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My Food is African

A campaign Toward Mobilization for an African food policy

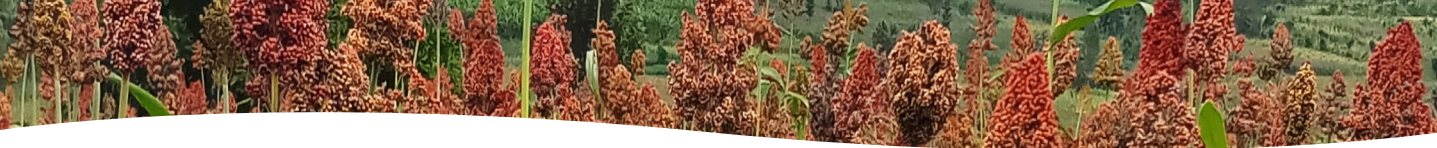
**For embracing the consumption of healthy, safe and culturally appropriate
foods supported by a favorable food policy**

Through a coherent food policy that recognizes

- * Agroecology as a pillar of hearthy and sustainable food systems.**
- * Comparative advantages of traditional culinary practices and dishes of Rwanda and Africa**
- * Divers, resilient and nutritious African foods**

A Continuous Campaign

- 1. To generate knowledge on healthy culturally appropriate foods of Africa**
- 2. To inform citizen on the health risks associated with industrial foods**
- 3. To strengthen the citizen voice to demand nutritious and healthy food**



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- 358 billion Frw is the cost for addressing non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in Rwanda for a five-year period from July 2020 to June 2025

-NCDs claim 59% of annual deaths in Rwanda: Malnutrition and unhealthy food among the main causes of diabetes, cancers, heart and respiratory diseases

-Chemicals are added to most fast food products to make them last longer and taste better, but these chemicals compromise the nutritional quality of the food and can even be harmful to your health

-Fast food chains rely on large-scale factory farms, which breed genetically modified chickens, pigs, and cows that are fed antibiotics to make them grow faster.

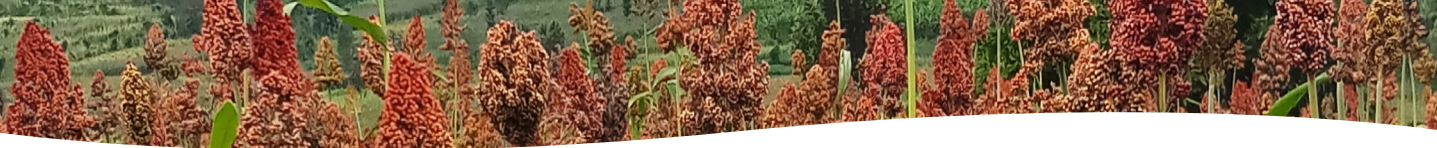
Hence antibiotics residues found in fast-food.

-Traditional African Dishes are popular from Across the Continents; they combine plant-and seed-based ingredients, without having food imported as exotic spices used in the traditional dishes are natively found in Africa, creating flavors tasted only in Africa.

-Traditional Food of Rwanda was cooked in one pot with all types of ingredients added to make a tasty, healthy dish for the family

-Most tools and utensils for food handling and conservation were from nature (wood, clay, plants),

-Cooking was without oil except the use of cow butter also called ibirunge.



Some facts behind the campaign

The 2022 Global Report on Food Crises stated that at least one in five Africans go to bed hungry and 140 million Africans suffer from severe food insecurity. The world is moving backwards in its efforts to end hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms.

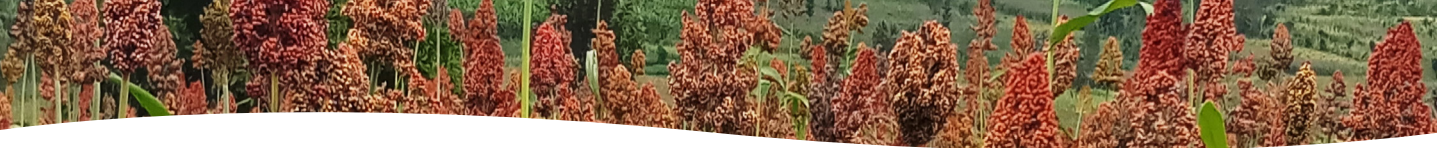
An increasing number of people in Africa, particularly in rapidly growing urban area are disconnected from the food production system, a situation in which what is billed as the best food by the media and the industrial system is deemed so regardless of nutritional value or harmful effects

