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We would like to express our gratitude to the entire RAC team that implemented the project between June 2011 and December 2014 for their hard work, commitment, diligence and dedication. All our efforts have borne fruit! From Helen Keller International (HKI), we recognize Julia Tagwireyi, the Regional Advocacy Adviser; Sarah Thotho, Advocacy Assistant; Dércio Matala, Promotion Expert, Mozambique; Mary Umoh, Promotion Expert, Nigeria; Margaret Benjamin, Promotion Expert, Tanzania; and Revelian Ngaiza, former Promotion Expert, Tanzania. From the International Potato Center (CIP), we would like to thank Jonathan Mukumbira, Regional Seed Systems Specialist; Elias Munda, Agronomist, Mozambique; Nessie Luambano, Agronomist, Tanzania; Jude Njoku, Agronomist, Nigeria; and Frank Ojwang, Procurement Officer and RAC Research Associate and Office Assistant.

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Acronyms

ARMTI	Agricultural and Rural Management Training Institute
CAADP	Comprehensive Advanced Agricultural Development Programme
CIP	International Potato Center
DVMs	decentralized vine multipliers
HKI	Hellen Keller International
OFSP	orange-fleshed sweetpotato
RAC	Reaching Agents of Change Project
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SETSAN	National Secretariat for Food Security and Nutrition
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
SUA	Sokoine University of Agriculture
UEM	University of Eduardo Mondlane

1. Background and definitions

The Reaching Agents of Change (RAC) project was a new and exciting idea when the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation funded it in 2011. It asked the question: could a much greater concentration on advocacy for policy change and institutional capacity building drive orange-fleshed sweetpotato (OFSP) uptake in Sub-Saharan Africa? In the course of a three-and-half years' (June 2011–December 2014), 'high risk' pilot project, RAC proved that, yes, it could. And more than that, it should.

The RAC project was complex, requiring a wide range of technical skills and consisting of a project team with diverse skills and backgrounds, located in different countries and regions, working under different management structures and needing to integrate their various activities to attain project objectives and goals. It had multiple deliverables in advocacy for raising of new investment, policy change and strengthening of institutional and individual capacities in the project countries.

Confucius encouraged his students to “study the past if we would define the future”. This is a maxim RAC followed. Learning is a continuous process, and given that RAC was a short-term pilot, the ability to act fast was essential. To encourage and inform those nimble reactions, the RAC project incorporated a systematic and comprehensive results-based monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system. Importantly, this process began at project inception and continued to the end of the project. The RAC M&E process was derived from the project design and was linked to both the delivery processes and learning, which informed all management and operational decisions.

This booklet shares the learning process that RAC used and highlights some of the most useful and replicable lessons learned. RAC confirmed that for projects to succeed at scaling out and scaling up technologies such as OFSP, they should not concentrate on technology alone. Indeed, researchers can develop all the varieties they want, but without policy and institutional innovations to catalyse and facilitate adoption processes, they will not attain their objectives. By actively seeking the endorsement and support of policy-makers and local institutions, RAC was able to till the ground in which technology scaling up at the national and regional levels became possible, and more importantly, sustainable.

It became very clear in the course of the project's implementation that one cannot have impact at scale if the political economy is not supportive. In Mozambique, where frequent droughts and floods had attracted both government and donor support to alleviate the plight of poor rural populations, and where OFSP had for 15 years been considered as an appropriate intervention by nongovernmental and community-based organizations, RAC was able to move fast and attain impressive

results. In Nigeria, where OFSP was almost unknown, RAC was obliged to concentrate on variety release and promotion activities before advocacy could begin. Without policy support and close collaboration with local institutions, technology work would be premature: the vines would wither, the markets would disappear and the demand would drop.

Many of the processes used in RAC were 'soft' and difficult to monitor. Thus, a systematic M&E system was essential to keep the project on track. RAC's M&E expert was constantly on the road, working with the country teams to assist in aligning the resources allocated with the activities (biweekly), the activities with the outputs (quarterly), the outputs with the objectives (half yearly) and the objectives with the project goal (annually). This alignment entailed careful and systematic documentation of what was working and what was not, and the reasons for what was happening. For RAC, M&E was not just for reporting on results but also a process for ensuring regular exchange of information and reporting and identifying and documenting the lessons learned.

1.1 Definition of key terms

It was important that all people involved in RAC were using the same definitions for the key terms. Below is a list of the special terms and the definitions used.

Experience: an encounter or practical contact with something, event or observation. The project team and stakeholders reflect on a project event or experience, i.e. what happened and whether or not the expected results were as planned, and they look out for learning points, which can be positive or negative. An experience is often documented as an issue for consideration, a best practice or an item for improvement.

Challenge: a difficulty in a task or undertaking that is stimulating to the one engaged in it.

Finding: information discovered as a result of an inquiry, an act of discovery. The project team identifies the learning points; was there a difference between what was planned and what actually happened? The difference may be positive or negative.

Analysis: an examination of learning points by distilling the root causes of success or of a problem and the differences observed and lessons identified that led to the discovery and identification of the appropriate action to sustain the success or correct the problem. What were the root causes? Why was there a difference?

Recommendation: a prescription on what should be done in a specific circumstance. It highlights what the learning point was and what should be done in future to avoid the problem or to repeat the success.

Lessons: knowledge that comes from experience, i.e. lessons have to be produced (distilled or extracted) from experience. A good lesson can help or influence the work of others, hence it needs to be specific enough to learn from, it needs to be accomplished by an action, and it needs to be a recommendation and not observation.

Lesson identified: learning points with a determined root cause from what was observed and pointers to what should be done in future activities to avoid the problem, or what should be repeated to ensure success. To make it a useful lesson for others to learn from, it needs to be instructional, hence it is framed as an actionable recommendation. Milton (2010:17)¹ defines a lesson identified as a “recommendation, based on analysed experience (positive or negative), so that others can learn from the lessons and improve their performance on a specific task or objective or to influence the work of others”.

Learned: knowledge, information or skill acquired by experience, exposure, instruction or study.

Lesson learned: a lesson needs to be accompanied by an action if it is to be considered ‘learned’, and something needs to be changed, such as a procedure, a budget or a methodology. It is the outcome of a learning process after applying innovative action or reflecting upon an experience, and may be positive or negative. It is a generalization based on the lesson identified and the action the project took to improve efficiency or effectiveness that can be used to improve future action or avoid repetition of past mistakes. The change needs to be communicated, hence a lesson learned is a change in process, behaviour or performance as a result of an experience.

In this booklet RAC shows the lesson learning process it used, how the process was managed, what was unique and what can be replicated. Many of the lessons learned will be of interest and use to both donors and project managers across the development arena.

