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Title:

Listening to the experiences of consumers and market vendors in Arusha's urban food system

Abstract:

Arusha, a rapid growing mid-sized city in the north of Tanzania faces severe food system challenges such as high levels of food unsafety and informality. Street vendors (*machingas*) play a central role in food provisioning and are usually 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 among the most important 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. Vendors and consumers have no means to assess the origin and safety of the produce, 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).

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. To dive deeper into some of the results, we complemented the data with 3 focus groups with market vendors, market observations and visual documentation.

The consumer survey reveals insights into their socio-economic status, spending patterns, food sourcing habits, market experiences, food preferences and food safety concerns. The survey with market vendors provides insights into their products, employment prospects, job satisfaction, relationships with other market actors, organization structures, perceptions of market infrastructure and food safety awareness.

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. Furthermore, the survey's results provide valuable information for those looking to understand and improve East African urban food systems. Based on the findings we provide several recommendations for further action.

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