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Food Security in Africa's Secondary Cities: No. 6. The Informal Food Sector in Dschang, Cameroon

URBAN FOOD SECURITY SERIES NO. 32

Food Security in Africa's Secondary Cities: No. 6. The Informal Food Sector in Dschang, Cameroon

Yanick Borel Kamga, Alexander Legwegoh, Liam Riley, Jeremy Wagner, Martin Lékéufack and Patrick Njukeng

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Cover photo: Sarah Tz, via Flickr. Vendors selling baguettes in Dschang, Cameroon

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1. Introduction

Cameroon, one of Africa's most urbanized countries, is experiencing significant demographic growth and rapid urbanization. The percentage of Cameroon's population in urban areas has increased from 27.3% in 1976 to 57.6% in 2020, with a projection of 73.1% in 2050 (UN-DESA 2018). The trend of rapid urban expansion is observed in secondary cities like Dschang as well as in larger centres like Douala and Yaoundé. It is increasingly important to understand urban food systems as people transition from rural areas where their food access is closely linked to own production to urban areas where residents depend on food markets to access most of their food (Crush and Frayne, 2011). Food systems are critically important for creating healthy, prosperous and inclusive cities, and yet in smaller African cities such as Dschang, most elements of the food system are informal and often undocumented (Crush and Young, 2019). Policy decisions are often made without a comprehensive understanding of the scale and nature of the systems they seek to improve (Battersby and Watson, 2019).

The Food, Urbanization, Environment and Livelihoods (FUEL) project has contributed new empirical data from three African case study cities that increases awareness and understanding of African secondary city food systems (Riley and Crush, 2022). Baseline household food security surveys conducted by FUEL partners demonstrated high rates of food insecurity and poverty in Dschang, Cameroon (Legwegoh et al., 2020), the Oshakati-Ongwediva-Ondangwa urban corridor, Namibia (Nickanor et al., 2019), and Mzuzu, Malawi (Riley et al., 2018). This report on small-scale food traders in Dschang, Cameroon, is part of the second round of surveys focused on the small-scale food trading enterprises that characterize a large proportion of food-related commercial activities in these cities. The household survey in Dschang found that few households sourced food from supermarkets and 91% of households purchased food at open markets (Legwegoh et al., 2020). Through an integrated city-wide survey of demographic characteristics, food trading regulations, food distribution channels, food consumption patterns, food production and food safety practices, the report explores the nature and significance of the informal food systems in Dschang municipality's urban core.

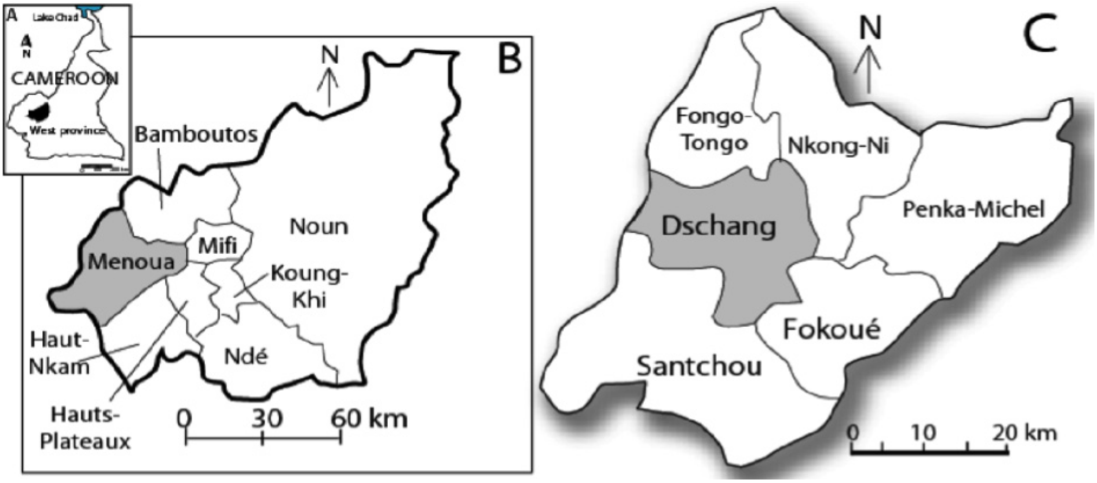
The report sheds new light on Cameroon's urban food systems, which to date have received little research attention with some notable exceptions (Akoko et al., 2019; Legwegoh and Fraser, 2017; Sneyd, 2013; Temgoua et al., 2012). This report provides comprehensive information about the informal food sector that can be applied to sustainable urbanization and food security policies in Dschang and similar secondary cities. These cities are critical to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 ("sustainable urbanization") and are key sites for implementing policies and projects to realize SDGs for poverty reduction, food security, environmental protection, and gender equality. Secondary cities are growing and transforming rapidly, and sustainable aspects of local food systems should be identified and supported to forge new directions for urban development while unsustainable aspects should be identified and addressed. This report will guide in finding solutions to urban poverty and food insecurity through the economic and social importance of small-scale food traders in secondary cities. This information will help urban planners and local leaders to provide essential public services and infrastructure in a sustainable way for the growth of Dschang and other cities in Cameroon.

The report first gives an overview of Dschang and then describes the methodology adopted to gather the required data, and the characteristics of the retail enterprise owners. The survey results are then presented – food retail enterprise structure, food sources and characteristics, business practices and strategies, food hygiene and food production. Finally, the major issues are drawn from the study and recommendations are made.

2. Dschang City Overview

Located in the West Region of Cameroon, Dschang City is the urban centre of the Dschang Subdivision, which includes the peri-urban Foto and Foréké-Dschang villages and surrounding rural communities. Dschang has a mean altitude of 1,400m above sea level and is located on the South-Western slope of Mount Bambouto, which contributes rich volcanic soils. Its topography is characterized by low plateaus dissected by steep valleys (Temgoua et al., 2012). Figure 1 presents the location of the Dschang municipality within the Menoua District, the West Region, and Cameroon. Dschang's population is about 200,000, although a lack of reliable census data and a highly mobile population means it has a bigger population at any given time. The population mobility is driven by the university, which attracts students, staff and their families from across the country, and the displacement of people from neighbouring Anglophone regions where political tensions have led to violence (Legwegoh and Riley, 2022).

FIGURE 1: Location of the Dschang Municipality in the Menoua Division (C), West Region (B), in Cameroon (A)



Source: Temgoua et al. (2009)

The alternation of hills and valleys allows the municipality to contain varied ecological zones of different altitudes with high agricultural potential. Agriculture is practiced both in rural areas and in peri-urban areas of the municipality and is an important economic activity (Temgoua et al., 2012; Legwegoh et al., 2020). The production systems are mainly artisanal and characterized by the practice of associated and mixed cultures – food crops and perennial crops (arabica coffee, plantain, beans, maize, cassava, macabo, tomatoes, cabbage, taro, etc.) are found on the same plot (ADEID, 2011). Peri-urban agriculture is increasingly developed with the rise of commercial food crops mainly practiced in the lowlands.

Trade is widespread in Dschang and surrounding areas. It is practiced by all social strata and concerns food, handicrafts and manufactured products (ADEID, 2011). Business activity is more intense on market days. The two market periods are the large market called *ngang* and the small market called *meta*, and both take place every eight days. There are several types of market places in the city. B Market in the city centre is open every day but is busiest on *ngang*. C Market (in peri-urban Tsimfem neighbourhood) is vacant except on market days when it becomes a vibrant centre of commerce (ADEID, 2011). A Market mostly sells hardware, textiles and other goods besides food. There are also traders operating throughout the residential areas and outside of the markets in the city centre.

