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## PROBLEMS OF PROPAGATION AND CONSERVATION OF INDIGENOUS FRUIT TREES IN GBOKO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF BENUE STATE, NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

*Tropical rainforests as natural resources are constantly in a state of flux, as several benefits can be derived from it, such as timber, fuel wood, rubber, fruits and nuts, dyes and some medicinal plants. Fruits are very important components of man's diet, containing a wide variety of amino acids, vitamins and minerals essential for growth and development. Unfortunately, in spite of their importance in the diet of man, indigenous fruits are often relegated to the background in preference for timber and its by-products. A field survey was carried out in Gboko Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria where the indigenous fruit trees were identified scientifically with their families and local names. Factors hindering their large-scale cultivation were also highlighted. Fruits play a leading role in the economy of many rural people and food security program too. Therefore a good study of them and the need for their conservation for future generations cannot be overemphasized.*

**Key words:** *Tropical rainforest, indigenous fruit trees, rural people, food security, conservation*

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### INTRODUCTION

Conservation is defined as the careful use of energy, water, and other resources so that they are not wasted or damaged (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2013). Its focus is on the protection of the natural ecosystem, and the variable utilization of the resources. Both the renewable and non-renewable resources are exploited for the benefit of our

people. Rainforests as renewable natural resources have many benefits to mankind such as timber, fruits, fuel wood, rubber and spices. They also have other products of high economic value such as medicines and dyes (Poore and Sayer, 1987). However the management and exploitation of these forest products is generally poor. Fruits are essential component in the human diet as

they contain varieties of amino acids, vitamins and minerals that are essential for man's growth and development. In spite of their tremendous values and usefulness to mankind, they still exist in the wild with little or no efforts in improving and developing them. This present work is aimed at creating awareness of this nature's gift to mankind and the problems militating against full exploitation of these wonderful resources.

### **Indigenous Fruit Trees in Gboko Local Government Area**

A field survey carried out has shown a reasonable number of fruit trees in Gboko Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria. Trees are useful not only as a source of food items, but also serve as livestock feeds, farming and household implements, beverages, drugs, timber, chewing sticks and dyes. Some fruits combine with the leaves, roots and barks to serve the useful medicinal purpose.

Indigenous fruit trees in Gboko Local Government Area with their local names are listed in table 1.

### **The Need to Conserve Indigenous Fruit Trees.**

The Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO, 1989) has revealed that indigenous fruit trees form an important component in the food needs of the rural people. Most rural people depend on wild fruits as source of food, and this could be attributed to poverty. Several low income rural households rely on harvesting, processing and sale of forest products as their main income throughout the difficult period of agricultural cycle (FRS, 1998). Also, Okafor (1993) opined that indigenous fruit trees are important fruit bearing tree species, and their rapid depletion especially by the rural poor is a source of worry to the food security programme. The alarming rate at which those tree species are being depleted and their supplies are dwindling

exponentially may lead to their threat of extinctions (Okafor, 1993). In Nigeria, policies formulated often favour the production of exotic species such as rice, coffee and cocoa. Some indigenous fruit trees such as oil palm and kola have just began to receive attention for their favorable growth. But this is insignificant when compared with those threatened with extinction due to unfavorable policies (FRS,

1998). Our indigenous fruit trees have been overexploited while deforestation, land clearance for agricultural, industrial and residential purposes have put them under severe stress several other factors such as logging, shifting cultivation, bush burning, destructive harvests, population growth etc have all combined to put both ecological and utilization stress on those indigenous fruit trees.

