RESEARCH ARTICLE

QUALITY ASSURANCE MANAGEMENT FUNCTION OF THE UGANDA NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS (UNBS) AND THE PERCEIVED CONSUMER SAFETY IN UGANDA

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	The study investigated the relationship between the quality assurance function played by UNBS and consumer safety in Kampala, Uganda. The population comprised traders and business owners in the capital city and the sample consisted of business people who had licenses issued by the bureau in the Kikuubo area, where most of the trade for imported and manufactured goods in the city takes place. The specific objectives were; (i) to determine the relationship between standardization requirement by UNBS and consumer safety; (ii) to ascertain the relationship between the traders' compliance requirement by UNBS and consumer safety; and (iii) to establish the relationship between the enforcement function performed by UNBS and consumer safety. Results revealed that there is a significant and positive relationship between consumer safety and; (1) standardization requirement [r =. 569**, p < 0.0001]; (2) traders' compliance requirement [r =. 340**, p < 0.004]; and (3) enforcement function [r =. 688**, p < 0.0001]. Regression results however indicated that it is only the enforcement function by UNBS that has a significant and positive effect on consumer safety in the city [β = .776, t = 4.438, p < 0.0001]. It is therefore recommended that UNBS strengthens its strategies to ensure that quality products are on market and that it is not only confiscation of products but that manufacturers take full responsibility for offering substandard products to the customers including a total burn and prosecuting them in the courts of law.

INTRODUCTION

The current political, social and economic pressure mounted on the Uganda National Bureau of Standards (UNBS) to effectively execute its mandate of ensuring standardization, quality assurance, metrology and testing (SQMT) is not about to end. This is because of the importance that individuals and the general public attach to the consumption of healthy products. As a result of this, the general public continues to register numerous complaints concerning fake, counterfeit, expired and substandard products which are said to be on the increase in Uganda. For example recently, the Parliamentary Committee on Trade as reported by (Sekanjako, New Vision, 28th May 2017) quizzed officials of UNBS over increased substandard goods and foodstuffs flooding into the Ugandan market. It was observed that the sale of such foodstuffs and substandard items such as fuel causes great health danger to the population. Besides consumers, government has also registered numerous complaints of goods with poor quality

and has consistently asked UNBS through the Ministry Trade and Industry to play its role and ensure that they promote trade, enhance competitiveness of local industries and protect the health and safety of consumers (PVoC guidelines, 2016). Additionally, the World Treaty Organization has warned of the need by government to closely monitor the rules, regulations and legitimate instruments that reinforce standards so as to; (1) avoid hazards inherent to the specific product (such as mechanical, electrical, thermal, fire or explosion, chemical, biological or radiation hazards); (2) ensure that there is homogeneity of goods in the imported consignments and that goods in the container are of consistent quality; (3) verify and ensure that the final buyer and end user have value for money in the product; (4) reinforce the law and ensure that manufacture or sale of sub-standard products is a criminal offence under the UNBS Act Cap 327, Laws of Uganda. It is noted concerning this that UNBS draws its legal mandate from legislation as contained in the Statutory Instrument No. 11 of 2015. Therefore, one of the most challenging management functions of a regulatory agency like Uganda National Bureau of Statistics (UNBS) is to ensure that there is conformance to standards for both imported and manufactured goods in the

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country. The mandate is to ensure that all stakeholders not only think quality, have quality controls but also manage quality in the supply chain process. This is premised on the assumption that quality in the product is impossible without quality in the process. The current increasing demand for goods of all types and the present supply proliferation from within and outside the country provides impetus for this study to investigate whether UNBS as a regulatory agency has been able to maintain high standards so as to protect consumers from dangerous or counterfeit products on the market. To protect consumers and ensure quality, the standard agencies such as UNBS are expected to uphold quality and seek to achieve improved food safety, quality and nutrition. In order to do so, UNBS has to ensure that all policies are not only reinforced but that they are seen to be working in all ways so as to ensure consumer safety.