3. Methodology

A city-wide survey of small-scale food trading businesses was conducted in Dschang in August 2019. The survey collected information from small-scale food trading businesses (fewer than five employees) operating in a range of venues with varying degrees of permission from the municipal government. The research activities were conducted in collaboration with staff, students and faculty at the Université de Dschang. The following subsections explain the steps that were followed to produce the data in this report.

Data for this report was gathered using a questionnaire adopted from the Hungry Cities Partnership (HCP) Cape Town Project (Tawodzera and Crush, 2019). The survey was translated into French, the main language spoken in Cameroon's West Region, and administered in French and Yemba, the dominant indigenous language in Dschang. The survey questions addressed the locality of vendors, demographic characteristics, enterprise characteristics (structure, practices and enterprise business environment), sanitation and food production patterns. The survey instrument was launched using kobotoolbox.org and loaded on to electronic tablets using Open DataKit software. The tablets were GPS enabled to capture the approximate location of each respondent for ease of follow up and generation of the map for the survey (Figure 2).

There was no registry of small-scale food traders from which to draw a sample for the survey (few of these businesses are registered and many are temporary and mobile). A rapid observational survey of the number of trading enterprises of each type by location produced a geographical profile of small-scale food trading enterprises that was used to develop a sample that would reflect the proportionality of enterprise types in selected locations in Dschang. In addition to the lack of a registry, there was no pre-existing typology for small-scale food trading enterprises in Dschang. The team adopted the eight small-scale food trading enterprise types developed in the FUEL Mzuzu study (Zuze et al., 2022) consisting of the following:

- Small shops, tuck shops, hawkers: This type includes shops that people enter to make purchases and the more common type where people go up to a window to buy items. They are located in residential neighbourhoods and in the markets.
- Permanent roadside vendors: These are vendors who operate from structures including a table, small shelter or bench built with sticks.
- Temporary roadside vendors: These vendors usually display the food

on mats or baskets and, because they do not operate from a fixed structure, they are able to gather their things and move fast.

- Home-based retailers: These retailers sell food from their homes – by leaving food at the front of the house for people to purchase, putting up a sign inviting customers, or letting people know by word of mouth that food can be bought from their home.
- Mobile vendors: These vendors move around the city selling food usually transported by handcarts, carried in baskets or on bicycles.
- Restaurants: Patrons sit in these small restaurants or eat prepared food while standing.
- Hot-cooked-food vendors: These vendors cook food (e.g., fried meat, cassava, boiled or roasted maize, chips) and sell it while it is hot, but do not have a place for customers to stay and eat.
- Market vendors: These vendors have stalls in designated market places and are considered formal vendors or vendors plying their trade with the acknowledgement of city authorities. The market vendors are allocated specific spaces in the city markets depending on the type of food they sell.

The census was conducted over three days at the following locations: (1) at B Market and Ntsinfem Market during *ngang*; (2) covering the main residential and commercial areas on a non-market day, and (3) at B Market and Ntsinfem Market during *meta*. The coverage of three days was required to produce a picture of the informal food trading activities on these distinctive types of trading days in Dschang. The profile activity collected GPS and enterprise typology information for 8,027 enterprises. Table 1 shows the breakdown by the type of enterprise. The GPS data generated a map on kobotoolbox.org that was used to orient the field supervisors to achieve coverage in the sample similar to the proportion of enterprises by type and location in the framing exercise. The step helped to reduce possible biases that could have arisen due to the lack of existing data about small-scale food trading enterprises in different parts of the city.

Survey data was collected from 848 respondents, which exceeded the target sample size of 500 traders. Table 2 shows the proportion of each enterprise type surveyed. Data was collected from 21 locations in Dschang (Table 3). The largest percentage (24.9%) were from the main food market (B Market). Commercial areas in highly populated residential areas (Foreké and Foto) had 15.3% and 14.4% respectively. Other major commercial areas were Ntsinfem Market (7.7%), Nouveau Quartier (6.4%) and A Market (5.8%). The remaining enterprises were operating in 14 residential neighbourhoods across the city.

TABLE 1: Distribution of Enterprise Types in the Profile		
Enterprise type	Frequency	%
Mobile vendors	1951	24.3
Small shops, tuck shops or hawker	1666	20.8
Market vendor	1176	14.7
Temporary roadside vendor	1127	14.0
Permanent roadside vendor	1022	12.7
Hot-cooked-food vendor	584	7.3
Restaurant	279	3.4
Home-based retailer	222	2.8
Total	8027	100

TABLE 2: Distribution of Surveyed Enterprises by Type		
Enterprise Type	Frequency	%
Permanent roadside vendor	183	21.6
Small shops, tuck shops or hawker	174	20.5
Mobile vendor	148	17.5
Market vendor	111	13.1
Temporary roadside vendor	111	13.1
Hot-cooked-food vendor	42	5.0
Home-based retailer	40	4.7
Restaurant	34	4.0
Unknown	5	0.6
	848	100

TABLE 3: Distribution of Surveyed Enterprises by Location		
Location	Frequency	%
Marché B	211	24.9
Foreké	130	15.3
Foto	122	14.4
Marché Ntsinfem	65	7.7
Nouveau Quartier	54	6.4
Marché A	49	5.8
Tchoualé	37	4.4
Mingmeto	33	3.9
Ngui	30	3.5
Mekaah	22	2.6
Gare Routiere	21	2.5
Madagascar	20	2.4
Paid ground	19	2.2
Zemda	9	1.1
Coplar	8	0.9
Keleng	7	0.8

Mechieu	5	0.6
Fokou	2	0.2
La Valée	2	0.2
Camp Militaire	1	0.1
Nylon	1	0.1
	848	100

4. Food Trader Characteristics

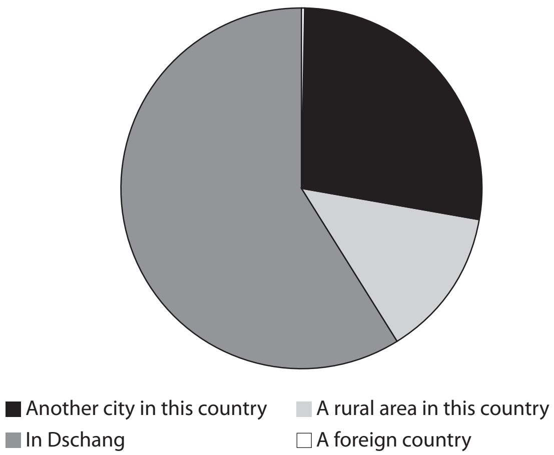
The city data for food traders in Table 4 shows a female-dominated food retail sector with almost two-thirds of food enterprises owned by women. The majority of the enterprise owners were married (56.7%) and possessed some form of formal education (primary education 18.1% and secondary education 63.2%). The majority (56%) had never been involved in any form of employment before they joined the food trading business and 68.6% did not have an additional form of employment. The average age of the food traders was 34.4, with 40 years old being the most common age (Table 5). The city's food enterprise sector largely comprises sole-enterprise owners with a negligible number of respondents having more than one business establishment.

