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The enabling environment for informal food traders in Nigeria's secondary cities

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ABSTRACT

Informal vendors are a critical source of food security for urban residents in African cities. However, the livelihoods of these traders and the governance constraints they encounter are not well-understood outside of the region’s capital and primate cities. This study focuses on two distinct secondary cities in Nigeria, Calabar in the South-South geopolitical zone of the country and Minna in the Middle Belt region. Local and state officials in each city were interviewed on the legal, institutional, and oversight functions they provide within the informal food sector. This was complemented with a survey of 1,097 traders across the two cities to assess their demographic characteristics, contributions to local food security, key challenges they face for profitability, engagement with government actors, and degree of access to services in the markets.

The analysis highlights two main findings. First, informal traders report less harassment by government actors than has been observed in larger Nigerian cities. At the same time, however, the enabling environment is characterized by benign neglect whereby government-mandated oversight functions are not comprehensively implemented and service delivery gaps remain a major hindrance to food safety. Second, there are important differences in the needs of traders across cities, suggesting that policies focused on food safety and improving the livelihoods of this constituency more broadly need to be properly nuanced even at the subnational level.

Keywords: Informal economy, Nigeria, secondary cities, street vending, urban food security

1. INTRODUCTION

Rapid urbanization undeniably has altered food systems. The informal food retail sector represents a critical source of food security for the urban poor, for whom food access is heavily conditioned on income, housing, transport, and time (Tinker 1997). In addition, the sector is a major source of employment for the poor in many cities of the developing world. This is particularly true in sub-Saharan Africa where a significant share of the population depends on the informal economy for their livelihoods, and most informal workers are concentrated in food retail.

As one of Africa's most populous and fastest urbanizing countries, informal food retail plays a central role in Nigeria. The informal economy is two-thirds the size of Nigeria's formal economy and constitutes about 80 percent of Nigeria's work force (Neuwirth 2011). Within the informal economy, retail represents the employment sector for around 40 percent of the population (Nigerian Bureau of Statistics 2014). Food retail is a major sub-sector among informal trade. Despite the growing presence of supermarkets in Nigeria, traditional open-air markets constitute the main source of food for two-thirds of the country's population (Nzeka 2011). Informal food retail is also a major source of employment for women, who control a large share of market activity and commodity trading in Nigeria (Mangdon et al. 2014). By providing consumers with access to processed foods, the informal economy also has the potential to foster stronger linkages to Nigeria's agricultural value chains, such as in poultry (Liverpool-Tasie et al. 2016).

Yet, despite the importance of informal retail to food security and employment needs in Nigeria and elsewhere, very little is known about the livelihoods of such vendors and the governance constraints they encounter. Much of the existing literature on Nigerian food traders focuses on Lagos, but as a megacity with a population of approximately 15 million people, conditions in Lagos may not be reflective of the experiences of traders in other urban centers in the country's secondary cities. Furthermore, a substantial share of existing literature focuses on the harassment encountered by traders from local government area (LGA) and state government officials (Onodugo et al. 2016), with minimal attention to the broader enabling environment in which these traders operate.

Consequently, this paper addresses these gaps by combining a survey with 1,097 food traders in the Nigerian cities of Calabar and Minna with key informant interviews with local and state policymakers as well as civil society organizations. We find some key differences across the two cities in terms of the demographic profiles of traders and the service delivery constraints they encounter within their trading locations, suggesting that policy responses to this constituency need to be properly nuanced even at the subnational level. Furthermore, we observe that, contrary to findings from other Nigerian cities, especially Lagos, the levels of harassment encountered by traders in these secondary cities is not especially high. However, there is a large gap between the *de-jure* roles of local bureaucrats in regulating traders and the *de-facto* actual oversight of traders on the ground. Many traders are unaware of government policies relevant to their occupation or have had little interaction with government authorities on issues of food safety.

To elaborate on these findings in more detail, the following section reviews the state of existing research on informal food traders in Nigeria. The subsequent section discusses the comparative context between Calabar and Minna by providing an institutional map of how informal food retail should be governed in the two cities. This is then followed by a discussion of the survey methodology and a description of the traders and the service delivery environment in which they operate, including their degree of engagement with government officials. The final section concludes.

2. INFORMAL FOOD TRADERS IN NIGERIA

Informal food traders include those who are stationary within open-air markets as well as peripatetic hawkers who may operate from various locations over the course of a day or week. Within the food sector, traders may sell fresh foods, such as vegetables, fruits, uncooked meats and fish; prepared foods, including cooked meals; and manufactured goods that are typically packaged in plastic or aluminum for retail. Such trading has a long tradition in Nigeria, but intensified with structural adjustment in the 1980s when the contraction of formal employment forced many to resort to informal vending (Onodugo et al. 2016). As in many other developing countries, traders in Nigeria operate in high risk and unfavorable conditions in which they frequently are exposed to a hazardous working environment (Abe 2012).

Much of the existing literature on traders in Nigeria is concentrated on two issues. First, food safety is a major concern, especially for those involved in the sale of fresh and prepared foods. Although street foods serve as a crucial link in meeting urban food demands, they pose numerous health dangers as proper sanitary measures are not commonly practiced due to lack of appropriate infrastructure. A number of studies have found that food vendors lack both necessary knowledge of food safety and hygiene and sufficient public services, such as clean water and toilets, to employ safe handling practices (Chukuezi 2010; Dipeolu, Akinbode, and Okuneye 2007). Omemu and Aderoju (2008) found that only 12 percent of food vendors in the city of Abeokuta had formal training in food preparation, while only 31 percent had a medical health certificate indicating their completion of recommended physical and medical examinations. Furthermore, specific safety practices could not be executed due to a lack of basic services, including water and toilets, at the vending locations.

