

Title of Article: Local knowledge, use pattern and geographical distribution of *Moringa oleifera* Lam. (Moringaceae) in Nigeria.

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Abstract

Ethno-pharmacological relevance: All parts of *Moringa oleifera* are medicinally valuable with overlapping uses in treating myriads of ailments and diseases including body pains and weakness, fever, asthma, cough, blood pressure, arthritis, diabetes, epilepsy, wound, and skin infection. *Moringa* also has robust ability to challenge terminal diseases such as HIV/AIDs infections, chronic anemia, cancer, malaria and hemorrhage. The present study was to obtain ethnobotanical information on the use and local knowledge variation, geographical distribution, and to collect different landraces of *Moringa oleifera* from the different agro-ecological regions in Nigeria, for further studies. Materials and methods: Ethnobotanical data were collected through face to face interviews, semi structured questionnaires and discussions with selected people who had knowledge about the plant. The fidelity level (FL %) and use value for different use categories of *Moringa oleifera* and its parts were estimated. The variation in ethnobotanical knowledge was evaluated by comparing the mean use value among ethnic, gender and age groups using sample T test. Garmi GPS was used to determine the locations (latitude and longitude) and height in different areas to assess the geographical spread of the species.

Results: Seven (7) categories of use (Food, medicine, fodder, fencing, firewood, gum and coagulant) were recorded for *Moringa oleifera*. Food and medicinal uses showed highest fidelity level while the leaves and the seeds were the plant parts most utilized for the same purposes. There were significant differences among the ethnic, gender and age groups regarding the ethno-botanical use value. The geographical distribution pattern shows that the *Moringa oleifera* is well distributed in all ecological zones of Nigeria, well adapted to the varied climatic conditions and gaining unprecedented awareness among the people.

Conclusion: Though considered an introduced species, *Moringa oleifera* has found wide acceptance, recognition and usefulness among the various ethnicities in the studied areas. The sources of introduction, domestication and ethnic differentiation influenced the distribution pattern across the geographical areas.