In Rwanda, 70% of people will be living in urban centres by 2050. With the current massive use of agrochemicals and microbionics in food production (agriculture) leading to Toxic soils, toxic foods, polluted water and air, loss of biodiversity and climate change, there will be

little opportunity to demand for Healthy & safe foods

Africa is already a market for dumped and biotech foods, Western harmful diets, processed foods, fast foods, fortified foods, commercial foods are pushing to the edge the local seed system, farming, foods and cuisines

The need for healthy, equitable, efficient, resilient, and culturally diverse food and agricultural systems has never been greater, especially learning from the C19 crisis that showed that external food dependency of countries can be disrupted by natural or manmade crises. Africa have to revisit its strategy for self-sufficiency in healthy foods, considering its abundant natural resources and ecosystems, its lands, water, forests and minerals , its rich biodiversity, its traditions and culture. There is an urgent need for Africa to invest in transforming the agrifood systems towards



becoming more resilient and delivering lower cost nutritious foods and affordable healthy diets for all.

Why is it so critical for farmers and consumers to deep dive into alternatives in African kitchen traditions and culture?

In search of food system that can provide a sustainable healthy foods to the population, Having an assumption that there are cultural traditions in preparing and eating healthy foods in ancient Rwanda we need to know how traditionally, healthy foods were prepared and served in different parts of the country. We need to document both the culinary practices from elders and look at the written sources on the same topic of healthy foods in Africa and Rwanda in particular. Ultimately, there is a need for availing a tool for educating and sensitizing people about eating healthy and nutritious foods.

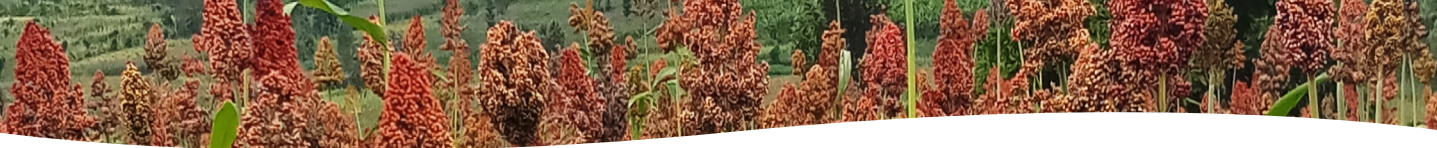
What is particular to the Tradition and culture of cuisines of Africa?

It is a combination of plant-and seed-based ingredients, without having food imported. The exotic spices used in the traditional dishes are natively found in Africa, creating flavors tasted only in Africa. All the ingredients come together to form a flavor that you just can't find in most western meals. The report cites some Traditional African Dishes that are popular from Across the Continent (see annex1)

What can we learn from the traditional culinary practices of Rwanda as a cultural heritage?

According to both written sources and focus group discussions organized by ACORD Rwanda in the four provinces, the following was noted

- The culture of “eating out” was practically non-existent,
- Food was cooked in one pot whereby all types



of ingredients are added to make a healthy dish for the family,

-Beans and milk are the main source of proteins instead of meat,

-Traditional foods were eaten with hands, cleaning hands before meals prevail in elders,

-Most of the dishes were made from fresh farm ingredients,

-Most tools and utensils for food handling and conservation were from nature (wood, clay, plants),

–the cooking without oil except the use of cow butter also called ibirunge. The report lists some traditional dishes referred to as a food heritage.

What mostly distinguish the so-called Western diet to the traditional African food?

The report notes that (1) the biggest features of the western diet are overconsumption of over-

refined sugars, highly refined and saturated fats, animal protein and a reduced intake of plant-based fibers, hence the many dangers of Chemicals and health risks in fast food and industrial foods

(2) Most western diets are fried or cooked in cooking oil, easily convertible in takeaway fast foods

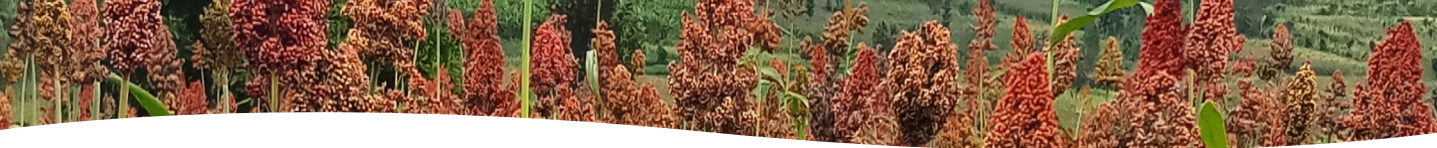
(3) Traditional dishes are healthier, from fresh ingredients, rarely prepared with cooking oil,

(4) various studies confirm that Western diet increases the risk of infection, Cancer risk, Obesity and diabetes; (4) city dwellers are beginning to change their mentality towards more preference of local foods

What are the main factors speeding up the invasion of western diets (processed industrial foodstuffs) in Africa?

