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“Filling gaps and removing traps
for sustainable resource management”

Entrepreneurial Potentials of Rural Women’s Groups to Process Underutilised Species in Northern Ghana

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Abstract

According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor survey, women’s engagement in entrepreneurship is highest in sub-Saharan Africa. Meanwhile, women are held responsible for the nutritional well-being of their families and many processing activities are gendered female. For these reasons, the transdisciplinary research project ‘UPGRADE Plus’ partners with women’s groups to process underutilised species. These plant species that are available, but not utilised to their full potential for economic benefit are targeted with the broader goals of increasing agro-biodiversity, enhancing food access over the seasons, and improving women’s livelihoods.

The aim of the study is to assess the entrepreneurial potential of the women’s groups to process underutilised species by focusing specifically on context-specific factors related to their processing-related goals, needs and constraints. This research focuses on six women’s groups in Tamale, northern Ghana where food security challenges are more acute than in the southern part of the country. Qualitative data was gathered from 37 group meetings in which multiple participatory rural appraisal tools were used in a sequence through which the women and the researchers could co-investigate business interest and options. This was complemented with 18 individual interviews.

Results showed variations between the different groups with regard to motivation to engage in a processing business and a learning process together with researchers. Differences were also found in groups’ prioritisation of opportunities and their ability and capacity to navigate constraints. Different crops were evaluated in relation to their local supply and the availability of other necessary resources for production and development of their business.

The process of engaging the women in a co-inquiry of their business related goals, needs and constraints creates momentum for them to develop viable business plans and put them into action.

Keywords: Agri-food entrepreneurship, Ghana, processing, transdisciplinary