

# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMMERCE & MANAGEMENT

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**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

**RESULTS & DISCUSSION**

**FINDINGS**

**RECOMMENDATIONS/SUGGESTIONS**

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**CONSUMER PROTECTION STATUS IN TIGRAI: A SURVEY STUDY ON SELECTED FOOD ITEMS****DESTA KIDANU****LECTURER****DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT****MEKELLE UNIVERSITY****MEKELLE****ETSEGENET KIDANE****DEPARTMENT OF MARKETING****MEKELLE UNIVERSITY****MEKELLE****MAHMUD ABADR****DEPARTMENT OF MARKETING****MEKELLE UNIVERSITY****MEKELLE****ABSTRACT**

Currently there is growth in population and income of the people of Ethiopia; on the other hand, due to market oriented economy, there is more involvement of the private sector in the economy. As a result, it is expected more business transactions; may be because of such business transactions, reports show that there are more unfair trade practices in Ethiopia. Therefore, the paper investigates the extent of consumers are protected from unfair trade practices and assesses the involvement of government bodies in protecting the consumers in Tigray-Ethiopia. To do that, cross-sectional data was collected from 391 consumers and analysed using descriptive statistics. The research shows that more than half of the consumers do not know whether or not they buy reduced and adulterated food item; about 40% do not know whether or not they buy expired food item. This indicates that majority of the consumers are vulnerable to unfair trade practice. Based on the experience of the consumers, while sugar and coffee are more vulnerable to weight reduction, honey, butter, red pepper and edible oil are more exposed to adulteration. Against the proclamation 661/2009, there are food items in the market without stated shelving periods. Hence, to protect the consumers from possible unfair trade practice, there is need of: (a) increasing awareness level and participation of consumers, (b) strict implementation of the laws and regulations of the Country, (c) acquiring testing equipment and/or forming integration with other organizations, and (d) developing integration between consumers associations and marketing cooperatives.

**KEYWORDS**

Consumer protection, unfair trade practice, Tigray, Ethiopia.

**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

CSA	Central Statistical Authority
BoFED	Tigray Bureau of Finance and Economic Development
ERTA	Ethiopian Radio and Television Agency
EPRDF	Ethiopian peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
MoFED	Ministry of Finance and Economic development
MSE	Micro and Small Enterprises

**1. INTRODUCTION**

The Derg regime, which ruled Ethiopia 1974-1991, followed command economy policy. The policy was bottleneck for private investment. However, in contrast to the command economy of Derg regime, the current ruling party, Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) pursues a market-driven economy, which encourages privatization.

Due the new economic policy of the country, more local and foreign private investors are encouraged and participated in different sectors of the economy except in some areas like telecommunication, electric power and water supply, which are monopolized by the government. As a result, the number of private firms in Ethiopia is increasing from time to time. For example, in 2008/09 budget year, the Tigray Bureau of Trade and Industry conducted a census and found about 85000 Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs). This shows the private investment is booming. Because of the increased investment, at constant price, the Ethiopian Gross Domestic Product (GDP) [in Ethiopian Birr] in 2008/9, 2009/10 and 2010/11 were 129.35 billion, 142.97 billion and 159.24 billion respectively; the GDP growth rates for the years 2008/9, 2009/10 and 2010/11 were 10.1%, 10.5% and 11.4% respectively (Ministry of Finance and Economic Development-MoFED, 2011). This indicates that the economy of the country is growing. On the other hand, in 1984, 1994 and 2007, the Ethiopian populations were 39.87 million, 53.48 million and 73.92 million respectively (Central Statistical Authority-CSA, 2008). This shows that the population of the country is increasing from time to time. Because of the three reasons, (a) population growth, (b) private investment, and (c) economic growth, it is expected the business transaction to become complex; in such complex business transaction, reports of the government shows that there are unfair trade practices.

To protect such unfair trade practices and to safeguard consumers, the government of Ethiopia has enacted different laws and regulations. For example, in 2003 the Ethiopian government enacted trade practice proclamation 329/2003. The proclamation prohibited traders the following issues: (1) price discrimination; (2) enforcing customers to buy a material they do not want to buy in combination to the material they need; (3) falsification of customers about quantity, quality, composition of materials, etc of the product. Moreover, the proclamation ordered traders to display selling prices of their goods and services and to label their products in the way that could show weight, country of origin, quality, quantity, composition, technical instruction, etc of the goods. In August 2010, the 329/2003 proclamation was replaced by proclamation 685/2010. In the new proclamation, duties of traders and rights of consumers are stated in detail; the duties of rights are rights of consumers. These rights and duties are about detailed on articles 22-24, 28, 30, 45 & 46. The articles (1) prohibit about misleading information on type, quality and quantity of items; (2) enforces traders to display selling prices of goods and to label about the goods they sell; (3) warns traders that hoarding and/or diverting of goods as well as selling higher than stated one are not allowed; (4) tells consumer to report to trade bureau or trade minister when they face problems. In addition, the government has enacted proclamation [661/2009] on food, medicine and health care.

Furthermore, the criminal code 414/2004 has indicated that breaching the above stated regulations is punishable. For example, article 414/367 shows that falsification of weight and measures are punishable. Article 414/391 and 414/392 indicate that adulteration or altering of goods is illegal. Article 414/439 also shows that breaking of seals and misappropriation of goods are punishable. As stated on article 414(527(1) manufacturing, distributing, storing and selling of products that are damaged and unfit for human consumption are punishable. Though there are such laws and regulations, there are literatures and reports [or news] those indicate that there were unfair trade practices in Ethiopia.