Secondly, government harassment features prominently in both academic and media reports on informal food traders in Nigeria. Such harassment includes bullying, beating, seizure of wares, forceful extortions, and occasional lock-ups in police cells (Olurinola et al. 2014). For more than a decade and under successive governors, Lagos in particular has been known for its “zero tolerance” policy towards vendors. In 2003, the Lagos State Street Trading and Illegal Market Prohibition Law was passed to prohibit street trading and involves a ₦ 90,000 fine or a six-month jail sentence. Under former Governor Babatunde Fashola, a series of beautification projects began in 2007 that resulted in demolishing markets throughout the city. Street traders became especially vulnerable to the Kick Against Indiscipline brigade, an environmental law enforcement unit within the Lagos State government, that seized the goods of traders deemed to be violating environmental laws (Nwanna 2018). The current governor, Akinwunmi Ambode, has retained the policy under the guise of Operation Clean Lagos. In 2015, he stated, “The next hawker could be a robber or a terrorist. You are now well-advised. If we all cooperate and decide not to buy, gradually and collectively, the hawkers will not come to the highways and streets anymore.”[1]

A study in Lagos found that 29 percent of the surveyed vendors had been arrested for street trading within the last 6 months, while 44 percent reported less severe harassment measures including frequent seizure and confiscation of merchandise (Basinski 2009). Another study in Lagos corroborates harassment by government officials, showing that 32 percent of their sample had their goods confiscated, 19 percent paid a bribe to retrieve said goods, 16 percent had goods destroyed, 10 percent were arrested, and 22 percent were evicted from their trading spot (Lawanson 2014).

While such harassment sometimes is justified in terms of addressing traffic congestion and pollution, some forced removals in Nigeria have been more recently motivated by the country’s industrial development policy focused on a cluster strategy. Specifically, some informal businesses were re-organized

[1] See https://www.vanguardngr.com/2015/11/ambode-reads-riot-act-to-traffic-offenders-okada-riders-street-hawkers/ (accessed September 25, 2018)

into “Enterprise Zones” to ensure a clustering of the same types of trading within the same geographic location for the purposes of economies of scale in delivering infrastructure (Iwuagwu 2011).

Notwithstanding a few studies in Enugu City (Onodugo et al. 2016) and in Ogun state (Omemu and Aderoju 2008), a majority of the insights about informal food trade has been concentrated on Nigeria’s primate city, Lagos. There are a few reasons to expand the focus on secondary cities in Nigeria. First, with a population of more than 15 million people, Lagos has a high level of inequality that can precipitate conflicts between poor, informal traders and more affluent residents who want to live in a world class city with clean streets and reduced congestion. Elsewhere in Africa, the relative share of the population made up by wealthier citizens and their resultant electoral significance has been found to influence government reactions to informal traders (see Resnick 2019).

Secondly, secondary cities are increasingly recognized as requiring greater policy attention as they are often driving much of the developing world’s rapid urbanization. The population of secondary cities can range from a few hundred thousand to several millions of people (Roberts 2014). Some secondary cities take the form of satellite city clusters that surround larger urban metropolitan areas, while others assume the role of key industrial centers or development growth poles. Regardless of size, secondary cities are an important catalyst in enabling local production, transportation, and transfer of goods, people, and ideas within sub-national, metropolitan, national, regional, and global systems of cities. Yet, insufficient data on the economic and political conditions of these cities inhibits the capacity to support urban development and encourage employment in them (Roberts 2014).

Thirdly, given Nigeria’s federal system, oversight of informal trade primarily is devolved to the state and LGA levels. The LGA is constitutionally mandated to oversee markets as well as to collect taxes from traders (Grossman 2016). This means that the experiences of, and government reactions to, traders should vary across cities in the country.

3. COMPARATIVE CONTEXT: CALABAR AND MINNA

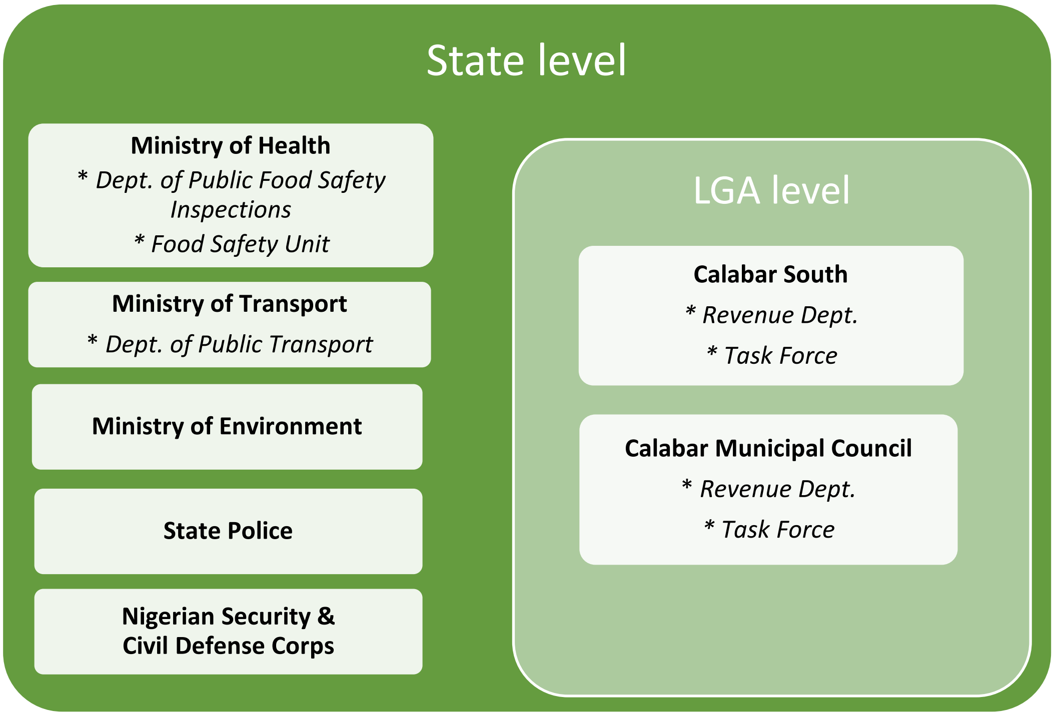
This paper focuses on two secondary cities of approximately 500,000 people: Calabar and Minna. These two cities were chosen due to the variation they offer in terms of geopolitical location, ethnic and religious composition, and regulatory framework regarding street vending. Minna, located in the North-Central state of Niger and within the Middle Belt region, consists of three major ethnic groups, namely Hausa, Nupe, and Gwari. Calabar sits in the South-South state of Cross Rivers and is home to the Efik people. While a majority of Minna’s residents are Muslim (Ndagi 2012), Calabar is predominantly Christian. In turn, such traditions have implications for food safety practices as well as the gender dimensions of informal employment. In addition, given the geographically biased nature of Nigeria’s political system, the two cities have favored different political parties. While Minna residents heavily voted for the now ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) in the last elections and there is an APC governor for Niger state, Calabar is a stronghold for the People’s Democratic Party (PDP). Such political differences may translate into different policy stances of the state government toward traders. In Niger state, there has been repeated demolition of vendors’ stalls in Tunga and Central markets, while in Cross Rivers state, the governor sent a Hawkers’ Rights Bill to the House of Assembly in 2016 to legalize hawking in the state. The described regional differences allow us to observe the presence of subnational variation across informal food retailers and understand the causes at play.

