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2020

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Nankinga, Caroline; Omona, Walter; and Bukirwa, Joyce, "Information Needs of Women Market Vendors in Kasangati Town Council, Wakiso District, Uganda" (2020). *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. 4241.

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# **Information Needs of Women Market Vendors in Kasangati Town Council, Wakiso District, Uganda**

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## **Abstract**

Information needs are an awareness of the information gap that exist among a group of people and differ from one group to another. The purpose of this study was to establish the information needs of women market vendors in Kasangati Town Council, Wakiso District in Uganda by establishing the information needs of women market vendors, sources of information that are available, barriers faced when accessing information, and making recommendations on the possible measures that can be put in place to address the information needs barriers. The study used a qualitative exploratory research design. Data was collected using interviews and observation, and analysed using content analysis method. The findings revealed that the most commonly needed information by women vendors was on sources of funding, saving, land and business opportunities. On sources of information, the most used was mobile phones, followed by radios, and suppliers of products for vending which featured both as an information need and information source. The barriers that respondents faced in accessing information included language barrier; lack of airtime; unreliable information; lack of information infrastructure and communication challenges between them and the local authorities. A number of key implications for policy and practices emerged including among others recognition of women market vendors and their inclusion in urban development planning processes by government, provision of relevant training particularly on information literacy and business, and repackaging and dissemination of information in local languages through channels like radios and televisions.

**Keywords:** Information needs; Information behaviours; Women; Market vendors; Uganda

## Introduction

Information is a vital part of our survival as human beings both for development and well-being. It has become an important resource in almost every human activity, and for this reason, it has been referred to as the fourth factor of production (Ojo et al., 2015). The dictum "information is power" will for a very long time to come remain relevant in man's life, as it is believed that information changes the state of its recipient when appropriately used. Reitz (2004) defines information as data presented in a comprehensible form to which meaning has been attributed within the context of its use. In other words, specific data can be considered as information if it conveys a meaning to the person who perceives it. If information is needed to make an informed decision which will help us avert or at the most mitigate problems associated with running a business, then it is the right of the citizens to have access to it. Availability of relevant information provides the basis for improved effectiveness and efficiency in all aspects of running a business.

Though everyone needs information, (Abdulkareem, 2010 as cited in Adekanye, 2014) reiterates that information is even more important to women because of they constitute the larger portion of the adult population in the world and also because of cultural expectations and the gender roles they play especially in the lives of other categories of people such as children, men, youths and the elderly. Olorunda and Oyelude (2003) believe that because they need to maintain themselves and their families, women have "economic needs". Furthermore, Ikoja-Odongo (2002) reveals that the most crucial information needs of women in the informal sector in Uganda included information about better markets and marketing strategies for their products, sources of access to raw materials and/or suppliers at rather cheaper prices, sources for credits, business advisory information and information about training opportunities.

Information needs refers to an individual's or group's desire to locate and obtain information to satisfy a conscious or unconscious need. In other words, information needs are those needs that arise in order to cope with problems arising from different business situation (Ndenje-Sichalwe, 2004). Kebede (2002) conceptualized information needs as the uncertainty that arises in the individual, which they believe can be satisfied through information acquisition. Factors that give rise to information need include seeking answers, reducing uncertainties, bridging gaps, solving problems, understanding (making sense) and coping (Case, 2002). The different characteristics of a work environment make one type of information need and seeking different from the other. The information needs of women working in the textile market industry are different from the needs of women working in the fishing industry. Therefore, it is beneficial to study each group of information seekers one at a time and use the results to develop user-oriented information systems and services in order to serve each group better.

Women market vendors are part of what is referred to as the "informal sector". The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines the informal sector as one that consists of units engaged in the production of goods or services with the primary objective of generating employment and incomes for the persons concerned (ILO, 2003). Uganda is no exception to the rise of the informal sector. The growth of the

sector dates back to the military regime of Idi Amin in the 1970's that resulted in economic dislocation and mismanagement of the economy (Mitullah, 2003). According to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (2018), the informal sector in Uganda is predominantly run by Ugandans at 99 percent and the majority of people in the informal sector are women (World Bank, 2017). There is also evidence that the informal economy will be growing even further because of the high rate at which town markets are sprouting and expanding in the country (Kristensen and Mukasa, 2009 as cited in N'guessan, 2011).

