THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

Indigenous Foods Consumption Patterns: A Case of Masvingo Urban District, Zimbabwe

Lokadhia Manwa
Lecturer, Department of Teacher Development, Home Economics Section, Great Zimbabwe University, Zimbabwe
Plaxcedia Mahundi
Lecturer, Department of Curriculum Studies, Home Economics Section, Great Zimbabwe University, Zimbabwe

Abstract:
Indigenous foods have of late attracted much research attention in terms of their innate nutritional content, quality and also their medicinal properties. Research has also shown that the consumption of these foods would go a long way in improving health status of individuals and populations. The main aim of this study was to establish the consumption patterns of indigenous foods by the residents of Masvingo urban district, Zimbabwe. A qualitative design was employed to get empirical data from the participants. Data were collected through observations and in-depth interviews at the two main Masvingo city markets. The researchers established the rate at which the participants consumed indigenous foods through the sellers and interviewed the buyers who were forthcoming. Generally, the researchers observed that there is informal trading of indigenous foods in the city. Cultural and geographical origins were recognised to significantly influence the consumption of indigenous foods. Some of the participants indicated that they are now aware of the nutritional values and medicinal properties of indigenous foods so they are trying to incorporate them in their diets. Two major themes which emerged were that, most people regarded indigenous foods as the food for the poor and some believe that indigenous foods are for people who live with HIV/AIDS so as to boost their immune system. The study recommends that the Ministry of Health and other supporting organisations continue to educate the population about the benefits of indigenous foods in the diet.

Keywords: *consumption, indigenous foods, leafy vegetables, lifestyle and nutritional knowledge.*

1. Introduction and Background to the Study

Zimbabwe is endowed with a wide variety of indigenous fruits, vegetables and wildlife that can offer variety and diversity to the diet (Maroyi, 2012; Chirimuuta & Mapolisa, 2011, Shava, 2010). This study therefore sought to establish the consumption patterns of these foods in Masvingo urban district, Zimbabwe. Indigenous foods are foods which are abound in the environment and most of them grow naturally in fields and forests or they are food crops that have their origin in the country (Zimbabwe). These foods are known to be of high nutritive value as well as health benefits (Onyongo, 2007). They are also nature's strong medicines with many healing properties (Chipurira, 2010; Tsiko, 2009; Onyongo, 2007) that cannot be found in imported and processed foods hence are very useful sources of nutrients without side effects (Chipurira, 2010).

Throughout nutritional history, wild vegetables and fruits played a significant role in the daily diet of the indigenous people of Zimbabwe (Chirimuuta & Mapolisa, 2011; World Bank, 2010; Devine, Connors, Bisogni & Sobal, 1998). In recent decades, people globally, have experienced rapid and dramatic shifts in lifestyle that are unprecedented in history and Zimbabwe is no exception to that. Moving away from their own self-sustaining, local food systems into industrially derived food supplies have caused adverse effects on dietary quality and health (The Herald, 8 September 2014). Rising cases of diseases like diabetes mellitus and some cancers are linked to the consumption of processed foods (Maundu, Kiimiywe, Smith, Johns & Eyzaguirre, 2008), particularly in urban areas where people "farm in supermarkets." Apart from these challenges and the overwhelming influence of western diets, there is a growing appreciation of the importance of indigenous foods in Africa at large and Zimbabwe in particular hence the purpose of this study was to establish the degree of present use of indigenous foods in Masvingo urban district.

As already mentioned, the dietary transform that typifies the "nutrition transition" and westernization of cuisine include both quantitative and qualitative changes in the diets of the populations worldwide (Delaney & McCarthy, 2009; Mithofer, 2006). The undesirable dietary changes include shifts in the dietary patterns towards higher energy density foods, fatty and sugary diets. These dietary alterations are compounded by lifestyle changes that reflect reduced physical activity at work and leisure time which promote the development of non-communicable diseases (Onyongo, 2007; Kimiywe, Waudo, Mbithe1& Maundu, 2007). One of the World Health Organisation (WHO) mandate is to promote healthy diets and lifestyles that reduce the global burden of non-communicable diseases (WHO, 2010). To achieve this, all nations worldwide are encouraged to ensure consumption of adequate quantities of safe

