



# PROMOTION OF LOCAL CROPS TO STRENGTHEN FOOD SECURITY IN SIA, KWILU PROVINCE, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO: PROPOSING SOLUTIONS BASED ON LOCAL AGRICULTURE AND DIETARY DIVERSIFICATION

Bundama Kishumi Virginie<sup>1\*</sup>, Mutinsumu Mufeng Pierre Célestin<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ecole doctorale de l'Institut Supérieur des Techniques Médicales de Kinshasa

<sup>2</sup>Section de Sciences Aliments Nutrition & Diététique Institut Supérieur des Techniques médicales de Kinshasa.

## \*Corresponding Author

Bundama Kishumi Virginie

Ecole doctorale de l'Institut Supérieur des Techniques Médicales de Kinshasa.



## Article History

Received: 19.12.2024

Accepted: 29.01.2025

Published: 23.02.2025

**Abstract:** - This article proposes strategies to strengthen food security in Sia, Kwilu Province, Democratic Republic of Congo, by leveraging local agriculture and dietary diversification. The objective is to promote sustainable solutions tailored to local contexts to address food insecurity challenges exacerbated by inadequate farming practices, climate change, and a lack of infrastructure.

The methodology is based on an extensive literature review using databases such as PubMed, JSTOR, and *The Lancet*. Existing nutritional interventions, including dietary diversification programs and participatory agricultural practices, were analyzed for their successes and limitations. The study underscores the importance of promoting local crops like maize, cassava, and sweet potato, while incorporating sustainable farming techniques.

Results indicate that local agriculture fosters food and economic resilience by improving nutritional intake and stimulating local economies. However, challenges persist, including climatic constraints, limited financial resources, and weak agricultural policies.

In conclusion, the article advocates for actions to build the capacity of local farmers, diversify crop production, improve infrastructure, and implement policies supporting local agriculture. Collaboration among local and international stakeholders is crucial to support these initiatives through participatory approaches and evidence-based solutions, ensuring sustainable and inclusive food security.

**Keywords:** Food security, local agriculture, dietary diversification, sustainable practices, economic resilience, sustainable development.

## Introduction

Food insecurity remains a major concern in many developing regions, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), approximately 26% of the sub-Saharan African population is undernourished, significantly impacting public health, economic growth, and social development (FAO, 2021). The village of Sia, located in a rural area heavily reliant on subsistence agriculture, exemplifies these challenges.

The factors contributing to food insecurity in Sia include poor agricultural practices, climate change, lack of access to quality seeds, and inadequate infrastructure for food storage and distribution. A study by Jones et al. (2019) demonstrated that the lack of resilient food systems makes rural communities particularly vulnerable to fluctuations in agricultural production. Additionally,

research published in JSTOR highlights that food insecurity disproportionately affects female-headed households, which often have limited access to resources and agricultural credit (Smith & Haddad, 2018).

Promoting local agriculture is vital for addressing food insecurity sustainably. Diversifying local crops such as cassava, legumes, and leafy vegetables can provide a more balanced nutritional intake while fostering food self-sufficiency. A literature review on PubMed revealed that interventions based on local agriculture improve diets and reduce child malnutrition (Ruel & Alderman, 2013). By adopting environmentally friendly agricultural practices such as agroecology and crop rotation, communities can mitigate the impacts of climate change and increase land productivity, as noted in a study by Thakrar et al. (2020) on Mendeley.

## Cite this article:

Virginie, B.K., Célestin, M.M.P., (2025). PROMOTION OF LOCAL CROPS TO STRENGTHEN FOOD SECURITY IN SIA, KWILU PROVINCE, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO: PROPOSING SOLUTIONS BASED ON LOCAL AGRICULTURE AND DIETARY DIVERSIFICATION. *ISAR Journal of Medical and Pharmaceutical Sciences*, 3(2), 33-36.

The importance of local agriculture extends beyond its nutritional benefits. It also stimulates the local economy by creating jobs and generating income for farmers. *The Lancet* has emphasized that nutrition solutions rooted in local agriculture strengthen food security sustainably while reducing dependence on costly food imports and enhancing community resilience (Fanzo et al., 2020).

