

## **The potential of food processing to improve the livelihoods of the poor in Zimbabwe**

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Food processing has several benefits including the reduction of post harvest losses, the preservation of food, providing consumers with convenience food items, adding value and improving distribution potential. In many parts of the world, including sub-Saharan Africa, food processing has been touted as having the potential to reduce poverty and improving the quality of life of the poor through improved incomes, employment, food availability and nutrition.

In the current study, the potential for food processing to improve the livelihood of the poor was studied by looking at the supply and demand of processed fruits and vegetables in Zimbabwe. Focus group discussions with consumers from the high-, middle- and low-income groups in Harare showed that dried fruits, jams/jellies produced by small-scale processors had the potential to penetrate the formal market (supermarkets, general dealer shops). Preferences of specific types of processed fruits and vegetables were class related. Although price was the most important determinant of the preferences for low-income consumers, it was apparently not a significant consideration among high-income earners. It was confirmed by preliminary results from a consumer survey (n=500) that low-income consumers in particular would buy from small-scale processors. Dried fruit was the most frequently mentioned processed fruit product. The consumer survey also showed that of the consumers who would buy processed fruit, 93% (n=28) and 90% (n=235) of the high-income and low-income consumers respectively, would actually buy dried fruit. Among those that buy processed fruits across the income groups (n=321), about 11.6% bought from the supermarket, 34.4% from the local market, while a small percentage (0.8%), would buy direct from the processor. The rest would buy from different sources such as the general dealer shops, speciality shops and from street traders. This study showed that there is a large potential market for new processed fruits and vegetables in Harare in particular, and in Zimbabwe in general. However, consumer preferences seem to indicate a greater potential for dried fruits, jams and jellies. One of the major constraints of the small-scale processors was found to be lack of information about markets and available technologies.