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UNIVERSITY OF ZIMBABWE

POLICY BRIEF



COP28
UAE



Sweet Potato:

**A Beacon of Hope
for Africa in a
Changing Climate**

Sweet Potato: A Beacon of Hope for Africa in a Changing Climate

As climate change disrupts the current cropping systems and threatens food security, the Government of Zimbabwe has been promoting transitioning of cropping systems that embrace the underutilised disease- and drought-tolerant crops that are less sensitive to climate change to move millions of households out of poverty in Africa.

Sweet potato (*Ipomoea batatas* L. Lam), with its remarkable resilience to harsh environments and rich nutritional profile, has offered promise as a solution to the challenges posed by climate change. Sweet potato is packed with better protein quality, higher content of fermentable fiber, essential vitamins including pro-vitamin A, and high iron content, making it an ideal ingredient for nutritious and delicious food products.



The University of Zimbabwe has been using the power of science, technology and innovation to develop value chain of a disease- and drought-tolerant sweet

potato as part of the Government of Zimbabwe's initiatives towards building climate resilient agricultural value chains. As part of the Government of Zimbabwe's drive to promote generation of new industries and new entrepreneurs that respond to the changing needs and requirements of society and global environmental changes including climate change, the University of Zimbabwe recently established a company, VN Agro (Pvt.) Ltd. The company produces at industrial scale food and feed products. It has a bakery which produces bread and confectionary made from sweet potato. The substitution of wheat with sweet potato in bread making is a cutting-edge innovation addressing the projected 15% decline in wheat yield due to climate change, ensuring food and nutrition security in communities across Zimbabwe and beyond. The University of Zimbabwe has been inspired by the Government of Zimbabwe's Heritage-based Education 5.0 Philosophy, which is largely concerned with generation of goods and services for the benefit of society.



The Bread and Confectionary Plant contributes towards increasing the supply of affordable and highly nutritious bread on the market. The production of bread with sweet potato will reduce the national wheat import bill, thereby saving the country's foreign currency through import substitution. The programme is training and empowering thousands of farmers in Zimbabwe for increased production of fresh sweet potato with a ready market that increase farmers' income. This model will be replicated by various businesses across the country, even in rural communities to dramatically bolster production of sweet potato-based bread and confectionaries. The University of Zimbabwe's sweet potato value chain initiative is therefore not only stabilising food supply chain in the changing climate, but creates economic opportunities for farmers and food related businesses., thereby promoting economic growth and strengthens local economies.

This initiative has been enabled through the University of Zimbabwe's Innovation

Hub. The Government has been developing the Innovation Hubs across the country's universities and research institutions to provide a conducive environment for co-generation of innovations and nurturing establishment of new companies and entrepreneurs.



Call to Action:

Embrace the future of food with sweet potato bread and confectionary products! Support the University of Zimbabwe's ground-breaking research, explore the delicious and nutritious options available from local bakeries, and contribute to a more sustainable and climate-resilient food system.