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Quality Standards and Export Performance of Tanzania Food-Based Small and Medium Sized Enterprises: Conceptual Model Development

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Abstract

This paper seeks to determine a conceptual framework that could guide the examination of the influence of quality standards on export performance in Tanzania's SMEs based on food industry. It is built on the premise that investment in the manufacturing and management of food products and its ensued processes that meet international standards have core contributions towards enhanced SMEs' competitiveness in international markets. The paper specifically proposes a model to examine the influence of three constructs—food product quality, food quality management, and compliance costs—on export performance of SMEs. Through extensive review of empirical studies conducted in various parts of the globe and Tanzania, the paper provides guiding framework to determine the influence of various attributes within the three main constructs on export performance of SMEs. This is preceded by a theoretical perspective that stipulates the legal context on Tanzania food standards, particularly through the Fair Competition Act, No. 8 of 2003, and the Standards Act, No. 2 of 2009. Moreover, the study applies the enlightening theories of resource-based view (RBV), core competency theory, and quality attributes in the context of food-related SMEs competitiveness. Lastly, the paper recommends a conceptual framework to guide future researches in the area of quality standards and export performance of SMEs in the food industry in Tanzania.

Keywords: *quality standards, international standards, export performance*

Background and Paper Context

Introduction

Governments throughout the world have acknowledged the impact of small and medium entrepreneurs (SMEs) in the improvement of peoples' standards of living, overall economy, and job creation in an environment where formal and full wage employment is scarce or unavailable (Hove & Tarisai, 2013; M'Nduyo et al., 2013; Edmiston, 2007). According to the OECD (2004), small entrepreneurs contribute over 55% of GDP, and over 65% of total employment in high-income countries. They also account for over 60% of GDP and over 70% of total employment in low-income countries where the development of SMEs is treated as a basic national priority for almost all countries. It is for these reasons that economies and societies are increasingly becoming characterized by small businesses entrepreneurs who are globally vital to local and national economic growth and development (Singh et al., 2010; OECD, 2019).

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Dalberg (2011) opines that the SME sector is the backbone of economies in high-income countries; however, it is less developed in developing countries despite being vital for economic growth, innovation, and prosperity. Estimates show that above 95% of businesses around the world are SMEs; and account for nearly 60% of jobs in the private sector, significantly contribute to innovation, provide support to regional development and social cohesion, and make critical contributions to GDP (SEAF, 2007; Ayyagari et al., 2011). In Tanzania, it is increasingly being recognized that SMEs play a crucial role in employment creation and income generation (CTI, 2013; Mbura, 2013; Mbura & Bambaganya, 2014). Tanzania's Development Vision (TDV) 2025 highlights the SME sector as one important contributor to the country's long-term development objectives. It is estimated that 95% of the businesses in Tanzania are SMEs, and contributes about 35% to the country's GDP (Tanzania Invest, 2016). Across countries, the highest job creation rates were seen in leisure-based activities (art, entertainment, and recreation); professional, scientific, and technical activities; and real estate and *food* and accommodation (OECD, 2018).

Nevertheless, constraints in terms of the lack of appropriate skills and expertise often prevents SMEs from acting upon win-win opportunities, and resource constraints often lead to SMEs to be more risk-averse and less willing to invest in new technologies than larger firms (EaP Green, 2016), which may hinders their engagement in international arena. This paper argues that in the new competitive context of liberalized, globalized food markets, standards should be seen as a major issue by SMEs managers, just as government policy makers perceive them. The importance of formulating private standards for the competitiveness of food-based firms downstream in the chain—such as in retail and processing—is paralleled with the importance of meeting new private standards for the survival of suppliers upstream in the chains.

SMEs in food industry represent a significant economic potential for Tanzania in jobs, income, increased tax revenue, and higher export earnings (http://www.competition.or.tz/). Food processing is also a critical component to stimulate the development of Tanzania's agriculture through continued value-creation (TPSF 2010). To increase the competitiveness of food SMEs, the country is seeking to expand and diversify its food and agricultural exports. Here, success greatly depends on whether appropriate international standards are adequately met in serving export markets. Standards offer many significant benefits for individual businesses and industries. It also provides SMEs with a vital competitive edge. One of the most important functions of a government is to create an enabling environment in which private enterprises, including those engaged in the food sector, operate (Mbega, 2011).

Tanzania Policy Context for Food SMEs Export Engagement

The country needs to enhance competitiveness of food product market through local SMEs performance to overcome more stringent regulations and standards in relation to food safety (Mtui, 2006). This is even more important when wishing to record expansion through export market.

