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“Can agroecological farming feed the world?  
Farmers’ and academia’s views”

## Women’s diets in East Africa: Can they be healthy and sustainable at the same time?

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### Abstract

Our current food systems are unsustainable and drive present diet intake and in turn are affected by diets. Often only one perspective is taken, and diets are seen as either a driver of change in the food system, e.g. through changing consumer demand, or are seen as an outcome of food systems, e.g. through climate change constraints.

Therefore, we applied the World Index for Sustainability and Health (WISH) - recently developed by Trijsburg et al. (2021) - to assess diets for both environmental sustainability and healthiness. Data were collected in the framework of the Fruits and Vegetables for all Seasons (FruVaSe) project – across two seasons in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. Four 24-hour recalls, two per season, were conducted with women of reproductive age. Data analysis consisted of 445, 292, and 415 women in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, respectively. Food intake quantities were grouped into 13 food groups and converted to the overall WISH index by giving a score between 0 and 10 based on both their environmental sustainability and healthiness.

Only the food groups whole grains, vegetables, unsaturated oils and added sugars were consumed by nearly all women during the last 24 hours (mean intake of two seasons), yet, not to the recommended amount. An increase in consumption to obtain a higher WISH score – and consequently a healthier and environmentally sustainable diet – is suggested for all food groups, except red meat and saturated oils where consumption was within the suggested range. Increase in unsaturated oils consumption is suggested for Tanzania and Uganda, while consumption of added sugars in Uganda needs to be decreased. When only the mean intake of women who consumed a certain food group was considered, the intake of red meat and poultry was above the recommended intake, and hence should be reduced, while the intake of legumes was too low for women in Uganda, and should be increased.

Through the WISH score, we were able to characterise the diets of women in East Africa which still need to be improved to attain environmental sustainability and healthiness at the same time.

**Keywords:** Healthy diets, Kenya, sustainable diets, Tanzania, Uganda, WISH index, women