Characterization and Sustainable Management of Street Trading in Bukavu Town, Democratic Republic of Congo

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The main objective of this study was to examine socio-economic characteristics of street trading activities and determine their sustainable management practices by local authority and other stakeholders. Urban planning and its associated paradigms, and state intervention measures directly affect sustainability of street trading. Street trading activities are further shaped by socio-demographic attributes of street traders, political, economic and geographic variables in urban environment. Studies have only managed to exaggerate the uncertainties involved in using the institutional, fiscal and legal framework in explaining crises of street trading management in urban centres. This study was accomplished by pursuing the following specific objectives: examining the profiles of street trading activity, assessing the mode of street trading governance and response of other stakeholders, determining the perception and attitudes of stakeholders towards street trading activities and analysing how stakeholders’ concern and government regulations impact on the viability of street trading activities. The hypotheses were tested using both chi-square and descriptive analysis. Apart from the second hypothesis, the other three were rejected based on the significant differences observed on the findings. Both primary and secondary data were collected using questionnaires, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. A sample size of 120 respondents was considered and the respondents were drawn from; street traders, local government officials, and other stakeholders in street trading business. Descriptive and inferential techniques were used to analyse data and it involved calculation of means, frequencies, percentages and chi-square test. Qualitative analysis based on study themes was done to determine mode of governance and various institutional responses to street trading. The study established that education level, gender and starting capital were crucial factors in determining profitability of street trading activities. Although most of the street traders (37.1%) sell foodstuffs, it was found that monthly returns from food selling activities were very low compared to other street trading activities.
Investigations on governance mode of street trading activities revealed that dealing with street traders is a difficult task and this was attributed to the ever-increasing number of street traders, hostility between traders and local authority, and inability to register traders by local authority. The greatest setback to good governance of street trading activities was lack of collaboration between stakeholders, and inability to solicit divergent views. Qualitative analysis showed that policies on street trading are not clearly backed by action to improve the profitability of street trading activities. Absence of an organised institutional body was noted as a major drawback in addressing the plight of street traders. Most stakeholders (67.8%) believed that street trading activities are viable and lucrative in providing jobs and social safety nets to many urban households. They identified sanitation, garbage generation, obstruction, and undignified behaviour of street traders as major challenges. The study recommends intervention measures that can enhance the profitability of street trading activities. They include policies on livelihood options for low-income urban residents and dialogue between various stakeholders on sustainable management of street trading activities. The study, further, recommends need to foster working partnership between street traders, other stakeholders and the officials of local authorities as one way of sustainable management of street trading activities.