

The Gastronomic Tradition Of Local Dishes In The Culinary Heritage Of The Fon People Of The Abomey Plateau In Benin

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Abstract:

Purpose: The study aimed to document the culinary traditions of the Fon people in the Plateau of Abomey (Benin) and to identify strategies for safeguarding and revitalizing emblematic dishes that are threatened by changing dietary habits.

Methods: Fieldwork was carried out with 510 participants using surveys and interviews to collect data on the perception, preparation, and consumption of traditional foods. Ten key dishes were identified and described through direct observation and community participation.

Results: The findings revealed that while traditional Fon dishes remain culturally significant, several recipes are rarely prepared, especially among younger generations. Dishes such as *Mantindjan*, *Amiwo*, and *Atchonkoun* are progressively disappearing from daily life. However, the study also showed that traditional foods still play an important role in maintaining cultural identity, promoting nutrition, and offering potential for gastronomic tourism.

Conclusion: Safeguarding Fon culinary traditions requires targeted interventions, including the inclusion of these dishes in intangible cultural heritage registers, the promotion of responsible culinary tourism, the transmission of traditional cooking knowledge through training, and support for sustainable agriculture to secure authentic local ingredients. These measures can preserve the cultural heritage of the Fon people while contributing to sustainable socio-economic development in Benin.

Keywords: cultural heritage, traditional cuisine, gastronomic tourism, preservation, local food, sustainable tourism, cultural identity.

1. Introduction

Traditional cuisines and culinary practices today occupy a central role in the tourism strategies of many destinations. In recent decades, gastronomic tourism has emerged as one of the most dynamic niches in the sector, attracting millions of travelers each year who seek to taste authentic flavors, explore regional food traditions, acquire local cooking skills, and immerse themselves in unique culinary experiences (1,2).

Every nation develops a culinary identity that contributes to both its cultural heritage and regional distinctiveness. Traditional gastronomy is far more than a pleasurable sensory experience; it is a cultural language through which communities express their values, beliefs, and collective memory (3). In this context, local cuisine enriches the tourist experience and enhances the

destination's appeal. African culinary narratives, as explored in literature and cultural studies, shed light on the deep socio-cultural significance of food across the continent (4).

While globally renowned cuisines such as those of China, India, Mexico, or the Middle East continue to dominate the international gastronomic scene, African cuisines are increasingly gaining attention (5,6). Iconic examples include Ghana's peanut butter soup, Ethiopia's injera, West Africa's jollof rice, South Africa's grilled meats, Mozambique's piri-piri chicken, and Kenya's irio. These dishes, passed down through generations, are living markers of Africa's diverse culinary heritage (7).

Food tourism, which encompasses both food and beverages, is defined as "the visit of primary and secondary food producers, food festivals, restaurants, and specific locations where tasting local products and engaging with food culture constitute the main motivation for travel" (8,9). It is also referred to as culinary tourism, gourmet tourism, or gastronomic tourism (10,11). According to the World Food Travel Association (2019), such tourism fosters discovery of flavors, textures, and cultural traditions offering visitors authentic encounters with local food and drink (12–14).

Although it is now recognized as a fast-growing industry with a positive impact on both the food and agricultural sectors, food tourism remains underexplored from a comprehensive and analytical perspective (15–17).

In Benin, the gastronomy of the Fon people in the Plateau of Abomey stands out for its cultural depth. More than a means of sustenance, Fon cuisine reflects the history, beliefs, and social and spiritual traditions of the community (18). Many traditional recipes are rich in symbolism and play a key role in passing down culinary expertise from one generation to the next. Yet, several of these dishes are in decline, overshadowed by modern dietary trends and changing lifestyles (19–21).

Field investigations have revealed a variety of emblematic local dishes, including Wo, Mantindjan, Amiwo, Bomivo, Wofléflé, Aman-Minnou, Akpahé, Atchonkoun, Kpo, Kowé, and Gbodoklin. While each holds its own significance within the Fon culinary repertoire, some are now rarely prepared or consumed, particularly by younger generations.

This study takes an initial step toward documenting and promoting traditional Fon dishes that are at risk of marginalization. The approach seeks not only to record and analyze these culinary traditions but also to raise awareness of their importance as integral components of the cultural identity and collective heritage of the Fon people.

2. Historical and Cultural Context of the Fon People of the Plateau of Abomey

The Plateau of Abomey, located in the central part of Benin, is the historical heart of the Fon civilization, whose influence has shaped the region's identity for centuries. Abomey, the former capital of a renowned kingdom, served as a political, economic, and cultural hub from the 17th to the early 20th century (22,23). This kingdom, recognized for its structured monarchy and its involvement in both regional and international trade, played a decisive role in the development of the social, artistic, and culinary traditions of the Fon people (24,25).

Within this heritage, food has always been far more than a necessity. It stands as a cultural language through which the Fon express their history, spiritual values, and social organization (26). Local dishes prepared with ingredients rooted in the region's agriculture carry symbolic meanings tied to identity and memory. Recipes are often transmitted orally, with each preparation method and seasoning reflecting centuries of accumulated knowledge (27).

The gastronomy of the Fon people is deeply connected to spiritual and ceremonial life. Communal meals prepared for ancestral rites, royal celebrations, or agricultural festivals reinforce social bonds and affirm the community's unity (28). Certain dishes are prepared exclusively for religious offerings, others for life-cycle events such as births, marriages, or funerals. In each case, the act of cooking and sharing food becomes a way of preserving collective memory and honoring cultural heritage (29).