¹ Milton, N. (2010). *The Lessons Learned Handbook: Practical Approaches to Learning from Experience*. Oxford: Chandos Publishing.

1.2 The RAC highlights

The RAC project advocated for increased investment in OFSP to combat vitamin A deficiency among young children and women of reproductive age. RAC also built the institutional capacity to design and implement gender-sensitive projects to ensure wide access and utilization of OFSP in selected African countries. Its efforts contributed to the broader Sweetpotato for Profit and Health Initiative (SPHI), which aims to improve the lives of 10 million African families by 2020. The RAC project, which began in June 2011 and ended in December 2014, was implemented in three principal countries – Tanzania, Mozambique and Nigeria – and two secondary countries – Ghana and Burkina Faso. RAC was implemented by the International Potato Center (CIP), which has expertise in OFSP breeding, production, use and promotion, and Helen Keller International (HKI), a nongovernmental organization (NGO) with experience in food-based nutrition and health interventions to combat vitamin A deficiency and in advocacy.

The RAC project was a unique effort to increase awareness about vitamin A deficiency and strengthen both the technical and advocacy capacity for successful nutrition interventions using OFSP. Through the development of strong advocacy efforts at the country level and the adoption of a strategy of identifying and training a cadre of African advocates, RAC aimed to generate at least US\$ 18 million in new investments from governments, donors, NGOs and the private sector to scale up the adoption of OFSP as a tool to combat vitamin A deficiency and improve food security in the five target countries. The project's promotion experts, regional advocacy adviser and OFSP ambassadors and advocates led the efforts to ensure that OFSP was included as an integral part of the policies and strategies that addressed food insecurity and malnutrition at national, subregional and regional levels in Sub-Saharan Africa.

RAC also aimed to build the capacity of national implementing agencies to design and implement technically strong, gender-sensitive and cost-effective programmes that drive the uptake of OFSP. The foundation of this effort was the development of a 10-day training of trainers' course on 'Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Sweetpotato' and its delivery in Mozambique, Nigeria and Tanzania. This residential course was run in collaboration with national institutions committed to conducting the course on an annual basis during and after the project period. In addition, a six-day course, entitled 'Engendered Orange-fleshed Sweetpotato Project Planning, Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation', was conducted in the three principal countries. RAC also worked towards developing an effective seed system that would enable households to obtain OFSP within 5 years of the project's completion, 600,000 of them directly and 1.2 million of them indirectly.

1.3 Key RAC achievements

- Through advocacy and awareness raising efforts during June 2011–December 2014, RAC generated new investments worth US\$ 21.6 million for OFSP. Mozambique had the highest amount of committed investment at US\$ 13,342,550, followed by Tanzania with US\$ 4,033,501, Burkina Faso with US\$ 2,963,244, Nigeria with US\$ 1,262,479 for year 1 of a four-year project, and finally Ghana with US\$ 42,036.
- RAC built the capacity of 55 national advocates and 11 regional champions hosted in national and regional public, private, nongovernmental or community-based institutions to engage and influence key decision-makers, governments, the private sector, philanthropists and donors to invest in projects in the OFSP value chain. At the regional level, a proposal was made by the African Union in September 2013 to include OFSP in the strategy of the Comprehensive Advanced Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP) as part of a flagship programme. Nutrition was integrated into the draft regional agriculture policy of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in April 2013. In April 2014, the SADC food and nutrition strategy draft document also incorporated food-based approaches, including biofortified crops, as a strategy for addressing micronutrient deficiencies.
- OFSP/biofortification was included in 18 key policy or strategy papers in the three primary countries.
- RAC built the capacity of three host institutions to deliver the training of trainers' course on 'Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Sweetpotato': the Sokoine University of Agriculture (SUA) in Tanzania, University of Eduardo Mondlane (UEM) in Mozambique and Agricultural and Rural Management Training Institute (ARMTI) in Nigeria. The training of trainers' course utilized adult learning techniques. The number of national primary facilitators trained in these three institutions over the three years covering 2012–2014 stands at 41. In partnership with RAC, the host institutions conducted 9 courses, for a total of 224 secondary facilitators trained as trainers. The secondary facilitators further trained 4,160 tertiary facilitators and farmers through 45 step-down courses. The total number of change agents trained by RAC is 4,476, of whom 2101 are female.
- To ensure sustainability, RAC developed and published hard copies of two important toolkits: *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Sweetpotato* training of trainers' manual and the *Engendered OFSP Project Planning, Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation* learning module. The former was translated into Portuguese, Swahili and French, and the latter into Portuguese.
- RAC facilitated the production of clean OFSP vine planting materials by decentralized vine multipliers (DVMs) for widespread distribution, including spearheading the release of two OFSP varieties in Nigeria in December 2012 and June 2013. In total, 7.3 ha of primary seed were established in year 2 of RAC and 11.2 ha in year 3. By July 2014, RAC had registered a seven-fold increase in the hectareage under secondary seed multiplication (4.2 ha in 2012 compared with 28 ha in 2014). Approximately 132,877 households received vines in Tanzania, Mozambique, Nigeria and Ghana.

2. The RAC lesson learning process

RAC adopted a formal and systematic approach to the learning of lessons from the project. Each team member had specific roles to play and expectations to deliver. The RAC management recognized that learning and documenting lessons were organic processes that needed to be properly planned and prepared for. To be fully institutionalized, these processes were embedded in the monitoring, evaluation and learning systems, in which all members of the project staff were involved in their respective roles. Lessons were also shared informally through social connections, discussions, meetings, workshops, conferences and other such opportunities.

Lesson learning in the project was initiated with the building of an interdisciplinary team for effective collaboration. In this regard, RAC organized a strong orientation programme to:

- communicate the project's vision and mission and share the passion of the leaders with the team members
- establish and agree on a common overall goal
- clearly define and simplify the objectives
- understand how to engage and inspire staff
- outline the various roles and responsibilities of the staff and prepare them mentally.

The project leadership defined the scope of authority of each team member's role, recognizing the interdependency of roles and the dynamics of how, by whom and when decisions would be made. This was particularly important and a reflection of RAC's conviction that effective teams are sustained through effective leadership that recognizes the attributes and interests of individual members while ensuring that team objectives were at the forefront. Team learning involved the alignment of the activities, outputs and objectives with the shared vision. This entailed candidly discussing the project's processes and deviations; analysing challenges, successes and causes of action; working out and trying out innovative solutions to the challenges; and sharing experiences and lessons learned with others. Staff were equipped with the capacity and tools for capturing and documenting the processes they followed and the lessons they learned.

