

The Contribution of Small-Scale Furniture Production to Household Food Affordability: A Case Study of Mafinga Town Council, Tanzania

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Abstract—This study investigates the impact of income generated through small-scale furniture production on household food affordability in Mafinga Town Council, Tanzania. The research employed a comprehensive data collection approach, incorporating structured questionnaires with both open- and closed-ended questions, key informant interviews, and documentary reviews. The sample consisted of 96 small-scale furniture producers and seven key informants. Quantitative data analysis was conducted using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) Version 27, while qualitative data were examined through content analysis. The findings reveal that engagement in furniture production has significantly contributed to increased income levels among small-scale producers, with 34.4% reporting monthly earnings between TZS 400,001 and 600,000—sufficient to meet essential needs, particularly food-related expenditures. Furthermore, 89.6% of respondents indicated an enhanced ability to afford food following their participation in the industry, underscoring the critical role of furniture production in improving household food security. To maximize the sector's contribution to food affordability, it is imperative to establish supportive policies and targeted interventions aimed at fostering the growth of small-scale furniture enterprises. Strengthening this industry will not only enhance economic stability among producers but also promote sustained access to adequate and nutritious food within affected households.

Keywords: Food affordability, furniture production, income generation, small-scale furniture producers, Mafinga Town Council

I. INTRODUCTION

I.I. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Small-scale furniture production plays a significant role in improving household food affordability by enabling income generation for producers. Earnings from this industry allow families to allocate funds for buying essential food items, ensuring better food intake and overall well-being. In many developing countries, small-scale enterprises make goods which are affordable, hence contributing to financial stability and enhancing food affordability [1].

In the global, furniture manufacturing sector has significantly impacted employment level and economic growth. In Africa, studies show that stable earnings from furniture production improve food affordability [2]. Research in Kenya and Ethiopia highlights the sector's role in enhancing financial security among artisans, while in Nigeria, profitable furniture businesses have contributed to poverty reduction and better food consumptions among households [3].

In Tanzania, furniture production sector supports households' food security by employing many small-scale furniture producers. Mafinga Town Council is a hub for timber-based furniture production, which enables generation of incomes for producers which can be essential to secure sufficient income for buying food for their families. However, financial constraints and competitive market conditions often limit the ability of these small-scale furniture producers to maintain stable and adequate earning, and thus affecting food accessibility [4][5]. Strengthening small-scale furniture enterprises through supportive policies and financial assistance can further enhance food affordability. By fostering economic resilience in the sector, households can achieve greater stability and sustained access to nutritious food, ultimately improving overall well-being in the region [6].

I.II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Small-scale furniture production is a key economic activity that helps households improve food affordability through income generation. Many producers rely on this industry as their main livelihood, using earnings to secure food for their families [7]. However, challenges like limited market access, fluctuating material costs, and inadequate financial support hinder their ability to maximize earnings, leading to financial uncertainty and food insecurity [4].

Furniture production in Mafinga Town Council, Tanzania, is a key economic activity, which enables small-scale producers to meet local demands for their products. Regardless of the potential of town having many resources of timber for furniture production activities, financial constraints and market competition hindered the income growth of small-scale furniture producers, hence affecting household purchasing power and food access. Through improvement in financial support and market accessibility, it can enhance the role of furniture production in food affordability.

Despite its potential to support food security, many small-scale furniture producers operate independently with inconsistent incomes, which in turn affect their capacity to sustain adequate food consumption. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the impact of furniture production on household food affordability in Mafinga Town Council, identifying strategies to enhance economic sustainability and food security among small-scale furniture producers.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

II.I. KEYNESIAN THEORY OF INCOME AND EMPLOYMENT

This study was guided by Keynesian theory of income and employment. This theory highlights how small-scale furniture production can help in enhancing food affordability. Investment in productive sectors can help in stimulating income growth, resulting to an increase of households' expenditures on essentials things specifically food [8]. Keynes theory shows how rising income increases spending on necessities like food. Higher income from furniture production activities enhances meal affordability, hence reducing food insecurity, while stable income among small-scale furniture producers helps in supporting local food availability [9]. Strategic financial planning and government intervention, as suggested by Keynes, can strengthen the purchasing power of furniture producers and enhance food affordability. Overall, Keynes' theory highlights the significance of investment in small-scale furniture enterprises as a driver of economic growth and food security. By supporting stable income sources, these businesses ensure that families can consistently afford nutritious meals, ultimately improving household well-being.

