

LOCAL COMMUNITIES; A KEY VOICE FOR THE FUTURE OF FOOD SECURITY

A focus on the African Diaspora input

By

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SAMPLE SURVEY OF AFRICAN DIASPORA FOOD MARKET IN BELGIUM

104 Anglophone African respondents

- African Food Consumption

28.8% - daily

39.4% - weekly

20.2% - monthly and the rest 1- 4 times yearly

- African Food shopping

41.3% - monthly

29.8% - weekly

19.2% - 1 to 4 times yearly

- Economic value

46.1% spend 0-50 euros monthly

37.3% spend 50 to 100 euros monthly

54.1% - money spent in shops does not help African farmers

92.1% - African farmers do not get a decent price

56.4% - Diaspora food market contributes to the development of Africa

92% - African Diasporans are key development agents

- Survey by The Food Bridge vzw and Africa Europe Faith and Justice Network, Brussels Belgium



PROJECTS

OUR FOOD, YOUR FOOD

FOOD THAT TRAVELS



AFRIKOT

AFRICAN DIASPORA AGRO FOOD
FORUM

THANK YOU

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SAVE THE DATE

African Diaspora Agro Food Forum 2019

13th September 2019
Bouchout Castle
Meise Botanic Garden
Belgium

For partnership, exhibition, participation
contact:
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LOCAL COMMUNITIES; A KEY VOICE FOR THE FUTURE OF FOOD SECURITY: A focus on the African Diaspora input

Introduction

I thank the organizers for making it possible for me to be here at this closing event .

As mentioned in the introduction, I am the founder and a director of the Food Bridge vzw, which is a non-profit organization based in Belgium. The work of my organization focuses on these themes:

- Protection of indigenous food systems and cultures
- Access to acceptable and nutritious food
- Economic Empowerment
- Research and Education

On the academic side, I am a food historian and a researcher, whose research interest focuses on Diaspora, food and identity. I am also actively involved in African diaspora initiatives in Belgium and serve as the vice president of Federation of Anglophone Africans Belgium (FAAB vzw), which as at today is made up of over 80 organizations run by Africans or working in Africa. Why this long introduction you may wonder, because my background is what has led me to be here today addressing you. Moreover, when you are about to speak to a group of scientists, who value data, it is good to start with good facts to show you are speaking from a place of knowledge.

Local communities as a key for future food security!!

I wish to thank Koen Els and Jutta Kleber of the Meise Botanic Garden Belgium for being bold enough, to try something many are still not open to doing; which is reaching out to communities, who didn't really have any idea that there is also a space for them, in botanic gardens and the work done within.

For years food security has been a major challenge in many communities across the world especially in Africa. So I will look at food security in communities but from an African diaspora perspective. The modern African diaspora communities, are not just dynamic components of the places they are located but also of Africa. Many migrated to Europe, not to leave their African communities behind but to insure their African communities can live! Thus African Diasporas have first-hand knowledge of the developmental challenges in Africa at the micro and macro levels. They want to be part of the solution and have actually been taking initiatives towards achieving this .many African Diasporas have supported their communities in Africa, through self-sponsored development projects, millions of dollars remittance sent home each month and investments in the agrofood sector too. Thus making them very positive influencers in their local communities.

Focusing on food security, It is also important to note that many AFRICANS in the diaspora, still depend on the continent for a lot of their food. Thus having food security in the continent benefits them as well. This is better illustrated with these examples from the results of a survey on the African diaspora food market in Belgium .This survey was carried out by the Food Bridge and the Africa Europe Faith and Justice network, with the findings presented at the 2018 African Diaspora Agrofood Forum . The survey covered themes like food choice, food safety, trade, regulations and

entrepreneurship. The data shown here is about food grown in the continent, many of which are indigenous to Africa. There were two surveys in French and English with exactly the same questions but I will only share some of the findings from the 104 Anglophone African respondents resident in Belgium. It is important to note the food consumption and the amount spent.

- African Food Consumption

28.8% - daily

39.4% - weekly

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56.4% - Diaspora food market contributes to the development of Africa

90% - African Diasporas are key development agents

These sample gives one an idea of the eating patterns of the community and the need for food security .It also highlights the relevance of a sustainable food system in Africa because the impact of food related issues in Africa, is felt beyond the continent. Not only these, the African Diaspora know the local terrain and what needs to be done. They are a depository of current information and knowledge about many African countries in Europe. By liaising with them, one can gain access to comparable data and information concerning different African communities and food cultures from the community without travelling to all these countries .

Why is our collaboration with the Meise Botanical Garden's Bigpicnic project unique?

First, I have been part of many food related events, conferences and projects. There are always experts and researchers working on this FOOD topic , from the humanities and the sciences, policy makers from global agencies, governments and so on, but all seem to be on parallel lines with no intersection, which for me is odd (maybe as an African diaspora with different trajectories). All these people are working towards the same goal- achieving food security. Having had the same issue for decades, maybe it is time to try another approach. Hopefully, one that will include the voice of the diaspora in these dialogues and policy making.

Secondly, we all eat but we do not all term the same things as food, so how can you proffer a sustainable solution to a community, when you do not understand their food culture because the cultural dynamics that influence food choices are very important.

By taking the bold step of reaching out across communities, beyond the normal scope of development and policy dialogues, this project helped create links between communities, individuals, businesses and scientific research.

The Big picnic project opened up the Meise botanic garden to the diverse diaspora communities in Belgium. This provided a great opportunity for knowledge sharing. It validated the indigenous knowledge of the people, whose communities may benefit the most from the work of the botanic garden. Ordinary African diasporas were given a space to share their knowledge about the plants in the garden. It meant a lot to be part of the different sessions of 'Your Food, Our Food, sharing food memories and experience. Through it all, showing that while in one community the value of a plant may be nutritional, in another it may be spiritual or economic. From this collaboration emerged sessions for children in "Food that travels". Helping children learn the origins of some of the food they love and the work that goes into producing them. Hopefully also raising a future generation of scientists of African diaspora origin, who will in the future take the researches you have started further.

We have been provided a space to also bring to a wider audience, the research of African scientists and the projects of African entrepreneurs, in the agro food sector. For the second time, the Meise Botanic garden, will be hosting the African Diaspora Agro food forum, this would not have been possible without the BigPicnic project. During the last edition, many of the African entrepreneurs present, were motivated by the innovative niches and economic potentials in the researches on coffee, mushrooms by the scientists of the Meise botanic garden. They now know they can always reach out to the garden for information regarding different plants. ANOTHER important outcome is the interest in the conservation of indigenous plants. Having visited the garden, many now have a different view about the food crops and plants they normally take for granted and appreciate the urgent need for conservation of African indigenous crops and plants.

we have worked together in this project to engage people across communities, sharing food cultures and knowledge. Many have been exposed to food cultures that they would otherwise not have known. We have had Igbo men performing kolanut rites with palm wine and sharing with government ministers of nationalist political parties. we have used African root recipes to share information about the relevance of root crops in food security and have shown that African cuisine is not just delicious but also nutritious.

The BigPicnic provided a space that enabled dialogue, inclusion, innovative ideas, knowledge sharing and economic empowerment. Let all these gains not be put aside, for that will truly be a step backwards. Thank you.