The Socio-economic Structure of Food Commodities Marketing in Mbeya Municipality, Tanzania

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Abstract

This study adopts the flow chart model of food commodities marketing in urban areas in Tanzania (Banyikwa, 2001) in the analysis of the socio-economic structure of food commodities marketing in Mbeya Municipality, Tanzania. The parameters included in the analysis are ownership of the enterprise, age groups distribution of the retailers, male/female ratios of the retailers, educational attainments of the retailers and the problems which retailers encounter in undertaking the businesses. The research findings show that most retailers are (a) self-employed, (b) adults, (c) men and females are guided by different criteria in entering into the different disciplines, (d) primary schools leavers; and (e) encounter a host of problems running from lack of start-up capital, supply irregularity, high prices at the supply side, inadequate space in the markets, high rents, non-collection of garbage, and fast rate of spoilage of fresh products. The research findings confirm that the flow chart model has a great potential in the systematic analysis of the socio-economic structure of food commodities marketing in Mbeya Municipality, in particular, and in urban areas of Tanzania, in general.

Introduction

Urban geography witnessed a raging debate on the preconditions for the emergence and continued existence of urbanism that revolved around four hypotheses. The first hypothesis stated that urbanism was a function of conducive physical environment. The hypothesis opined that urbanism could only emerge in an environment that contains the main elements of life support system (Sjoberg, 1966). The second hypothesis held that urbanism was a function of technological developments in a society. Since societal productivity is a function of technological innovations, this school of thought attempted to elevate itself above all others as the explanatory variable (Smailes, 1953). The third hypothesis stated that urbanism was a function of a social surplus product. This hypothesis emphasised that it were only

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those societies that could set aside a social surplus product—basically surplus food products—which could entertain a section of society to live without actively contributing to their own food upkeep (Harvey, 1973). The fourth hypothesis stated that urbanism was a function of a supportive social organization. This hypothesis show that, even when a social surplus product was created by society, urbanism would not emerge. The reason was that a social surplus product tended to be scattered over a very wide area, and existed in very small quantities per producer. It required a supportive social organization to organize the production, mobilization, manipulation and concentration of the social surplus product over a selected narrow geographical area for urbanism to emerge and thrive. This hypothesis tried also to elevate itself above the others as the main explanatory variable (Carter, 1983). Many authors (Smailes, 1953; Sjoberg, 1966; Harvey, 1973 and Carter, 1983) have contributed to this debate.

The disagreement among the hypotheses is on which of the four is the most important. An evaluation of the hypotheses has revealed that each had a grain of truth but, each was one-sided. The correct position is that each of the four schools of thought was a necessary but, not a sufficient condition for the emergence and continued existence of urbanism. It is only after the four preconditions combine at a given place at a given time that the necessary conditions for the emergence of urbanism are met. The implication here is that, over time, more and more people become urbanites, and a reduced share of people in towns gain their livelihood directly from the land. Urban based people are unable to physically produce their own food. It is, therefore, reasonable to agree that urbanism can only emerge in those societies that are able to produce, mobilize, manipulate and concentrate a social surplus product over a selected geographical area. This condition imbibes all the four preconditions at the same time and at a given place.

Despite this knowledge systematic studies on the spatial structure and socio-economic characteristics of food commodities marketing in urban areas, in general, and urban areas in Tanzania in particular, have been very few and far between (Hance, 1960; Bradford, 1977; Tacoli, 1998). The aspect of socio-economic structure of food commodities marketing has attracted little academic interest in urban geography. The aim of this paper is to develop a theoretical basis for the analysis of the socio-economic structure of food commodities marketing in urban areas in Tanzania, and present preliminary findings of the model in a selected municipality in Tanzania.

