MARKET CHAIN SYSTEMS AND COMMUTER LIVELIHOODS: A RE-ASSESSMENT OF MARKET CONDITIONS IN UGANDA

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Abstract
The toughening economic conditions in the developing world in general and in Uganda in particular have compelled many households to diversify their livelihood activities. On the one hand, rural farmers have been drawn to non-farm activities in both the urban and rural areas. On the other hand, urban households have been compelled to seek economic opportunities beyond urban confines, thus engaging in both non-farm and farm activities. These urban-rural interactions are the hallmark of the market chain systems in Uganda. This paper therefore, is a reassessment of market conditions in Uganda in view to establish the influence of market chain systems on the livelihoods of commuters in Uganda. The paper is informed by vast literature on the subject and more particularly by the lived experiences of commuting households in the Bugisu region of Eastern Uganda. The paper has established that commuting is a common livelihood strategy in Uganda although there are a number of inherent challenges to sustainable livelihoods of commuter households in this country.

Keywords: *Chain systems, commuter livelihood, Market conditions*

Introduction

Market chain systems have emerged as increasingly important in the field of business practice. Markets matter for rural and urban households and it has become increasingly clear that in tackling poverty, market-related issues such as access to information, institutions, linkages and trade rules are vital. It is also widely accepted that making markets work better for the poor is integral to pro-poor and broad-based economic development. The toughening economic conditions in the developing world in general and in Uganda in particular have compelled many households to diversify their livelihood activities. On the one hand, rural farmers have been drawn to non-farm activities in both the urban and rural areas. On the other hand, urban households have been compelled to seek economic opportunities beyond urban confines, thus engaging in both non-farm and farm activities.

This paper therefore, is a reassessment of market conditions in Uganda in view to establish the influence of market chain systems on the

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livelihoods of commuters in Uganda. The paper is informed by vast literature on the subject and more particularly by the lived experiences of commuters in the Bugisu region of Eastern Uganda.

Market Chain Analysis

Market chain points to the process of production in which the economic actors produce and transact a particular product as it moves from primary producer to final consumer (Banks, 2010). Market chain systems play a pivotal role in influencing livelihood activities undertaken by households. Market chain is composed of activities and services that bring a product from conception to end use in a particular industry (Namazzi 2008). In most cases market chain systems work well. Failure of the market system arises when problems occur in which shocks such as severe drought, floods, major disease outbreaks or civil unrest disrupt market system. In the case of agricultural markets, seasonal factors may affect the market chain system exacerbated by the lag time between farmers observing a price trend or opportunity and being able to respond after making decisions to plant, grow and harvest a specific crop or to rear animals (Lundy et al, 2007). Consequently, changes in market supply conditions in one year can lead to major swings in the supply and demand of agricultural goods in subsequent years. This is sometimes referred to as boom to bust marketing cycles. When such scenarios occur, interventions may focus on improving the enabling environment namely; business regulation or business service provision such as financial services, or take the enabling environment and business service provision as a given and instead just focus on opportunities intrinsic to the market chain such as greater coordination along the market chain (Banks, 2010).

Lundy et al, (2007) further, notes that, in an attempt to avoid problems in food supplies and reduce price volatility in the agricultural market chain, governments may take it upon themselves to regulate the market by setting up support measures such as subsidies, floor prices and quotas for specific commodities in an attempt to match demand with supply.The other option is creating farmers 'capacity to: enhance product quality, standardization, bulking, storage, and value addition for primary products (Tatwangire, 2013). In any particular context there are a wide variety of constraints that influence poor people's livelihoods and incomes. This means, in turn, that there are a wide range of options for governments and donors wanting to assist with improving poor people's livelihoods and income (Banks, 2010).

The general literature therefore, reveals that, there is a close link between market chain systems and livelihood activities often undertaken by both rural and urban households. Access to information, institutional linkages and trade rules greatly influence household decisions in regards to what livelihood activities to engage in. Consequently livelihood activities influence household wellbeing. In Uganda, the link between market chain systems and livelihood activities can best be explained by the commuting phenomenon.