The researchers understand that this area is less researched in the region in particular and in Ethiopia in general. Hence, investigating the consumer protection status in Tigray is important; this project is prepared with the intention of investigating the extent of unfair trade practices on some selected food items. Moreover, the reason that the researchers preferred to conduct study on food items is that because literatures indicate that, in developing countries, majority of total expenditure goes to food consumption. For example, according to his study in Maichew-Tigray-Ethiopia, Menasbo (2010) indicate that about 70% of the total expenditure was spent on food consumption. This indicates that the unfair trade practices on food items needs more attention though non-food items are also important.

Accordingly, a cross sectional data was collected from four towns of Tigray in 2011; this research was conducted to check the consumer protection status in Tigray by taking a sample of 400 consumers. The research finding indicates that consumers are more vulnerable to unfair trade practices though there are government efforts to control the unfair trade practices.

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### 2.1 AN OVERVIEW OF CONSUMER PROTECTION

The United Nations (UN) (2003) stated that consumers should be protected from hazardous products; they should be protected from abusive practices. Therefore, firms are required to produce and distribute goods and services ethically in the way that can promote sustainable consumption. The general principle of the UN guideline indicates that governments are responsible to protect consumers by designing strong policies in line with economic, social and environmental situations of the country and interests of the people (ibid).

*Governments should adopt or encourage the adoption of appropriate measures, including legal systems, safety regulations, national or international standards, voluntary standards and the maintenance of safety records to ensure that products are safe for either intended or normally foreseeable use . ... Appropriate policies should ensure that if manufacturers or distributors become aware of unforeseen hazards after products are placed on the market, they should notify the relevant authorities and, as appropriate, the public without delay. Governments should also consider ways of ensuring that consumers are properly informed of such hazards. ...Governments should, where appropriate, adopt policies under which, if a product is found to be seriously defective and/or to constitute a substantial and severe hazard even when properly used, manufacturers and/or distributors should recall it and replace or modify it, or substitute another product for it; if it is not possible to do this within a reasonable period of time, the consumer should be adequately compensated (UN, 2003).*

All the above quotations indicate that there is need of applying different rules and regulations in the way that can protect the sovereignty of consumers by providing optimum economic benefits; if producers and distributors are found distributing unforeseen hazardous materials, they should substitute by right products and the consumers should be compensations timely. Therefore, government policies should seek to enable consumers to obtain optimum benefit from their economic resources.

To fulfill the above requirements, governments should protect the interest of consumers by having proper rules and regulations. And therefore, associations should be encouraged to monitor adverse practices, such as the adulteration of foods, false or misleading claims in marketing and service frauds (ibid).

Generally, the UN (2003) consumer protection guideline revolves around (a) Physical safety, (b) Promotion and protection of consumers' economic interests, (c) Standards for the safety and quality of consumer goods and services, (d) Distribution facilities for essential consumer goods and services, (e) Measures enabling consumers to obtain redress, and (f) Education and information programmes.

### 2.2 TYPES OF DECEPTIVE ACTS

"Trader" in relation to any goods means a person who sells or distributes any goods for sale and includes the manufacturer thereof, and where such goods are sold or distributed in package form, (Consumer Protection Act, 1986).

"unfair trade practice" means a trade practice which, for the purpose of promoting the sale, use or supply of any goods or for the provision of any service, adopts any unfair method or unfair or deceptive practice (Consumer Protection Act, 1986).

The deceptive practice includes falsely representation of goods and services in standard, quality, quantity, composition, usefulness of any goods or services, etc (ibid). If there are such practices, there are unfair trade practices. Those who do such false representations are violators of laws and regulations of government. And therefore, they are subject to punishments.

### 2.3 CONSUMER PROTECTION LAWS AND THE PRACTICES OF TRADERS IN ETHIOPIA

To protect such unfair trade practices and to safeguard consumers, the government of Ethiopia has enacted different laws and regulations. For example, in 2003 the Ethiopian government enacted trade practice proclamation 329/2003. The proclamation prohibited traders the following issues: (1) selling price discrimination; (2) enforcing customers to buy a material they do not want to buy in combination to the material they need; (3) falsification of customers about quantity, quality, composition of materials, etc of the product. Moreover, the proclamation ordered traders to display selling prices of their goods and services and to label their products in the way that could show weight, country of origin, quality, quantity, composition, technical instruction, etc of the goods. In August 2010, the 329/2003 proclamation was replaced by proclamation 685/2010. In the new proclamation, duties of traders and rights of consumers are stated in detail; the duties of rights are rights of consumers. These rights and duties are about detailed on articles 22-24, 28, 30, 45 & 46. the articles (1) prohibit about misleading information on type, quality and quantity of items; (2) enforces traders to display selling prices of goods and to label about the goods they sell; (3) warns traders that hoarding and/or diverting of goods as well as selling higher than stated one are not allowed; (4) tells consumer to report to trade bureau or trade minister when they face problems. In addition, the government as enacted proclamation [661/2009] on food, medicine and health care.