In recent years, Tanzania has put in place clear policies and laws to foster a competitive environment for business enterprises, thereby increasing efficiency in the economy to the ultimate benefit of both consumers and producers (CTI, 2013).The National Trade Policy (URT, 2003) emphasises the need to improve the investment environment of the private sector as a strategy for promoting trade. The overall strategy includes a reform of institutional structures and a change in cultural norms and practices in economic activities to set in motion the process of reorienting the economy towards an open market system targeting export-orientation.

The Agricultural Sector Development Strategy (ASDS) aims to create an enabling and conducive environment to improve the profitability of the agriculture sector so that farm incomes are improved and rural poverty alleviated (www.kilimo. go.tz/publications/english docs/ASDP).The Sustainable Industrial Development Policy (SIDP 1996-2020) provides an overall framework for Tanzanian's future industrial development and lists specific national objectives, including making the industrial sector contribute more broadly and evenly to the creation of employment opportunities (Economic Survey, 2009). The TPSF (2010), through the Cluster Competitiveness Programme (CCP), developed a strategic action plan to support Tanzania's food processing industry at the national and cluster levels. The CCP strategic initiatives entails strategizing to making it easier for Tanzanian food processors to compete through improved regulatory environment and promote competitiveness across the industry; enabling food processing entrepreneurs to grow through developing solutions for small and medium processors to access hygienic, and scalable production premises; assisting food processors in developing markets in Tanzania and the EAC region through creating market channels and strengthening distribution networks; developing access to quality, affordable packaging material through expanding access to affordably and acceptably recognized forms of packaging; supporting institutions for training to expand linkages to industry clusters by enabling them to become centres of excellence in food processing.

Studies indicate that the manufacturing sector—food processing inclusive—is still highly regulated. A situational analysis by CTI (2011) posits that one of the manufacturing operations that are exceedingly regulated is food processing. Will and Guenther (2007) indicate that food standards are generally classified according to the type of standards (private or public), the sphere of standards (product or process standards) and their geographic focus (national or international). The main reason is to safeguard the interests of public consumers and ensure that manufacturers operate in accordance with health and safety standards. These same reasons can also contribute to competitiveness of SMEs in the international market.

Several policies in Tanzania highlight the rationale for regulating food processing, and promoting product quality and safety standards. Nevertheless, worldwide, we see progress in the development of private food standards to assure quality and safety in a competitive market. According to Reardon and Farina (2002), private standards attempt to complement missing public standards, and to differentiate products and

build reputation for both quality and safety. Faße, Oelze & Grote (2015) opine that Private standards—mostly product and to some extent process standards—are mainly focused on the domestic market. Particularly for the vegetable sector, supermarkets are found to be the major driver of private standards. They have especially adopted the standards originating from international markets. These private product standards mostly refer to quality attributes of products and agriculture commodities.

Private food standards are playing an increasingly important role in determining market access in international trade. Food standards are defined as rules of measurement established by regulation or authority (Reardon et al., 2001); and are enforced by governments, food companies, and retailers. The ISO Guide (2004:2) defines a standard as a… "document, established by consensus and approved by a recognized body that provides, for common and repeated use, rules, guidelines or characteristics for activities or their results, aimed at the achievement of the optimum degree of order in a given context." Caswell, (2003) identifies three different kinds of standards to include process, product, or information. Most regulations use a combination of the three to regulate food processing and marketing. The standards vary widely according to the nature of the entities developing and adopting them: they commonly address food safety, food quality or social and environmental issues along the production to scale-up marketing (Henson & Blandon, 2009). While official 'food safety' standards must respect rules laid down within the Sanitary and Phytosanitary Standards (SPS) agreement, private food safety standards are not presently bound to this requirement.

In the view of Reardon and Farina (2002), food standards infer a collection of technical specifications terms, definitions, and principles of classification and labelling. They include rules of measurement established by regulation or authority (standards), and a system of classifications based on quantifiable attributes (grades). These standards may be articulated in terms of quality (e.g., appearance, cleanliness, taste, etc.); safety (e.g., pesticide or artificial hormone residue); authenticity (e.g., guarantee of geographical origin or use of a traditional process); and the 'goodness' of the production process (e.g., with respect to workers' health and safety, or to environmental contamination). According to UNCTAD (2005), standards may constitute an ever-growing obstacle to exports from developing countries as the number and scope of the requirements increase.

