

STAKEHOLDERS' MEETING ON THE REGIONAL INITIATIVE FOR THE PROMOTION OF LOCAL FOODS FROM WEST AFRICA'S TRADITIONAL FOOD SYSTEMS

ABUJA NIGERIA, MAY 18TH-20TH 2010

**A Partnership of the West African Health Organization (WAHO),
ROPPA, Bioversity International, the Food and Agriculture
Organization (FAO) and the ECOWAS Commission for Agriculture**

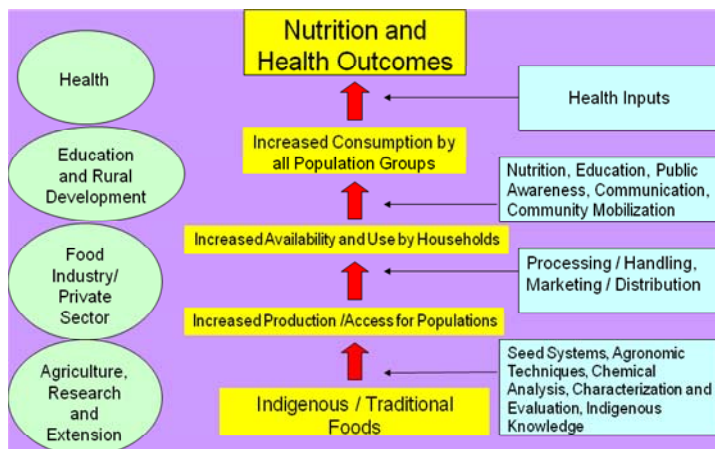
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Adequate nutrition for the West African population can rightly be perceived as a product of interventions requiring several essential inputs for its development and execution. Each sector identified on the schema has its unique expertise to provide its own unique and indispensable set of inputs.

It is becoming abundantly clear that no one sector working alone, can effect sustainable improvements in the nutrition and health of populations. Vital inputs from several sectors, public and private institutions are required in order to ensure the desired goals of adequate food security, nutrition and health of a population.

The need for collaborative partnership is increasingly being recognized in West Africa where during the past four years, a strong regional collaborative, multi-disciplinary and cross-sectoral partnership has developed involving the West African Health Organization (WAHO), the ECOWAS Commission on Agriculture, the regional network of small-scale food producers (Reseau des Organisations Paysannes et des Producteurs Agricole de l’Afrique de l’Ouest –



ROPPA), in collaboration with Bioversity International and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). The overarching objective of this initiative is to ensure, through its activities, the effective promotion of use of local food resources from West Africa’s traditional food systems in households, and in strategies and interventions against food insecurity, micronutrient deficiencies and diet related chronic

diseases.

Representatives of member organizations of this initiative consortium, as well as stakeholders from research, public and private sector organizations (See participants’ list) met in Abuja, May 18– 20, 2010 to:

- (1) Assess progress on the implementation of previously identified priority activities (See report of November 2009 Ouagadougou WAHO/ROPPA/Bioversity Regional Workshop)
- (2) Develop guidelines for a 5-year operational plan to facilitate increases in production, availability and use of traditional foods by urban and rural households, as well as increased use in food and nutrition intervention programmes.

Summary of Stakeholders' Recommendations

Research

- Continue with ongoing food data compilation and the creation of an interim user- friendly food composition database from existing published and unpublished data on the compositional attributes of food resources from West Africa's traditional food systems
- Through a task force comprising FAO, WAHO and Bioversity International and research institutions, verify, validate, adopt and disseminate the created User-database.
- Identify information gaps and food resources requiring new or further research activities
- Make resources available for additional research to close the information gaps in order to provide new and reliable data on the compositional attributes of a larger selection of traditional and gathered food resources from the region's food systems
- Create a network of research institutions and food analysts with a mandate and the necessary resources to undertake research and make available new data on the nutritional and health attributes of traditional foods
- Regularly update the created User-database with new research data
- Continuously support research through existing regional agriculture programs, especially ECOWAP.

Raising Public Awareness for Action and Change in Dietary Habits

- Produce and disseminate a pictorial book of food resources from the region's food systems with information on their nutrition and health attributes
- Produce a regional recipe book containing at least 20 recipes per country
- By use of social marketing techniques and programmes, promote the use of local foods in households and in governments' social functions in order to boost pride in the local food culture
- Organize national and local feedback workshops to disseminate and widely make available information on the nutrition and health attributes of local food resources reported in the food composition database
- Integrate the use of the information on the nutrient values of local foods in nutrition education, health promotion and school feeding programs.