Information has the potential for helping women market vendors make sound decisions in their businesses. Madukoma (2012) agreed with this statement by stating that, the smooth running of any business or market-oriented economy is based on availability, accessibility and use of timely, reliable, and complete information. When information is readily available in the environment, it enhances the cumulative and individual knowledge of traders, thereby making them informed and rational (Yue, 2004 as cited in Mwale-Munsanje, 2011). However, when there is a lack of vital information available, misjudgement can occur and can be very costly to the business. Richardson, Howarth and Finnegan (2004) define information access as one of the issues impacting women's ability to take advantage of market opportunities, to meet market needs and to reach the market more effectively.

The lack of understanding of the information needs of women vendors is a major barrier in the design of information systems and services to satisfy their needs. Nicholas (2000) states that when "there are no information sources or systems available or immediately at hand, then it is highly unlikely that people will be able to meet their information needs or engage in information-seeking behaviour." It is essential that women vendors acquire information seeking skills and be able to identify, search and gather their needed information on their own. Women vendors make up a large percentage of the market population in Uganda and fulfilling their information need can provide the impetus for the government to achieve its integrated economic development programme. To achieve this, there is a need to develop awareness of information needs of women vendors through the establishment of mechanisms for efficient, effective and reliable formal information delivery. This study investigates the information needs of women market vendors in Kasangati Town Council, Wakiso District, Uganda, so as to uncover the factors among women market vendors that prevent them from accessing information, they need to successfully conduct their businesses.

## **Review of Literature**

The informal sector plays a pivotal role in the economic structure of many developing countries especially in the areas of employment and income opportunities in both rural and urban areas. Chen (2002) notes that the term "informal sector" is invoked to refer to street vendors in Bogota; rickshaw pullers in Hanoi and Calcutta; garbage collectors in Cairo; home-based garment workers in Manila; and women traders in Lusaka, Zambia. The main features of informal sector economic units are: ease of entry; small scale of the activity; self-employment, with a high proportion of family workers and apprentices; little capital and equipment; labour intensive technologies; low skills; low

level of organisation with no access to organised markets, to formal credit, to education and training or services and amenities; cheap provision of goods and services or provision of goods and services otherwise unavailable; low productivity and low incomes (Charmes, 2000). In Uganda, the activities in the informal sector are classified into six broad categories as follows according to Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) (2018): agriculture, forestry and fishing; manufacturing; trade; transport and storage; hotels, restaurants and other service activities. To be able to succeed, employees in the informal sector have different information needs that must be met if they are to remain competitive and improve on their livelihoods.

Ndenje-Sichalwe (2004) studied the information needs of small-scale business women in Dar es Salaam. The findings revealed that lack of access to information on business skills, market and technology was one among several problems small scale women entrepreneurs faced when trying to develop their business. Adekanye (2014) investigated the Information needs of Textile Market Women in Southern Nigeria and the findings showed that there was a relative influence of information needs, seeking, sources and use on the socio-economic empowerment of the textile market women. Mwale-Munsanje (2011) and Banda et al. (2004) studied the information needs and information seeking behaviour of traders in Zambia, and identified the major information needs of traders in the city of Lusaka as including information relating to the sourcing of goods, suppliers, customers, pricing and trade finance. Finally, Mchombu's (2000) identified the information needs of women in small businesses in Botswana as including information on business management, technical skills, financial information, legal information, and on sources of raw materials for their businesses.

