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“Filling gaps and removing traps
for sustainable resource management”

Small-Scale Processing and Marketing of Underutilised Vegetables – What Role for Women’s Livelihoods in Ghana?

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Abstract

A growing body of literature today is focusing on the potential of underutilised fruits and vegetables to improve nutrition in Western Africa and prevent micronutrient deficiencies among vulnerable populations. In Northern Ghana these crops, also often referred to as orphan crops, are commonly perceived as “women’s crops”. As such, they play a considerable role in women’s agricultural production, processing and marketing routines. Despite growing evidence for their importance in terms of both on- and off-farm activities, their role in the context of rural livelihoods has been neglected in research to date. Market data for these underutilised vegetables is sparse and such crops are frequently omitted from agricultural and livelihood surveys, both in Ghana and Western Africa more broadly.

The study at hand addresses key knowledge gaps on the marketing of underutilised vegetables and their role within livelihood strategies of women in Ghana’s Northern Region. For the purpose of this study, market surveys were conducted in two urban and three rural markets at the height of the local dry season. Between February and March 2019, data was collected on availability, supply chains and pricing for 10 species of underutilised vegetables, in both fresh and processed form. The survey was complemented by qualitative data obtained from Focus Group Discussions with four local women’s groups.

Results emphasise the overall importance of production and marketing of underutilised vegetables for livelihoods of women in Northern Ghana. Small-scale processing of indigestible vegetable crops, in particular, provides a key source of income during the dry season, when prices for staple crops are high and income generating opportunities are otherwise constrained. Nonetheless, the economic potential of these underutilised vegetables continues to be curtailed by challenges in women’s access to resources and raw materials, fragmented and volatile markets, as well as suboptimal quality and storability of traditionally processed products. In light of these constraints, the introduction of improved post-harvest processing practices has a significant potential to strengthen the livelihoods of women in Northern Ghana, by reducing losses and providing access to higher value markets.

Keywords: Marketing, post-harvest processing, underutilised fruits and vegetables, Western Africa, women’s livelihoods