Advocacy at National and Regional Levels

- Develop and implement an advocacy strategy to raise awareness among decision makers
- Organize quarterly regional and national roundtables on the importance of using foods from local food systems for improved nutrition and health, in collaboration with the media, private sector organizations, NGOs and civil society groups

- Organize on a regular basis regional/national food fairs, food exhibition and cooking competitions under the auspices of the Executive President of ECOWAS
- Organize biannual regional/national policy advocacy workshops involving relevant public sector directors with the objective of enabling policy makers to integrate agricultural biodiversity for improved nutrition and health into national development plans, and in ECOWAS health policies and agricultural investment plans.

Capacity Building

- Increase, through regular training, the critical mass of local experts trained in the generation, development and dissemination of data on the compositional attributes of local/traditional foods
- Train local experts on ways and means of maintaining quality control of data generated
- Train ROPPA members (food producers and processors), as well as other food processing groups, on the need and use of nutrient data in public awareness, food labeling and information, marketing of food products, and in advocacy
- Train food processors on the key role that information on the compositional attributes of local foods play in correct packaging and labeling of fresh and packaged food products both for local and international markets
- Train junior researchers in the development of food composition databases.

BACKGROUND

Dietary diversification is vital to tackling the problems of hunger, micronutrient malnutrition and diet-related chronic diseases. Studies in the sub-region reveal high prevalence rates of these conditions in most ECOWAS Member States and these conditions put immense strain on the health services infrastructure of governments in the sub-region.

Dietary diversification requires diversity in agricultural production leading to diversity in the food supply systems of the population. Reports also show that the increasing nutrition and health problems of population groups in West Africa are paralleled by the decline in the use of foods from the traditional food systems, and by the loss of indigenous knowledge that is essential for the full and sustainable exploitation of these food resources, generally known for their positive nutrition and health benefits.

Small-scale food producers – members of ROPPA, whose production systems are characterized by large varieties of carbohydrate staples, pulses and bean varieties, leafy vegetable varieties, fruits, food condiments and spices, and animal-sourced foods, play a pivotal role in the maintenance of diversity in national food systems. The production, easy availability, and use by households of these nutrient-rich traditional foods are therefore *sine qua non* in the ongoing regional battle against food insecurity, micronutrient malnutrition and diet-related chronic diseases.

This regional initiative for the promotion of local foods from West Africa's traditional food systems has set itself the goal of catalyzing strategic actions of national governments and regional institutions to increase knowledge of the nutrition and health

benefits of the region's traditional food resources, increase their production and use by the population, thereby effectively mainstreaming these food resources in everyday family diets. Furthermore, it is hoped that the established collaborative partnerships would provide platforms to bring together stakeholders from related disciplines, allowing them to coordinate their efforts and optimize the use of increasingly scarce resources for policy development as well as programme implementation.

RATIONALE

The West African sub-region is blessed with abundant food variety – millet, sorghum, fonio, local rice, maize, sesame, bambara groundnut, cowpeas and well over 30 bean varieties, roots and tubers, over 200 indigenous leaf and fruit vegetables, and fruits. The physical geography of the region largely determines the distribution of these food crops, creating a grain-based subsistence agriculture in the north of the sub-region and a tuber based system in the south. With intra-regional trade in food crops, this makes for diversity in the food supply, in food choices and in household diets. However, this diversity of foods in family diets has now been replaced by diets of predominantly rice, maize, wheat and their products. Family diets in the sub region now lack the diversity of foods that ensure optimum daily supplies of micronutrients and health protecting phytochemicals. It is therefore not surprising that nutrition and health data from the sub-region show very high rates of infant and under-five mortality rates, as well as high rates of growth retardation in young children. Among adults the changes in dietary patterns from traditionally diversified to diets high in carbohydrates and fats have resulted in increasingly high rates of obesity and diet-related non-communicable diseases. These are

the results of fundamental changes in the region's food systems. It is thus vital that frontline interventions aimed at reversing these high rates of micronutrient deficiencies and diet-related chronic diseases address the root cause of the situation, which is lack of diversity in national and regional food supplies.

The resilience and sustainability of West Africa's traditional food systems are pivotal to tackling the multiple problems of micronutrient malnutrition and diet-related chronic diseases. West Africa's agriculture is dominated by small-scale farmers whose production systems hold the key to diversification of the region's food supply. Thus the active participation of small-scale food producers through their network-ROPPA in this initiative comes at an opportune and critical juncture in the regional and global search for sustainable solutions to the food security, and health problems resulting (double burden of malnutrition) viewed, in a context globalization and food crisis.