Market Chain Systems and Commuting Phenomenon in Uganda

Commuting has gained pace in many developing countries such as Uganda due to toughening economic conditions and improved transport facilities that have brought rural and urban households closer to each other enabling easy connection between one urban area and another. In this paper, the term commuting refers to the process by which people move to and from along the rural-urban continuum deriving a living in town, while remaining based in rural areas. It also describes a situation where people move from urban to rural areas deriving a living in rural areas while remaining based in the urban. Some people also commute from urban to urban deriving a living in one of the towns and yet staying in another. The first case however, is the most common phenomenon in Uganda. Many households in Uganda have adopted commuting as a livelihood strategy trying to cope with problems of poverty and rising cost of living. Many households traverse the rural-urban continuum regularly deriving a living from the nearby towns or rural areas.

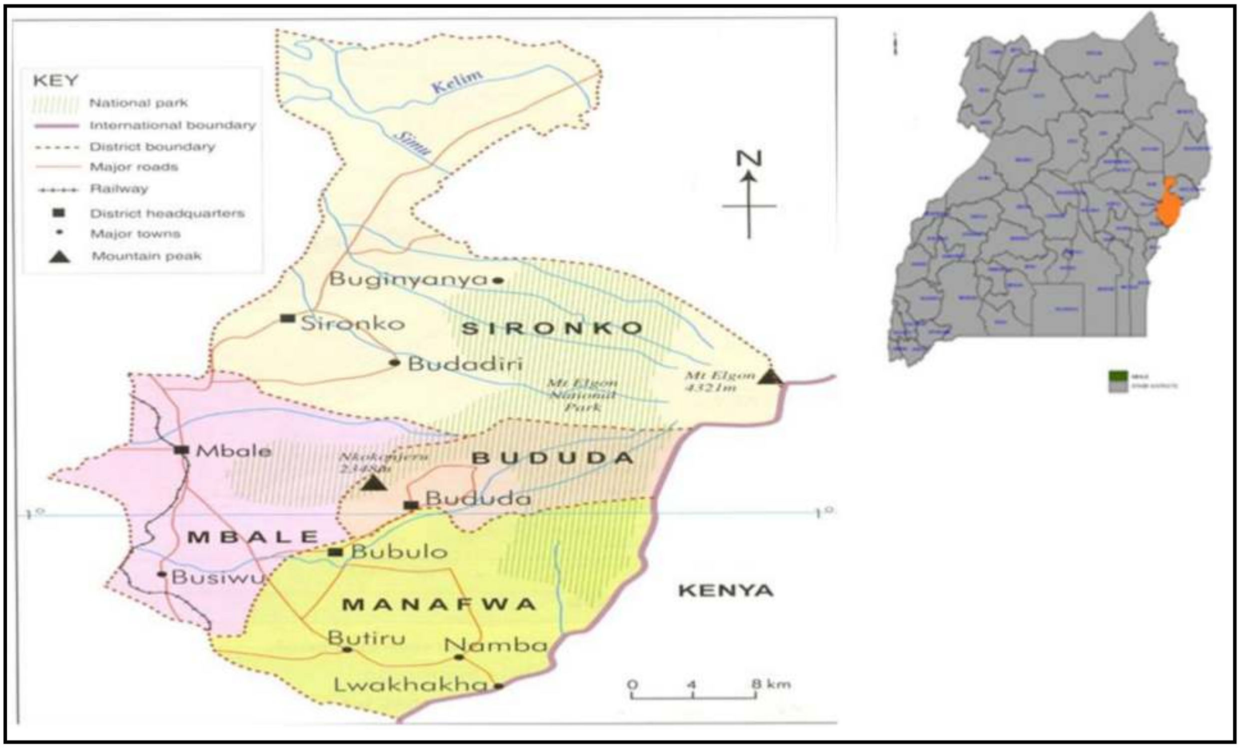
Commuting takes two major dimensions namely; commuting as a form of mobility and commuting as a livelihood strategy. As a form of mobility, commuting takes the form of interaction that exists between rural and urban settings marked by the flows of people along the rural-urban continuum moving along with other flows such as goods from the rural areas to urban and vice versa; flows of capital for investment in the form of remittances by the urban relatives to the rural families; flows of services mostly from the urban to the rural areas. Flows of people (commuting as a form of mobility), constitutes one of the major flows that dominates the interaction between rural and urban areas in the search for livelihoods. These flows of goods, services and people and the livelihood activities undertaken in these flows characterise the market chain systems in Uganda.