In addition to team formation, capacities were enhanced for individual RAC project staff through personal development and training. Through both workshops and mentorship, CIP and external experts assisted in training RAC staff on key advocacy and seed system processes. A five-day training workshop on advocacy and policy analysis organized by RAC provided the opportunity for team building for project staff to become familiar with operational procedures, and for agreeing on the

approaches and methods for monitoring advocacy activities. The team also conducted a situation analysis, identified and trained advocates, and developed advocacy materials and country advocacy strategies through participatory processes consisting of two workshops in each country. During these workshops, RAC compiled the feedback from stakeholders, received clarifications and inputs from the advocates on the OFSP advocacy strategy, and clarified the roles of the advocates and stakeholders in the operationalizing of the OFSP advocacy strategies. In all cases, these workshops endorsed the key elements of the country advocacy strategies. Lessons in advocacy were shared among the advocates and champions at retreats, through reports, in joint meetings and in an electronic discussion group of champions of nutritious foods.

The RAC team understood that advocacy is an art that requires preparation preceded by adequate capacity building. From lessons learned through training and from best practices from other countries, RAC equipped and prepared the advocates for their roles to influence key decision-makers, governments, the private sector, philanthropists and donors to invest in projects in the OFSP value chain. The capacity building approaches used included mentorship, sharing of reports and joint meetings of RAC staff and the advocates, for example during the annual review and planning meetings. Moreover, for continuous learning and for reference, RAC prepared a mix of advocacy factsheets and promotional materials for the advocates.

The development of the 7-volume, 10-day training of trainers' course manual on sweetpotato – *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Sweetpotato* – and the 5-volume, 6-day course learning module on project cycle management – *Engendered Orange-fleshed Sweetpotato Project Planning, Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation* – was a truly collaborative effort of a diverse and multidisciplinary team, according the scientists an opportunity to learn from each other. CIP scientists led the development of the manual, with input from HKI staff, national partners and consultants. For the 10-day training of trainers' course manual, the team identified and assessed existing training materials on sweetpotato and used a format that built on the strengths of those manuals and that filled the gaps identified. The team then added contributions from scientists with many years of experience in sweetpotato work. A highly experienced consultant worked with the specialists to develop the manual and produce the first version of the toolkit. The manual was tested during the first round of training in Mozambique, Tanzania and Nigeria. RAC then organized a workshop of sweetpotato specialists to discuss the lessons learned and the reflections of the facilitators and participants from round-one training to fill the gaps. The workshop made improvements to the manual, and the consultant enriched the revised draft by engendering all sections and integrating new content, images and illustrations and exercises. PowerPoint presentations and learning aids were added and the

manual was then edited and translated into Portuguese, Swahili and French. After agreeing on the content, the facilitators from CIP, HKI and national implementing agencies, who were mostly the authors of the content or topics, adopted a peer learning approach to further refine the topics to prepare the content for training participants on the 10-day courses.

Once the capacities were well built within RAC, the project adopted a cascading approach to deliver the lessons and build the capacities of primary national counterparts and training institutions through mentorship.² For the host institutions and the national facilitators a stepwise organization and process were used to deliver the courses. The RAC team and the national host institutions jointly planned and organized the 10-day training courses and selected participants based on several criteria.³ The course was based on the adult learning methodology, which fosters a participatory, hands-on, learning-by-doing and discovery approach. In year 1 of the project, RAC led the process of organizing and facilitating the course, while the national counterparts backstopped the efforts of their CIP and HKI counterparts. In year 2, these roles were switched, and during year 3, the national counterparts organized and facilitated the course on their own with the RAC and HKI team observing and stepping in only where absolutely necessary. With the capacity of national partners built, it is hoped that these partners can be relied upon to continue offering the courses beyond the life of RAC, and on a full-cost recovery basis. In the 3 rounds of training, the host organizations were encouraged to attract at least 10 fully paying participants as a way to lay the basis for post-RAC training. Important lessons were learned and shared on marketing the course, shortlisting and selecting the participants, preparing for the course, financial management, reporting, and follow-up on the participants trained. Although the project design did not include a budget for step-down courses, the trained

² National facilitators were paired with their CIP and HKI experts and were introduced to the training of trainers' manual, adult learning techniques, facilitation skills and gender issues in OFSP, among other topics. The CIP/HKI and national facilitators jointly developed session plans, PowerPoint presentations and other training materials required for the training and rehearsed the course delivery process.

³ To facilitate and foster the effectiveness of the cascading capacity building approach, RAC selected project sponsored and privately financed participants based on several criteria: minimum qualification of a degree, actively practising agriculture, interested in working with sweetpotato, in a position to influence practice or have the potential to do so in the short or medium term, likely to train others, experienced with training adults, and committed to or interested in investing in OFSP. Other considerations had to do with the aims to maintain a gender balance, a public/private/NGO balance and a social group balance, and to have a diversity of home areas in the community/country for a good spatial spread of the trained facilitators from whom farmers were to learn.

participants were expected to train other people within their communities. Some 45 step-down courses had been conducted by the close of RAC in December 2014.

The development of the project's learning module took a slightly unique pathway, benefiting from the wealth of experience of its subject matter experts and the support of a 'learning expert'. RAC adapted and complemented the content and processes from learning plans jointly developed by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), the International Services for National Agricultural Research (ISNAR) and the Agricultural Research and Development Support Facility (ARDSF) to fit the needs of RAC stakeholders. The learning expert guided the facilitators on the delivery of the course by developing sequential content for each session and practical exercises. The course was designed to prepare the facilitators to facilitate the learning process.

RAC needed to understand how the partnership would be managed and to agree on the roles and responsibilities of the partners and the scope of work. It assessed the capacities and the potential of various training institutions and identified one national counterpart in each primary country, which were Sokoine University of Agriculture (SUA) in Tanzania, the University of Eduardo Mondlane (UEM) in Mozambique and the Agricultural and Rural Management Training Institute ARMTI) in Nigeria. RAC strengthened the capacity of these three to deliver training by supporting the establishment of demonstration plots and installation of irrigation facilities. RAC then organized a five-day pre-training session in each country, held before each course, to build the capacity of national counterparts (primary facilitators) to train secondary facilitators. The length of this training was shortened as years progressed.

Organizational learning required the acquisition of timely data, information and knowledge, which the project gathered and documented on a regular basis from the individual implementers, processes and systems. The team leaders were in constant touch with their teams and regularly shared experiences, challenges, solutions, knowledge and the lessons learned. Each team member had specific responsibilities and delivery requirements and was required to capture successes and failures in the course of implementing the project activities. The lesson learning process called for analysis of project experiences related to specific tasks, activities and objectives.