Before women can access any information, it is important for women to know their sources of information (Mumba, 2014). Information sources are tools that are used to meet the information needs of different groups of users. Bates (2006) mentioned that anything human beings interact with or observe can be a source of information for small enterprises and these may include other business owners, family members or friends. Mchombu (2000) observed that women in Botswana obtained their business information through informal channels and a large number of women operators are not aware of formal information resources and sources. Mumba (2014) investigated Information Access and Use of ICT among Zambian Women Entrepreneurs and the study revealed that the major sources of information for most women entrepreneurs are friends and relatives, social networks, on line sources, and television. Zambian women entrepreneurs also relied on women's organisations, customers and suppliers as sources of information. Ikoja-Odongo and Ocholla (2004) in a survey of entrepreneurs in the informal sector of the economy of Uganda, observed that women largely depend on their immediate surroundings as a first stop for information. These may include word of mouth, use of personal experience, and use of friends, relatives and neighbours. They noted that information is mostly gotten from within the environment where a business is located. However, Chiware and Dick (2008) note that women suffer from information poverty because most of them tend to avoid formal sources of information, but prefer what Urquhart and Yeoman (2009) refer to as "approachable" information sources.

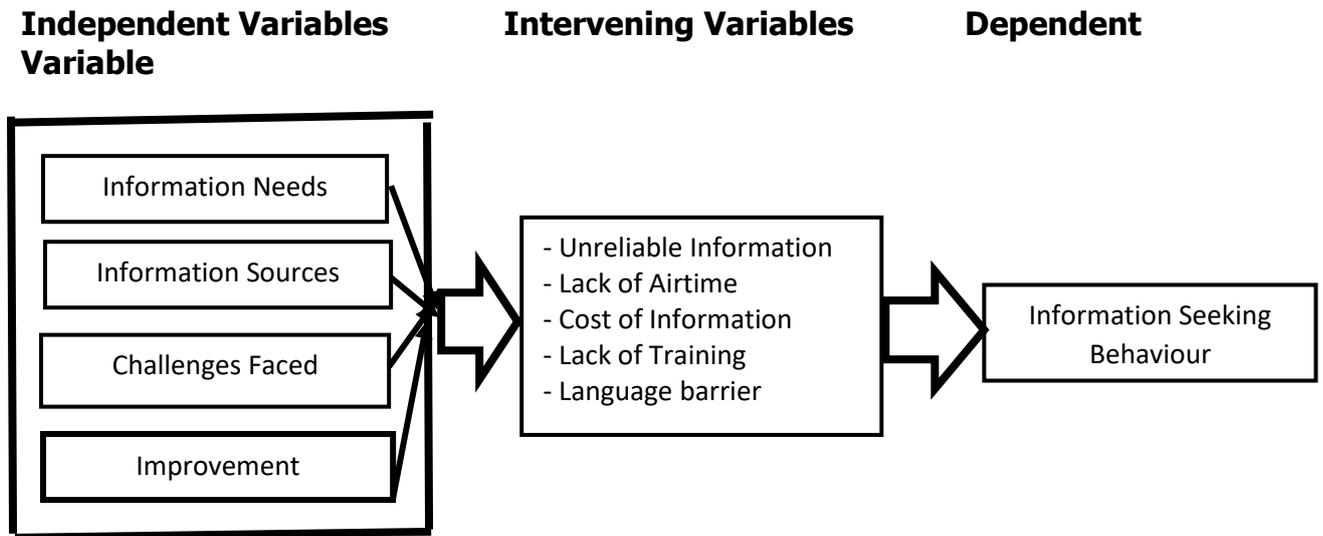
Burnett et al., (2008) explained access to information as the ability of the citizen to obtain information that is real information which is useful and practical, and capable of helping the citizen to make an informed opinion on an issue. According to Primo (2003), the lack of access to information is the third most important challenge faced by women after poverty and violence in developing countries. Most women entrepreneurs in Africa fall into the category of information poor as they lack information for their businesses, especially since most of them have no knowledge of the existence or availability of information Mchombu (2000). Mumba (2014) identified numerous barriers to information access by Zambian women as including lack of financial resources, high cost of ICTs, poor network, non-availability of current information, poor government policies and lack of information skills among women business owners. Ndenje-Sichalwe (2004) identified inability to access information on business skills, business opportunities, and markets by small-scale business women in Dar es Salaam as the other factors. Finally, Mwale-Munsanje (2011) studied the information needs and information seeking behaviour of traders in Lusaka, Zambia and identified lack of access to information on sources of goods, suppliers, customers, pricing and trade finance; unwillingness by fellow traders to share trade information; not knowing where to access information; and lack of information skills as key hindrances to their business success.