Livelihoods refer to the sum of ways and means by which individuals, households and communities make and sustain a living over time using a combination of socio-economic, cultural and environmental resources (Pain and Lautze 2002). A livelihood is a job one does to earn a living. It points to multiple activities households employ to earn a living. Households make a living through a myriad of ways doing formal and informal jobs, farm and non-farm activities, legal and illegal jobs. Strategies adopted by households are more dependent on household's *objectives* and *interests*. Livelihood strategies are further shaped by the prevailing market conditions, the assets available and capabilities of households (Edaku, 2012). Livelihood strategies adopted by households are usually short or long-term or both depending on the shocks and stress caused by poverty, seasonal factors, household's objectives and the assets available.

Short-term livelihood strategies may take the form of budget adjustments to fit expenditure within limited income and high cost of living; the case of the current soaring prices and high cost of living in Uganda. In this case households have been forced to make substantive budget adjustments to fit expenditures within their incomes. In such circumstances households may adjust consumption from expensive items to cheaper ones; move children from expensive schools to affordable schools; and stop obtaining medical care from professionals and start seeing traditional herbalists or buy drugs from drug shops. Such mechanisms are adopted out of necessity as households seek better livelihood alternatives. They are a result of sudden and immediate changes (seasonality such as seasonal shifts in prices, production, food availability, employment opportunities). Long-term strategies are those undertaken to help a household build capacity over time in preparation for long-term life changes. These may take the form of investment in children's or personal education, capital investment such as real estate investment or setting up a business, firm or factory. Commuters usually diversify their livelihoods to cope with high cost of living and multiple socio-economic demands.

Commuting Phenomenon and Livelihood Activities in Bugisu Region in Uganda

This paper is a result of the study conducted in Bugisu region in eastern Uganda covering five districts of Mbale, Manafa, Budduda, Sironko and Bulambuli (See, map 1).



Map 1: Bugisu Region in Eastern Uganda: ***Source:*** *BMK Atlas, 2010*

Bugisu region is situated in eastern Uganda and comprises of five districts: Mbale, Manafa, Budduda, Sironko and Bulambuli. It lies approximately between Latitudes 45'N, 1 35'NandLongitudes 34'E, 34 35'E**.** The region covers a vast area of 2.467 sq km. The Bagisu constitute about 5 percent of the population of Uganda with an average population size of about 1.012.831 people (Uganda National Census Statistics, 2002). The region has the highest population density in the nation, rising to 250 households per square kilometre.

The study considered a sample population of seven hundred and sixty (760) respondents comprising of; five hundred and twenty (520) commuters, one hundred (100) District Local Government Officials, one hundred (100) Urban Authorities, twenty (20) Civil Society Organisation officials and another twenty (20) officials from financial institutions in Mbale.

Purposive sampling was used to select key informants. The selection of key informants was based on their knowledge-ability of commuting patterns and livelihood activities in the selected areas. Cluster sampling, purposive sampling and snowball sampling were used to select the seven hundred and thirty six (736) commuter respondents. The researchers mapped the study areas and classified them into clusters of one rural village and one urban centre (treated as a village) from which the respondents (commuter households) and key informants were selected from the districts. The use of snowball sampling technique was useful in the selection of respondents. Snowballing was used especially where it was not easy to identify "commuters". Through snowball sampling, the identification of one "commuter" enabled the identification of others, making the selection easy.

The study relied on primary and secondary sources. It adopted a triangulation of methods of data collection and analysis, combining information from different sources of data collection namely; unstructured expert interviews, focus group discussions, review of secondary literature, use of questionnaires, rapid rural/urban appraisal and observation. Photographs were also taken to capture observable commuting and livelihood activities in the study area.

The study findings indicate that commuting is a key marketing activity and dominant livelihood strategy. As a livelihood strategy, commuting takes the form of activity that characterise the interaction between rural and urban areas as commuters traverse the rural-urban continuum regularly residing at one point and working and or deriving a living from another. Most households have adopted this as a survival strategy mainly out of necessity sometimes diversifying livelihoods as they operate in at least two places. It is common practice to find one having gardens in the village where he/she resides and at the same time taking on non-farm activity in the urban engaged in vending, hawking, "*boda boda*" riding, among other activities.

Commuting in the Bugisu Region is an activity by people of different ages, sex and occupation. Children below the age of 12 commute and account for about, 1% of the total percentage of commuters in Bugisu region. Both males and females commute although males dominate commuting accounting for 60% as compared to 40% for females (Edaku, 2010).