Harmonization of Standards

According to the World Bank (2012) and Larsen et al. (2009), harmonization of standards requires including the WTO SPS Agreement; and other trade facilitation instruments can easily be negotiated by developing countries to create immediate benefits. This review of different policy instruments cites two recent experiences with standards harmonization, including the EAC's move to adopt mandatory standards for food staples; and the voluntary standards system being set up by the SADC countries. The effort by EAC to harmonize food standards for all member countries

will enable industries to reduce transaction costs by reducing duplicative functions of conformity assessment; and quality assurance that includes testing and certification when the exporting company or SME seeks to export from one country to another.

According to UNCTAD (2004), one approach to improve the SMEs trade environment for food staples that has gained considerable momentum and widespread support over years has been to harmonize quality standards in East Africa with international ones. Various policy papers on commodity trade in Africa have pointed to the lack of consistency in quality requirements as a non-tariff barrier, and called for the harmonization of standards as a prerequisite for improved trade (Nyoro, 2007). In particular, the effectiveness of quality standards and performance of local food SMEs ought to be supported by researches. It is from this background that this paper proposes a model to examine the effectiveness of quality standards on export performance for local food SMEs.

In Tanzania, micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) engage in non-farm economic activities; mainly in manufacturing, mining, commerce, and services. Micro enterprises tend to employ between 1 to 4 people, in most cases family members. Their capital may not exceed TZS5m. Most micro-enterprises fall under the informal sector. Small enterprises are mostly formalised undertakings engaging between 5 and 49 employees, or with capital investment of TZS5m to TZS200m. Medium enterprises employ between 50 and 99 people, or have capital investment of TZS200m to TZS800m (SME,2002).

Context of the Problem

Quality standards food inclusive provides a powerful incentive for the modernization of export supply chains, and have spill-over effects on the rest of the economy by raising domestic standards through the adoption of good agricultural and manufacturing practices, thereby benefiting consumers and the environment (Jaffee & Henson, 2004). Furthermore, they allow exporters in developing countries to enhance their international engagement and competitiveness, and enable them penetrate high-value food markets, thus increasing their market share (Luciana, 2005; Faße, Oelze & Grote, 2015). According to the CTI (2013), regulations governing the food processing sector are amenable and ensure public safety, protect the environment, correct market failures, and promote fairness. Standards that have been subjected to international agreements lead to increases in trade and exports by providing export opportunities, which help businesses to grow, and also avail consumers with a wider range of probably cheaper products and services (Büthe & Walter, 2011).

The increasing complexity of the standard environment has made compliance a difficult task for many developing countries, especially for SMEs that depend on lucrative markets from industrialized countries (Janaka & Suwendrani, 2011). According to the UNCTAD (2005), quality standards may constitute an ever-growing obstacle to exports from developing countries as the number and scope of the requirements increase. UNIDO (2010) argues that conformity assessment,

accreditation, metrology, and standards—all of which are components of a quality infrastructure—play a part in the integrated technical mix that is necessary for a country to be able to trade successfully. Various policy papers on commodity trade in Africa have pointed to the lack of consistency in quality requirements as a non-tariff barrier, and called for the harmonization of standards as a prerequisite for improved trade (Nyoro, 2007).

According to the UNCTAD (2004), Tanzania has been encountering problems in food safety and agricultural health standards. To address this problem, the country, like many other African countries, has taken various measures to establish policies and regulations that comply with international qualities and standards (URT, 2010). For example, in 1978 the country enacted the Food Control of Quality Act No. 10, and established the National Food Control Commission (NFCC) to oversee food control activities. Numerous specific regulations were subsequently enacted to deal with specific dimensions of food safety. The NFCC's primary function was to coordinate and audit food inspection activities. Most of the latter was carried out by local government authorities, essentially by health and meat inspectors (URT, 2007).

Furthermore, the government established institutional infrastructures such as the Tanzania Bureau of Standards (TBS) and the defunct Tanzania Food and Drug Authority (TFDA—whose roles have shifted to Tanzania Bureau of Standards) to provide guidance and training to local Tanzania SMEs/firms; and assist them in accessing foreign markets (Mtui, 2006). On its part, the TBS has made various efforts to promote quality standards (URT, 2010). This has included conducting several trainings to local Tanzania SMEs on issues of product quality management and standards. Nevertheless, a significant number of local SMEs, consumers, retailers, and institutions still ignorantly sell or purchase products without the certification of the TBS. This has sometimes been associated with the lack of financial acumen to cater for the costs of compliance.