In this sense, the local dishes of the Plateau of Abomey are not simply recipes they are living testimonies of history. They embody the resilience of traditions in the face of modern influences and remain key elements in the construction of cultural identity for the Fon people today.

3.2.2 Data Collection Methods

Various data collection tools were deployed to ensure robust and diversified information gathering. Structured questionnaires were administered to a diverse group of respondents, including residents, local leaders, restaurateurs, and hotel managers, aiming to document knowledge, preparation practices, and cultural significance of local foods. Observation checklists were utilized during visits to restaurants, markets, and cultural events to record culinary activities in situ. Visual documentation was performed using digital photography to capture food preparation steps and final presentations. Field notes were systematically taken with traditional notebooks to supplement observations and interviews. Data processing and management were carried out using computerized software to facilitate analysis (36).

3.3 Data Collection Methods and Techniques

The data collection process combined documentary research, field investigations, sampling strategies, and various collection techniques to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the culinary heritage in the Abomey plateau.

3.3.1 Documentary Research

An extensive literature review was carried out focusing on the culinary traditions of Benin, with particular emphasis on the Abomey area. The sources consulted included academic theses, books, articles, and other relevant documents. Table 2 summarizes the main documentation centers and types of materials consulted during this study.

Table I. Documentary Research on Beninese Culinary Traditions

Documentation Center	Document Types	Information Focus
Internet	Books, reports, projects, publications	Data on local gastronomy and culinary customs
Vallée Library	African cookbooks	Culinary arts and gastronomic knowledge
Central Library of the University of Abomey-Calavi (UAC)	Theses, research reports	Valorization and preservation of traditional dishes
MIRD and LHT Documentation Centers	Completed theses	Methodologies and academic approaches related to local gastronomy

Source: Field Survey, October 2023

This table summarizes the main documentation centers consulted and the types of materials used to gather information on local gastronomy, particularly in the Abomey area. The systematic consultation of these resources provided foundational information for data processing and analysis throughout the research.

3.3.2 Field Surveys

Fieldwork was conducted in two sequential stages: an exploratory preliminary survey followed by the main data collection phase. The initial stage aimed to familiarize with the study area, identify relevant social groups, and locate key informants knowledgeable about the traditional dishes of the Abomey region. The principal survey focused on collecting detailed information regarding the culinary characteristics, preparation techniques, and potential strategies for promoting these local specialties within the hospitality sector. Data were gathered through direct observation, interviews, and participatory approaches across different neighborhoods and the central urban area (37).

3.4 Sampling Approach

To capture a broad perspective, five target groups were selected based on their role and knowledge concerning local gastronomy: household members, indigenous practitioners, restaurant and hotel operators, their clientele, and local experts. Sampling employed a dual strategy: purposive sampling to define the typology of participants and identify key areas for investigation, and random sampling to select individuals within these categories for interviews (38).

Selection criteria included:

- Households were chosen to provide insights on the perception and valuation of traditional dishes within everyday family contexts.
- Restaurant and hotel operators were selected to assess the incorporation and popularity of local dishes among visitors and guests.
- Clients of hospitality establishments were interviewed to gauge their preferences, perceptions regarding local culinary offerings, economic viability, and challenges faced in preparing traditional meals.

Table II: Distribution of the Sample

Target Group	Number of Respondents
Hotel and Restaurant Operators	80
General Population	298
Key Informants	122
Total	510

Source: Field Survey, November 2023

A total of 510 individuals were surveyed across the municipality of Abomey. The data collected from this diverse sample provided rich insights into the variety of local dishes, their methods of preparation, and the approaches used to promote them within restaurants and hotels.

3.5 Data Collection Techniques

Individual interviews were conducted with the targeted groups using structured interview guides that encouraged open-ended responses. This approach enabled the collection of detailed insights into perceptions, culinary practices, and the valorization of traditional dishes. Additionally, direct observation was employed to participate in the preparation of various local dishes, noting the ingredients and cooking techniques used. Detailed notes were taken using observation grids to accurately document culinary processes.

3.6 Data Processing

Data processing was performed in multiple stages. Initially, questionnaires were manually coded to ensure the effective organization of responses. Subsequently, analysis and interpretation were carried out using software tools such as Word and Excel, facilitating coherent data structuring and thematic presentation of results, thus easing reporting and comprehension.

3.7 Methods of Results Analysis

This section outlines the techniques used to process and analyze the collected data. It describes the stages of handling responses as well as the interpretative approaches adopted to present the findings clearly and systematically, extracting relevant insights for analysis (39).

3.7.1 Data Processing and Thematic Interpretation

The final methodological phase involved manual processing of completed questionnaires, allowing the assignment of answers to specific questions. Thematic interpretation was applied to organize and present results clearly, highlighting major themes and patterns within the data.

3.7.2 SWOT Analysis: Identification of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats

The SWOT framework, a common strategic evaluation tool, was employed to identify positive and negative factors affecting the promotion of traditional local dishes. This structured analysis helped delineate strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to the valorization of the culinary heritage (40,41).