The major purpose of this study therefore was to examine the contribution of Uganda National Bureau of Standards (UNBS) in performing its quality assurance function aimed at consumer safety in Uganda. The specific objectives of the study include;

(i) To determine the relationship between standardization requirement by UNBS and consumer safety;
(ii) To ascertain the relationship between the traders' compliance requirement by UNBS and consumer safety; and
(iii) To analyze the relationship between the enforcement function performed by UNBS and consumer safety.

Given the above objectives, the following null hypotheses were tested;

1. There is no significant relationship between standardization requirement by UNBS and consumer safety in Uganda.
2. There is no significant relationship between the traders' compliance requirement by UNBS and consumer safety in Uganda; and
3. There is no significant relationship between the enforcement function performed by UNBS and consumer safety in Uganda.

As noted earlier, this study is important because of the present local and international environment in which UNBS is operating. The most salient characteristics of such a landscape include; (1) the increasing burden of illness such as cancer emanating from contaminated foods, etc; (2) the changing technologies in food production, processing and marketing that have increased the risk of unwanted chemicals and preservatives in most of the dried preserved foodstuffs and drinks; (3) the need for science-based food control systems which focus on consumer protection; (4) the present international trade which demands for harmonization of consumer safety and quality standards across borders; (5) the increasing purchasing power and changing youthful lifestyles that characterize the urbanization and urbanism; and (6) the increasing quest for awareness from consumers and the demand for food safety and better information compounded by the present population explosion. It is assumed that consumers come to the market with prior experience and a level of minimum education that can enable them to differentiate between a genuine product from a fake one. However, this is not always true because the present market environment is littered with new products on a daily basis and therefore the consumer cannot readily do so with ease and comfort. Therefore, UNBS has the duty to evaluate the quality risks and provide the required consciousness so as to protect the consumer and ensure the required safety. According to the report by WHO (2015), effective food control is undermined by the existence of fragmented legislation, multiple jurisdictions, and weaknesses in surveillance, monitoring and enforcement. Additionally, Gauthier and Mahabir (2012) observed that in order to ensure that foods are safe for human consumption, almost all countries have introduced a food control system to protect their citizens against unsafe, adulterated or otherwise poor quality food.

Literature review

According to Storey *et al* (2000), quality assurance (QA) is concerned with providing adequate confidence that a product, service or result will satisfy given requirements for quality and be fit for use. The aim is to provide certainty and with no doubt that a product or service will fulfill requirements of quality. Accordingly, governments worldwide have enacted laws and regulations designed to ensure that goods are fit for human consumption or utilization. Such laws protect consumers from harm resulting from unsafe foods and from deception resulting from misrepresentation or fraud relating to certain established quality characteristics. Governments have also established various agencies that enforce these laws and regulations; this legal framework is intended to provide consumers with confidence in the safety and quality of goods. Meanwhile, Gauthier and Mahabir (2012) noted that the major purpose of FAO include; (1) protect the health of consumers; (2) ensure fair prices in the food trade; (3) promote coordination of food standards and publish them worldwide.

According to the World Health Organization (1995), the state has an obligation to protect both marketers' and customers' interests in the buyer-seller relationship through developed institutions like UNBS. These institutions may be in form of competition commissions, regulatory agencies or consumer organizations. The main functions are to develop free and fair competition, guarantee the quality of products and services, ensure consumer safety, and protect the economic interests of consumers. Nevertheless, regulatory bodies in developing countries have not been able to fulfill these objectives. Reasons for this perhaps include: insufficient technical and material resources, ineffective application, poor communication between regulatory bodies and consumer organizations and lack of independence. In most developing countries the necessary resources to exert these new statues for protecting both consumers and producers are to a larger extent insufficient.

