

The Politics of Street Vending in Zimbabwe: Reflections on the Events in Harare

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ABSTRACT

Zimbabwe is faced with undesirable phenomenon of street vending. Focusing on Harare and other cities, order and neatness in the past were the hallmark of street management and the general philosophy guiding development control and policing of the city, the streets are presently littered. This is the result of two forces – urban poverty and high unemployment, driving people to seek their livelihoods in the streets, and the failure by politicians to agree on the direction to take worsening the situation. Top government officials and the Minister responsible for local government have been quoted as putting pressure on street vendors to move from the streets and operate elsewhere. Meanwhile, the former First Lady of Zimbabwe has questioned the morality of chasing away poor street vendors and encouraged them to continue operating from the streets. The first stance is not popular but the second is utterly populist and seems to be dictating the momentum of the current events. The first stance is supported by formal business operators and local government officials. Using content and textual analysis of the statements and texts made by the different stakeholders (Forum Qualitative Social Research, 2006) on this issue and with particular reference to the business precincts of Harare, this article is an attempt to assess the validity of these texts against what is obtaining and what is desired. The major argument we put forward is that urban economies are in serious danger, as long as informality is treated as sacrosanct and given priority over formality and professionalised business.

Keywords: urban politics; informality; street working, sustainability; urban taxation; patronage; political economy

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Introduction

This article is an attempt to chronicle and assess the validity of the utterances by urban and political heavy weights about street vending in relation to what is obtaining and the desired economic, social and physical urban contexts. The major argument put forward is that urban economies are in serious danger, as long as informality is treated as sacrosanct and given priority over formality and professionalised business. Harare, like other urban centres in Zimbabwe, is faced with street vending which is taking the centre-stage as households seek livelihoods for sustenance. Unlike in the past, when order and neatness were the hallmark of street management and the general philosophy guiding development control and policing of the city, the streets are presently littered. This is the result of two forces – urban poverty and high unemployment (Dwamena, 2015; Nyati et al, 2020), driving people to seek their livelihoods in the streets, and the failure by politicians to agree on which direction to take and worsening the situation by their reckless utterances.

Top politicians, one former Vice-President of the Republic of Zimbabwe and the former Minister responsible for local government have been quoted as putting pressure on street vendors to move from the streets and operate elsewhere. Meanwhile, the former First Lady of Zimbabwe has questioned the morality of chasing away poor street vendors encouraging them to continue operating from the streets. The first stance is not popular but the second is utterly populist and seems to be dictating the momentum of the current events. The first stance is supported by formal business operators and local government officials.

The article was informed by primary data collected through field surveys (photographs and observations), which was used together with secondary data obtained from existing literature and newspapers. It was qualitative or exploratory, as it aimed to chronicle and assess the validity of the statements made by

influential politicians concerning the phenomenon of street vending. A literature review of knowledge available on the topic allowed for the assessment of street vending globally, regionally, which was compared with Zimbabwe's current experiences and realities (Ridley, 2008). Newspaper publications and articles also constituted a key source of data, particularly the statements of politicians and the reactions to them as well as the current vending situation and the welfare of the street vendors. Newspapers were used as they are broad and up-to-date, despite their cons (Denscombe, 2014). The street vendors were photographed in the business precincts of Harare. The photographs revealed sites of struggles in Harare townships, the city centre and industrial sites. For analysis, content and textual analysis (Forum Qualitative Social Analysis, 2006) were engaged. Textual analysis was done to obtain insight into their (people) concerns, behaviour and motivations (Fairclough, 2003). The statements made by the different stakeholders, images of and existing literature on street vending were analysed to expose the points of contention. The analysis of various pieces of data exposed the realities of street vending in Zimbabwe.