The lessons were carefully captured and shared regularly among the project team and key stakeholders for learning; innovation; improving the project's performance, efficiency and effectiveness; and to inform future actions. Documented lessons were supported by data and facts. RAC's progress reports, therefore, were important tools in documenting not only processes but also outputs, outcomes and impact. The reports accorded the team the necessary

platform to exchange information and receive feedback and served as key tools for monitoring the delivery process. Some of the reports were intended for RAC management only while others were for internal and external audiences. The internal reports were more frequent and comprised biweekly and quarterly reports, meeting minutes and mission reports. These were sent to CIP and HKI thematic leaders and senior management. Other internal reports such as the quarterly briefing notes, monthly or annual reports, external mid-term and internal end-of-term evaluation reports were submitted to CIP and HKI senior management and the donor. External reports such as those on technical activities, training workshops, situation analysis and advocacy strategies were shared with partners, stakeholders and the general public. The reporting protocols were therefore an essential structure that facilitated strong vertical and horizontal feedback and teamwork in support of the knowledge creation and lesson learning process. Advocacy materials were designed for wide distribution among the key stakeholders and partners. More details on some of these reporting tools are provided below:

- **The biweekly reports** focused on resource use and the activities executed. Based on these reports, the thematic leaders would provide the necessary feedback or institute action to correct what was not going as expected.
- **The quarterly reports** linked the activities to the respective outputs. They provided an opportunity to interrogate the quality and timeliness of the delivery of the expected outputs.
- **The monthly reports** provided the opportunity to assess the extent to which the delivered outputs contributed to the achievement of the two project objectives – policy change and resource mobilization, and capacity building for the engendered OFSP projects.
- **The annual reports** focused on the overall achievement of the RAC objectives and the extent of their contribution to the project goal of improved nutrition, health and incomes.

In all cases, the lessons learned were documented and the way forward charted out. The information and knowledge acquired became part of the cognitive systems, memories and decision-making culture of the project, with the aim to focus on results-based management.

RAC also involved partners and stakeholders to provide ‘external’ insights. This was mostly through the annual stakeholders’ review and planning meetings, mid-term evaluation, management consultative meetings with the donor, and end-of-project stakeholders’ meeting.

- **Annual review and planning meetings:** The RAC team met annually to review the project’s achievements over the year and the cumulative period, plan for

the following year, review sustainability strategies, address the closure of RAC (in the final year), and share the lessons learned. A consultant was identified to facilitate the final meeting in Naivasha, Kenya, 28–29 August 2014, where the team reviewed the achievements of the project towards the expected results over the year; analysed the extent to which RAC had realized its expected outputs, outcomes and impact as laid out in the project theory of change; and reviewed the exit strategies. The meeting also set aside time for a write-shop to reflect on the identified lessons and document the lessons learned.

- **External mid-term and internal end-of-term evaluations:** An external mid-term evaluation was carried out by an independent assessor, with assistance from the project’s M&E specialist. This exercise assessed the project design, implementation process, achievements and challenges against the set objectives. The internal end-of-term evaluation, conducted by the project’s M&E specialist, assessed the performance of RAC and the extent to which it had realized the expected results. The key lessons learned by the project were documented and shared through reports.
- **End-of-project stakeholders’ meeting:** The RAC project scheduled an important close-out meeting at the end of the project in August 2014. The stakeholders reviewed and reflected on the project’s objectives, achievements and challenges, and gave feedback on the lessons learned as presented by the project team. They gave their perspective on the reasons that some of the project activities went well while others did not and advanced recommendations for future projects. They also discussed their plans to continue pursuing RAC objectives beyond the project period and how the information and learning generated during the RAC project would inform their future strategic directions.
- **Management’s consultative meetings with the donor:** The RAC management team and the donor’s programme officers met every two months to discuss the project’s progress and challenges and their solutions and the lessons learned. These meetings were documented through briefing notes and minutes, which were shared among the thematic leaders to guide their decision-making.
- **Monitoring, evaluation and learning:** At the centre of the entire RAC learning process was a comprehensive M&E system that was understood and embraced as a management tool critical for the project’s planning and implementation and handling of feedback. The M&E system encompassed the theory of change with a corresponding results framework and associated indicators of success. This framework formed the base of a comprehensive database that stored cumulative data at the activity, output, outcome and impact levels of operation. Though the planning process was a continuous management function, its formal component was executed during the annual planning and review meetings. During these events resource schedules were

drawn up, negotiated, refined, reviewed and updated to ensure that the activities would generate the required outputs that met the project's objectives and contributed to its goal. The overall purpose of the M&E process was to provide a framework for collecting accurate, relevant and timely information for assessing the project's progress and effectiveness to enable the project to meet the information needs of stakeholders for decision-making, to provide opportunities to learn from experience about what works, and to identify areas that needed modification or corrective action. The M&E process also provided opportunities to learn how to execute activities and how to write reports with the end in mind.

3. Lessons learned by RAC

All the observations, lessons learned and recommendations included here emerged from in-depth analysis of the project's activities, continuous monitoring, evaluation and learning, and from a formal lesson learning retreat. However, owing to the RAC project's short duration, some recommendations were neither shared nor implemented.

Project design lesson 1 – implementation time frames

Background: RAC's overall goal was to increase the rates of vitamin A intake in the targeted beneficiary countries. It was an ambitious pilot project with a very short time frame of three years and six months within which to deliver on its objectives. These objectives were:

- To mobilize new investments by governments, donors and NGOs to scale up adoption of OFSP in five countries;
- To build the capacity of implementing agencies to design and implement technically strong and cost-effective interventions to drive OFSP uptake.

To achieve these objectives, the RAC project was designed with a focus on 'soft' advocacy and capacity building rather than 'hard' technology work. The project was expected to advocate for increased investment, influence policy change and build institutional capacity of national implementing agencies to design and implement gender-sensitive OFSP initiatives in five African countries.

Experience/challenge: RAC surpassed most expectations. But the process was challenging, especially for the staff, who had to work very long hours throughout the life of the project. They spent gruelling weeks on the road and cut back on their vacation time.

Innovation: The RAC project's leaders led by example and worked very hard, providing exemplary leadership. This motivated the staff, advocates, champions

and implementing partners and fostered commitment to the implementation of the work plan and adherence to the project time frame. The stakeholders also embraced RAC's vision of reducing vitamin A deficiency and its debilitating effects.

Analysis: RAC was extremely fortunate in the devotion and commitment showed by its team and their sacrifice of personal time to see the project succeed. But in the interest of maintaining a healthy home–work balance, is not a recommended practice for staff to be called upon to give up their personal time for the sake of a project.

Recommendation: Future projects with transformative expectations should plan longer interventions to safeguard the health of their staff and ensure the long-term sustainability of their interventions.

