

Utilization and Medicinal Value of Indigenous Leafy Vegetables Consumed in Urban and Peri-Urban Nairobi

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Indigenous African leafy vegetables have recently been attracting research attention not only in terms of their inherent nutrition quality but also the healing power of some of these plants. Diversification of diets through increased utilization and consumption of these vegetables would go a long way in alleviating hidden hunger and malnutrition. The main objective of this survey was to determine the consumption patterns and medicinal use of indigenous African leafy vegetables by the residents of urban and peri-urban Nairobi. A descriptive cross-sectional survey was conducted and the survey subjects included populations from all socio-economic strata and income levels. Probability proportional to size stratified sampling was used to select a representative sample of 800 households (600 urban and 200 peri-urban). Data were collected through structured questionnaires, focus group discussions and an observation checklist guide. A picture guide consisting of all foods available on the Nairobi markets was prepared, and used by the researchers to help the respondents to identify the vegetables they consumed. Ethnic origin was found to greatly influence consumption of indigenous African leafy vegetables. There was no significant relationship between household income and education level and choice or use of indigenous leafy vegetables. Some of the reasons for not consuming the vegetables included prohibitive costs and not knowing how to cook them especially those from other tribes. More than 60 percent of the respondents reported that the vegetables had a medicinal value attached to it and some were said to cure more than one disease. About half of those who used them also said the vegetables were healthy. It was concluded that dietary diversity of indigenous African leafy vegetables in addition to providing essential nutrients presumably offers broad benefits to health. The findings support interventions to promote use of indigenous African leafy vegetables as a foodbased initiative towards alleviation of micronutrient deficiencies and poverty through premium value addition incentive strategies.