Mbega (2011) argues that the ignorance of standards and regulations by domestic consumers can have adverse impact on their health, and also strongly hinder international market access to SMEs. It is in this context that the government contends that Tanzania SMEs are not well-positioned in the exportation of food products (URT, 2010). Faße, Oelze & Grote (2015) argue that although Tanzania is integrated in the international market, and hence must comply with related standards in trading, only little information is available on the role and implementation of food and safety standards related to the domestic market. Nevertheless, a study by Henson and Humphrey (2009) indicates that the cost of maintaining the integrity of food quality standard is perceived to be considerably higher by small producers. Mtui (2006) further contends that the cost of harmonization can, at times, be unbearably costly for SMEs to penetrate the international market.

This paper, therefore, proposes a model that examines the influence of food product quality, quality management, and compliance costs on export performance of Tanzania local SMEs in the food sector.

Legal and Theoretical Context

This section provides the theoretical perspectives related to the subject of the paper. It begins with a discussion of the legal contexts of Tanzania's food standards, and then proceeds to theories related to the internationalization of food standards.

Legal Context on Tanzania Food Standards

The Standards Act, No.2 of 2009

The concept of liberalization has generally been misconceived, leading to some business entities supplying sub-standards goods, including food products. As mentioned earlier, the government established the TBS to counter this by certifying that commodities, including those traded by SMEs, meet acceptable standards. The TBS Act of 2009 was primarily established to undertake several functions. These include undertaking measures for quality control of commodities, services, and environment of all descriptions, promoting standardization in industry and trade; assisting in the preparation and framing of standard; cooperating with representatives of industry or persons with a view to securing the adoption and practical application of standards.

Moreover, TBS is mandated to approve, register, and control the use of standard marks in accordance with the provisions of the Act; undertake measures to control the quality of commodities, services and the environment of all descriptions; as well as to promote standardisation in industry and trade. It also deals with the inspection, sampling, and testing of locally manufactured and imported commodities to determine compliance to standards. (http://www.tbs.go.tz/ index. php/regulations). The TBS sets standards and acts as a member of the ISO, which provides international standards. It certifies imports and new local company products introduced into the market for a fee (CTI, 2013). The Act also confers powers to the Bureau to issue licences for standard marks (Mbega, 2011). By March 2015, the TBS had certified about 200 SMEs. However, thousands of SMEs were still supplying markets with untested products (Katyega, 2016)

The Fair Competition Act, No. 8 of 2003

The Fair Competition Act, No. 8 of 2003 promotes and protects effective competition in trade and commerce, and protects consumers from unfair and misleading market conducts. It further regulates restrictive trade practices such as anti-competitive agreements, the misuse of market power, mergers and acquisitions (Economic Survey, 2009). The law also protects consumers from deceptive and unconscionable conduct, conditions implied in consumer contracts, manufacturers' obligations, product safety and product information, among others. The Act also established the Fair Competition Commission with the power to study government policies, procedures and programmes, legislation and proposals for legislation so as to assess their effects on

competition and consumer welfare, and to publicise the results of such studies (http://www.competition.or.tz/). Section 49(I) of the Act provides for restrictions on the supply of unsafe goods. The provision prohibits the supply of goods that are intended to be used by a consumer if the goods are of a kind that do not comply with the certified standards.

It is clear from the foregoing that the legal framework is in place to handle issues of food standards in Tanzania. The key questions are: (i) How adequate are these legal perspectives adopted by SMEs; and (ii) To what extent do they contribute to export performance of food-based SMEs? These are the issues that this paper attempts to trigger by developing a conceptual framework to guide a study on the same.

Theoretical Context

Resource-Based View (RBV)

Theoretically, the resource-based view (RBV) addresses the fundamental question of why firms are different, and how firms achieve and sustain competitive advantage by deploying their strategic resources.The theory is based on the social exchange theory that sees organizations as open systems that depend on inputs and output resources to fulfill their goals (Buvik, 2001). According to the RBV, the principal determinants of a firm's internationalization strategy are its internal organization strategic resources (Barney et al., 2001). A strategic resource is an asset that is *valuable*, *rare*, *difficult to imitate*, and *non-substitutable* (ibid.).