To better understand the enabling environment for informal food trade in the two cities, semi-structured interviews were conducted with almost two dozen key informants at the LGA and state levels in April and May 2018. Collectively, they provide an overview of the complex governance landscape, from both an institutional and regulatory perspective, in which informal food traders are expected to operate. In

Calabar, two main pieces of legislation govern food vending. These are the Cross River State Public Health Laws Cap 16 Vol. V of 2004, which stipulates how foods should be prepared for safety reasons, and the Hawkers' Rights Protection Bill of 2016. The latter Bill was introduced by Governor Benedict Ayade and passed by the Cross River State House of Assembly in 2016 and signed into law. The Bill legalizes street hawking as a livelihood option for persons living in the State and protects hawkers against harassment by government officials while carrying out their daily vending activities.[2]

Figure 1 illustrates the complex array of actors involved in overseeing informal food traders in Calabar. The city consists of two LGAs, which are the Calabar Municipal Council and Calabar South. The LGAs technically are responsible for providing adequate infrastructure within the markets, which is why revenue collection is so critical. The Revenue Department in each LGA plays a key role in collecting levies from traders in the market and on the streets. The vendors in the market and on the streets pay ₦ 150 and ₦ 250 daily, respectively.[3] Those in the markets pay a lower daily rate since they must also pay rent on their stalls. The Revenue Department also issues an operational permit to food vendors and requires them to submit a medical certificate to assess their health status.[4] The Task Force in each LGA consists of temporary employees of the LGA who monitor and enforce adherence to LGA regulations, often with the help of the police.

Figure 1: Institutional actors involved in informal food trade regulation, Calabar



Source: Authors' compilation.

At the level of Cross River State, five actors are relevant. The Ministry of Health through the Public Food Safety Inspection unit is mandated to certify the safety of foods sold to consumers by food vendors. Inspections ideally are carried out monthly to ensure that food vendors operate under hygienic conditions and that the vendors possess their required medical certificate. The Food Safety Unit within the Ministry of Health provides traders with hygiene training, increasing awareness on food handling from production to

[2] Interview with Honorable State House Assembly Member, Yala, Cross River.

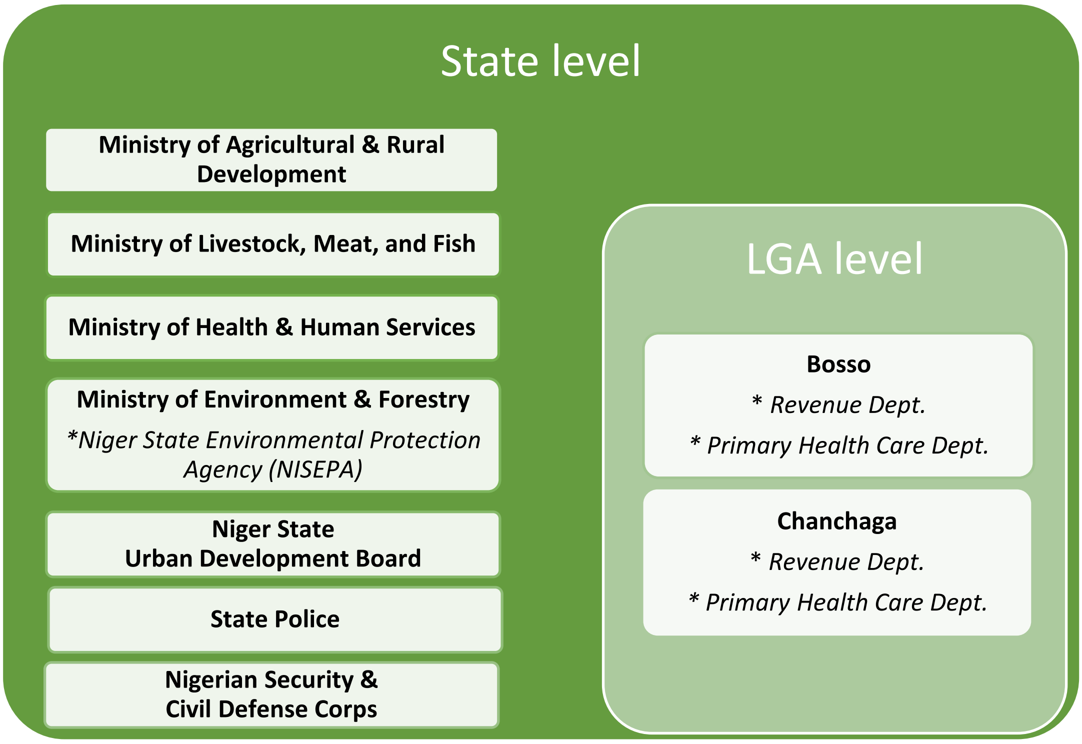
[3] At the time of writing, 1 USD = 363 Nigerian Naira.