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The Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study was developed to guide a field course study for students of geography at the University of Dar es Salaam. The framework is actually a flow-chart model of food commodities marketing in urban areas in Tanzania. The model comprises four structural components (Fig.1).
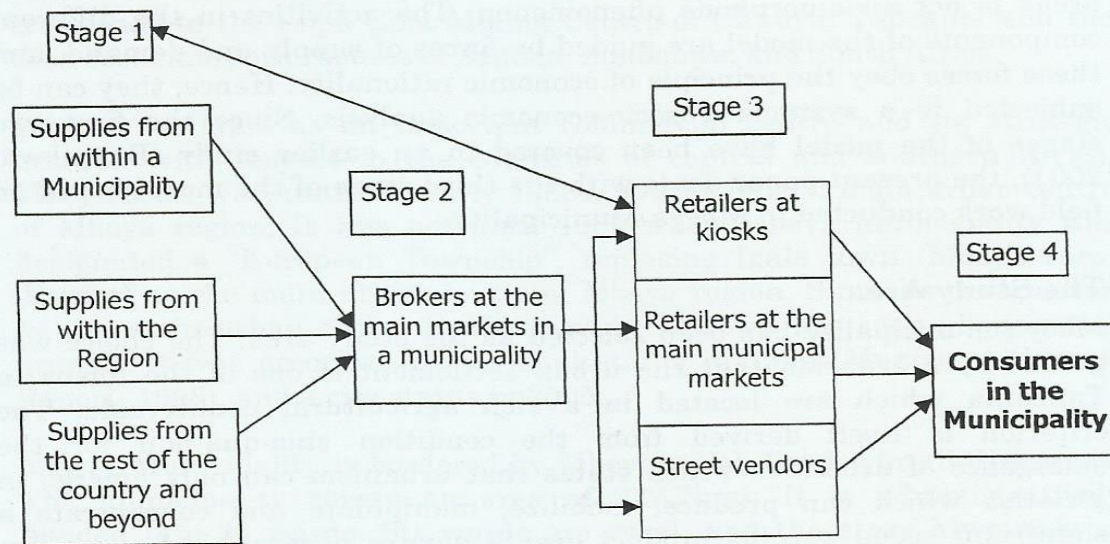

Figure1: A *Flow Chart Model for Food Products Marketing in Urban Areas in Tanzania*

Fig. 1 shows that the four structural components are lineally inter-connected from stages one to four. Stage one show the supply side of the model. The supply side has three main sources: the area comprising the urban area itself; the administrative region within which the town is located and, the entire country and beyond. Stage two comprises the brokers stationed in each main market, who receive the bulk of the food commodities from suppliers at the local, meso, and national scales. The brokers are freelance and act as control agents of the dynamics of supply and demand of food commodities within the urban area. Given a free market situation in an urban area, brokers have a unique role in organizing the dynamics of food commodities marketing in the flow chart and they warrant an own and separate structural component. The third component is the retail outlets stage.

Three main retail outlets are suggested: established retailers at the main municipal markets; strategically located kiosks away from the main municipal markets; and street vendors. It is these three retail outlets that come into direct contact with consumers. The fourth component of the flow chart comprises customers from all walks of life in an urban area. Consumers comprise the demand side of the flow chart.

It is suggested in this model that food commodities marketing in urban areas is not an amorphous phenomenon. The activities in the different components of the model are guided by forces of supply and demand, and these forces obey the principle of economic rationality. Hence, they can be subjected to a systematic socio-economic analysis. Since the first two stages of the model have been covered in an earlier study (Banyikwa, 2001), the present paper deals with the third stage of the model based on field work conducted in Mbeya Municipality.

The Study Area
Mbeya municipality has been selected as the study area. The choice was guided by a criterion that the urban settlement is one of the towns in Tanzania which are located in a rich agricultural countryside. The criterion is itself derived from the condition sine-qua-non for the emergence of urbanism which states that urbanism can only emerge in societies which can produce, mobilize, manipulate and concentrate a significant social surplus product over a narrow geographical area. The social surplus product which is put under consideration in this expose is the production, supply and marketing of food commodities which are used to support life in the municipality.