II.II. EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

Stable earnings help furniture producers afford quality food, ensuring nutritional security and food diversity [10]. Key indicators like food expenditure, nutritional diversity, and stability measure affordability. However, seasonal income fluctuations impact household budgets, often leading to poor dietary choices [9][11].

Economic stability influences food consumption, with higher earnings supporting diverse, nutritious meals while lower-income households face health risks due to limited options [12][13]. Market accessibility also affects affordability, particularly in remote areas [14]. Strengthening local food distribution networks can enhance food security [15].

Financial decision-making affects meal choices, with economic instability forcing families to prioritize cost over nutrition [16][17]. Financial literacy programs and income support initiatives can help improve food choices despite income uncertainties [18]. Further research is needed to examine how small-scale furniture producers manage nutrition in their budgeting and adjust food purchases during financial instability to develop targeted affordability interventions.

III. METHODOLOGY

III.I. DESCRIPTION OF THE AREA OF STUDY

Mafinga Town Council, located in Iringa region, borders Mufindi District to the South, West, and East, and Iringa District to the North. It has a population of 122,329, with most residents relying on agriculture for income [19]. The area benefits from forest resources and a Tanzania-Finland joint program supporting small-scale furniture enterprises to boost employment and reduce poverty.

III.II. RESEARCH APPROACH

The study employed the mixed research approach which included both quantitative and qualitative approaches which figured out the association among the study variables according to the objective of the study.

III.III. RESEARCH DESIGN

The study used a descriptive research design to analyse population features, gathering qualitative and quantitative data on furniture production. A cross-sectional approach was applied, collecting data at a single point in time.

III.IV. POPULATION OF STUDY

In this study, target population was small-scale furniture producers. Key informants of the study included Community Development Officers (CDOs) from three wards involved in the study which were found within Mafinga Town Council. The wards which were involved in this study included Kinyanambo, Boma and Changarawe.

III.V. SAMPLE SIZE AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUES

The sample of the study was selected among population of small-scale furniture producers, and key informants which included the CDOs from different wards involved in the study who were residing in Mafinga Town Council.

III.V.I. SAMPLE SIZE

Sample size for unknown and infinite population was estimated by using the formula proposed by Cochran for infinite and unknown population [20]. In the study, the total number of 96 respondents were selected from three wards.

III.V.II. SAMPLING TECHNIQUES

The study used probability and non-probability sampling, applying simple random sampling for ward and furniture producer selection, while purposive sampling identified key informants.

III.VI. TYPES OF DATA AND DATA COLLECTION METHODS

The study collected qualitative and quantitative data. Primary data came from questionnaires and interviews with small-scale furniture producers and CDOs, while secondary data were sourced from relevant documents on furniture production.

III.VII. DATA ANALYSIS

The study used descriptive statistics to determine percentages and frequencies, assessing respondent characteristics and presenting key findings with SPSS Version 27. Interview data were analysed through content analysis.

III.VIII. VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY OF RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

The study ensured validity through a mixed research approach and multiple data collection techniques, including interviews, questionnaires, and document reviews. Reliability was maintained by using unbiased tools and pre-testing to ensure consistent results.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

IV.I. RESPONDENTS' DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

The demographic information of the respondents which were collected in the study involved age, sex, education level and household size.

IV.I.I. SEX AND AGE OF RESPONDENTS

The results (Table 1) highlight that small-scale furniture production is predominantly male-led, with 93.8% of participants being men and only 6.2% women. Age distribution shows a significant concentration of furniture producers between 26 and 35 years old (41.7%), followed by 25% in the 36–45 age group. Meanwhile, 19.8% are younger than 25, and only 13.5% are older than 45. This suggests that the sector attracts younger and middle-aged individuals, while fewer older producers.

