

Enhancing Food Security through Urban Infrastructure and Services

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This policy brief is informed by the findings of the ESRC/DFID-funded Consuming Urban Poverty project (formally called “Governing Food Systems to Alleviate Poverty in Secondary Cities in Africa”). Work in Kisumu, Kenya, was conducted in 2016-2017 and generated data on food security, food systems and governance. The implications of the project’s findings are presented here.

The world’s population is growing, and more people are congregating in urban areas. In the second half of the 20th century, and for the first time in history, more than half of the people in the world lived in urban areas. By 2050, two-thirds of the world’s population and 56% of Africa’s population are expected to be living in urban areas.¹ With the population shifting from predominantly rural to increasingly urban, feeding the growing urban population has become a critical development issue. However, policy makers continue to view food security as a rural issue, often ignoring urban food security challenges.

The greater Kisumu region does not produce enough food to feed the residents of Kisumu despite the presence of large rice and sugar-growing farmlands in close proximity to the city. In Kisumu, food is generally accessed through purchases via diverse retail options.

A reverse value chain analysis of five key food items consumed in the city (*ugali*, fish, vegetables, eggs and porridge) revealed that the main production sources of these food items were located between 75km and 150km away and, in some instances, key foods were brought in from even greater distances, often from other countries. This finding contradicts the widely-held assumption that cities, particularly secondary cities, are fed from agricultural activities in the immediate surroundings.²

Unless food security is urgently placed on the city’s development agenda, the long-term development and health-related consequences of food poverty place Kisumu at risk of continued food insecurity and long-term underdevelopment. One area where urgent policy focus is required is not often seen as directly connected to food security – urban infrastructure and services. However, when infrastructure deficits are viewed through a food lens, the need for critical policy interventions becomes clear.

The role of urban infrastructure and services in food security

Location and design of markets: City authorities in Kisumu have designated marketplaces for sale of food. However, these are either inadequate or located in inconvenient places for both traders and shoppers. The main municipal market, located near the public service vehicle terminal in the city exceeds capacity, overflowing into neighbouring roads. At the same time, markets in Migosi, Manyatta and Nyalenda residential areas are underutilised. This points to either inadequate consultations with residents on location of markets or inappropriate design, or both. The CUP study revealed that food retailers congregate along commuter routes and transport nodes in the city to meet local demand.

When trader clients were asked the most important reasons for patronising informal food retail outlets, proximity to their neighbourhood and passing traffic (about 47% each) were cited as most important. Locating close to commuting routes to and from home and public transport terminals was another important reason for clients’ patronage of informal food retail outlets.

¹ UN-Habitat (2016). Urbanization and Development: Emerging Futures: World Cities Report 2016. Nairobi: United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat).

² See specifically work by the World Bank and the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) where cities of less than 1 million residents are termed agriculture towns and cities. See: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/454961511210702794/pdf/Food-Systems-for-an-Urbanizing-World.pdf>

