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CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR OF COMMUNITIES ON THE CAPE FLATS

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The foodways of the urban poor are unique and knowledge of them is essential for government decisions. Consumers in these communities are not fully motivated. Their environment gives rise to a purchase behaviour that is not always the results of a study on the fruit and vegetable consumption patterns.

VERBRUIKERSGEDRAG VAN DIE PASPERS VLAKE

Die voedselverbruiksgedrag van lae inkomste stedelike gemeenskappe is nie heeltemal gemotiveer nie. Hulle omgewing skep 'n aankoopgedrag wat nie altyd die uitkomst is van 'n studie op die Kaapse Vlakte word aangebied.

1. Introduction

Since the ultimate objective of economic activity is the satisfaction of human needs, the nature of such needs is directly related to direct economic activity. Food consumption behaviour should, for instance, provide important guidelines for production, marketing activities, government intervention and, therefore, also for the RDP. In this context, food consumption behaviour is, however, also a dependent variable and the relationship that exists is interactive. Balance and harmony between the variables usually develop naturally in course of time. This shows that economic and political decision makers are apparently not sufficiently informed about the food consumption behaviour of the population.

The unnatural mass urbanisation throughout the past 50 years, together with limited economic growth and resulting "urban unemployment", clearly creates identifiable communities for which the food consumption behaviour differs significantly from that of the well-to-do white urban resident in South Africa, as well as the low income rural inhabitant. These are the newly urbanised low income communities that evolved in and around almost every town and city in South Africa.

Little is known about the food consumption behaviour of these communities in particular - mainly because they have appeared on the scene only recently and because their limited buying power results in little economic activity. These communities are, of course, one of the target groups of the RDP and this compels a more comprehensive knowledge of, inter alia, their food consumption behaviour.

As a part of an extensive study about the food consumption behaviour applicable to low income urban communities (Myburgh, 1992:285-288) the food consumption behaviour of these communities was also investigated. The low income residents in informal settlements and squatter camps on the Cape Flats were selected for this study. The residents are relatively new immigrants in the urban environment, mostly coming from the rural districts, primarily from the Ciskei and Transkei areas. The old apartheid legislation, with its time-lag effect on the normal urbanisation process, as well as the limited economic growth and resulting unemployment, largely contributed towards the two outstanding characteristics of these communities: their low income and urbanised and extremely low income.

- (iv) The availability of food products for the consumer. The availability over time, social influences, distribution, retail activities, limiting government regulations, regulatory, hygienic and trade practices belong to this category.
- (v) Consumers' knowledge and information about food products. The nature and extent of the consumer's previous experience, exposure to promotion are relevant here.

These influences are constantly in interaction and are variable in scope. A change in the income of the consumer will, for instance, influence the importance of nutritional value in the purchasing and consumption behaviour. If a household is considered the consumption unit, family size and composition also become determining factors. For the target group in this study as an example, the influence of a factor such as, for instance, "the number of years already urbanised" will manifest under categories (iv) and (v).

Observed food consumption behaviour of a community should be traced back as far as possible to its influencing factors if it wants to be specifically manipulated (community health projects, food subsidies, etc.). This should be done when the environment within which it takes place changes for some reason. An understanding of the influence of such environmental changes on food consumption behaviour can then be taken into account in decision making regarding environmental changes brought about by, for instance, government actions such as agricultural production development policy, health and hygiene legislation, development of and limitations on distribution trade and agricultural marketing policy.

The importance of knowledge about the food consumption behaviour of a particular community (market) also comes to the fore when questions such as the following need to be answered:

- What should the retail provision system look like and how should it function in respect of the products that should be provided when and where? For how big a volume per transaction should provision be made?
- What are the quality requirements that the product should adhere to, also regarding its shelf life, readiness to eat and ability to store?
- What should the packaging and promotion strategy be?
- What future volumes will be required?

These types of questions are often asked by existing potential dealers, processors and manufacturers, by the government that fulfils a facilitating role with respect to markets, transportation access and local food regulations, as well as by higher level government departments that administer development.