The problem to be tackled being clearly defined, there was a clear need to expand the partnership and bring in national, regional, and international partners with competences required to achieve the stated objectives of the initiative. The stakeholders' meeting brought together a multidisciplinary and multisectoral group of experts to map out strategies and action plans for achieving specific target objectives, and to assume responsibilities for specific output targets. The meeting broke into two working groups to deliberate further and, based on priority plans earlier identified during discussions by the experts,, develop a five-year operational plan which will constitute a road-map for activities aimed at:

- Providing needed support to ROPPA members in order to facilitate and effect increases in the production and marketing

of traditional foods from the local food systems.

- Increasing the use by households, as well as in food and nutrition intervention programmes, of traditional foods from local food systems.

The working groups considered research, public awareness, advocacy and capacity building as four impact oriented priority areas that need to be tackled in a 5-year operational plan (See attached suggested workplan).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Research

There is a commonly held belief that foods from the region's traditional food systems contain high levels of micronutrient and health protecting bioactive compounds. However such beliefs are based more on anecdotal evidence. The stakeholders recognized the importance and vital role that empirical data on the nutritional and health protecting attributes of these food resources would play in policy development and programme implementation of several sectors- agriculture, health, trade, rural development and environment. They argued that, although there was still a dearth of compositional data on these food resources, more recent research has provided some data to confirm the micronutrient superiority of the not-so-commonly-used food varieties, as well as some wild cultivars which have remained part of the traditional food systems. The working groups therefore recommended that research activities of the 5-year operational plan needed to concentrate on the development of a comprehensive user-database of the compositional attributes of food resources from West Africa's food systems. The participants also recommended much closer ties between researchers and members of small-scale farmers groups to ensure that agronomic research activities are based on farmers' needs for improvement in their agricultural production. Furthermore, the

participants acknowledged that a lot of research had been conducted to determine best agronomic practices for local food production but noted that such results were largely not communicated to the food producers. They therefore recommended that, in the development and implementation of the ECOWAS Agricultural Policies such as the Regional Agriculture Policy for West Africa (ECOWAP), the vital links between research, policy and practice be strengthened.

Raising Public Awareness for Action

It was recognized that the marketing of local foods was still a major obstacle to the creation of demand. However effective marketing strategies cannot be developed without scientific based information on the composition of the local foods. The ultimate beneficiaries of programmes to increase the availability, access and use of the diversity of food resources from local food systems are resource-poor households in both rural and urban areas whose dietary practices have changed significantly over the years and are now characterized by carbohydrate-rich staples, sugars and fats. The participants noted that it would take enormous and concerted efforts by governments, working with public, private sector organizations and the civil society to develop public awareness campaign messages targeting nutrition information and education, in order to counteract the strong competition which imported and subsidized carbohydrate staples such as rice and wheat posed to local food resources. The participants therefore recommended that, in addition to planned public awareness programmes and activities, and as part of a national and regional public awareness campaign, the use of local foods and products be institutionalized in all government and public sector official functions.

They also recommended that social marketing techniques that target change in food habits by use of data showing the high nutritional

qualities of traditional foods, be used to promote their increased consumption by the population. The stakeholders argued that such social marketing programmes will not only result in positive changes in household food habits and the increased consumption of local food resources, they will stimulate demand, resulting in increased production of these foods.

Advocacy at National and Regional Levels

Advocacy is an ongoing activity for members of the regional associations of small-scale food producers (ROPPA) and so the participants urged the ROPPA stakeholders to maintain constant pressure on national governments in order to ensure that the Heads of States Maputo agreement of devoting 10 percent of national budgets to agriculture be realized. Participants noted that advocacy was a vital and effective tool for raising awareness on social issues, not only among the population at large but also among policy and decision makers within public and private sector institutions. Thus, while advocacy was identified as one of the priority action areas, the participants noted that a multipronged strong and continuous advocacy is required of all institutional members of the initiative including ECOWAS and national parliaments, for the promotion of local food resources from West Africa's traditional food systems, in order to speedily achieve the desired results. They also recommended that "champions" of the cause among political leaders and influential members of the public be identified to be involved in "headlining" planned national and regional level advocacy activities.