and good quality foods that together make up a healthy diet. It was therefore the aim of this research to examine trends in consumption patterns of indigenous foods which have been found to constitute healthy diets (Chipurira 2010; Maundu et al, 2008; Onyongo, 2007). Dietary patterns or food consumption habits evolve over time, being influenced by a lot of factors and complex interactions. Family income, food prices, individual food preferences, knowledge and awareness, beliefs and cultural traditions as well as geographical, environmental, social and economic factors all interact in a complex way to determine dietary consumption patterns of individuals and populations (Sobal, Bisogni, Devine & Jastran, 2006). Figure 1 illustrates the interplay of factors which influences the food choices of the populations and individuals.

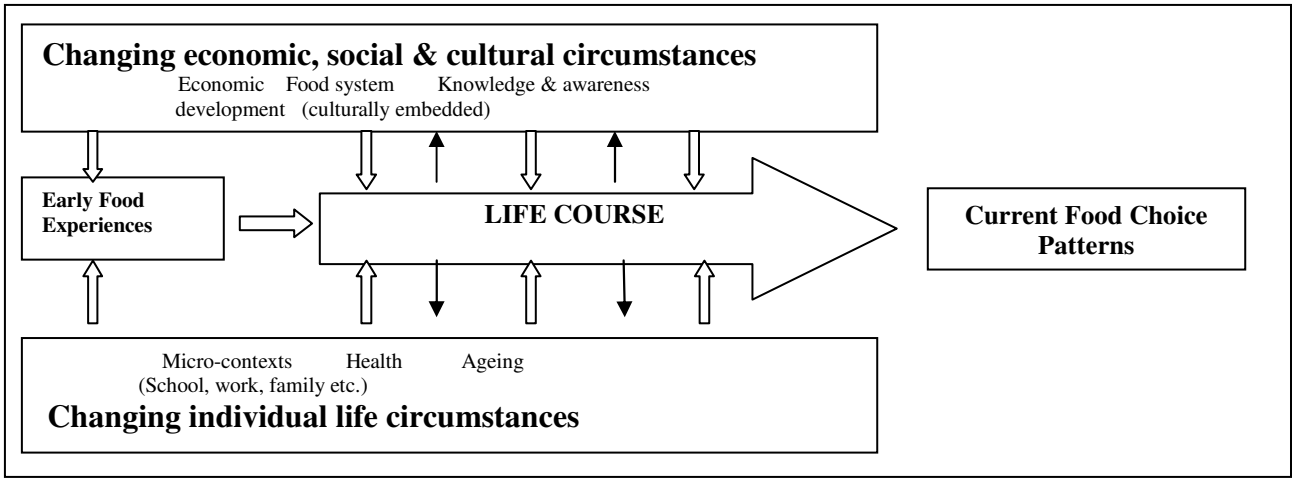

Figure 1: Key life course influences on present food choice patterns (Adopted from Sobal et al, 2006:4)

Macro-environmental influences may change over individuals' life cycle stages as historical events unfold. An individual's socio-culturally influenced life experiences may be brought to bear in food choices over the life course (Cloutier, Mongeau, Pageau, & Provencher, 2013). Thus the environment in which a person operates offers expanded or constrained possibilities for food choice (Delaney & McCarthy, 2009), as in the case of this study, staying in an urban environment. Research has also demonstrated that the home and the workplace are the two key micro-contexts which social considerations and managing eating relationships determine food choices of individuals and populations (Paquette, 2005). Hence the need to study the indigenous foods consumption patterns of those who live in the urban locale.

