

Rural Women Speak on Traditional Food Production Systems:

A Documentation of their dialogue

**Proceedings of a one-day meeting held at the Zimbabwe
International Book Fair 1999 held in the Penthouse,
National Gallery of Zimbabwe**

Edited by B S Mukonyora August 3, 1999

Acknowledgements

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The meeting was facilitated by Ms Benhilda Mukonyora and organised and co-organised by Mrs Martha Chinyemba through the Gender Forum of the ZIBF '99.

The following LinKS project partners identified the articulate rural participants the majority of whom were women: AZTREC, Africa 2000 and Zimbabwe Women's Bureau. We are indebted to them.

Background

The meeting where rural women dialogue with researchers and policy makers was in fulfilment of a recommendation made at an earlier meeting held in the absence of grassroots people. The meeting organised by FAO-LinKS project focussed on how gender, biodiversity and LinKS could promote agro-natural ecosystem and food security.

It has been realised that most current and past development initiatives are actually marginalising rural women and men while at the same time rendering them powerless and subject to the vagaries of nature and the inhospitable economic environment.

The dialogue was organised and encouraged by the FAO –LinKS project that is currently being piloted in four Southern African countries. The project summary for LinKS seeks to address the problems listed in the preceding paragraph by:

- raising awareness on the value of rural women and men's knowledge in the sustainable use and management of agricultural biological diversity for food security;
- seeking to strengthen institutional capacity building in each participating country by applying this understanding in planning, research, project management and policy development; and
- Supporting the on-going work of key partner organisations to generate and document information about the gender dimension of traditional food production and management systems.

Objectives of the Dialogue

- To expose the rural women to the objectives of the FAO-LinKS project.
- To get the hitherto marginalised rural women to discuss pertinent issues with regard to LinKS and food security.
- To generate a dialogue between rural women on one hand, and policy makers and elite women and men who influence policy.
- To encourage partner organisations to participate in debating local indigenous knowledge systems pertaining to food production, processing, storage and management of agro-biodiversity for food security with the rural people involved in and vested with the relevant indigenous knowledge at grassroots level.

Opening Address

In the opening address Mrs M Chinyemba , the Gender and Communications Officer of the FAO-LinKS Project stressed that this was a follow –up meeting ostensibly organised so that the policy makers and those who influence policy decisions may dialogue with rural women who are the `custodians` and `implementers` of indigenous knowledge systems pertaining to food production, processing, storage and management of agro-biodiversity for food security.

She thanked partner organisations that had contributed by identifying the participants from the grassroot. She acknowledged the invaluable contribution of the ZIBF and the Gender Forum, which had provided the venue for the meeting. (see Annex 1: Opening Address by Mrs M Chinyemba).

Mrs Stembiso Nyoni MP, Minister of State in the Vice President’s Office and co-chairperson welcomed the guests and stressed the importance of the dialogue with the rural women whom she said are extremely resourceful and are experts at averting crises in the family and catastrophes in the country as a whole. This is so as they sustain their families from virtually nothing.

PART A: Indigenous crops / seeds

The indigenous crops/seeds commonly known include: rapoko / finger millet, sorghum / mapfunde, pearl millet / mhunga / inyauti, peanuts or groundnuts / nzungu, round nuts / mambara nuts / nyimo. maize, indigenous watermelons, mashamba, indigenous pumpkins / mapudzi, pumpkins/ mubowora (cucurbita maxima), sweet potatoes, indigenous cucumber / magaka, cow peas / nyemba / indumba (Vigna unguiculata), indigenous rice, tsunga and indigenous rape vegetable / mbuya dzakupuka.

Rapoko / finger millet

Some traditional crops have a host of advantages and uses. One such crop is rapoko / finger millet / zviyo which has two known varieties. It is a nutritional cereal with a long shelf of up to 10 years. Rapoko is used to brew beer for socio-economic and ritual purposes, food for the sick and healthy persons. Scientifically, this cereal is one of the most nourishing grains in Africa. Its husks are both an invaluable garden manure and pesticide for crops in the granary.

Rapoko is planted and harvested in one wet season ranging from October / November to April. This cereal requires little rain / moisture in the soil to survive.

Pearl millet / mhunga and sorghum / mapfunde

Pearl millet and sorghum are cereal crops, which thrive in semi – arid conditions. Both are nutritious and are used at ritual events to make brew and food. Besides being used as a breakfast cereal, they are prepared into a traditional Zimbabwe dish called

sadza (a thick porridge). When people such as children or hunters have to be away from home for long periods, ground pearl millet is mixed with peanut butter to make food balls called modho, which can last for days.

Both cereals mature within one season.

Peanuts / ground nuts

Peanuts are a highly nutritious and popular food / cash crop. The leguminous crop 's traditional uses range from being eaten raw, cooked, fresh, dried or processed. It is used to enhance the taste and nutritional value of many dishes. For instance, it is mixed with rice, pearl millet or maize to turn them into filling nutritious meals.