Capacity Building

As rightly noted by the participating stakeholders, the first victims of any food crisis are rural communities, women within these communities being particularly affected. In West Africa, women dominate the food

processing industry. They are involved in harvesting and other post-harvest activities – processing, storage, distribution and marketing of food resources from the local food systems. The stakeholders therefore recommended that particular attention be paid to reinforcing the value adding capacities of women food producers in the areas of processing, packaging, storage of processed products and their marketing in order to enable these women food producers to meet the challenges and competition for market share posed by food imports and the externally owned large-scale food processors. The representatives of ROPPA at the stakeholders’ meeting expressed the need for improvements in the sharing of new technologies, quality control, and food production information which they believe would help to ensure sustainable conservation and use of agro-biodiversity by their members.

The participants also expressed the need to develop short training programmes for all categories of local food processors on food packaging and labeling using nutritional data from the regional food composition table being developed. They believed that such labeling of nutrient content would provide the needed nutrition information and further increase demand and consumption of local processed food resources by an informed population.

The need to continuously develop the capacities of the providers of the vital nutrition information was also addressed by the participants. Bearing in mind the key role that information on the nutrition and health attributes of foods from local food systems play in the promotion and mainstreaming of local food resources in household diets, the stakeholders recommended increasing, through regular training, the number of

experts who generate and disseminate this information.

WRAP-UP DISCUSSIONS

Expanding the List of Collaborating Research Institutions and Individual Researchers for the Food Composition Database Initiative

The suggestion to establish a list of universities and research institutes participating in the food composition database initiative was discussed in plenary, and the decision was taken to identify participating researchers and research institutions based on specific required competencies as well as institutions’ laboratory infrastructure and analytical facilities.

Establishing a Task Force to Direct the Activities of the Food Composition Database Initiative

Some participating stakeholders from regional institutions and research institutes (Universite Cheikh Anta Diop, University of Ghana Legon, , Bioversity International, WAHO, CILSS and FAO) were proposed to lead the task force while, the country-level consultants who were involved in the initial compilations of existing published and unpublished food composition data (Ms P. Addy, Mr Etel Fagbohoun, Dr Victor Enujiugha, Mr Romaric Bayili, Mr B. Samb) would constitute the members of the task force. The full mandate of this task force is yet to be developed.

Expanding the Multi-Sectorial Collaborative Partnership

The representative of the ECOWAS Agriculture Commission suggested raising the existing WAHO/ROPPA/FAO/Bioversity/CILSS, ECOWAS Agriculture collaborative

partnership to Ministerial level. It was also suggested that the collaboration be expanded to include the ministries of Education, Finance and Rural development, as well as other public, private sectors, civil society organizations and donor groups.

CLOSING COMMENTS

Through closing comments from representatives of ROPPA, ECOWAS/WAHO and Bioversity International, the stakeholders were reminded of the progress that had been made since 2006 before which such collaborative partnerships were non-existent, to the year 2010 when WAHO could report, not only about an active and functional multi-sector collaborative partnership, but also the achievement of concrete results from the partnership activities. The participants recognized the active participation of the representative of the African Development Bank (ABD) and expressed the hope that ABD would continue to be actively engaged and provide needed funding support for the activities of the regional initiative for the promotion of foods from the region's food systems. Participants were also encouraged to continue to cultivate the existing partnership and alliances between institutions and individual stakeholders in order to convince other agencies and groups of the need for such collaborative partnerships. This allows partnerships formed to take full advantage of the specific competences of partners, thereby maximizing limited resources in the development and successful implementation of programmes that ensure sustainable food and nutrition security in the sub-region.

Draft 5-Year Operational Work Plan for Recommended Priority Actions (2011-2016)

Priority Area: (Research) Assembly of scientifically proven food composition data following harmonized and acceptable standards

Activities	Timing	Indicator(s)	Principal Actor(s)	Partners	Indicative Budget	Source of Funds
Compilation of scientific data to create database	2011-2013	Tables of composition available for specific crops	WAFOODS & WAHO	National Food Research Institutions & Universities, ROPPA/OP, CILSS etc.	USD 50.000	ECOWAS, ADB ¹ , WAHO
Scientific verification and validation of data in database by Task Force	2011-2016 (Every 6 months)	Availability of validated data every 6 months.	WAHO/Bioversity /FAO	WAHO, Bioversity, WAFOODS Coordinator	50000	ECOWAS, ADB, USAID, WAHO
Continuation of compilation of existing data into an archival dbase and verification	2011-2016	Completion of the collection of existing data	WAHO/Bioversity /FAO	Universities/ research institutes	USD 150,000	ECOWAS, ADB, WAHO/ USAID
Creation of an expanded user database to be validated by FAO that	2012-2013	Existence of a user database	WAHO/Bioversity	Universities/ research institutes/ROPPA	USD 30,000	ECOWAS, ADB

