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Nutritional evaluation and the importance of traditional vegetables that sustain the indigenous people of Malaysia

Rachel Thomas Tharmabalan
Sunway University, Malaysia

The growing unease over the matter of food security in the world is the result of a maturing realization that the genetic base of most human caloric intake from plants is dangerously narrow. Malaysia's tropical rainforests contains at least 60% of the world's known species and have the potential to contribute to diet diversification and provide a source of nutrient-rich food. It has been established that the Orang Asli communities in Malaysia stretch back at least a few thousand years and owing their livelihood to the land and the environment. Past research has shown that they were healthy and relied almost entirely on the jungle for food, fodder, medicine and fuel antithetical to what is happening today. This segregation of the Orang Asli from traditional lands and resources leads to severe loss of knowledge of biodiversity. In order to preserve these wild edibles, four different types of vegetables that are frequently consumed by the Orang Asli were selected and analysed to determine its proximate and mineral content to help ascertain claims and reaffirm the impact it can play in ensuring food and nutrition security, in addition to combating chronic diseases. From the results obtained, the Meranti had the highest crude fiber, iron and calcium content. Other minerals such as potassium, magnesium and copper were also found in varying content. These wild edibles could also contribute to education and bringing awareness to younger generations as well as urban populations to start consume more of these in their daily life as it could prevent various chronic diseases, as Malaysia has the highest obesity rate in Southeast Asia.

rachthomas777@gmail.com

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