Table III: SWOT Analysis of the Promotion of Traditional Local Dishes

This table summarizes the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats affecting the valorization of the local culinary heritage.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Rich gastronomic diversity	Decline in intergenerational knowledge transfer
Strong cultural and historical roots	Lack of documentation and formal recognition
Culinary traditions deeply embedded in society	Limited access to traditional ingredients
Emphasis on locally sourced products	Absence of traditional dishes on restaurant menus
Community solidarity and cooperation	Insufficient marketing and promotional tools
Frequent cultural events and gatherings	Lack of professional culinary training
Affordable, locally produced ingredients	Unattractive presentation of traditional dishes
	Limited investment and initiative
Opportunities	Threats
Growth of culinary tourism	Influence of globalization and external food trends
Culinary education and professional workshops	Climate change affecting ingredient availability
Use of social media and mass communication	Changing dietary preferences among younger generations
Preservation and promotion of culinary heritage	Limited institutional support
Partnerships with cultural and educational institutions	

This SWOT analysis provided a clear diagnosis of the factors influencing the effective promotion of traditional dishes within the community. It offers a foundation for strategic planning aimed at leveraging strengths and opportunities while mitigating weaknesses and threats, ultimately enhancing the preservation and appreciation of local culinary heritage.

4. Results

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Understanding the demographic characteristics of the participants is essential to contextualize their engagement with the consumption and promotion of traditional dishes within the Abomey municipality. This section analyzes key demographic variables including age, gender, educational background, marital status, and occupation to identify the social groups most actively involved in the gastronomic valorization of local cuisine.

4.1.1 Age Distribution of Respondents

Examining the age distribution in relation to respondents' knowledge and participation in the promotion of traditional dishes reveals notable patterns. Specifically, certain age cohorts demonstrate varying levels of familiarity and involvement, with some groups showing limited awareness or engagement in preserving culinary traditions.

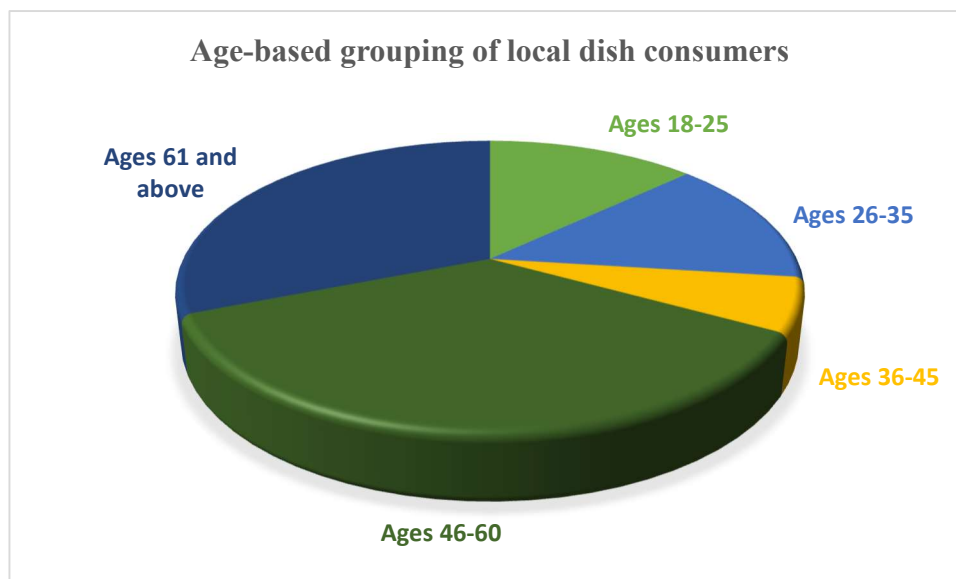


Figure 3: Distribution of Respondents by Age Group

The analysis of respondents' age groups in relation to their knowledge and involvement in promoting traditional dishes reveals noteworthy patterns. Younger individuals tend to possess less familiarity with these culinary traditions, likely influenced by cultural shifts and the growing impact of globalization on their dietary preferences. Conversely, older generations appear more knowledgeable and actively engaged in preserving and promoting these dishes. These observations underscore the need to tailor valorization efforts to effectively engage younger populations while reinforcing the role of elders in transmitting culinary heritage.

4.1.2 Gender Distribution of Respondents

The demographic insight enables an examination of the respective contributions and levels of involvement of men and women in the promotion and appreciation of traditional local dishes. Figure 4 illustrates the breakdown of respondents by gender