Furthermore, the criminal code 414/2004 has indicated that breaching the above stated regulations is punishable. For example, article 414/367 shows that falsification of weight and measures are punishable. Article 414/391 and 414/392 indicate that adulteration or altering of goods is illegal. Article 414/439 also shows that breaking of seals and misappropriation of goods are punishable. As stated on article 414(527(1) manufacturing, distributing, storing and selling of products that are damaged and unfit for human consumption are punishable.

However, against the laws and regulations of the country, there are instances of unfair trade practices by falsification of weights; for example, there are business firms which sell reduced quantity than of the labeled quantity. For example, Demeke (2003:7) indicated that "a good part of the margin that goes to traders comes from the inappropriate measuring instruments (under-weighting), not just price differentials."

## 3. NEED/IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

- ✓ Based on the analysis result, concerned government and non-government organizations:
  - will have better understanding about the status of consumer protection in Tigray and take corrective action to safeguard the consumers when desirable;
  - can establish ways that can increase the awareness level of consumer rights as well as obligations of merchandisers;
- ✓ The finding can promote fair trade, which can improve the economic and health condition of the consumers in particular and the public in general.
- ✓ Moreover, the research result can be used as a base for further research in this area in Tigray in particular and Ethiopia in general.

## 4. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Currently the population and economy of Ethiopia are growing; due to market driven economy, there is also more involvement of the private sector in the economy. As a result, the business transaction becomes more and more complex. In such economic system, there are possibilities of unfair trade practices.



To protect and safeguard consumers from possible unfair trade practices, the government of Ethiopia enacted different laws and regulations. For example, in 2003 the Ethiopian government enacted trade practice proclamation 329/2003. The proclamation covered different issues; among them were prohibiting falsification of customers about quantity, quality, composition of materials, etc. In August 2010, the 329/2003 proclamation was replaced by proclamation 685/2010. In the new proclamation, duties of traders and rights of consumers were stated in detail. The proclamation prohibits traders about misleading information on type, quality and quantity of items. The proclamation also tells consumer to report to trade bureau or trade minister when they face problems. In addition, the government as enacted proclamation on food, medicine and health care (661/2009). Furthermore, the criminal code 414/2004 has indicated that breaching the above stated regulations is punishable. For example, article 414/367 shows that falsification of weight and measures are punishable. Article 414/391 and 414/392 indicate that adulteration or altering of goods is illegal. Article 414/439 also shows that breaking of seals and misappropriation of goods are punishable. As stated on article 414(527(1) manufacturing, distributing, storing and selling of products that are damaged and unfit for human consumption are punishable.

Though there are such laws and regulations, there are literatures and reports [or news] which indicates that there are unfair trade practices. For example, you can see the following unfair trade practices about falsified weights as well as injurious and adulterated food products. For example, the "police and society" program of Ethiopian Television presented many times that there were many unfair trade practices. Some of them are listed below.

- **Falsification of weights:** - against the laws and regulations of the country, there were instances of unfair trade practices by falsification of weights; for example, there were business firms which sold reduced quantity than of the labeled quantity. For example, Demeke (2003:7) indicated that "a good part of the margin that goes to traders comes from the inappropriate measuring instruments (under-weighting), not just price differentials." Moreover, in Mekelle city, pilot study was conducted by the researchers and found unfair trade practices, like less weight than labeled one; for example two lentil packages labeled one kilogram each were actually with the weights of 800 and 900 grams.
- **Injurious, altered and adulterated products:** - similarly, there were instances of violations of the consumer protection laws. That is, there were occasions that business firms sell expired and adulterated products to their customers. The Ethiopian Radio and Television Agency (ERTA) broadcasted many times about unfair trade practices, such as adulteration of food items through its news as well as "police and society" program. For example, according to the news of the agency broadcasted on Nov. 02/2010 at 1:00PM local time, some merchants were caught while selling adulterated and expired food items in Addis Ababa. Moreover, the researchers observed that merchants were selling broken seal white horse whisky; it was only packed by the plastic-upper cover. This was happened to mix up some external material to the genuine whisky. The researchers also observed in their pilot study that there were some packed food items without manufacturing and expiry dates; even the production and expiry dates of some products were done using stamps on the packages that can be easily replaced, tempting traders to cheat.

The above situations led the researchers to raise the following research questions: (1) what is the awareness level and checking habit of consumers about unfair trade practices? (2) What is the extent of unfair trade practices on food items by merchandisers? (3) What are the most common food items that are vulnerable to unfair trade practices? (4) What are the roles of governments and non-government institutions in protecting the consumers from unfair trade practices?

The researchers understand that this area is less researched in the region in particular and in Ethiopia in general. Hence, investigating the consumer protection status in Tigray is important; this project is prepared with the intention of investigating the extent of unfair trade practices on some selected food items. Moreover, the reason that the researchers preferred to conduct study on food items is that because literatures indicate that, in developing countries, majority of total expenditure goes to food consumption. For example, according to his study in Maichew, Menasbo (2010) indicate that about 70% of the total expenditure was spent on food consumption. This indicates that the unfair trade practices on food items needs more attention though non-food items are also important.

## 4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

### 4.1 GENERAL OBJECTIVE

To investigate the extent consumers are protected from unfair trade practices and the involvement of concerned governmental and non-governmental organizations to protect the consumers.