Mbeya municipality is the regional headquarters of Mbeya region. The region forms part of the southern highlands of Tanzania. It borders Iringa region to the eastern side, Tabora and Singida regions to the northern side, and the countries of Malawi and Zambia to the southern side. Mbeya region has a total area of 6,0348km². The administrative districts of Mbeya region are Chunya, Ileje, Kyela, Mbarali, Mbeya rural, Rungwe and Mbeya urban. Mbeya municipality is the Mbeya's urban district. Mbeya municipality is connected to the rest of the country through the Tanzania–Zambia Railway Line (TAZARA), Tanzania–Zambia Highway (TANZAM), and many district roads. The municipality's strategic location in the rich agricultural countryside of the southern highlands of Tanzania and its location with respect to transit traffic to Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe and South Africa are among the factors that have greatly contributed to its growth and economic prosperity.

At the turn of the 20th century, Mbeya town had already become famous in its broader region for barter trade of *ibeja* (local name for salt). Since the British colonial administrators could not pronounce the word *ibeja*, the word was corrupted to read Mbeya. Henceforth, the word became the official name for the urban settlement and the larger administrative region. It is this commercial role in salt that explains the historical roots of urbanism in Mbeya municipality. Apart from its fame as an important salt trading centre in the broader region, the commercial centre stood also at the crossroads to the Lupa Gold Mining Centre of Chunya, Tanzania and the then economic powerhouses of Zambia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa.

Despite its fame as an important commercial centre and its strategic location with respect to the countries of central and southern Africa, Mbeya town was, until the early 1930s, not the official main urban centre of Mbeya region. It was not until 1935 when Mbeya Municipality was designated a "European Township", replacing Igale town (Mbeya rural district) as the main urban centre of Mbeya region. Since its designation as the main urban centre in the region, the town has seen phenomenal growth. It was accorded a municipal status in 1980 (Municipal Council Report, 1998), and a city status in 2005.

Mbeya Municipality is bordered by Mbeya rural district in all directions. The municipality covers an area of 222.7km². It is administratively divided into 36 wards. Six wards are rural, and these are Mwansekwa, Itagano, Mwansanga, Tembela, Itende, and Iziwa. Sixteen wards are mixed, and include: Iganzo, Itezi, Msalaga, Igawilo, Iganjo, Uyole, Iduda, Ilomba, Mwakibete, Ilemi, and Isyesye. Others are Iyela, Kalobe, Iyunga, Iwambi, and Nsoho. Fourteen wards are urban, and these are Sisimba, Isanga, Ruanda, Sinde, Maanga, Mbalizi road, Forest, Mabatini, Nzovwe, Majengo, Ghana, Nonde, Itiji and Maendeleo (Census Report, 2003).

Located 830km south-west of Dar es Salaam city and port, the municipality serves as the main transit centre for cargo bound for Malawi and Zambia. The municipality serves also as the main administrative, industrial, commercial, and services centre of Mbeya region, in particular, and the southern highlands of Tanzania, in general. Mbeya municipality is, therefore, the interface of activities in the rural and urban space economies of Mbeya region (Tacoli, 1998). In the interest of the theoretical framework of this study, Mbeya Municipality provides a fertile material for the study of the socio-economic structure of food commodities marketing in the municipal markets of Mbeya Municipality, in particular, and the urban areas in Tanzania, in general.

Methodology

The methodology section in this paper covers the techniques used in selecting the main markets for the study, the types of food commodities included in the study, the research instrument used in collecting the data, the parameters included in the research instrument, the statistical methods used in analyzing the data and the methods used in the presentation of empirical findings.

Selection of the Main Markets in Mbeya Municipality

The number of areas set aside for the marketing of food commodities in Mbeya Municipality as gazetted by the Municipal Authority is fifteen (Fig. 2). These are Airport, Igawilo, Ilomba, Isanga, Iyunga, Mabatini, Maendeleo, Majengo, and Makungulu. The others are Mwanjelwa, Nzovwe, Soko Matola, Soweto, Uhindini, and Uyole. The fifteen markets form the total population of markets in Mbeya Municipality. Because the number of municipal markets was numerically small, all the fifteen markets were included in the study. Kiosks and street vendors were excluded from this phase of the study because they contribute very little, if at all, to the third stage of the flow chart model that is used for this study.

