Locally produced nutritious foods and imported foods

Progress report

Raymond Sognon Vodouhe[1], Sognigbe N'Danikou[1], Mauricio Bellon[2]

[1]Bioversity International, West and Central Africa office, 08 BP 0932, Cotonou, Republic of Benin

[2]Bioversity International, via dei Tre Denari, 472/a, 00057 Maccarese, Rome, Italy

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July 2015

Introduction

In West Africa, many households relied on traditional locally produced foods to reach household food and nutrition security. With the increased access to market, a number of imported foods become available to the community households in some areas. However, accessibility to these imported foods, although they play a key role in bridging the gap during the lean seasons, they may not available and accessible to all the rural poor households. In some locations women had to rely on wild-harvested food products. For instance, due to less stable land tenure and small farm size, many wild species are the primary source of income and food for women and their families in the dry areas. The iconic shea tree (*Vitellaria paradoxa*) of the West African savannah for example, forms part of a complex women-led value chain that reaches both local and foreign markets as chocolate, cosmetics and other uses. The surveys being conducted in the Kano-Katsina-Maradi transect in the framework of the Drylands CRP aimed to assess the diversity of locally produced nutritious foods and imported foods, their abundance, the levels of use, the temporal availability across the year in dry areas, and the perceived nutritional values to rural communities. The current progress report presents some preliminary results and the planned activities for the next few months.

Material and methods

Data are being collected through rapid rural appraisal technics followed by participatory species selection and capacity building for the production of the most nutritive and lucrative species. In this process, the technical skill of the participating farmers is enhanced. For a baseline assessment, three sites are selected in Aguié, Maradi, viz. Milli, Gourdjia and Dan-Saga. The villages were selected based on population size, differential access to natural resources and levels of infrastructural development.

Preliminary results

An earlier assessment carried in Aguié, Niger indicated a relatively high diversity of locally produced food crops. Besides, the rapid inventory showed there was few nutritious wild vegetable species that were collected during the lean season to bridge the gap in household food supply. These species were particularly helpful at crop onset when little food is available in household granaries. They also constituted a good source of income in that period for the women involved in their collection and sale. In order to sustain the provision of these food resources, women have been organized and trained on how to produce two of the most advanced species that people are trying to domesticate in the area. These were *Senna tora* and *Ceratotheca sesamoides*. The two species are highly nutritious and mostly used as leafy vegetables for daily consumption. Although more research needs to be done, *Senna tora* for example, is known for its richness in zinc, β-carotene and antioxidants - nutrients that are lacking in the staple crops consumed in the area (millet and sorghum).

The opportunities for domestication are huge. Our research in Niger has indicated that 100-150 wild species are commonly consumed as vegetables by rural and urban communities. Many of these become even more important in times of drought or crop failure. Considering that these countries are also suffering from deforestation, increased land competition and weak institutional structures to support access to wild foods, domestication is a key part of keeping these resources within reach. Recognition and documentation of the role that these farmers play is the first step although but much has yet to be done.

Planning for the next few months

Additional surveys are being conducted in three selected villages (Gourjia, Milli et Dan Saga) in Aguié, Maradi. Gender disaggregated (Male and female) Focus Group Discussions are being organized to collect data on :

- diversity of the locally produced and imported food products;
- food products obtained from the species;
- abundance periods;
- importance of use;
- perceived nutritional values;
- the functional diversity of these locally produced food species.

The survey is combined with the “Crop, tree and animal breed diversity and distribution” assessment. The survey Team consists of two Scientists (Bioversity and INRAN) and 4 national Technicians. The team is familiarized with the survey tools. Local communities are informed and agreed to participate into the activity. The survey will take place from 03 to 13 August 2015.

The guidelines for the survey is available in the attached file (see pages 7 to 9).