[4] Interview with Revenue Officer, Calabar.

point of delivery to consumers.[5] The Ministry of Transport through the Department of Public Transportation (DOPT) collaborates with the Ministry of Environment and law enforcement agencies like the Police and the Nigerian Security and Civil Defense Corps in the monitoring of all street activities (including trading and public transportation) to forestall breakdown of law and order. They ensure that the roads in market areas are decongested, and they apprehend vendors who go against the regulations regarding street hawking in the city.[6]

In Minna, laws over food safety have been in place since 1976, but were amended in 2013 to ensure clean, healthy and safe processing of food preparation and packaging for consumption. Street vending is not banned, but there are restrictions in some of the city's main streets. Like in Calabar, food vendors are likewise required to obtain a food vending license before they sell food. According to the LGA councils for Minna, Bosso and Chanchaga, food vendors are regularly monitored, and the food they sell is routinely inspected by health workers from the LGA Health Care Department. In addition, there are also sanitary offices in some of the major markets in the city, such as Kure market and Kasuwan Gwari. Like Calabar, the Revenue Department of the LGA is responsible for the collection of revenue from food vendors in the markets on a daily basis. Petty traders with a stall in the market pay ₦30 for a daily ticket, hawkers with no stall pay ₦20 a day, and food vendors with established shops pay a monthly rate that ranges from ₦500 to ₦800.[7]

Figure 2: Institutional actors involved in informal food trade regulation, Minna



Source: Authors' compilation.

Figure 2 shows that seven key organizations are relevant at the Niger State level. The state Ministry of Agricultural and Rural Development has no formal role, but does apparently retain a repository of data on formal and informal traders and vendors, such as names and locations of business outfits, types of food

[5] Interview with Environmental Health Officer, Ministry of Health, Calabar.

[6] Interview with Road Traffic Officer, Department of Public Transportation, Calabar.

[7] Interview with Revenue Officer, Chanchaga LGA.

businesses, and scale of operation.[8] The Ministry of Livestock, Meat, and Fish monitor the sale of meat and fish in the open market and ensure products sold are wholesome. Along with the Ministry of Health, they inspect animals before slaughter and inspect meat and milk before being taken out of the abattoir and the farm house.[9] The Niger State Urban Development Board is responsible for the siting of markets and maps out where traders are allowed or prohibited.

The state Ministry of Environment's oversight of informal vendors is primarily through a parastatal that it houses, known as the Niger State Environmental Protection Agency (NISEPA). NISEPA primarily has an oversight and enforcement role focused on bakeries, hoteliers, corporate food vendors, and informal traders. They also issue a special license to those traders who wish to sell food in the market. These traders need to be registered with the Environmental Health Officers Registration Council. With their mobile courts, which are simply NISEPA's offices rather than a formal court of law, traders who have violated environmental safety regulations or refused to pay their LGA fees can be arrested by the police and tried with the assistance of the Nigerian Security and Civil Defense Corps. In addition, NISEPA works with the LGA's Sanitary Vanguards on enforcing basic sanitary rules within places where food is traded. In reality, NISEPA's functions are limited by inadequate logistics and funding as well as insufficient staff.[10]

The Niger State Ministry of Health, through its Department of Food and Nutrition, also regulates food vending activities by routine inspection, and claims to offer periodic training of food vendors on food safety requirements. In doing so, it interacts closely with the LGA Primary Health Care Units. This Ministry also has mobile courts for trying food vendors who do not have a special license to sell food in the markets and on the streets.[11]

In neither city are there many civil society organizations that lobby for vendors' rights. However, the Food Sellers' Association in Minna trains butchers on personal hygiene and sanitary conditions. For instance, they ensure that slabs where meat are placed are washed with disinfectant, such as Dettol disinfectant, to eliminate pathogens and microbes. They also train butchers to place netting in meat and fish stalls to control contamination from flies.[12] In Calabar, the Capital Traders Umbrella Association, with a membership of about 3,000, tries to liaise with the LGAs regarding the setting of levies. By paying monthly dues of ₦50, the Association attempts to protect members from harassment by government agents. In terms of food safety challenges, they note that despite paying heavy taxes, there is poor market infrastructure related to the quality of water, toilets, and waste bins. This in turn prevents traders from preparing foods in a hygienic manner.[13]

4. SURVEY APPROACH

To determine the degree to which traders are aware of the governance landscape that oversees their activities and how well written policies actually are implemented, as well as to analyze their livelihoods in greater depth, a survey of 1,097 informal food sellers in nine markets within each city was conducted, 530 respondents in Calabar and 567 respondents in Minna. The interviews took place from mid-May to early June 2018. Figure 3 presents the location and names of the sampled markets in each city. Markets were selected because they are typically where a large concentration of informal food vendors are found. To ensure a representative sample, nine markets were selected in each city.

[8] Interview with Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Planning and Statistics Directorate.

[9] Interview with Ministry of Livestock, Meat, and Fish, Directorate of Veterinary Public Health.

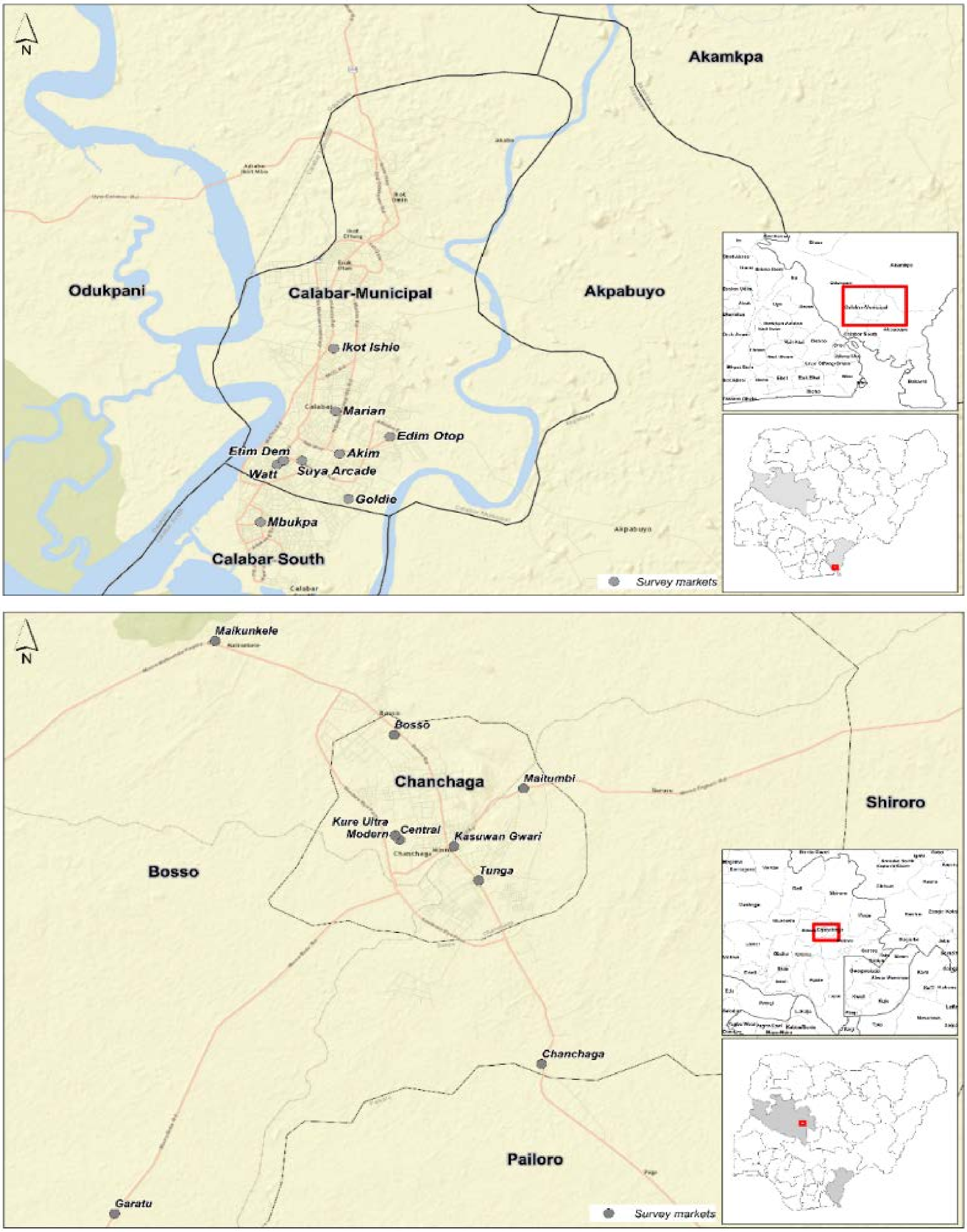
[10] Interview with General Manager of NISEPA.

