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## Breeding Cooking Bananas: Do Men and Women's Trait Preferences Matter?

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### Abstract

Cooking banana ('Matooke') is an important food staple that supports 17 million Ugandans. Banana productivity is declining due to many factors including pests and diseases. Breeding new varieties offers feasible strategies to address such constraints. However, ensuring that breeding meets the numerous desirable attributes of the end-users is complex. Where improved varietal attributes fail to meet the needs of the end-users, low uptake and adoption ensues. Women and men may have diverse preferences for varietal characteristics because of differing production objectives, norms and values. A study was thus conducted to understand important cooking banana traits preferred by men and women value chain actors. The study sought to determine how the preferred traits shape acceptability of selected cooking banana varieties in central Uganda. Data were collected using sex-disaggregated focus group discussions, key informant interviews and a survey of 174 respondents (87 male and 87 female principle household decision makers). Two sensory evaluation exercises of promising and released hybrids banana varieties were conducted. Results indicated that the traits driving acceptability of cooking banana could be categorised into: traits that enhance (i) production, (ii) food quality, and (iii) marketability. Both men and women end users selected food taste as the most important trait determining acceptability of a cooking banana variety. Although most traits were equally appreciated by both men and women, men showed an inclination towards production and market related traits such as tolerance to drought and poor soil, bunch size, maturity period and shelf life. Women on the other hand appreciated food quality traits such as flavour and colour of the cooked food. We recommend redesigning the banana breeding pipeline to prioritise the gender differentiated attributes so as to deliver varieties that meet the preferences and needs of men and women end users. Since both adult men and women cooking banana consumers are not willing to compromise on the food quality traits, the 'Matooke' hybrid ideotype could be redefined to prioritise traits associated with marketability and quality of the cooked food.

**Keywords:** Breeding, cooking bananas, food quality, trait preferences, Uganda