## **Theoretical Framework**

An information needs and behaviour model can be described as a framework for thinking about an information problem and may evolve into a statement of the relationships among theoretical propositions (Wilson, 1999:250). Various models exist that can be used to study information needs and information behaviours of different user groups (Dervins, 1983; Ellis, 1989; Kuhlthau, 1993). This study however uses the Wilson's General Model of Information Seeking Behaviour as a research framework to guide this study. Wilson's 1999 model is based upon two main points: firstly, information is a secondary need that arises out of a basic or primary need; and secondly, the information seeker tends to meet different barriers during the process of discovering the needed information (Wilson, 1999). The Information Behaviour model demonstrates that the information user develops a need for information, which leads to information-seeking behaviour (Wilson, 1999). The user will use various information sources or services to satisfy his/her needs but in the end he/she may either experience failure or success in terms of finding the exact and relevant information he needed (Wilson, 1999:251). If the search is unsuccessful or it becomes a failure, then the information user has to repeat the steps of the model again.

The model shows that the information user exchanges information with different people and if the search is successful and he finds the information useful, he/she will give it to others to use it or even use it. The model as illustrated in figure 1 below is thought to be appropriate for this research because the research focuses on the information needs and information-seeking behaviour of women market vendors. Therefore, the adapted model assists in producing the relevant answers for this study including the information needs of women vendors, the information sources that they use, whether the information they find satisfy or fail to satisfy their needs and what can be done to improve on these needs.

**Figure 1: Adapted Conceptual Framework**



### **Research Objectives**

The purpose of the study was to establish the information needs of women market vendors in Kasangati Town Council, Wakiso District, Uganda. Specifically, the study focused on the following research questions.

- (i) What are the information needs of women market vendors in Kasangati Town Council, Wakiso District?
- (ii) What sources of information are available to women market vendors in Kasangati Town Council, Wakiso District?
- (iii) What barriers do women market vendors in Kasangati Town Council, Wakiso District face when accessing information?

### **Methodology**

The study was conducted using a case study design following a qualitative research paradigm to ensure achievement of the study goals although a quantitative approach was used in simple statistical representations in forms of tables and percentages. Data were collected using the observation and interviews methods and instruments. The samples were purposively selected and consisted of fourteen women from two markets in Kasangati Town Council, Wakiso District, Uganda. Face to face interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide and each interview lasted for approximately thirty minutes. This method was adopted because it made it easier for the researcher to record the context of the topic, using an audio recorder. Observation, on the other hand was used because it was thought to be a realistic approach to observing women market vendors, as the researchers perceived that it would be difficult to participate fully in all aspects of market vending without disrupting the women’s usual experiences of their occupation. Issues that were of interest during observation included the level of trade (buying and selling of goods), interactions

between women market vendors and customers, and the work environment in which women market vendors operate. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for simple statistical analysis mainly in creating tables while content analysis was used to analyse qualitative data and involved interpreting the views and perceptions of respondents that were given using the open-ended questions and putting them into categories for analysis according to themes.

## Results

This section gives out the results from the study and includes profile of respondents, information needs of women market vendors, sources of information for women market vendors, barriers faced and suggestions to improve information accessibility to women market vendors.

