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AN INVESTIGATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF INDIGENOUS VEGETABLES IN BULAWAYO URBAN AND PERI-URBAN AREAS.

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ABSTRACT
The indigenous leafy vegetables are marketable and hence generate income. They have competitive advantage to small-farmers, as they require few inputs, labour and take less time to mature than exotic vegetables. They can also withstand harsher environmental conditions better than imported vegetables and still produce stable yields. These vegetables empower poor people especially women, who otherwise would not get employment in the formal sector and they contribute to food security. The study sought to determine the importance of the indigenous leafy vegetables in the lives of the people of Bulawayo urban and peri urban areas. A survey on the production, marketing, consumption and importance of indigenous leafy vegetables was carried out from October 2013 to March 2014. In depth interviews, observations and questionnaires were used for data collection on a randomly selected sample of traders, collectors/producers, consumers, restaurants and supermarkets management. The study found out that the most important indigenous leafy vegetables (ILVs) were spider flower (Cleome gynandra), pumpkin leaves (Cucurbitapepo), jute mallow (Corchorusspp), cowpea leaves (Vignaunguiculata), and amaranthus (Amaranthusspp). Income from the sale of ILVs is used for school fees, school uniforms, rentals, and household food stuff. These ILVs play a major role in income generation, employment and food security at household level. The main challenges are the seasonal supply, unhygienic handling and selling. It is recommended that the government and local authorities like Bulawayo City Council expedite the adoption of policies that will promote the uptake of ILVs and promote the comprehensive production, marketing and consumption of the indigenous leafy vegetables.