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ABSTRACT

Although Maasai's traditional food system (TFS) is claimed to keep a low prevalence of metabolic diseases (MD), the link between its qualities and health benefits is not well established. An ethnobotanical survey was conducted to determine the link between health benefits and qualities of the Maasai TFS in Monduli, Arusha, Tanzania. The survey involved 21 Maasai TFS practitioners (MTPs) and revealed that the TFS has varieties of 19 dishes and a diversity of 78 flora species. The diversity of dishes and species had various potential health benefits: nutrition like Fe and vitamin A; therapeutic and protective effects against ailments including MD like gout, pressure, indigestion, and kidney disorders. Some food processing technologies (FPT) like nixtamalization, and meat roasting had potential protective effects against the MD. Cultural preferences and restrictions (CPR) for the food selection insured individual nutritional and health needs are met, and reinforcement of Maasai socio-structure and cohesion. Integrated protection and promotion measures are required to prevent unplanned nutritional transitions away from the TFS. Further research on the nutritional and medicinal roles of some FPT and the frequently used species could facilitate the protection and use of the TFS for the health benefits of especially marginalized people.