

Traditional African vegetables strengthen food and nutrition security in Madagascar

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Abstract

Malagasy farmers still maintain a high diversity of traditional vegetables, but their production and consumption are low. Low usage makes traditional vegetables vulnerable to local or national extirpation under pressure of land-use change and crop replacement. Within the framework of the 3-years Darwin Initiative funded project, the WorldVeg, FOFIFA, University of Antananarivo and SEMANA are working with small-scale farmer families in the Itasy and Antsirabe regions of Madagascar to improve the production of traditional vegetables for income generation and to diversify diets and reduce hidden hunger. The approaches integrate a good understanding of the status of agro-biodiversity in Malagasy food systems; Germplasm collection to rescue landraces of both popular and threatened traditional vegetables in ex-situ; Capacity building of 25 Malagasy extension workers, 200 women farmers and 5 primary schools on seed saving and production of traditional vegetables; and seed business capacity development of 10 progressive women farmers on promising varieties of traditional vegetables. The women farmers receive seed kits for on-farm evaluation. These actions will enhance and protect vegetable genetic resources through increased utilization. The project strengthens existing school garden initiatives with training on seed saving and provision of good quality seeds of traditional vegetables to raise awareness for local food plants. An agro-biodiversity catalogue about Malagasy food plant diversity will be developed and promote the relevance of agro-biodiversity as a biocultural heritage, a source for human diets, and the importance of this diversity for nutrition.

Keywords: Seed saving, seed kits, healthy diets, on-farm evaluation, genetic diversity