
THE PHENOMENON OF STREET VENDING IN KAKAMEGA TOWN, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Street vending is an economic activity that involves offering commodities for sale to the public without having permanent built up structures from which the wares are sold. Although some vendors may have permanent spots along the streets, apparently there are those whose operation has remained mobile. Accordingly, this study purposed to investigate the factors that have led to the growth of street vending activities in Kakamega town. The specific objective was to investigate the factors which have pushed these traders to operate on the streets in Kakamega town. The study adopted the Legalists theory that mainly view the challenge presented by street vending in terms of bureaucratic obstacles created by authorities and lack of enforceable laws and policies. The study used descriptive research design. A sample of 169 street traders, 20 drivers of different types of vehicles, 30 pedestrians, 45 customers, 25 fixed shop operators, 20 County market traders, 2 street traders 'associations' officials and 4 County Government of Kakamega (CGK) officials were used for the study as respondents. The research study used both probabilistic and non-probabilistic sampling techniques. Data collection methods used included purposive sampling, interviews, questionnaires, photograph taking. The data collected was analyzed by use of MS excel, Predictive Analytical Software (PAS) and descriptive statistics. The study revealed that the traders' relocation and operation on the streets in Kakamega town is due to the desire for profit maximization, lack of adequate infrastructural facilities and limited spaces in the market structures, dilapidating buildings and poor structural design and poor spaces and stall allocation. In order to address these challenges, there is need to mobilize resources for improving market structures, have proper space use, identify appropriate policies and collaboration among all stakeholders so as to succeed in settling these traders.

Key Words: Street vendor, Urban public space, County Government Authority

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

According to UNCHS – Habitat (2009), it is estimated that by 2050, about 70 percent of the world population will be living in towns. This phenomenon has resulted into rapid and unsustainable urbanization which is characterized by a rise in unemployment (Onyango, 2008). Moreover, Bryceson (2004) posits that restructuring global economic realities among other factors has contributed to the challenges facing urban growth .In this perspective, people migrate from the country side to towns and cities to search for employment and business opportunities.

However, when they fail to secure jobs in the formal sector they end up in the informal sector (Nabuteya, 2007; Onyango, 2008) to earn a living which is a common phenomenon in developing countries all over the world (Ndhlovu, 2011).

Street vending is highly visible in many cities and towns all over the world and many governments have acknowledged its existence (Sonah, 2014). However, they continue lacking proper recognition and hence not well catered in urban planning process. Consequently the informal sector operators occupy several streets and public places in towns interfering with mobility, sanitation and plans for open spaces development. In Kenya, in spite of the efforts of the County Governments the challenge of the street vending along the street still persist.

Kakamega town has experienced unprecedented proliferation of street vending activities. This situation can be attributed to rapid population growth, migration, expanded learning institutions and the establishment of many new economic activities triggered by devolution have set street vending activities on the rise hence it has become a challenge to plan for the traders (Ngome, 2018).

For instance, Ngome (2018) observed that these traders occupy several streets and public places within Kakamega town Central Business District (CBD). Furthermore, the phenomenon was more prevalent in the central streets of the town, main bus stage at the entry points of Muliro gardens, near the main gate of Kakamega General Hospital, the Mumias stage and Navakholo stage.

The County Government of Kakamega (CGK) tried to settle these traders by renovating the main municipal market structure, built the second structure for the traders between 2011 and 2014 to settle these traders and in addition erected movable metallic stalls in order to clear them from the streets. In spite of these efforts, the challenge of the street traders operating along the street still persisted.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Area of Study

The study was carried out in Kakamega town; western Kenya (see fig. 1). The town is situated along the main road trunk, Webuye-Kisumu highway. It serves as the administrative headquarters of Kakamega County. Kakamega is one of the fast growing towns in Kenya.