In Zimbabwe, most of these indigenous crops grow naturally while some are produced and found growing in the country under various regions according to weather conditions. In point of fact, food availability varies by region, socioeconomic level and season and this is the case in Zimbabwe as she has five agricultural regions. The geographical area under study falls in natural region four which receives average to low rainfall (450-650mm per annum) with severe mid-seasons droughts (Mithofer, 2006). Indigenous foods are mainly grown in the rural farming communities and on small scale, chiefly for subsistence purposes. Indigenous crops and their products were never commercialised, despite their nutritional and economic value they offer to the population (Zimbabwe Independent, 2011; Mushita, 2006). In most parts of Zimbabwe, as a case in point, Masvingo, the surplus of the produce is only traded informally within neighbourhood to generate income for the farmers. However, there is now an increasing interest by the Zimbabwean Ministry of Health through the government and other stakeholders about the value of indigenous foods to address nutritional needs of the populations and food security (Shava, 2010). In light of the above, efforts are being made to inform the Zimbabwean population about the benefits of indigenous foods as maintaining the good meal composition of the indigenous foods would be beneficial in preventing diseases.

Thus, in spite of the abundance of indigenous foods in Masvingo district, the district is one of the major beneficiaries of food insecurity interventions like nutrition gardens and food handouts or food relief. Another cause of concern is the rising cases of diseases like diabetes mellitus and some cancers which are linked to the consumption of processed foods, which could be minimized by the use of indigenous foods in the diet (The Herald-8 September, 2014: Tsiko, 2009). It is against this background that lead to the study of the indigenous consumption patterns in Masvingo urban district, Zimbabwe since no work has looked at the consumption of indigenous foods in urban centres of the country.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

The study undertook to investigate the extent to which indigenous foods are consumed in Masvingo urban district.

1.2. The study Research Questions

The study was guided by the following three research questions:

(a) To what extent are indigenous foods consumed in Masvingo urban district?
(b) What are the effects of seasonal availability to usage of indigenous foods in the district?
(c) What is the population's level of nutritional knowledge in relation to indigenous foods?

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

In this research which established indigenous foods consumption patterns in an urban district adopted a qualitative approach. A qualitative approach was used in order to gain entry into the world of markets (natural settings) where the majority of the population under investigation purchases their food items. This was done so that the researchers could interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings participants brought to researchers (Marshall & Rossman, 2008). Understanding the extent of the urban population's usage of the indigenous foods and their nutritional knowledge in relation to indigenous foods required the researchers to interact with the participants. A descriptive design was chosen to answer the research questions. This method focused on description or exposure of the salient aspects of the situations in markets in relation to indigenous foods consumption with a focus on the patterns that emerged (Sidhu, 2003; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011).

2.2. Sample

Convenient sampling was used to select forty participants who were involved in answering the semi-structured interviews over the six and half months which the researchers were regularly going to the markets from 20 September 2014 to 30 March 2015. This was to see indigenous foods consumption during the dry and wet seasons. The sampling technique allowed the researchers to reach information rich informants (Denzin & Lincolin, 2011).

2.3. Instruments

Observations and semi-structured interviews were used to collect relevant data from the indigenous foods shoppers. Observation was found to be the most ideal data collecting instrument for the nature of the study sample (Marshall & Rossman, 2008). The interviews gave evidence to the observations which were made by the researchers. A semi-structured interview guide with follow-up probes was used to explore participants' current eating habits as well as their attitudes and knowledge (beliefs) about indigenous foods. This also helped to explore how the participants' dietary patterns had evolved through their accounts of their experiences. Interviews lasted between 30-45 minutes and were recorded and transcribed verbatim after oral consent has been made (Resnik, 2012). This helped to obtain behavioural and environmental data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

Data were presented in descriptive and narrative forms and analysed thematically.

	Male	**Female**	**Total**
Age	15	30	45
21-31	2	6	8
31-41	13	24	37
Occupation			
Professionals	1	5	6
Technicians and associate professionals	2	3	5
Clerical support workers	4	9	13
Services and sales workers	2	4	6
Crafts and related trade workers	2	3	5
Uniformed forces	3	2	5
Not employed	1	4	5
Location			
Low density	8	13	21
High density	7	17	24
BMI*			
Obese	9	25	34
Healthy weight	6	5	11
*BMI according to IOTF criteria (Healthy weight: BMI 18.5-24.9, Obese: >30)			

Table 1: Characteristics of study participants (n=40)

