Chapter 18

Indigenous Food Preservation and Management of Postharvest Losses among the Akan of Ghana

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ABSTRACT

The rapid population increase has consequences on food security in Africa. The policies of the colonialists protected European markets and discouraged the growth of indigenous agro-industries in Africa. In Ghana much food is produced during the harvest seasons but greater part of it gets rotten due to lack of preservation or storage facilities. Despite the negative attitude of the colonialists towards local products indigenous food preservation continued unabated although limited to the aging population in the rural areas. The purpose of this chapter is to share the Akan heritage of indigenous food preservation as a strategy to manage postharvest losses and ensure food security and sustainable livelihoods. The chapter which emanated from an ethnographic study used interviews and observations for data collection. The study found that the Akan communities without agro-industries use their indigenous knowledge and skills to preserve food and create jobs. The chapter concluded that in this era of Africa’s rebirth its people should utilize indigenous food processing skills to reduce postharvest losses and ensure food security. It was recommended that the government of Ghana should provide financial support to make indigenous agro-industries sustainable.

INTRODUCTION

Food security is a family, community, national and international concern. With the global rapid population increase food security has become a great challenge to humankind because of the inability of many developing countries to feed every mouth. In a developing country like Ghana farmers produce food in abundance but due to lack of modern preservation and storage facilities they go rotten and create scarcity.
of food during the lean season. Thus many people in the country experience what can be referred to as poverty in the midst of plenty situation. The Akan ethnic group which is predominantly peasant farmers use their ingenuity and heritage to preserve some of their major foodstuffs to ensure that their families have access to food throughout the year.

This chapter gives the reader some insight into indigenous food preservation, storage and management techniques to ensure food security among the Akan of Ghana. The objective of the chapter is to:

- Outline the major food production activities among the Akan;
- Describe the various indigenous methods of preserving, storing and managing specific food items to ensure food security;
- Discuss some of the major challenges to indigenous food preservation and storage;
- Discuss some lessons that can be learnt from the Akan heritage by other developing communities; and
- Provide some recommendations for sustainable utilization of indigenous food security measures.

**BACKGROUND**

Food security is a concern for every family, community, government and nation all over the globe. Access to food is a right that should not be denied any human being because it borders on existence or survival and enhances development. Without food there can be no life and without life there would not be development. The rapid population increase in the developing world has consequences for food security in Ghana and Africa at large. Getting enough food to feed every mouth makes food production, preservation and its security crucial. Reutlinger (1986) for instance defines food security as ‘access by all people at all times to enough food for an entire healthy life’. This definition of food security might shift the attention of the world from food production and importing capabilities at the micro or local-level to focus on individuals and their ability to avoid hunger and under nutrition. It also indicates the importance individuals and organisations, the world over, attach to food as the basic human right. The challenge in a developing country like Ghana is the ever increasing number of people to be fed. The country’s population now stands at over 25 million and this has serious consequences for food security. The situation requires that people have both physical and economic access to basic food by either growing or buying it (Scanlan, 2001).

Agriculture (i.e. subsistence farming) is the mainstay of Ghana (Quan-Baffour, 2011) and in the rural areas food becomes abundant during harvest season but gets rotten due to lack of processing plants, preservation and storage facilities. Thus making postharvest loss a problem to farmers. Harvesting losses of grains alone range between 4.7 and 12.05% at farmer’s fields (Appiah, Guisse & Dartey, 2011). About 55% of Ghana’s population is directly engaged in agriculture and the sector contributes to 40% of the country’s GDP (Bill & Melinda Gates, 2010). The colonial policy of discouraging local indigenous agro-industries in order to protect European market created a legacy of a lack of agro-based industries; a problem which successive governments have not been able to adequately address since independence in 1957. In the absence of formal food processing industries the indigenous mode of preserving food to ensure food security should be revived and popularised to fill in the vacuum. Unfortunately the knowledge and skill for indigenous food processing and preservation, a true Akan heritage, is limited to the aging population who might die with it.
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