

AFROFOODS CALL FOR ACTION FROM THE DOOR OF RETURN: FOOD COMPOSITION, BIODIVERSITY AND SUSTAINABLE DIETS

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The importance of food composition data in food safety, trade and nutrition activities made it imperative for food composition activities to be continued and sustained, especially in Africa. In December 2009 the sub-regional AFROFOODS Coordinators drafted and endorsed the AFROFOODS Call for Action from the Door of Return. Key points in the Call included recognition that returning to local crops and traditional food systems is a prerequisite for conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity for food and nutrition; and the acknowledgment that local foods are the basis for African sustainable diets.

Food composition and consumption studies are important dimensions for promoting the use of underutilized traditional foods for dietary diversity. Boosting dietary diversity through the consumption of underutilized traditional foods benefits, in particular, young children and women of reproductive age in the rural areas, holistically and sustainably. Women in low-income households are more vulnerable to nutritional deficiencies where the food budget is limited and the diet restricted. Diversifying the family diet through the use of wild plants enables women in poor households to improve their nutrient intake at little or no additional cost. The benefits are more quantifiable when the nutrient and health promoting functional composition of the traditional foods are known which is where AFROFOODS would contribute immensely by providing reliable data for choosing the varieties consumed. This diversity for sustainable diets is also important since it directly targets poverty and hunger, which the Millennium Development Goal One and the remaining seven MDGs seek to address. Harnessing the diversity in traditional foods is the key to sustainable diets in Africa

Successful food systems in transition effectively draw on locally-available foods, food variety and traditional food cultures. In practice this process involves empirical research, public policy, promotion and applied action in support of multi-sectoral, community-based strategies linking rural producers and urban consumers with traditional and modern food systems. Research on the properties of neglected and underutilized species and local varieties deserves higher priority in Africa and AFROFOODS need to develop plans for moving this agenda forward. Traditional systems once lost are hard to recreate, underlining the imperative for timely documentation, compilation and dissemination of eroding knowledge of biodiversity and the use of food culture for promoting sustainable diets.