



Tropentag, September 18-20, 2019, Kassel

“Filling gaps and removing traps
for sustainable resource management”

Are Vegetables Foods or Just a Sauce?

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Abstract

An adequate consumption of fruits and vegetables contributes to a lower risk for non-communicable diseases. Fruits and vegetables are not only characterised by a high micro-nutrient content but also an important source of bioactive plant components with health benefits. This study focused on perception and attitudes towards vegetables to better understand willingness to plant and consume vegetables at household level.

In Feb. 2019, 24 focus group discussions were held in Kapchorwa District, Uganda, and Teso South sub-County, Kenya. Women, male and youth farmers were invited to discuss separately about legumes, vegetable and fruit availability in the upcoming 5 months. Further topics were food preparation techniques, taste, perception and attitudes towards the foods.

The food lists included between 12-25 different green leafy vegetables (GLV) which were either available at home only, both at home and on the market or at the market only. The list was shortest among the youth groups, and about the same length among women and men. Most groups respondents, given a choice they rather purchase fruits instead of vegetables. Only 2-3 GLV species were regularly consumed and considered eligible to be served to guests. Tomatoes and onions were just used as spices to most GLV dishes. Mixing of GLV to change taste and to cover shortages was rarely done. The portion sizes were often 'too little' compared to the recommended amounts for vegetables and fruits because they are 'just the sauce' to the staple.

The discussion confirmed that GLV are perceived as sauce and not considered as important component for a healthy diet. Gaps in the provision of vegetables are usually not closed by purchases on the market although GLV can be found there. The value of mixed dish composition for example enhancing bioavailability of plant based iron by consuming vitamin C rich fruits next to the vegetables is not known. Agriculture extension and nutrition counselling need to join efforts to raise awareness about the nutrient value of vegetables to sustainable raise consumption levels.

Keywords: Healthy diet, Kenya, sauce, Uganda, vegetables