The recent study of ACORD Rwanda on documenting the traditional culinary practices of Rwanda articulates four factors as follow:

(1) Young population and fast urbanization are



factors of invasion of WD in Africa in a sense where city dwellers will want ready and fast food on the go. (2) International Food aid policy fast track the industrial foods from West.

(3) Trade and Profit behind fast foods Industry, food becoming a prime commodity than a right. (4) Extreme poverty and food insecurity exacerbated by conflicts and climate change: people in need of foods will eat what is available

Perceptions and preferences of youth towards western diets and processed foods: What is missing in the African diets?

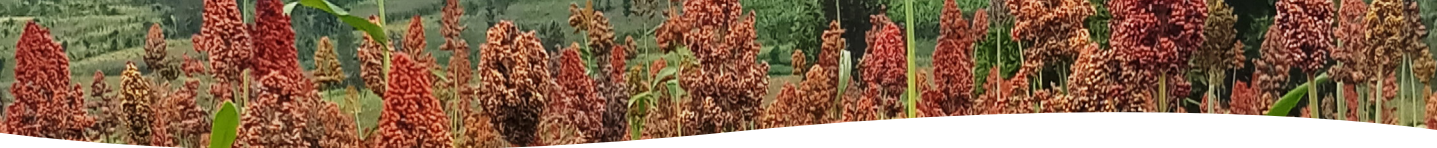
Among the reasons behind the rush of young generations to industrial foods, most participants mentioned availability in quantity and quality (kuboneka vuba) and the beliefs that they are safe from germs. In deeds, most of the youth ignore the health risks associated with industrial foods or western diets, this campaign is timely in raising awareness and encouraging healthy eating and educate children about the benefits

of eating well-balanced meals from a young age. The true challenge for the African cuisines is to fast food (make it available, fast and ready for take away) the traditional dishes to compete with the western diets

More attention and actions required to embrace the consumption of healthy foods in Rwanda

From the focus group discussions and Members of the advisory group to the campaign, it was noted that in terms of consumption of healthy foods in Rwanda, attention should be brought on

-Increase of consumption of fresh foods: That there is a low consumption of vegetables and fruits in households though uncooked foods such as fresh legumes (intoryi) and tubers (guhekenya) were part of our traditional foods. Not only there is a need to increase the production of vegetables in rural households but also to introduce the preparation of fresh vegetables for direct consumption as a source of vitamins. There is a need to suggest a recipe of fresh foods to supplement the cooked foods



-Reduction of consumption of fried foods in a lot of cooking oil in cabarets and bars:

Considering the important role that fried food plays in the life of the inhabitants of cities and villages, and that it is dominated by meat, potatoes and bananas often fried in a lot of oil. There is a need to learn from traditional practices in frying meat without too much oil, with a purpose to diversify other foods for a better balanced diets. There is a need for changing eating habits (and mindset about good foods) in public spaces and events

-Rehabilitation of traditional cooking pots that preserve the healthiness, and taste of foods, save cooking energy and are climate friendly.

Happily, the majority of the population lives in rural areas and people still have traditional cooking pots there. In a single pot, the mixture improves the taste of the meals. A single cooking, unlike cooking several small ingredients in separate pans, saves energy consumption and contributes to the protection of the environment and climate change.

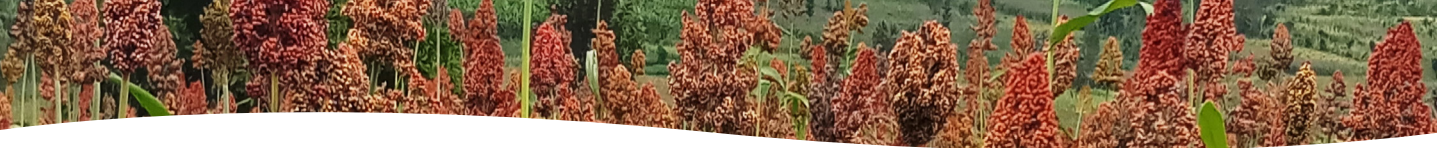
- Adding value in fast fooding our local foods: There is a need to study all the options to prepare and serve quickly our local foods to people who are hungry, in a hurry, and have only little money in the pocket, who might stop at a fast food restaurant for a take away meal, a fried maize, banana or potatoes and a local juice. Targeting young generation in want of something tasty, cheap, and fast but importantly high in nutrients and low in added fat, salt, and sugar

Recommendations: Who should do what in order to promote and to develop the consumption of healthy and culturally appropriate food?