Selection of the Main Types of Food Commodities

Mbeya Municipality and region have a very wide variety of food commodities. A deliberate effort was made to select the main types of foodstuffs that are adequate for an active and healthy life, and which are also culturally and personally acceptable to the urbanites of Mbeya Municipality – (Mustafa Koc et al, 1999). The food categories included in the study were proteinous, staples, fruits, vegetables and cooking fat types.

Research Instrument Used in Collecting Data

A simple structured and pre-coded questionnaire was designed, and it formed the principal instrument used in the collection of data.

Selection of Parameters Included in the Research Instrument

In keeping with the third stage of the conceptual framework of this study, the parameters included in the research instrument covered five points: ownership of enterprise, age groups of retailers, gender of retailers, level of education attained, and the nature of the problems encountered by retailers in conducting the businesses in the municipal markets of Mbeya.
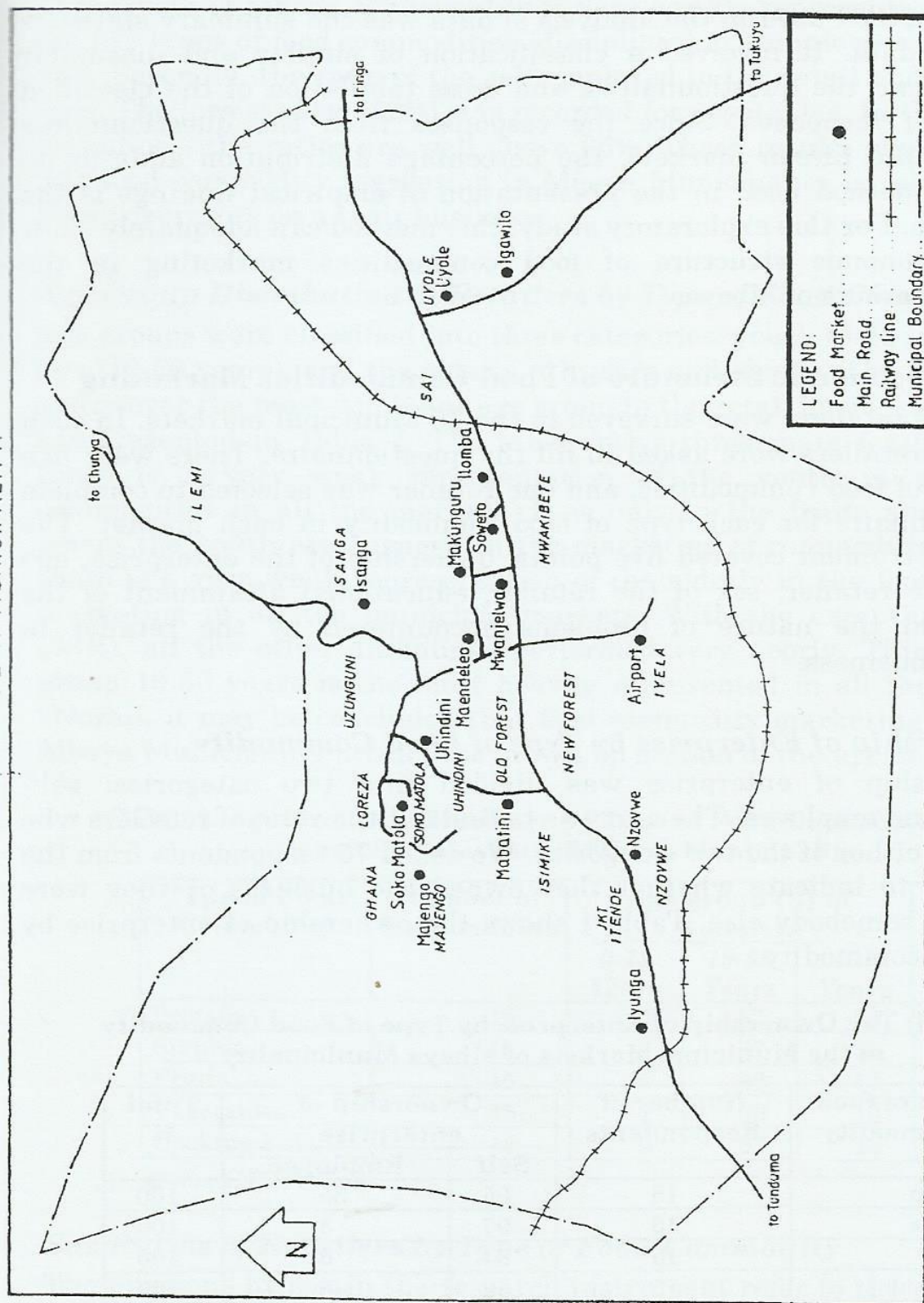
Figure 2: *Location of Food Markets in Mbeya Municipality*

