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Ethnobotanical study of wild edible plants used by Meinit ethnic community in Bench-Maji zone, Southwest Ethiopia

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Abstract

The Meinit community utilised wild edible plants widely for various purposes, mainly as food, household healthcare, and market value. However, the indigenous knowledge associated with the use of plants is significantly degraded by human and climate variability.

The study aims to document the traditional knowledge about wild edible plant species (WEPS) pertained by the Meinit community.

Ethnobotanical data were collected by semi-structured interviews of the Meinit community in the Bench-Maji Zone from May 2019 to March 2021. A total of 198 study people aged between 18 and 70 years were interviewed. Ethnobotanical information such as plant local name, growth habit, habitat, edible part, mode of consumption, and preparation was collected from the individual household, focus group discussion, and key informant following standard interviewing methods. Voucher specimens were also collected and identified through standard procedure.

A total of 66 WEPS were documented from 34 families. The families Asteraceae, Fabaceae, Amaranthaceae, and Moraceae recorded the highest number of species among documented plants. The diversity of WEPS occurred in varied natural habitats, and the more significant number of WEPS existed in cultivated land (33 species), followed by bushy grassland (18 species). Among documented WEPs, herbs growth habits contained the highest number of species. The WEPs consumed in many forms, such as raw, boiled, fried, and beverage; boiling was the usual mode of consumption form. Additionally, among the total documented WEPS, 12 species were used as nutraceutical value, and one species contributed to market value. Human activity was a potential threat to WEPS and associated knowledge.

High plant diversity existed in the study area, and these plant resources are still utilised mainly for food, medicine, and income generation, which can contribute a significant role in dietary diversity, food security, and health care for rural households. Wild edible plant diversity and their utilisation knowledge are disappearing. Therefore, priority plants domestication, nutritional, phytochemical and toxicological analysis, and conservation practices are recommended.

Keywords: Market value, medicinal use, threat and conservation practice, traditional knowledge, traditional Meinit recipe

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