



Tropentag, September 20-22, 2017, Bonn

“Future Agriculture:
Socio-ecological transitions and bio-cultural shifts”

The Use of Indigenous Knowledge for Nutrition Communication: An Example of Pastoralists in Turkana County

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Abstract

Indigenous knowledge increasingly gains interest as an important aspect in development, particularly in the case of people living in marginalised regions like Turkana County in northern Kenya. To date, however, such knowledge is underutilised in the context of development activities, especially, in the field of health care and nutrition.

Bioversity International is a non-governmental research for development organisation engaged in projects addressing agrobiodiversity conservation in the Turkana region in Kenya. Bioversity and the University of Hohenheim jointly conducted a study to investigate the potential utilisation of indigenous knowledge for nutrition communication focussing on local narratives and local institutions that store and transmit knowledge. The objectives were: 1) to detect certain educative messages in local narratives, 2) to assess what positive aspects of the local knowledge system can be utilised in nutrition communication, and 3) to explore local populations' as well as external administrative stakeholders attitudes and perceptions towards indigenous knowledge.

In April 2016, twelve Focus Group Discussions involving the local population were conducted. Additionally, eleven structured Expert Interviews with different stakeholders from government or NGOs were conducted in July - August of the same year.

The findings demonstrate local people's strong connection and appreciation of indigenous knowledge and the people who store and transmit it. Only few nutritional messages could be detected in local narratives, but, upon request, crucial knowledge about nutrition was available at community level. Local decision makers are partly aware of the potential use of indigenous knowledge systems and some examples of incorporating nutrition-related messages in local narratives were mentioned. The overall attitudes towards the utilisation of indigenous knowledge systems were positive. Stakeholders grown up in the particular cultural setting of Turkana are even more aware of the potential use of local knowledge. Lastly, the local population calls for an acknowledgment of their inherent culture, traditions and knowledge.

The findings, therefore, support the use of indigenous knowledge systems and local narratives in special, as a well-adapted means to deliver nutrition-related messages in Turkana County.

Keywords: Cultural-centric narratives, indigenous knowledge, Kenya, nutrition communication

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