

Banana production, processing and marketing in Rwanda

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INTRODUCTION

Banana is the second major food crop in Rwanda next only to beans. It is used both as food and cash crop (MINECOFIN, 2001; Kiiza *et al* 2004). The crop is grown all over the country by small-scale farmers. Though banana is one of the main starchy foods in Rwanda, farmers are still facing many constraints such as those related to post harvest handling, processing, storage and marketing. The narrow range of available post harvest technologies leads to the farmers selling their products at a very low price. The few traditionally processed banana products are of low quality and sometimes injurious to health. (Figure 1). Improvement of the quality of these products will enable the farmer access even external markets and improve revenue.

METHODS

A one month survey was conducted in most producing areas of Rwanda to assess banana post harvest technologies and constraints. A 286 randomly selected sample size comprising farmers, processors and traders answered a structured questionnaire of open and close questions.

RESULTS

Bananas are mainly processed into juice and wine and the number of banana processing factories is still low. At harvesting time, the main constraints revealed were marketability (30.5% of respondents), price fluctuation (18.5% of respondents), robbers (4%) and diseases (3.7%) and similar observation has been made by UNR *et al* (1989). In Rwanda, there are three types of banana: Cooking, dessert and beer banana. Most of the cooking bananas are eaten boiled (68.5%). Banana beer was produced by 23% of respondents. Besides food for human, banana contributes to animal feeding such as banana steams, banana peels and banana leaves. Dried stems of banana are used for handcraft products (Figure 2). In terms of processing, a mixture of brewing bananas was used for banana beer and juice production and this was confirmed by 82.6% of respondents and Shingiro (2005) find similar results. Intuntu, Kayinja and Kamaramasenge were the most varieties used for juice production for their high yielding. The banana ripening step was also done traditionally (Figure 3) and different indices such as softness of banana fingers, banana fingers turning to yellow and the development of the aroma of ripened bananas were indicated to be used for the detection of ripened banana ready for processing. Similar indices were observed by Treutens (1986).

Banana juice filtration is done using a plastic funnel together with a sieve or with grass (Figure 4).



Fig 1. Traditional methods of banana juice extraction in Eastern province in Rwanda



Fig 2: Rwandese woman preparing handbags using banana stems



Fig 4. Traditional banana juice filtration



Fig. 3. A place called urwina where bananas are ripened

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In Rwanda banana post harvest technologies are still traditional. Therefore the quality of banana products such as banana juice and wine is still low and it may be difficult to be competitive at external market. There is a need of introduction of modern technologies of juice and wine processing for good quality products. The use of banana dried stems for handcraft purpose needs to be exploited for export market.

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