

Introduction to the special edition of *Water SA* on indigenous crops, water and human nutrition

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Background

Throughout Africa indigenous and indigenised vegetables and fruit have sustained rural populations for many centuries. Through natural selection by survival under local environmental conditions, aided by collection of seeds from top-performing plants only by local farmers, these have become adapted to these conditions. Unfortunately, indigenous plants have received scant attention by researchers in Africa (including South Africa) in regard to improving agronomic practices and upgrading genetic potential. Likewise, little attention has been given to studies on their nutritional value and the bio-availability of nutrients contained in them. It seems as if there has recently emerged new interest amongst South African researchers in these crops. It is hoped that this publication will help to promote this interest further.

On 19-20 September 2006 an *'International Symposium on the Nutritional Value and Water Use of Indigenous Crops for Improved Livelihoods'* was held in Pretoria, South Africa. This special edition of *Water SA* contains 3 articles prepared specifically for this edition and 13 articles that are peer-reviewed revised versions of papers originally presented at the symposium. The unedited early versions of these 13 papers, as well as 5 other papers that had been presented at the symposium, are available on a CD-ROM which can be obtained from Prof André Oelofse, University of Pretoria, at Andre.Oelofse@up.ac.za

The primary aim of this symposium was to bring together experts in the fields of agriculture and nutrition who focus on the contribution that indigenous and other traditional crops can make to improve human nutrition. Agriculturists are concerned with improving the production of food, both in terms of quantity and quality. Nutritionists are concerned with determining the quality of different foods and promotion of the adoption of high-quality diets by people. Unfortunately experts from the two groups often work in isolation from each other, without adequate effective interaction between the two groups. According to the participants, the bringing of the two disciplines together at the Symposium was a major breakthrough. This message was carried through during the process of compiling this special edition.