Most enterprise owners (59%) were born in Dschang (Figure 2). Over one-quarter (27.6%) were born in another city in Cameroon, 13.2% were born in a rural area in Cameroon, and less than 1% had migrated from another country.

TABLE 4: Enterprise Owner Demographic Characteristics

Characteristic		Frequency	%
Sex	Female	541	63.8
	Male	307	36.2
Marital status	Married	469	56.7
	Single	358	43.3
Education level	No formal education	22	2.7
	Primary education	150	18.1
	Secondary education	523	63.2
	Tertiary education	133	16.1
Employment before food vending	Yes	371	44.0
	No	472	56.0
Alternative employment besides food vending	Yes	264	31.4
	No	578	68.6

FIGURE 2: Birthplace of Enterprise Owner



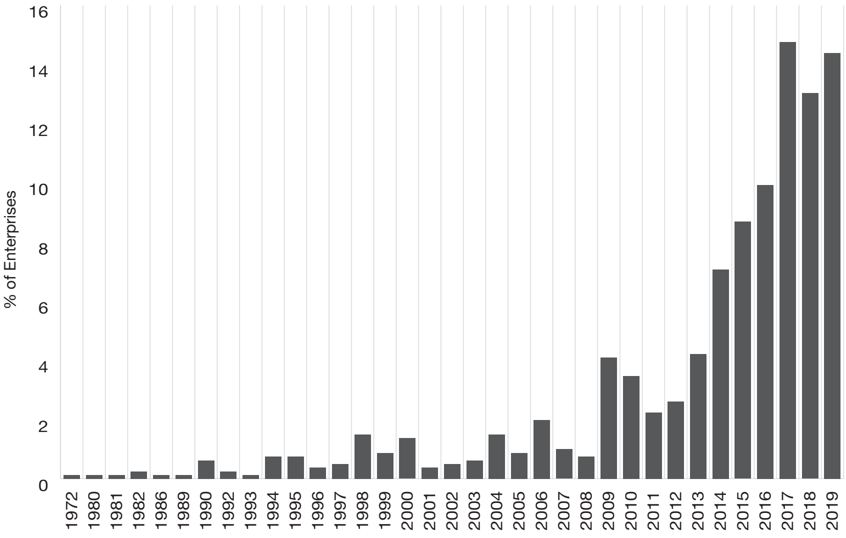
5. Food Retail Enterprise Characteristics, Strategies and Operations

This section turns from a focus on the entrepreneurs to the enterprises. Enterprise owners provided extensive information about their enterprise characteristics, strategies and operations.

5.1. Year of Enterprise Establishment

Most of the businesses were established in the decade before the survey and a large share were established in the previous three years. There has been a significant increase in the number of food retailers since 2009, with most being established since 2014 (Figure 3). The city's food retail sector is rapidly growing, which could be a result of an increase in food demand in an urbanizing environment, as well as a changing labour market and food policy environment. The trend in Figure 3 could also reflect the short-term nature of these small businesses.

FIGURE 3: Year of Business Establishment



5.2. Factors Influencing Location

Food traders consider multiple factors when choosing a location for their business operations. The most common factors influencing food trader location in Dschang are plenty of passing traffic (78.8%) and the greatest number of customers (68.2%) (Table 5). Other important factors were being close to home (47.8%), the absence of city authority security personnel (43.1%), being close to other enterprises (40.4%), near public transportation (36.1%), a safe place to operate (34.3%) and simply that it is the usual place of doing business (30%). Owning the land (20.1%), proximity to the source of food products (24.0%) and the land being cheap (25.3%) were factors of the least importance in considering a location for a food enterprise.

TABLE 5: Factors Influencing Location	
Location influencing factor	%
Plenty of passing traffic	78.8
Place with greatest number of customers	68.2
Closeness to enterprise owner home	47.8
Absence of city authority security personnel	43.1
Closeness to other enterprises	40.4
Closeness to public transport	36.1
Safe place to operate	34.3
Usual place of doing business	30.0
Possession of permit to operate	28.4
Cheap rentals	27.8

Access to utilities	25.7
Land is cheap	25.3
Closeness to the source of food products	24.0
Far from competitors	23.0
Owns the land	20.1
Note: Multiple-responses	

5.3. Tenure Status of Enterprise Structure

A minority of food traders owned their enterprise structure (15.7%) while 17.7% utilized the premises without permission and 29.9% were tenants who paid rentals to private owners of the premises. Sharing of the premises was the least common form of tenure status (2%).

TABLE 6: Tenure Status of Enterprise Structure

Tenure status	%
Pay rent to private owner (company or individual)	29.9
Rent-free without permission	17.7
Pay rent to council/municipality	16.0
I own it/am part owner	15.7
Rent-free, with permission	12.0
Share space/premises with others	2.0

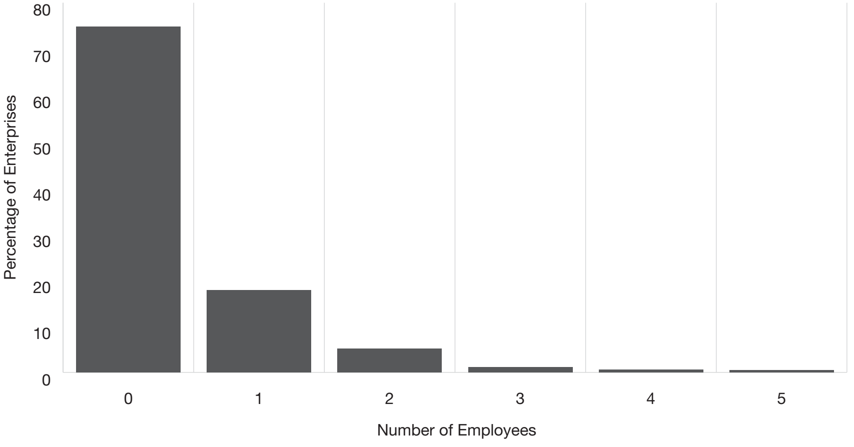
5.4. Employee Status and Benefits

Most small food trading business do not hire staff. Three in every four (74.8%) did not have any employees working for them, 17.8% had one employee, and 7.4% had 2-5 employees (Figure 4). Most staff in small food trading businesses (91.4%) did not receive overtime pay, and did not get holiday pay (97.9%) or sick days (91.7%) (Table 7). About one-third of employees received medical benefits and almost half had paid lunch breaks. Overall, employee benefits in small-scale food enterprises in Dschang are scarce.

TABLE 7: Employee Benefits

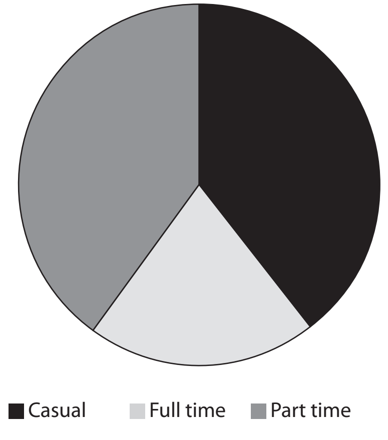
Employee benefits	%
No paid vacation	97.9
No paid sick days	91.7
No overtime	91.4
No medical benefits	67.3
No lunch breaks	54.1

FIGURE 4: Number of Employees



Most employees of these enterprises either work casually or part time (Figure 5). Nearly 40% (39.9%) of employees work part time while 39.5% work casually. The remaining 20.6% of employees work full time.