The Analytical Framework

A variety of theories have been advanced by various scholars to explain the informal business sector. This paper focuses on the dualist school by Hart (1973) and Tokman (1978), the legalist school by De Soto (1989, 2000) and the structuralist school by Moser (1978) and Castells and Portes (1989). These form a crucial part of the article, as they provide different perspectives of the informal sector, enlightening the discussion, analysis and conclusions and recommendations on street vending in Harare. The dualist school views the informal sector as a separate marginal sector – not directly linked to the formal sector – but which provides income or a safety net for the poor in times of crisis by providing jobs. This school of thought also alludes to the fact that the informal sector persists because economic growth or industrial development has failed to absorb those who work in the informal

sector. It therefore, acts as a buffer for cyclical trends in the formal sector by providing a dumping ground for retrenched labour. This implies that once sufficient levels of economic growth are attained, the informal sector will gradually reduce in size.

The legalist school, meanwhile, is of the view that the informal sector comprises entrepreneurs who want to avoid the costs and hassle associated with formalisation which include business and labour regulations as well as company tax. The structuralist school considers the informal sector as part of a continuum within the market that serves to reduce input and labour costs. In cognizance of these diverging views on informal business, it is crucial to consider Elis' (1996: 28) point that the economic, social and physical context might dictate that the members of the society behave formally while another demands informal behaviour.

The conceptual framework (Figure 1) reflects the urban context in which urban management in Harare is currently taking place. The country is experiencing a severe economic crisis characterised by company closures and massive retrenchment. The few who are not retrenched are inconsistently paid. This is accompanied by conflicting management goals relating to urban sustainability and current social welfare. These conflicting goals result in diverging priorities among planners and politicians and even among politicians themselves. This is explained by the difference between urban planning principles and political rationality. Such an urban political environment and economic context give rise to more informal than formal development. In Figure 1, the informal sector has a bigger arrow than the formal sector. This situation explains the current urban problems which include the collapse of formal businesses, human and motor traffic congestion and the exacerbation of street 'tradership' in the CBD, which are the focus of this paper.

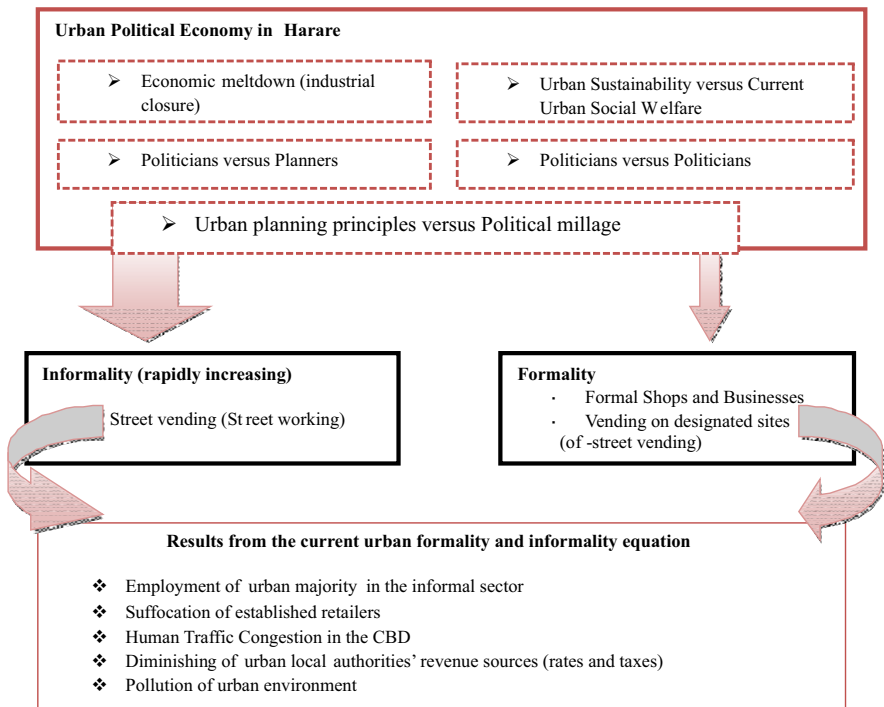


Figure 1: The conceptual framework of the issues
 Source: Authors (2015)