### *Profile of Respondents*

**Table 1: Profile of Respondents**

Characteristics	Frequency	Percent
<b>Age</b>		
20-29	4	28.6
30-39	2	14.3
40-49	4	28.6
50-59	3	21.4
Over 60	1	7.1
<b>Education</b>		
No Education	2	14.3
Primary	7	50
Secondary	4	28.6
Tertiary	1	7.1
<b>Years of Operation</b>		
0-9	8	57.2
10-19	2	14.3
20-29	1	7.1
30-39	3	21.4
Over 40	0	0
<b>Business Types</b>		
Foodstuffs	9	64.3
Makeshift Restaurant	1	7.1
Traditional Items	1	7.1
Papyrus Mats	1	7.1
Pottery	1	7.1
Charcoal	1	7.1

As shown in table 1 above, the findings show that women of all ages are found in the market with the biggest age group clusters lying between the age of 22-29 years and 40-48 years at 4 (28.5%). Only 1 (7.14%) woman had tertiary education, 4 (28.6%) had secondary education, 7 (50%) had primary education and only 2 (14.2%) had never been to school. In relation to the length of time they have been involved in business, the results show that 8 respondents (57%) had been working in the market for up to ten years, 3 (21.4%) had been engaged for between 11-30 years, while 3 (21.4%) had worked for more than 30 years. When it came to business variety, the study revealed that 9(64%) of women market vendors traded in foodstuffs. It is interesting to note that women also traded in a combination of both foodstuffs and other items like pottery, firewood and papyrus mats to supplement their income. The reason for this was that foodstuffs perish easily, therefore these other items act as backup to supplement the business. Other businesses included makeshift restaurants, charcoal and African traditional with 1 (7.14%) person being involved in the trade.

Regarding the employment status of the women vendors, findings show that the number of days and hours women put in their businesses varies. Since they are all self-employed, each individual decides on their own working hours depending on their level of commitment and desire for growth. Some women were forced to work beyond reasonable hours in order to make profit. For example, one respondent had this to say about working hours:

*"I work every day of the week. Sometimes I leave at 2:00 a.m. in the morning. The process is not easy. They bring the fish when it's still fresh, then we have to roast it till late in the night, because if we don't, it goes bad."*

On knowledge about the business, the findings show that the respondents had good knowledge of the businesses prior to entry in the market. They knew the products, how to manage them, where to buy and sell and whom to sell to. Regarding the use of income that is obtained from the business, they revealed that profit from sales, although marginal, was either ploughed back into business due to lack of capital, or used for either personal or family upkeep. On why they join the business, the factors identified included being poor and the need to earn money for survival and be independent, lack of capital to start large business ventures, getting financial support from different microfinance or credit and saving groups, and joining a family business. One respondent had this to say:

*"Misery made me enter this business. I had spent three years sitting at home and I realised I wasn't gaining anything. We had even started having misunderstandings with my Husband. I said let me go start and working, come what may."*

### **Information Needs of Women Vendors**

Table 2 presents the information needs of women market vendors in Kasangati Town Council, Wakiso District, Uganda

**Table 2: Information Needs**

<b>Types of information needs</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Market and storage facilities	8	57
Sources of fund	7	50
Saving	4	29
Water and sanitation	3	21.4
Business opportunities	2	14.2
Suppliers	2	14.2
Land information	1	7.14

NB: Majority of respondents had multiple information needs for each respondent

As shown in table 1 above, the most crucial information needs of women market vendors in Kasangati Town Council, Wakiso District, Uganda, include information on market and storage facilities, sources of fund and saving at 57%, 50% and 29% respectively. This is followed by the need for information about water and sanitation at 21.4%, business opportunities, suppliers at 14.2%, and land information at 7.4%. Further probing on sources of fund showed women market vendors needed information on alternative sources of fund for their businesses different from bank loans. This is because the lack of information about the implications of bank borrowing had worked against some women who had accessed these loans due to not understanding the repayment terms, as described in the agreements. This lack of understanding of the loan conditions had led to some of them defaulting on the loans with the resultant confiscation of properties that had been put in as securities for the loan. One participant stated that:

*"I got a loan some time ago, and I regretted it. I failed to pay back the money so I had to sell my piece of land and pay it back. Up to now, I haven't been able to recover my land. That is why I do not want to hear anything about loans."*

The need for information on business opportunities and commodity suppliers was highlighted as critical because these women were all running similar businesses and competing for the same suppliers. This meant that they were competing not only for customers, but also for suppliers as well. The fact that almost all of them sold foodstuffs, made the business environment very competitive, which makes the need for information on alternative businesses so critical. Respondents also pointed out that they conduct business in difficult situations without start-up or with very limited capital. For instance, they often started their businesses with a very low capital base which ranged from Uganda shillings 10,000 to 400,000 (\$3 to \$110), and this did not enable them to grow their businesses fast.