In contrast, the industrial organization theory argues that it is external factors that determine a firm's strategy, which in turn determines its economic performance (Scherer & Ross, 1990). The resource-based perspective has an intra-organizational focus, and argues that performance is a result of firm-specific resources and capabilities (Wernerfelt, 1984). The basis of the RBV is that successful firms will find their future competitiveness on the development of distinctive and unique capabilities, which may often be implicit or intangible in nature (Teece, et al., 1991). Thus, the essence of strategy is defined by a firm's unique resources and capabilities. For Barney (1991), if all firms were equal in terms of resources, there would be no profitability differences among them because any strategy could be implemented by any firm in the same industry. Thus, the underlying logic of the RBV is that the sustainability of a competitive edge rests primarily on the cost of resources and capabilities utilized for implementing strategies pursued. This paper employs this theory as it signals the importance of developing competitive advantages through the conduit of accessibility of resources amongst food-based SMEs firms for enhanced export performance.

Core Competency Theory

Meeting food quality standards will likely depend on the core competency held by a firm. The core competency theory is a concept in management theory introduced by Prahalad and Gary Hamel (1994). It is defined as a harmonized combination of multiple resources and skills that distinguish a firm in the marketplace. A core

competency is a deep proficiency that enables a company to deliver unique value to customers, which are derived from distinctive competencies that are difficult to be replicated by rivals. It embodies an organization's collective learning, particularly of how to coordinate diverse production skills and integrate multiple technologies. The core competency theory prescribes actions to be taken by firms to achieve competitive advantage in the marketplace; and advocates that firms must play into their strengths those areas or functions in which they have competencies.

The theory defines what forms of core competency are important: these are competencies that are not easy for competitors to imitate; and ones that must add value to end-users. Companies must orient their strategies to tap into core competencies that are fundamental to values added. As mentioned earlier, Prahalad and Hamel (1994) pioneered the concept and laid the foundation for companies to follow in practice. According to them, some core competencies that firms might have include technical superiority, customer relationship management, and processes that are vastly efficient (ibid.). Each firm has a specific area in which it excels relative to its competitors. The implications for real world practice are that core competencies must be nurtured and business models be built around them, instead of focusing too much on areas where a firm does not have competency. This is not to say that other competencies must be neglected or ignored. Rather, firms must leverage upon their core strengths and use them to their advantage. For food-based SMEs, the development of unique capabilities requires developed core competency in areas of food quality and management, as well as management of compliance costs as they may affect export performance.

Approaches to Product Quality Standards

According to Morgan (1985), Kotler and Amstrong (2018), Baines et al. (2019), and Jobber AND Fiona (2019), it is important to view quality from the point of view of consumers as they are the ones who decide what to buy. This necessity is underlined by the 'quality perception gap' that normally exists between manufacturers and consumers. Trijp and Steenkamp (1996) proposed the possibility of bridging this 'quality perception gap' by a quality guidance approach, which relates perceived quality judgements to physical product characteristics. The approach consists of three steps: (i) identification of quality judgments; (ii) disentanglement of quality judgments into perceptions on intrinsic quality cues and quality attributes; and (iii) translation of consumer perceptions into physical product characteristics. The goal of quality guidance is the formulation of technical product specifications that are related to consumer's quality perception. According to Garvin (1984), researchers in the 'perceived quality' approach use the term *perceived quality* instead of just *quality* to underline the fact that it is consumers' perceptions, needs, and goals that play important roles in quality judgements.

Empirical Studies

Several studies with mixed results have been conducted both worldwide and in Tanzania on food quality. Some concentrate on food quality management, food product quality standards, and envisaged cost of compliance in the food sector as depicted in the proposed conceptual framework in Fig.1.

Food Quality Management

In a study on food safety controls in the UK meat industry, Mohamud (2010) found that co-regulatory approaches can be cost-effective when regulators are capable of devising incentive mechanisms that encourages compliance. The issue of governance is also important for compliance. Gereffi (1994) study findings in Brazilian beef industry describe the kinds of governance that stimulate upgrading and transferring best practices, and consequently full compliance with mandatory standards. In all the six cases studied, buyers (wholesalers/retailers) oversaw these issues. Regarding food standards, export companies complied with basic forms, which are based on public standards set out by the Brazilian government. Nevertheless, compliance was not very smooth in all cases.

Related to this paper, is a study by Jaffee and Henson (2004), and Henson and Jaffee (2008), who reframed their research question to consider whether higher standards might serve as catalysts for improved management, higher value-added, and greater efficiency in production and marketing. The imposition of standards for quality food commodities, such as uniform size of products and the requirement for regularity of supply, are among other requirements at the producer level. Improved food safety is taken to be implicit in improved quality. In other words, these studies do not directly test hypotheses regarding compliance with food standards, the competitiveness of firms, and the awareness flow from the farm to the market.