3. Findings and Discussion

Socio-demographic data are provided to furnish background information on the sample as these are life course and have an impact of food choices and preferences (Wardlaw & Smith, 2011; Sobal et al, 2006). Forty-five indigenous food shoppers who participated in the study were fifteen males and thirty females. The researchers were pleased to observe that there are some men who participate in the purchasing of indigenous foods as most men regard the kitchen issue to be women's. Their age ranged from twenty-one to forty-one and the majority were in the thirty-one and above range. The age ranges indicate that the people who go to the market are mature and can make decisions of what to buy. Most of them had recognisable occupations only a few were not employed and they all indicated that they were staying with their working spouses or relatives. These results indicate that the participants purchased indigenous foods because of various reasons and not because they are of low status as assumed by most people (Rozin, 2006), but because they like them or they know their value in the diet. The majority of the participants were obese and only about a quarter were in healthy weight. Obesity signifies some degree of ignorance in the importance of maintaining good health.

3.1. Indigenous Foods Level of Consumption in Masvingo Urban District

From the observations, it was noted that most Masvingo residents who reach the markets would at least stop at indigenous foods tables. This indicates that the residents are aware of their existence and their present food choices were found to be influenced by early food experiences especially those who grew in urban. Thus, geographical area, culture and norms had been seen to influence which foods are acceptable and preferable for consumption and how they should be consumed (Delaney & McCarthy, 2009; Onyango, 2007). From the interviews, researchers also noted that, the changing economic, social, political as well as cultural circumstances and the changes in individual life circumstances had a bearing on the consumption of indigenous foods. This is because most participants indicated that their children shun traditional foods and enjoy exotic foods which they link to modernisation. Therefore, it may be necessary to mention that most young couples do not consider indigenous foods in their diets as they treat indigenous foods as inferior. All participants who bought indigenous foods gave the impression that they consume indigenous foods in the form of leaves, fruits, pods and also in the form of the plant roots. Participants mentioned various reasons for consuming indigenous foods with the most common being good relish. When participants were asked to state the frequency they took indigenous foods, most of them indicated that they try to take indigenous vegetables at least once a week and usually on weekend days as they will be at home and have ample time to prepare them. This shows that most families who take indigenous foods have some limitations in taking them daily, hence their contribution to the populations' health status is very low. This is in line with what Paquette (2005) state as micro-contexts that influence food consumption patterns.

Considering the number of people who reach the market at an average day, the researchers observed that about one tenth of the people would buy one or two food items from the indigenous foods tables. This shows that the majority of people who reach the market shun indigenous foods therefore their consumption is very low in the urban district. The common reason for not purchasing was "not used to the food stuffs." This could be true because some did not grow up in rural areas as most of these foods are grown in rural and peri-urban areas. Some participants indicated that they had problems in preparing these foods so could not buy them. One female participant in the thirty-one and above age group had this to say, "I only enjoy these foods when prepared by some other people, I think I need some skills in preparing them." This indicates that there could be a good number of people who like them but do not purchase because of lack of preparation skills.

3.2. Seasonal Availability of Indigenous Foods and Their Use in Masvingo District

The researchers observed that there is an upsurge of trade and interest in indigenous foods especially vegetables because even when they are not in season. When they were asked to indicate whether their consumption levels were affected by seasons, the majority indicated that consumption is much higher in the wet months as most people prefer fresh fruits and vegetables than the dried ones. A good number of participants indicated that they take indigenous foods as families and they reported to consume different types of indigenous leafy vegetables. Indigenous vegetables like fresh pumpkin leaves (cucurbit) was the most commonly mentioned to be consumed by most households and are plentiful almost all year round except in the dry months which the vegetable is scarce. Preserved pumpkin leaves are consumed by less than a quarter of the people who consume fresh vegetables. This shows that the season or availability of indigenous foods determine their consumption level as some cited availability as their main reason.