### 4.2 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- To check the awareness level and checking habit of consumers about unfair trade practices
- To identify the extent of unfair trade practices on food items
- To identify the most common food items which are vulnerable to unfair trade practices.
- To investigate the role of governments organizations in protecting the consumers from unfair trade practices

## 5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 5.1 DATA TYPE, DATA SOURCE AND RESEARCH STRATEGY

Qualitative and quantitative data were collected from consumers of four towns of Tigray: Mekelle, Wukro, Axum, and Shire-EndaSilassie. That is, to reduce bias and to increase credibility of the research, the researchers used the mixed research method. Only primary data was collected. Moreover, the researchers used cross sectional data type.

### 5.2 TARGET POPULATION

The target population of the study included two major elements: (1) consumers of food items, and (2) governmental organizations like trade and industry and health bureau. Of the consumers, both sexes were targeted. Moreover, concerned bodies from the trade and industry as well as health bureau were targeted. One hundred merchandisers were also our targets.

### 5.3 SAMPLE SIZE AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

In case of this project, there was heterogeneity of the samples: consumers from both sexes from different places and backgrounds as well as different organizations, like trade and health bureaus. In the census of 2007, the population size of Mekelle, Wukro, Axum and Shire-Enda sellasie were 215546, 30208, 44629 and 46382 respectively (CSA, 2008); this indicates that, of the study towns, Mekelle, Wukro, Axum and Shire-Enda-sellassie represented 64%, 9%, 13% and 13% respectively. Hence, by considering the business transaction from the rural areas surrounding the towns and for simplicity purposes, the researchers took samples of about 55% from Mekelle and 15% from the other towns.

Before starting gathering data, each town was sub-grouped in to three: (1) high business transaction area; (2) medium transaction area; and (3) low business transaction area. This was done to incorporate all types of information.

In each study area, 100 firms were selected purposively; this was happened because the researchers couldn't find list of the merchandisers. But, in selecting the merchandisers, the researchers considered the traffic of the buyers; shops with more traffic of consumers were incorporated in the sample. From each merchandiser, four respondents were selected; totally 400 respondents were selected purposively; this was happened because it was impossible to get the list of consumers.

To reduce biasedness and increase reliability of the data, the researchers selected the sample respondents systematically: (1) two males and two female buyers of food item from each shop were selected; (2) but each gender should buy food items that can be checked their weights and shelving periods. In effect, of the four consumers that selected from each shop, half of them were those who bought at least food items that could be measured their weight, and half of them those who bought food items that could be checked their expiry dates. This was happened because there was a need of checkup of weight and expiry of food items that were already bought by the buyers. This was done to compare the perception and actual practice of buyers about the possibility of buying of reduced and expired food item. Moreover, the respondents from bureaus were selected purposively: authorized personnel from trade and health bureaus.

### 5.4 DATA COLLECTION METHOD AND INSTRUMENTS

With the help of enumerators, the researchers collected data from consumers of all study towns using semi-structured questionnaire. The males and female buyers of food items were selected using purposive methods: the enumerators stand around selected shops and were waiting until the needed type of

consumer comes. The weights of the food items, which were bought by the consumers, were checked using measuring scales. In addition, the manufacturing and expiry dates of the food items were checked by observing the package of the food item. Accordingly, the required data was gathered from 400 representative consumers; of those consumers, about 57% were females;

Moreover, to know (1) whether or not the food items with or without stated shelving period, (2) whether or not the food items were with longer shelving period, (3) whether or not the shelving period were written, etc, the researchers checked the manufacturing and expiry dates of the processed food items. Furthermore, based on the result of the primary data of the consumers and observation, the researchers proceeded to conduct in-depth interview with concerned personnel of trade and health bureaus using semi-structured questionnaire.

##### 5.5 DATA ANALYSIS METHODS

After the required data was gathered, the researchers edited the filled questionnaires. Accordingly, 9 out of 400 questionnaires were discarded; as a result, 391 questionnaires were used for the analysis. Because the research method was mixed, the data was analyzed using statistical descriptive method. Moreover, major points of the qualitative data were summarized.

## 6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter comprises four major points: (1) the awareness level and checking habit of consumers about unfair trade, (2) Experience of consumers in unfair trade practices (3) the most common food items vulnerable to unfair trade practice; (4) the role of governmental and non-governmental institutions in protecting the consumers from unfair trade practice.

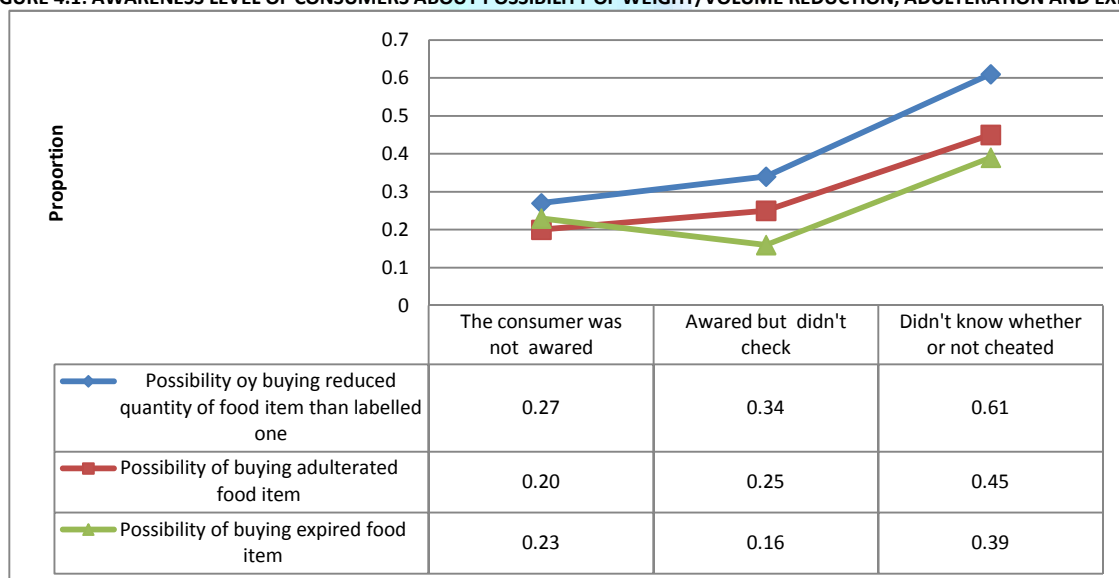
In checking the awareness level, checking habit and extent of unfair trade practice, the researchers used descriptive statistics