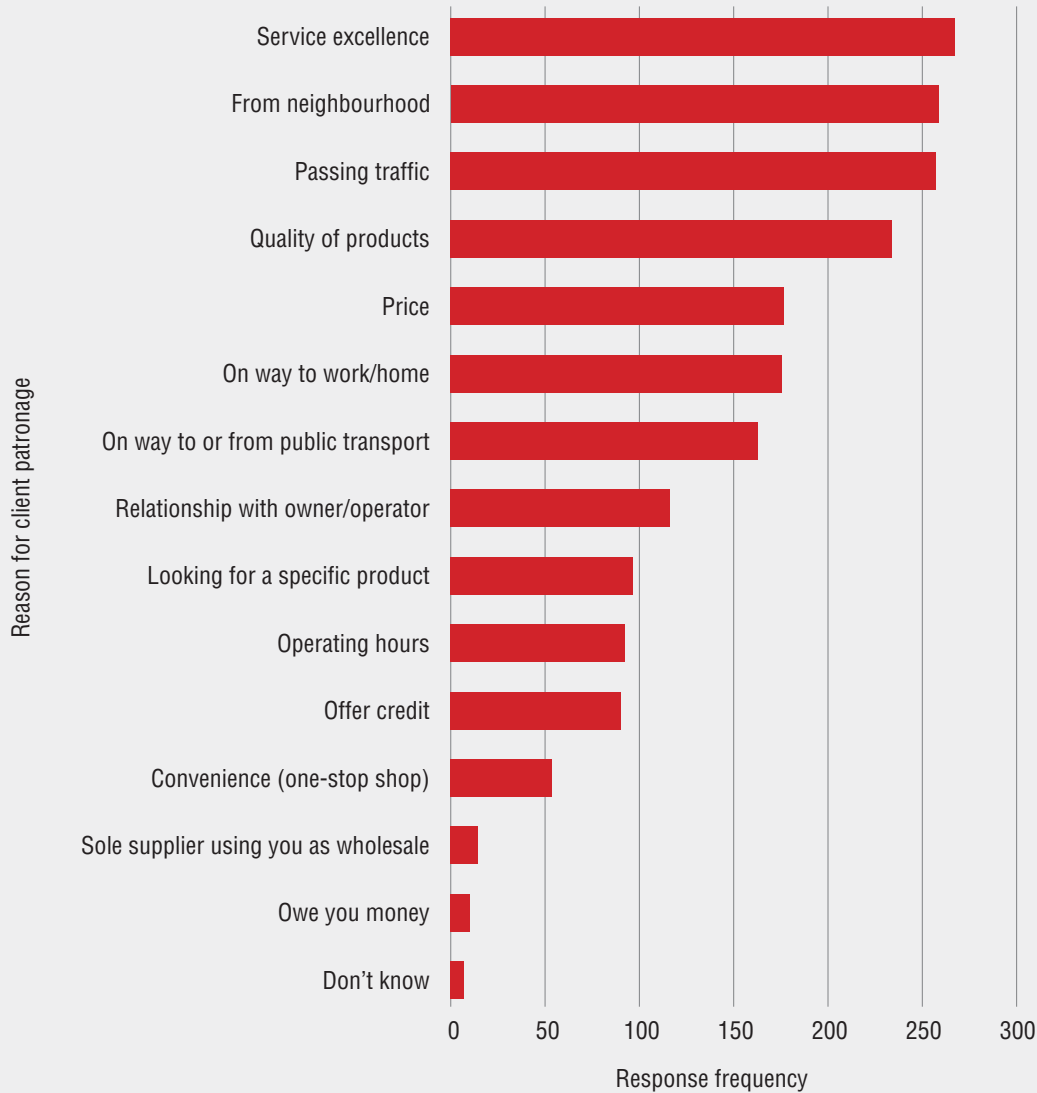


Figure 1: Frequency of client patronage Kisumu – multiple-response option.

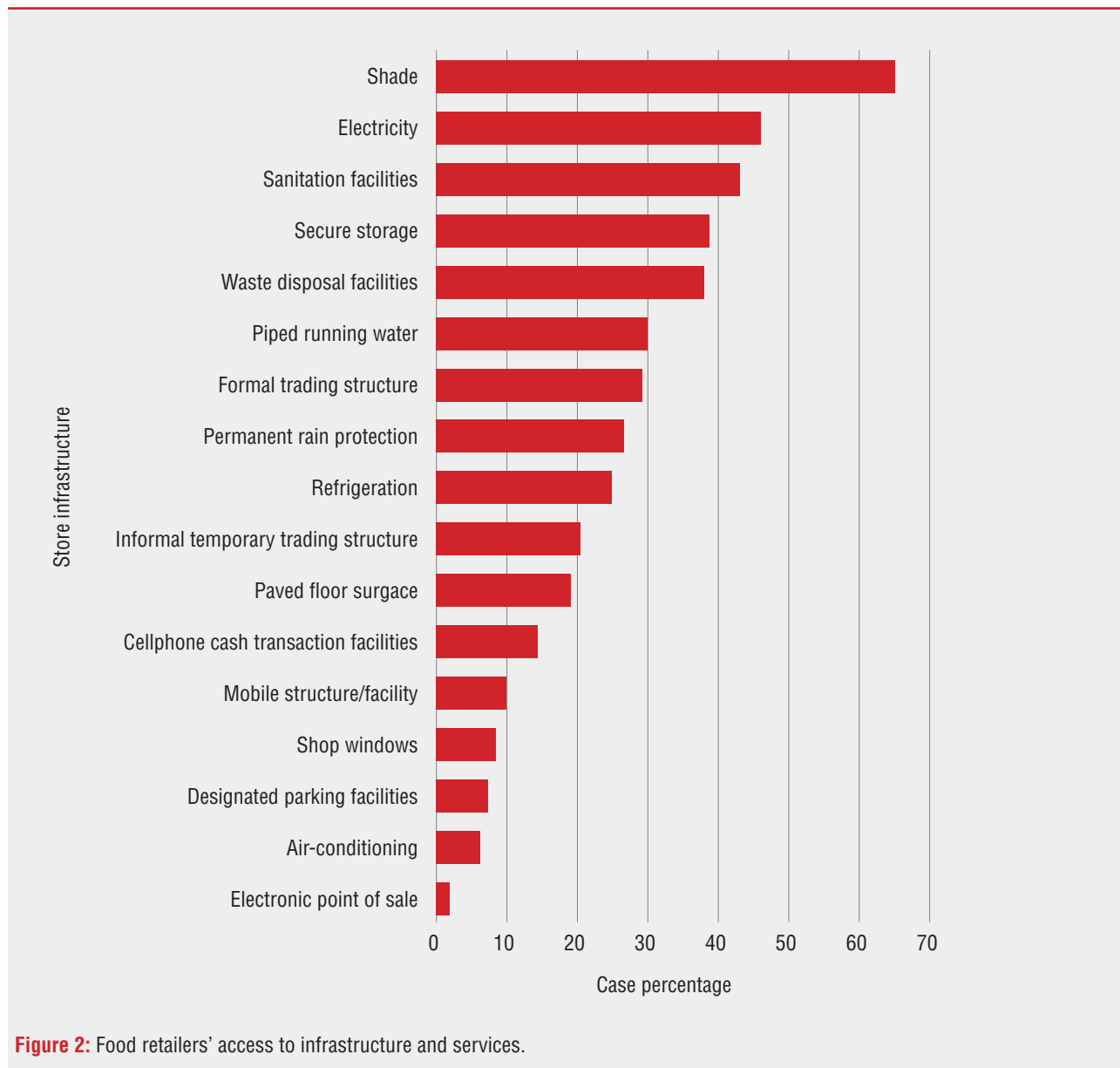
Many retailers operated outside formal market space, mostly in temporary sites and structures. These informal traders provide food for the majority of the city dwellers. The location and design of markets needs to consider the convenience of both traders and shoppers, as well as ensure that design supports the health and hygiene-related aspects of food trade. These are essential components of the Kisumu food system and it is recommended that an enabling environment be created that works with traders to create safe and hygienic trading environments.