The continental CFTA market, an opportunity at AU level

-The need for mainstreaming the tradition and culture of cuisines of Africa through the continental CFTA market and sponsoring adverts in all AU countries on the most popular traditional African Dishes from Across the Continent

-The need for a favorable food policy to back up and encourage the consumption of healthy and



culturally appropriate foods, and to protect the diverse, resilient, and nutritious African foods

Assessing the traditional cuisines of Rwanda as a cultural heritage

- The need for the ministry having cultural heritage to assess the traditional cuisines of Rwanda as a cultural heritage, especially rehabilitating the practices that made the foods nutritious and healthy

Educate and sensitise youth in and out of schools on the dangers of Chemicals and health risks in fast food and industrial foods

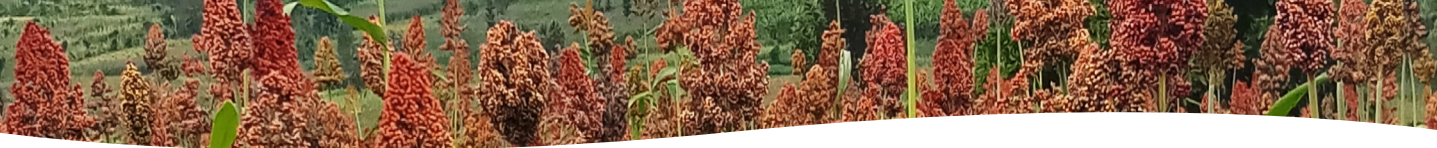
The Ministry of health, education and trade

- The need to enhance the implementation of the national strategy on NCD with an emphasize on traditional dishes which are proven healthier than those in cooking oil, as an alternative to Western diet proven to increases the risk of infection, Cancer risk, Obesity and diabetes;
- The need to educate and sensitise youth in and

out of schools on the dangers of Chemicals and health risks in fast food and industrial foods

Create infrastructure and space for fast-fooding traditional and local foods

- The need to create infrastructure and space for fast-fooding traditional and local foods in order to make it available, accessible at affordable costs for youth and other consumers, as well as enhancing safety and healthiness of non essential imported foods (incl international food aid)
- The need for marketing and branding of traditional dishes and cuisines in specialized restaurants, supermarket, hotels as well as selling points market. There is a behavior change communication niche-identity associations through the PSF actors in the food market



Parliament to call the ministry of health for accountability in regard to healthy food policy

•The need for the Agricultural Commission of Parliament to be sensitized and equipped with awareness and knowledge in order to demand for accountability to Ministry of Health in regard to healthy food. ACORD Rwanda should take this opportunity to develop a concept note and discuss it with concerned commission in Parliament.

Prime ministry to coordinate the coherence of food policy for availability and consumption of healthy food

- The need for food policy coordination at the PM office as the gaps identified in the healthy food sector have links to agricultural/livestock, health, trade and consumer policies, lands, climate and environment departments actually working in silos
- The need for a coherent food policy that can

transform the agrifood systems to become more resilient and are delivering lower cost nutritious foods and affordable healthy diets for all, sustainably and inclusively.

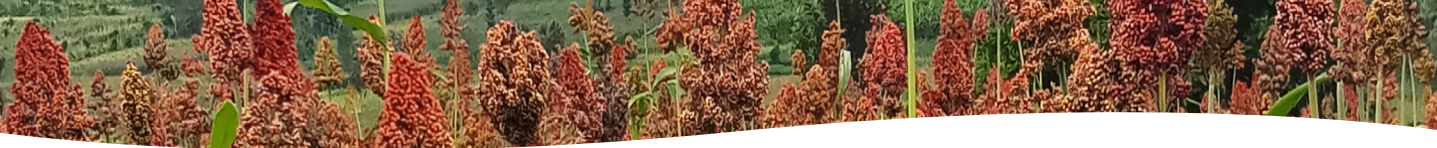
- The need to re-purpose the public investments to food and agriculture in order increase the availability of nutritious foods to the consumer and to contribute to the objective of making a healthy diet less costly and more affordable.
- The need to review our school feeding policy and programs that exposes children to an unhealthy diet, basically composed of poorly preserved (aflatoxin-friendly) or of poor quality beans and maize flour /akawunga consumed are often.