Lesson learned: Complex projects on advocacy for new investment, policy change and institutional capacity building are social development interventions that need 5 to 10 years of implementation to effectively catalyse change processes and track the results.

Project design lesson 2 – management of multidisciplinary and multi-stakeholder projects

Background: The RAC project's implementing agencies, HKI and CIP, are two autonomous and decentralized organizations, each with unique objectives, values and culture in the five project countries. The project staff in Mozambique, Nigeria and Tanzania had as their administrative managers the national liaison leaders from either HKI or CIP but RAC's regional thematic leaders as their professional supervisors.

Experience/challenge: In the first year, the implementing staff, country managers and regional leadership faced difficulties associated with unclear reporting lines. HKI and CIP viewed the project staff as their staff rather than RAC staff, and some national managers dealt with staff as if they belonged to only national programmes rather than to the regionally coordinated initiative. Country management structures tended to be relatively independent of the regional coordinators, leading to confusion and conflict, which could have been avoided had the project design accommodated such considerations. Given the short length of the project, this obstacle caused a significant loss of staff time and delays.

Innovation: By applying experience and skill, RAC managed to clarify the roles of the partnering organizations and the different staff and operational levels. The regional team worked with national leaders to design and operationalize the matrix management structure. The thematic leaders had responsibility over the

technical issues while the country level leaders oversaw the administrative functions. For example, access to project vehicles at the country level was handled by the country managers, while technical backstopping, monitoring and evaluation of outputs against project objectives were handled by regional thematic leaders. By the end of the first year, the working relationships had become harmonious.

Analysis: RAC was a complex project. It was implemented by two organizations and several partners and across five countries. This called for a cross-functional project management approach with more than one reporting line, and with functions centralized at the regional level and decentralized at the country level.

Recommendation: Projects being implemented and managed by multidisciplinary, multisectoral and decentralized multi-agency teams should include clear reporting lines and well-illustrated matrix management systems in their design. Thematic leaders or the project manager should have direct control over and responsibility for technical reporting lines, while country liaison leaders should manage administrative matters.

Lesson learned: To ensure successful completion of complex, decentralized projects, it is important to have professional, cross-functional project management processes. Matrix management provides the opportunity for vertical and horizontal supervision in complex multidisciplinary, multisectoral and decentralized multi-agency teams. The project staff report to thematic leaders or the project manager who is directly responsible for delivering the project's results, while country liaison leaders manage administrative matters.

Advocacy lesson 1 – advocacy among government officials and policy-makers

Background: In May 2012, the RAC Mozambique team undertook situation analyses to understand the internal and external forces that might influence the project's success and the policy environment, to assess the capabilities for OFSP advocacy and identify potential implementing partners. The team identified a number of policies that they wished to influence, and partnered with civil society actors to do so.

Experience/challenge: It was appropriate for CIP to partner with an NGO to carry out advocacy activities, but the RAC team quickly realized that it needed well-positioned advocates in strategic public sector and research institutions to influence the government policy processes. The team also recognized the need for partnership with government-sponsored policy platforms. Advocacy appeared to work best where RAC activities were co-hosted by a legitimate national policy

forum and supported by senior government officials, as this meant that RAC already had ‘a foot in the door’.

Innovation: RAC engaged three senior policy advisers at SETSAN (National Secretariat for Food Security and Nutrition) as advocates for OFSP. These advisers were supported to push the message that OFSP should be promoted not just for its potential economic advantages but also for nutritional and health reasons. SETSAN was already an established multisectoral policy platform, and so RAC’s advocacy yielded results much faster in Mozambique than in Tanzania or Nigeria, where such platforms did not exist. By December 2014, among the countries involved in RAC, Mozambique had the highest hectareage under OFSP, the highest number of people and institutions trained on OFSP and the highest level of investment.

Analysis: The process of advocating for OFSP among senior public policy-makers is more effective when it is led by well-positioned and respected actors in the public sector and research institutions and supported by civil society organizations.

Recommendation: Advocacy projects should work with the already established multisectoral policy platforms where they exist. Where they do not exist, efforts should be made to facilitate their establishment and to build their institutional capacity.

Lesson learned: In pursuing an advocacy agenda, it is effective to associate with credible national multisectoral policy institutions.

Advocacy lesson 2 – timing of advocacy and OFSP variety introduction

Background: In Nigeria, the RAC team found it very hard to start advocacy activities as planned in the project design because OFSP was relatively unknown in the country.

Experience/challenge: According to the project design, the advocacy team in Nigeria was expected to persuade policy-makers to invest in OFSP even before the crop varieties were released officially. However, it was quickly realized that what was needed in the circumstances more than advocacy for policy change, in fact, was varietal release and then promotion of OFSP.

Innovation: Rather than sticking to the advocacy work that had been planned in the project design, the RAC team revised the project activities to focus on the promotion of OFSP. The team also restructured the agronomic activities so that some of the project resources could be dedicated to fast-tracking the release of the OFSP varieties. Nigeria is now ready for a RAC-style project. Fortunately, as the RAC project came to a close, the Rainbow Project was launched. That project, which was funded by the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Agriculture in response to

RAC's advocacy efforts, will implement some of the activities initiated during the RAC project.

Analysis: The timing of advocacy activities is critical. The project design assumed that RAC Nigeria's advocacy efforts were starting from zero when in fact they were starting from well below zero. No OFSP varieties had been officially released by the government and OFSP was hardly known in Nigeria. Thus, prioritization of the activities to commence with OFSP promotion was appropriate, since one cannot advocate for a commodity that does not exist.

Recommendation: Before active advocacy for policy change commences, OFSP should be promoted and, more importantly, its varieties should already have been released.

Lesson learned: Countries are at different levels in OFSP adoption, and, therefore, entry points for advocacy work should be defined according to their specific context. An analysis should be done to determine the extent to which OFSP varieties have been released and how widespread OFSP is. In countries where no official OFSP varieties have been released, awareness raising and promotion need to precede advocacy. In the case of RAC, Nigeria was not as ready for advocacy as Mozambique was.

Advocacy lesson 3 – holistic messaging

Background: The RAC project design was centred on advocating for OFSP to combat vitamin A deficiency. Although this is a valid goal, there are a host of other reasons to grow, eat and market OFSP.

Experience/challenge: Soon after commencing advocacy activities, it became apparent that the focus on a single crop and micronutrient was not effective in catching policy-makers' attention. In addition, many RAC advocates and champions were more comfortable advocating for biofortification and micronutrients than for OFSP alone as a means of combatting vitamin A deficiency.

Policy debates at both national and regional levels view OFSP as an integral part of the broader public issue of food-based approaches to address malnutrition, or biofortified crops for income, nutrition and health.