### 6.2 THE AWARENESS LEVEL AND CHECKING HABIT OF CONSUMERS ABOUT UNFAIR TRADE PRACTICES: (OBJECTIVE-1)

Analysis was done for both the awareness level and checking habit of consumers about whether or not they could buy reduced weight than its label, adulterated and expired food items.

About quarter of the respondents were not aware that traders could sell them reduced food item than of labeled one; moreover, though they were aware about one-third of them didn't have the habit of checking whether or not the food item they bought was reduced than of labeled one. As a result, majority of the respondents didn't know whether or not they buy reduced food item than of labeled one. This implies that majority of the consumers are more vulnerable to buy reduced food item than of labeled one. You can refer table 4.1.

FIGURE 4.1: AWARENESS LEVEL OF CONSUMERS ABOUT POSSIBILITY OF WEIGHT/VOLUME REDUCTION, ADULTERATION AND EXPIRY



Source: Survey data of 2011

Second, next to weight/volume reduction, significant proportion of respondents were not aware that traders could sell them adulterated food item; of those who were aware, quarter of them didn't have the habit of checking whether or not they buy adulterated food item. In effect, about half of the consumers were vulnerable to adulterated food item. This implies that, next to quantity or weight reduction, more consumers are vulnerable to possibility of buying adulterated food item.

Thirdly, about quarter of the respondents were not aware that traders could sell them expired food items; of those who were aware, about 16% didn't have the habit of checking. Compared to possibility of purchase of reduced weight or adulterated food items, consumers didn't know whether or not buy expired food items. This implies that, compared to possibility of purchase of reduced weight and adulterated, consumers are less vulnerable for the purchase of expired food items.

Generally, based on the awareness level and checking habit of consumers, rank wise, more consumers are vulnerable to buy reduced, adulterated and expired food items respectively.

### 6.3 EXPERIENCE OF CONSUMERS IN UNFAIR TRADE PRACTICES [OBJECTIVE-2]

Experience of respondents showed that more number of consumers bought adulterated food item than of reduced and expired; the proportion of consumers who bought reduced and expired food items were similar. Refer table 4.1.

TABLE 4.1: PROPORTION OF CONSUMERS WHO BOUGHT REDUCED, ADULTERATED AND EXPIRED FOOD ITEMS

Description	Proportion of consumers who experienced unfair Trade practice
Proportion of consumers bought reduced weight food item	0.20
Proportion of consumers bought adulterated food item	0.27
Proportion of consumers bought expired food item	0.19

Source: Survey data of 2011

The experience of the respondents shows that more consumers are exposed to adulterated food item than of to buy expired and weight reduced food item. This is happened because it is difficult to detect adulterated food items easily. Only well experienced consumers identify adulterated food items; the detecting mechanisms are listed on table 4.3.

**6.4. MOST COMMON FOOD ITEMS VULNERABLE TO UNFAIR TRADE PRACTICES [OBJECTIVE-3]****6.4.1 EXPERIENCE OF CONSUMERS ABOUT MOST COMMON FOOD ITEMS VULNERABLE TO WEIGHT REDUCTION, ADULTERATION AND EXPIRY**

Sugar and coffee were the common food items vulnerable to quantity reduction. On the other hand, honey, butter, red pepper and edible oil were more exposed to adulteration. Moreover, Juices, powdered milk, edible oil and biscuits were more vulnerable to expiry; hence, edible oil was exposed to both adulteration and expiry. [Refer table 4.2]

**TABLE 4.2: MOST COMMON FOOD ITEMS VULNERABLE TO WEIGHT REDUCTION, ADULTERATION AND EXPIRY**

Common food items vulnerable to quantity reduction	Most common food items exposed to adulteration	Most common food items sold while expired
1. Sugar 2. Coffee	1. Honey 2. Butter 3. Red pepper 4. Edible oil	1. Juices 2. Powdered milk 3. Edible oil 4. Biscuits

Source: Survey data of 2011

The weight reduction practices were done by adjusting the weighing scale and weighing lesser than of the actual weight though the weighing scale is right.