This paper focuses on the interconnection of urban politics, informality, street vending, sustainability, patronage and political economy. Urban politics is interlinked with direct or indirect public and private power in the local area (Levine, 2015). Though the formal local government rules remain important, urban politics define what cities can and cannot do. Formal structures also determine who gets what, stipulating rules for services and utility distribution. Complex national politics have shaped urban politics and the general political economy. The urban morass manifests in a rapid increase in urban informality that works against economic, social and physical sustainability. Informality includes unregulated activities or those not covered or

insufficiently covered by formal arrangements (Onyemaechi, 2013; Baker, 2004). Informal vendors activities are therefore, not in harmony with the local authority's development control regulations. Street working is a daily business along the streets and goods sold include fresh foodstuffs and vegetables, medicinal drugs, cell phones, electrical gadgets, cars and bricks (Njaya, 2014). It is therefore crucial to consider these activities given that streets are part of the spaces within cities and in neighbourhoods. Large pedestrian traffic volumes draw a variety of business activities to the streets, taking away the public right to the uninterrupted use of streets and street pavements. Sustainability as a concept goes against street vending and entails that development meets the needs of the present generations without compromising the needs of future ones. The concept of sustainability is hinged on three main pillars: the economic, the social and physical (Parris et al., 2003). It is crucial to consider these three pillars about street vending, different stakeholders and current and future economies. It is necessary to assess the current and future effects of vending on formal business, on public welfare, livelihoods and public infrastructure. Patronage refers to the granting or distribution of favours based on political affiliation or the granting of favours for political support (Willerton, 1992). Patronage plays a crucial role in mobilising political support and influencing the behaviour of politicians. Political economy is the method of economics to analyse political and institutional behaviour. At the core of political economy is contradicting paradigms, namely evolutionary fitness and maximising public utility. Political candidates employ survival tactics that are sometimes irrational, for political mileage (Barry et al., 2008).

A Review Of Street Vending: Causes, Forms And Impacts

Debates on street vending across the globe show incredible similarities despite differences in historical and geographical contexts. Arguments in favour or against street vending relate to its operation, the price and quality of goods/products, payment/evasion of taxes, illegality/legality, unfair/fair

competition, hygiene, consumer protection, consumerism and convenience, and the possibilities of making an honest living (DeLuca, 2012). In the world's megacities, there is an upsurge of indiscriminate street vending and millions of people throughout the world make their living partly or wholly by selling goods on the streets (Muzaffar et al., 2009). In some parts of the globe, especially Africa, political corruption, war, and lack of opportunity combined with the threats of poverty, forcing many people to migrate in search of greener pastures (ibid). Many find it difficult to survive and resort to working in the informal economy.

In the city of Dhaka in Bangladesh, almost 100 000 street food vendors are operating illegally in the streets, under highly precarious working and living conditions. They are at risk of being evicted by the police, drawn into the micro-politics of extortion, usually fail to earn a decent income, and below the poverty line (Etzold, 2014:1). Lack of gainful employment coupled with poverty in rural areas has pushed people out of their homes in search of better opportunities in the cities and many of them do not have the skills to find secure paid employment in the formal sector, hence they settle for work in the informal sector – street vending (Bhowmik, 2005). The low-skilled rural migrants exist in all Asian countries but they are more prevalent in the poorer countries such as India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Cambodia and Vietnam (ibid). A part of India's populace is forced to seek low-paid work in the informal sector due to job losses in the formal sector due to company closures, downsizing or mergers in the industries.

In European countries such as Spain, street vending has for a long time been a refuge and a way for thousands of less-educated people facing employment difficulties. In New York City, the street vending trade grew immensely due to the influx of immigrants and the fact that start-up costs were few. This made the occupation an economically viable option for immigrants and provided a livelihood for the unemployed. In response, the city's measures

reflected a lack of interest in street vending, making the street less welcoming for vendors. The mayor removed vendors from the street and relegated them to designated market spaces, which adversely affected vendor sales because the locations were not convenient for former customers, who did not want to travel great distances for products that could be purchased in a nearby storefront (Browne et al., 2011). This made people shun vending, citing economic viability challenges.

