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“Filling gaps and removing traps
for sustainable resource management”

Marketing and Consumption of Edible Insects in the Urban Center of Yangon, Myanmar

MYINT THU THU AUNG, JOCHEN DÜRR

University of Bonn, Center for Development Research (ZEF), Germany

Abstract

In Myanmar, insect-eating is a traditional habit in rural, food-scarce areas. Nowadays, insects have become popular also in big cities. Edible insects vary from region to region and include crickets, bamboo caterpillars, water beetles, honey bees, giant water bugs and big ants. Despite the fact that entomophagy is widespread in Myanmar, research on its market potential is scarce. This study explores the potential and constraints of edible insect consumption in the urban centre of Yangon by using a qualitative data collection technique through face-to-face in-depth interviews with vendors and consumers at five market places. Results revealed that crickets are the most popular edible insect. Crickets are collected from nearby Bago region, and from the more distant States of Karen, Mon and Shan. There are two cricket seasons when they are sold fresh or fried in downtown markets and also offered as a special snack in bars. In recent years, cricket prices have increased which hindered development of demand. Five types of consumers and seven types of non-consumers could be categorised, depending on their reasons to buy or not edible insects. Reasons for consumption comprise good taste, high nutritious value, and natural and healthy food considerations. People who do not eat insects mentioned hygiene factors, cultural and religious beliefs, anxiety of the appearance of insects, health problems, suspicion of the use of insecticides for gathering, unaffordable high prices, and doubts about the freshness of the product. To overcome the main constraints, differentiated strategies would be necessary according to the non-consumer group. Hygiene standards and regulations could help convince non-consumers who fear that insects are a non-fresh and impure product. Awareness-building on collecting methods would be important for non-consumers who believe that crickets are gathered by using insecticides when they are actually caught by means of light traps. Promotion of value-added products may persuade non-consumers by taste. Finally, the problem of limited supply and high prices could be solved by increased production of edible insects through systematic rearing.

Keywords: Consumer groups, crickets, entomophagy, insect rearing