This article aims to analyze existing nutritional intervention strategies, highlighting their strengths, weaknesses, and impacts on food security. Strategies such as food supplementation programs, fortification initiatives, and awareness campaigns have been developed and applied in contexts similar to Sia's. A literature review from PubMed and *The Lancet* shows that while these approaches have improved short-term nutritional indicators, they often lack sustainability and fail to promote community food self-sufficiency (Bhutta et al., 2013; Haddad et al., 2015). Recent studies from Google Scholar also reveal that centralized strategies often depend on external funding, limiting their longevity (Fanzo, 2019).

By analyzing these strategies, this article seeks to propose practical solutions based on promoting local crops and dietary diversification. The potential of local agriculture lies in its ability to offer dietary diversity, reduce malnutrition, and strengthen food security. Research on Mendeley demonstrates that integrated farming practices, such as intercropping legumes and cereals, not only enhance the availability of essential nutrients but also build resilience to climatic disruptions (Henderson et al., 2020).

Drawing on scientific evidence, this article will propose initiatives such as introducing community garden programs, encouraging the cultivation of traditionally nutritious foods, and training farmers in sustainable agricultural techniques. *The Lancet* has noted that such interventions are not only nutritionally effective but also play a crucial role in stimulating the local economy and reducing poverty (Pingali, 2012).

This analytical framework and set of proposals aim to provide evidence-based solutions to help Sia effectively address its nutritional challenges while strengthening food security.

## Methodology

### 1. Data sources

To conduct a comprehensive and rigorous analysis of nutritional intervention strategies and the promotion of local crops for food security, an extensive literature review was carried out using several academic databases. Each database was selected for its relevance and the breadth of scientific resources it offers.

i) PubMed: This database, managed by the National Library of Medicine, is a key source for biomedical and scientific literature, particularly for research on nutrition, public health, and health interventions. Articles reviewed from PubMed include systematic reviews and experimental studies on the impacts of nutritional interventions using local products (Bhutta et al., 2013).

ii) Google Scholar: Google Scholar provides access to a wide range of academic studies, including journal articles, theses, books, and conference reports. For this study, Google Scholar was used to compile recent publications on sustainable approaches to local agriculture and food systems, helping to better understand current trends in food security (Fanzo, 2019).

iii) Mendeley: Mendeley is a reference management tool and database hosting millions of scientific articles. It was used to identify studies on the integration of sustainable agricultural practices with food security, as well as research on the benefits of local crops in rural communities (Henderson et al., 2020).

iv) JSTOR: Known for its extensive catalog of academic publications in the social sciences, JSTOR was explored to obtain contextual and historical information on traditional food practices and the evolution of nutritional interventions. Research articles on the connections between agriculture and nutrition, as well as the socio-economic impacts of food solutions, were particularly informative (Jones & Grace, 2018).

v) The Lancet: *The Lancet* is a leading medical journal that publishes cutting-edge research in the fields of nutrition and global health. This source provided information on global nutritional interventions and analyses of the health impacts of diet, contributing to the formulation of solutions proposed in this article (Pingali, 2012).

This methodology ensures an evidence-based approach, enabling the formulation of informed recommendations for food security in Sia.

### 2. Study selection criteria

To identify the most relevant studies, a systematic research strategy was employed, using specific keywords related to food security, nutrition, and interventions based on local agriculture. The main terms included: "food security," "nutritional interventions," "local crops," "dietary diversification," and "sustainable agriculture." These keywords were combined with Boolean operators to refine the search results and ensure that selected publications aligned with the study's objectives.

The inclusion criteria consisted of studies published in the last ten years (2014–2024) in peer-reviewed journals, addressing nutritional interventions based on local crops and promoting dietary diversification. Additionally, only studies with robust methodologies, such as randomized controlled trials, cohort studies, and systematic analyses, were considered. Publications from journals like *The Lancet*, JSTOR, and PubMed were prioritized to ensure the scientific quality of the information (Bhutta et al., 2013; Pingali, 2012).

We also used Chatgpt, version 2, developed by Open AI to understand and produce fluid article text, as in a human discussion.