Comments from the shoppers during buying all indicated that indigenous foods were expensive to the majority of the citizens especially in the dry months. The researchers also observed that the majority of the shoppers would just see, admire and could not buy any food items in the dry months. This shows that the scarcity of indigenous foods makes it difficult for poor households to afford them. Another female participant elucidated that "...during wet season, I purchase indigenous foods for the whole family and when they are out of season, I can only afford for me and my husband. Children will eat covo and cabbage." Thus, some families consider special cases when indigenous foods are out of season. About half of those who consumed these indigenous vegetables reported that the vegetables were bought and not adequate and because of this, indigenous vegetables, especially cucurbit are a well-adapted choice in urban agriculture to those who have average to large gardens.

3.3. Participant's Nutritional Knowledge in Relation to Indigenous Foods

People in Masvingo urban district had knowledge on a variety of edible indigenous foods. Most mentioned vegetables are used as relish and almost all participants came up with some medicinal uses of the indigenous foods. Indigenous fruits and vegetables were liked because they were said to be nutritious and had a medicinal value attached. One participant said "...from the day I learnt they are good for health; I make sure every weekend I take indigenous meals. Actually, it's now two years and my health status has changed,

less ailments so now spreading the gospel to family members and friends." This quote indicates that the participant had discovered the secrecy behind constant consumption of indigenous foods. It also shows that people have been generally informed about the importance of indigenous foods though some did not take it seriously. This could be because most people regard indigenous foods as foods for the poor and also for those with diseases such as diabetes mellitus and HIV/AIDS as they hold on to the medicinal properties attached to them. Regarding indigenous foods as foods for the poor as well as for the sick is consistent with Mujova's (2011) results. Another possible explanation for the view shared by many participants is that, most people turn to indigenous foods when doctors or nurses refer them.

4. Conclusion

The study found that, generally, people have developed interest in indigenous foods. Among the reasons given for the consumption of indigenous foods in response to the semi-structured questions during the interviews were that they are enjoyable, they are good for individuals suffering from diseases such as diabetes and HIV/AIDS and also that they are good for vegetarians. Indigenous vegetables are still therefore seen as poverty crops and they are still seen as food for the poor and the ill. The food and nutrition system of a particular region determines availability of foods, social meanings and functions attached to indigenous foods. Major constraints to consumption of indigenous leafy vegetables were the cost, lack of time and knowledge in food preparation.

5. Recommendations

The study has the following recommendations:

- The value of traditional foods needs to be appreciated by all the residents, government policy makers and scientists responsible for research, extension activities and agricultural policy so that availability is increased.
- There is need to mobilize resources to conduct extensive research on indigenous foods to develop new breeds that could meet new demands for taste and other properties.
- Food nutritionists and dietians need to prepare tasty and appealing indigenous vegetable dishes so that our young people can eat them as well.
- Information on the nutritional and medicinal value of indigenous foods should be put together in a simple and easy-to-read manner and circulated extensively to promote the intake of indigenous foods across the country since there is need to educate the consumers (especially the urban consumers) on the importance of indigenous foods.

5.1. Recommendations for Further Study

- A wider research which covers the whole country.
- A study which looks into the types of indigenous foods taken and their nutritional contribution.

