

## **Promotion of Underutilized Vegetables in Central Asia and the Caucasus (CAC) to Improve Household Nutrition**

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### **Abstract**

The population of the Central Asia and the Caucasus region is over 76 million and its annual growth rate is 0.9%. The percentage of population living below poverty line is 43.9%. Average consumption of vegetables and fruits is 4.61% among 10 significant food items (FAOSTAT). Vegetable crops play significant role in ensuring food security for the CAC population. Many underutilized crops are important for balanced nutrition and health. There are some achievements on their promotion. Direct and indirect reasons for vegetable crop underutilization in the region are: changing ecological conditions, narrowing habitat of some species and lack of vegetable cultivation skills amongst current generation. Lack of awareness on the importance of vegetable for human health is a problem and traditional food preparation has been forgotten. Sometimes, vegetables are underutilized due to difficulties on cultivation and low yield, limited time of use because of short shelf-life, insufficient market demand, and absence of processing and marketing infrastructure, among others. Development of strategies to promote underutilized vegetable crops in the region is very important. This includes strategies for ex-situ and in-situ diversity conservation, cultivation of wild edible species, alliaceus, greens, legumes and root crops in home gardens, seed multiplication as well as establishment of output market. Trainings to raise awareness of nutritional characteristics of underutilized vegetable crops are necessary for preservation of human health; as well as trainings on their cultivation and processing. There is a significant potential to introduce AVRDC's non-conventional nutritional greens and legume crops into vegetable production and household consumption in the region. Spectrum of the problems for underutilized vegetable crops promotion can be solved within the framework of national and international projects.