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African Indigenous Vegetables Contribution Towards Food Security and Safety in Kenya: A Meal Cultures Perspective

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Abstract

Food insecurity and micronutrient deficiencies have been persistent issues in Kenya that are averting the achievement of the sustainable development goals. One of the existing strategies to alleviate the situation is the use of African indigenous vegetables (AIVs). Notable for their high levels of bioactive compounds, AIVs have been recommended as beneficial for nutrition and health. Besides, some species grow naturally and their minimal requirement for fertilisers and pesticides contributes to food safety. AIVs were part of the meal culture of most Kenyan households during the pre-colonial times. However, during the colonial times, there was a change in the meal cultures resulting from introduction of exotic vegetables. Thus, AIVs were neglected but as a result of concerted efforts by researchers and other stakeholders increased consumption of the vegetables has been noted. Consumption at the household level, however, still faces a number of challenges. Several studies have been conducted on production and marketing of AIVs, but preparation and cooking, and thus food safety at the household level still remain a missing link. The aim of the paper is to present the results of the HORTINLEA research project ‘Meal Cultures in Market Trends and Consumption Habits’. The objective of this research was to establish factors that influence the preparation, cooking and consumption of AIVs in Kenya. The research questions were: Which factors determine AIV consumption and how do meal cultures affect consumption trends of AIVs? A qualitative approach was used and the innovative concept of meal cultures by Teherani-Krönner employed. Research areas were Nairobi (urban), Nakuru (peri-urban), Kakamega (rural). The sample size was 70 (expert interviews, focus group discussions and cooking along interviews) conducted in 2015–2017. Results showed that eight different AIVs were consumed regularly in households. Preparation, cooking and eating of AIVs depended on ethnicity, availability of resources and age. Water, which is key to food safety, was found to influence consumption. Preparation and cooking of AIVs was highly gendered. The study concluded that AIVs could contribute to food and nutrition security in Kenyan households if the meal cultures concept was applied in the investigation of AIV consumption and food safety.

Keywords: African indigenous vegetables, food safety, food security