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Gendered knowledge on food trees for addressing food security and nutrition in Uganda & Kenya

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Food trees provide fruits, nuts, leaves and seeds that contribute substantially to food and nutrition security of African rural households. Farmers have a wealth of local knowledge on food tree species for cultivation and use for various household needs. This knowledge is influenced by gender and age-related factors often neglected in research and development endeavors. This study sought to understand gendered and age-related knowledge on food trees use in Uganda and Kenya. The purpose was to identify context-specific food tree portfolios that can sustainably address food and nutrition gaps while responding to the needs and strategic interests of different gender and age groups. Data collection was conducted through gender- and age-segregated focus group discussions in two sites in Uganda, Nakaseke and Nakasongola, and two sites in Kenya, Kitui and Mwingi west. Participatory research using seasonality calendars and score - ranking was conducted with sixteen focus groups and comprised of a total of 160 participants to understand knowledge and preferences for food trees. A total of 61 food tree species were listed with differences among countries. In Uganda, the total species number was 47 (including 58% exotic species), and in Kenya 55 (65% exotics). In Uganda, knowledge on food tree species differed between genders, with older women listing the greatest number of priority species (22), followed by younger women (19) and older and young men (15). In Kenya, older women and men identified 38 and 36 species respectively, whereas younger women identified 26 species and younger men 23 species. In all four sites, both men and women preferred exotic food tree species such as *Mangifera indica*, *Passiflora edulis* and *Persea americana*. Both men and women especially valued food trees that contribute to improved health, nutrition and income, those whose products have a good taste, and with medicinal properties. For old and young women, the main reasons for selecting food trees species was their availability and role as children's food. Findings show diverse food tree species that fill food and nutrition gaps and the value of gender-sensitive participatory research for understanding local knowledge, needs and constraints, to inform project implementation decisions.

Keywords: food trees, participatory research, local knowledge, gender, youth.