In African countries, street trade is rampant and is a major source of employment and income for many urban dwellers. The informal sector as a whole is estimated to account for 60 percent of all urban jobs and over 90 percent of all new urban jobs in Africa, and street trading is estimated to account for the largest share of these jobs (Skinner, 2008). However, in most countries, it is usually unaccounted for and unrecognised in national economic statistics (Mitullah, 2003:3). Street vending accounts for 9% in Guatemala of total non-agricultural employment, 14.6% in South Africa, 6% in Tunisia and 8% in Kenya (ILO, 2002). Street trade is viewed as an underground activity that undermines the healthy function of the formal economy. This perception has resulted in conflicts with urban authorities over licensing, taxation, sites of operation, sanitation and working conditions (ILO, 2002).

The trends in street vending are closely linked to urbanisation, migration and economic development processes. In the region, poor economic performance has led to this phenomenon given that the industries are failing to create sufficient employment opportunities for the youth. It becomes the escape route from poverty serving as a development strategy on young people's journey towards adulthood (Skinner, 2008). Another dimension of urbanisation processes that swells the number of street traders is regional migration, which is a response to regional economic inequalities, resulting in the migration of many people to South Africa. Political crises and civil wars for example Somalia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of Congo,

Rwanda, Burundi, Ethiopia and Eritrea have generated high levels of forced migration. More recently, the crises in the Darfur region as well as in Zimbabwe are generating flows of migration within both Africa and elsewhere. These movements pose many problems for the host country, town or city and the immigrants themselves, since the host cannot generate adequate economic activities and services to cater for such population hence the emergence of informal street trading.

The foregoing reveals that controversy surrounding the use of public space and street vending is by no means unique in Zimbabwe but also occurs within the region and the global community at large. Street trading, a manifestation of the state of the economy in Zimbabwe, is a common phenomenon across the nation's towns and growth points, where street pavements have become dominant market places for traders selling a variety of commodities ranging from food and vegetables, to clothes, traditional medicine, footwear, stationery and electronic gadgets. According to the ILO (2003) the issue of street vending is a political and economic crisis that has effectively disturbed the formal sector, making its re-establishment difficult. It is not very clear whether street vending is subject to taxing and monitoring of street vending by the government and its agencies and what contribution it makes towards the Gross National Product (GNP). Its very existence is a major point of contention among professionals in the built environment sector, business people, politicians and civic society.

The Street-vending Phenomenon In Harare: Contrasting Views

In Zimbabwe, existing policies on street vending do not reflect the economic context of the country. Politicians are heard making public pronouncements, which serve to either please vendors or to supposedly promote order, and cleanliness in cities. Saungweme et al. (2015) have estimated that unemployment ranges between 85%

and 90%, which calls for alternative means of employment for citizens. The cumulative result has been the growth of informal enterprises as urban populations seek various ways of eking out a living, spreading 'informality' (Myers, 2005). This reflects the incapacity of the formal economy to generate adequate private and public resources for housing, infrastructure and urban employment. The economy is not sufficiently developed to create employment opportunities for the teeming masses of urban unemployed, a situation further compounded by high levels of rural-urban migration contributing to the invasion of city pavements by vendors seeking a livelihood.

The legislative framework provides guidelines governing urban activities, to which street vending should prescribe. These include the Regional, Town and Country Planning Act, Harare Vendors Bye-Laws of 2014, Harare (Hawkers) Bye-Laws (2014), Roads Act (Chapter 13:18), Public Health Act (Chapter 15:09), Food hygiene bylaws, and the Environmental Management Act (Chapter 20:27). The Regional Town and Country Planning Act provides a procedural guideline to control and manage development (local development plans, development permits, regularisation, enforcement, prohibition as well as demolition). Moreover, in the preamble of the Act, the principle objectives of planning and development control are indicated as improving the social, economic and physical wellbeing of the public by improving amenities, welfare, order, health and safety. The nature of street vending in Harare CBD, calls for planning interventions to ensure order, and the safety and convenience of pedestrians and the general public. The Harare (Vendors) Bye-Laws of 2014 (also stipulated by Statutory Instrument 159 of 2014), mandates the local authority to designate official vending sites, register vendors, set tariffs, and fine them for failure to adhere to the stipulations of the law. This by-law provides for the regulation of the activities of vendors, to improve welfare and boost council finances. The Harare (Hawkers) Bye-Laws (2014) provide the guidelines relating to hawking in Harare, the Harare (Hawkers) Bye-Laws gazetted in May 2014 stipulates that 'no person shall conduct

hawking business stationary for more than fifteen minutes' (Njaya 2014). The large number of goods sold by hawkers limits their movement.