[11] Interview with Ministry of Health and Human Services, Department of Food and Nutrition.

[12] Interview with Chairman of Food Sellers Association, Minna Central Market.

[13] Interview with Secretary of the Capital Traders Umbrella Association.

Figure 3: Maps of informal food trader survey locations in Calabar and Minna



Source: Compiled by Mekamu Kedir, IFPRI.

During the survey, we stratified between those vendors located within markets and those on the periphery of the markets, trading on the pavement or roads. This is because those outside the market theoretically are more vulnerable to harassment, while those inside the market can provide a better assessment of market infrastructure. As such, having a relatively equal combination of the two groups allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the institutional and governance constraints they encounter. To be eligible to participate in the survey, the respondents needed to be at least 18 years of age and be a food seller, either vending fresh, prepared, or packaged food.

Survey modules explored the demographic characteristics of the vendors, including educational attainment and migratory history, measures of food security, experiences with local government authorities, and services offered within the market. Due to the density of respondents, surveying informal traders proved much more complex than a typical household survey, because traders can be organized in multiple rows along streets or alleyways within the markets. Therefore, a random walk methodology using a zigzag pattern of movement through the market areas and targeting every third food trader was employed to both remain systematic and maintain a degree of randomness so as not to inappropriately target specific traders.[14]

5. PROFILE OF INFORMAL FOOD VENDORS

Table 1 presents an overview of informal food vendors in the survey locations in Nigeria. In Calabar, there were almost equivalent shares of traders who permanently traded from the same shop or stall (i.e. "fixed") and those who traded from the same table or place on the pavement every day but had to remove their wares every evening (i.e. "semi-static"). Despite the Hawkers' Bill in Calabar, there were far fewer itinerant street hawkers in the sample there than in Minna.

Table 1: Livelihood profile of informal food vendors in Calabar and Minna

Variable	Calabar	Minna
Respondent location, percentage share of sample		
Inside the market	*50.8*	*61.4*
Outside the market on pavement/street	*49.2*	*38.6*
Nature of vending, percentage share of sample		
Fixed	*53.0*	*50.8*
Semi-static	*43.8*	*28.9*
Itinerant/peddler	*3.2*	*20.3*
Food category, percentage share of sample		
Fresh foods	*54.8*	*52.7*
Prepared foods	*11.1*	*3.3*
Processed foods	*34.1*	*44.0*
Holds a second job, percentage share of sample	3.2	2.5
Self-employed, percentage share of sample	95.7	90.7
Days per week you are working in the market, average	6.3	6.5
Hours per day working in the market, average	10.7	10.1
Minutes to travel one way to place of trade, average	20.3	13.1
Average sales per day, percentage share of sample		
Less than ₦1000	*1.1*	*0.4*
Between ₦1000 to ₦ 3000	*9.3*	*6.9*
Between ₦3000 to ₦ 5000	*21.3*	*31.8*
Between ₦5000 to ₦ 7000	*22.5*	*21.9*
Between ₦7000 to ₦ 9000	*14.3*	*13.4*
More than ₦ 9000	*30.6*	*21.7*
Monthly taxes, average	₦ 4,468.7	₦ 688.5
Total observations	*530*	*567*

Source: Authors' compilation from survey data.

[14] In more densely populated markets, every fifth food trader was targeted.

More than half of the sampled vendors sold fresh foods, considerably fewer traders sold prepared foods, while a sizeable portion sold packaged foods. Since food vendors could sell foods that belonged to multiple categories, the total percentages aggregate to more than 100 percent. Further breakdown of the food categories reveals that fresh vegetables were the top fresh food sold, while roots and tubers were also a commonly sold commodity. In terms of prepared foods, the top items sold were roasted yams, soup, and prepared rice, while bottled oils and canned goods constituted the top packaged foods.

Almost all vendors in the survey sample are self-employed, rather than employees working for someone else or unpaid family workers. Food vending is their primary occupation. Based on the average travel time to their trading location, most work relatively close to where they live. Nonetheless, most work on average more than six days a week and very long hours. In both cities, more than half have a daily turnover that is less than ₦ 7,000 (USD 19). Despite being informal vendors, they need to pay a variety of taxes and fees to multiple actors, including the LGA revenue authorities, the market chairperson, and product associations, e.g., tomato, onion, etc. The level of these taxes varies substantially between the two cities, with traders in Calabar paying on average more than seven times more in taxes and fees than their counterparts in Minna.