In a study on compliance with food quality standards on primary producer level in the Moroccan tomato sector, Walgenbach and Beck (2003) found out that small producers were not disadvantaged in the compliance process, and that less-organized or less-integrated farmers tend to be disfavoured since forward integration—especially in the form of being a member in a cooperative—changes the cost of compliance. Moreover, forward integration tends to be of particular importance not only because of decreasing cost of compliance, but because of a direct access to information on buyers' requirements. Another study by the CTI (2013) indicates that most enterprises generally recognise the importance of the regulations governing the food processing sector. Most of the enterprises surveyed indicated statistically that the regulations have a significant impact on the performance and competitiveness of their enterprises. The main impediments on their competitiveness were the multiplicity of licensing and inspections fees, delays and bureaucracy, multiple testing of products, cost of administration, lost sales, reporting requirements, and increased prices. Nevertheless, the survey could not identify the commonly used standards among local food SMEs.

In some instances, compliance is basically a statutory obligation: a necessary requirement embedded in existing legal structures. In a study on registered food processing industry in Tanzania and Uganda, the CTA (2000) found that most of the enterprises produced traditional, well-known products using locally established technologies. On the other side, enterprises such as flour, oil mills and bakeries were well-established within the agro-food chain with compliance to the TBS and

TFDA requirements. A study by Jaffee et al. (2005) discussed the pressure of the fish processing and exports from Tanzania, and how successful the country had responded to the challenges posed by the EU ban to be able to expand its fish and fishery product exports in the EU. The study cited few areas where Tanzanian producers and exporters are beginning to adopt and benefit from higher international food safety and quality standards. Remarkably, the study indicates that the success had been due to monitoring food product quality and safety of food commodities through numerous commodity boards (for dairy, sugar, and cashew nuts) and institutions established by the government, public authorities dealing with animal health and the safety of animal products, and the TBS.

Overtime, the need for compliance has taken new structural shape. URT (2011) highlights processing of food as an important link in the value chain of the food sector in Tanzania. From the early 1990s, the government launched a deliberate programme to restructure and privatise public-owned enterprises to withdraw state control from the food processing sector. Since then, there has been a switch to adopt standardized operations in the food sector in the country. This has been witnessed by several firms run by local investors—such as Bakhresa's Group of Companies, Azania Wheat Processors, and the Ilovo in the sugar processing industry (Enterprise Map, 2008)—improving their competitiveness through compliance. Compared to SMEs, however, these are as large-scale enterprises in the food sector, and local SMEs do not have the required resources to compete with them.

Cost of Compliance

The cost of compliance has at times been perceived as a barrier to effective compliance and the development of product quality. A study by Unnevehr and Ronchi (2014) emphasizes on the application of standards by small firms for economies of scale. However, the study found that food safety management at the firm level requires high up-front (fixed) costs that SMEs cannot afford. The study cited these costs to include the setting up a management or quality control system such as hazard analysis critical control points (HACCP), and training staff in new procedures as well as new equipment for reducing risks or monitoring outcomes. Such high initial fixed investment costs can thus be a heavy burden to small firms or farms as they will have higher per-unit costs of adoption than to large firms or farms. Nevertheless, there are some empirical studies of small food enterprise firms and farms that successfully adopt higher standards, with resulting benefits of higher incomes and greater market access (Silva & Filho, 2007).

Jaffee and Henson (2004), and Henson and Jaffee (2008), sought for evidence on whether the argument that the proliferation and increased stringent rules of food safety and agricultural health standards were perceived as a barrier to trade, or increased the potential for exporters from developing countries to access highly-valued agri-food markets in developed countries. With evidenced literature to commonly refer sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures within the context of the World Trade Organization (WTO), it was found that there exists significant

different perceptions in tastes and income levels that influence the response and tolerance of consumers towards food safety risks, such that with the emergence of supermarkets, there were examples of positive dynamics, some of which have been validated in more rigorous empirical studies. The major drivers to changes in official standards to address food safety risks and consumer preferences have been the private sector and civil society organizations. Reardon and Berdegue (2002) allude that systems of private food safety management are also applied in low-income countries in part through multinational enterprises investing in food chains, and also through competitive responses from local firms.

Mtui (2006) argues that product standards may be more stringent than required to achieve the intended health and safety outcomes, thereby becoming de facto barriers to trade. Similarly, standards harmonization can result in substantial additional costs for producers, which can shut out small firms in exporting countries to foreign markets. However, this argument has been challenged by a counter-argument that the costs of registration of products are outweighed by the benefits of competitiveness and access to markets. Moreover, increased management performance leads to increased capacity of meeting cost of compliance with standards, and could be considered as a necessary investment. Thus, enhanced capacity by local food SMEs to meet stricter standards from consumers in industrialized countries could potentially create new forms of competitiveness, and relatively comparative advantage to developing countries.

