

Central and Western Africa

We spoke on the phone to Dr Berga Lemaga in Kampala during the last week of October. Dr Lemaga is the Coordinator of the PREPACE Network in Eastern and Central Africa. We spoke to Dr Lemaga about the work of PRAPACE, and he informed us about the latest developments in the potato industries of Kenya and Uganda.

PRAPACE

PRAPACE is a French acronym for Regional Potato and Sweetpotato Improvement Network in Eastern and Central Africa. It developed out of PRAPAC, a network established in 1982 by the national research institutions of Burundi, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo to link their potato programs. Uganda joined in 1990, Ethiopia and Kenya in 1992 when the network took sweetpotato as a second crop. Eritrea joined in 1995, Madagascar and Tanzania in 1999. The Sudan will join soon. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) funds PRAPACE. The network is affiliated with the International Potato Center ([CIP](#)), which provides resources for improved germplasm, scientific information, training, and administrative support. According to Dr Lamaga, potatoes and sweetpotatoes, low-yielding commodity crops in Eastern and Central Africa, can become high-yielding crops with good market potential. PRAPACE, the potato and sweetpotato network, supports the National Agricultural Research Systems to boost seed and ware production, develop better-targeted varieties and promote new products. It also helps prevent regional disasters by anticipating events such as El Niño and by creating variety "seed banks". More land is continuously being allocated to the production of potatoes and sweetpotatoes in Eastern and Central Africa. Potato is an important food and cash crop in the highlands and is becoming an increasingly favoured food in urban areas, partially due to the growing number of fast food industries and hotels. However, yields are low. The major contributing factors are diseases, insect pests, poor soils, and unfavourable weather conditions and, above all, lack of planting material and poor extension services. *Note: More information about the latest figures re: yields in some of the countries in Central and Western Africa will be published in the December issue of this Newsletter.*

Kenya

Processing Dr Lemaga told us that the *demand for crisps and chips* in the fast food industries is increasing rapidly in Kenya. Processors require potato stocks with well-defined qualities, including consumer acceptability. A pilot economic analysis in Nairobi showed that processing potatoes into chips is indeed profitable. Since the identification of some local varieties for chips and crisps, farmers have a better chance of earning more money if they grow these varieties. The economic advantages will increase even further if farmers organize themselves better and form associations or cooperatives which can take care of a growing potato processing industry.

Uganda

Processing: In Uganda the market for *potato chips and french fries* is also growing, especially in the bigger cities. In Kampala, the price of the Rutuku variety is higher than that of other varieties just because it makes good quality chips that absorb little fat and have a shining golden colour. Since Rutuku is red skinned, all red-skinned varieties now have a better market price than most white-skinned varieties.

New varieties: In 1998-1999, three potato and six sweetpotato varieties were officially released in Uganda. CIP potato varieties *Nakapot 1, Nakapot 2 and Nakapot 3* were released in early 1999. They are resistant to late blight and viruses and tolerant to unfavourable environmental conditions, particularly drought and marginal soils. Nakapot 1 and Nakapot 2 are early maturing with wide adaptability and have white tubers. Nakapot 3 is medium maturing, adapted to highland areas and its tubers are pinkish-red. The three varieties are recommended for French fries, crisps, mashing, and boiling and are favoured by consumers.