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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 known to be influenced by government decisions. Consumers in these communities are less motivated. Their environment gives rise to a purchasing behaviour. The results of a study on the fruit and vegetable consumption

VERBRIUKERSGEDRAG VAN DIE PASVERBRIUKERS OP DIE KAAPSE VLAKTE

Die voedselverbruiksgedrag van lae inkomste stedelike bewoners van die Kaapse Vlakte word beskryf. Die markingsaktiwiteite en overhedsbesluitnemings wat die gedrag beïnvloed, word bespreek. Die resultate van 'n studie oor die fruit- en groenteverbruik word aangebied.

1. Introduction

Since the ultimate objective of economic activity is the satisfaction of human needs, the nature of such needs should be considered in the context of economic activity. Food consumption behaviour should, for instance, provide important guidelines for food 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 various needs usually develop naturally in course of time. This should be the case when economic and political decision makers are adequately informed about the food consumption behaviour of the population.

The unnatural mass urbanisation throughout the past few 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 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 city in South Africa.

Little is known about the food consumption behaviour of these communities in particular - mainly because they 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 of the urban poor (Myburgh 1992:285-288) the food consumption behaviour of the communities on the Cape Flats 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: urbanised and extremely low income.

(iv) The availability of food products for the consumer. The availability over time, social influences, distribution, retail activities and limiting government regulations regarding 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 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. The size of a household is considered the consumption unit, family size and composition also become determining factors. In 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 (commodity subsidies, 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 provided? When and where should products be provided when and where? For how big a volume per transaction should provision be made?
- What are the quality requirements that a product should adhere to, also regarding the readiness to eat and ability to store?
- What should the packaging and product strategy be?
- What future volumes will be required?

These types of questions are often asked by existing and 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 that administers 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 research nightmare (Myburgh, 1992:286), but

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

Business hours are determined by daylight length, varying from 6 hours 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 can see his own purchases. Product ranges mirror consumer preferences and the traders echo the consumers' price attitude 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. It is not of a mere impersonal trading nature. Consumers in these communities express sympathy with the informal trader - something that developed through a sense of belonging together and an intimate knowledge of particular circumstances. Consumers express a better understanding for the fact that the retailers have to sell the product under difficult circumstances and at high prices. They are aware that he does not have his own transportation, can only buy relatively small quantities of fruit at a time and is dependent on his supplier for price and quality. Consumers emphasise that they do not blame the informal trader for the lack of freshness or high prices of produce. By the same token the traders explain their small profit margin with: "my clients are very poor and cannot afford to 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 them as lower, 11% as the same, 4% as higher than elsewhere). The second reason is that these dealers are near the customers' homes and that the high cost and time-consuming

Table 1: Consumer perception (% respondents that agree)

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 investigation it was found that 77 percent of the households had stocks in the house and in 27 percent of the cases there were no vegetable stocks. Stock that did appear were limited to products with a long shelf life such as apples, potatoes and onions.

Consumers are exceptionally conscious of quality and this is definitely not a market for third grade agricultural products. Quality requirements do, however, differ significantly from those of the higher income formal urban market. It is remarkable that they are almost obsessed with freshness. More specifically, the fresh smell and taste of products. The preference for freshness is usually given as the main reason behind attempts as own vegetable gardens within the densely populated urban environment.

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

4. Conclusions

The fruit and vegetable consumption behaviour of low income urban communities provides important guidelines for social, economic and trade decision making. Consumption behaviour is, at the same time, also the product of environmental circumstances with far reaching implications for food security.

For those living beneath the so-called breadline, the physiological value of food is literally of vital importance. A recent study (Bourne, et al., 1994:140-148) of the nutritional status of these communities put forth some concerning inter alia, deficiencies in the intake of vegetables and fruit, specifically with reference to Vitamin C and C-13 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 Canadian Science Development.

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