According to the stipulations of the Roads Act (Chapter 13:18), street vending on pavements violates section 48 (1) of the Roads Act, which labels pavements as roads and as a space where trade is not allowed. Road Act Section 48 (1) sets down that no trading should be carried out on roadsides (6 metres from the road and less than 500 metres from the intersection of roads without the written consent of the local authority. It further stipulates that anyone contravening the act shall be liable to imprisonment or payment of a fine. Significantly, street vending is in contravention of section 69 of the Public Health Act (Chapter 15:9), which prohibits the sale of contaminated foods. Food hygiene bylaws section 8 k(ii) which is in line with the Health Act stipulates that members of the public should not place any food lower than 500 millimetres from the ground of any pavement and should ensure that while it is displayed or exposed for sale or during delivery, food is kept covered to prevent infection or contamination. Also, the Environmental Management Act (Chapter 20:27) provides for the maintenance of environmental quality, which street vending in Harare has contributed to lowering. These policies and legislative framework guiding street vending activities in Harare do not reflect the economic reality, as manifested by the continued existence of vendors in undesignated sites.

Sites of Struggles in Harare

Street vending in the CBD poses numerous challenges, as shall be illustrated and explained in the following pictures. Plates 2 and 3 illustrate how vendors take away the public right to uninterrupted use of street pavements, displaying their wares on the pavement is competing with the conventional use of pavements in the CBD. Plate 1 illustrates the places in the CBD where street vending is most common. These areas include the pavements of the streets, where there are more pedestrian–vendor conflicts, specifically in the morning and evening peak hours, where most people are going

to work and going home through the CBD. As indicated in red on the map these streets are along:

- Chinhoyi street from Kwame Nkrumah to Robert Mugabe
- Julius Nyerere way between Robson Manyika and Robert Mugabe
- Robson Manyika Street between Julius Nyerere Way and Angwa Street
- Mbuya Nehanda Street from Albion to Kwame Nkrumah
- Nelson Mandela Street from Chinhoyi to Rezende Street
- Robert Mugabe Road from Julius Nyerere up to 4th Street

Plate 1: Streets where vending is more pronounced in the CBD



Source: Madziba, (2015)

In these streets, vendors display their wares throughout the hours that the city is active. From around 4:00 pm, nocturnal vendors bringing vegetables, fish and other products join their counterparts who operate during the day, reducing the street pavement space for

the pedestrians during the evening peak hours. Plate 2 illustrates how street vendors displayed their wares: the wares and the banana push-chart have occupied a large proportion of the street pavement, leaving a very small proportion of the pavements to pedestrians.

Plate 2: Conflicting interests in street pavement use



Source: Fieldwork (2015)

The way vendors display their wares in the street pavements illustrated in plate 2, results in them occupying a large part of the street pavements. This situation creates a problem of pedestrian congestion, specifically in the morning and evening peak hours. Plate 3 shows pedestrians struggling to manoeuvre their way through street pavements as vendors have displayed their wares on the other side of the pavement. The plate also demonstrates that street vending in Zimbabwe is illegal and a public nuisance.

Plate 3: Pedestrian congestion created by street vending



Source: Fieldwork (2015)

Vendors display their products in front of formal business premises, selling similar products in most cases at prices lower than of those charged by established businesses. This is seen in Plate 4, where vendors display shirts and shoes adjacent to shops selling similar products.