### ***Information Sources for Women Market Vendors***

Every type of business needs information in order to be successful, and that information can come from a variety of sources depending on the nature of business being pursued. Having an understanding of the various sources of information and how to access them can be very helpful for business operators including women entrepreneurs (Mumba, 2014). Table 3 presents the information sources for women market vendors in Kasangati Town Council, Wakiso District, Uganda

**Table 3: Information Sources**

How information was sought	Frequency	Percent
Mobile Phones and Suppliers	(6)	(43%)
Friends	(4)	(21.4%)
Radio and Television	(2)	(14.2%)
Experience	(1)	(7.14%)
Market Leaders	(1)	(7.14%)

NB: Suppliers featured both as information need and information source

As shown in table 3, it can be seen that the majority of women market vendors in Kasangati Town Council, Wakiso District, Uganda, use mobile phones and suppliers as their main sources of information at 43%. 4 (21.4%) said they used friends as sources of information, 2 (14.2%) used radios and televisions, and, 1 (7.14%) vendor each used experience and local market leaders as information source for business. Mobile phones were pointed here very helpful as they saved travelling time, are suitable for buying goods from suppliers, and useful in finding out the prices of these goods from different markets. Respondents also highlighted the use of a combination of both formal and informal sources to access information which may include listening to the radio or talking to a work colleague about a need. Therefore, both formal and informal information sources were identified as crucial in fulfilling the information needs of women market vendors. One respondent cited thus:

*"I always listen to Prime Radio. I love listening to Mr Ssewanyana. I don't know if you know him. He has changed my life. I listen to him every Sunday on a programme called Akezimbira. He talks about saving and how to stop renting, and that buying a piece of land doesn't mean you should have 100 million shillings, you can save slowly and get there."*

### **Barriers to Information Access for Women Vendors**

Recognition of information needs is the first step in information seeking. Information needs are, however, often not recognized by key stakeholder as highlighted in this study. This might be the reason for the ongoing concerns and frustrations expressed by women market vendors interviewed in this study. Hearing their experiences in their own words (voices) especially conveyed the seriousness of this situation. When asked

whether they faced any barriers in their quest for information, women market vendors mentioned a number of barriers that limit them from accessing information:

- (i) **Lack of airtime:** The vendors highlighted the inability to buy airtime for their mobile phones ever since the use of airtime scratch cards was banned by Government as a great barrier, preventing them from communicating with their clients. The banning of airtime scratch cards affected how they can access airtime to load on their phone, as they must now move long distances in order to be able to buy airtime from vendors or mobile money agents. One participant had this to say:

*"The challenge I get when trying to use my phone nowadays is, airtime. Because previously we used to have those airtime scratch cards, it used to help us a lot. But as I speak now, you first need to find a mobile money agent if you want to load airtime. Sometimes they don't have easy load which means I can't reach my suppliers."*

- (ii) **Communication challenge:** Respondents pointed out the limited communication between the market women and the local market authorities as exemplified by the irregular communication of decisions made in meetings between Town Council officials, Tenderer/Market Chairman, and other key stakeholders. Generally, the lack of communication when making important decisions at institutional level imply that the vendors have to rely on rumours which cannot be depended upon.

- (iii) **Lack of accurate information:** Findings revealed that the information available to market women was not enough and it was often incorrect. Some women, for example, reported that sometimes, suppliers gave them incorrect information about the prices of goods only to get to the market and there were different prices altogether. Women rely on information to determine prices and identify sources of supply and goods. Therefore, when information is inaccurate, it can ruin business for them. This is what one respondent had to say:

*"The problem I have is sometimes my suppliers are not reliable. For example, they tell you how much each herb costs over the phone, only to go there the next day and they have changed their minds. You go with a lot of money expecting to buy something, only to get it in low quantities because the price has changed."*

- (iv) **Lack of inclusion in decision making:** Findings showed that no one from management, policy level and government ever bothered to ask women vendors about their needs, which made it difficult for them to have their information needs met. For example, there was a lack of consultation during the process of relocation of vendors from the areas lying in the road reserve to a new location and yet the road reserve was where the women vendors

were operating. Some vendors revealed that they had never met the Town Clerk not even once, and yet they had a lot to grievances to communicate to her, which left them frustrated.