Availing Traditional seeds to farmers and leveraging monoculture versus mixed crops farming are key to consumption of healthy foods in households

- The need for consistent advocacy for MINAGRI to make traditional seeds available to farmers, beyond keeping them in the genes bank for many years



- The need for leveraging the practice of monoculture on consolidated lands and the traditional practice of mixed crops, taking into account the food security plan for the household along the planting and harvesting seasons
 - The need for emphasize on the practice of kitchen garden (akarima k'igikoni) and the practice of off soil cultivation of vegetables in support of the consumption of legumes and vegetables which remain the main source of vitamins (umushogoro and dodo, isogi and isogo)
 - The need to engage actors along the upstream and downstream of food value chain (producers, processors, consumers) in the transition to agroecology and adoption of ecological practices in economic activities, hence agroecology is the main pillar of safe, nutritious and healthy food
- Linking post-harvest management, storage and processing technologies to healthiness of foods**
- The need to promote and support development of post-harvest management, storage and processing technologies at community level household level and awareness of safe handling of food items and safe storage (in prevention of aflatoxin)
 - The need to sensitize foods markets and retailers, restaurants to adopt traditional culinary practices, contributing to fighting malnutrition and stunting
 - The need to sensitize and raise awareness and sensitizing producers and consumers to the added value and nutritional value of agro ecological products.
 - The need to sensitize youth in and out of schools on the fact that the western diets (fast foods, pizzas, hamburgers, sugary sodas and processed foods) are superseding the cultural food that is diverse, healthy and resilient. Food habits are drastically changing especially for youth and rich households hence the need for educating both the young and the old about the types of foods that are beneficial to their health.



Adopting Cooking techniques that preserve the healthiness of foods

- The need to deep dive into the Africa and Rwanda culinary practices to adapt and adopt a single cooking in one clay pot, instead of cooking several small ingredients in separate pans, saves energy consumption and contributes to the protection of the environment and climate change.

Informed citizens are key for communication and behavior change towards healthy African food

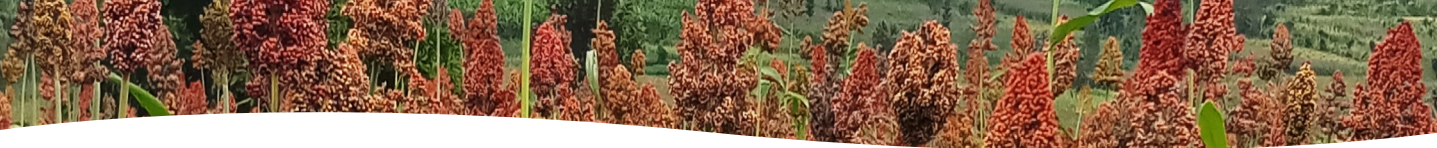
- The need to set up national programs that inform citizens about traditional foods and documentation of culinary practices from different agro-ecological zones of Rwanda;
- The need to design and implement the campaign on how traditionally healthy foods addresses multiple issues including malnutrition, non-communicable diseases such as obesity, cardiovascular problems, respiratory diseases, cancer, and diabetes., devaluation of local food products and traditional culinary good practices.

- The need to produce tools such as leaflets, alert notes for sensitisation of stakeholders on the dangers of industrial processed foods compared to traditional healthy foods

- The need to disseminate the results of the research in schools where young people are taught the traditional way, to reduce the consumption of sugar (juice, fanta, etc) and of industrial salt in food

Train and equip the health advisers across the country in making healthy food at households level

- The need to set up a national program of teaching the traditional culinary practices, including the nutrition counseling (abajyanama b'ubuzima), setting up counseling centers based on traditional concepts but approaching the people in rural areas not just staying in the cities.



Main reference Document

**ACORD Rwanda, February 2023 :
Documenting traditional culinary
practices of Rwanda. A desk study and
survey conducted with the financial
support from AFSA**

The desk study and survey focuses on documenting knowledge on local and traditional culinary practices in different regions of Rwanda. The study looks at how traditionally, healthy foods were prepared and served in different parts of the country, and look at the written sources on the same topic of healthy foods in Africa and Rwanda in particular. This study is a tool for educating and sensitizing people about eating healthy and nutritious foods..