**6.4.2 EXPERIENCE OF CONSUMERS ABOUT MOST COMMON EXTERNAL AGENTS ADDED TO FOOD ITEMS****TABLE 4.3: MOST COMMON EXTERNAL AGENTS ADDED TO FOOD ITEMS**

Description	Main food item exposed to adulteration			
	Honey	Butter	Red pepper	Edible oil
External agent added to the main food item	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sugar</li> <li>potato</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Banana</li> <li>Edible oil</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Red soil</li> <li>Chopped carrot</li> <li>Salt</li> <li>Water</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expired edible oil</li> <li>Artificial butter</li> </ul>

Source: Survey data of 2011

The most common item added to honey was sugar; but the research result indicated that potato was also added to honey. Banana was the most external agent added to butter; but sometimes, edible oil was also added to butter. The most common external agent added to red pepper was red soil; but note that salt, chopped carrot and 'shiro'- roasted powdered chickpea- were also added to red powdered red pepper. Moreover, to increase the weight, the raw red pepper was also wet by water. Mostly, expired edible oil was added to the unexpired food items. The expired food items were like USA oil which was provided to people on gift or food for work basis. As per the information of the respondents, the USAID edible oils was held by the farmers and until they expired [without their knowledge]. Moreover, concerned NGOs didn't distribute the edible oil ahead of time before the expiry date approached; but they distributed when the expiry date approached. Because of the above stated reasons, the USAID edible oil was found more exposed to expiry.

**6.3.3 EXPERIENCE OF CONSUMERS ABOUT DETECTION MECHANISM OF ADULTERATED FOOD ITEMS**

The consumers use different mechanisms to detect whether or not the some food items are adulterated. For example, sugar added to honey could be detected using heat; the colour of the adulterated honey also changes to black. Moreover, the smell of the burned adulterated honey is bad. In addition, significant portion of the consumers stated that Coca Cola soft drink could be used as detecting tool; if the honey has sugar and inserted to coca-cola soft drink, the soft drink buffers. Most of the time, banana is added as external agent to butter. And sometimes, edible oil is added to butter; this happens because butter is expensive than of edible oil. The added banana to butter can be detected through heat process; the banana doesn't melt using heat. Moreover, some consumers stated that they could detect the adulterated butter by their tongues and noses. Adulterated red pepper could be detected by tasting and observing the red pepper. For example, the added extra salt can be detected by tasting the powdered red pepper; the raw pepper is wet if water is added, etc. The adulterated edible oil could be detected by smelling the oil; the adulterated edible oil smells bad. But, except the smelling, observing and tasting methods, detecting mechanisms are not as such practical in the market place; consumers mostly check the food items when they back home-which cannot save them from deceptive. Compared to adulterated food items, checking of reduced weight/quantity than label and expired food items are simple. You may refer table 4.4.

**TABLE 4.4: DETECTION MECHANISM OF ADULTERATED FOOD ITEMS**

S/N	Most common food items vulnerable to adulteration	Detection mechanism
1	Honey	1. Burning on fire; the adulterated food item turns to black and smells bad. 2. Inserting to coca cola; if the honey has sugar, it buffers when it is inserted to coca cola. 3. by checking the color of the honey
2	Butter	1. Heating; if banana is added, it doesn't melt in heat. 2. smelling; 3. tasting; 4. observation; if it is adulterated, the color changes from its natural status
3	Red pepper	1. Tasting and observing for the powdered one 2. observing and weighing for the raw red pepper
4	Edible oil	1. Smelling; it smells bad 2. tasting; the taste of the oil is not good

Source: Survey data of 2011

**6.4.4 OBSERVATION ON MANUFACTURING AND EXPIRY OF FOOD ITEMS**

The researchers gathered information on shelving period of some food items; these food items are grouped in two: (1) Processed food items but whose manufacturing and expiry dates are unknown (2) Processed food items and whose manufacturing and expiry dates are known, but had some limitations.

**a. Processed food items but whose manufacturing and expiry dates are unknown**

Article 9 (3) of the proclamation on food, medicine and health care administration (661/2009), states that the "The type and content of nutrition, usage guide and shelf-life of nutritionally produced food shall be stated in an unfading and clearly mark on its package." However, though they are susceptible for expiry, the following listed food items were found being sold in the market without manufacturing and expiry dates.

- Wheat flour-Fino**: - The wheat flour/ processed in agro industries/ found in the market was produced in Ethiopia. The research team checked whether or not the products had manufacturing and expiry date; but though the product is highly vulnerable to expiry, none of the flour was with manufacturing and expiry date.
- Cooking food items**: - The researchers found different types of locally processed cooking food items- like products of Selam baltina, Zeineb Baltina, etc. all of them didn't have manufacturing and expiry dates. But it is known that the 'baltina' products are exposed to expiry.
- Peanut butter**: - there were different brands of peanut butter, whose shelving period varies from one to three years. The manufacturing and expiry period was written on piece of paper and stuck to the container. Even some of the peanut butter manufacturing and expiry dates were without month, only the year was stated. The stated shelving periods seem false dates. Hence, the researchers hesitated that the written dates may not be checked by concerned government body like, Ministry of health and Ethiopian quality and standards authority.
- Biscuits**: - there were some biscuits made of Ethiopia which were without manufacturing and expiry dates.