## Results

### 1. Impact of local agricultural practices on food security

The findings highlight that promoting local agricultural practices significantly enhances food security by improving nutritional intake and fostering economic resilience. Local crops such as maize, cassava, and sweet potatoes were found to provide essential nutrients and energy, addressing common nutritional deficiencies in rural communities.

A study on PubMed revealed that local maize cultivation, when biofortified, can alleviate micronutrient deficiencies, particularly in vitamin A, iron, and zinc (Graham et al., 2019). Similarly, cassava was identified as a critical source of carbohydrates for energy, while processing techniques like fermentation reduce its

cyanogenic compound content, increasing safety and nutritional value (Bhutta et al., 2013). The sweet potato, particularly the orange-fleshed variety, was highlighted as an excellent source of beta-carotene, essential for preventing vitamin A deficiency (Ruel et al., 2018).

Moreover, integrated agricultural techniques, such as crop rotation and intercropping legumes with staple crops, were found to improve soil fertility and enhance crop yield. These practices simultaneously address food production challenges and contribute to environmental sustainability (Henderson et al., 2020).

## 2. Economic and Environmental Benefits

Local agricultural systems not only improve food availability but also bolster local economies. Studies from JSTOR revealed that local markets driven by indigenous crop production increase farmers' incomes and create rural employment opportunities (Altieri & Nicholls, 2017). Furthermore, developing agricultural value chains based on local products stimulates economic growth through processing and marketing activities (Kumar et al., 2020).

Environmentally, sustainable agricultural practices that emphasize local crops reduce reliance on chemical inputs and conserve water resources, thereby lowering the ecological footprint of farming. These strategies are particularly crucial in regions like Sia, where climatic variability poses significant challenges to traditional farming systems (Pretty et al., 2018).

## 3. Community Participation and Role of Women

Women play a pivotal role in promoting local agriculture and ensuring household food security in Sia. Studies from *The Lancet* emphasize that empowering women in agricultural systems leads to significant improvements in household nutrition by increasing access to diverse and nutritious foods (Black et al., 2013). Women often reinvest their earnings into their families, enhancing overall well-being.

Community initiatives, such as shared gardens and agricultural cooperatives, were found to strengthen food security by pooling resources, sharing knowledge, and increasing resilience to climatic shocks. Research on Mendeley highlights the importance of community-driven solutions, which integrate traditional agricultural practices with innovative techniques, to ensure the sustainability of local food systems (Gillespie et al., 2019).

## Conclusion

### 1. Summary of proposed solutions

The strategy to enhance food security in Sia is built on practical and context-specific solutions. The first recommendation is to promote the diversification of local crops such as maize, cassava, sweet potatoes, and other plants adapted to local climatic conditions. This not only increases the availability of nutrient-rich foods but also reduces reliance on imported foods, thereby improving the community's food security.

Additionally, implementing nutrition education programs is essential to raise awareness about the importance of a varied and balanced diet. These initiatives should be paired with training campaigns for farmers to help them adopt sustainable agricultural techniques that maximize yields while preserving natural resources.

Finally, strengthening agricultural infrastructure is a priority. This includes improving rural roads to facilitate market access, installing irrigation systems to ensure continuous production, and developing storage facilities to minimize post-harvest losses. These practical recommendations aim to create an environment where local agriculture can thrive, ensuring sustainable food security and boosting the region's economic well-being.

## 2. Call to action for local and international stakeholders

For the effective and sustainable implementation of the proposed solutions, mobilizing both local and international stakeholders is crucial. Local authorities, including municipal and regional governments, must play a key role by investing in agricultural infrastructure and supporting small-scale producers' initiatives. By promoting policies favorable to local agriculture, decision-makers can facilitate access to essential resources such as quality seeds, irrigation water, and agricultural credit.

International organizations, such as development agencies and NGOs, are also encouraged to integrate approaches based on local agriculture into their programs to combat hunger and poverty. These institutions can provide technical and financial support while collaborating closely with communities to ensure that solutions are adapted to the specific needs of the population.

Researchers and academic institutions have a vital role in providing evidence-based data to support local interventions. Collaboration between researchers and farmers can help develop innovative agricultural practices tailored to the region's changing climatic conditions. Furthermore, the active participation of local communities, especially women and youth, is essential to ensure that interventions are inclusive and directly benefit families most in need.

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