Statistical Techniques in the Analysis of Data and Methods of Presentation of Empirical Findings

The main method used in the analysis of data was the summary statistics of discreet data. It involved a classification of similar and dissimilar responses from the questionnaires, and cross tabulation of the classified frequency of responses. Since the responses from the questionnaires covered all the fifteen markets, the percentage distribution adds up to 100%. The method used in the presentation of empirical findings is the tabular form. For this exploratory study, this method can adequately show the socio-economic structure of food commodities marketing in the municipal markets of Mbeya.

The Socio-economic Structure of Food Commodities Marketing

A total of 75 retailers were surveyed in the 15 Municipal markets. In each market, 15 retailers were asked to fill the questionnaire. There were five main types of food commodities, and one retailer was selected to complete the questionnaire for each type of food commodity in each market. The research instrument covered five points: ownership of the enterprise, age group of the retailer, sex of the retailer, educational attainment of the retailer, and the nature of problems encountered by the retailer in conducting business.

The Ownership of Enterprise by Type of Food Commodity

The ownership of enterprise was divided into two categories: self-employed, and employee. The aim was to find out the ratio of retailers who belonged to either of the two categories. We asked 75 respondents from the 15 markets to indicate whether they owned the business or they were fronting for somebody else. Table 1 shows the ownership of enterprise by type of food commodity.

Table 1: The Ownership of Enterprise by Type of Food Commodity in the Municipal Markets of Mbeya Municipality

Type of food Commodity	Number of Respondents	Ownership of enterprise		Total %
		Self	Employee	
Protein	15	65	35	100
Staples	15	97	3	100
Fruits	15	94	6	100
Vegetables	15	52	48	100
Cooking Fat	15	68	32	100

Source: Field Work.

Table 1 shows two contrasting features of the ratio of self-employed to the employees. Firstly, the category of employees in the retail business in the 15 markets of Mbeya Municipality is very weakly represented. In none of the five types of food commodities (disciplines) are employees' ratios above 48%. Secondly, the ratio of the self-employed in the retail business is very high. The lowest ratio (52%) was recorded for vegetables. In the other four disciplines, the ratios are well above 65%. These results show that entry into food commodity marketing in Mbeya Municipality is relatively easy. Many operators own their business.

Age Group Distribution of Retailers by Type of Food Commodity

Age groups were classified into three categories: youth (0-18 years), grown ups (19-50 years), and the elderly (51 years and above). The intention was to discover the most dominant age group in the retail business. The results are presented in Table 2. The table shows three main features. Firstly, there is a very weak representation of the youth in all the food commodities in all the markets. It is only in the fruits and vegetables where the youth are engaged in the marketing of commodities. Secondly, there is a very weak representation of the elderly in the food commodity marketing in all the municipal markets. With the exception of staples (33%), all the other disciplines performed very poorly. Thirdly, the age group 19-50 years is the most heavily represented in all the disciplines. Overall, it may be concluded that food commodity marketing activities in Mbeya Municipality attract the grown up section of the urban labour force.

Table 2: Age Groups of Retailers by Type of Food Commodity in the Municipal Markets of Mbeya Municipality

Type of Food Commodity	Number of Respondents	Age group (%) of Retailers			Total %
		0-18 Years	*19-50 Years*	*50+ Years*	
Protein	15	0	87	13	100
Staples	15	0	67	33	100
Fruits	15	7	80	13	100
Vegetables	15	7	80	13	100
Cooking Fat	15	0	87	13	100

Source: Field Work

Sex-Ratios of Retailers by Type of Food Commodity

The divisions by sex in the research instrument refer to the ratio of males to females' participation in the food commodities marketing in the municipal markets. The intention was to find out whether all the five disciplines are equally attractive to both sexes. This question was included

in the research instrument because the Mbeya Municipal Authority officials said that there was no discrimination by sex in the issuance of business licenses in the markets of the Municipality (Mbeya Municipal Authority Report, 1998).