**Table 1: Indigenous Fruit Trees in Gboko Local Government Area**

S/No	Scientific Name	Local Name (Tiv)	Family
1.	<i>Azelia africana</i>	Yiase	<i>Caesalpiniaceae</i>
2.	<i>Anosna senegalensis</i>	Ahur	<i>Annonaceae</i>
3.	<i>Anacardium occidentale</i>	Ishase	<i>Anacardiaceae</i>
4.	<i>Bombax buonopozense</i>	Genger	<i>Bombacaceae</i>
5.	<i>Cola acuminata</i>	Alie	<i>Verbenaceae</i>
6.	<i>Mangifera indica</i>	Mangor	<i>Anacardiaceae</i>
7.	<i>Maytenus senegalensis</i>	Alomade	<i>Celastraceae</i>
8.	<i>Landolphia owerensis</i>	Ipunga	<i>Apocynaceae</i>
9.	<i>Spondias monbin</i>	Konkuagh	<i>Anacardiaceae</i>
10.	<i>Irvingia gabonensis</i>	Ive	<i>Irvingiaceae</i>
11.	<i>Prosopis africana</i>	Gbaaye	<i>Mimosaceae</i>
12.	<i>Parkia biglobosa</i>	Nune	<i>Mimosaceae</i>
13.	<i>Tomarindus indica</i>	Tsamia	<i>Anacardiaceae</i>
14.	<i>Vitellaria paradoxa</i>	Chamegh	<i>Sapotaceae</i>
15.	<i>Elaeis guineensis</i>	Vile	<i>Palmae</i>
16.	<i>Psidium guajava</i>	Gwava	<i>Myrtaceae</i>
17.	<i>Citrus sinensis</i>	Alum	<i>Rutaceae</i>
18.	<i>Gardenia erubescens</i>	Ibohough	<i>Rubiaceae</i>
20.	<i>Vitex donniana</i>	Hulugh	<i>Verbenaceae</i>
21.	<i>Ananas comosus</i>	Pinapu	<i>Bromeliaceae</i>
22.	<i>Carica papaya</i>	Ambuegh	<i>Caricaceae</i>
23.	<i>Dialium guineensis</i>	Koondo	<i>Leguminosae</i>
24.	<i>Musa paradisiacal</i>	Ayaba	<i>Musaceae</i>
25.	<i>Pears eludies</i>	Mzembe	<i>Pittosporaceae</i>
26.	<i>Cocoa nucifera</i>	Ikyeve	<i>Palmae</i>

Source: Field Surveys (2015).

The indigenous fruit trees have specialized ecological niches which when altered due to the activities of timber lumbering by companies and individuals may further affect them. Lack of adequate attention and cultivation has forced many of the species that were hitherto used by man into extinction. However, experienced and aged traditionalists use them for trado-medicinal purposes, and sell them at the open markets. With the decline in timber wood, a lot of pressure has been put on the indigenous fruit trees which invariably have sustained the economy of many rural people.

Fruits play a crucial role in combating food security as their health benefits in the diet of man cannot be underestimated. The combined effects of nutrients and other substances in fruits help in the prevention of diseases. Their dietary fiber is useful in the reduction of cholesterol levels in the blood, cancer prevention, management of obesity and diabetes has elevated the status of fruits.

### **Problems of Cultivation of Indigenous Fruit Trees**

Despite the strategic position occupied by indigenous fruits in the food demands of many households, their cultivation has become difficult due to a number of factors. The arrival of foreigners changed the perception of certain foods. It has also increased the varieties of fruits available, mostly exotic ones.

Consequently, the demand for imported fruits such as apples and pears has usurped the demand for local fruits. FRS (1998) identified other intrinsic factors such as long period of maturity, trees too tall, ( not easy for picking of fruits), pests, bush fires, inadequate water, livestock feeding on seedlings, diseases and fruit abortion. Others includes poor harvesting techniques, processing rigor, lack of business expansion, poor preservation method, lack of storage facilities, and poor prices for fruit products. The land that is available is often utilized by

local farmers to grow food crops for consumption and cash crops for export. Onuorah and Iyamabo (1986) stated that some of the land is used in establishing forest plantations, urbanization, roads, airports and large dams.

### CONCLUSION

Despite the myriads of constraints, the

present study has shown many fruit trees are still useful to mankind. They have the potential as food and cash crops when fruits are conserved and put to rational uses. They also play crucial roles in food security programmes, stabilization of the ecosystem and help sustain the economy of many rural people.

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