

## **CSIR-CRI and CSIR-PGRRI Engage Agricultural Stakeholders in a Workshop to Upscale Indigenous Leafy Vegetables**

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The CSIR-Crops Research Institute (CSIR-CRI) and Plant Genetic Resources Research Institute (CSIR-PGRRI) brought together key agricultural stakeholders on April 30, 2024, for a workshop titled, "*SEEDS FOR RESILIENCE (SfR) GERMPLASM USER GROUP FEEDBACK AND REVIEW WORKSHOP*". Held at the CSIR-CRI Training Center, Fumesua-Kumasi, the workshop aimed to strengthen linkages between germplasm conservation and participatory germplasm evaluation, selection and production.

The well-attended event featured presentations, interactive sessions, and group discussions focused on the Seeds for Resilience (SfR) project's Germplasm User Group (GUG) concept. Participants included representatives from CSIR-CRI, MOFA, ILV/BGN Traders, students, industry, and farmers' groups.

### **Opening Remarks**

The workshop commenced with the Director of CSIR-CRI, Prof. Moses Brandford Mochiah underscoring the significance of the project and urging active engagement from all participants. The Director of CSIR- Plant Genetic Resources Research Institute (PGRRI), Dr. Daniel Ashie Kotey welcomed the attendees and informed them of the plans to upscale the traditional leafy vegetables. "We want traditional leafy vegetables to gain the same level of prominence as rice in Ghana because Traditional leafy vegetables have the potential to ensure food security in Ghana." The representative standing in for the DCE of Atwima Nwabiagya North also expressed appreciation for the project's inclusion of their district and pledged support for local farmer involvement.

### **Keynote Address**

Prof. Mochiah provided the keynote address emphasising the importance of germplasm conservation and utilisation in enhancing agricultural productivity. He highlighted the value of conserving Ghana's indigenous vegetables and called for collaboration between researchers, policymakers, and farmers to ensure the indigenous leafy vegetables become prominent, well-

cultivated, and widely accepted throughout the country. Prof. Mochiah stressed that these efforts are crucial for food security and a healthy diet for Ghanaians.

### **Brief Overview of Workshop**

Moving forward, Dr. Patricia Pinamang Acheampong, a lead scientist of the project, highlighted the role of germplasm banks in this initiative. She made it known that CSIR-CRI is working with the CSIR-PGRRI to leverage their diverse accessions of indigenous leafy vegetable seeds. CSIR-PGRRI provided 20 traditional leafy vegetable accessions for research and participatory varietal selection by farmers in 2023.

The farmers chosen for the selection hailed from Barekese and Baodi since they are well known for growing indigenous leafy vegetables. The farmers who indulged in the participatory selection were the same group invited to the workshop so that they could be updated on activities the project was currently embarking on and the way forward. Dr. Acheampong elaborated, "At the moment, we're multiplying the selected accessions for distribution back to farmers. Since the farmer chose the varieties themselves, we're confident of their acceptance." She further added that CSIR-CRI will also provide technical support throughout the production cycle, ensuring farmers have the knowledge and resources needed for a successful harvest.

### **Presentations**

The workshop also featured a variety of presentations.

- Dr. Patricia Acheampong's presentation examined the GUG approach, highlighting its potential for fostering collaboration within the ILV value chain.
- Mr. Isaac Newton Boakye Mensah reviewed methods for effective participatory varietal selection by GUGs.
- Dr. Rashied Tetteh addressed strategies for increasing user access to diverse ILV germplasm through inclusive conservation initiatives.
- Dr. Matilda N. Bissah discussed the selection of user-preferred ILV varieties for building climate resilience and enhancing livelihoods.
- Dr. Joseph Bandanaa's presentation focused on approaches for gender-inclusive varietal selection, promoting climate-resilient crops.

### **Farmer's Testimonials and Challenges**

Speaking to Atta Kweku, a participating farmer from Barekese Ataase, he shared his experience, stating, "I've learned a lot about traditional leafy vegetables through this project and in my community we have even established a farmer group for collaboration. The project has also introduced us to buyers and provided training on good agricultural practices. In all, the activities we have undertaken under the Seed for Resilience project have led to increased production and yields."

Afia Buakyewaa, another participating farmer, echoed the same sentiment. "I've expanded my knowledge and planting techniques with traditional leafy vegetables. This rainy season, I plan to plant extensively to increase sales. I believe widespread cultivation of these indigenous vegetables can give us farmers a comfortable life."

Aside from their giving their testimonials, the farmers also addressed their challenges. The major challenges addressed by farmers who cultivate indigenous vegetables is limited access to land, particularly in urban areas where lowlands traditionally used for planting are being converted for housing development.

### **Interactive Sessions and Group Work**

There was also a question-and-answer session during the workshop that allowed participants to clarify concepts and share their experiences. Additionally, participants were divided into where they actively discussed issues surrounding Indigenous Leafy Vegetables and developed a roadmap for the future. The workshop concluded with group presentations summarising the breakout session discussions. The valuable insights gleaned from the workshop will be compiled into a communiqué and used to guide future endeavours.

### **The Value of Indigenous Leafy Vegetables**

Throughout the workshop, emphasis was placed on the unique benefits of indigenous leafy vegetables. Speaking at the event, Director of PGRRI, Dr. Daniel Ashiekotie stressed the importance of these nutrient-rich vegetables. "We've observed many Ghanaian farmers are focused on planting exotic vegetables, despite the superior nutritional value of indigenous vegetables. What most people don't know is that these indigenous leafy vegetables thrive in our ecosystem and possess natural resistance to pests and diseases, hence reducing the need for chemical controls." With that, Dr. Patricia Acheampong emphasised the importance of growing

awareness about the indigenous leafy vegetables. She stated, "As compared to the northern part of Ghana, people in the other part of Ghana often overlook indigenous leafy vegetables. However, by encouraging patronage of these vegetables, we can improve livelihoods, health, and the Ghanaian economy."

### **Way Forward**

The CSIR-CRI's "Seeds for Resilience" workshop funded by the Global Crop Trust proved to be a resounding success, since it brought together key players in the agricultural sector to explore the potential of indigenous leafy vegetables. Through presentations, interactive sessions, and group discussions, the workshop fostered a collaborative environment focused on promoting germplasm utilisation.

The enthusiastic participation of farmers, researchers, and policymakers underscored the value proposition of indigenous leafy vegetables. By leveraging the unique benefits of ILVs, such as their superior nutritional value and natural pest resistance, the SfR project has the potential to enhance food security, improve farmer livelihoods, and contribute to a healthier Ghanaian diet.