The gender distribution among vendors varies across the two cities. Females represent 64.7 percent of food traders in Calabar and only 35.1 percent in Minna (Table 2). The lower share in Minna is likely related to religious differences in the two states, which have implications for female employment. Indeed, while most traders overall in Minna are from the traditionally Muslim Hausa ethnic group, most of the female traders in Minna are from the Gwarri, Igbo, or Yoruba ethnic groups. While young people in Africa are often believed to be disproportionately employed in the informal economy (Banks 2016; Filmer and Fox 2014), this needs to be nuanced with respect to food traders. Those who are 18 to 24 years of age comprise a relatively small share of food traders compared with those who are in the 25 to 34 years of age youth cohort.[15] The latter represent more than one-third of the traders in each city, as do those in the 35 to 44 years of age range.

Importantly, the data reveal that food vendors in secondary cities of Nigeria are relatively well-educated, validating previous studies showing that lack of employment, rather than lack of employable skills, shapes informal vending (Adedeji, Fadamiro, and Adeoye 2014; Olurinola et al. 2014; Onodugo et al. 2016). In other words, informal food vending is no more an activity for illiterates than it is for college graduates. However, there are some notable differences between the two cities, with vendors in Calabar having higher levels of education than those in Minna. In both cities, today's traders have on average higher levels of education than their primary caretaker when they were children. Indeed, even in Minna, many more traders have completed their secondary education than did the previous generation. This supports findings elsewhere in Africa that a major generational shift in Africa has been the expansion of education (see Resnick and Thurlow 2015).

A number of scholars argue that significant increases in the prevalence of informal vending are due to rural-urban migration (Bhowmik 2012; Bromley 2000; Skinner 2008). Our data support this argument, showing that a large share of food vendors are migrants, especially in Calabar where 55 percent of the sample moved to the LGA in which they currently reside. Of this migrant population, 21.0 percent moved from a different LGA within Cross River state and the remaining 79.0 percent migrated from either a different state within Nigeria or a neighboring country. A lower proportion of Minna's food traders are migrants, with 32.3 percent reporting to not be born within that LGA. Of the migrant population among Minna food vendors, 10.9 percent migrated from a different LGA within Niger State, while 89.1 percent moved from a different state in Nigeria.

[15] The African Union defines "youth" as ranging from 15 to 35 years of age.

Table 2: Demographic profile of informal food vendors in Calabar and Minna, percentage share of sample

Variable	Calabar	Minna
Ethnic community cultural, group, or tribe		
Efik	*35.5*	*0.0*
Gwari	*0.0*	*14.8*
Hausa	*3.2*	*58.2*
Ibibio	*23.1*	*0.0*
Igbo	*22.5*	*8.5*
Ijaw	*0.9*	*0.0*
Nupe	*0.0*	*2.7*
Yoruba	*1.9*	*6.5*
Others	*13.8*	*9.3*
Female	64.7	35.1
Age, years		
18-24	*9.2*	*6.0*
25-34	*34.2*	*34.7*
35-44	*34.5*	*36.0*
45-54	*15.8*	*18.0*
55-64	*5.5*	*4.9*
65 or older	*0.8*	*0.4*
Education		
No school	*2.4*	*14.8*
Some primary	*2.1*	*7.2*
Primary completed	*11.3*	*21.3*
Some secondary	*10.2*	*5.3*
Secondary completed	*46.8*	*37.6*
Post-secondary qualification	*27.2*	*13.8*
Education of caretaker		
No school	*13.2*	*38.8*
Some primary	*10.4*	*13.2*
Primary completed	*22.3*	*16.1*
Some secondary	*11.7*	*4.1*
Secondary completed	*26.8*	*15.5*
Post-secondary qualification	*15.7*	*11.1*
Migrant to LGA	54.9	32.3
From different LGA	*11.5*	*3.5*
From different state/country	*43.4*	*28.7*
Number of years resident in LGA, average	10.3	14.2
Parent was a trader	80.8	77.3
Member of any association or organization related to job	2.1	4.6
Public participation within the last 12 months		
Attended a community meeting	*35.3*	*50.8*
Attended a meeting or rally of a political party	*20.9*	*20.6*
Participated in a protest or demonstration	*15.5*	*16.1*
Total observations	*530*	*567*

Source: Authors' compilation from survey data.

Evidently, there is far more migration occurring across state boundaries than across LGAs of the same state. A closer examination of the migration patterns reveals from where most traders are moving. As Calabar is located in the South-South geopolitical zone in Nigeria, it is unsurprising that 80.0 percent of the surveyed migrants moved from either the South-South region or the neighboring South-East zone. As for Minna, located in the North-Central zone, 44.2 percent of its food vendor migrants reported to have moved from the bordering North-West zone, while 19.0 percent migrated within the same geopolitical zone of North-Central. Twenty percent moved from the further away South-East region. Overall, migration to Calabar tends to occur from geographically adjacent areas, while migration to Minna appears to take a larger cross-country movement. Notably, in both cities, women constitute a larger share of migrants, with their primary reason for moving being either for marriage or to join their families, while men noted that their main motivation was to find work.

In both cities, traders spend an extended period of time in one location. In Calabar, the average number of years of residence in the current LGA was 10.3 years, while a typical food vendor in Minna had lived in the given LGA for an average of 14.2 years. These data demonstrate a sense of permanency with their present living situation, emphasizing the importance of trading for their livelihoods. Data on length of time trading reveals that 49.5 percent of traders in Calabar and 35.0 percent of traders in Minna have been vending in their current location for at least 6 years. Food vending therefore is not a temporary job. Rather, for most it is their sole means of income. This notion is further highlighted by the strikingly small number of traders who hold a second job – only 3.2 percent in Calabar and 2.5 percent in Minna.

Bromley (2008) notes that street vending provides a pathway of upward social mobility through entrepreneurial channels, particularly for marginalized groups that have limited wealth and power. Similarly, McMillan et al. (2017) argue that as structural transformation unfolds, individuals shift from agriculture to modern economic activities, including informal trade where incomes are marginally higher. To examine whether informal vending is either a stepping stone or the status quo, respondents were asked if at least one of their parents had also been a trader. Table 2 shows that 80.8 and 77.3 percent of traders in Calabar and Minna, respectively, had a parent who is or was a trader. On the one hand, this suggests that vending is more of a family tradition for most food traders rather than an active step toward a new livelihood. On the other hand, of the smaller share of vendors whose parents were not traders, the most common employment reported for their mothers and fathers was farming or having been unemployed. As such, this suggests that for a segment of these vendors, informal trade signifies a step towards potentially higher incomes than were realized by their parents.