¹ For the ADB, the proposal is to prepare a programme of work with a research institution.

includes priority foods identified by ROPPA (food producers and processors)			/FAO			
Organization of a feedback workshop making the user database available and reinforce a transversal communication strategy within the region	2013	Information well disseminated on existence of user database and its use	ROPPA Bioveristy /WAHO	ECOWAS/ NGO'S/ Consumer Associations	USD 70.000	ECOWAS, ADB
Identification of information gaps that require further research actions on the nutritional and health benefits of foods	2013-2016	Information gaps and needs for new research identified	Bioveristy/WAHO/FAO	Universities/ research institutes	USD 70,000	ECOWAS, ADB
Institutional adoption of validated data by competent ECOWAS structures (WAHO)	2016	Resolutions on adopted validated data every 12 months	WAHO	WAFOODS, Task Force	60.000	ECOWAS, ADB, WAHO

Priority Area: Advocacy at National and Regional Levels

Activities	Timing	Indicator(s)	Principal Actor(s)	Partners	Indicative Budget	Source of Funds
Develop advocacy strategic plan & tools	2011	Strategy document containing	Consultants to be engaged by WAHO	ROPPA, WAHO, Bioversity International, Task Force, CILSS, AMLD,	60000	ECOWAS, USAID

		tools, and implementation plan		ENDA		
Strategy implementation	2012-2016	<p>National:- Policy makers integrate biodiversity for nutrition in national development plan in some countries</p> <p>Regional: Integration of biodiversity for nutrition in ECOWAS policies and investment plan.</p>	<p>National -Producers or Farmers Coordinating Council (Farmers Organization) & Inter-Ministerial Committee (Ag, Env, Health)</p> <p>Regional:- ROPPA, CILSS, AMLD, ENDA, Hellen Keller International (HKI)</p>	<p>Experts in Biodiversity for nutrition & health, Task Force, WAHO</p> <p>Bioversity International</p>	120.000	ECOWAS, ROPPA & Partners, USAID
Organization of regional round-table discussions with the media and restaurant operators (Three round table meetings	2013	Three regional round table meetings organized	Bioveristy/WAHO/ ROPPA/ ECOWAS	NGO's /Civil Society/ Chambers of Commerce/ Media	USD 30.000	ECOWAS, ROPPA and partners

attached to meetings						
Organization of regional food fairs/food exhibition/cooking competition under the auspices of the executive president of ECOWAS	2013	Three Regional Food fairs/ exhibition organized	Bioveristy/WAHO/ROPPA/ECOWAS/CILSS	Chambers of agriculture/ consumer Associations/Food industries	USD 12, 000	ECOWAS ROPPA and partners
Development of regional recipe books	2013	Regional recipe book available with 20 recipes per country	Bioveristy/WAHO/ROPPA/ECOWAS	Consumer associations/ Food processors/ Womens' groups	USD 50000	ROPPA and partners

Priority Area: Raising Public Awareness for Action

Activities	Timing	Indicator(s)	Principal Actor(s)	Partners	Indicative Budget	Source of Funds
Develop public awareness/communication strategy (target groups, message, tools, channels, languages etc)	2011-2012	Strategy document	ROPPA/OP, ENDA	Bioversity International, AMLD, CILSS,	60000	ECOWAS & Partners, ROPPA & Partners
Implementation of public awareness & communication	2012-2016	Tools & channels; Feedback from	National: ENDA, ROPPA/OP & partners,	Bioversity International	80000	ECOWAS & ROPPA + partners

strategy		public and private sector stakeholders;	HKI Sub-regional: WAHO			
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Priority Area: Capacity Building

Activities	Timing	Indicator(s)	Principal Actor(s)	Partners	Indicative Budget	Source of Funds
Identification of target groups and their focal persons. For example, training of ROPPA members(food producers and processors) on the need and use of Food composition tables	2011-2016	Identified target groups & focal persons. For example, ROPPA Members well informed and knowledgeable on the use of the FC Database Training tools and support developed, translated	Bioveristy/ WAHO/FAO/ ROPPA	Universities/ research institutes AMLD, ENDA, CILSS	USD 70,000	ECOWAS & Partners; ROPPA & Donor Partners, WAHO

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