MAP OF KAKAMEGA TOWN

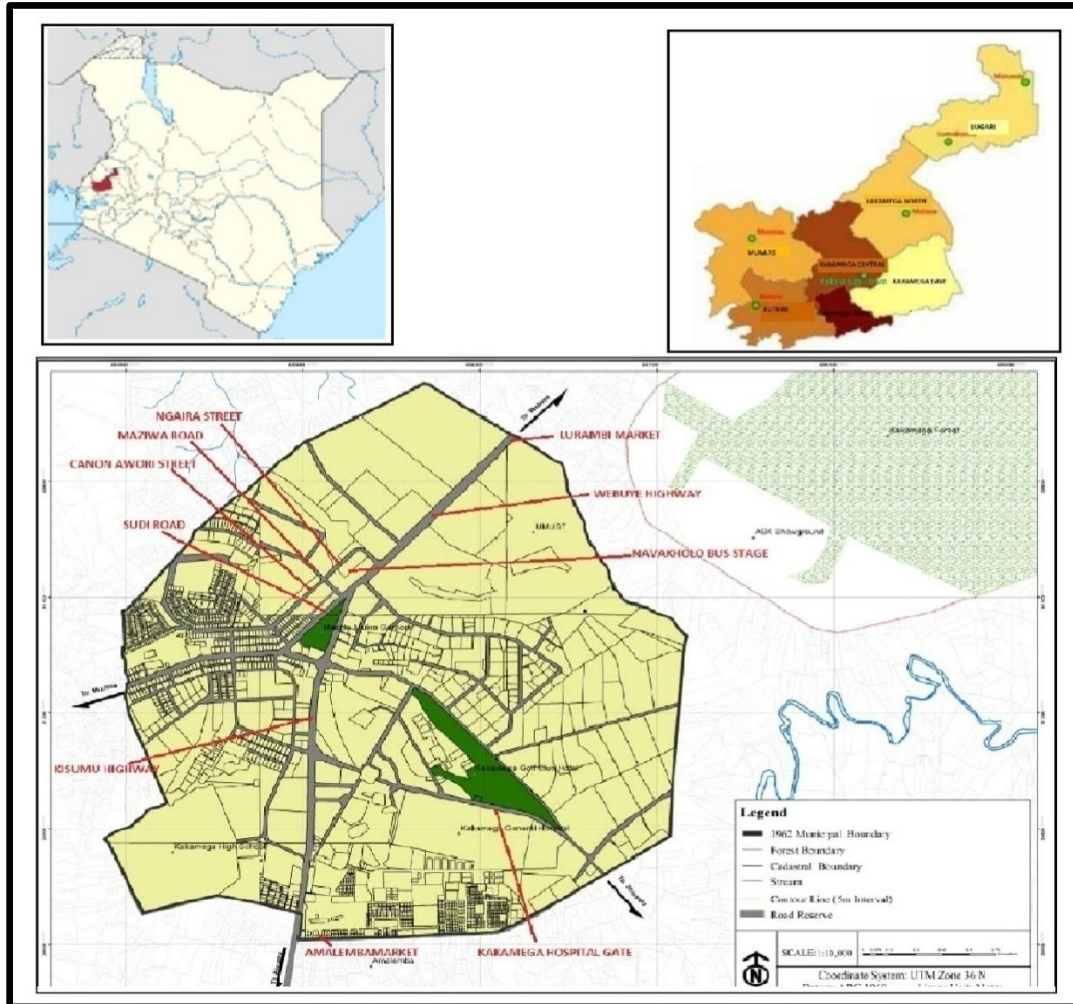


Fig: 1 Map of Kakamega town showing streets with high concentration of vendors.

2.2 The Study Population

The researcher collected information from the vendors, County Finance officer, the Town physical planner, County finance officer, and Town administrator, County Market manager, the customers who bought goods from the street vendors, drivers and pedestrians and Kenya National Association of Street Vendors (KENASVIT) officials.

2.3 Sampling Procedure and Sample Size for the Study

Area sampling was used to classify the street traders into categories basing their locations within town so as to get varied responses and experiences. Random sampling was then used to pick the respondents from these areas. 150 street traders were picked for the study. Convenience sampling was used to select 25 fixed shop owners, 20 drivers, 30 pedestrians, 20 County market traders and 45 buyers for the study. In addition, purposive sampling was used to select 4 county

officials(1 town administrator and 1 officer in the Finance department, 1 County market manager and 1Physical planner) and the 2 street traders association leaders weresampled as key informants to provide the information on street trading activitiesand policies of the town. In addition, they were expected to shed light on the intervention measures put in place to mitigate the challenges of street ending.

2.4 Data Collection Instruments and Methods

Structured and semi-structured interviews, open ended and closed ended items questionnaires were administered to these respondents to get accurate responses that are devoid of any influence. Triangulation data collection method was used so as to compare the responses from respondents. Photograph taking was also used to collect the data on the real situation of vending activities in Kakamega town.