Innovation: It made greater sense to focus on a food-based approach such as biofortification to improve nutrition, health and income than on OFSP for vitamin A deficiency reduction. Taking this approach ultimately attracted more partners and stakeholders, creating a much more effective advocacy platform. The regional champions advocated for the adoption of biofortified crops as a food-based approach to combat vitamin A deficiency. National advocates aligned their

advocacy efforts with the current topical issues that policy-makers were driving (the agenda of the day) to create convergence, and OFSP was cited as an example of biofortified crops capable of addressing a serious nutrition and health challenge.

Analysis: RAC's advocacy efforts at the regional and national levels succeeded because they were tailored to the development agenda of the target audience or advocacy platform. As a result, RAC was able to gain partners and elicit wide participation in the project, especially at the regional level.

Recommendation: Future projects should allow flexibility in their messaging plans so that they can be modified to fit different levels of intervention.

Lesson learned: When advocacy efforts are pegged to the broader development agenda and policy debates at national and regional levels, they are likely to attract more partners and be more successful than if they focus on a single crop and micronutrient.

Advocacy lesson 4 – multidisciplinary approaches

Background: The RAC project design envisaged a multidisciplinary approach to combating vitamin A deficiency, linking the agriculture, health and nutrition segments of the government. RAC therefore expected to work with the ministries responsible for these three sectors.

Experience/challenge: Government ministries often are semi-autonomous institutions operating almost independently of each other, and so the advocacy advisers met considerable resistance when they tried to encourage them to work together. Worse still, it became clear that in all the countries except Mozambique, all the decisions on OFSP would be made in the ministry of agriculture; but for this ministry vitamin A deficiency messages were of little interest.

Innovation: RAC provided a multisectoral platform to address interlinked issues from agriculture, nutrition and health. This approach worked best where the countries were already experimenting with multisectoral platforms such as SETSAN in Mozambique that promoted OFSP as an example of how to roll out a food-based approach to combat vitamin A deficiency. Where such platforms did not exist, the process was much slower. Nonetheless, RAC's efforts led to the formation of a broad-based coalition of actors with a shared agenda.

Analysis: Advocacy for increased investment, policy change and capacity building to reduce vitamin A deficiency using OFSP appeared to work better where RAC activities were hosted by a national multidisciplinary platform such as SETSAN. This is partly because the platform enjoyed national legitimacy and partly because it

was an avenue through which key multisectoral actors whose voices were influential in decision-making could be involved.

Recommendation: For better results in advocating for food-based approaches for improved nutrition and health such as the reduction of vitamin A deficiency, it is critical to work with multisectoral platforms, for example those involving agriculture, health and nutrition, to pursue shared objectives. If such platforms do not exist, effort should be made to facilitate their creation.

Lesson learned: Advocating for OFSP for reduced vitamin A deficiency needs to be approached from a holistic perspective by government institutions responsible for agriculture, health and nutrition. For advocacy projects, working with legitimate multidisciplinary and multisectoral national forums ensures effective and sustainable advocacy and programme decisions.

Advocacy lesson 5 – investment guidance

Background: RAC's promotion experts, the regional advocacy adviser, the advocates and the regional champions worked hard on advocacy for policy change and resource allocation for reduction of vitamin A deficiency. To a large extent they were successful in these efforts. But many questions remained unanswered, such as what does it take to invest in OFSP? How much investment is needed to reduce vitamin A deficiency and increase incomes of rural households, and how should it be done? RAC did not have ready answers to these questions, and often the RAC team and other experts from CIP or HKI could only provide sketchy responses.

Experience/challenge: The RAC project was supposed to advocate for OFSP, yet the team could not provide ready answers to investors on how much to invest and on what components. Even the sketchy responses they provided did not have concrete guidance on how to invest in OFSP. Where funding was secured, RAC could not provide tangible guidance on how to implement OFSP activities under different scenarios. Discussions with advocates and regional ambassadors pointed to the need to unpack investment opportunities along the OFSP value chain and to offer a decision-support tool to guide investment processes. Potential investors, for example, needed to be advised on what it would take to invest, how much to invest and how to invest in order to improve food and nutrition security, reduce vitamin A deficiency and increase incomes of rural households.

Innovation: In Tanzania, the RAC team responded to the need for an investment guide by developing a basic PowerPoint tool. This tool helped guide local government leaders as they designed projects and allocated funds for OFSP to combat vitamin A deficiency. Their efforts resulted in a US\$ 111,147.50 investment by local governments in OFSP. Encouraged by Tanzania's experience and by

requests from national advocates and regional champions, RAC produced and published three investment guide products with PowerPoint presentations to inform and guide investors, implementers and policy-makers. The guides were closely aligned to the CAADP process, which was in sync with the RAC regional advocacy strategy and the prevailing development agenda for Sub-Saharan Africa.

Analysis: RAC succeeded in raising investment in OFSP from local government leaders because the simple investment guides directed them on what to invest in and how much to invest, based on the needs of their communities. Indeed, government, donor, private sector and philanthropic investors are more likely to allocate resources to projects where carefully targeted investment guides help them visualize what and where to invest, what it takes to turn ideas into programmes and projects, and the returns on OFSP investment.

Recommendation: When designing projects like RAC that advocate for increased investment in the value chain, the development of investment guides should be planned for from the onset. Such guides allow governments, donors and the private sector to make evidence-based decisions on where and how to spend their money.

Lesson learned: An investment guide is a critical tool in advocating for increased investment in OFSP. Clear guidance on how to transform ideas into programmes and projects leads to better and more effective programming. Consequently, such investment decision-support tools help to spur investment in biofortified crops to combat vitamin A deficiency.

Capacity building lesson 1 – equipping high level advocates

Background: The RAC project design did not provide details on scaling up of OFSP. The advocacy team employed several strategies at national and regional levels and worked with advocates and champions from civil society organizations and the private and public sectors at varying levels of seniority. RAC advocates and champions needed to be sensitized on the importance of promoting and investing in OFSP. They also needed skills to advocate for policy change and investment at the macro level.

Experience/challenge: RAC's experience was that although NGOs carried out advocacy work, most of them tended to focus on capacity building at the operational level. Often, their project designs focused on implementation at the farmers' level and ignored the broader political economy that is so crucial for upscaling. Understandably, these advocates faced challenges when engaging in high level policy processes. Similarly, in instances where relatively junior national

promotion experts were expected to support high level national and regional advocates and champions, the arrangement failed to gain traction.

Innovation: RAC organized retreats in exclusive resorts facilitated by highly respected consultants for high level advocates, regional champions and ambassadors to share experiences. RAC used this opportunity to disseminate the necessary knowledge and develop skills among the high ranking personalities. As an outcome of these retreats, RAC gained committed champions in strategic organizations, who have continued to actively promote RAC's agenda beyond the project life.