Product/Food Quality

Food quality is the quality characteristics of food that is acceptable to consumers. This includes external factors as appearance (size, shape, colour, gloss, and consistency), texture, and internal attributes (chemical, physical, microbial). Internationally harmonized food and safety standards ensure that trade and economies of scale flourish by providing common reference points for safety, quality, and authenticity. As developing countries are increasingly being involved in global trade, there has been increased push in food and safety standards to safeguard against quality, health, and environmental risk to both developed and developing countries. Accordingly, minimum quality requirements are included in the food law to ensure that foods produced are unadulterated and are not subjected to any fraudulent practices intended to deceive the consumer (http://www.fao.org/food/food-safety-quality/). Those firms that find it difficult to adhere to the set standards may find their growth being hindered. Wilson (2013) indicates that barriers—in terms of import quality and foreign standards in many agricultural, food and manufactured products—have led to a decline in exports from developing countries.

Stroyan and Brown (2012) ascertain that international marketing standards play several important roles in the economy; and support innovation, growth, and competitiveness of countries. Furthermore, they argue that SMEs could play a fuller role in standardization, but are hampered by the lack of awareness of standards relevant to their businesses, a misconception that standards are more relevant to large

businesses, and the lack of human (technician) and financial resources to both develop and make use of standards. Jacobs et al. (2009) and Coveney (2007) reveal that in Southern Africa, factors leading to SMEs' use of standards like food labels and marketing ploys aims to communicate the quality of food or its nutrition information. However, these standards are not the only factors that determine consumers' decisions to purchase food. A related study by Mbega (2011) in Tanzania on consumer awareness towards quality assurance and standards found that the demand of products that meet international standards is higher as compared to local ones.

Conceptual Framework

The paper is structured around three major aspects leading to a conceptual framework depicted in Fig.1.

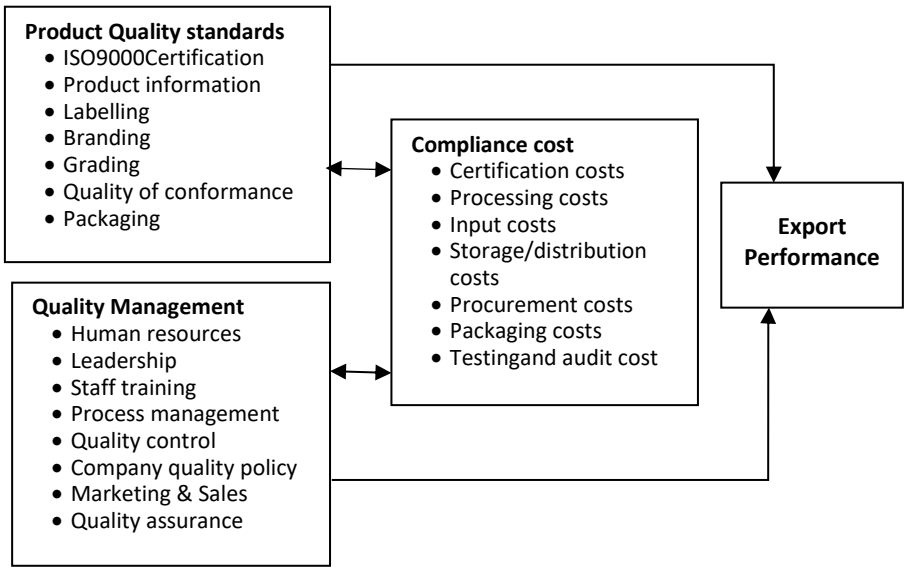


Figure 1: Food Quality Standards and Export Performance Model
Source: Developed from the literature

Fig. 1 shows the relationship between product quality and quality management as two predictor variables, and export performance as an outcome variable through a mediating variable of compliance costs.