The common livelihood strategies commuter households engaged in are farm and non-farm activities. Farm activities include crop and animal husbandry. Households grow a range of crops such as maize, beans, cabbages, carrots, coffee and bananas for domestic and commercial purposes. The rural commuters rear chicken, goats and cattle though on a small scale due to shortage of land. Non-farm activities are dominantly found in urban areas such as Mbale, Manafa, Budduda, Sironko and

Bulambuli towns which serve as district headquarters. There are other small towns, trading centres and markets in the region that offer opportunities for growth of no-farm activities. One of the major markets in the region is Kamus that draws commuters from within and outside the region. Urban influence in the region has led to increase in scale of non-farm activities in the rural areas. Non-farm activities take the range of activities such as professional and non-professional services such as education, medical care, and equipment repairs. They also include retail and wholesale trade, vending, hawking, construction and processing activities as shown in table 1.1 below. In the rural areas the dominant non-farm activities are brick laying, coffee and maize processing, carpentry, teaching and pottery.

Table 2.1: *Some of the Commuter Livelihood Activities in Bugisu Region*

Livelihood Activities	**Number of Responses and their Percentages**	
	N	**%**
Hawking	24	8.89
Street vending	62	22.96
Retail/ wholesale	44	16.29
Small manufacturing	20	7.41
Construction	18	6.67
Service	78	28.89
Farming	24	8.89
Total	**270**	**100**

Source: *Field Data*

With reference to table 1.1, about 59% of commuter livelihood activities are commercial related taking the form of retail and wholesale trade, vending and hawking. The opportunities in town dictate upon what commuters do and explains why the service sector takes the largest share of livelihood activities accounting for about, 29% of commuter livelihood activities followed by street vending (23%). Street vendors engage in diverse activities taking advantage of every opportunity available that a household can do. In the evenings, traders from the suburbs and nearby villages come to towns to occupy most of the commercial streets and taxi/bus park areas. In the night between 8.00pm and 10.00pm, the commuters go back to their areas of aboard and return to the streets the following morning or evening. Plate, 2.1 illustrates some of the livelihood activities by the commuters.

Plate 2.1: Some of the Commuter Livelihood Activities in Mbale Town;

Source: Field Photos

An interesting scenario in Bugisu region is the manner in which urban households maintain close links with their rural homes and continue to carry on with farming activities in the rural areas alongside their urban livelihood jobs. Most households integrate rural and urban activities having gardens of coffee, maize and beans in the country side. The farms are managed by relatives in the rural areas. Once in a while (weekly or monthly basis), urban commuters visit their rural homes to check on their investments there. Asked why urbanites have to have farms in the country side rather than concentrate on their urban livelihoods, one of the respondents from Manafa district headquarters (town) had this to say:

> *We maintain links with our rural homes for two reasons; to register your presence and to keep in touch with your relatives at home thus securing your social position in the community. This is because when you die or lose a family member, you have to be taken and buried in the ancestral land. The second reason is the need to diversify sources of income amidst hard economic times of today. By having a garden of maize or beans, one can supplement the little earnings with food staffs from home – making life a little easier than solely depending on earnings from urban job, (Respondent in Manafa Town Council).*

From this statement, we note that commuters often find it necessary to have homes and activities in the urban and also in the rural for purposes of maintaining close relationships with the ancestral origins. They also do it by diversifying their sources of livelihood in which they have farms in the rural areas for food production and to supplement income earned from urban livelihood activities. It can be concluded that in maintaining links in both urban and rural areas, commuter households are able to establish and maintain a market chain system for sustainable livelihoods.