The ratios of male to female participation in food commodity marketing in the municipal markets in the Municipality appear in Table 3. The table shows two contrasting features of the participation of males and females in the food commodity marketing in the markets. Firstly, there appears to be a very heavy presence of males than females in the proteinous and cooking fat food types than in the other disciplines. The concentration of males in the proteinous food type, especially meat business, is particularly striking. Meat is sold fresh in the butcheries of Mbeya.

Table 3: The Sex-Ratios of Retailers by Type of Food Commodity in the Municipal Markets

Type of Food Commodity	Number of Respondents	Sex of the Retailer		Total (%)
		Male (%)	Female (%)	
Protein	15	69	31	100
Staples	15	35	65	100
Fruits	15	42	58	100
Vegetables	15	24	76	100
Cooking Fat	15	70	30	100

Source: Field Work

Municipality and the work environment are generally bloody. The operations involve lifting heavy parts of a carcass, weighing the parts, and cutting pieces of the carcass for every customer sometimes using an axe. Besides, the serving of customers involves a lot of standing and the use of physical force in cutting through the bones. One may say, perhaps, that the work environment in butcheries is unattractive to the female sex.

The heavy presence of males than females in the cooking fat business is not easy to explain. It appears reasonable to say, however, that the cooking fat procurement and handling procedures require skills and capital which are far surpassing than the current female population in Mbeya municipal markets can master (Banyikwa, 2001). Secondly, Table 3 shows very high ratios of females to males in the staples (65%), fruits (58%), and vegetables (75%) trade. These three disciplines have a type of items which are normally displayed on the market stalls for customers to choose. The females had stools on which they rested during periods of low activity. It may be said that these products are relatively easy to handle and they have, therefore, attracted more females than males. It must, however, be emphasised that Mbeya Municipal Authority does not have any laws and regulations that

deter the participation of any of the two sexes in the business. Nonetheless, the results of Table 3 show that males and females choose differently when it comes to the marketing of food commodities.

Educational Attainment of the Retailers by type of Food Commodity

The attained level of education in the research instrument involved four categories: retailers with no formal education, retailers with primary school level education, retailers with secondary school level education, and retailers with post-secondary school level education. The intention of this question was to try and discover which of the four levels of educational attainment contributed the most people to the food commodity marketing in the municipal markets.

Since the 1960s the philosophy of education in Tanzania has emphasised self-reliance. Self-reliance should be seen in the light of the educated being self-employed in various aspects of human endeavour in urban areas, food commodities marketing being one of them. The educational attainments of retailers by type of food commodity in the municipal markets of Mbeya appear in Table 4.

Table 4: The Educational Attainments of Retailers by Food Commodities in the Municipal Markets

Type of Food Commodity	Number of Respondents	Educational level				Total (%)
		None (%)	Primary (%)	Secondary (%)	Post Secondary (%)	
Protein	15	0	26	74	0	100
Staples	15	13	74	0	13	100
Fruits	15	13	74	0	13	100
Vegetables	15	26	61	13	0	100
Cooking Fat	15	0	26	0	0	100

Source: Field Work

The table shows four contrasting features on the level of educational attainment and participation in the marketing of the five types of food commodities in the municipal markets. Firstly, there are the proteinous and cooking fat food types that have attracted a substantial number of retailers with secondary school level of education. In each of these two disciplines, the ratio is well above 70%. Secondly, there are three disciplines—staples (74%), fruits (74%), and vegetables (61%)—that have a very high percentage of retailers with primary school level of education. Thirdly, there are retailers in two disciplines, i.e. staples (13%) and fruits (13%), whose educational attainment is at the post-secondary school level.

Fourthly, there is a pattern of retailers who do not have any formal education. The retailers within this category are very weakly represented in all the five disciplines.