3.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1Demographic characteristics of the street traders

3.1.1 Sample Frame for the Street Traders

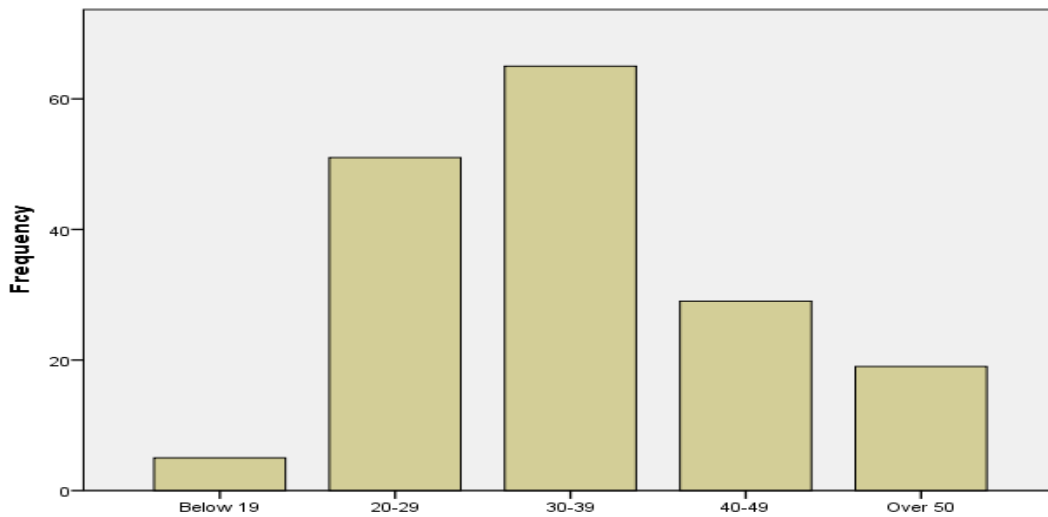
The street vendors were sampled from various parts of the town with the highest concentration and categorized according to their gender and spatial distribution. The information is represented in the table 1 below.

Place	Vendors		TOTAL
	Male	Female	
Sudi Road	12	18	30
Webuye Highway	7		12
Kisumu Highway	5	10	15
Navakholo Bus Stage	12	14	26
Canon Awori Street	10	10	20
Ngaira Street	12	13	25
Maziwa/KFA road	19	22	41
TOTAL	77	92	169

Figure 1: Street traders’ Spatial Distribution in Kakamega town

From the sampled respondents, the research established that there were more women engaged in street trading activities than men. The study involved (69)46.0 % male and (81)54.0% female respondents, from the sampled traders.

3.1.1 Respondents age



Ages (years)

Figure 2: Ages of Street Traders in Kakamega Town

From Fig. 2, the findings showed that street traders of below 20 years constituted 3.6%. The traders whose ages range between 20-29 years constituted 30.8%, those of between 30-39 years comprised 39.6%. The traders whose ages are 40-49 comprise of 14.2% while those whose ages are more than 50 years constituted 11.8%. From these findings, it can be seen that majority of street traders in Kakamega were youths (20 – 39 years).

3.1.2 Level of education

The study sought to establish the level of education of the street traders. The findings were established as follows in Fig 4.3 below:

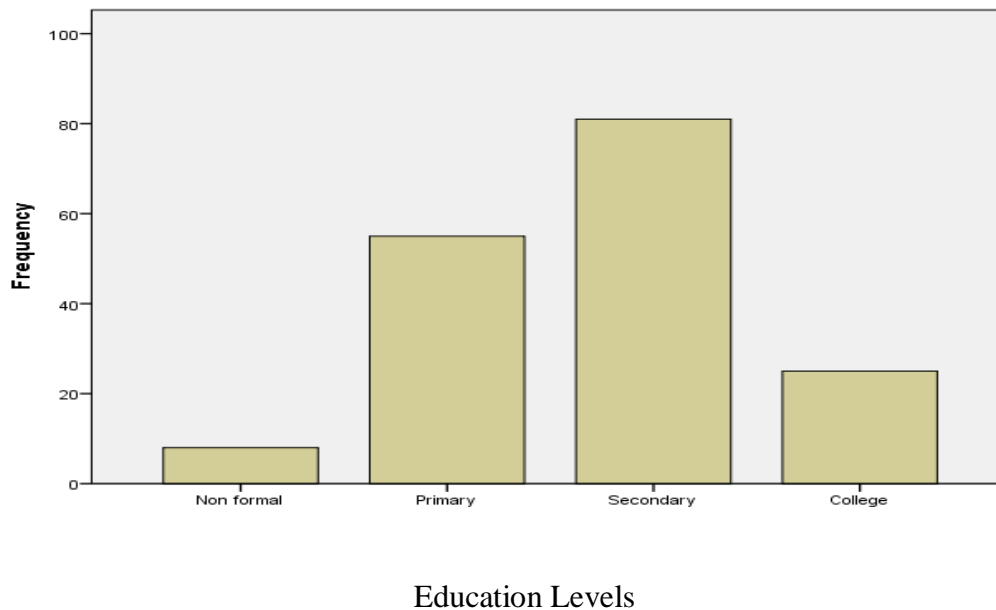


Figure 3: Education Levels of the Street Traders operating in Kakamega Town

Fig. 3 shows that majority (95%) of street traders had formal education. Out of this number, 16% of the respondents had tertiary level education. Only 5% did not have formal education. Those with Secondary school education were 42% while those with Primary level of education constituted 37%. The findings imply that many people who attained education up to tertiary level are engaged in street trade in Kakamega town. The research findings are similar to the research undertaken in by Ndhlovu (2011), Njaya (2014) who stated that most street traders have attained primary and secondary education. This study revealed high number of college graduates operating these businesses in Kakamega town as a result of high level of unemployment among the people. The study revealed that most of street traders who had higher qualification dealt in higher value commodities like electronics, beauty shops and droughts men. Those traders who sold low value goods like agricultural produce, assorted jua kali items and second hand clothes had relatively lower academic qualifications.

3.1.4 Duration of engagement in street trading activities

The street traders were asked the length of time they have been in business for the sake of capturing their experiences at their work places. The findings were shown in Fig. 4 below:

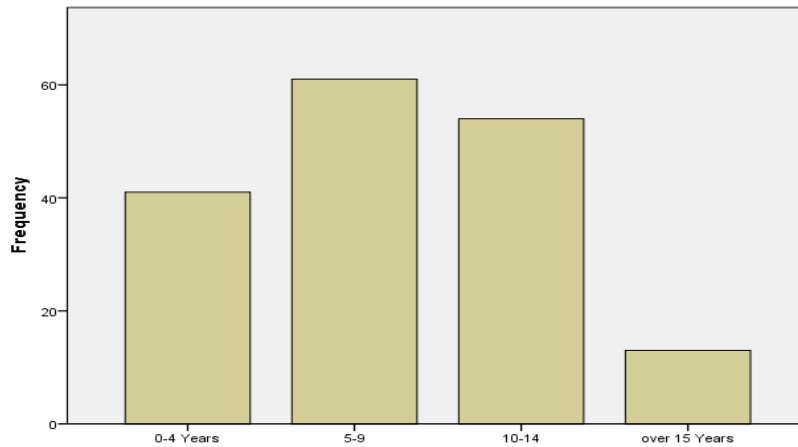


Figure 4: Length of time in Street Business

The Fig. 4.6 revealed that 76% of the sampled street traders had been in business for more than 5 years. It was also established that some of the street traders who operated larger stock of merchandize begun as mobile street traders and showed tendency of growth. The results implied that the varied and long experiences were captured in the sample for the study that contributed to findings.

The street traders were also asked how long they had occupied their current spots of operation. The purpose was to establish how frequent they change the sites of operation and how their businesses are affected. The findings were as shown in Fig 4.7 below:

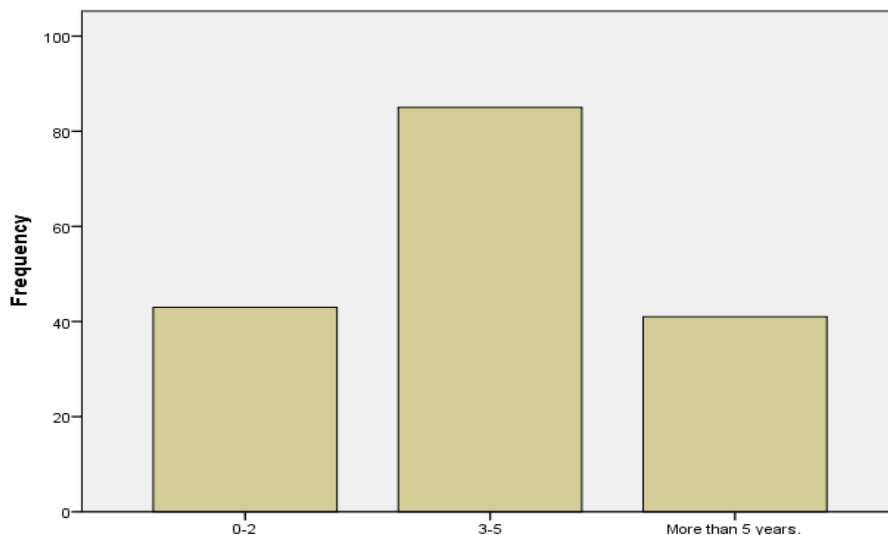


Figure 5: Duration of Occupation of Sites in Kakamega Town by Street Traders

As shown in Fig. 5, the study established that majority 77% of the street traders had occupied the same spot for a period of less than 5 years. These traders said that the changes of sites were occasioned by relocations and displacements by the CGK authorities. Other traders said that they frequently changed locations in search of strategic sites for their businesses.

The study also sought to inquire why some traders (23%) had occupied their spots for longer time. The findings revealed that such traders had established regular customers. Such traders showed no tendency to change the sites of operation.

3.2 Classification of street vending activities

The research revealed three categories of street vendors in Kakamega town. The first category comprised the settled street traders who work at the self- allocated sites every day. Some of these traders have constructed their own temporary sheds along the roads and any available open spaces where they sell from. It was observed that these vendors dealt in durable goods like building and construction material traders, motor vehicle, motorcycle and bicycle mechanics, welders and agricultural produce vendors.

The second category is of the street vendors who temporarily occupy spots on the streets to display their goods for some time and move to new locations to seek for potential customers. Some of these traders deal with highly perishable agricultural goods like fruits, onions, tomatoes and vegetables. They use wheelbarrows, carts and open vehicles to carry and display their merchandise. The study further revealed that other traders in this category deal in electronics like mobile phones, airtime credit cards and portable radios. Moreover, motorcycle and bicycle operators who do not have permanent parking sites in town are included in this category.

The third category is the highly mobile street vendors referred to as hawkers. In Kakamega town, these traders deal with light portable assorted articles like car accessories, household items and appliances, fruits and newspapers. Most of these traders operate in bus stages and areas of high concentration of people. They also move from one street to another, offices and estates.

The study revealed that street vending activities in Kakamega town increase on market days- Wednesdays and Saturdays. On such days, the street vendors operate in the town CBD thus occupy available spaces designated for the other uses in the CBD. As a result some of them encroach onto streets yet spaces in the official market structure remain unoccupied. In addition, it was observed that these activities also increase along the streets in the evenings when many people are moving from their places of work back home.

The research findings revealed that most street traders exhibited specialization in the merchandize they deal in. The study established through the Market manager that County Market authorities had segmented the markets according to the nature of commodities dealt in. In this view, separate markets for second hand cloth and footwear is designated along Ngaira Street whereas fish, cereals and vegetable market is at Kambi Somali and Masingo. Vegetable and cereals wholesalers are designated to work from the old County market structures while electronics and service providers like salonists, barbers and manicurists are expected to work

from the new County market structure. In spite of this directive, street vendors continue to vend their wares in the areas not designated for such activities (see Plate 1).



Plate 1: Photograph showing Goods displayed along Sudi Street in Kakamega Town CBD.

3.3 Factors pushing informal traders to operate out of designated market structures in Kakamega

3.3.1 Reasons for operating out of designated areas

The study sought to establish the reasons why these traders operated out of designated market structures and allocated sites. Their responses were as follows:

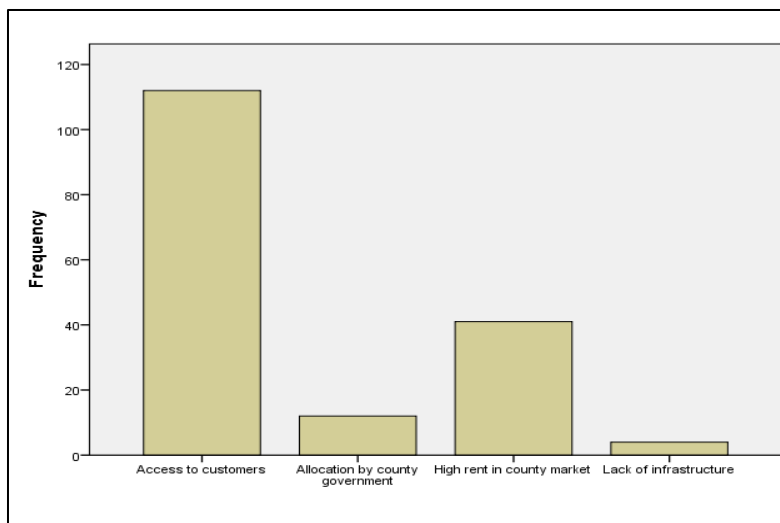


Figure 6: Reasons for Operating on Streets in Kakamega Town

From Fig. 6, the study findings established that in spite of the CGK having spent resources on construction of the new County market structure, majority (66%) of the street traders carried out their businesses on the streets in the CBD because they wanted to access many customers. It was established that some of these traders who operated out of the market structure had stalls in the County market. One of these traders was asked why she had chosen to work from the streets, and the response was,

“I moved out because my colleagues who operate near the entrance and outside were getting many customers” (Interview with a trader).

Such stiff competition for customers triggered some street traders to move out of the market structures and operate on streets to access as many customers as possible for profit maximization. Another trader said that “the customers could not easily go up to the second floor of the market structure to purchase their commodities when they can easily purchase them from the traders who display their merchandize along the streets” (Interview with a trader).

The study established that a quarter, 20% of the street traders complained of high rent for the stalls in the County Market structure and the metallic kiosk stalls. These traders said that high rent kept them away from the County Market structures since they were operating on little capital and small amount of merchandize. The study established that the street traders who operate in the County market structure pay rent ranging between Ksh. 1500 and Ksh. 2000 per month for a single stall and at the same time pay for the license



Plate 2: The new Kakamega County Market structure

Many traders have refused to move in and some stalls had remained unoccupied. Through interview, one trader complained that “by operating in the market structure, I will be compelled to pay for the stall and license fee. At the end of the day, I realize little profit. Better take chances of operating on the street where I may access many customers and realize some profit for my survival” (Interview with a trader). From this finding, it can be seen that the cost of doing business in the County market structure remain a challenge to some of the small businesses.

The study findings revealed that only 7% of the street traders said they operated at the sites assigned to them by the TA of Kakamega town through the allocation of metallic kiosk stalls along the streets. Few street traders (only 2%) complained of lack of enough infrastructure like clean water, garbage bins and functional toilets and poor design of the market structure. These street traders claimed the County market structure was incomplete and had leaking roof. In addition, these traders complained that the new County market building did not have regular clean water flow, access to garbage bins and electricity.

The traders who had secured market stalls on the second floor complained that the County market structure was incomplete and had leaking roof. These factors caused the traders move out and operate along the streets. It was observed that there was little investment undertaken to improve the market facilities for these traders.

In contrast, the official market structure traders were asked why they chose to operate in the in their stalls. The study established that these traders minded the security of their businesses. These traders said that they had their own regular customers who accessed their businesses in the market structure. This enabled them to earn some profit for their survival. However, they criticized the CGK for tolerating the traders selling along the streets who denied them fair competition. In addition, these traders complained that the loading and unloading lane behind the County market building in the bus stage was blocked by some traders who had illegally occupied the spaces for their businesses. It resulted in limited space for parking, loading and unloading.

The traders who sold from the ground floor in the market structure complained of poor drainage where after heavy downpour, the rain water could drain onto the floor soaking their goods. The study also realized that the County market was poorly organized. It was observed that heavy and bulky cereals traders were allocated spaces on first floor while vegetable sellers operated on ground floor. Whereas cereals traders complained that the goods were heavy to be transported upstairs, the vegetable sellers said their perishable goods needed highly accessible areas to be bought by the customers. These factors contributed to the exit of some traders from the County Market structure and operate on the streets.