5. **Packed spring water:** - the researchers found about ten types of packed spring water. But none of them was with manufacturing and expiry date. In fact, based on the information gathered from health bureaus, some of the packed spring water was found with algae. Note that, at this time [when the report is presented] few of the packed spring water are being distributed with expiry date; this seems improvement.
  6. **Beer and alcoholic liquors:** - There were different locally manufactured alcohols in the market. But none of them was with expiry and manufacturing dates. There are also different brands of beers in the market; all of them are products of Ethiopia. But, none of them are found with manufacturing and expiry dates.
  7. **Soft drinks packed in bottles:** - Of the locally manufactured soft drinks, the soft drinks produced by Moha and packed in plastic bottles had only expiry date; because the manufacturing date was unknown, it was not possible to calculate the shelving period of the soft drinks.
- b. Processed food items and whose manufacturing and expiry dates are known, but had some limitations**
- i. **Pasta:** - The pasta imported from Italy as well as produced in Ethiopia had only expiry date; they didn't have manufacturing date. As a result, the researchers couldn't know the shelving period of the pastas.
  - ii. **Honey:** - The researchers found packed honey in the market whose shelving period varies from two to five years; the manufacturing and expiry dates of these honeys were written on piece of paper and stuck to the container, which can be replaced easily. It contradicts to the article 9 (3) of the proclamation [661/2009] on food, medicine and health care administration, which states that the "The type and content of nutrition, usage guide and shelf-life of nutritionally produced food shall be stated in an unfading and clearly mark on its package." The researchers hesitate that whether or not the gap in shelving period is right for the same type of product; concerned bodies need to check this situation.
  - iii. **Juices and sliced pineapples:** - Manufacturing and expiry dates of some of the locally produced juices were written on piece of paper and stuck to the container, which can be replaced easily. This contradicts to the article 9 (3) of the proclamation [661/2009] on food, medicine and health care administration, which states that the "The type and content of nutrition, usage guide and shelf-life of nutritionally produced food shall be stated in an unfading and clearly mark on its package."
  - iv. **Edible oil:** - In fact, edible oil marked by USAID was found in the market; the researchers couldn't know the shelving period of the oil because only expiry date was written in the container. But the consumers indicated that this type of edible oil was circulated in the market even after expired; it was also mixed up with unexpired ones and sold to consumers.
  - v. **Soft drinks packed in bottles:** - Soft drinks which are produced locally and packed in glass bottles do not have manufacturing and expiry dates.

#### 6.5 THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS IN PROTECTING THE CONSUMERS FROM UNFAIR TRADE PRACTICES [OBJECTIVE-4]

The bureau of trade and industry of Tigray region checks the weighing scales always and irregularly. As a result, significant portion of the traders were found using unstandardized grams, like piece of iron bar, coins, bolts and nuts, etc to measure weights of items; some traders also use magnets and very thin rope to pull down the scale. However, there are problems in administering the controlling activity of the weighing scales; some of them are: (1) When the workers of the bureau start checking the correctness of the weighing scales in some traders, the information was disseminated immediately and other traders take precautions; as a result, it was difficult to know whether or not the remaining traders were participating in the unfair trade practice. On the other hand, as compare to the number of traders, especially in large towns like Mekelle, the number of workers was few, which cannot help to check many traders at the same time. (2) Moreover, the already checked scales can be readjusted easily by the traders; there was no prevention mechanism to control readjustments by the traders. Because of the stated reasons and others, controlling the possibility of quantity reduction seems difficult.

Checking of the expiry of food items was the responsibility of health bureau. The bureau randomly checked to know whether or not the traders stock and sell expired food items. When it got expired food items, it collected and disposed them. But similar to that of weight control, information was easily disseminated to traders when check up was started in some areas. Moreover, as per the response of the health bureau, there were some food items, like candy and juices, which were imported from countries like Sudan with exaggerated shelving period. This seems that there was no strict control and check up on the shelving periods of some imported food items.

Control of the adulteration was the responsibility of health bureau; in fact it was done in collaboration with agriculture bureau. It was less controlled area. This was happened because the workers didn't have a testing tool to detect whether or not the food item were adulterated. Sometimes, there were instances of sending samples to Addis Ababa for check up purpose; but timely response was less likely.

However, currently an agent is established under the health bureau which is responsible to check such problems; this is good start to protect the public.

## 7. FINDINGS

About quarter of the respondents were not aware that traders could sell them reduced food item than of labeled one; moreover, though they were aware about one-third of the consumers didn't have the habit of checking whether or not the food item they bought was reduced than of labeled one. As a result, majority of the respondents didn't not know whether or not they buy reduced food item than of labeled one. Significant proportion of respondents were not aware that traders could sell them adulterated food item; although aware, quarter of the respondents didn't have the habit of checking whether or not they buy adulterated food item. Moreover, about quarter of the respondents were not aware that traders could sell them expired food items; even about 16% didn't have the habit of checking. In effect, about half of the consumers were vulnerable to adulterated food item. Generally, based on the awareness level and checking habit of consumers, rank wise, more consumers were vulnerable to buy reduced, adulterated and expired food items respectively. Moreover, the experience of the respondents shows that more consumers are exposed to adulterated food item than of to buy expired and weight reduced food item.

Sugar and coffee were the common food items vulnerable to quantity reduction. Moreover, honey, butter, red pepper and edible oil were more exposed to adulteration. Juices, powdered milk, edible oil and biscuits were also vulnerable to expiry; This indicates that edible oil was exposed to both adulteration and expiry.

