

Variety for security: the role of households, markets and individuals in maintaining agrobiodiversity in Western Kenya



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Mary Ng'endo Kanui

Linacre College

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Abstract

Agricultural diversity, commonly referred to as agrobiodiversity, is that part of biodiversity that is geared towards agriculture and food production. Agrobiodiversity is said to contribute much to food, nutrition and health, but there is lack of data confirming this, particularly from Eastern Africa. By assessing the role of agrobiodiversity on small scale farms, local markets and food perceptions in six villages of Mumias and Vihiga districts in Western Kenya, the study sought to answer three main research questions: (i) What is the extent of crop diversity on mixed small scale farms and how much does on-farm crop diversity contribute to farm household's food security (ii) What is the relationship between household food consumption and food available on mixed farms and in local markets, and what is the level of market integration among small scale farmers? (iii) How comparable are gender perceptions on local foods and small scale farming systems? The key findings were that: (i) crop diversity is not dependent on crop seasonality and farm sizes, and small scale farmers rely on multiple food sources to achieve household food security (ii) food consumption and availability on mixed farms and in local markets is shaped by cultural and economical reasons, and there is low integration of small scale farmers as sellers in local markets (iii) gender views on seasonality and perceptions on local foods greatly differ with regard to subsistence food crops, but not with purchased foods.

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