

Gender and Food Safety: A Policy Focus on Uganda's Urban Fresh Fruits and Vegetable Markets

Monica K. Kansiime^{1*}, Lilian Owembabazi¹, Clare Arinitwe² and Annet A. Mulema³

¹CAB International, Nairobi Kenya, ²Anticorruption Coalition Uganda (ACCU), ³International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Nairobi Kenya

Purpose

This factsheet aims to highlight gender dimensions in food safety with a focus on urban fruits and vegetable markets in Uganda, to contribute to the design of a gender-inclusive and equitable National Food Safety policy for Uganda.

Incorporating gender-sensitive data into policy design is a strategic approach that leads to a more robust, efficient, and impactful policy that promotes the empowerment of all stakeholders.



Figure 1: A stall with onions repackaged into smaller quantities

Market survey

- Assessed women, men, and youth food safety knowledge and practices in a sample of Uganda's urban markets.
- Drew insights from focus group discussions (FGD) with market participants and interviews with market leaders.
- Three public and two private markets were visited, collectively accommodating approx. 4,100 vendors o/w fresh fruits and vegetable traders comprised 52% [70% women, 20% youth, & 10% men].
- On av. 30% of the traders operate in open space (Fig 2). Bugolobi and Wobulenzi markets are fully sheltered.

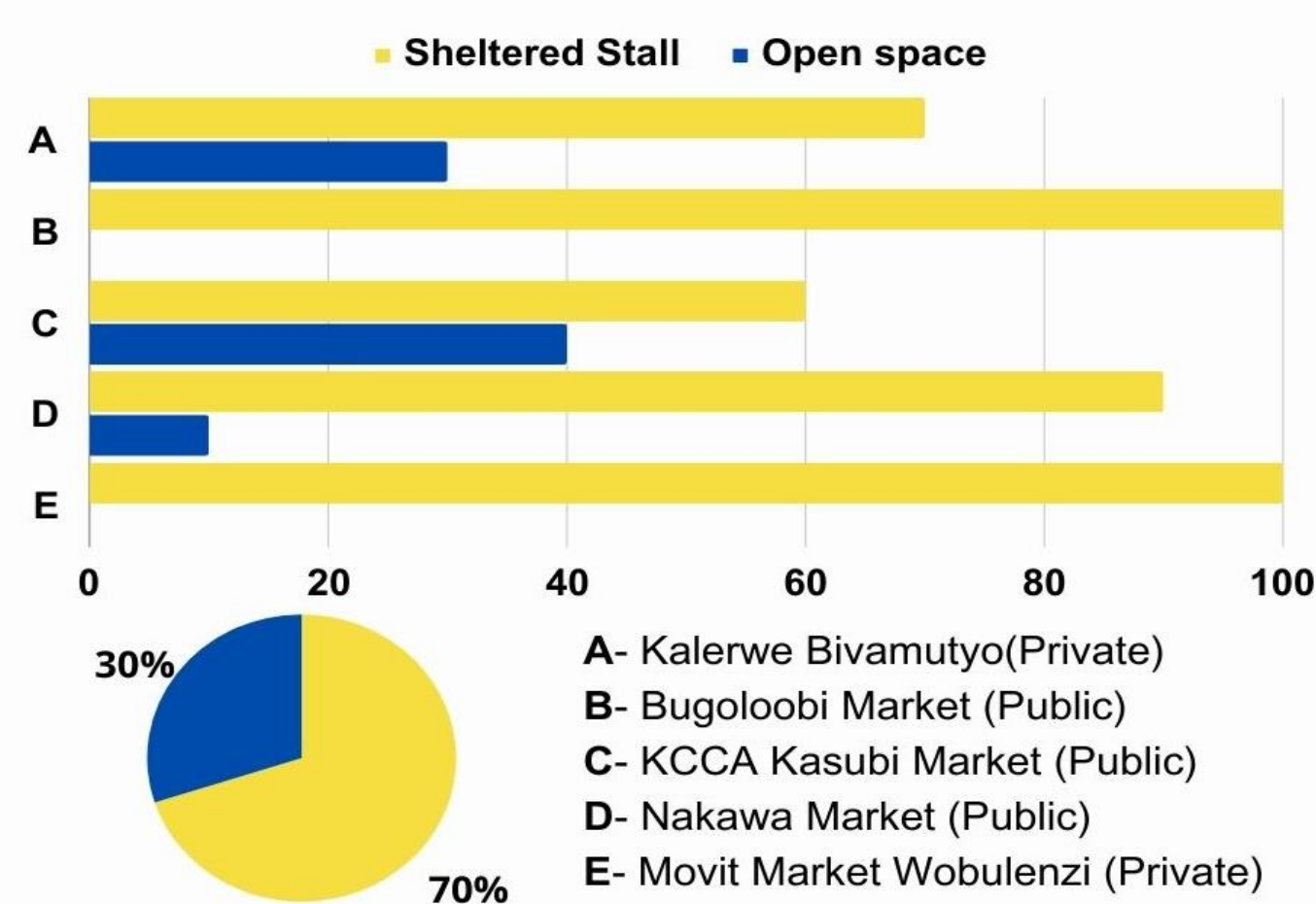
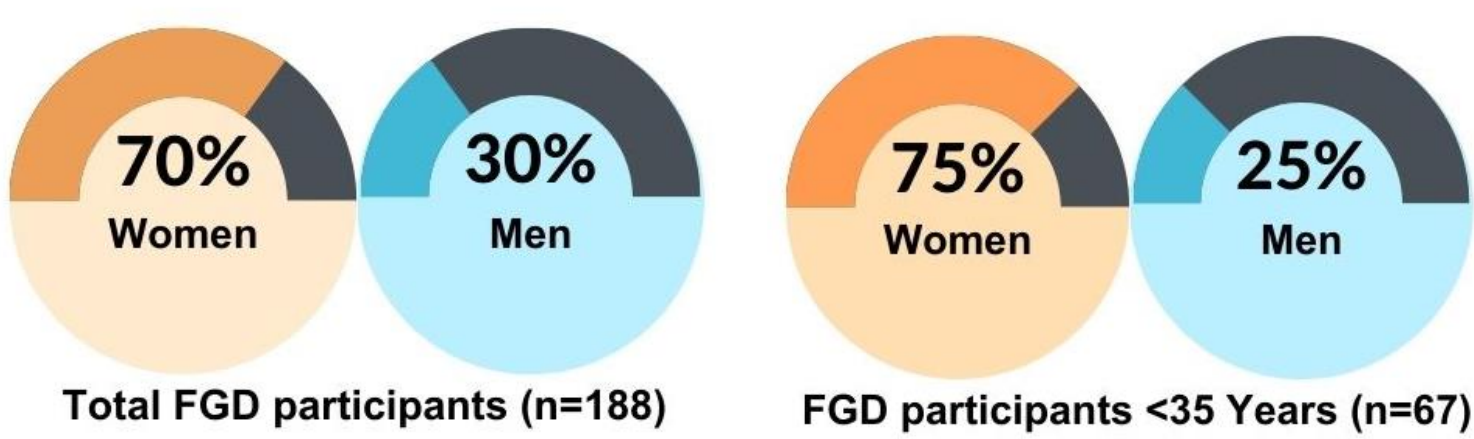