FIGURE 5: Employee Status



5.5. Enterprise Licensing

Nearly three-quarters (72.9%) of enterprises operate without any sort of licensing from the municipality (Figure 6). Enterprise owners who paid some form of a license fee for their enterprise did that in the form of a city licensing fee (51.6%), a market daily operating fee (35.3%), a vendor association fee (43.4%) and property taxes for the business site (5.0%) (Table 8).

FIGURE 6: Licensed Food Business Enterprises

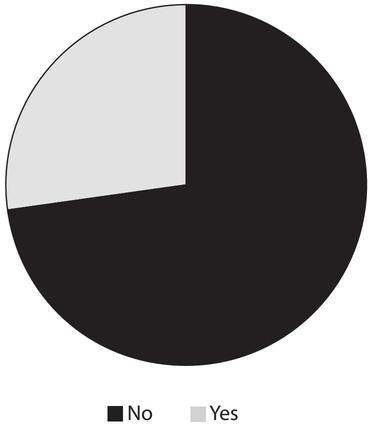


TABLE 8: Food Enterprise Licences	
Type of licence	%
City licensing fee	51.6
Vendor association fee	43.4
Market daily operating fees	35.3
Property taxes for a business site	5.0
Note: Multiple-responses	

6. Foods Sold

The list of foods in this section is compiled from responses to open-ended questions about what foods the enterprises sold. This approach differs from that used in the HCP surveys. The HCP food purchasing matrix uses a set list of 30 foods for each city, asking the retailer if they sell a particular item, how frequently, and where it is normally purchased (Crush and McCordic, 2017). The reason for keeping the question open-ended in Dschang was to capture the diversity of foods traded through the informal food system. The procedure also captured locally significant foods and seasonal foods that might not show up on a pre-determined list.

Table 9 groups the foods by how many traders were offering them. Traders could list up to five foods that they usually offered for sale and then answered a series of questions pertaining to each food. The most commonly offered food was bread, which was sold by 167 traders or about 20%. Because the percentages were low, the foods are grouped by number of traders selling them. As well as bread, rice and peanuts were in the highest category of over 100 traders. The list of foods in Table 9 includes

121 food items, beverages and dishes sold by small-scale food traders in Dschang.

To understand more fully the role of various foods in the Dschang food system, in-depth analysis was conducted on the following foods and food types: bread, rice, peanuts, cookies, tomatoes, cooking oil (all), eggs, beans, plantains, safou, meat (all), and fish and seafood (all). This analysis captures aspects of popular foods, important food groups, and the most commonly sold indigenous forest food (safou).

TABLE 9: List of Foods by Category (Number of Vendors Selling)

Number of vendors selling	Foods sold (number of retailers selling the food)
> 100 traders	Bread (167), Rice (149), Peanuts (124)
50-99 retailers	Cookies (84), Tomatoes (84), Cooking oil (83), Eggs (83), Doughnuts/Beignets (73), Beans (72), Plantain (65), Pasta (56);
20-49 retailers	Potatoes (44), Bananas (40), Wild plums/Safou (39), Fish (39), Juice (38), Milk (34), Sugar (32), Avocado (31), Candy (31), Beer (28), Meat (24), Chicken (23), Cabbage (23), Onion (22); Tapioca (22), Cocoyam (22), Soft drinks (20), Green relish (20), Cake (20)
10-19 retailers	Sardines (19), Corn (19), Oranges (18), Chili peppers (17), Sweet potato (16), Maize poodle (14), Apples (14), Vegetables (14), Papaya (13), Whiskey (13), Koki (12), Salt (12), Garlic (11), Beignets koki (11), Chocolates (11), Buillion cubes (11), Eru (11), Fermented cassava sticks (10), Carrots (10), Water (10), Dairy products (10), Spices (10)
5-9 retailers	Sugarcane (8), bitter kola (7), flour (7), Kola (7), Mayonnaise (7), Pears (7), Yogurt (7); Djansang (6); Yams (6); Cassava (6); Red wine (6), Afromamum (5), Lemons (5), Croquettes (5), Pancakes/Galette (5)
2-5 retailers	Eggplant (5), Maizemeal (4), Dried shrimp (4), Ginger (4), Okra (4), Nescafe (4), Pistachio (4), White pepper (4), Soy (4), Palm wine (4), Waterfufu and eru (4), Cassava flour (4), Pineapple (3), Caramel (3), Cucumber (3), Ndolé (3), Pastries (3), Cow skin (3), Banana doughnuts (2), Corn doughnuts (2), Beets (2), Celery (2), Fruits noirs (2), Yeast (2), Honey (2), Pofpof (2), Rondelle (2), Waterfufu (2), Waterleaf (2), Snails (2)
1 retailer	“4 Coté”, Butter, Alcoholic beverages, Coffee, Cinnamon, Goat, Fufu, Ice cream, Monkey kola, Lion kola, Red kola, Yogurt beverage (kossam), Rabbit, Mandarin oranges, Sheep, Coconut, Hazelnuts, Ovaltine, Grapefruit, Paté, Phosphatine, Peppers, Vinegar, Braised pork

6.1. Source of Food Products

Each food was associated with one main source where the trader accessed it for resale. The formal market in Dschang was the top source of foods for resale for eight of the twelve selected foods: bread, rice, peanuts, cookies, tomatoes, cooking oil, beans and fish/seafood (Table 10). This finding highlights the importance of the markets in the distribution system as well as for consumers to purchase food directly. Wholesalers were also an important source for most foods. Informal markets were the main source of eggs (37%) and safou (34%). The top foods sourced from rural markets were plantain (36%), beans (23%) and tomatoes (23%). Tomatoes were also the most likely to be sourced directly from farmers (13%) and one in every ten retailers sourced beans and plantains direct from farmers. The results show the important role that small-scale retailers play in the rural-urban linkages that sustain the urban food system.

TABLE 10: Sources of Selected Foods

	Whole-saler	Formal market in Dschang	Informal market in Dschang	Shop/ super-market	I made or grew them	Market in another city/ country	Direct from farmer	Rural market
Bread	37	37	18	6	1	1	0	0
Rice	26	52	8	8	4	2	0	1
Peanuts	22	28	26	3	3	3	2	15
Cookies	25	51	11	12	0	1	0	0
Tomatoes	15	32	16	1	0	0	13	23
Cooking oil (all)	33	35	10	1	0	6	1	13
Eggs	34	16	37	3	5	3	1	1
Beans	15	25	18	2	5	2	11	23
Plantains	9	18	20	2	0	5	11	36
Safou	23	14	34	0	3	3	3	20
Meat (all)	22	20	17	2	19	9	2	9
Fish and seafood (all)	23	42	13	8	0	15	0	0

6.2. Enterprise Types Selling Selected Foods

Table 11 shows which types of businesses are most likely to sell the selected foods. The majority of enterprises selling bread (56%), rice (56%) and cooking oil (51%) were small shops. About half of enterprises selling safou (49%) were temporary roadside vendors. The foods most likely to be sold by mobile vendors were peanuts (31%), eggs (21%) and fish and seafood (17%). The foods most likely to be sold by market vendors were plantains (21%), fish and seafood (21%), tomatoes (18%) and cooking oil (18%). Beans were the most likely to be sold by a restaurant (25%).

