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An Evaluation of Native West African Vegetables

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Abstract

Vegetables are a vital constituent of the West African diet, and traditional vegetable species are highly important yet many species of African native vegetables are poorly known, being used only locally. Native West African vegetables have in the past and presently been paid too little or no attention both by local, national and international research institutions. Seemingly, many local inhabitants in the West African region appear not to have deep scientific knowledge on the values possess by native vegetables species in their vicinity. By so doing, they sometimes turn to prefer the cultivation and consumption of exotic vegetable species rather than native ones-unconsciously or consciously rendering unexploited native vegetable species to extinction.

This research was purely a desk work research; focusing on the works of other authors with the prime aim of generating with analysis a list of native West African vegetables in terms of medicinal, nutritional and economic values. First, all the vegetables were identified based on local or regional origin, common name, scientific name, botanical family and types (leafy, root, legume or fruit vegetable). Second, the identified vegetables were then evaluated based on their nutritive, economic, and medicinal values. To this effect, a total of twenty three native West African vegetables were identified and analysed with respect to the different information sources. For example, in terms of medicinal properties, a vegetable like “Egusi” (*Citrullus colocynthis*) was found to have ribosome-inhibiting properties, potential as a therapeutic agent for HIV/AIDS... Also, nutritionally, the leaves of “Eru” (*Gnetum africanum*) species were also found to constitute an important source of protein, essential amino acids and mineral elements.

It can be concluded from this research that, although native West African vegetables are not well known and documented, the few that have been identified and analysed within the scope of the current research prove to have profound nutritional, economic and medicinal potential which if well exploited would possibly open up new markets for the global commercialisation of native West African vegetables likewise, encourage the local and global cultivation, consumption and conservation of many other native West African vegetables-especially orphan species.

Keywords: Indigenous African vegetables, West African vegetables, vegetables native, under-utilised crops