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THE CHALLENGES OF LOCAL FOODS FOR OVERCOMING RURAL POVERTY AND MALNUTRITION IN WESTERN AFRICA

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Hunger, malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies continue to threaten millions of people in Sub-Saharan Africa. The rural population suffers disproportionately from poverty, food insecurity and nutritional deficiencies. In some countries, the situation is becoming worse. Malnutrition is a direct consequence of a monotonous, insufficient and unbalanced diet. Malnutrition can also lead to diet related chronic diseases (type 2-diabetes, hypertensive diseases, and cardiovascular diseases). Risk factors for diet related chronic diseases are more and more common in African populations. Therefore, Sub-Saharan populations are facing this double burden of malnutrition. But, on the other hand, Sub-Saharan Africa is endowed with an incredible array of traditional crop diversity, made of cereals, pulses, vegetables, fruits, medicinal and aromatic plants which have potentials yet to be fully exploited. Many of these local foods have a high nutritional value that can be helpful to prevent malnutrition, micronutrient deficiencies and diet related chronic diseases. These foods with functional properties, rich in fibers, antioxidants, polyphenols, β -carotene, enhancers of micronutrient absorption, are of great interest for a good health and well being of African populations. Processing and marketing of these products must be developed for a sustainable food and nutrition security, and would prevent against dramatic effects of a food crisis, particularly in countries whose food consumption is mainly based on imported crops. A better knowledge and development of the functional properties of these foods can be a source of innovation for African agricultural products and of more income for African farmers. So, it is important to strengthen relationships between agriculture, nutrition and food processing in order to create an added value to African agricultural food products to overcome rural poverty and to prevent different forms of malnutrition.

Keywords: Africa, biodiversity, malnutrition, rural poverty, local foods