Analysis: RAC learned that to bring about sustainable uptake of OFSP, there was need for high level policy engagement in agriculture, nutrition and health. Considering that advocacy was relatively new in these fields, it was found necessary to build capacity of the high level personalities who were capable of engaging in high level policy processes. However, many of these targeted champions would have felt that training undermined their status. RAC therefore introduced the concept of retreats, which resonated with the target groups. The retreats organized by RAC helped the advocates to own the vision of RAC and equipped them with information and skills to advocate for OFSP at national and regional levels.

Recommendation: Capacity building initiatives for senior personalities to engage in high level advocacy processes should be innovative and well resourced. In the case of RAC, retreats facilitated by high level and reputed specialists were found to be very successful.

Lesson learned: Formal retreats are an effective platform for exchanging advocacy information and equipping senior personalities with requisite knowledge and skills for influencing policy at the high level. It is critical for them to understand the politico-economy forces that drive the issues at stake. It is equally important to articulate the issues at different levels of scale. For example, while the concept of food-based approaches to combat vitamin A deficiency makes sense in the policy formulation processes, the concept of OFSP as an intervention to combat vitamin A deficiency is useful in formulation of national programmes in which resources are allocated to specific subsectors.

Capacity building lesson 2 – development of learning toolkits

Background: The RAC design anticipated that developing learning toolkits in multiple languages for the annual 10-day sweetpotato training and 6-day project management courses would be a relatively simple process involving low resource investment in time and money. It was expected that this activity would be

completed in the first year of the project for the products to be used in the second year's events. As it turned out, the project design underestimated the time, human and financial resources required to design, translate and publish holistic learning modules.

Experience/challenge: In the course of implementing the project, RAC team members learned that developing, translating and publishing the toolkits are complex processes involving specialized input from multidisciplinary teams across partner organizations and service providers. The process started as early as 2012 but some of the translations were completed only in 2015, and only with injection of a lot more resources than was initially anticipated.

The resources assigned for the development of the seven-volume training of trainers manual on *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Sweet Potato* and the five-volume project toolkit *Engendered OFSP Project Planning, Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation* were inadequate, and the challenge was further complicated by the fact that the learning kits needed to be published in English, French, Kiswahili and Portuguese. Consequently, publishing of the toolkits had to wait until June 2013 for savings to accrue from other budget lines. This had a knock-on effect on training events, causing implementation delays.

Innovation: The RAC management engaged a multidisciplinary team of specialized experts from CIP, HKI and national partner institutions, and a highly experienced consultant to help develop quality content. Savings from other budget lines were used to meet the costs for translation, proofreading and printing the guides. RAC also worked with other projects to bridge the production costs. For example, it partnered with the Jumpstarting project to translate the French version of the OFSP guides in 2014.

Analysis: Unforeseen processes and costs delayed both the training of trainers' manual and the project cycle management learning kit. This had had knock-on effects on training and project design and implementation. Nonetheless, the production of the toolkits in four languages ensured that the courses were conducted using the appropriate language of instruction.

Recommendation: Where developing and publishing learning toolkits in multiple languages is part of the project design, the project plan and budget must provide for adequate time, human talent and financial resources for this.

Lesson learned: Development of quality learning toolkits in multiple languages took significant amounts of time, human talent and financial resources. But once they were developed, these toolkits continued to be used way beyond the project period.

Capacity building lesson 3 – market linkages

Background: In all the three priority countries, RAC was supposed to focus on capacity building and advocacy for policy change and resource mobilization. The RAC project design assumed that the linkages to markets and to agroprocessing for value addition would be the responsibility of other actors. In Mozambique, where OFSP was relatively well established, links to markets were beginning to form by the time the RAC project was initiated, but this was not the case in Nigeria and Tanzania.

Experience/challenge: RAC did not dwell on the linkages to markets or agroprocessing for value addition. In Nigeria and Tanzania, farmers and marketers were slow to adopt OFSP since the crop was highly perishable, and so the market infrastructure had to be created. Agroprocessing techniques were very slow to develop and did not take into account the speed at which the OFSP value chain needed to evolve.

Innovation: Through the ‘Engendered OFSP Project Planning, Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation’ course, RAC equipped the participants with requisite skills in project proposal writing and implementation of OFSP projects. RAC strongly encouraged the participants and other partners to design projects that had strong marketing, agroprocessing and value addition components. In Nigeria, various RAC partners had already begun processing and marketing OFSP products. Moreover, CIP’s two new projects, SUSTAIN and Jumpstarting have strong elements on access to markets and agroprocessing.

Analysis: In countries where OFSP was relatively new and unfamiliar, the gaps in production, agroprocessing and markets discouraged investment in value addition.

Recommendation: Future project designs addressing scalability and sustainability of biofortified crops need to link advocacy and capacity building with access to markets and agroprocessing to drive demand.

Lesson learned: Forging linkages between agribusiness and markets is critical in ensuring adoption of a technology, economic empowerment and improved livelihoods of the communities involved. Strengthening the capacity of change agents to develop projects that address the entire sweetpotato value chain encourages the development of fundable projects with strong components in marketing, agroprocessing and value addition.

Capacity building lesson 4 – pre-training sessions

Background: The project design assumed that only one five-day pre-training session would be required per country. It was planned that all the PowerPoint

presentations, course materials, field activities and exercises for the 10-day training of trainers' course would be prepared during this pre-training session, then used in all subsequent courses.

Experience/challenge: As it turned out, some of the national facilitators would drop out and be replaced by others in subsequent training courses and so the pre-training sessions had to be repeated for the sake of the new facilitators. In addition, some of the facilitators trained during the first pre-training session had limited experience working with sweetpotato in general and almost none working with OFSP value chains. These inexperienced facilitators, as well as the new arrivals, participated in plenary, group and practical sessions. They were also paired with CIP/HKI experts. Overall, they received training on the adult learning methodology, facilitation and communication skills and the sweetpotato value chain. In all the pre-training sessions, the primary facilitators proposed that the pre-training sessions needed to be held long before the 10-day training course to give them enough time to plan and prepare for the training course. But because of RAC's budget limitations, the pre-training sessions had to be organized a week before the training course to cut back on travel and related costs and time.

Innovation: To adequately deal with the need for the additional pre-training sessions required before each course held 2012 to 2014, the RAC management used creative budgeting approaches to divert funding from other budget lines. The RAC team mentored the facilitators and finalized the advanced session plans for the training before conducting the 10-day training course. These sessions proved very useful and fostered learning and clarification on grey areas. The positive effect was seen in the third and final courses, where national facilitators organized and facilitated the 10-day course on their own, with the RAC team only observing the process.