Plate 4: Conflicts between Established Business and Vendors



Source: Fieldwork (2015)

There are also issues relating to street vending and public health, the type of products sold by the street vendors and the way they are displayed, in contravention of Harare's Food hygiene bylaws, posing a serious risk to public health. Plate 5 shows vegetables displayed in the streets, in contravention of section 8k (ii) of the Food hygiene bylaws, which stipulates that there is need to ensure that, while displayed or exposed for sale or during delivery, food should be kept covered to prevent infection or contamination.

Plate 5: Display of Foodstuffs in contravention of Public Health Standards



Source: Fieldwork (2015)

In industrial areas, street vending is often characterised by hawkers and other mobile traders using pushcarts, selling a variety of wares. In townships, street vending is rampant, especially in middle and low-income areas. Most vendors display their wares along main

streets that have high pedestrian traffic volumes and in open spaces and car parks in shopping centres, as seen at Hatcliffe and Mukomva Shopping Centres.

The observations and photographs have revealed that street vending generates controversy in urban planning debates. City of Harare has experienced cycles in which it tolerates, then regulates, and then evicts street vendors following economic trends, election cycles and other urban management pressures. It is poor management that generates problems of congestion and pollution. Street vending, it is argued, contributes to the economic, social, and cultural life of a city by offering a dependable retail outlet for a wide range of affordable goods, including fresh produce, prepared food, school and office supplies, clothing, hardware, and electronics. Because street vendors sell affordable goods in small quantities, they offer the poor customer access to otherwise unaffordable goods.

Meanings And Interpretations Attached To The Utterances By Selected Politicians

In response to rampant street vending in street pavements, open spaces and even car parks in cities, townships, neighbourhoods and industrial areas, the former VP Phelekezela Mphoko stated,

“I have got my views regarding vending where you find an able-bodied man seated selling tomatoes. There are better things to do for someone fit except for those who are indisposed and physically-challenged” (*Daily News* 27 January 2015).

This statement hints that vendors do not want to work or lack the innovation to make a living by other means. The statement also suggests that devising a sustainable way of accommodating street vendors is not the best solution. Different stakeholders, depending on their perspective, interpreted this statement differently, as seen by the various comments made in different newspaper articles, some factual, while others were lopsided and emotional.

The vendors, through the National Vendors' Union of Zimbabwe (NAVUZ), responded emotionally to the former VP Mphoko's statement. The NAVUZ president described Mr Mphoko's statement as insensitive to the current economic situation, which has seen many turnings to vending following company closures (*Newsday* 2 February 2015). In line with the dualist school of thought on the origins of the informal sector (Hart 1973 and Tokman 1978), street vending in Zimbabwe increased as companies retrenched and closed down. Though the vendors have a point, their response is one-sided. Comments from vendors interviewed in several newspaper articles do not consider how their activities are impinging on those of the established formal business, the pavement rights of the general public, and how their vending activities are not in sync with existing urban management and development control regulations.

Professionals recognise how street vending is impinging on the economic, social and physical wellbeing of different stakeholders in Zimbabwean cities. Moreover, they acknowledge that the current economic context, the rate of company closures and retrenchment make street vending a necessary evil, as it provides safety nets for victims of the prevailing economic context. Although best strategies differ in keeping with the local context (the percentage of population involved in vending, the economic context and another local context), this statement points to the need to protect established retailers and devise the best way of sustainably incorporating street vending into public space management. The Harare City Council also views street vending in the same way. Although established businesses are succumbing to pressure from unregulated street vending, therefore, it is key to consider how a “win-win” situation can be created in cities. This shows that professionals are not in agreement with Mr Mphoko's statement on vending, as they consider that vending enables vendors to fend for their families.

The purist's views on vending are represented by statements by the Harare City Council, made during a dialogue meeting between it, NAVUZ, and ZUNA. Harare City Council pointed out that illegal vending is a major problem in the city, and that vendors should move to designated vending sites in the CBD (*Daily News*, 27 January 2015). This is in line with planning principles and the existing legal framework for vending, Vendors and Hawkers' By-laws of 2014, the Regional Town and Country Planning Act, among others. Different stakeholders have divergent viewpoints about the former Vice President Mphoko's statement. It is crucial to consider the point that if planning is to be sustainable, it needs to take into account the current situation and economic future of the CBD. Street vending is proving to be unavoidable, so if urban planning is to be sustainable, it needs to devise the best strategies for sustainably incorporating it into the existing urban system.