Peanuts are also mixed with a host of indigenous vegetables such as mowa, runi / nyevhe (*Cleome gynandra*), mubowora (*Cucurbita maxima*), leaves of the black jack (*Bidens Pilosa*), nyemba / indumba (*Vigna unguiculata*) or indigenous mushrooms.

The ground nut leaves are used as fodder fresh or dried. The crop matures in one wet season.

Cow peas / indumba / nyemba (*Vigna unguiculata*)

There are several varieties of the protein – rich leguminous cowpeas whose leaves and seeds are eaten fresh or dried. The peas are crushed to make a special dish while the pods are an invaluable stockfeed.

While the crop matures in one season, the leaves are harvested within six weeks of planting.

Traditional crops still under production

The traditional crops still widely grown include maize, rapoko, pearl millet, sorghum maize, peanuts, sweet potatoes, madhumbe, indigenous rice and tsenza. With the exception of maize these are grown primarily for their ritual and food purposes.

It has been observed that one of the edges the traditional crops have over modern crops is that they are relatively cheaper to produce in so far as they require reduced capital input of fertilizers and pesticides. The majority of the traditional crops can be stored in barns without the aid of modern pesticides.

The reduced purchasing power of the Zimbabwe dollar coupled with the increased number of home-based patients due to the HIV-AIDS pandemic and other terminal illnesses has resulted in an emphasis on traditionally nutritious foods. Consequently the demand for traditional has increased.

Part B: Uses of some traditional edible fruits and plants still available

This section attempts to list some widely known and commonly used traditional fruits and plants and their uses.

Some traditional edible fruits	Traditional uses
Baobab / <i>muuyu</i> (<i>Adansonia digitata</i>)	fruits: when ripe eaten as is, as porridge, makes alcohol, the shell used to make a sodium compound for cooking; leaves: makes a relish; bark: makes food baskets
<i>Banana</i> (<i>Musa sapientumi</i>)	fruits: food and alcohol roots: as a medicine
Guava	fruits: food and drink leaves: as a medicine
<i>Marula / mupfura</i> (<i>Sclerocarya caffra</i>)	fruits: alcohol, porridge and eaten direct. pod-nut eaten kennels: peanut butter bark: as pesticide in granaries
<i>Mushumha</i> (<i>Diospyros mespiliformis</i>)	Fruits: food (fresh or dried), alcohol
<i>Mutsvanzva / munhengeni</i> (<i>Ximenia caffra</i>)	fruits: food, seeds: peanut butter
<i>Mukwakwa</i> (<i>Strychnos madagascariensis</i>)	fruits: food, alcohol and hair dressing
<i>Muzhanje</i> (<i>Uapaca kirkiana</i>)	fruits: food and alcohol; kennels: peanut butter
<i>Wild oranges/ mutamba</i> (<i>Strychnos</i>)	fruits: food, alcohol and hair dressing
<i>Muhacha</i> (<i>Parinari curatellifolia</i>)	fruits: food and alcohol
<i>Mutudza / nhunguru / mandwinde</i> (<i>Flacourtia</i>)	fruits: food and alcohol
<i>Mutunduru</i> (<i>Garcinia huillensis</i>)	fruits: food and alcohol
<i>Mutohwe</i> (<i>Azanza garkeana</i>)	fruits: food kennels: peanut butter and coffee
<i>Munzvuru</i> <i>Vangueria infausta / longicalyx</i>)	fruits: food and alcohol
<i>Musau</i> (<i>Ziziphus mauritiana</i>)	fruits: alcohol and food
<i>Muhute</i> (<i>syzyginu cordatum</i>)	fruits: alcohol and food
<i>Muroro</i> (<i>Annona stenophylla</i>)	fruits: alcohol and food
<i>Fig tree / muonde / mutufu</i> (<i>Ficus capensis</i>)	fruits: food and cakes
<i>Mutsamvu / musamvu</i> (<i>Ficus birkei</i>)	fruits: food roots: burnt used as a pesticide in vegetables
<i>Munzambara</i> (<i>Carissa edulis</i>)	fruits: food
<i>Musosoti / musvosvotwe</i> (<i>Faurea saligna and speciosa</i>)	fruits: food
<i>Munyiyi</i> (<i>Berchemia discolor</i>)	fruits: food and alcohol
<i>Mhubva</i> (<i>Vitex mombassae and payos</i>)	fruits: food seed : coffee

Source: Meeting resource persons and Revai brothers (August 1999)