As has been found more generally in Africa regarding informal sector workers (Lindell 2010), these vendors rarely participate in associations representing their interests because of the potential costs involved as well as the difficulty of an association being able to speak on behalf of a highly heterogeneous constituency. Nonetheless, some of the vendors engage in some forms of political participation, with half of the Minna sample claiming they attended a community meeting in the last year and 20 percent in each city claiming to have engaged in a political party meeting or rally.

Studies have demonstrated that even with the recent expansion of supermarkets, the urban poor continue to obtain most of their food through informal means (Abrahams 2006; Crush and Frayne 2011; Madevu 2006). While this survey did not explicitly look at urban consumers, informal traders are themselves a major share of the urban poor. Table 3 strongly support trends found elsewhere, emphasizing the importance of informal food retail on urban food security. Respondents were asked to specify where they regularly source eight different groupings of food that are viewed by major international organizations as critical to a healthy diet and for dietary diversity (see FAO 2016).[16] Except for milk and other milk products, such as cheese and yogurt, supermarkets play a negligible role as a food source for these traders.

[16] Values do not total to 100 percent since respondents may purchase food from more than one source.

Table 3: Informal traders who obtain food from specific sources, percentage share

Food Groups	Calabar			Minna		
	Street vendor or market trader	Small shop or kiosk	Supermarket	Street vendor or market trader	Small shop or kiosk	Supermarket
Fresh fruits	99.4	69.1	8.1	99.3	79.9	8.1
Fresh vegetables	99.1	70.4	4.2	99.1	84.5	6.9
Meat, fish, other animal products	98.3	68.9	4.0	99.1	86.2	6.5
Eggs	93.6	74.3	8.7	83.4	89.6	5.8
Grains and flours	97.7	70.2	8.3	91.2	88.2	7.6
Milk and other milk products	91.5	71.5	15.3	85.0	90.3	12.3
Roots, tubers, and plantains	97.9	70.2	5.1	93.8	88.9	7.2
Prepared snacks and meals	95.3	63.4	6.6	99.5	67.7	6.2

Source: Authors' compilation from survey data.
Notes: 530 observations in Calabar and 567 observations in Minna

6. ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR INFORMAL VENDORS

As noted earlier, informal traders often face a complex array of actors regulating their activities, which can create opaque lines of accountability and opportunities for extortion and harassment. As such, respondents were asked about their experiences with three types of harassment – seizure of goods by authorities, forced removals, and arrests. In addition, traders were asked to share any other types of harassment that they might have encountered from government authorities. Table 4 shows that, in contrast to Lagos, where documented experiences of harassment and even brutality are quite high, this is not a major problem in these two secondary cities. Only 12 percent of food traders in Calabar have ever experienced any type of harassment at all, while the corresponding figure in Minna is only 3 percent. Importantly, however, of the 112 traders who were harassed across the two cities, 70 percent were women and most of them reported experiencing a seizure of their goods. This is a troubling dynamic given the importance of informal trade to their livelihoods, especially in Calabar.

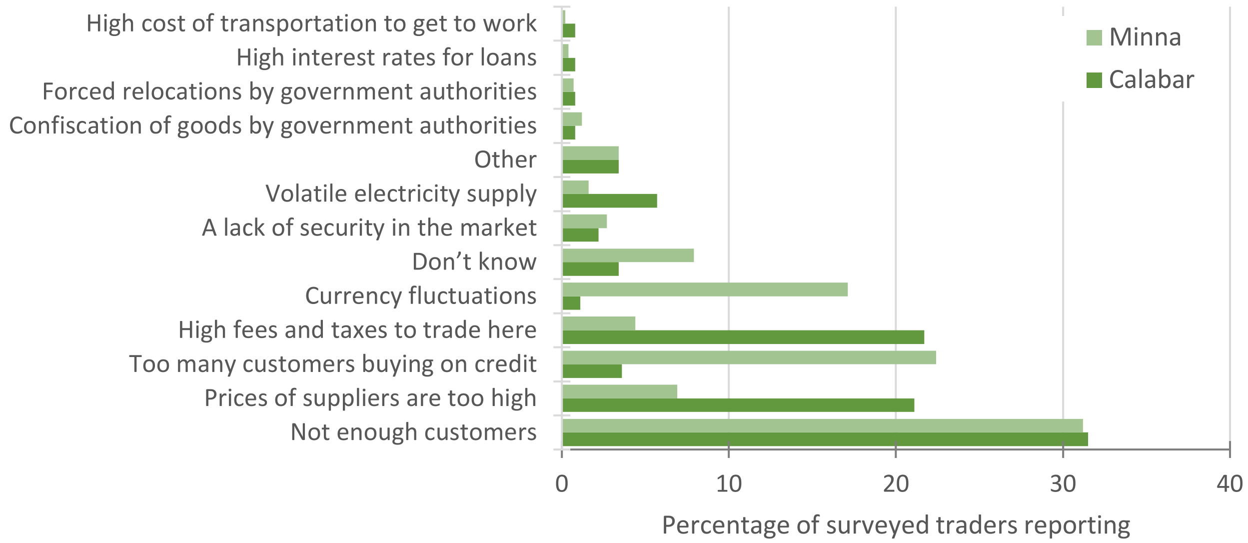
Table 4: Experiences of informal food traders with forms of harassment by government authorities, percent of traders surveyed

Type of harassment	Calabar	Minna
Ever harassed at all	12.2	3.2
Goods seized	12.3	2.1
Forcibly relocated	8.8	1.4
Arrested	0.8	0.0
Other	2.3	0.0
Total observations	*524*	*564*

Source: Authors' compilation from survey data.
Note: The total observations are lower because a number of respondents refused to answer.