6. References

i. Bogdan, R.C. and Biklen, S.K. (1992). Qualitative research in education. An Introduction to Theory and Methods. 2nd Edition. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
ii. Chipurura, B. (2010). Nutritional content, phenolic compounds composition and antioxidant activities of selected indigenous vegetables of Zimbabwe. Dissertation: University of Zimbabwe.
iii. Chirimuuta, C. and Mapolisa, T. (2011). Centring the peripherised systems: Zimbabwean indigenous knowledge systems for food security. Zimbabwe International Journal of Open & Distance Learning Volume 1 Number (2) International Research Conference Revised Edition.52-56.
iv. Cloutier, K, Mongeau L., Pageau, M and Provencher, V. (2013) Food Perceptions among Adults and Registered Dieticians: Are They Similar? Food and Nutrition Sciences Vol.4 No.10A.1-7 DOI:10.4236/fns.2013.410A002
v. Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2011). Research Methods in Education. 7th edition. London: Rutledge.
vi. Delaney, M. and McCarthy, M. (2009). Food choice and health across the life course: A qualitative study examining food choice in older Irish adults. Paper prepared for presentation at the 113th EAAE Seminar "A resilient European food industry and food chain in a challenging world", Chania, Crete, Greece.
vii. Denzin, N. K. and Lincolin, Y. S. (2011). Handbook of Qualitative Research. 4th edition. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
viii. Devine, C.M., Connors, M., Bisogni C.A. and Sobal, J. (1998), "Life-course influences on fruit and vegetable trajectories: Qualitative analysis of food choices." Journal of Nutrition Education, Vol. 30 (1) 71-90.
ix. Kimiywe, J., Waudo, J., Mbithe1, D and Maundu, P. (2007). Utilization and Medicinal Value of Indigenous Leafy Vegetables Consumed in Urban and Peri-Urban Nairobi. African Journal of Food, Agriculture, Nutrition and Development Vol 7 (4) 1-10.
x. Maroyi, A (2012). Enhancing food security through cultivation of traditional food crops in Nhema communal area, Midlands Province, Zimbabwe. African Journal of Agricultural Research. Vol. 7(39) 5412-5420.
xi. Marshall, C. and Rossman, G. B. 2008. Designing a qualitative research. London: Sage Publication.
xii. Maundu, P. Kimiywe, J. Mbumi, M. Smith, I. F., Johns, T. and Eyzaguirre, P.B. (2008). Nutrition and indigenous vegetables in urban and peri-urban agriculture in Kenya. Bioversity International: Kenya
xiii. Mujova, V.J. (2011). The rural-urban linkage in the use of traditional foods by peri-urban households in Nompumelelo community in East London, Eastern Cape: A comparative study. Masters Dissertation: University of South Africa.

xiv. Mushita A. (2006). Traditional vegetables in Zimbabwe: the NGO agenda. Community Technology Development Association: Harare

xv. Onyango, A.M.O. (2007). African indigenous vegetables in Kenya**:** Strategic repositioning in the horticultural sector. Department of Horticulture, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT).

xvi. Paquette, M.C. (2005), "Perceptions of healthy eating; state of knowledge and research gaps." Canadian Journal of Public Health, Vol. 96 (S3) s15-19.

xvii. Resnik, D. B. (2012). What is Ethics in Research & Why is it Important? National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences. National Institutes of Health - U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. http://www.hhs.gov.

xviii. Rozin, P. (2006). The integration of biological, social, cultural and psychological influences on food choice in: Shepherd, R, Raats, M., (Editors), The Psychology of Food Choice, (pp. 19-39), CABI Press, Oxfordshire, UK.

xix. Shava, S. (2010) Traditional Food Crops Provide Community Resilience in Face of Climate Change, Harare.

xx. Sidhu, K.S. (2003). Methodology of Research in Education. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd.

xxi. Sobal, J., Bisogni, C., Devine, M. and Jastran, M. (2006), A conceptual model of the food choice process over the life course. In: Shepherd R, Raats M, (Editors). The Psychology of Food Choice. (pp. 1-18). CABI Press, Oxfordshire, UK.

xxii. The Herald, 8 September 2014

xxiii. Tsiko, S (2007) Wild Food Plants of Africa Project Gibbs Magazine, Harare.

xxiv. Tsiko, S. (2009) Zimbabwe: Indigenous Vegetable Policy Framework Crucial. Harare, Government of Zimbabwe.

xxv. Wardlaw, G.M. and Smith, A.M. (2011). Contemporary Nutrition. (8th Ed.) New York: MacGraw Hill

xxvi. WHO. 2010. The health and human rights of Indigenous Peoples. www.who.int/hhr/activities/indigenous/en/.

xxvii. World Bank. (2010). Indigenous Peoples. http://web.worldbank.org/wbsite/external/topics/extsocialdevelopment/extindpeople/0,,menupk:407808~pagepk:149018~pipk:149093~thesite pk:407802,00.html.

xxviii. Zimbabwe Independent. (2011). Two million people need food aid. Thursday 13 January 2011. http://www.theindependent.co.zw/business/29485-two-million-need-food-aid-in-zim--fewsnet.htm USAID responds to global food crisis: USAID Humanitarian Assistance.