Your Voices Title (up to 50 characters, including spaces):

Neglected and underutilised crops for inclusive diets

Tafadzwanashe Mabhaudhi[1,2], Rosemary Green[3] and Pauline Scheelbeek[3]

[1]Centre for Transformative Agricultural and Food Systems, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa

[2]International Water Management Institute, Pretoria, South Africa

[3]Department of Population Health, Centre on Climate Change & Planetary Health, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, London, UK

What critical barriers must be overcome to enable sustainable, healthy, accessible and equitable diets for all?

Main text (up to 1600 characters, including spaces)

*If you need to include references, please enclose them as in-text hyperlinks. Please also note that we may accommodate up to 3 hyperlinks.

While the existing food system may have improved widespread food security, this was achieved in an unsustainable way and has led to issues of obesity, environmental degradation and exacerbated social inequalities, while hunger persists among many communities. Also, the focus on providing sufficient food calories over improved nutritional quality has left millions in Africa still lacking access to nutritious and healthy diets. Many are now calling for a transformation of Africa's food system, which is currently centred around a few major staple crops, by expanding the role of neglected and underutilised crop species (NUS). Successful production and consumption of NUS could improve food systems' resilience to climate shocks and transform diets to be healthier, more equitable and inclusive. For example, several NUS crops are nutrient-dense and could be a sensible addition to the current average African diet, which typically lacks micronutrients. Furthermore, there will be environmental co-benefits, as NUS typically can adapt to marginal environments: they require less landscape modification, are more tolerant to stresses (e.g. drought, heat, salinity) and need fewer external inputs (e.g. fertilizer, water). Hence, diversifying the food system by incentivising NUS production and consumption can be pivotal in adequately addressing food insecurity, micronutrient deficiencies, vulnerability to climate change and environmental degradation. To gain momentum, policy changes are needed to acknowledge NUS' critical value and potential for food system transformations; support and fund research, development and innovation on NUS; and develop inclusive value chains.