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Gendered Knowledge and Preferences of Food Trees for Addressing Food Security and Nutrition Needs of Communities in Uganda

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Abstract

Food trees play a central role in rural livelihoods and can contribute substantially to food and nutrition security. Farmers have a wealth of local knowledge and prioritise food tree species for cultivation and use for various household needs. This local knowledge and preferences are often not adequately considered during research development endeavours. This study sought to understand farmer preferences for food tree species to improve food and nutrition security in Uganda with respect to local priorities. The purpose was to identify sets of species which are ecologically adapted and seasonally available and fill specific food insecure periods and 'nutrient gaps' in diets, while responding to various gender and age-related needs, interest and constraints. Data collection was conducted using focused group discussions in two districts in Uganda, Nakaseke and Nakasongola. Participatory research using seasonality calendars and score - ranking was applied with eight groups of 80 participants, 40 women and 40 men segregated by gender and age to understand knowledge and preferences for food trees. A total of 36 important food trees species were listed, of which 17 were indigenous and could be used to fill food and nutrition gaps during food insecure months. The total number of food trees listed differed between genders, older women (aged 37 to 59 years) identified 22 species, younger women (aged 19–30 years) identified 19 species and older and young men identified 15 priority species. Score-ranking revealed that both men and women preferred exotic food tree species such as *Mangifera indica* (mango), *Passiflora edulis* (passion fruit) and *Persea americana* (avocado). Preliminary findings show that the most important considerations for scoring were: use of species for consumption, taste, medicinal value and opportunities for income generation. The latter was notably cited by both old and young men but also by young women. Findings shows availability food tree species that fill food and nutrition gaps and the value of gender-sensitive participatory research for understanding local knowledge and preferences, and their relation with farmer's needs and constraints, to inform project implementation decisions

Keywords: Food trees, gender, local knowledge, participatory community research, priority setting, Uganda, youth

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