Besides, the report by David and Rees (2000) expounded on the requirements for global food safety and noted that only food that is safe under normal and reasonably foreseeable conditions of use should be placed on the market. For food to be considered unsafe, it must potentially be injurious to health and unfit for human consumption or contaminated. The research by Bamossy & Scammon (1985) expressed worry that many developing countries do not have specific laws that address the issue of product counterfeiting and availability of low quality products in these countries' markets. It has been observed that those countries that have established specific institutions to deal with this drastic problem have nominal penalties for violations and very lax attitudes regarding

enforcement. Therefore, Kisembo (2008) proposes the need for the governments to put in place a mechanism to enhance the enforcement of standards and laws in the work of massive circulation of low-quality products in the country since institutions that protect both marketers and customers are quite new in developing countries. Shaw (2003) noted that most countries have statutory inspectorates to monitor compliance with published licensing regulations. More specialized functions include fire, hygiene, radiation, medical device, among others. Inspections standards have legal authority and are transparent, but by the same token are not easily updated. Standards address the minimal legal requirements for the organizations to operate and care for consumers; they do not usually address performance. Licensing inspections often apply only to new organizations, particularly in the private sector; where relicensing is applied, certificates may be issued on payment of a fee with minimal or no inspection. When assessment is managed locally by a governmental entity or its designated agent, there may be little national consistency or aggregation of reports, and when it is highly centralized, results are often not shared with staff or consumers.

According to the consumer protection in E-commerce report by OECD (2016), there is need to enhance the ability by regulatory bodies to protect consumers in business through exchange of information and cooperation in cross-border matters. Similarly, Barrett (1996) warned that there is need to improve product quality through stringent laws and if this is not done, pressure may come from marketing organizations to initiate standards on items such as frozen foods. Meanwhile, nutritional experts such Kisyombe (2012) have expressed their worry that counterfeit goods are usually harmful and dangerous goods which have the effect of hurting the economy and the citizen. Counterfeit is a serious problem with a number of effects in the socioeconomic perspectives which includes eliminating off from the market the dealer of the genuine products; since such genuine dealer cannot sell his products as they are unable to compete with the cheap selling counterfeit goods. To add insult to injury, it is noted here that counterfeiters do not actually pay government tax as stipulated by law and the final consumers who buy counterfeited goods end up spending more money for the same product due to its short life span and put their lives and health in high risk. Prusak *et al* (2013) concluded that consumers while buying food products trust in their quality and safety. They trust in the information on food labels, and that all operators of food chain act in the ethical way. Ethics is the key issue in quality assurance.

Methodology

The population comprised traders and business owners in the capital city and the sample consisted of business people who had licenses issued by the Bureau in the Kikuubo area, where most of the trade for imported and manufactured goods in the city takes place. The population of 200 respondents was selected. Purposive and convenience sampling were used to select traders and business owners who were willing and able to provide the required information by filling the questionnaire at their own convenience. A self administered questionnaire comprising sections with questions on demographics, standardization by UNBS, items on compliance with standards, enforcement and a section on safety which was aggregated to represent the dependent variable was used. A five point Likert Scale was used for rating the items of the opinion survey

ranging from (5 = Strongly Agree to 1 = Strongly Disagree). In order to determine the relationship between consumer safety and the activities of standardization, compliance and enforcement that are played by UNBS, correlation and regression analyses were employed after the initial descriptive statistics using SPSS version 20. It should be noted that the items on standardization, compliance, enforcement and consumer safety were based on the UNBS manual (2006) that spells out its day-to-day mandate in execution of quality assurance management function. Reliability of the questionnaires was finally determined using Cronbach Alpha that stood at 0.8292 implying that the questionnaire registered the highest form of reliability.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Analyzing descriptive statistics on measures of standardization

Before conducting the correlation and regression analyses, descriptive statistics was first analyzed. Table 1 shows that most of the respondents (97.1%) agreed that UNBS develops standard specifications for various products and gives them to various manufacturers to enable them produce quality products. Similarly, 94.3% of the respondents agreed that UNBS carries out conformity assessments of products to ensure that they meet relevant standards while a relatively large number (90%) agreed that UNBS provides information about standard requirements to industries concerning product ingredients and quality to guide them in the manufacture of their products. Results also reveal that most of the respondents agreed that UNBS holds sensitization/awareness workshops to educate manufacturers and consumers (91.4%), provides technical advisory services to industries to enable them meet quality (78.6%), provides technical assistance to industries so as to improve on product quality (67.1%), carries out quality audits with the aim of quality marking (87.2%) and also makes guidelines to guide the users of the product (68.6%). Additionally, it was also agreed that UNBS inspects products with the aim of certifying whether they conform to standards (97.1%), carries out market and factory surveillance (97.2%), provides information to consumers about the quality of products/service (71.4%) and an equal number (71.4%) agreed that UNBS inspects goods coming into the country. Finally 71.4% of the respondents agreed that consumers are always informed about hazardous products in the market.

