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## Traditional and Exotic Vegetable Diversity in the Field and on the Plate of Women in two Different Agroecological Zones of Rural Tanzania

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### Abstract

A high level of agrobiodiversity, which provides important nutritional diversity is a valuable resource in supplying the necessary nutrients for a health-oriented human diet. Moreover, traditional foods, particularly vegetables, are usually more nutritious compared to exotic alternatives. Despite this, traditional vegetables are still neglected in research and development.

In a study on diversity of both traditional and exotic vegetables, the production, gathering, and consumption of vegetables of 291 women were studied by interview. This research was performed during both dry and rainy season in three different rural districts (Muheza, Kongwa, Singida) situated in two different agro-ecological zones of Northeastern and Central Tanzania.

Vegetable diversity produced and consumed by women was influenced not only by agro-ecological zones but also by seasonality, the distance of consumers to urban centers, and individual preferences. Consequently, vegetable diversity used over the whole year varied to a great extent among the three districts researched (Muheza about 70, Kongwa 35, Singida 20 different vegetable types). The mean number of vegetable types consumed per woman and week varied among districts and between dry and rainy season (Muheza dry 6.6 / rainy 7.8; Kongwa 4.9 / 6.1; Singida 6.1 / 5.4). Similarly, the daily amount of vegetable consumed also varied (Muheza dry 210g / rainy 140g; Kongwa 300g / 230g; Singida 290g / 280g). Women in Muheza district with the highest vegetable diversity available, consumed the lowest amount of vegetables.

In general, traditional vegetables were consumed more often and also in a larger quantity than exotic vegetables because of the distance of consumers to urban markets and exposure to exotic types. However, it remained open if exotic vegetables are eaten instead of or additionally to traditional ones.

This study identified factors influencing production and consumption of vegetables. Further work is needed to compare the impact of both vegetable variety and traditional versus exotic vegetable consumption on the health of women, especially in terms of micronutrient supply.

**Keywords:** African traditional vegetables, Tanzania, vegetable consumption, vegetable diversity, vegetable production

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