Uses of some traditional plants

Traditional plants	Uses
<i>Bupwa (Ceratotheca sesamoides)</i>	leaves: as a vegetable and a soap
<i>Chirovaduru (Dicoma kirkii)</i>	roots: used to sore eyes in chickens
<i>Chikukurume (Wormskioldia longepedunculata)</i>	leaves: food
<i>Gavakava (Aloe)</i>	leaves: treats sore eyes in chickens
<i>Derere munda (Plmad)</i>	leaves: fresh or dried, used as food for sick and healthy people and medicine for expectant mothers
<i>Makoni tea (Fadogia ancylantha)</i>	leaves: as tea leaves and medicine roots: as medicine
<i>Matindindi (indigenous mushroom)</i>	a vegetable
<i>Mowa (Amaranthus thunbergii and graecizans)</i>	leaves: as vegetables and burnt to produce a sodium for cooking purposes
<i>Mubvee / mumvee (kigelia pinnata)</i>	seeds: food and stock-feed
<i>Munhanzva (Pouzolzia hypoluca)</i>	leaves: as vegetables, used in gardens as a pesticide and burnt to produce a sodium compound
<i>Muhweti</i>	leaves: as a sodium compound
<i>Mutsemwatsemwa / mutsemwa (Barleria)</i>	leaves: food and medicine
<i>Nhedzi (indigenous mushroom)</i>	a vegetable
<i>Black jack / mutsine (Bidens pilosa)</i>	leaves: food and medicine
<i>Nhundurwa (Solanum incanum)</i>	leaves: as medicine for sore eyes fruit: as a vegetable
<i>Nyevhe / runi (Cleame gynandra)</i>	leaves: as food and medicine
<i>Pfiripfiti (indigenous mushroom)</i>	as a vegetable
<i>Zumbani (Lippia javanica)</i>	leaves: as herbal tea and medicine

Source: Meeting participants and Revai brothers (August 1999)

Part C: Obstacles to using / reverting to traditional crops

It was noted that disadvantages of traditional crops include labour-intensive methods of production in the field and at processing stages. A typical example is the round nuts, which require loose sands to be heaped around them soon after the flowering stage. The processing of traditional cereals such as pearl millet is a demanding physical exercise. The connoisseurs prefer the taste of hand processed cereals as compared to those prepared using machines such as the grinding mill

Generally there has been a tendency to sideline traditional crops because of their cash returns. Only peanuts (\$ per ton) and sorghum (\$ per ton) have cash returns comparable to maize (\$ per ton). While peanuts are bought by several peanut butter making companies, the former cereal is used in the manufacture of commercially produced opaque beer. Other crops such as pearl millet, finger millet and cowpeas do not seem to have any commercial value.

In some communal lands, land hunger is so intense that there's no land specially set aside for traditional crops. Whatever unutilised land exists, it is put under production of commercial crops with a higher return than those, which have a cultural significance.

Cultural practices should be given due regard instead of being resorted to only when everything else fails. For instance, when borehole drilling is unsuccessful or when mines run into difficulties, spirit media are consulted to intervene. Positive results are realised then. In some instances, farmers are reluctant to revert to traditional farming practices due to absence of government support. Most extension workers impose their ideas on the grassroot people. This way the educated people discourage the perpetuation of traditional farming methods, which are not always complementary to their modern scientific training. For instance, the Department of Agricultural, Technical and Extension (AGRITEX) services was encouraging farmers to practise monoculture while traditionally the people were onto multiple cropping.

Semi-arid areas are suitable for the production of hardy traditional grains, but the small-scale farmers do not produce these because of returns. In the past government did not determine competitive producer prices for them. If they planted these they would be assured of a crop even in instances of drought.

The present educational system does not avail students the opportunity to be familiar with their culture. There is need to do this so as to ensure that traditional farming knowledge and IKS on agro-biodiversity is passed on to the future generation.

In order to be able to use modern machinery, such as tractors, in agriculture, it has been necessary to clear large tracks of land. This move has led to massive wind erosion when the lands are prepared for cultivation and drying of some wetlands.

It was in connection with the problem of water shortage that some organizations such as AZTREC employed traditional methods of conserving wetlands. These included fencing former wetlands and conserving sacred and rain associated trees. The water table in those areas has significantly risen.

Part D: Views on the Chief's Granary (*Zunde raMambo*) and Land Redistribution

The people in the rural areas are supportive of the Zunde raMambo (isiphala esenduna) scheme. This is a scheme solely run from the chief's kraal. The people in a given chieftancy communally work on fields whose produce they harvest and store at the chief's house. Not everyone had access into the granaries. In times of severe famine the affected people approached the chief who then handed out food to them. The special granaries were highly respected as they ensured that no one starved as long as there was food in the granary. On land redistribution, it was urged that women farmers be given land in their own right. The current practice of giving land to adult women through their sons was deplored. The women were also opposed to the idea that they could claim entitlement to land only after they had received training in agriculture. The unfairness of this system lies in the fact that hitherto, women were disadvantaged in education let alone skills training in modern farming.

Annex 1: List of Questions

- 1 What fruits / plants are still available ? When ?
- 2 What ideas do you have on water conservation and tree planting?
- 3 What are the people's views on Zunde raMambo (isiphala esenduna)?
- 4 What indigenous seeds / crops are the rural people aware of? When are they eaten? How are they preserved?
- 4 Are people still planting the traditional crops? if so, which ones? Why so?
- 5 What are obstacles to our using / returning to traditional crops ? Who causes changes in agriculture ? Is it the farmer ? Government ?
- 6 Is there harmony between AGRITEX and IKS on traditional farming production ?
- 7 On traditional the Land Redistribution Commission.