Testing the hypothesized relationship between standardization and consumer safety

In order to test the hypothesis that there is a significant relationship between standardization practices by UNBS and consumer safety, a correlation matrix was generated with the results as indicated in table 2. The results reveal that there is a positive and significant correlation between standardization and consumer safety (r = .569** p<0.0001). This implies that the present standardization practices by UNBS are significantly associated with consumer safety.

Analysis of the descriptive statistics on traders' compliance requirement measures put in place by UNBS

The analysis of descriptive statistics in table 3 shows that 77.1% of the respondents agreed that UNBS specifies the required quality of products to manufacturers to ensure that products are produced with the required standards.

Table 1. Responses on standardization of products by business people

No.	Item	Responses		
		SA &A	N	D & SD
	UNBS;	%	%	%
1.	Develops standard specifications for various products	97.1	2.9	0.00
2.	Carries out conformity assessments of products to standards	94.3	5.7	0.00
3.	Provides information about standard requirements to industries	90.0	10.0	0.00
4.	Holds sensitization/awareness workshops to educate manufacturers and consumers	91.4	8.6	0.00
5.	Provides technical advisory services to industries to enable them meet quality	78.6	21.4	0.00
6.	Provides technical assistance to industries so as to improve on product quality	67.1	31.4	1.4
7.	Provides technical assistance to industries so as to improve on product safety	62.8	37.1	0.00
8.	Carries out quality audits with the aim of quality marking	87.2	8.6	4.3
9.	Makes guidelines to guide the users of the products	68.6	11.4	20.0
10.	Inspects products with the aim of certifying whether they conform to standards	97.1	2.9	0.00
11.	Caries out market and factory surveillance to check the quality of the products in the market.	97.2	1.4	1.4
12.	Provides information to consumers about the quality of products/service	71.4	14.3	14.3
13.	Inspects goods coming into the country	71.4	14.3	14.3
14.	Consumers are always informed about hazardous products on the market	71.4	10.0	18.6

SA; Strongly Agree; A: Agree; N: Neutral; D: Disagree; SD: Strongly Disagree

Table 2. Correlation matrix

	Standardization	Compliance	Enforcement	Safety
Standardization	-			
Compliance	.611**	-		
Enforcement	.856**	.445**	-	
Safety	.569**	.340**	.688**	-

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 3. Responses on traders' compliance with standards

No.	Item	Responses		
		SA &A	N	D & SD
	UNBS;	%	%	%
1.	Specifies the required quality of products to manufacturers	77.1	21.4	1.4
2.	Provides information on chemical substances to manufacturers to ensure their safe use	65.7	27.1	7.1
3.	Has testing laboratories that ensure that products comply with standards in manufacture and composition	87.1	12.9	0.00
4.	Ensures that regulations of consumer protection are complied with	71.4	21.4	7.1
5.	Ensures that laws of consumer protection are complied with.	72.8	15.7	11.5
6.	Audits manufacturers to ensure that they produce quality products	80.0	18.6	1.4
7.	Has a quality assurance department that ensures that manufacturers comply with the standards	90.0	10.0	0.00
8.	Limits the ingredients of products	58.6	25.7	15.7
9.	Rewards manufacturers who excel in quality of products	62.8	21.4	15.7

SA; Strongly Agree; A: Agree; N: Neutral; D: Disagree; SD: Strongly Disagree

Table 4. Descriptive responses on the enforcement function by UNBS

No.	Item	Responses		
		SA &A	N	D & SD
		%	%	%
1.	UNBS has enforced consumer protection laws	75.7	10.0	14.3
2.	Manufacturers who produce poor quality products are subjected to legal redress	78.6	5.7	15.7
3.	Manufacturers who adulterate products are prosecuted	80.0	4.3	15.7
4.	Manufacturers take responsibility for sub-standard products	64.3	14.3	21.5
5.	Product certifications are withheld once the manufacturers fail to comply with the standards	78.6	4.3	17.2
6.	Manufacturers who do not conform to product standards are penalized	78.6	7.1	14.3
7.	Products that do not conform to standards are confiscated by UNBS	85.8	7.1	7.1