TABLE 11: Enterprise Type Selling Selected Foods								
	Small shop, tuck shop, hawker	Permanent road-side vendor	Market vendor	Temporary road-side vendor	Home-based retailer	Mobile vendor	Restaurant	Other
Bread	56	14	2	3	7	14	5	1
Rice	56	14	4	3	4	5	11	4
Peanuts	24	20	10	7	7	31	0	0
Cookies	41	40	4	1	14	0	1	0
Tomatoes	38	24	18	9	9	3	0	0
Cooking oil (all)	51	26	18	1	2	0	1	0
Eggs	42	13	5	5	5	21	5	4
Beans	17	15	17	9	2	11	25	5
Plantains	0	25	21	30	0	9	9	5
Safou	0	26	3	49	0	9	6	9
Meat (all)	17	24	15	13	2	11	4	15
Fish and seafood (all)	28	11	21	9	0	17	9	4

Characteristics of the enterprises selling each of the selected foods reveal further information about the diversity of enterprise owners in relation to food sold in Dschang. In terms of the gender of the enterprise owner, enterprises selling plantains (88%), safou (83%) and tomatoes (82%) were mostly owned by women (Table 12). Enterprises selling meat (37%), eggs (44%) and bread (47%) were mostly owned by men. Cooking oil was the most likely food to be sold by a retailer born outside of Dschang (53%) and, conversely, fish and seafood were the least likely (26%). In terms of the education level of enterprise owners, tomatoes (28%) and beans (28%) were the most likely to be sold by someone with a primary school education or no formal education, whereas fish/seafood (8%) and safou (9%) were the least likely to be sold by someone with a low level of formal education.

The percentage of retailers paying some kind of fee (whether market stall fees or municipal fees) is suggestive of the level of informality of each food business. The most "informal" business was safou (6% paying a fee to operate), followed by plantains (17%) and peanuts (23%). The most "formal" businesses were fish/seafood (44%) and eggs (43%). The observation that safou is highly "informal" yet also sold by relatively highly educated traders suggests that informality should not be assumed to correlate with low social status of informal business owners.

The location of the business suggests the accessibility of the food, whether it is widely available from enterprises operating in residential neighbourhoods or in centralized periodic markets. The enterprises least likely to be operating in the central markets were those selling cookies (10%), bread (16%) and tomatoes (25%). The foods most likely sold in the central markets were meat (72%) and fish/seafood (53%).

TABLE 12: Characteristics of Selling Selected Foods

	% women-owned	% migrant-owned	% owned by someone with primary education or less	% paying fees to operate	% operating in central markets
Bread	47	41	20	40	16
Rice	65	38	19	40	27
Peanuts	60	38	15	23	32
Cookies	62	51	19	41	10
Tomatoes	82	48	28	34	25
Cooking oil (all)	71	53	27	40	43
Eggs	44	49	16	43	37
Beans	72	48	28	27	46
Plantains	88	46	21	17	46
Safou	83	37	9	6	40
Meat (all)	37	41	20	36	72
Fish and seafood (all)	53	26	8	44	53

7. Business Practices, Attitudes and Challenges

This section reports on enterprise practices including record keeping, use of daily profits, payment methods, attitudes towards formal lenders, motivations, business challenges and profitability, as well as start-up capital sources.

7.1. Business Practices

Negotiating prices with suppliers was the most common business practice used by the surveyed food retailers (88.3%), followed by sleeping at the business premises (85.3%) (Table 13). Other common practices include extending business hours to make more profits (69.6%), purchasing the cheapest goods to make more profits (68.3%), and using mobile phones to coordinate with suppliers, other traders and customers (49.8%). Very few respondents (0.5%) engage in shareholding. Only 15.5% reported that they change what they sell at different times of the year. Few food traders reported paying for security guards (16.7%) and even fewer pay the police or community leaders for the purpose of protecting their property (7.4%).

TABLE 13: Types of Business Practices

Business practices	No importance (%)
Negotiate prices with your suppliers	88.3
Sleep at your business premises	85.3
Extend your hours of operation to make more profits	69.6
Purchase the cheapest goods to make more profits	68.3
Offer credit to your customers	62.1
Use mobile phones to coordinate with suppliers/other vendors and customers	49.8
Open business only during periods with most customers	35.9
Purchase stock in bulk yourself to make more profits	34.1
Sell goods more cheaply than your competitors	32.9
Keep records of your business accounts	19.9
Pay for security guards	16.7
Change what you sell at different times of the year	15.5
Purchase stock in bulk together with others	8.1
Pay the police/community leaders for protection of your properties	7.4
Partner with other businesses to distribute risks	1.5
Engage in shareholding	0.5

7.2. Motivating Factors for Establishing an Enterprise

Most small-scale food trading enterprise owners are constrained by unstable economic conditions and are using the business as a livelihood strategy. The need to have money for survival (extremely important 40.0% and very important 41.2%) (Figure 7) and greater financial security for the family (extremely important 38.4% and very important 33.5%) (Figure 8) were the main motivational factors pushing people into establishing food enterprises (Figure 9 and 10 respectively). The factors that were not important in terms of establishing an enterprise, such as providing employment or using the funds for a purpose other than survival, are shown in Table 14.

TABLE 14: Motivating Factors for Establishing an Enterprise	
Motivation	No importance (%)
I decided to go into business in partnership with others	87.9
I had a job but it did not suit my qualifications and experience	80.7
I wanted to provide employment for people from my home area	78.2
Support and help in starting my business was available from other people	78.2
I wanted to provide employment for members of my family	76.3
I wanted to make more money to send to my family in my home area	67.5
I had a job but it did not pay enough	67.3
I wanted to increase my status in the community	66.6
My family has always been involved in business	64.8
I was unemployed and unable to find a job	48.5
I wanted to run my own business	43.6
I wanted more control over my own time/I wanted to be my own boss	36.4
I wanted to give my family greater financial security	15.2
I need more money to survive	8.1

FIGURE 7: Level of Importance: 'Money for Survival'

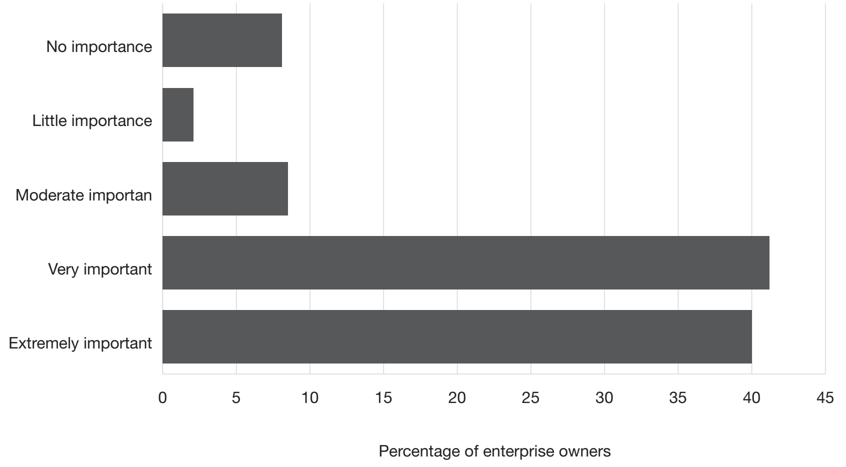
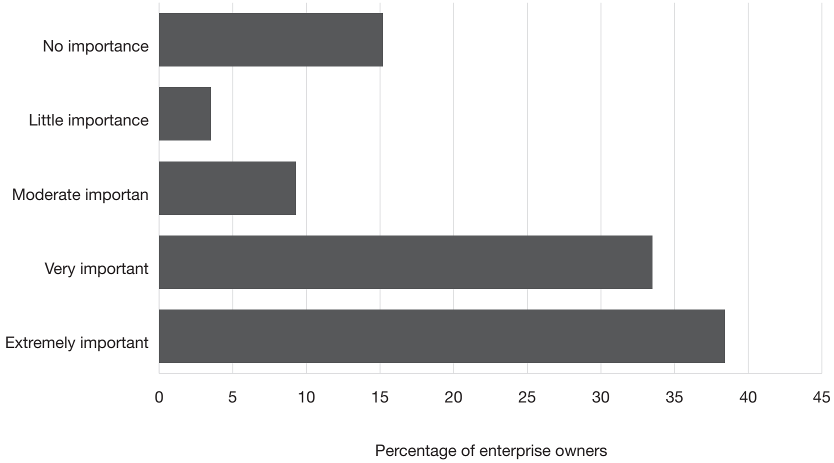