3. Results

Gathering information about the food consumption behaviour of newly urbanised low income communities in the Cape Flats was altogether an exceptional challenge and a research nightmare (Myburgh, 1992:286), but

Most of the retailers obtain their stock from middlemen (brokers) who, on their turn, mainly buy at the Epping Produce Market. A poor negotiation position, lack of purchasing of stock and the lack of own transport severely handicap these traders. Profit margins are low because of the low income of clients and the high competition on retail level. Most of these traders live within a radius of 100 meter from each other.

Business hours are determined by daylight length, varying from four 'o clock in the afternoon until just before dark. Fridays, Saturdays and especially Sundays are the best trading days of the week.

All the products are displayed and the consumer chooses his own purchases. Product ranges mirror consumer preferences and the traders echo the consumers' preferences with respect to quality. Product quality is negatively affected by repeated handling which is a consequence of the transportation problem, and also by sun and wind in the summer. Products are not weighed (scales are never used), but rather as single items and sometimes in plastic bags at a fixed rand value.

The trading environment is also unique in the sense of the relationship between consumers and the informal traders, not of a mere impersonal trading nature. Consumers in these communities express sympathy with the trader - something that developed through a sense of belonging together and an intimate knowledge of particular circumstances. Consumers express understanding for the fact that the retailers have to sell the product under difficult circumstances and at great loss. They are aware that he does not have his own transport, can only buy relatively small quantities of time and is dependent on his supplier for price and quality. Consumers emphasise that they do not blame the trader for the lack of freshness or high prices of products. By the same token the traders explain their small profit margin with: "my clients are very poor and cannot ask too high prices".

3.3 Fruit and vegetable consumption behaviour

Ninety-six percent of these communities' fruit and vegetable purchases are made with informal traders within the community. This may be explained by two predominant reasons. The first is that prices are competitive (85% experience prices as lower, 11% as the same, 4% as higher than elsewhere). The second reason is that these dealers are near their customers' homes and that the high cost and time-con-

Table 1: Consumer perception (% respondents t

Association	Apples
Important for household	42
Healthy to eat	86
Good value for money	49
Easy to use	45
Tasty	38
Good quality available	49
Poor quality available	13
Too expensive	10
Expensive but worth it	14
Cheap	52
Will buy more with income increase	22
Buy often	79

Table 2: Consumer perception (% respondents 1995)

Association	Mea- lies	Cab- bage	Sp na
Important for household	1	36	9
Healthy to eat	18	65	42
Good value for money	8	45	27
Easy to use	20	43	19
Tasty	19	39	27
Easy to prepare	9	44	23
Good quality available	19	45	22
Poor quality available	22	11	15
Too expensive	22	10	22
Expensive but worth it	27	19	21
Cheap	8	50	27
Will buy more with income increase	35	28	23
Buy often	5	87	40

practical experience in the concept of trade.

Vegetables and fruit are purchased at the time and when needed for consumption. during the investi was found that 77 percent of the households had stocks in the house and in 27 percent of the cases th no vegetable stocks. Stock that did appear were li products with a long shelf life such as apples, pota onions.

Consumers are exceptionally conscious of quality and definitely not a market for third grade agricultural p. Quality requirements do, however, differ significan those of the higher income formal urban marke remarkable that they are almost obsessed with fresh more specifically, the fresh smell and taste of produ preference for freshness is usually given as the m behind attempts as own vegetable gardens wi densely populated urban environment.

In contradiction with national standards, appearance is regarded as of lesser importance emphasis is almost exclusively on the sensor nutritional qualities of a product. As a result of e low income the price of, for instance, one ap constitute more than 10 percent of a person's daily These consumers, can therefore, simply not affor product they bought does not satisfy the whole which it was acquired.

4. Conclusions

The fruit and vegetable consumption behaviour income urban communities provides important gu for social, economic and trade decision making. C behaviour is, at the same time, also the pro environmental circumstances with far reaching imp for food security.

For those living beneath the so-called breadl physiological value of food is literally of vital import recent study (Bourne, et al., 1994:140-148) of the n status of these communities put forth some concer inter alia, deficiencies in the intake of vegetables a specifically with reference to Vitamin C and C intake. It is general knowledge that product marketing issues such as varieties, size of fruit and

and conclusions arrived at, are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to the Council for Science Development.

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