



Tropentag, September 15-17, 2021, hybrid conference

“Towards shifting paradigms in agriculture
for a healthy and sustainable future”

Nutritional Potential of Traditional Food Products for the Nutrition of Young Children of Arid Zones

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Abstract

Global change processes induce complex transformations in African societies in general and particularly in dryland which already face environmental challenges for food production. This strongly affects the food environment of the inhabitants and makes it difficult for them to adopt a quality, balanced and healthy diet; which further increases the prevalence of chronic malnutrition and the various micronutrient deficiencies in drylands in general and North Benin in particular. Although these areas have traditional foods with high nutritional potential that can be used as local solutions to improve children's diets and nutrition, these foods are losing importance and particularly in peri-urban areas face competition from imported children's food. This study aims to assess the nutritional potential of traditional children's foods with a view to identify those that are highly nutritious and can counter micronutrient deficiencies. To do this, traditional children's foods were identified through focus group discussions and individual interviews with mothers of different generations in seven (07) villages of the municipalities of Nikki and Banikoara in North Benin ; The identified children's food were ranked by mothers for their value and from the 12 most preferred child food samples were prepared according to the traditional recipes. Nutritional composition including the mineral and vitamin profile of the samples of food preparations were determined in duplicate using standard methods of food analysis. The results show a variety of traditional foods with high levels of protein, iron, calcium, zinc, vitamins A and C which are nutrients of interest to enhance nutrition of young children. In the next steps local processors will be involved on how these foods can be improved to make them more widely available and accessible to rural and peri-urban areas in order to improve the nutrition of young children in the dynamic context of the drylands of North Benin.

Keywords: Food and nutrition for young children, food environment, micronutrients, traditional food products