FIGURE 8: Greater Financial Security for Family



7.3. Level of Business Start-up Capital

The average start-up capital was CFA327,228.40 (USD594.28). The largest share of enterprise owners started their business with capital of CFA50,000 (USD90.80). The financial data collected in Table 15 shows a huge gap between the two extremes in start-up capital ranging from none to CFA6,000,000 (USD10,897).

TABLE 15: Start-up Capital Amounts

	Mean	Mode	Minimum	Maximum
Start-up capital (CFA)	327,228.40	50,000	0	6,000,000
Start-up capital (USD)	594.28	90.80	0	10,896.6

7.4. Source of Start-up and Operational Capital

Food enterprise owners were most likely to engage in the food business using their personal savings (79.2%) compared to other sources of funds (Table 16). Money gift from a relative (26.4%) was the second most popular source of start-up capital followed by loans from informal finance institutions (13.3%) and loans from relatives living in Cameroon (9.2%). Very few received start-up capital from a bank (2.9%) or micro-finance institution (2.4%).

TABLE 16: Sources of Start-up Capital	
Source	%
Personal savings of money	79.2
Money gift from a relative	26.4
A loan from an informal finance institution	13.3
A loan from relatives living in Cameroon	9.2
A loan from non-relatives	3.9
A loan from a bank	2.9
A loan from a micro-finance institution	2.4
Business credit (goods on terms)	1.7
A loan from relatives in another country	1.5
Money from usurers (money lenders)	0.8

7.5. Perception of Formal Lenders

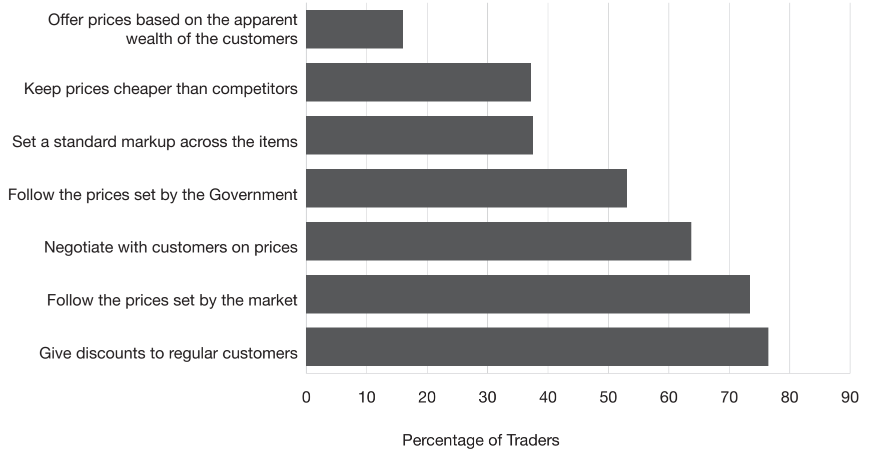
Small-scale food enterprise owners in Dschang face systemic barriers to accessing money from formal lending institutions. Respondents perceived many barriers that prevented them from attempting to apply for loans from formal institutions. Most agreed with all the statements offered, with a strong majority believing that banks would think that the loan would not be repaid (96.6%) and that they would have insufficient guarantees or collateral to secure a loan (96.6%) (Table 17).

TABLE 17: Perception of Formal Lending Institutions	
Perception	Percentage Agreeing
Banks think that the loan will not be repaid	96.6
Insufficient guarantees/collateral	96.6
Believe these enterprises are not viable	89.7
Only loan money to formal businesses	78.1
Insufficient initial capital	72.5

7.6. Customer Retention Capacity

Various techniques are employed by food enterprise owners to retain their customers. Giving discounts to loyal and regular customers is the most popular strategy (76.5%) to achieve regular sales (Figure 9). Other popular strategies included following the prices set by the market (73.4%), negotiating with customers on prices (63.7%) and following the prices set by the government (53%). The least popular strategy for retaining customers was to offer prices based on the apparent wealth of the customer (16%).

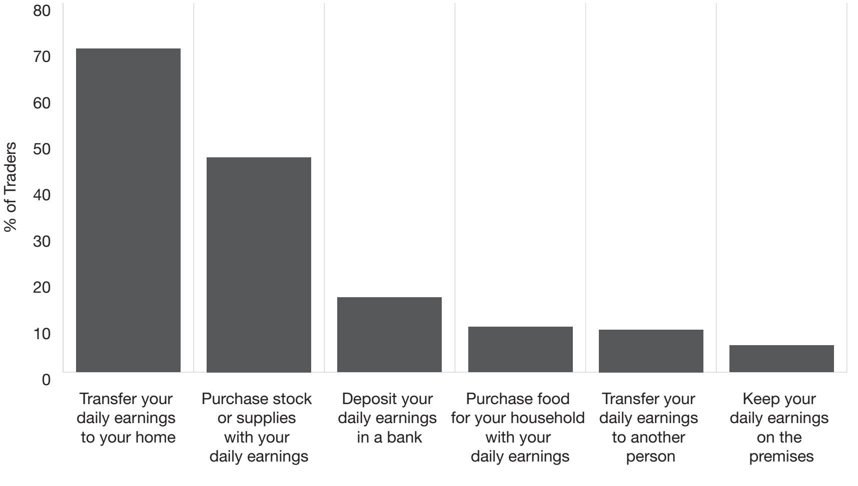
FIGURE 9: Customer Retention Strategies



7.7. Business Profit Expenditure

Food enterprise owners use their daily earnings in a variety of ways, with the majority transferring their daily earnings to their home (70.1%). Almost half sometimes purchase stock for business continuity (46.6%). Few keep daily earnings on the business premises (5.8%) or transfer daily earnings to another person (9.2%) (Figure 10).