- (v) **Language barrier:** Language barrier was reported as another barrier to information access by women market vendors as majority of information sources are in English language only. In addition, the majority of their customers can only communicate in English and do not speak the local language. The fact that English is the official language of communication in Uganda did not help the situation as most information sources are only available in English. This not only limited their ability to develop their marketing skills, but also their exposure and sales.
- (vi) **Lack of business trainings:** Respondents also pointed out the lack of information sources that they could use to develop their business skills and that they had never been given any formal business training prior to joining the business. A lack of information sources and formal business training meant lack of capabilities amongst them to manage and plan their businesses efficiently. This limits their entry into the business world and affects the effective running of their businesses. For women to enter competitive ventures or even improve on the existing ones, access to the necessary information sources and training is essential.

## **Discussions**

Information is the key to any business. Without information, market women would not be able to make sound decisions thereby negatively affecting their businesses. Market women rely on information to determine prices and identify sources of supply and goods. Therefore, accurate and pertinent information becomes an essential tool to the success of their businesses. A look at the business profile of the women market vendors studied in Kasangati Town Council, Wakiso District, Uganda, show that the age ranges of the respondents are between 20 to 60 years which could be explained by the fact that most of these women are already mothers trying to look for ways to fend for their family. Bessie and Ekechi (1995) assert that although in most societies' women are responsible for caring for their husbands and raising their children, it does not hinder them from creating opportunities that will generate income for themselves and bring about economic development. This is because women are seen as vital forces in economic development. On the finding that the majority of the respondents are from secondary school level and below, this could be explained by the fact that majority of school drop outs end up in employments in the informal sector as the only gainful means to survive. According to Nakanyike Musisi (1995), lacking sufficient education to be gainfully employed makes women become the backbone of the informal market economy such as market vending. When women have no access to land in their own right, they will most likely turn into informal sector workers (Ikoja-Odongo, 2002).

Market information is an integral part of trade promotion (Musana and Huttemann, 1988). Accurate and pertinent information becomes an essential tool to the success of any business. It is therefore imperative that information needs of women market vendors are met so as to ensure gainful employment and the smooth running of their

businesses. Without information, women market vendors would not be able to make sound decisions thereby negatively affecting their businesses. As shown in the findings of this study, women market vendors rely on information to determine prices of their products; identify sources of supply and goods; determine what goods to deal in; identify business opportunities; markets for their products; determine where to store their products; and where to save their money. All these information needs confirm what Chiware and Dick (2008) found in their study where they identified information needs of traders as including information to: establish the appropriate sources of goods, sources of finances or credit facilities, marketing opportunities, and where to save their money.

Every type of business needs information in order to be successful, and that information can come from a variety of sources depending on the nature of business being pursued. Having an understanding of the various sources of information and how to access them can be very helpful for business operators including women entrepreneurs (Mumba, 2014). This study confirms the different sources of information that are required by women market vendors to fulfil their information needs. Morris and Saul (2000) notes that most traders usually have no official information about the market thus have to rely on friends and fellow competitors' market information which in most cases is unreliable or faulty. Chiware and Dick (2008) agree that women suffer from information poverty because most of them tend to avoid formal sources of information, but prefer what Urquhart and Yeoman (2009) refer to as "approachable" information sources or the informal sources like listening to words of mouth.