Transport system: The CUP study revealed that the food system of Kisumu relies heavily on the regional and city transport systems, and the linkage between the city, processing sites and production sources of food. In over 80% of cases, food retailers ranked the cost of transportation as accounting for

the greatest share of their operating costs after stock purchase costs. This reinforces the finding that most food is transported to Kisumu from distant production sources, often via a poor road network. Apart from out-of-town transport costs, local transportation costs associated with frequent restocking adds to the overall transport cost element. These costs are passed on to the consumer, making food more expensive. The cost of personal transport to the market, particularly by the poor, makes local neighbourhood-scale purchases preferable, promoting informal trade practices. Policy focus on an efficient and affordable transport network (both from a supply and public transport perspective) could contribute to a reduction in the cost of food, and therefore enhance access to food by city residents.

Energy, water and sanitation: Supplies of energy, clean water and sanitation services are critical in the provision of safe food for urban dwellers. This is particularly important in the context of informal trade, but also in terms of trade taking place in designated market areas. A large proportion of the sampled informal food retailers in Kisumu trade in fresh foods (58%), and a significant proportion also deal in cooked foods (16%) that require clean water, refrigeration

and sanitation facilities to ensure the supply of safe food to consumers. Constrained access to these facilities negatively impacts on food retailers and consumers. Traders are exposed to losses through spoilage. Food retailers' efforts to mitigate spoilage through frequent restocking expose them to high transportation and even supply costs as bulk discounts are limited, making food more expensive for consumers.



Household implications: The household survey revealed that 11% of surveyed households experienced food shortages in the six months preceding the survey due to increased costs of energy, lack of preservation facilities, increased costs of water and pests combined. In-depth household interviews in informal settlements identified the costs of fuel and water as hindrances to food security. For example, an average household in the informal settlements pays more per unit of water (KES500 or about USD5 per cubic metre). Residents of middle and high-income residential areas who have metered supplies from a public water service provider pay far less for water (about KES68 or USD0.68 per cubic metre). The in-depth interviews also identified that the lack of energy implies that traditional foods, which take longer to cook, are being replaced by “faster” but less nutritious foods from street vendors. Thus, policy interventions in the provision of energy, water and sanitation can improve food security.

Access to decent and affordable housing: Housing is a major component of urban households’ budgets, and access to decent

and affordable housing can significantly contribute to the food security situation of households. The CUP study established that the most common dwelling structure for households in Kisumu was a room in a house (39% of households) including single rooms in a row (locally called *landi*), usually without electricity and water and also without space for a kitchen or facilities for food preservation. The poor who live in houses without these facilities cannot benefit from economies of scale by preserving food or the cost savings associated with preparing one’s own food. Poor residents of Kisumu generally purchase food on a daily basis, at a higher cost per unit. Kisumu residents without access to cooking facilities often have to purchase prepared food or street food. Due to increased costs, and preparation approaches, nutritional discounting often takes place alongside a higher consumption of fats and energy-dense foods. A particular case in point is the purchase of potato chips by school children on the way home from school as lunch. Policy focus on the provision of decent and affordable housing, with requisite services, can contribute immensely to urban food security.

Policy suggestions

- Design of markets should be oriented to the culture of residents, and public participation should be enhanced in the design of markets. This should include specialised markets for special agricultural produce, e.g. fresh produce, fish, meat and poultry.
- Spatial location of food markets should be in convenient and accessible areas. The use of formal markets should be encouraged through participatory enforcement and incentives. The allocated space at these markets also needs to be increased.
- General policy initiatives should focus on the provision of urban services, including transport, electricity, water and sanitation at regional, city and household levels. This is particularly relevant for urban food security policies. Food-sensitive planning and urban design is a particular approach that should be included in urban infrastructure planning and food policy.
- Policy should also address provision of decent and affordable housing for low-income earners.



Series Editors :
Dr Jane Battersby and
Prof Vanessa Watson

KISUMU LOCAL
INTERACTION PLATFORM
(KLIP), KISUMU, KENYA

Contact:
Paul Otieno Opiyo
popiyo2002@yahoo.com

Prof Stephen Gaya Agong
sgagong@jooust.ac.ke

