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AN EXPLORATION OF ARUSHA'S FOODSCAPE

LISTENING TO THE EXPERIENCES OF MARKET VENDORS AND CONSUMERS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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CONTEXT

Arusha is experiencing rapid urban growth, has a large youth population and faces several food system challenges such as high levels of food unsafety. In Tanzania, agriculture accounts for 1/4th of the GDP and employs 65% of the workforce. The economic sector is characterized by high informality. For example, street vendors, in Tanzania referred to as machingas, play a central role in Arusha's urban food system and are often unregistered. In 2021, in an attempt to include these vendors in the formal economy, new regulations were put into place that prohibited machingas from selling at the streets and relocated them to a new market.

Local public markets in Arusha are one of the main food sources for urban consumers and they act as regional distribution hubs. Regardless of specific policies, guidelines, food safety regulations and management structures in place at these markets, the quality and infrastructure are insufficient due to a fragmented political environment, limited resources, and a lack of enforcement.

One of the effects is that vendors and consumers have little or no means to assess the origin and safety of the produce that they buy or sell, while recent research shows that 63.2% of market samples at 9 major markets in Arusha had biological contaminants and 47.5% of the samples contained chemical contaminants, both causing severe health risks (Kapeleka et al., 2020).

METHODS

This research aims to generate a better understanding of Arusha City's urban food system by listening to the experiences of market vendors and consumers at the local public markets. Data was collected through multi-method field studies. We conducted a survey with 123 market vendors and 116 consumers (n=239 with 52% female and 52% youth respondents) at the 3 main markets of Arusha City: Kilombero, Samunge, Soko Kuu and the new machinga market. To dive deeper into some of the results, we complemented the data with 3 focus groups with market vendors, market observations and visual documentation.

SOME KEY FIGURES

2.4M

is the population of the Arusha Region according to the latest census in 2022. Arusha City's urban population quickly grew to over half a million citizens, with 46% youth (15-35y). Agriculture and the informal sector account for 88% of youth's sources of livelihood, and youth is overrepresented in urban unemployment rates.

10%

of market vendors younger than 45 years old are member a vendor association, meaning that there are no adequate governance structures in place where they can voice their concerns on market quality, -infrastructure, conflicts or lack of return on paying taxes.

77%

of all market consumers think the food bought at the markets is safe or very safe. Only 22% thinks the food is not safe, while we know 63% of the food has biological contaminants and 48% chemical contaminants, both of which are linked to severe health risks.

43%

of the market stalls at Kilombero are unregistered, in contrast to 10% at the new machinga market. This tension between formality and informality creates an unequal competion dynamic that further discourages formal registration.

HYPOTHESES

Hypothesis 1	There is a growing awareness on food safety issues among consumers and market vendors in Arusha.
Hypothesis 2	Youth has little interest to be professionally involved in the food system (moreover because it is difficult to generate a liveable income, being a farmer has low social value, and access to land is a challenge).
Hypothesis 3	The current infrastructure at local public markets in Arusha is insufficient.
Hypothesis 4	Given the growing middle class and overall economic growth in Tanzania, there is a growing demand for safe, healthy, processed and quality food.
Hypothesis 5	Consumers in Arusha prefer to buy day-by-day fresh foods and see vegetables as inferior products. They prefer high starch and meat diets. Furthermore, there is a growing tendency to buy and eat processed food

These hypotheses are developed during a multi-stakeholder workshop 'framing the system'. This report aims to verify or get a deeper understanding of them. Please read the discussion section in the full report for more information about why they are (not) verified.

RESULTS

CONSUMERS

The consumer survey revealed insights into their socio-economic status, spending patterns, food sourcing habits, market experiences, food preferences and food safety concerns. Most consumers (71%) spend over half of their household budget on food. They claim to be aware of food safety risks, report a willingness to pay a higher price for safe food products, although budget constraints limit their ability to do so. Consumers primarily assess food safety based on quality factors (e.g. cleanliness, freshness and smell) but choose to buy food based on price, resulting in them not always buying from clean market stalls since they assume it will be more expensive. For almost all consumers (81%) food safety is a high or essential priority.

Female consumers prioritize safety higher and for more than half of the respondents it became more of a priority over time. However, 71% assume that food bought at the markets is safe. Only 22% reported that it is not safe. When food is not damaged and looks clean, consumers assume it is safe. Only three of the surveyed consumers link it to the misuse of pesticides, which is a primary source of chemical contamination.

MARKET VENDORS

The survey with market vendors provided insights into their products, employment prospects, job satisfaction, relationships with other market actors, organization structures, perceptions of market infrastructure and food safety awareness. When assessing their job satisfaction, most respondents state that they would prefer to stay in their current conditions, except for the vendors at the machinga market – the new market where street vendors were relocated to. Almost all of them (90%) are dissatisfied, mainly because street vending was more profitable, and because the new market fails to attract sufficient consumers. Furthermore, the number of formally registered stalls is significantly higher at this market. At Kilombero market, the number of unregistered stalls is the highest (43%). Informal vendors often don't pay taxes, creating an unequal competition dynamic that further discourages formal registration.

Market vendors indicated that proper infrastructure is lacking to be able to sell safe food. The main challenges are a lack of drainage systems, lack of access to clean water and the bad condition of vending stalls. Vendors perceive a lack of return on paying taxes and see little improvements over time. Currently, adequate governance structures that might resolve these issues are absent. For example, less than 10% of the vendors younger than 45 years old are member of a vendor association. Differences between gender are most clear when it comes to the quality of relationships with market managers and brokers, who are mostly male. Female vendors tend to have a bad or very bad relationship with these powerful food system actors.

After analysing the perceptions of market vendors and consumers regarding food safety at public markets, the results confirm that awareness and knowledge of food safety risks are present but also often misunderstood. Increased knowledge and awareness have not led to behavioural change due to the misperception that food bought at the markets is safe, that safe food products are more expensive, and the lack of means of assessment. The current system is very dependent on the trust between brokers, vendors and consumers to assess the origin, safety and production methods used. In this regard, strengthening and supporting the piloting initiatives PGS (Participatory Guarantee System) and PFSS (Participatory Food Safety System) can be a means to facilitate access to safe food, create a shared understanding of safety, build networks of trust and further sensitization.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

These results provide valuable information for those looking to understand and improve Arusha's food system. Based on our findings we make six recommendations for further action.

1	**Given the several misconceptions that exist about food safety, there is a need to generate a shared understanding about the concept and to co-create a definition with different food system actors including the vendors. This shared understanding should be useful and actionable.**
2	**Extend consumer sensitization campaigns, inform about the differences between food quality and – safety, and specifically target women.**
3	**Strengthen existing governance structures and create channels for market vendor participation.**
4	**Establish and support market vendor associations, channels through which their voices and concerns can be heard.**
5	**Improve market infrastructure and working conditions, together with the market vendors.**
6	**Set-up designated market spaces for safe food combined with sensitization while avoiding reinforcing negative price perceptions.**

FUTURE RESEARCH

Further research is needed to determine whether there is an actual price difference between safe and unsafe food. Secondly we need a better understanding of food safety assessment by vendors based on their knowledge about the origin of the product and means of transportation. Regarding consumers, we need to understand how knowledge and awareness can translate in safe food buying behaviour, changing attitudes and practices. Lastly, it would be interesting to know what motivates different actors (producers, transporters, vendors, and consumers) to participate in emerging food safety initiatives such as PGS and PFSS.