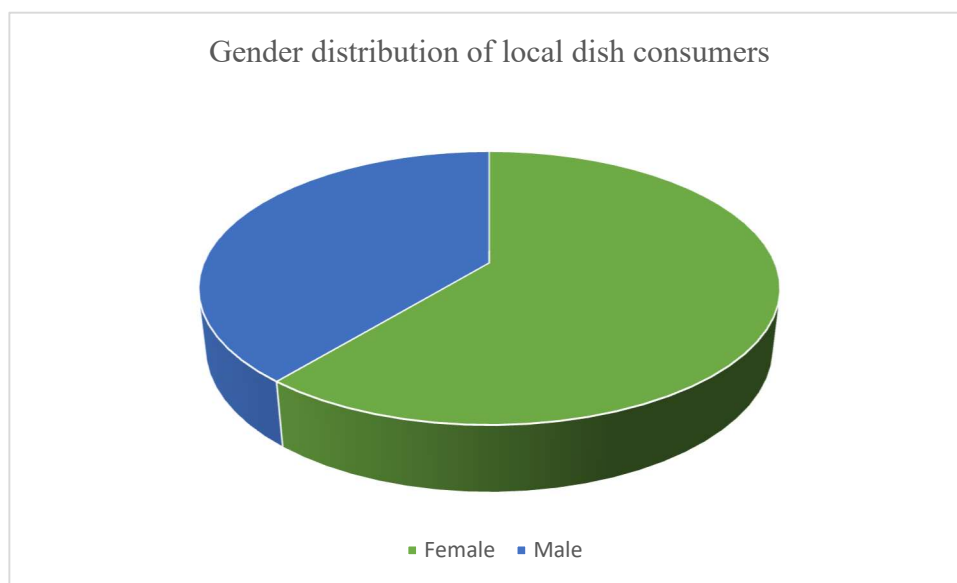


Figure 4: Distribution of Respondents by Gender

The results indicate a predominance of female respondents, who represent 61% of the sample compared to 39% male participants. This finding suggests that women play a pivotal role in the preparation and promotion of traditional dishes in Abomey, both within households and across hospitality venues such as hotels and restaurants.

4.1.3 Educational Level of Respondents

The educational background of participants was examined to assess its influence on the promotion and appreciation of traditional culinary practices within the Abomey municipality. The distribution of education levels is illustrated in Figure 5 below.

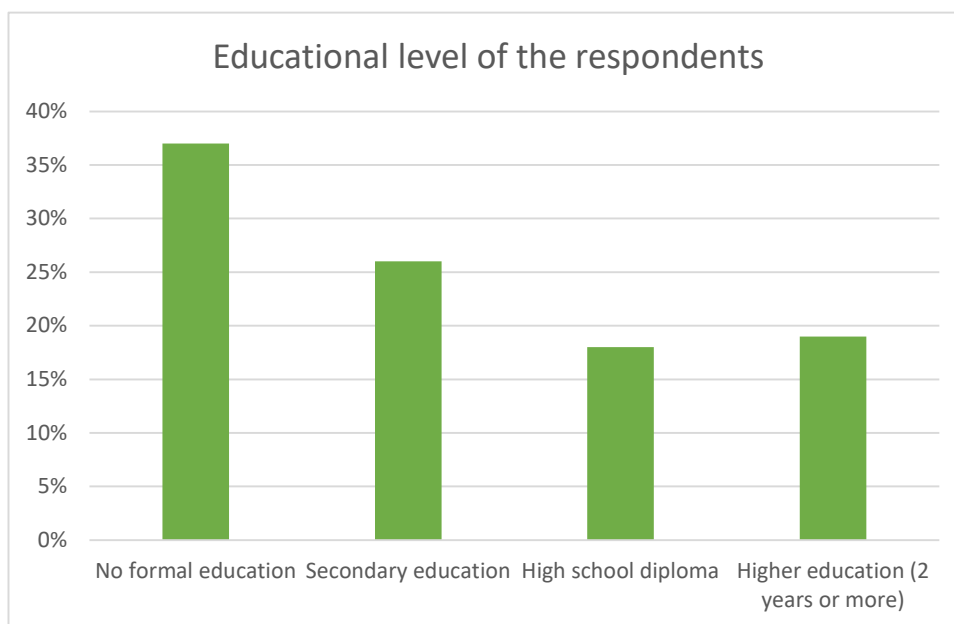


Figure 5: Distribution of Respondents by Education Level

The analysis of respondents' educational backgrounds reveals a significant relationship between education and both the knowledge and promotion of traditional dishes. A notable proportion of participants lack formal qualifications, indicating that many individuals directly engage in traditional culinary practices at the community level. However, limited formal education may restrict access to broader platforms for promoting these dishes, such as the hospitality industry or tourism sectors. In contrast, respondents with higher educational attainment such as those holding secondary diplomas or post-secondary qualifications tend to have greater capacity to support the dissemination and valorization of traditional cuisine through structured means, including media, culinary education, and tourism initiatives. This disparity highlights the important role of education in shaping perceptions and effective transmission of local gastronomic heritage.

4.1.4 Marital Status of Respondents

Understanding the demographic aspect offers insight into the family and social dynamics that influence consumption habits and the appreciation of traditional dishes. Figure 6 presents the distribution of respondents according to their marital status