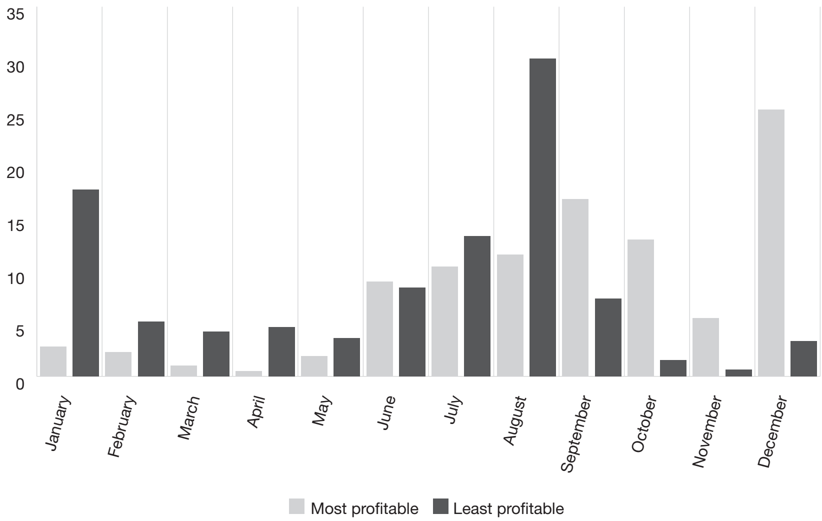
FIGURE 10: Daily Earnings Usage



7.8. Business Profits

Most food retail businesses indicated that December is the most profitable month of the year, largely due to the holiday celebrations that increase demand for food (Figure 11). Business enterprises reported being least profitable during the months of January and August.

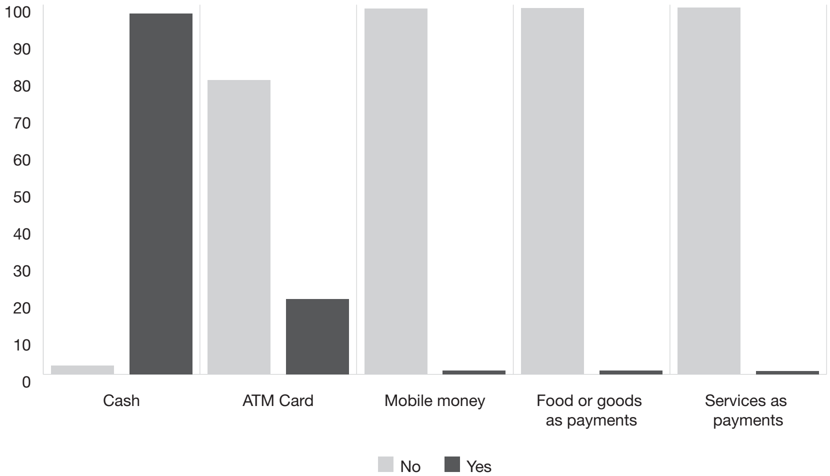
FIGURE 11: Enterprise Profitability



7.9. Accepted Methods of Payment

The informal food sector is foremost a cash economy. This is evident in Figure 12 by 97.6% of the respondents accepting cash as a form of payment as compared to other payment forms. The use of Automated Teller Machine (ATM) cards, mobile money and exchange with other goods and services are not popular mechanisms of payment for food products. ATM cards were the second most common form of payment, accepted by 20.3% of the businesses surveyed.

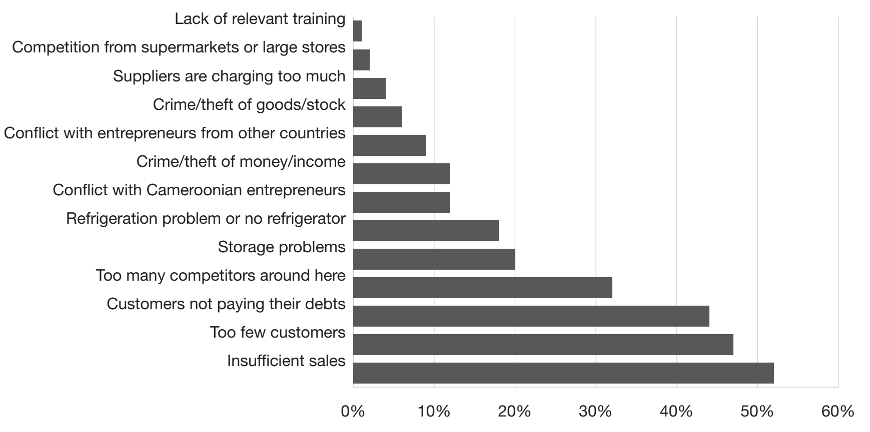
FIGURE 12: Methods of Payment



7.10. Enterprise Business Challenges

The biggest challenge cited by most respondents was a lack of sufficient sales (51.4%) and the lack of potential customers (46.9%). "Too many competitors in the area" (31.6%) was also a common concern. Customers not paying their debts was a challenge for 43.4% of respondents. The city does not have a well-established supermarket system to the extent that competition from supermarkets (1.3%) was an uncommon challenge.

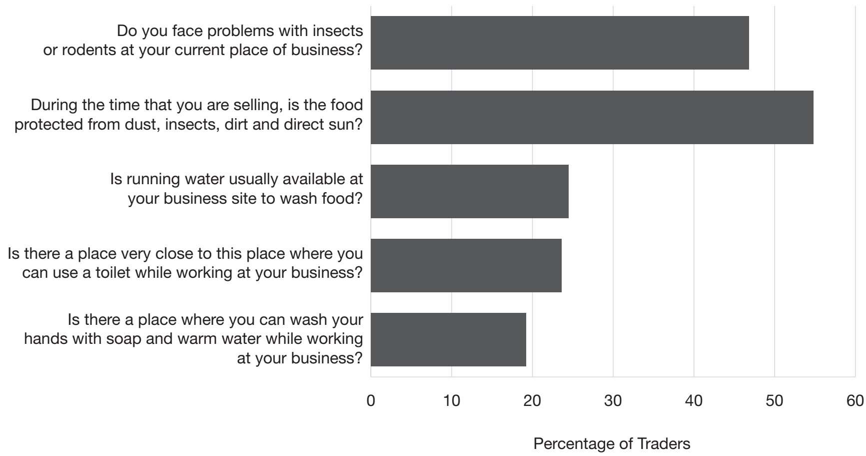
FIGURE 13: Enterprise Challenges (multiple responses)



8. Sanitation and Hygiene

The hygienic aspects of food trading are of concern for public health practitioners. In most secondary cities, food vending is practised in areas that are not well structured, lack running water, toilets and washing facilities (Khairuzzaman et al., 2014). Previous research in Cameroon has found food contamination to be a serious public health hazard (Akaochere et al., 2018; Temgoua et al., 2015). The basic findings for sanitary conditions where small-scale food traders operate reveal that about one in every four (23.6%) has a place nearby where they can use a toilet while working and about one in five (19.2%) has a place where they can properly wash their hands while doing business (Figure 14). In terms of food management, fewer than one-quarter (24.5%) have running water available at the business site to wash food, close to half (46.8%) face problems with insects or rodents at the place of business, and slightly more than half (54.8%) are able to keep the food protected while they are selling it (Figure 14).

FIGURE 14: Sanitary Conditions Where Food Retailers Operate



There seems to be a broad awareness of food hygiene: 60.1% of respondents have learned about food safety and hygiene. The most common source of information about hygiene was from government (56.1% of those who had learned about food safety and hygiene), followed by other food traders (44%) and public awareness campaigns (42.6%) (Table 18).