Table 1: Sex and age groups of respondents (n=96)

| Item | Frequency | Percent (%) |
|------|-----------|-------------|
|------|-----------|-------------|

| Sex | | |
|--------------|-----------|--------------|
| Male | 90 | 93.8 |
| Female | 6 | 6.2 |
| Total | 96 | 100.0 |
| Age | | |
| Below 25 | 19 | 19.8 |
| 26 - 35 | 40 | 41.7 |
| 36 - 45 | 24 | 25.0 |
| Above 45 | 13 | 13.5 |
| Total | 96 | 100.0 |

Source: Research Survey (2024)

This pattern indicates potential gender barriers that limit female participation in the industry, possibly due to cultural norms or economic constraints. These findings align with [3] which focused on traditional gender roles in furniture production activities. Moreover, the dominance of younger participants implies that small-scale furniture production offers viable livelihood opportunities for those seeking stability. The results of the study show that domination of active age groups discovered to be important in furniture production activities [3][21]. However, the lower presence of individuals above 45 may suggest physical demands or career shifts that lead to reduced engagement over time. Addressing these dynamics could help create a more sustainable and inclusive workforce.

Expanding opportunities for women through training and financial support can enhance household wellbeing. Skill development for young furniture producers strengthens career prospects, ensuring sector sustainability. These efforts promote economic empowerment and better living standards.

Household size of respondent

Study findings (Table 2) shows that most respondents live in households of three to four members (36.5%), while 30.2% have five to six members. Smaller households of one to two people make up 22.9%, and only 10.4% have more than six members. This suggests that the majority of households involved in furniture production fall within medium-sized family structures.

The 2022 National Census reports an average household size of 3.4 in Mafinga Town Council [19], which align with study findings. The prevalence of three to six-member households suggests furniture production supports families with moderate sizes [22]. Smaller households may consist of individuals starting independently, while larger families may face financial constraints limiting their involvement in furniture production.

Table 2: Household size of respondents (n=96)

| Size | Frequency | Percent (%) |
|--------------|------------------|--------------------|
| 1 – 2 | 22 | 22.9 |
| 3 – 4 | 35 | 36.5 |
| 5 – 6 | 29 | 30.2 |
| Above 6 | 10 | 10.4 |
| Total | 96 | 100.0 |

Source: Research Survey (2024)

Linking household size to furniture production can refine economic support programs. Medium-sized households gain from stable income, while larger ones may need financial aid or business growth initiatives. Promoting skill development and entrepreneurship enhances financial stability across all household sizes.

IV.II. AVERAGE MONTHLY INCOME BY ENGAGING IN FURNITURE PRODUCTION

The findings in Table 3 shows that after engaging in furniture production, no respondents earn below 200,000 TZS, indicating financial improvement. Most furniture producers earn between 400,001 and 600,000 TZS (34.4%), while 24.0% earn between 600,001 and 800,000 TZS. Additionally, 20.8% earn above 800,000 TZS, reflecting increased income compared to previous earnings. Key informants supported the role of furniture production in boosting household income.

A CDO from Changarawe ward emphasized this during the interview; *“Manufacturing employs diverse skills, boosting household incomes. Innovation in design enhances earnings, with many sustaining their families through furniture production”*.

Table 3: Average monthly income after engaging in furniture production (n=96)

| Income Level (TZS) | Frequency | Percent (%) |
|--------------------|-----------|--------------|
| Below 200,000 | 0 | 0 |
| 200,001 - 400,000 | 20 | 20.8 |
| 400,001 - 600,000 | 33 | 34.4 |
| 600,001 – 800,000 | 23 | 24.0 |
| Above 800,000 | 20 | 20.8 |
| Total | 96 | 100.0 |

Source: Research Survey (2024)

Furniture production offers strong income potential. Ongoing support through training, resources, and business expansion can boost earnings [21][22]. Scaling operations and market diversification enhance financial stability and industry growth.