Figure 4 highlights that government harassment, through either forced relocations or confiscations, is not perceived to be the biggest challenge faced by traders in either city. Instead, a lack of sufficient customers is the main concern of traders, since it obviously affects their profitability, followed by high prices faced from their suppliers. Beyond that, there are some stark inter-city differences. In Calabar, the other top concerns include high prices by suppliers and high fees and taxes by authorities who oversee the markets. In Minna, the tendency of customers to buy on credit and currency fluctuations are perceived as the major challenges.

Figure 4: Top challenges faced by informal food traders surveyed in Calabar and Minna



Source: Authors' compilation from survey data.

While harassment is a relatively small problem for traders compared to other challenges, how do they engage with the broader governance landscape they encounter related to food licensing and safety? As noted, a variety of actors at the state and LGA levels are responsible for regulating informal food trade in these two cities. However, in contrast to the official statements by state and LGA officials in the two cities, less than one percent of the sample of vendors stated that they required a license to sell food. Moreover, 78 percent of the sample of vendors noted that they had never had an inspection of their food handling or food quality by a health officer in the six months prior to the implementation of the survey. This was even true for markets that have sanitation officers housed in the market, such as Kure market and Kasuwan Gwari in Minna and the major meat market in Calabar known as the Suya Arcade.

The traders were also asked which government officials they come into contact with the most over the course of a month in the context of their work as a food trader. In Minna, half of the sample claimed that they did not encounter any authority. Otherwise, the LGA revenue officer was the main authority identified by most of the respondents in each city (Table 5). Neither state-level authorities nor LGA health officers were encountered frequently by these food traders. Importantly, in Calabar, 23 percent identified engaging often with the Task Force.

Table 5: Government official that informal food traders reported engaging with most often, percent of surveyed traders

Official	Calabar	Minna
Local government market managers	18.7	21.2
LGA health officers	6.4	4.4
LGA revenue officers	33.8	22.8
State-level authorities	2.1	0.4
Task Force	23.2	0.9
Police	1.9	1.0
None	13.0	49.4
Other	0.9	0.0
Total observations	*530*	567

Source: Authors' compilation from survey data.

Of the relatively small number of respondents who vend prepared foods (see Table 1), 30 percent noted that they lack clean water and soap to wash their hand and their utensils within the markets. This is even though 81 percent of prepared food sellers in Calabar and 95 percent in Minna make the meals and snacks that they then sell within the marketplaces. This suggests that market infrastructure requires as much attention as regulation and oversight for food safety concerns to be addressed.

Table 6: Access to key services within the market, percent of surveyed traders inside markets reporting

Service	Calabar	Minna
Trash collection	43.1	44.5
Toilets	62.1	36.2
Electricity	40.2	66.1
Clean, running water	16.7	8.9
Safe storage facilities for merchandise	28.3	37.6
Shelter during bad weather	28.3	55.2
Fire extinguishers	2.2	1.1
Security	74.3	82.5
Health facilities	1.9	2.9
Proper drainage	15.2	53.7
Total observations	*269*	*348*

Source: Authors' compilation from survey data.
Notes: Since access to services was limited to those who worked inside a market, the number of observations is smaller than for the entire sample of informal traders.

Indeed, Table 6, which only focused on traders inside markets who would be more knowledgeable about market services, reveals that access to clean running water and health facilities are major deficiencies in the markets of both cities. Toilet access is a particular concern in Minna, while insufficient drainage, which can contribute to cholera and other food-borne diseases during the rainy season, is more problematic in Calabar. In addition, more than half of the traders in each city lack access to trash collection, which can attract pests and vermin with negative impacts on human health. In many cases, having physical access does not provide a comprehensive perspective – those utilizing those services often must pay a user fee to either a market official or a private citizen who is renting out a toilet or collecting garbage.

Overall, while traders do not face high levels of government harassment, their daily efforts to earn a living can be thwarted by the sub-standard service environment in which they operate. This presumably is even more pronounced for those operating on the streets and pavements, who may not be entitled to use the services that do exist within the markets.

7. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Despite the recognized importance of traders to urban food security in Africa and elsewhere (Resnick 2017; Skinner 2016), very little is known about this relatively heterogeneous constituency. A better understanding of the role of informal food traders in urban food systems in Nigeria is hampered by the predominance of empirical work that is concentrated in just one city, Lagos, even though the demographic trends and governance structures that characterize cities can vary quite substantially. By focusing on two similarly sized but culturally and geographically distinct secondary cities in one of the world's fastest urbanizing countries, this paper used an original survey of informal food vendors to understand their livelihood profiles, demographic composition, work challenges, and public opinions. This was combined with semi-structured interviews with knowledgeable policymakers involved in regulatory and oversight activities relevant to informal food trade. The joint integration of perspectives from both the government and the vendors allows for identifying where efforts are needed to improve the livelihoods of the traders and to strengthen their role in local food systems.

In doing so, the analysis presented here reveals two key findings. First, the enabling environment encountered by vendors in Calabar and Minna varies substantially from what has been found in other Nigerian cities, especially Lagos where the government is well known for its draconian treatment of informal vendors. Instead of harsh repression of their activities, food traders in Calabar and Minna are operating more in an environment of benign neglect by the government. Despite a range of hygiene training, food licensing, and oversight activities that state and LGA officials claim to execute over traders, many of the traders in our survey sample had not been exposed to these activities, except for revenue collection. Notwithstanding the collection of taxes and fees, important investments in services essential for hygienic food preparation have not sufficiently materialized.

In Nigeria and elsewhere, informal food traders frequently are blamed for outbreaks of food borne disease. Establishing laws and regulations for governing their behaviors is necessary but not sufficient to improve food safety. Regular sensitization of traders to food sourcing and preparation issues is critical, as is the investment of revenues collected from traders into the relevant infrastructure that will enable them to implement proper food safety practices.

Secondly, while sharing many similarities, the profile of vendors in Calabar and Minna is quite diverse in notable ways, including their gender composition, experience with government harassment, the priority challenges to the profitability of their businesses, and the profile of services to which they have greatest access. Recognizing this variation is critical to ensure that policy responses for food safety, gender inclusion, taxation, market siting, and other key issues are properly nuanced to actually resonate with traders. More importantly, governments that are concerned about urbanization need to properly strengthen, via resources and human capacity, the bureaucratic institutions aimed at supporting informal food trade.

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