

Effects of the Informal Street Food Vendors on the Nyeri Town Publics

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Nyeri town boasts of informal street food vendors found almost in every street, offering products from indigenous to trendy foods. During evening hours the street food operators compete for the limited street space with the town publics. The design and the size of the town's streets trail the increasing informal street food vendors and the growing urban community. This poster highlights the effects of the informal street food vendors' location, products and operating time on the urban community in Nyeri town.

Informal street food businesses are common elements in towns, contributing to local and national development through food security and job creation (Adhikari, 2017). The informal street food ventures provide affordable and convenient food alternatives to the busy urban communities (FAO, 2003; Adhikari, 2017). This protect the ever-growing urban populations from starvation and unemployment, and also promote social and economic inclusivity, thus promoting social justice. Growing urbanization, limited formal employment opportunities, minimal initial capital, increased cost of living and the need for additional income drive the growth of the informal street food ventures.

The contribution of the informal street food ventures to the socio-cultural and economic development and growth is given little academic and policy attention, hence underestimating their tangible role in national development and wealth creation. Street entrepreneurs seek to create gainful employment; generate income and provide alternatives food sources to town publics (Njaya, 2014; Riet, 2002; Mwangi, 2002; Edeme and Nkalu, 2018). Generally, streetpreneurs are motivated by low start-up costs, flexible work schedules, quick returns and low entry barriers (Moussavi and Liguori, 2016). The informal street food ventures are not always operated by poor households, they also attract the middle-class keen to earn an extra income. This demonstrates the shifting of sands in the investors' hourglass, where every potential opportunity is explored.

The informal street foods falls in three categories: stationary, mobile and semi-mobile (Edeme & Nkalu 2018). Irrespective of the category, they should promote safe food quality, hygiene and assure safety of consumers. Most ventures are located in spots with high human traffic. This makes the main street intersections and streets along malls business hot spots (Acho-Chi, 2002; Khongtong, *et al*, 2014; Alimi, 2018; Gupta Vikas, Khana & Gupta Raj, 2018).

Strategic location offers convenience to customers not necessarily the low income class. The informal street foods vendors enhance urban life (income, vibrancy of life formal and informal business linkages & meeting basic needs. The informal street foods vendors are not necessarily a nuisance in the streets as argued by many.

Methodology-the researchers used the cross-sectional survey design, adopting enumeration & convenience sampling techniques to select vendors and consumers respectively who responded to questionnaires administered face to face. Thematic content analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data.

Key findings

1.Location -main drive to engage in the informal street foods was to generate income and sustain livelihoods. Market segment included students, working class, and general public. Findings reveal that the apart from offering convenient and affordable foods, informal street foods ventures increase wastes, cause obstructions & inconveniences in the streets.

2.Products –commonest food category was protein, followed by carbohydrates, then carbo-protein and vitamins. The methods of food preparations (noise, rudimentary equipment, cocktail of aroma) inconvenience the public. Compromised street safety & security. Streets users exposed to fire risk .

3.Operating time- dominant peak hours (11am-2pm & 3pm-6pm. Misunderstanding between vendors escalate into conflicts that affect movement in the streets. Vendors' failure to collaborate with the authorities degenerate into conflicts that inconvenience other street users.

Overcrowding customers cause congestion in the streets. **Vendors save** part of their income in Saccos, thus contributing to wealth creation in Nyeri county. Despite the challenges, the streetpreneurs wake up every day to hustle out their daily bread.

Conclusion & recommendation : the informal street food businesses facilitate the flow of resources, and promote the mainstream economies like agriculture, retail and food manufacturing, thus contributing to wealth creation in the county. Most customers eat their foods in the streets, and therefore throw the wrappings and leftovers in the streets. There is need for sustainable waste management system, where each actor needs to be reminded to dispose wastes appropriately. There is need for tailor made waste management, food production and hygiene short courses targeting the vendors to promote safe and healthy street food sector. Each vendor tends to apply different quality parameters. Research is required in order to understand how quality is interpreted in the streets, and to what extend the street quality parameters converge or diverge from the conventionally determined quality standards.



7th DeKUT International Conference 8th-9th

November 2023

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