IV.III. AFFORDABILITY OF FOOD

Study findings in Table 4 shows that after engaging in furniture production, 89.6% of respondents can afford food, an increase from previous levels. Only 9.4% have partial affordability, while just 1.0% report being unable to afford food. This suggests improved financial stability for the majority of furniture producers.

Respondents and CDOs noted improvements as furniture production generated adequate income, supporting farming investments. A CDO from Boma ward highlighted food affordability among small-scale producers during the interview; *“With experience working in this ward and engaging with furniture producers, they appear to earn sufficient household income. Despite challenges like price fluctuations and extended families, many still afford food costs.”*

A CDO from Changarawe ward shared insights on food affordability among small-scale furniture producers in the area; *“Lifestyle changes and food management are key to sustaining furniture makers' ability to afford food. The situation is improving, with many managing food costs.”*

Table 4: Affordability of food after engaging in furniture production (n=96)

| Affordability | Frequency | Percent (%) |
|---------------|-----------|--------------|
| Yes | 86 | 89.6 |
| Somehow | 9 | 9.4 |
| No | 1 | 1.0 |
| Total | 96 | 100.0 |

Source: Research Survey (2024)

Rising food affordability shows that earnings from furniture production have boosted purchasing power [7]. Fewer households struggle financially, though some disparities remain. Expanding income opportunities, business growth, market access, and financial literacy can further improve food security and economic resilience.

IV.IV. CONSIDERATION FACTORS IN BUYING FOOD

The results in Table 5 indicate that convenience is the most significant factor influencing food buying decisions, with 94.7% of respondents considering it as a priority. Price follows closely behind at 93.7%, while nutrition value (19.8%) and durability of commodities (12.5%) are less prioritized. This suggests that households prioritize ease of access and cost-effectiveness over other considerations.

In an interview with CDOs from different wards shared their views on the factors which many people in small businesses considered in buying food for their households which included price and convenience.

In Kinyanambo ward, CDOs emphasized much on the issue of prices of commodities which affect the power of the individuals in buying food. One CDO argued that, "...price of commodity in relation to income will always determine what the person choose to consume."

Table 5: Consideration factors in buying food (n=96)

| Factor | Frequency | Percent (%) |
|-------------------------------|-----------|--------------|
| Convenience | 91 | 94.7 |
| Durability of the Commodities | 12 | 12.5 |
| Nutrition Value | 19 | 19.8 |
| Price | 90 | 93.7 |
| Total | 96 | 100.0 |

Results are based on multiple responses

The strong preference for price and convenience suggests that financial limitations and accessibility shape food purchasing decisions [23][24]. Improving economic stability through furniture production can enhance purchasing power, hence allowing households to prioritize healthier food options. Educating consumers on nutrition value alongside affordability can promote better food intake habits. Strengthening food accessibility and affordability can ensure balanced consumption while supporting long-term well-being of the households.

IV.V. SATISFACTION LEVEL ON FOOD AFFORDABILITY

Table 6 shows that 41.7% of respondents rank food affordability at level 4, 36.5% at level 3, 14.6% at level 2, and 7.3% at level 5. No respondents rated it at level 1, suggesting food affordability is not a major concern for most households.

Table 6: General satisfaction level with food affordability at households (n=96)

| Item Ranking | Frequency | Percent (%) |
|--------------|-----------|--------------|
| 1 | 0 | 0.0 |
| 2 | 14 | 14.6 |
| 3 | 35 | 36.5 |
| 4 | 40 | 41.7 |
| 5 | 7 | 7.3 |
| Total | 96 | 100.0 |

Source: Research Survey (2024)

Most households rate food affordability at levels 3 and 4, indicating moderate satisfaction. No respondents ranked it at the lowest level, suggesting improved food security. However, few highly satisfied responses highlight ongoing challenges in stable food access despite financial gains from furniture production.

These findings align with studies which noted that small businesses enhance living standards through income generation [25][26]. Enhancing financial opportunities and cost management can improve food affordability for furniture producers. Expanding

market access and entrepreneurship support strengthens economic growth and purchasing power, while promoting nutrition awareness and food budgeting boosts satisfaction.