Notwithstanding the numerous efforts by Commuter households to ensure their livelihoods in this region, there are a number of challenges that impose limitations to commuting activities in Bugisu region. These limitations include:

1. Exploitation of rural households by middlemen who offer meagre gate prices for agricultural produce and services and yet charge exorbitant prices for urban manufactured goods and services in exchange is one of the challenges faced by rural commuters. The challenge also lies in the fact that most products from rural areas are exchanged in their raw form and therefore fetch low prices compared to urban industrial products.
2. Poor transport compounds the problem making marketing far beyond local markets difficult. The roads are in a poor shape due to ragged terrain that makes road construction, maintenance and other improvements very difficult. Most rural roads have been affected by the rains making them impassable throughout the year. Most of them are laced with potholes, which makes it difficult for vehicles to get to the farm sites to collect produce. The poor state of roads has led to higher transport costs hindering access to markets and flow of market information. This has led to increase in transportation costs and a rise in consumer food prices.
3. Market instabilities that affect pricing of locally produced goods is one of the challenges faced by commuters especially farmers. The volatility of crop prices has stressed both farmers and farmer institutions. Current market fundamentals centre on demand and supply operations made worse by unscrupulous middlemen whose aim is to extort from farmers in order to make abnormal profits by paying low for farm produce and selling to urban households at abnormal rate. The collapse of cooperative movement and lack of agricultural market information has served to deepen the crisis. This has been made worse by the farmers

themselves who sell their produce during the harvesting season, the time of bumper harvest bringing prices much lower than ever. During bumper harvest farmers fetch very low prices for their produce because all the surrounding areas of the region, will be supplying the same products.

4. Price fluctuations in the international market have affected the marketing of cash crops such as coffee that depend most on the international market conditions. Farmers dealing in coffee have often reported fluctuation of coffee prices at the international market as a hindrance to their farming activities in the region, affecting their farm gate prices. The average price of commodities fluctuates a lot and this obviously is a major factor determining the level of profitability for producers and, therefore, the value of land used for the production of these commodities. The annual variation in price level, then, will influence the annual variation in profitability. The inter–year variation in prices may also have important implications for decisions relative to pricing annual production.
5. Problems of storage have often affected farmers and businessmen dealing in farmer produce. There is general lack of storage and warehousing facilities such as lock-up stores, silos, barns in which farmers would store produce and sell when prices have appreciated. Very few marketers store produce more over in jute bags and baskets which do not allow storage for a long time before produce goes bad. Insufficient storage facilities often lead to produce loss due to premature germination, fungal and bacteria attack, insects and rodents attack. All these often account for increased marketing cost leading to higher retail prices and reduced marketing efficiency.
6. Theft of crops threatens the ability of households to survive, particularly in times of food shortages. Theft of crops in rural areas is largely related to food insecurity. The problem of theft was stated as having escalated with declining landholdings, poverty and unemployment among the youth. The changing times included prolonged hunger periods, food shortage and the exorbitant cost of food and other essential household items.
7. High taxes on business transactions have had an impact on the production and marketing of both industrial and agricultural products. Taxes range from indirect to direct taxes in the form of fuel prices, trading licenses, market dues let alone rent for operating space. This in

itself has affected profitability of businesses and thus discouraging production and business activities. The failure rate of business enterprises is high, thus affecting commuting activities and the level of interaction between rural and urban settings.

Influence of Market Chain System on Commuter Livelihood Activities

Market chain systems have become central to the analysis and explanation of the level of adaptation and assimilation of households into local and international market systems. Any given market chain is situated within a broader overall market system comprised of three interlinked components namely; the market chain, the enabling business environment, consumers and service providers (Banks, 2010). The four components make the market chain system complete, figure 1.1.

