IN THE ELIMINATION OF HUNGER AND POVERTY IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA **IMPORTANCE** "Even to-day the distribution of the hoe cultures is on a tremendous scale, with tropical Africa, America, Indonesia, and Oceania as its principal regions. Among the most frequently cultivated plants are bulbs and tubers, like yams, manioc, batata, taro, and potato." The Origin of Things (1949) **FARMING SELLING PREPARING EATING FOOD SECURITY** "This food is like a reserve. This food helps us when money is scarce or you have no money in your pocket." Dan Maxwell (1994) **SELLING PREPARING CULTURAL VALUE** "Before meals they usually wash their hands, which serve both as knife, fork and spoon; however at the coco[yam]-banquet they sometimes use a wooden stick. They usually eat coco[yam] by itself, only spiced with the usual extremely strong pepper: and on a finer occasion palm-oil is added..." Swedish Ventures in Cameroon, 1833-1923

THE ROLE OF EDIBLE AROIDS

Edible aroids or taro (L. Araceae) are on record as the world's most ancient food crops. Their antiquity and importance in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is underlined by their cultural value and numerous dishes. In the region faced with chronic food insecurity, climate change and loss of biodiversity, taro (L. Colocasia) and tannia (L. Xanthosoma) continue to make a valuable contribution to the rural and urban diet. All plant parts of the most widely cultivated and consumed aroids are edible and nutritious, still they are mostly cultivated for their starchy underground parts. Taro and tannia grow well in marginal, often harsh and complex environments not well suited for intensive

CULTIVATION AREA

CORMS

LEAVES

agriculture and conventional staple crops such as wheat, corn and rice. Nicknamed a "poor man's" or "woman's crop", they are essentially grown by resource poor farmers that rely on infertile and marginal soils for food, income and employment. Although the scope and scale of taro and tannia cultivation for local and home consumption is unknown, it is estimated that SSA accounts for three-quarters of the global production. Because edible aroids provide food, income and a safety net for the world's most vulnerable people, there are practical, cultural, and moral grounds to optimize their cultivation and utilization.

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