The most common food item added to honey was sugar; but the research result indicated that potato was also added to honey. Banana was the most external agent added to butter; but sometimes, edible oil was also added to butter. The most common external agent added to red pepper was red soil; but note that salt, chopped carrot and 'shiro'- roasted powdered chickpea- were also added to red powdered red pepper. Moreover, to increase the weight, the raw red pepper was also wet by water. Mostly, expired edible oil was added to the unexpired food items. The expired food items were like USA oil which was provided to people on gift or food for work basis. As per the information of the respondents, the USAID edible oils was held by the farmers and until they expired [without their knowledge]. Moreover, concerned NGOs didn't distribute the edible oil ahead of time before the expiry date approached; but they distributed when the expiry date approached. Because of the above stated reasons, the USAID edible oil was found more exposed to expiry.

While wheat flour, processed cultural cooking food items, peanut butter, some biscuits, packed spring water, beer and alcoholic liquors, Soft drinks packed in bottles where found being sold to consumers without manufacturing and expiry dates, products like pasta, honey: Juices and sliced pineapples, edible oil, soft drinks packed in bottles had expiry dates but did not have manufacturing date.

To sum up, though the governments of Ethiopia and Tigray exert efforts to protect the consumers by enacting and implementing rules and regulations, the consumers are unsafe from unfair trade practices.

## 8. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

### 8.1 CONCLUSION

As already shown in the results and discussion, consumers were not aware about the possibility weight/quantity reduction, expiry and adulteration of the food items they buy for consumption. Even those who know about the possibilities of unfair trade practices, they lack the habit of checking. Both situations can expose the consumers to unfair trade practices. Experiences of the consumers also show that, compared to the possibility of buying reduced and expired food items, consumers are more exposed to the possibility of buying adulterated food item. Though the government is striving to protect the consumers from unfair trade practices using its organs, like trade and industry, health, standard and quality authority, police, etc., the unfair trade practices are still continuing.

Generally, there are factors that hinder the effectiveness of the controlling mechanisms; some of them are listed below.

- a. The fast communication system is contributing for the unfair trade practice; when the concerned government bodies start checking in one corner, the information reaches in the other corners. It is only the traders who are checked first can be known whether or not they are involved in unfair trade practice; finding the behaviour of the other traders is difficult.
- b. While there are proclamations about consumer protection, there are no as such specific rules and regulations for the violators of the law; for example, the proclamations 661/2009 and 685/2010 are not supported by the detailed rules/regulations which can state the punishment types and levels for each type of violations of the law. For example, the trade and industry bureau is using the proclamation as a rule. This can have a contribution for the delayed action of the concerned bodies on the violators of the law. Moreover, this can leave a room for unneeded type of relationship between the traders and executive /controlling body- like corruption.
- c. Though the proclamation 685/2010 states that mistreated consumers should report to trade and industry minister or bureaus, reporting mechanisms are not well stated. For example, if someone is mistreated by trader, (1) the customer do not know the location and telephone numbers of the concerned bodies; or (2) though the customers know, they may not have enough account balance to make telephone calls, etc.

## 8.2 RECOMMENDATION

To protect the possible cheatings by the traders:

- The government should increase the awareness level of the consumers, having programs on Mass Medias, like television and radio; the program can include information like the types of cheatings and their respective protection/detection mechanisms;
- There is need of integrity between the consumers and the controlling body; to do that, there is need of knowing the address and telephone numbers of the controlling bureaus. The address and telephone numbers of the concerned controlling bodies of the government are required to be written on bill boards and placed at different corners [of towns] where people can see them easily. The government can get more cooperation from the consumers when the government avail free charge telephone numbers to the public. There is need of stating rules and regulations in detail that can help to implement the law by the implementers; moreover there is need of strict implementation of the law.
- Similar to that of imported from China, there is need of pre-shipment inspection for food items. That is, before the food items are cleared for importation from the source, there is need of testing the quality and shelving periods of the food items.
- The health bureau either should acquire the necessary testing equipment (to test adulterated and exaggerated shelving periods) or should work in collaboration with other organizations that have the testing equipment, like the Ethiopian Quality and Standards Authority (EQSA)
- There is need of integration between the marketing and cooperatives of consumer. That is, the marketing cooperatives should have merchandising shops at fixed locations thereby consumer associations can get chance to buy quality products at fair price.

## 9. LIMITATION AND CHALLENGES OF THE STUDY

- The researchers tried to check the actual weight and expiry dates of the items bought by consumers; however, during that time, the government of Ethiopia was conducting market surveillance. Because of that surveillance, the traders were very conscious that they were under surveillance. Hence, at least for that time, the traders were in fear not to reduce weights, not to handle and sell expired food items, etc. As a result, the check-up didn't help the researchers to get the real behaviour of the traders. Hence, the data was gathered from the past experience of consumers; the finding of the research doesn't represent behaviour of merchandisers.
- The research was done on four towns of Tigray; moreover, the sample size [399] of the consumers was minimum, which may not represent the population size of the region. As a result, the findings of the research may not perfectly represent the consumer protection practice in Tigray level. It is exploratory research which can lead to further research.

## 10. SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESERACH

The research was done on four towns of Tigray; for better findings, further research can be conducted on more number of towns. Moreover, further research can be conducted, which investigates the real behavior of traders; this can be done in better way when traders are not aware that research is being conducted on them. The determinant factors of unfair trade practice can also be scope for further research.

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