

Optimising Leafy Indigenous Vegetables as Functional Foods: The Nigerian Case Study

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Abstract : Developing countries like Nigeria are facing myriad problems, ranging from economic challenges, lack of no jobs, food insecurity, malnutrition, and poverty. However, tackling some of these menaces is not just a trivial issue neither do some of them require rocket science to fix, but rather the understanding of every individual citizen recognizing their respective roles that they have to play in making the country better, rather than putting all the blames on the Government. Tackling nutrition and food insecurity is a complex problem, but this work examines what an individual can do to improve nutrient consumption. Leafy indigenous vegetables can be termed as functional foods since they are very rich in nutrients, phytochemicals and other beneficial compounds to the body system. These functional foods are the class that provides necessary health benefits beyond basic nutrition. Usually functional foods often contain bioactive compounds, which help the body through the prevention and management of various diseases, as well as improving the overall health of human beings. The analysis carried out on some Nigerian leafy indigenous vegetables in home grown setting revealed, for example, the potential use of Iron (Fe) amount of 318.15ppm in *Basella alba* (red species) and that of *Telfaria Occidentalis* (Ugu) with 261.22ppm as being useful to stimulate heme, a necessary precursor and protein in the formation of blood in human being. Moreso, *Virnonia amygdalina* (ewuro) and water leaf possess anti-bacterial and anti-diabetic properties. They also provide digestive health benefits and support to the body system, including anti-inflammatory properties. Also, medicinal plant like *Morinda citrifolia* (Noni), which had been found to possess anti-cancer properties, has a Vitamin C amount of 528.85 mg/100g and a total carotenoids amount of 85.50 µg/g. However, despite all these results and potential utilization of these and other indigenous vegetables in Nigeria, there is a gross unawareness and/or non-cognizance of their utilization potentials, as some home garden lacks understanding of the immense nutrition benefits, thus hindering some of the populace to make proper use of these vegetables to enhance their health.

Keywords : developing countries, optimising, leafy vegetables, functional foods

Conference Title : ICNFFFS 2025 : International Conference on Nutraceuticals, Functional Foods and Food Science

Conference Location : London, United Kingdom

Conference Dates : April 10-11, 2025