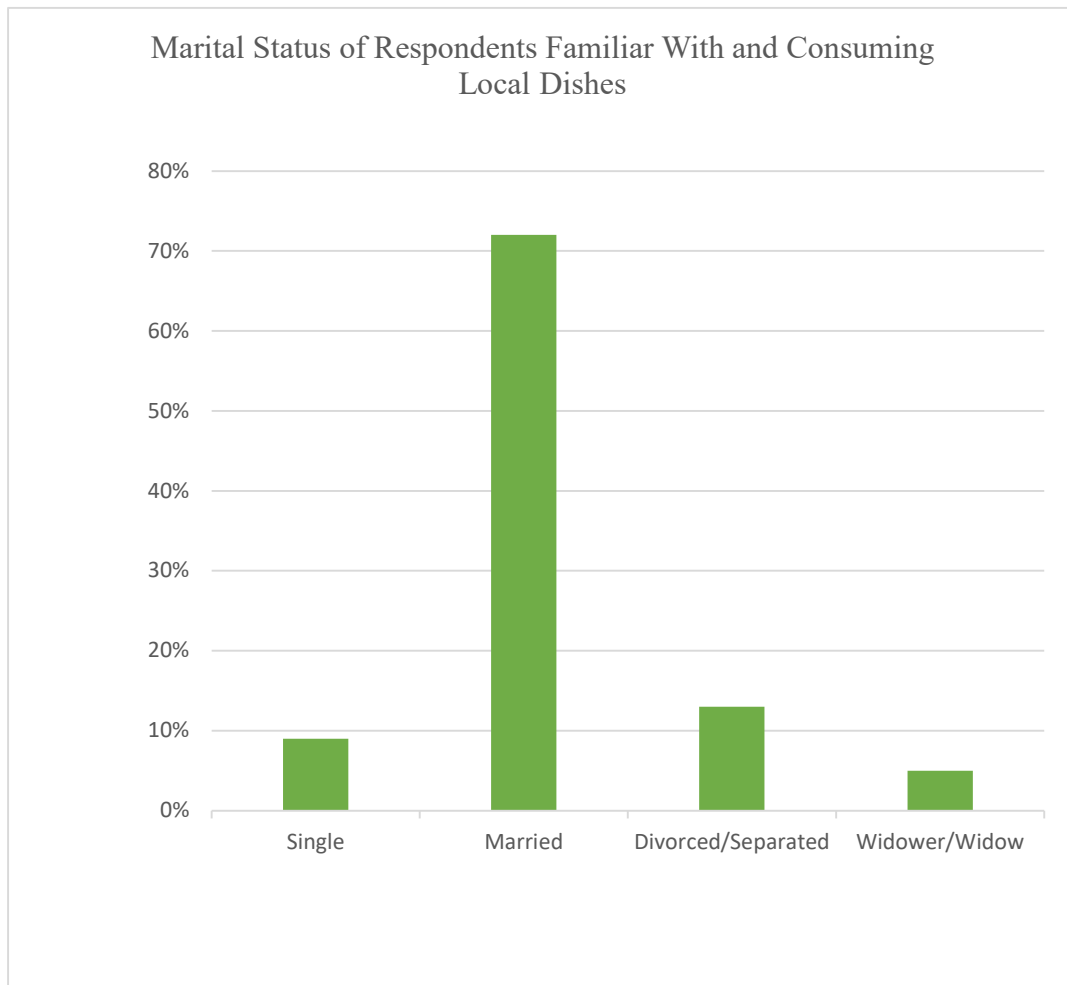


Figure 6: Distribution of Respondents by Marital Status

The findings reveal that married individuals constitute the majority of respondents, followed by single participants. This suggests that married households serve as the primary consumers and promoters of traditional dishes. The comparatively lower involvement of single individuals in the appreciation and transmission of these culinary practices highlights the central role of family units in preserving gastronomic traditions.

4.2 Ranking of Traditional Dishes by Familiarity and Consumption in the Abomey Municipality

Field surveys conducted within the Abomey municipality identified eleven (11) key traditional dishes: Wô, Mantindjan, Aman-Minnou, Amiwo, Bomiwô, Woflèflè, Akpahé, Atchonkoun, Kpo, Kowé, and Gbodoklin (see Plate 1). These dishes exemplify the richness and variety of the Fon people's culinary heritage.

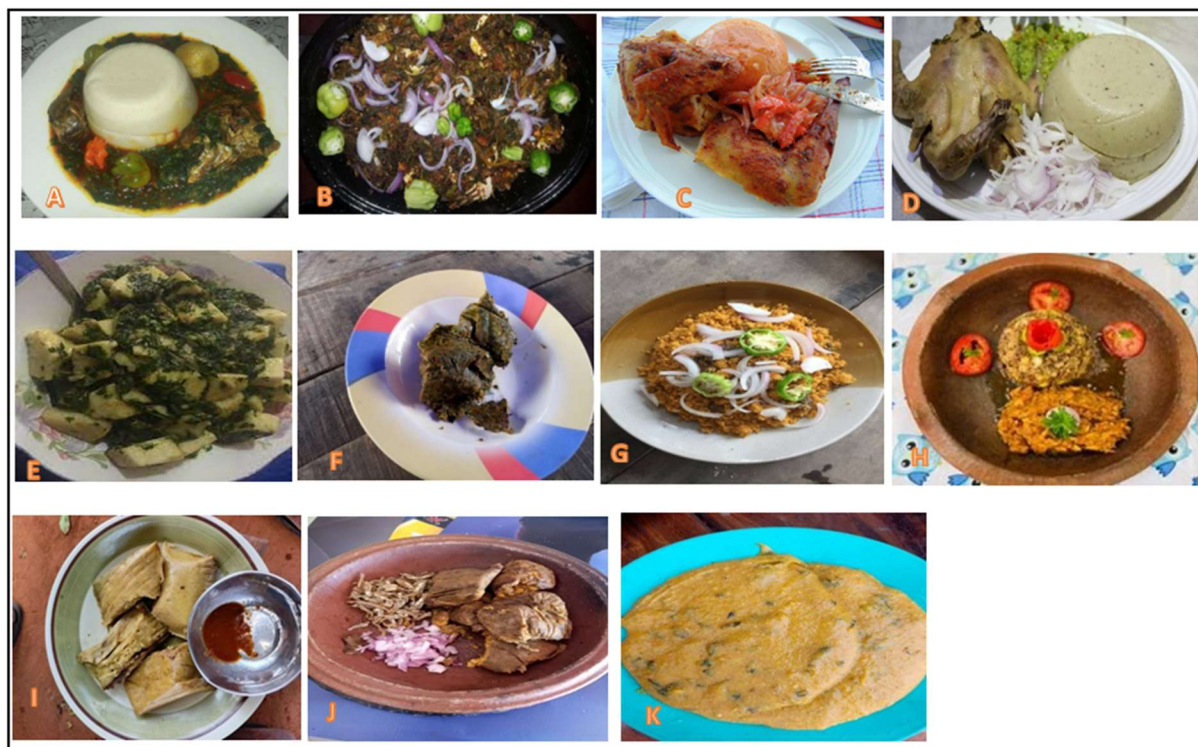


Plate 1: Illustrated examples of traditional dishes recorded in the commune of Abomey (ADJAHG Gildas, July 2024)

