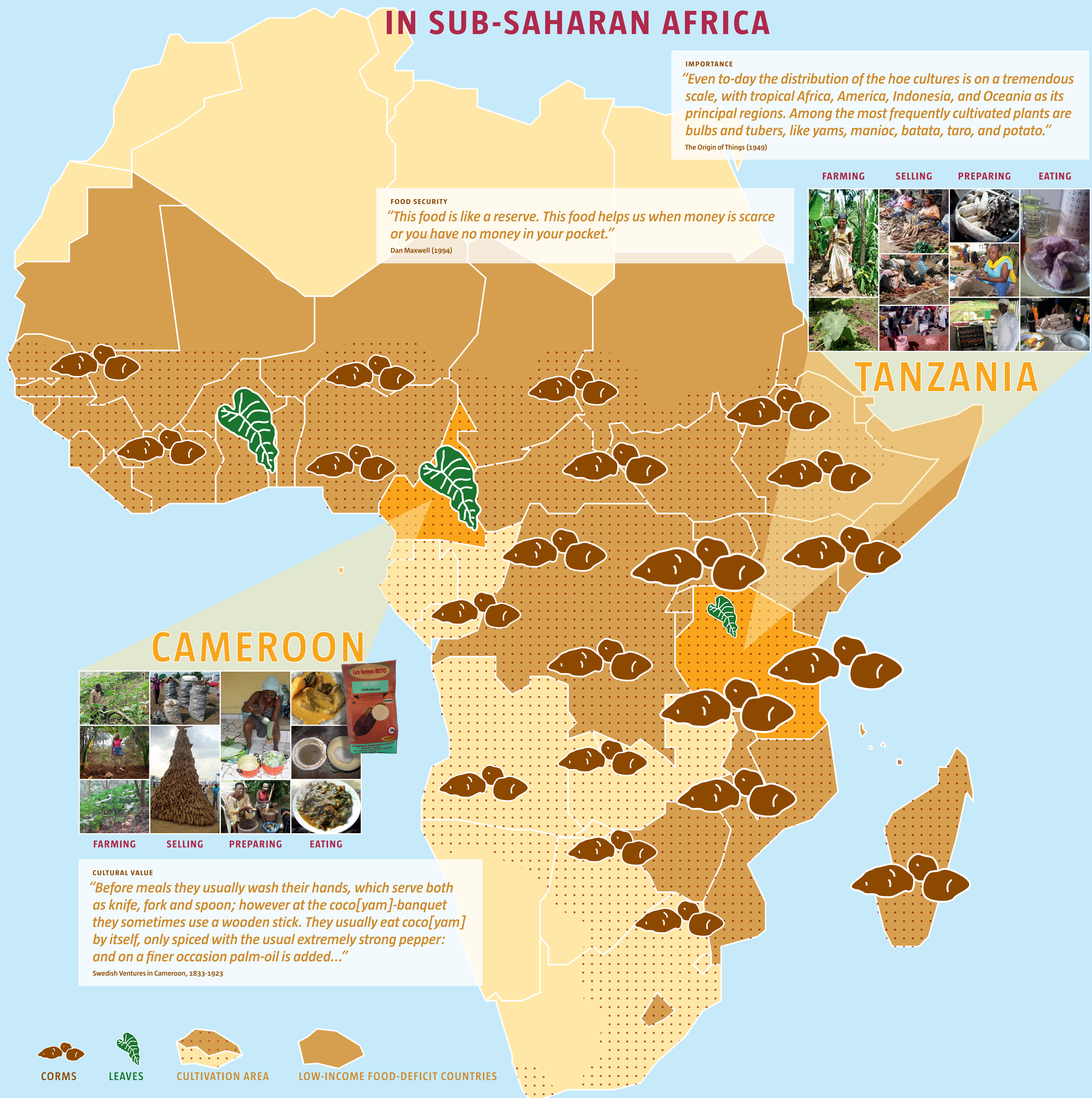


THE ROLE OF EDIBLE AROIDS IN THE ELIMINATION OF HUNGER AND POVERTY IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA



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

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.