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Women’s Indigenous Knowledge and its Contribution to Sustainable Livelihoods: The Case of African Indigenous Vegetables in Kenya

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Abstract

This paper aims at demonstrating the important role of indigenous knowledge and its contribution to sustainable livelihoods through an investigation of the African indigenous vegetables (AIVs) value chain from a gender perspective. AIVs are a woman’s crop and as such they have indigenous knowledge which they pass on orally and practically regarding the production, preparation, preservation and uses of AIVs. This knowledge is in danger of being lost if not well preserved and disseminated especially because of increased commercialisation of the AIVs value chain, the loss of the women’s share, rural urban migration, and the emphasis on cash crop production.

This paper presents the findings of the HORTINLEA subproject “Gender order: Embedding gender in horticultural value chains to close the productivity gap.” The results are based on field research carried out in the rural, peri-urban and urban areas in Kenya. The research employed the use of qualitative methods of data collection such as semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with male and female farmers, traders, and respondents from NGOs, research organisations and Government. Qualitative content analysis was carried out using MAXQDA software.

The results demonstrated that women have knowledge on AIVs varieties, seed bulking, production processes, medicinal values, ecological sustainability, social networking and methods of AIVs preparation and preservation that contribute to food security and sustainable livelihoods for their households and communities. The paper therefore seeks to discuss methods of oral knowledge preservation and dissemination by universities and policy innovations that can be made by decision makers to make visible the important indigenous knowledge contribution of women to food security.

Keywords: African indigenous vegetables (AIVs), gender, indigenous knowledge, policy innovations, sustainable livelihoods, women