SA; Strongly Agree; A: Agree; N: Neutral; D: Disagree; SD: Strongly Disagree

Table 5. Descriptive responses on consumer safety

No.	Item	Responses		
		SA &A	N	D & SD
	UNBS;	%	%	%
1.	Protects the lives of consumers	80.0	8.6	11.4
2.	Has led to the availability of quality goods to consumers	78.5	11.4	10
3.	Has Led to the provision of quality materials to consumers	77.2	11.4	11.4
4.	Has Led to the provision of better services to consumers	77.1	14.3	8.6
5.	Has Provided education to consumers about products on the market	82.9	12.9	4.3
6.	Has Provided information to consumers about products on the market	84.3	8.6	7.1
7.	Destroys harmful products on the market	91.4	5.7	2.9
8.	Monitors products on the market daily	41.4	37.1	21.4
9.	Made sure that manufacturers do not connive with government to manufacture substandard products	45.7	27.1	27.1

SA; Strongly Agree; A: Agree; N: Neutral; D: Disagree; SD: Strongly Disagree

Similarly, it was agreed that UNBS provides information on chemical substances to manufacturers to ensure their safe use (65.7%), has testing laboratories that ensure that products comply with standards (87.1%) and also ensures that regulations of consumer protection are complied with (71.4%). In addition, 72.8% of the respondents agreed that UNBS ensures that laws of consumer protection are complied with. It is important to note that UNBS also audits manufacturers to ensure that they produce quality products (80%), has a quality assurance department that ensures that manufacturers comply with the standards (90%) and 58.6% of the respondents agreed that UNBS limits the ingredients of products. Finally, 62.8% of the respondents agreed that UNBS rewards manufacturers who excel in quality of products.

Testing the hypothesized relationship between traders' compliance and consumer safety

In order to test the hypothesis that ensuring that products comply with standards significantly correlates with consumer safety, a correlation matrix was generated with the results as indicated in table 2. The results reveal that there is also a direct positive and significant correlation between promoting compliance or conformance to standards and consumer safety (r = .340**, p < 0.004).

Analysis of descriptive statistics on the enforcement function played by UNBS

It can be deduced from table 4 that most of the respondents (75.7%) agreed that UNBS has enforced consumer protection laws. In the same vein, manufacturers who produce poor quality products are subjected to legal redress (78.6%) and that manufacturers who adulterate products are prosecuted (80%). In addition, 64.3% of the respondents agreed that manufacturers take responsibility for substandard products and that those manufacturers who do not conform to product standards are penalized (78.6%) while 85.8% of the respondents agreed that products that do not conform to standard are confiscated by UNBS. Finally, 78.6% of the respondents agreed that product certifications are withheld once the manufacturers fail to comply with the standards.

Testing the hypothesized relationship between enforcement function of UNBS and consumer safety

In order to test the hypothesis that the enforcement function of UNBS influences consumer safety, a correlation matrix was generated. As indicated in table 2, the results reveal a significant and positive correlation between the enforcement function of UNBS and consumer safety (r = .688**, p < 0.0001).

Analysis of descriptive statistics on consumer safety

Descriptive statistics in table 5 indicates that that most of the respondents (80%) agreed that UNBS protects the lives of consumers. In addition, majority of the respondents (77.2%) agreed that UNBS destroys harmful products (91.4%) and a relatively small number (41.4%) also agreed that UNBS monitors products on the market daily. In the same vein, it was agreed that UNBS has led to the availability of quality goods to consumers (78.5%) and also the provision of quality materials (77.2%). Additionally, UNBS has led to the provision of better services to consumers (77.1%). Finally, it

was also agreed that UNBS has provided education (82.9%) and information (84.3%) to consumers about products on the market as well as making sure that manufacturers do not connive with government to manufacture substandard products (45.7%).