The amount of money required to start a business as reflected in the findings of this study reflect what Rahman et al. (2007) noted in their study showing that women running small business enterprises face a wide range of problems, and among these are lack of capital and starting their businesses with little capital. ILO (2003) reveal that women face a number of challenges as they attempt to start and grow their own enterprises. They have difficulty accessing financing due to collateral constraints; they have unequal access to land and property titles through matrimonial and inheritance laws; they are stifled by laws requiring them to have permission from their husbands to borrow money; they are subject to patriarchal controls within their families, thus limiting their mobility and economic independence, and they lack information regarding business opportunities. Fonutchi (2012) further points out that a business person has to be literate enough to understand the business language and to be able to negotiate important deals. These challenges however, are made worse in a country like Uganda where English is the official language of communication. Ndenje-Sichalwe's (2004) notes that women in Tanzania did not understand English language used in some books and newspapers and identified language barrier as a challenge to the use of information to improve on their marketing skills.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

For any business to be carried out effectively, it must have access to reliable and relevant information because it is information that empowers women traders to make sound decisions that will build and expand their businesses. This study was conducted

to establish the various information needs of women market vendors, the information sources they used, and the problems they encountered when seeking information. The study not only identified the information needs, sources of information, challenges faced when seeking information but also made recommendations on how they could overcome the challenges faced in seeking information to address their needs. The most commonly needed information was identified as being information about market and storage facilities, sources of fund, where to save, land, suppliers of commodities, water and sanitation facilities, and business opportunities. The study also identified the attempts by women to inform each other was through formal and informal channels such as the use of mobile phones, use of suppliers, getting information from friends, use of radios and televisions, use of experience and sometimes market leaders. Finally, the women market vendors identified a number of barriers in accessing information. These included lack of time, business training, and airtime; difficulties in communicating with their local authorities, unreliable information sources; lack of marketing infrastructure, and inability to access utilities like water and sanitation facilities.

This study has shown that women market vendors face numerous challenges in fulfilling their information needs including having difficulty in understanding market information resources that are produced in English. In most cases, they are not in a position to be heard in terms of suggestions they can make in relation to information they need to improve their life. To address this, therefore, policymakers should endeavour to develop market information materials that are tailored to the needs and education level of grass root workers like women vendors. The information should be practical, context specific and in simple, local and easy to understand language that supports marketing needs in general and women market vendors needs in particular. As one way to address these challenges, this study recommends carrying out further study on the production and dissemination of information that addresses women needs and their active participation in the identification and definition of information of the different activities that take place in the informal sector because women have unique information needs that need to be identified and integrated in decision making processes at all levels.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

- (i) Information literacy and business training:** Women market vendors should be provided with relevant training particularly on information literacy and business skill development. There exists informal education in Uganda that aims at serving uneducated or partially educated persons. Under this informal system, a range of practical/hands-on skills can be imparted using programs such as Functional Adult Literacy (FAL) programme in Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development and Adult Basic Education.
- (ii) Trade fairs and agricultural shows:** Women market vendors should participate more in Trade Fairs and Agricultural Shows as these will expose them to a lot of information that will in turn help them manage their businesses much more effectively. The market vendors will be able have information on various sources of goods that they would want to trade in.

- (iii) **Information repackaging:** Information providers should repackage and disseminate information in local languages through channels like local radios, televisions, newspapers, newsletters, magazines, pamphlets, flyers, posters and other audio-video materials (such as CDs or tapes) that are accessible and understandable to the society in general and women market vendors in particular.
- (iv) **Cooperation:** Government should team up with telecommunication companies to enable them distribute airtime across the country, even in hard to reach areas. The option of bringing back airtime scratch cards to supplement the "easy load" airtime should also be considered for the under-privileged. This will improve communication among women market vendors and the different stakeholders.
- (v) **Recognition:** The local authorities should recognize the economic contributions made by women market vendors and use that as a basis to include them in urban development planning processes. This would serve as an eye opener on women vendors information needs so that government and other related agencies are able to put in place the necessary facilities and structures needed in meeting the women market vendors' needs.
- (vi) **Empowerment of market management:** Market managers who are in charge of monitoring the day-to-day running of the markets must be empowered with all the information they need so that they could be in a position to help the women market vendors. This will be of great importance as they are the ones on the ground and are always in touch with the women market vendors.

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