3.3.2 Reasons for choice of sites on streets along the streets

There was need to find out the factors traders considered for the choice of trading locations on the streets. These street traders gave varied responses as shown below in Fig 4.9:

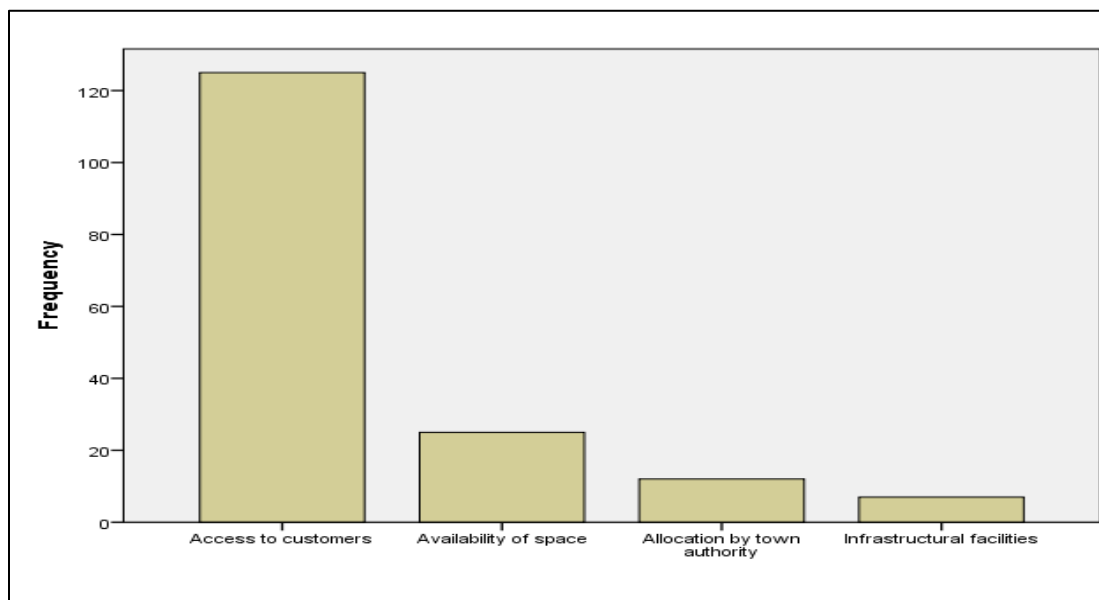


Fig 7: Reasons for choice of sites in Kakamega Town

From fig. 7, the research findings established that majority, 74% of the street traders in Kakamega town said that proximity to the buyers was the main determinant of the choice of site of operation. The implication was that the traders' choices of sites were determined by sales volumes and profit margin maximization. Therefore these traders chose to operate in areas of high population concentration to access potential customers. These areas included the Canon Awori street, Sudi road, Maziwa/KFA Street Ngaira street, in the Muliro Garden near Tusky's mall, illegal bus stages the University gates and the area near the Kakamega General Hospital in Kakamega town. These traders dealt in clothes, fruits, bicycle and motorcycle transport, beauty products, household goods and jewels.

15% of the traders chose to operate on streets because of availability of spaces for their merchandize. These traders included those dealing in building and construction materials, motorcycle and bicycle transport, vehicle mechanics, furniture makers and jua kali artisans.

7% of the traders were allocated the spaces through metallic kiosk stalls programme. Approximately 4% of the street traders operated on the streets due to lack of infrastructural facilities like electricity and water in the market structure.

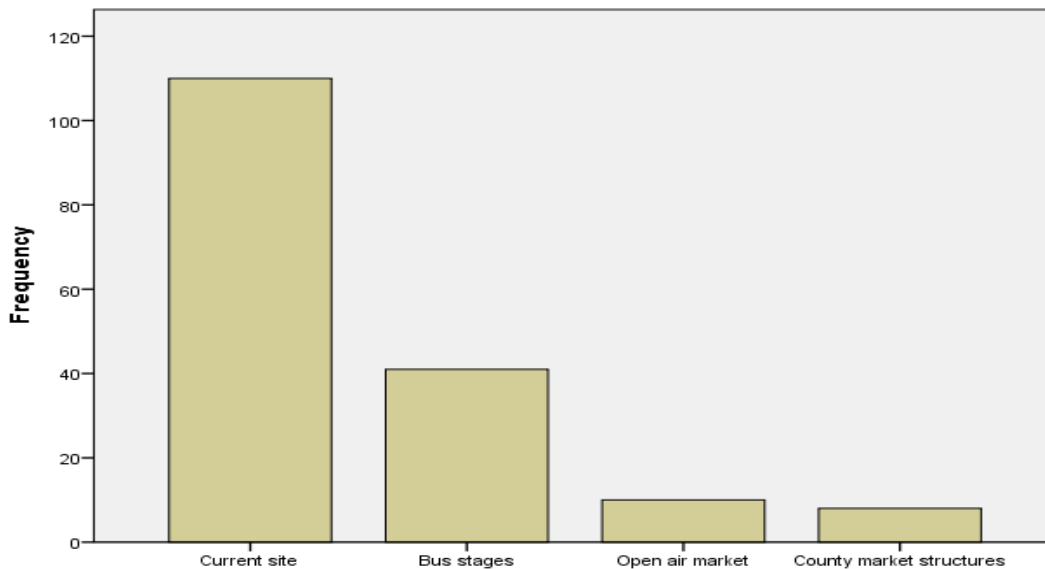
A comparison was made between the street traders and those who operated in the designated market structures on the reasons why they chose their trading sites. The traders who sold from the official market places said they preferred working in their locations because of security and storage for their merchandize. Most of these traders said they had established clients who knew the location of their businesses. They confirmed that their businesses were making modest profit. These traders dealt in heavy and bulky goods like cereals and jua kali articles.