Product Quality Standards Attributes

According to Hollern et al. (1999), a need for quality certification is not only to fulfill customer requirements, but also to stimulate the opportunity in expanding business and competitive advantages. ISO-certified organizations do not automatically have a good product quality; thus, there is a need for further scrutiny in quality measurement so as to genuinely strengthen a company's position and competitiveness in the global food market (Drew & Healy, 2006). Nevertheless,

product quality has been identified as the most difficult requirement to meet as exporters have little control over this aspect (Janaka & Suwendrani, 2011). The complexity is partly attributed to quality characteristics that tend to be expressed in varied ways. In operations or production management, multiple dimensions of quality have been determined that result into the fitness usage of a product. This means; does the product do as it is supposed to do, and do the features meet customers' needs. It also concerns reliability of the product, which means at what level does the product abstain from insufficiency (Parasuraman et al, 1988).Webster and Hawkes (2009) put quality construct on national standard levels to have special standards for foods that are sensitive to different healthy consumer needs, and with different nutrients requirements.

Garvin (1984; 1987) provides a well-known framework for thinking about product quality attributes that is based on eight dimensions that are clustered into three approaches: *product-based* approach that focuses on performance, features and durability; *user-based* approach that focuses on aesthetics and perceived quality; and *manufacturing-based* approach that focuses on conformance and reliability. In a later case, Sebastianelli and Tamimi (2002) argue that this view of quality, based on a measurable characteristic of a product rather than on preferences, enables a more objective assessment of quality

Quality Management Systems Attributes

In the view of Drew and Healy (2006), a quality system is more than an organizational structure or registration/system: it is a culture approach achieved through training and participation in an organization. A quality management system is composed of different elements including a company's quality policy, technical quality requirements, product safety (excluding food safety), packaging and transportation requirements, availability of quality manuals, documentation and control processes, defined objectives, performance indicators, periodic review systems, audit systems, documented corrective actions, and a purchasing and supplier approval system. Winning quality awards offers significant publicity opportunities, particularly to organizations that use its quality to achieve a marketing edge (Kontogeorgos & Semos, 2008). An award raises the profile of an organization and generates pride in employees, and also becomes a symbol of quality and business excellence (Lee, 2002). Generally, quality assurance practice is measured by: (i) new product design review procedures, (ii) design for manufacturing procedures, (iii) control of product(s) and work specifications and procedures, (iv) preventive maintenance activities, and (v) quality control activities along the value-added chain (Rao & Raghunathan, 1997).

Compliance Costs Attributes

The costs of standards are related to the incidence and level of compliance costs incurred by SMEs in a given market (World Bank, 2005). Compliance costs include input costs; processing, packaging, storage and distribution costs; labeling costs; capital investments (mainly in the form of obtaining new machinery), and

certification fees (OECD, 2007).The costs of compliance to industry may change and can be summarised in two parts: *transitional/implementation* costs that require changes in investment in new machinery or processes, training, product testing and redesign of packages; and *ongoing costs* which depend on the level of compliance required (ACG, 2001).

Normally, concerns arise when producers think that they are being burdened with costs for measures that they consider unnecessary for the assurance of food safety, and when they consider that transaction costs for certification are excessive in relation to the value of their business (Cuffaro & Liu, 2007). This concern is more likely to face SMEs that operate at comparably small-scale levels. Nevertheless, the costs must be considered alongside the benefits: initial investments in infrastructure and upgraded technologies can lead to significant improvements in efficiency and quality improvement (World Bank, 2005; UNCTAD, 2007; Lupin et al., 2010).

Export Performance

Generally, there is no agreed criterion for measuring export performance. Shoham (1996) has defined export performance as a result of a firm's actions in export markets. Export performance is concerned with the overall outcome of a firm's activities in its export markets (Sousa et al., 2008). This outcome is reflected in a firm's ultimate profits, sales, market share, competitiveness, and perceived customer satisfaction (Ayse & Gary, 2003). Cadogan et al. (2008) define export performance as a firm's degree of economic achievement in its export markets. On the other hand, Aaby (1989) defines export performance as effectiveness, export efficiency and continuous engagement in exporting; while Leonidou et al. (2002) identified measures mostly used in export performance to include export proportion of sales or export intensity, export sales growth, export profit level, export sales volume, export, market share, and export profit contribution. On their part, Brah et al. (2002) argue that organizational performance measurement has become more crucial for the survival of companies in today's globalized markets.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study aimed at developing a model to assess the effectiveness of quality standards and export performance of food-related SMEs in Tanzania. The argument has been that businesses that use quality standards create innovations to enable them compete in the domestic and international markets. The study has proposed some constructs to guide the process of establishing the relationship between food standards and the export performance for SMEs in Tanzania in the food industry. Three main constructs namely product quality standards, quality management, and compliance costs were raised in the model to examine their influence on a dependent variable: namely export performance. It is recommended that a study be conducted to uncover the influence of these three major constructs on export performance.

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