Economic restructuring involving spatial regulation and urban management has resulted in intensified political tensions and struggles as the interaction between planning agendas and local political dynamics conflicted. Evidence across the country reveals that the intermittent eviction of vendors from sidewalks and streets has received varied responses. The public abhors street vendors for spreading dirt and disease, investors blame them for adversely affecting business, and local government and representatives of the state view them as unruly and difficult to regulate. In response to the phenomenon of rampant street vending, the former Minister responsible for local government, Dr Chombo, has been quoted as addressing mayors and council chairpersons at the 73rd Urban Councils Association of Zimbabwe (UCAZ) annual general meeting in Bulawayo, putting pressure on local authorities to move vendors from streets to designated vending sites. Minister Chombo stated that vendors operating at undesignated areas in the cities and rural districts should be removed for the sake of urban neatness.

The Minister mentioned that the role of the informal sector in the Zimbabwean economy and the upsurge in indiscriminate vending

in urban areas has acutely affected the environment, compromising the health of the residents, since vendors are selling their wares on pavements, open spaces and in front of shops. This calls for local authorities to act accordingly to restore urban neatness, and the responsible authority has allowed for the eviction of vendors from the street. The question remains as to the sustainability of such a move given the resurgence of such activities after the devastating 2005 Operation Restore Order. The statement drew mixed feelings and reactions among various stakeholders, some of whom view the directive as being reckless and disparaging. Vendor Associations said his speech would have made sense in 1985, when unemployment was virtually zero and all the designated vending stations could accommodate the population of hawkers. Nevertheless, given the current 90% unemployment rate, the population of street vendors has swelled enormously. The National Vendors Union of Zimbabwe chairperson Sten Zvorwadza lashed out at Minister Chombo, accusing him of being reckless and insensitive (*New Zimbabwe*, 8 February).

The vendors vowed to continue operating at undesignated sites in central business districts, saying they would only move out after the government has provided them with formal employment. The business people or retailers welcomed the development, saying this would safeguard their investments, allowing them to get a return from trading. Business people's main criticism of street vending was that vendors had an unfair advantage over off-street establishments because they did not incur registration and taxation costs and do not have costs such as rent and utility payments. This threatens the viability of off-street. Vendors have appropriated streets frequented daily by customers with varying needs and because of the convenient location in public space. Business proprietors are of the view that local governments should “formalise” street vendors by relocating them to off-street premises, where they would be expected to register, pay taxes and rent or own their workplace. According to recent development

theory, street vending is an example of micro-entrepreneurship and constitute a solution to urban poverty and represent a major dilemma in policy and urban management.

The former First Lady, Grace Mugabe, also made the following statement on street vending,

“mapurisa please mapurisa! ngatiregei kutorera vanhu zvunhu zvavo, if they are selling at undesignated places. Tell them peacefully, they will understand.... Vazvinzwa vakuru vemapurisa vagere pamberi apo (Senior Assistant Commissioner Charity) Mai Charamba nevamwe vavo vazvinzwa. Mazvinzwa mhamha handiti?” (The police chiefs seated in the front row have heard me. Mrs Charamba and her colleagues have heard me. You heard me, didn't you, ma'am?) (*The Herald* 7 march 2015, *Newsday* 7 March 2015)

Significantly, the former First Lady's statements on vending were uttered during her “meet the people” rallies in various regions (the *Daily News* 6 May 2015) and when she was addressing a gathering on International Women's Day. These controversial comments from the First Lady's utterance on street vending were met by various factual and emotional comments from different stakeholders, as shall be seen in subsequent paragraphs. The then First Lady's views must be considered in light of her position, she assumed interests in the majority and her background in as much as urban systems, urban economics and urban planning principles are considered. Her view on vending is contrary to the utterance by the Vice-President Mphoko. The vendors at undesignated space welcomed the First Lady's statement as it informally legalized their activities. This is reflected in numerous comments from such vendors, who pointed out that their business activities are now flourishing. (*The Weekend Post*, 3 December 2014). In contrast, licensed vendors were not happy with the statement, as it negatively affected their normal business activities, as seen in some statements uttered by some established vendors.