Each dish is represented by a capital letter. The correspondence between the letters and the traditional dishes is as follows: (A) Wô; (B) Mantindjan; (C) Aman-Minnou; (D) Amiwo; (E) Bomiwô; (F) Woflèflè; (G) Akpahé; (H) Atchonkoun; (I) Kpo; (J) Kowé; (K) Gbodoklin.

The images illustrate the diversity of traditional dishes identified during fieldwork, highlighting the culinary know-how transmitted across generations in the Abomey region.

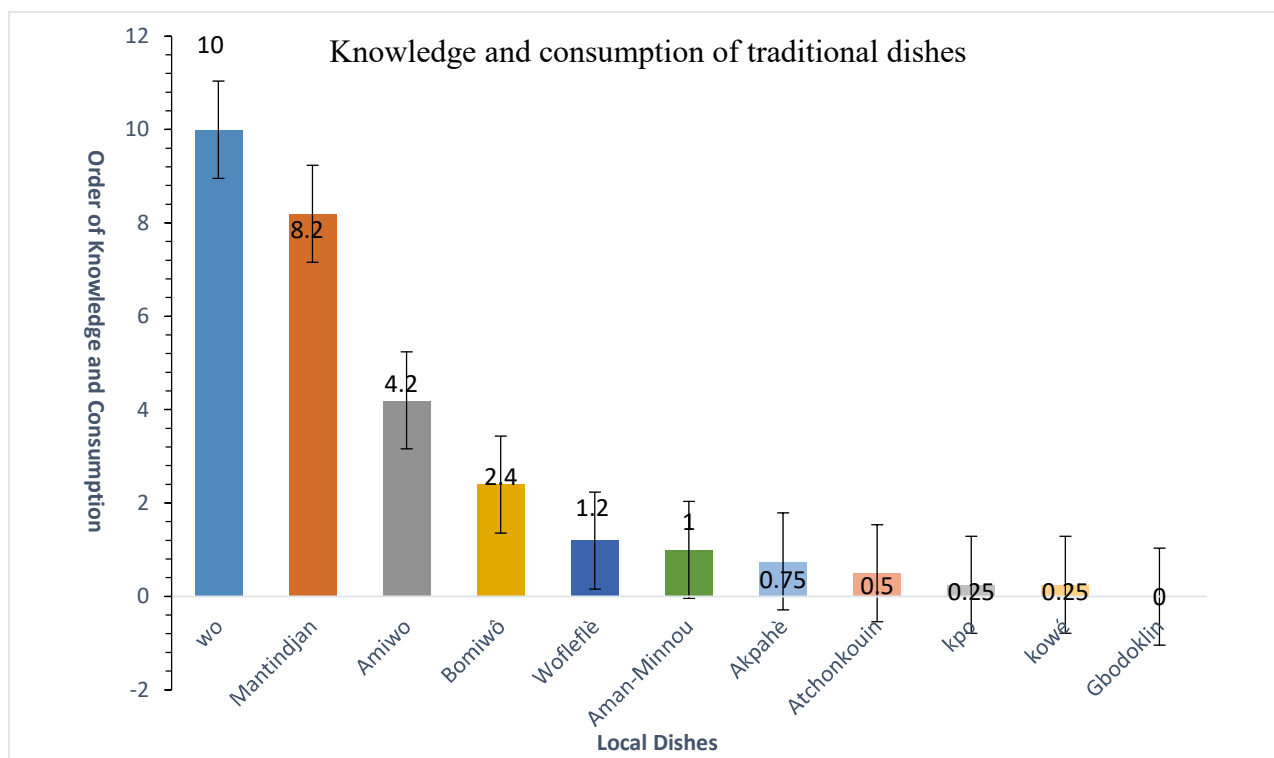


Figure 7: Ranking of Traditional Dishes Based on Awareness and Consumption Levels in the Abomey Municipality

Figure 7 presents the comparative levels of familiarity and consumption of traditional dishes among the residents of Abomey. Leading the list is Wô with the highest rating of 10, followed by Mantindjan at 8.2, highlighting their prominent role in local diets and their cultural importance. These dishes serve as foundational elements of the region's culinary identity.

Intermediate rankings are held by dishes such as Amiwo (4.2) and Bomiwô (2.4), reflecting moderate popularity that could be shaped by generational tastes or particular social contexts.

In contrast, Woflèflè (1.2) and Aman-Minnou (1) show relatively low recognition and consumption, though they maintain occasional presence in family gatherings or ritual occasions.

The dishes Akpahè (0.75), Atchoukouin (0.5), Kpo (0.25), Kowé (0.25), and Gbodoklin (0) rank at the bottom, indicating a marked decline in both awareness and usage. This trend likely stems from factors such as changing food habits, evolving preferences, and the weakening transmission of culinary traditions across generations.