The salonists and barbers, tailors, electronics repair traders said that the County market structure had electricity and water though not regular. In an interview with a barber who worked from the County Market, he said that, “frequent interruption of electricity, water and shortage of garbage disposal bins is forcing me to move out of this market because without electricity, I cannot provide services to my customers” (Interview with a trader).

When the County market manager was asked for the reasons of the shortage, he said that “the water and electricity bills were not paid on time due to delayed remittance of taxes hence contributing to disruption of supply of these services”(Interview County market manager). From these findings, the study established that to control the exit of traders from the County Market, infrastructural facilities must be made available.

3.3.3 Preferred locations by the street traders

The street traders were asked of their preferred locations for businesses. The findings were as shown in Fig. 8 below:



As revealed by fig. 8, the findings established that majority 65% of the street traders preferred to locate their businesses along the streets where they worked from since they easily accessed customers.

These traders said that their businesses had been in existence on these sites for some time hence they had established a market niche with their own regular customers who they feared to lose if they relocate to the market structures. The implication of this finding was that street traders prefer taking their products closer to their potential buyers because of competition.

24% of the street traders said they would prefer to operate at the bus stages because of a high number of people in these areas. 6% of the traders said they may only consider operating in the open air markets if they are upgraded and all the street traders made to work from these areas. Only 5% said they would not mind working from the market structure if it is renovated. These findings imply that most traders preferred to operate in those locations they considered as convenient for the potential customers. These research findings are in contrast with the findings of Molefe (2011), Nyanyintono (2013) who stated that the traders operate on streets as a result of lack of spaces. In fact it was established that the Kakamega County and open air markets have many unoccupied spaces yet these traders insist on operating on the streets (see Plate 3)..



Plate 3: Traders selling their Merchandize out of County Market structure in Kakamega Town

4. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Summary of the findings and conclusions

The study findings established that in Kakamega town street trade is the source of employment opportunities and hence income to the people in the town. Most of the respondents said they depended on it for their livelihood. Furthermore, the urban population provided potential market at convenient locations within town for the much needed goods and services

However, the research established that settling street traders in town set-up of Kakamega remained a challenge because the Town Authority planning for the development of the town had little input from the street traders and other stakeholders in decision making processes. These leads to competition for customers, poor market structural design and high rent. Other impediments of integration are inadequate infrastructural facilities and failure to enforce policies and laws. These factors had contributed to lack of sustainable interventions and policy framework that protect the urban environment as well as guarantee more security and livelihoods for these traders.

4.2 Recommendations

1.) Collaboration between stakeholders

There is need for broader involvement of all stakeholders in town planning. Such collaboration can play a greater role where all stakeholders take part in negotiations which guarantees protection of such traders' rights and working environment through regular policy dialogue.

2.) The Town strategic Plan (TSP)

To transform the town, the County government of Kakamega needs to develop strategic town plans which emphasize maximum utilization of the public spaces.

3.) Policy and by-laws

Policies and by-laws need to be adapted to the changing circumstances but at the same time retaining the ability to regulate the operations of street vending activities. In Kakamega town, it can be achieved by involving the street traders and other stakeholders in building consensus on regularization and enforcement of these policies and bylaws.

4.) Infrastructure

The open air markets and County Market structure need to be improved by installing infrastructure like electricity, toilets, goods display tables, stalls, electricity, water, waste disposal bins and storage facilities.

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