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## Forgotten Crops and the Vulnerability of Rural Livelihoods: The Case of Enset in Ethiopia

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### Abstract

This study examines the role of enset or false banana, one of the many identified forgotten crops, in the livelihood of rural households in Southern Ethiopia. Like many other forgotten crops, enset has a high resilience to extreme environmental conditions and a high nutritional value. Enset matures in 2 to 3 years but can stay in the field for up to 12 years and can be harvested any time of the year. Some enset-derived fermented food products can be stored for a long period of time. With these characteristics, enset could play a vital role in supporting rural livelihoods and reducing their vulnerability to shocks but this is poorly understood. In this study, we analyze the contribution of enset to household income, food security and vulnerability to shocks. We use data from a large comprehensive household survey, covering 684 rural households in 46 kebeles in Southern Ethiopia. We rely on the sustainable livelihoods framework to guide the empirical analysis and use a stepwise regression approach in line with this framework. We find that household income increases with the number of enset plants a household has. We find no significant effect of enset cultivation on household food security but owning enset plants significantly reduces the negative impact of shocks on food security. Moreover, we find that households with more enset plants are less vulnerable to shocks and perceive less risk. We conclude that enset cultivation plays a crucial role in reducing household vulnerability, rather than being a food security strategy.

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