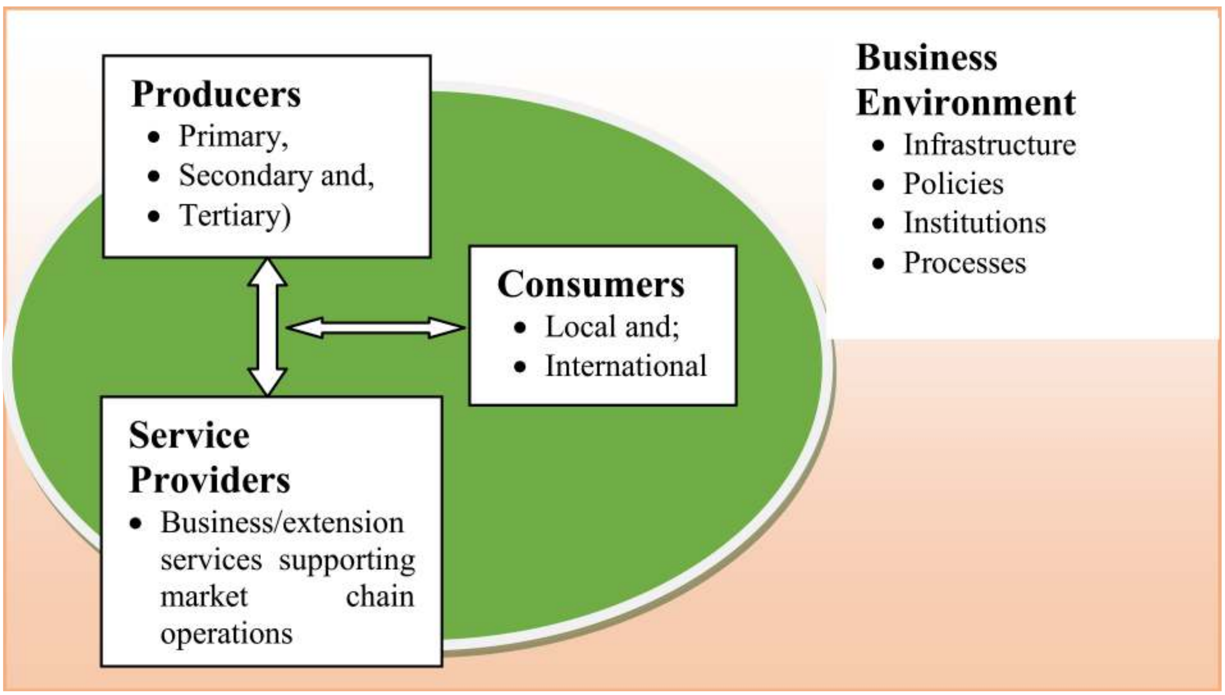


Figure 1.1: Actors in the Market Chain System

Market chain constitutes primary actors in the market namely, producers, processors, manufacturers, distributors and consumers, their roles and interrelationships, market channels and trends within the market chain and final sales and market segments. Service providers constitute business or extension services that support the market chain operations. There are numerous actors in market chain system. Such constitute small or large-scale producers or both, input suppliers, traders, processors, transporters, wholesalers and retailers. Isabelita et al (2008) in the analysis of key actors, prices and value shares in coconut production in Philippines note that the activities performed by the various actors in the chain are the exchange functions (buying, selling, wholesaling and retailing), physical functions (transportation, storage, processing, packaging), and facilitating functions (sorting and grading, financing, market intelligence, and various forms of market promotion). Consumers in the market chain system can be local or international. Mariott et al, (2004) support this statement by arguing that, the fish industry in Uganda operates in two distinct sets of enterprise notably, the local market and export market pointing to consumers being local or international.

The existence of numerous actors in the market chain impacts on the market price especially for the producers who receive low prices for their products and consumers who are often exploited by paying high prices for the products. Mariott et al, (2004) in their study of the impact of globalization on fish utilization and marketing systems in Uganda note that, where the commodity chain is under global forces, the producers become price takers. Munyua et al (2013) also support the fact that the existence of numerous traders in the market chain reduces the farmer's share of the final price. Such low prices sometimes discourage farmers from active production who seek to shift their focus to non-farm activities

The environment constitutes constraints and opportunities in the market chain. Such constraints and opportunities are infrastructure, policies, institutions and processes. All marketing activities for both industrial and agricultural products require a supportive policy, legal, institutional, macro-economic, infrastructural and bureaucratic environment. Arbitrary government policy such as those policies restricting imports or exports or internal movement of goods and services undermine production, supply and marketing process. Excessive bureaucratic tendencies create inadequacies in the market chain that make it dysfunctional.

Appropriate laws often increase market efficiency, reduce the costs of doing business and enhance the development of a competitive private sector. The presence of supporting or functional institutions such as extension services for farmers, supportive private sector foundation or export systems impact variably on the market chain system and often enhance the process of doing business. The availability of good transport systems and networks increase efficiency and reduces delays and prices to final consumers. It also increases payments to producers particularly farmers.

Institutions play potential roles in strengthening markets for commodities produced, bought, and sold by reducing transaction costs, managing risk, building social capital, enabling collective action and redressing missing markets (Torero, 2011). Institutional practices such as corruption create market inefficiencies and increases transaction costs encountered by those in the market chain. Successful market systems however, require learning new skills, new techniques and new ways of obtaining information.