TABLE 18: Source of Food Hygiene Information

Have you learned about food hygiene from the following sources?	%
Government officers or City Council extension workers	56.1
Other food traders	44.0
Public awareness campaigns	42.6

9. Food Production

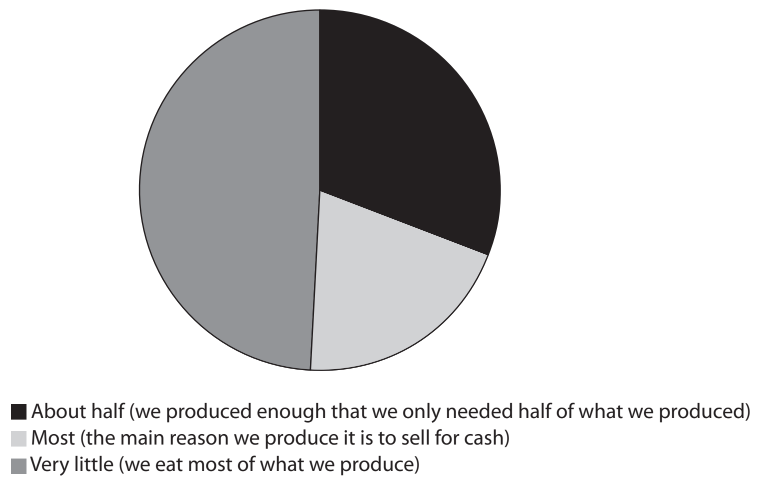
Most of the small-scale food enterprises purchased the food for resale. Only 16.2% produced some food to sell. The most common foods produced and sold were beans, corn and potatoes (Table 19). Most were plant-based foods cultivated as tree crops, root vegetables, garden crops and field crops. Five enterprises were related to chicken farming, with three producing and selling eggs, and two producing and selling livestock.

TABLE 19: Types of Foods Produced for Sale

Number of enterprises producing for sale	Foods produced (number producing the food)
>10 enterprises	Beans (23), Corn (19), Potatoes (11)
5-9 enterprises	Plantain (9), Bananas (7), Cassava (7), Tomatoes (7), Cabbage (5), Vegetables (5), Chicken (5)
2-4 enterprises	Carrots (3), Ginger (3), Eggs (3), Sweet potatoes (3), Taro (3), Peanuts (2), Yams (2), Livestock (2), Bell peppers (2), Apples (2)
1 enterprise	Garlic, Pineapples, Avocado, Beets, Okra

About half (49%) of the enterprise owners who produce some of what they sell, sell very little of what they produce, suggesting that income generation through sales is a secondary purpose of their agricultural activities. Nearly one-third (31%) sell about half of what they produce. Only one in five sell most of what they produce, meaning that the retailing business is the main purpose of their agricultural activities.

FIGURE 15: Use of Food Produced for Sale



Considering the kinds of enterprise owners who produce some of the food they sell, Table 20 compares some of their characteristics with retailers who produce none of the food they sell. Women are more likely to be food producers. In terms of place of birth, those who were born in another city in Cameroon had the lowest rate of producing food for sale (12.1%), perhaps reflecting a lack of land entitlements for agriculture or the focus on business and professional income sources for urban-born migrants. The variations in the distribution of enterprise type between the food producing and non-producing groups provides some counter-intuitive findings: home-based enterprises are the least likely to produce some of the food they sell (7.5%), despite the idea that selling garden produce from home would be a convenient business model; on the other hand, restaurants are the most likely to produce some of the food they sell (32.4%).

TABLE 20: Characteristics of Food Producers

	Non-food producers	Food producers
Gender		
Female	82.3	17.7
Male	86.5	13.5
Place of birth		
A foreign country	100.0	0.0
A rural area in this country	81.7	18.3
Another city in this country	87.9	12.1
In Dschang	82.3	17.7
Type of enterprise		
Home based	92.5	7.5
No fixed place	85.6	14.4
Permanent stall in a market	84.5	15.5
Permanent stall on a street/roadside	79.2	20.8
Restaurant or hotel	67.6	32.4
Temporary stall on the street/roadside	79.1	20.9
Workshop or shop	90.6	9.4

The low rates of food production for sale in small-scale food trading businesses is in sharp contrast to the high rates of household food production for domestic consumption (Legwegoh et al., 2020). The contrast between these findings highlights the separate roles of traders and farmers in Dschang's food system and the important role that small-scale traders play in the exchange of food from producers to consumers at a local level.

10. Conclusion

This report provides a broad overview of the people who own and operate small-scale food enterprises, the food they sell, where they source the food, and their business practices. The majority of the enterprise owners possess some secondary educational background and were born in Dschang, suggesting that it is not necessarily a livelihood activity for people who are socially marginalized. It includes a diverse group of people motivated primarily by the necessities of feeding their households and making a living. In this sense, the popularity of small-scale food businesses as a livelihood strategy has more to do with the lack of employment opportunities in Dschang than a particular interest in entrepreneurship. The fact that very few jobs are created by these enterprises, and the lack of employment creation as a motivation for creating an enterprise, reflects a disjuncture between the informal food system and local economic development objectives. This is perhaps a missed opportunity in that government investment in these types of businesses could harness the energy of these multiple food system actors.

Nearly three-quarters (73%) of enterprises operate without paying any registration or licensing fee to the municipality, market association or other authority. Fewer than half pay rent or own the structure where they conduct business. This high level of informality highlights the lack of oversight and planning required for economic development of the sector and public safety measures such as hygienic facilities. Further research is required to understand social and political barriers to this kind of intervention, especially in the fraught climate of the Anglophone crisis in the neighbouring South West Region and the growing number of Internally Displaced Persons residing in Dschang (Legwegoh and Riley, 2022).

The myriad foods sold by these businesses include foods grown in the area, foods gathered from the forest, and foods made through artisanal and industrial processes. Most are sourced mainly at the formal markets in Dschang, highlighting the double significance of these markets as a source for household and business procurement. Many foods are also sourced from rural markets, which illustrates the key role that small-scale entrepreneurs play in the urban-rural food linkages that supply the urban food system. A small but important minority of business owners produce some of the food that they sell. The informal food system therefore appears to be an important source of fresh, locally sourced foods that contribute to dietary diversity, agricultural households' livelihoods, and access to indigenous foods. This observation presents a public health objective to investing in understanding and supporting informal food system actors.

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AFRICAN FOOD SECURITY URBAN NETWORK (AFSUN)

Food Security in Africa's Secondary Cities: No. 6. The Informal Food Sector in Dschang, Cameroon

This report forms part of AFSUN's Food, Urbanization, Environments and Livelihoods (FUEL) project, which highlights the rapid transformation taking place in African secondary cities and its impact on food security, food systems, livelihoods, poverty and governance. Through an integrated city-wide survey of demographic characteristics, food trading regulations, food distribution channels, food consumption patterns, food production and food safety practices, this report explores the nature and significance of the informal food systems in Dschang municipality's urban core. It provides a broad overview of the people who own and operate small-scale food enterprises, the food they sell, where they source the food, and their business practices. The myriad foods sold by these businesses include foods grown in the area, foods gathered from the forest, and foods made through artisanal and industrial processes. Most are sourced mainly at the formal markets in Dschang, highlighting the significance of these markets as a source for both household and business procurement. Many foods are also sourced from rural markets, which illustrates the key role that small-scale entrepreneurs play in the urban-rural food linkages that supply the urban food system. The informal food system therefore appears to be an important source of fresh, locally sourced foods that contribute to dietary diversity, agricultural households' livelihoods, and access to indigenous foods.

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