Figure 2: Ownership of formal stalls in sample markets

The issue

Food safety challenges remain causing massive economic and social burdens on societies and their health systems (WHO, 2016). Food safety issues are significant for fresh perishable products, such as fresh fruit and vegetables.

Uganda's urban food markets are vital sources of fresh perishable products, serving as crucial points of access for consumers especially the urban poor, and important for the livelihood of small local retail businesses (Vieitez-Cerdeño et al., 2023). They are characterized by diverse stakeholders, with women and youth playing a central role in various aspects of the supply chain, from production to retail.

Gender disparities exist in access to resources, knowledge, and decision-making power, impacting food safety practices. Recognizing and addressing these challenges is essential to empower women and youth in these markets and enhance their contribution to Uganda's food economy.

The lack of a harmonized and inclusive National Food Safety Policy for Uganda hinders the enforcement of compliance with safety standards.



Figure 3: Vegetable preservation using water in basins

Market participation, roles, and food safety issues

- All vendors play the basic function of product identification, selection, purchase, and selling.
- Men mostly buy in bulk from transporters or farmers, while women and youth buy in smaller quantities mostly from other vendors due to limited restocking capacity, and lack of storage.
- All vendors sort and grade produce before selling, women in addition wash, cut/slice, and re-package in smaller quantities.
- Key food safety concerns raised by all vendors include; pesticide residues, food additives, and food contamination with dirt.
- Challenges exist in access to resources, disproportionately affecting youth and women vendors, given their roles in the market (Figure 4).



Insufficient garbage collection:

Garbage collection was a paid-for service, yet collection centers often contained piled-up waste for more than a day before collection.



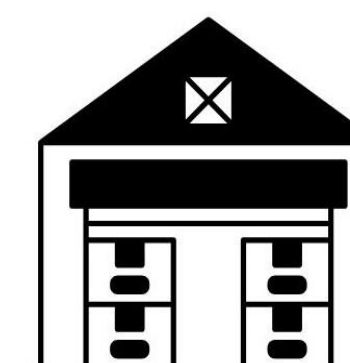
Insufficient market infrastructure:

30% of vendors, mostly youth operated in open spaces due to affordability issues. The absence of shades/stalls poses a risk to the quality of produce, potentially leading to damage.



Limited food safety knowledge:

Insufficient training and knowledge about food safety practices can result in mishandling, cross-contamination, and improper storage.



Lack of access to safe storage facilities:

This can result in improper handling leading to contamination and spoilage.

Inadequate sanitation facilities:

Toilets were insufficient relative to the vendor population and lacked gender-specific labeling. Women & youth were forced to use private facilities.



Limited access to water:

All markets did not own water sources, and relied on privately owned taps. Limited access to affordable water poses hygiene challenges.



Figure 4: (top) Access to market resources by women and youth and challenges

Figure 5: (left) Tomatoes with visible signs of pesticide residues

References: WHO (2016). World health statistics 2016: Monitoring health for the SDGs sustainable development goals. World Health Organization, Vieitez-Cerdeño, Manzanera-Ruiz, et al. (2023). Ugandan women's approaches to doing business and becoming entrepreneurs. *Third World Quarterly*, 44(7), 1435–1454. **Acknowledgments:** The study was funded through a publication recognition award by the CABI Development Fund (CDF). CABI is an international intergovernmental organisation, and we gratefully acknowledge the core financial support from our member countries and lead agencies. AWARD/GRASP fellowship offered in-kind support through training, mentorship, and technical support for the design of this policy innovation project. We gratefully acknowledge the support from Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA), market leaders, and women, men, and youth who participated in FGDs. Data collection by John Patrick Ngabirano, Clare Arinitwe and Kenneth Pras Odong. Infographics by Katelyn Zion Athieno.