Analysis: The pre-training sessions equipped the national facilitators with the requisite skills and technical knowledge for facilitating the 10-day course using adult learning techniques. The pairing of national facilitators with CIP and HKI scientists for the various modules allowed mentoring and advanced planning. The teams jointly developed and reviewed session plans, prepared and revised the training materials and exercises and rehearsed the course delivery process for their modules. In sum, 10 pre-training sessions were held, 3 of which were in each of the primary countries of Tanzania, Nigeria and Mozambique, and 1 in Burkina Faso.

Recommendation: Project designers should budget for pre-training sessions before each training course. These sessions should be held long before the respective training of trainers' courses to ensure sufficient lead time is provided and to prepare for the associated practical sessions.

Lesson learned: The pre-training course provided a platform for advanced planning, equipping of the facilitators with facilitation skills and mastery of adult learning principles and techniques that ensure effective learning. Training of the primary facilitators and planning (pre-training) need to be conducted as early as possible as opposed to being carried out back-to-back with the 10-day course, to ensure that the facilitators have adequate time for planning, preparation and adapting of the content to the local context. Future projects should therefore budget adequately for this activity.

Capacity building lesson 5 – step-down courses

Background: After being trained during the pre-training session, the primary facilitators were expected to facilitate the 10-day training of trainers' course. The secondary facilitators trained would then step down the training to at least 60 other facilitators. The step-down courses were expected to be similar to the 10-day courses but much shorter events.

Experience/challenge: The RAC project design did not include a budget to support the step-down courses, and so those attending these courses were expected to mobilize their own resources. Mozambique had the highest number of step-down courses. This is because a good proportion of the participants were from NGOs with funds for the training and scaling up sweetpotato production and consumption at the community level. In Nigeria and Tanzania, most of the participants were from public institutions without the budgets for such courses. These institutions needed time to incorporate this agenda into their budgets. Consequently, for Nigeria and Tanzania, only a few secondary facilitators were able to undertake the step-down training.

Innovation: The RAC team worked with the national implementing agencies to explore funding sources. The participants were encouraged to share their action plans with their superiors, brief them on what they had learned and seek their support to fund the step-down training course. In Mozambique, some participants contacted their line managers before developing their action plans to ensure their buy-in. Those who obtained funding and organized the training were encouraged to invite their colleagues as co-facilitators. RAC and the participants also sought support for the step-down courses from other projects and programmes such as the Rainbow project in Nigeria and the CGIAR Research Programme on Dryland Systems and the West Africa Agricultural Development Programme based in Ghana.

Analysis: The RAC project assumed that the training of trainers' course participants would be able to mobilize the resources for the step-down courses. However, in situations where OFSP was relatively new, collaborating organizations needed time

to absorb the new ideas before incorporating the OFSP agenda into their budgets. Where the course added value to their scope of work, some of the participants working in NGOs were able to secure funding for the step-down training.

Recommendation: Future project designs should include a budgetary allocation for seed money for step-down courses. This will ensure that the required number of people receive training as early as possible during the project period.

Capacity building lesson 6 – seed multiplication

Background: The RAC project design envisaged that decentralized vine multipliers (DVMs) would produce clean planting materials. The DVMs were expected to operate from wetland areas and to distribute the vines for planting at the onset of the rains.

Experience/challenge: RAC quickly realized that the weather patterns made the distribution of the vines at the onset of the rains unrealistic. In Tanzania, for example, RAC produced seed during the rainy season but the demand from farmers was low because they had already planted other crops. The situation was much more challenging in Nigeria, where the new variety was released off-season without synchronization with the dissemination activities, which made the use of irrigation facilities inevitable. In Tanzania, the vines had to be watered by hand using buckets. This resulted in high labour costs and limited the amount of land that could be cultivated. To change this situation, it was necessary to install irrigation equipment.

Innovation: The RAC team realized that to attempt seed multiplication without irrigation was folly – it could cause disease and water stress for the vines and hamper the steady flow of vines to the secondary and tertiary levels. Using unspent funds from other line items, RAC supported the national research stations at Kibaha and Ukiriguru in Tanzania with funds to procure basic irrigation equipment for delivering water to their primary vine multiplication plots. This has resulted in the expansion of the area under vine multiplication in Tanzania and an increase in the vines harvested from the primary sites. RAC also supported the procurement of a basic drip irrigation system for ARMTI to ensure the availability of vines and roots for the training of trainers' courses.

Analysis: Vine multiplication is necessarily a dry season activity for the vines to be ready for the onset of the rains. By using irrigation systems, planning well and implementing proper distribution strategies, the project saw a 10-fold increase in the number of vines distributed from the primary sites to DVMs and subsequently to farmers in all the countries.

Recommendation: With the prevailing change in climatic conditions, where rains are increasingly unpredictable, irrigation is necessary to produce clean planting materials to distribute to farmers at the onset of the rains. Additionally, in instances where an intervention such as the use of OFSP for vitamin A deficiency has not been sufficiently established, subsidies for seed multiplication and distribution can expedite demand creation.

Lesson learned: Synchronizing seed availability with the onset of the rains is critical in sweetpotato production. This essentially means that there needs to be reliable water sources during the dry season. Investing in irrigation upfront enables the synchronizing of seed multiplication activities with the demand period for clean planting materials with the onset of the rains.

4. Conclusion

Despite the limitations in the intervention design, many lessons were learned from this pilot project. As a learning initiative in five countries and over the three years and six months covering June 2011–December 2014, RAC successfully tested innovative approaches to generating investment, reaching policy-makers and training advocates and implementers on OFSP, a new technology that links agriculture and nutrition. The RAC project surpassed all expectations, an achievement that would not have been possible without a meticulous and systemized M&E design. The M&E process allowed the RAC team to extract lessons and learn from this pilot intervention in real time. Where adjustments were required, it was possible to make them quickly and easily. This allowed the project team to learn from the mistakes as well as from the successes. As a result of this conscious learning by doing approach, the three years and six months of implementing the project turned out to be sufficient to test the RAC model, but probably not enough to see change and impact, which would have been of great value for a project that was centred on institution building and policy change.

This short booklet should help other development practitioners to learn from RAC's experiences and ensure that the lessons learned inform necessary management decisions and lead to the delivery of the expected results.

The International Potato Center (known by its Spanish acronym CIP) is a research-for-development organization with a focus on potato, sweetpotato, and Andean roots and tubers. CIP is dedicated to delivering sustainable science-based solutions to the pressing world issues of hunger, poverty, gender equity, climate change and the preservation of our Earth's fragile biodiversity and natural resources.

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