4.3.6 Le patrimoine culinaire des Fon : préservation des savoir-faire traditionnels et richesse nutritionnelle

La tradition gastronomique du peuple Fon, ancrée dans la région du plateau d'Abomey, se caractérise par une grande diversité de plats locaux préparés selon des techniques ancestrales transmises de génération en génération. Ces mets ne sont pas seulement des expériences gustatives, mais aussi des expressions culturelles fortes, incarnant l'histoire, l'identité et les valeurs sociales de la communauté. Cependant, beaucoup de ces pratiques culinaires traditionnelles tendent à disparaître, notamment chez les jeunes générations influencées par l'urbanisation et les modes alimentaires mondialisés.

4.3.6.1 Traditional Culinary Techniques Under Threat

The dishes of the Fon people rely on precise methods such as the careful selection of ingredients, artisanal grinding, slow roasting to enhance flavors and nutritional qualities, and patient cooking that imparts unique textures and aromas. For example, the

roasting of cereals not only improves taste but also facilitates digestibility and nutrient absorption. Plate 2 presents a series of images illustrating these traditional culinary practices, from the transformation of raw agricultural products to the preparation of complete meals. The photographs highlight the know-how transmitted across generations, now increasingly threatened by modernization and changing consumption habits.



Plate 2: Illustrated examples of stages in the preparation and consumption of local dishes recorded in the commune of Abomey (ADJAHO Gildas, July 2024).

Each image is represented by a capital letter. The correspondence between the letters and the stages/dishes is as follows:

- (L) Traditional mill where maize is ground;
- (M) Traditional cooking of vegetables on a wood-fired stove;
- (N) Roasting of flours;
- (O) Red palm oil and condiments for the cooking of the traditional dish.

These images highlight the central role of traditional techniques in shaping the identity of Fon gastronomy. The use of the traditional mill (L) reflects both the persistence of artisanal practices and the community's reliance on maize as a staple food. The wood-fired cooking method (M) emphasizes the importance of natural resources, although it also reveals the environmental and health challenges linked to firewood dependency. The roasting of flours (N) demonstrates the community's empirical knowledge in enhancing flavors, improving digestibility, and extending preservation. Finally, the use of red palm oil and condiments (O) underlines the symbolic and nutritional value of local ingredients in defining the taste and cultural authenticity of Fon dishes.

Beyond their functional role, these techniques embody a cultural heritage that is at risk of disappearing under the pressure of industrial foods, urbanization, and changing dietary habits. Their documentation is therefore essential for both cultural preservation and the promotion of healthier, more sustainable diets rooted in local traditions.

4.3.6.3 Nutritional Contributions of Traditional Fon Dishes

The recipes of the Fon people combine cereals, tubers, vegetables, spices, and local animal proteins, thereby providing balanced meals rich in macronutrients (carbohydrates, proteins, fats) and micronutrients (vitamins, minerals). Maize and yam serve as major

sources of sustainable energy and dietary fibers, supporting digestive health. Palm oil and other local oils provide essential lipids and facilitate the absorption of fat-soluble vitamins.

Ingredients such as mustard, aromatic herbs, dried or fresh fish, and fresh vegetables further enrich these dishes with high-quality proteins, antioxidants, and essential micronutrients. This nutritional knowledge, embedded in traditional culinary practices for centuries, reflects a dietary balance well adapted to local needs and ecological resources. The following images (Table 1) illustrate some of the key ingredients commonly used in the preparation of Fon traditional meals, highlighting the diversity of resources mobilized to ensure both nutritional and cultural value.










Ingredients	Photo	Ingredients	Photo	Ingredients	Photo
Maize (<i>Zea mays</i>)		Chili pepper		Palm nuts	
White cowpea (<i>Vigna unguiculata</i>)		Onion		Garlic	
Salt		Clove		Fresh ginger	

Plate 3: Ingredients (ADJAHG Gildas, July 2024)

The selected ingredients illustrate the nutritional synergy underlying Fon culinary traditions. Maize (*Zea mays*) and white cowpea (*Vigna unguiculata*) form the carbohydrate-protein base of the diet, ensuring both energy and satiety. Palm nuts provide red palm oil, a lipid source rich in carotenoids and vitamin E, while also imparting distinctive color and flavor.

Aromatic spices such as chili pepper, onion, garlic, clove, and fresh ginger not only enhance the taste of dishes but also supply antioxidants, antimicrobial compounds, and micronutrients that contribute to disease prevention and overall health. Salt, although used in moderation, plays a vital role in flavoring and mineral balance.

Together, these ingredients demonstrate how Fon traditional cuisine integrates locally available products into meals that are simultaneously nourishing, flavorful, and culturally meaningful. This holistic approach to food preparation underscores the wisdom of traditional diets in promoting both well-being and resilience in the face of modern nutritional challenges.

4.3.6.4 SWOT Analysis of the Promotion of Local Dishes in the Plateau of Abomey

The table IV below presents the SWOT analysis, which identifies the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to the promotion of traditional dishes in the Plateau of Abomey, thus providing a basis for developing promotion and development strategies.

