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Can African Indigenous Vegetables Contribute to Nutrition Security in Kenya?

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Abstract

Kenya is classified as a food deficit country, close to one of each three Kenyans (14.5 million) suffers from chronic food insecurity and poor nutrition. In addition, about 30 percent of the children country wide are stunted, 13 percent moderately wasted, while 7 percent are moderately underweight. Approximately 20 percent of the population does not attain the minimum dietary requirements to sustain a healthy and productive life according to the National Bureau of Statistics. African indigenous vegetables (AIVs) contain a lot of beneficial micro-nutrients, which are critical for achieving nutrition security. The study seeks to assess the household preferences regarding vegetable consumption. A mixed method approach was used to analyse a panel data-set that covered 706 households in four counties in Kenya. The data was collected between 2014 and 2016.

The results show that, the consumption of AIVs is not widely acknowledged or documented. This is because the vegetables are usually consumed as an accompaniment. Households purchased an estimated 10 percent of their vegetable requirements and spent 16 times more on exotic vegetable when compared to how much they spend on AIVs. In seasons when households did not have enough food they spent 19 times more money on exotic vegetables when compared to AIVs. In cases where households had enough food they spent 9 time more money on exotic vegetables. This is an indicator that exotic vegetables were the preferred vegetables for most households that purchased vegetables. For the households that produced AIVs their consumption was positively correlated with their household income, household size, the amount of land under AIVs and their food security status. The study proposes the following; First, concerted efforts are needed to increase the availability and consistent supply of AIV products in the market. Secondly, innovations need to be upscaled to show case the nutritional benefits of AIVs for the different stages of growth, to support the life cycle approach in the management of nutrition security.

Keywords: African indigenous vegetable, food security, nutrition security