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“Bridging the gap between increasing knowledge and decreasing resources”

## Can Local Foods Improve Dietary Diversity? The Biodiversity for Food and Nutrition Initiative in Kenya

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### Abstract

Kenya is rich in plant diversity. It is home to 7,500 plant species of which 475 are endemic. Despite this richness, most Kenyans rely on a handful of food crops for their sustenance. Kenyans consume very small amounts of fruits and vegetables at 40g per day, way below the WHO recommended intake of 400g per day. Maize, beans, banana, rice and potatoes make up the bulk of the daily energy requirements of a typical Kenyan household, yet many indigenous species have been shown to be nutritionally equivalent or superior than more commonly used crops, both in terms of energy and of the micronutrients they provide. Knowledge and policy gaps exist, however, in the occurrence and use of this biodiversity as well as in food composition data to demonstrate the nutritional importance of many of these underutilised species, which are more affordable and better adapted to the environments in which they grow. To close this gap, the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI) – executing agency of the Biodiversity for Food and Nutrition (BFN) initiative in Kenya, in collaboration with Bioversity International and relevant country partners – is documenting the current status of agricultural biodiversity in Busia County in Western Kenya. So far, surveys have shown the existence of rich biodiversity in the area – cultivated and wild staples, vegetables, fruits, small livestock and fish – but the effective reliance on very few species. Low dietary diversity is mostly due to changing eating habits/preferences and lack of access to good quality seed. A socio-economic survey identified the lack of organised market channels coupled with poor agronomic practices and limited knowledge surrounding the production, consumption and marketing of traditional crops as the main causes of food insecurity in Busia County. Results of socio-economic surveys and situational analysis will be presented.

**Keywords:** Agricultural biodiversity, BFN project, Kenya, local foods