Inherent Limitations in the Market Chain System

Internal Institutional Contradictions

Although institutions play an important role in the market chain, internal inadequacies such as coordination failure, innovation failure and authority failure create institutions inefficiency (Torero M, 2011). Such internal inadequacies interfere with the normal flow of activities leading to market failures. Government institutions, farmers' and traders' associations require substantial expansion and development to function effectively. Farmers' associations could play an important role in disseminating market information, providing extension services and credit and providing economies of scales both for input supply and the marketing of produce, enhancing the bargaining power of farmers in commodity markets (Namazzi, 2008). The collapse of the cooperative movement in Uganda in the 1980s has denied farmers the services accruing from farmer associations. This in a way now stands as a bottleneck to production and marketing of agricultural produce. On the other hand government institutions that would regulate markets are weak and generally lack resources and credibility to regulate market conditions especially the quality of commodities that come to the market.

Problems Related to Infrastructure Development

The infrastructure needed for value addition includes energy, transport, communications and physical marketing facilities is lacking. Many parts of Uganda face the problem of poor state of roads. Such poor roads have undermined transportation of goods and services from production areas to market places. The energy sector is not yet fully developed to adequately support production. Power outages and load shedding have enormously affected the production process. Despite the excessive use of mobile phones in Uganda, most farmers lack the required information and knowledge about market conditions. Market information keeps farmers and traders attuned to the demands and changing preferences of consumers; guiding their farming, marketing, and investment decisions (Namazzi, 2008). Unfortunately, market information system in Uganda is poor characterized by absent or slow information dissemination. Problems of irregular or absent market information that adversely affects farmer market decisions.

The Role of Middlemen

Middlemen have sometimes posed as obstacles to the market chain system by offering meagre gate prices for agricultural produce and services and yet charge exorbitant prices for urban manufactured goods and services in exchange. The challenge also lies in the fact that most products from rural areas are exchanged in their raw form and therefore fetch low prices compared to urban industrial products.

Market Instabilities

Market instabilities that affect pricing of locally produced goods have affected the smooth flow of activities in the market chain system. The volatility of crop prices has stressed both farmers and farmer institutions. Price fluctuations in the international market have affected the marketing of cash crops such as coffee that depend most on the international market conditions. Farmers dealing in coffee have often reported fluctuation of coffee prices at the international market as a hindrance to their farming activities in the region, affecting their farm gate prices. The average price of commodities fluctuates a lot and this obviously is a major factor determining the level of profitability for producers and, therefore, the value of land used for the production of these commodities. The annual variation in price level, then, will influence the annual variation in profitability. The inter–year variation in prices may also have important implications for decisions relative to pricing annual production.

The level and magnitude of variability of crop prices have important implications on commuting activities. General level of market prices influences the amount of capital or credit that traders will require to buy an inventory of crops. Higher prices increase capital requirement to own a fixed amount of inventory for a specific length of time. If capital or credit limitations emerge, dealers may choose to own smaller inventories or own inventories for a shorter period of time. Second, the magnitude of volatility in prices within a marketing year will influence the amount of capital or credit needed to maintain margin accounts. For consumers, the most important implication of the magnitude of price volatility is on the timing of purchases. This is especially the case for end users who are not able to profitably price the end product at the same time that forward contracts for crops are made.

Problems of Storage

Problems of storage have often affected farmers and businessmen dealing in farmer produce. There is general lack of storage and warehousing facilities such as lock-up stores, silos, barns in which farmers would store produce and sell when prices have appreciated. Very few marketers store produce more over in jute bags and baskets which do not allow storage for a long time before produce goes bad. Insufficient storage facilities often lead to produce loss due to premature germination, fungal and bacteria attack, insects and rodents attack. All these often account for increased marketing cost leading to higher retail prices and reduced marketing efficiency.

High Taxes

High taxes on business transactions have had an impact on the production and marketing of both industrial and agricultural products. Taxes range from indirect to direct taxes in the form of fuel prices, trading licenses, market dues let alone rent for operating space. This in itself has affected profitability of businesses and thus discouraging production and business activities. The failure rate of business enterprises is high, thus affecting commuting activities and the level of interaction between rural and urban settings.

Conclusion

Market chain systems remain central to livelihood analysis. It also follows that any attempts by government or development partners to address householdpoverty concerns should focus on market chain analysis. Access to information by households, institutional linkages and trade rules are important benchmarks upon which to evaluate the role of market chain system in influencing livelihood activities.

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