

Nutritionally Rich Wild Vegetables of Tribal Communities of Northeast India: Learning and Lessons about Traditional Biocultural Resources

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Abstract

North East India is one of the mega biodiversity centres with a wide range of biocultural diversity. Region is characterised by difficult hilly terrain and diverse ecosystems. The state is unique in having collective decision making and rights over biocultural resources and govern & accesses and manage by traditional institutions (*Kebang*). Tribal communities have been using different wild vegetation for food and medicinal purpose since the time immemorial. Looking to the importance of such bioresources, an effort was made to identify and rank them on the basis of their relative importance for food and nutrition security. Conventional and participatory methods were applied to explore the data on wild vegetables. The ecological literacy tools such as biodiversity contests among school going children and recipe contests among village elders were implemented as an action research to understand the dynamics of culturally and nutritionally important foods, and to verify the cooking & processing methods explored through survey. Focus group discussion (FGD) were organised and community maps were drawn showing availability of different wild vegetables. Taxonomy was completed and samples were photographed and preserved as herbarium. Culturally important vegetables were analysed for proximate and mineral composition. Composition studies showed that some of these wild Green leafy vegetables Such as Poi (*Basella rubra*), Dheki (*Diplazium esculentum*), Oyik (*Pouzolzia benettiana*), Gaam Oying (*Glochidion multiloculari*) are denser in minerals than to energy on being compared with common vegetables such as spinach, amaranth and brassica. Lessons taken from the work inspired that these vegetables could be promoted for commercialisation to widen the nutrition base. Based on medicinal importance such as red ginger, *Solanum spirale*, *Zanthoxylum rhetsa* may be studied for nutraceutical or bioactive compounds. Need for research work on development of cultivation practices for these wild vegetables was strongly felt.