IV.VI. BARRIERS TO FOOD AFFORDABILITY

Results which presented in Table 7 shows that the biggest barrier to food affordability is price fluctuations, affecting 63.2% of respondents. Increased costs of living (17.6%) and scarcity of commodities (11.2%) are also significant concerns. Distance to markets (6.4%) and underperformance of businesses (1.6%) are fewer common barriers, indicating that broader economic factors play a bigger role in food accessibility.

The dominance of price fluctuations as a barrier suggests that unstable food prices create financial uncertainty, which affects plans of households on food expenditures and other budgets [27]. Scarcity of commodities further limits accessibility, reflecting potential agricultural supply chain inefficiencies. Distance to markets and business underperformance are less frequently cited, though they may still affect small-scale furniture producers.

Table 7: Barriers to food affordability (n=96)

| Barrier | Frequency | Percent (%) |
|------------------------------|-----------|--------------|
| Distance to the Market | 8 | 8.3 |
| Increased Costs of Living | 22 | 22.9 |
| Price Fluctuations | 79 | 82.3 |
| Scarcity of Commodities | 14 | 14.6 |
| Underperformance of Business | 2 | 2.1 |
| Total | 96 | 100.0 |

Results are based on multiple responses

Addressing food affordability requires stabilizing food prices and improving agricultural supply chain efficiency. Through expansion of food production and distribution networks, it can help counter the issues associated with scarcity, while policies aimed at reducing living costs may ease financial pressure on households. Supporting household income growth and business stability can help in improving food affordability and economic resilience.

IV.VII. STRATEGY TO ENSURE FOOD AFFORDABILITY

The data in Table 8 shows that the most favoured strategy to ensure food affordability is government regulation of prices (67.7%). Improving food crop production also has strong support, with 54.2% of respondents favouring it, while 5.2% prefer enhancing market diversification.

The majority prefer government price regulation, which highlights the importance of stabilizing food costs through policy intervention [28]. Many respondents also acknowledge the role of improving food production in ensuring affordability, suggesting that increasing supply is a key factor in reducing costs. The relatively low emphasis on market diversification implies that access to different selling locations is viewed as less impactful compared to price stabilization and production efficiency.

Table 8: Strategies to ensure food affordability (n=96)

| Strategies | Frequency | Percent (%) |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|--------------|
| Diversification of Markets Locations | 5 | 5.2 |
| Government Regulation of Prices | 65 | 67.7 |
| Improving Production of Food Crops | 52 | 54.2 |
| Total | 96 | 100.0 |

Results are based on multiple responses.

Policymakers can focus on price regulation and agricultural enhancements to address food affordability. Expanding farming initiatives, improving crop yields, and ensuring fair pricing mechanisms could strengthen economic stability. While market diversification receives limited support, it can still complement food affordability efforts by broadening access and reducing price disparities.

IV.VIII. CORRELATION RESULTS

The spearman correlation analysis was used since the data were no normally distributed. The coefficient as shown in Table 9 between income and food affordability (0.72) confirms that increased earnings allow families to allocate resources toward essential needs.

Table 9: Correlation analysis

| Variables | Income Increment | Food Affordability |
|--------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| Income Increment | 1.00 | |
| Food Affordability | 0.72 | 1.00 |

These findings highlight the sector's role in improving livelihoods, emphasizing the need for financial assistance, market expansion, and social support programs to sustain economic growth and household stability.

V. CONCLUSION

Food affordability among furniture producers is directly influenced by income levels. The study highlights that higher earnings allow individuals to purchase nutritious food, reducing the risk of food insecurity. Financial literacy and budgeting play a crucial role in ensuring small-scale furniture producers allocate their income effectively to meet their essential needs. Government support through price regulations can enhance food affordability and sustainability within the community. Improving food affordability requires supportive initiatives like subsidies and cooperatives for lower-cost meals. Financial literacy education can help workers budget effectively, ensuring food security.

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