Table 6. Results of the regression of the three (3) variables against consumer safety as a dependent variable

Variable	Predicted sign	β	t – value	p – value
Intercept	+-	3.172	1.290	.202
Standardization	+	-.146	-.736	.464
Compliance function	+	.084	.736	.464
Enforcement	+	.776	4.438	.000

Analyzing the overall effect of the quality assurance function of Uganda National Bureau of Standards (UNBS) on perceived consumer safety

In order to determine the overall effect of the quality assurance variables on perceived consumer safety, a multiple regression was performed using consumer safety as the dependent variable. As indicated in table 6, it is the enforcement that supports the hypothesis that there is a significant and positive effect of enforcement on consumer safety [β = .776, t = 4.438, p < 0.0001]. Other variables of standardization (β = -.146, t = -.736 p<0.464) and compliance (β = -.084, t = -.736 p<0.464) do not support the alternative hypothesis. In other words, it is only enforcement that UNBS has significantly carried out in the capital city. This was measured by the degree to which products that do not conform to standards are confiscated; the degree to which manufacturers who don't conform to standards are penalized, the degree to which manufacturers of adulterate products are prosecuted, and the like. Therefore, UNBS is challenged to ensure that standardization of products and compliance are done to the satisfaction of consumers. This is through specification, audits and other laboratory tests that are required, among others. The funding here is that at present it is only enforcement practices that can determine and guarantee consumer safety.

DISCUSSION

This study provides important findings concerning the extent to which UNBS effectively performs its function. It is for example indicated here that the enforcement function does not only significantly relate with consumer safety but also significantly determines the extent which consumers are safe in the Capital City. This implies that the more UNBS enforces consumer protection laws and deters the manufacturing of poor quality products, the more consumer safety is guaranteed. This is in line with several researchers who have warned that there should be an active quality management system in order to ensure that the commodities that are sold in the market are safe. For example Morris (2000) provides mechanisms in which quality can be assured in the production, distribution and processing of commodities. According to Sterns (2001), there is urgent need to strengthen the global food safety initiative in all countries because this can help establish effective criteria for global food safety standards that can be used for suppliers and supplier audits. Similarly, Baines *et al* (2000) identified several costs associated with the proliferation of quality assurance systems and warned that there are significant costs in evaluating whether or not a particular system meets the quality standards of the firm as well as the national regulatory standards. In this research it has been found

that UNBS has significant contributions in the enforcement of standards. However, other aspects like compliance and standardization are insignificant. This means that traders have not yet complied and standardized the products they are putting on market currently to the satisfaction of the regulatory agency.

According to Woodward (2000), the aim of any health quality assurance department is to make sure that the criteria set are being met. Thus, the cardinal responsibility of the health professional is to continuously improve performance to reach the level of perfection required. That is why strong reprimand is necessary when the facility, service or person whose performance is assessed and does not meet the minimal standard. Sometimes, failure to uphold standard results in close monitoring, fines or other sanctions such as temporary loss of license to carry out such activities. Usually, some remedial action plan is developed that is agreed upon by the parties and performance is reassessed after a given time period. Because quality assurance emphasizes finding and correcting problems, it can be perceived as a negatively-oriented process. Many healthcare professionals are unenthusiastic about it as they perceive it as a threat to, rather than as a support for, their work activities. However, given the sensitization component, traders and manufacturers are supposed to adhere to the rules and regulations designed to protect the ultimate consumer.

Conclusion

The study here was an attempt to assess the relationship between the Quality assurance function of Uganda National Bureau of Standards (UNBS) and perceived consumer safety in Kampala. It has been noted that while UNBS has the responsibility to ensure standardization, compliance and enforcement, it is only enforcement that currently positively and significantly determines consumer safety. However, all the variables examined significantly correlate with consumer safety implying that they are very important aspects of quality assurance which should not be neglected. Put another way, UNBS needs to improve on the various aspects of standardization and compliance so as to effectively perform its quality assurance function. It is only by demonstrating proactive orientation leadership and sensitizing the masses to be vigilant that counterfeit products are discouraged on the market. Therefore there is need for a quality management system which can ensure proper procedures for ensuring quality in not only the production process but also in the final consumption so as to guarantee consumer safety.

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