These results suggest that the more complicated the operations of a type of food commodity is, the higher the educational attainment for the participants. Evidence of this may be cited for the proteinous and cooking fat types of food commodities. This link, notwithstanding, the strong relationship shown between secondary school level of attainment and a strong participation of retailers in the staples and vegetables food types remains baffling.

Types of Problems Experienced by Types of Food Commodities

The problems included in this part of the research instrument are seven: access to start-up capital, supply regularity of commodities, prices of commodities at the supply side, restrictions of physical space in the municipal markets, high rents exacted by the Municipal Authority, garbage collection, and spoilage of food commodities.

A comparison of the importance of these problems to the business of the retailers appears in Table 5. The critical cut-off point for the significance of a problem was set at 20%. In this regard, Table 5 shows three distinct classes of problems. The first major problem experienced by food commodities retailers in the municipal markets was capital to establish a business. The magnitudes for this class of problem were 22.3%, 25.0%, 22.6% and 27.2% for proteinous foods, staples, fruits and cooking fat, respectively.

Table 5: Types of Problems Experienced by the Retailers in the Municipal Markets of Mbeya Municipality by Types of Food Commodities

Type of Food Commodity	Type of Problem Experienced							Total
	Capital (%)	Supply Regularity (%)	Prices (%)	Space (%)	Rent (%)	Garbage (%)	Spoilage (%)	
Protein	22.3	16.4	21.9	9.5	9.5	5.4	15.0	100
Staples	25.0	12.8	21.0	13.0	15.5	2.7	10.0	100
Fruits	22.6	14.2	12.6	12.6	8.4	2.7	26.9	100
Vegetables	17.4	15.4	18.0	18.0	5.2	4.0	22.0	100
Cooking Fat	27.2	10.0	18.4	18.4	6.5	4.4	15.2	100

Source: Field Work

The second class of problems encountered by retailers in the municipal markets of Mbeya Municipality was the prices at the supply side. This class of problem is heavily felt by retailers of proteinous foods and staples.

The other big problem was the rate of spoilage of fresh food commodities. This is the greatest challenge to retailers engaged in the marketing of fruits and vegetables. Table 5 shows that the magnitudes for this problem for fruits and vegetables were 26.9% and 22.0%, respectively.

Overall, the challenges which the retailers encounter in the marketing of food commodities in Mbeya Municipality are numerous. Yet, one may say that three problems are the most significant. These are the problems of capital, cost of products at the supply side, and spoilage of merchandise. Solutions to these three problems may go a long way in stabilizing the role of retailers in the food commodity marketing in Mbeya Municipality.

Conclusions

The debate on the condition *sine-qua-non* for the emergence of urbanism has been laid to rest (Harvey, 1973:238). The physical expression of urbanism is an urban settlement has also been accepted (Carter, 1983). Despite these achievements, studies on the systematic analysis of the socio-economic characteristics of food commodities marketing in urban areas in general, and in Tanzania in particular, have remained few and far between. The aim of this study was to develop a theoretical framework for the analysis of the socio-economic structure of food commodities marketing in urban areas in Tanzania. It is suggested in the model that food commodities marketing in Tanzania urban areas is not an amorphous phenomenon. The activities in the third component of the model show that they obey the principle of economic rationality. The empirical findings in this paper show that most retailers in the five types of food commodities in Mbeya Municipality are self-employed. The results show further that most retailers in the food commodities in the municipal markets of Mbeya are the grown-up section of the urban labour force. The results also show that females and males approach the preference for the five disciplines differently. In particular, females shy away from the proteinous food commodities. It can also be said that most retailers for food commodities in the markets of Mbeya Municipality have a primary school level of educational attainment.

Finally, the results of this investigation have shown that it is possible to point out the pertinent problems whose solution would go a long way in stabilizing the role of retail traders in the food commodity marketing in the Mbeya municipal markets in particular, and in the urban areas in Tanzania in general. The results show that the flow chart model of food commodities marketing in urban areas in Tanzania provides a unique opportunity for the study of the socio-economic characteristics of food commodities marketing in urban geography.

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