Table V: Strategic Evaluation of Factors Influencing the Promotion of Local Dishes in the Plateau of Abomey

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Restaurants offer a wide range of gourmet dishes. Various varieties of local dishes are sold in the Plateau of Abomey.	Lack of Investments Lack of initiative for the promotion of these dishes at the governmental level.	Promotion of Local Dishes in the Plateau of Abomey Creation of an online platform for the sale of local dishes Subsidies for farmers to cultivate maize	Population Growth Unsold Stock High Cost of Cereals Climate Change

Source: ADJAHG Gildas, November 2023

Table VI presents a SWOT analysis of the promotion of local dishes in the Plateau of Abomey, identifying the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to this dynamic. Among the strengths, the diversity of local dishes available and the presence of restaurants offering gastronomic dishes are notable assets for promoting local cuisine. However, several weaknesses are to be noted, including the lack of investments in the sector and the absence of government initiatives to support the promotion of local products. In terms of opportunities, the promotion of local dishes, the rise of online sales platforms, and agricultural subsidies for maize production represent potential drivers to boost this sector. However, threats such as population growth, poor sales, rising cereal prices, and the effects of climate change may hinder this promotion, highlighting the challenges to be overcome for the full success of these initiatives.

5. Discussion

The promotion of traditional dishes from the Plateau of Abomey, and African cuisines more broadly, involves significant cultural, economic, and environmental challenges. Globally, gastronomic tourism is rapidly growing and serves as a strategic tool to preserve and promote culinary heritage. However, in Sub-Saharan Africa, various barriers hinder the effective valorization of these traditions. Comparing these challenges and opportunities with global experiences provides valuable insights, supported by recent studies.

5.1 African Traditional Cuisine and Globalization: A Cultural Viewpoint

In many African societies, food represents far more than sustenance; it acts as a crucial expression of cultural identity and community cohesion (42,43). Cuisine functions as a cultural language that strengthens social ties and reinforces collective identity (44,45). Yet, traditional dishes such as Akpahé among the Fon people face the risk of fading away, reflecting a widening gap between younger generations and their culinary heritage (46,47). This disconnect is widespread across Africa, where globalization driven by media influence and urbanization has disrupted traditional foodways.

Countries like Mexico and Thailand have successfully leveraged their culinary traditions as tools for cultural preservation and national identity reinforcement (48–50). For instance, the designation of Mexican cuisine as an intangible cultural heritage by UNESCO has helped structure culinary traditions as a centerpiece of gastronomic tourism (51,52). This model offers useful lessons for African nations, including Benin, to promote their cuisines while supporting sustainable economic development.

5.2 Gastronomic Tourism as a Catalyst for Promoting Local Dishes

Gastronomic tourism represents a significant avenue for elevating local culinary traditions. Emphasize that when integrated effectively into tourism development plans, the food sector can drive economic growth while safeguarding local culinary practices. Regions like Tuscany and Provence in France exemplify how gastronomy can become a core attraction for tourists. This demonstrates that traditional cuisine can simultaneously fuel economic progress and cultural heritage conservation (53–55).

However, the Plateau of Abomey, similar to many African regions, has yet to fully realize this potential. The scarcity of organized initiatives and investments in promoting local dishes restricts their exposure. Tourism in Sub-Saharan Africa remains underdeveloped, leaving substantial room to introduce indigenous foods to global audiences (56,57).

5.3 Challenges in Integrating African Cuisines into Tourism Circuits

Despite the rising global popularity of gastronomic tourism, Africa lags behind destinations such as Italy and France, where local cuisine is fully embedded in tourist itineraries (58). Cultural marginalization in public policy and insufficient recognition of cuisine as intangible heritage contribute to the fact that, although Gabonese cuisine enjoys local acclaim, it struggles to attract international interest (59,60).

This scenario is mirrored in the Plateau of Abomey, where promising local efforts suffer from limited visibility and institutional backing. By drawing inspiration from structured gastronomic tours that have successfully attracted visitors in other countries, Benin could adopt similar strategies. Organizing culinary festivals, establishing food-focused tourist circuits, and training tourism stakeholders may enhance the visibility and appreciation of the Plateau's gastronomic offerings (61–63).

5.4 Environmental and Socio-Economic Barriers to Sustainable Promotion

Environmental pressures such as climate change, rising costs of agricultural inputs, and population growth directly impact food production in Sub-Saharan Africa. Climate shifts threaten the availability of essential ingredients for traditional dishes, a challenge likely to intensify. At the same time, escalating agricultural prices limit access to key ingredients for many, hindering both consumption and tourism-based promotion. Addressing these issues requires support for local farmers, particularly those cultivating staple crops, and the promotion of sustainable agricultural practices to ensure a consistent supply for traditional culinary preparations (64–68).

6. Conclusion

The survey of 510 participants revealed a rich diversity in the perception and consumption of traditional dishes in the Plateau of Abomey. Several dishes were identified as key components of the local gastronomic heritage, reflecting the cultural identity and culinary traditions of the Fon people. However, many traditional recipes are experiencing declining popularity, particularly among younger generations, due to changing dietary preferences and the effects of urbanization.

This study underscores that traditional cuisine is not merely a source of nourishment but also a vital element of cultural preservation and social cohesion. The gradual erosion of culinary knowledge threatens the transmission of heritage and the reinforcement of community identity.

To safeguard this invaluable heritage, concerted efforts are required to promote, preserve, and adapt traditional culinary practices within a modern context. Such initiatives will not only help maintain cultural continuity but also create opportunities for sustainable development through local gastronomy and tourism.

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