Several stakeholders, with the exception of illegal vendors, had views contrary to the statement of the First Lady on the issue of vendors. It is clear that the professional side does not buy into the statement that the rights of the public must be protected, although they are realising the fact that vending provides a safety net for the unemployed masses in the urban areas. Moreover, the Chairperson of the Harare Environmental Management Committee in a statement to *The Herald* of 6 May 2015 indicated that the City Council needed to conduct a blitz to restore order in the city, and that it does not approve the sale of food in the open. On the issue of vending and foodstuffs, one of the doctors practising in the CBD was cited in the same newspaper speaking of the likelihood of cholera or typhoid outbreak given the manner in which street vending is currently being practised. Such views on street vending are not in keeping with the former First Lady's views on street vending. Though these views are rational and stress the importance of adhering to planning principles, they seem to be divorced from the economic reality of Zimbabwe, where the majority of the population is not formally employed.

It is also clear that the First Lady's view on the plight of vendors does not consider the effects on established business. Given the location in which the statement was made, it may be assumed that it was done for “political mileage”. With the current rate of unemployment in Zimbabwe, the majority is made up of more street vendors than established retailers. If there were more retailers than vendors, she might have directed the police to effectively deal with vendors and not even consider their plight. Sustainable urban planning calls for a system's approach, which takes into account the current context and tries to create a “win-win” situation, concerned about the welfare of the public. Though this statement by the First Lady seemed sensitive to the plight of vendors, it did not consider the economic and physical sustainability of cities, as uncontrolled vending has the potential to destroy the wellbeing of cities in the next few years. The impact of the statement is manifested in cities like Masvingo, where vendors

have invaded most public areas and open spaces. The statement by the Deputy Mayor of Masvingo highlights that they are unable to maintain order due to the controversial statement. (*The Weekend Post*, 3 December 2014).

There are contrasting views on the statement by the former First Lady. Some are in support of it based on the very low rate of formal employment and some are opposed to it because of such planning principles as order and maintaining the city's aesthetics. Taking into account both views, which aims at balancing between the planning principles and economic reality, seems to be the best.

Zimbabwe has literally been reduced to a country of vendors, as the economy deteriorates. The statements by the politicians that vendors should be evicted attracted a backlash from the vendors, who accused the government of being responsible for the collapse of industries which had led to massive unemployment, and vowed to remain in this trade for survival. According to the Harare City Council, the CBD can only accommodate 6 000 vendors and the rest currently operating in the city centre will be moved to sites in residential and industrial areas. According to the Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries (CZI), there are close to 300,000 people in Mutare alone who have been rendered jobless in the past four years. The CZI says 10 major companies closed shop during the same period, among them, Karina, Mutare Board and Paper Mills, while others such as Cairns Foods, Quest Motor Corporation are operating below full capacity. This makes it very difficult for the Mutare city to evict vendors, as the Mutare Council stated categorically on the Voice of America Press on 12 February 2015. Following a verbal directive from Local Government Minister Ignatius Chombo Mutare Mayor, Councillor Nhamarare says the council has no immediate plans to remove vendors from the streets. Planning professionals in Mutare are working on ways and partnerships intended to construct marketing stalls for these vendors at strategic points.

In Harare, the Town Clerk agrees with the Minister that the vendors need to be moved out of the streets to designated sites outside the CBD. Town Clerk Dr Mahachi has expressed surprise that vendors are flooding the Central Business District (CBD) to sell tomatoes and vegetables, leaving customers in the residential areas (*New Zimbabwe*, 8 February 2015). The Minister's directive is in keeping with the Town Clerk's desire to restore the sunshine city status. He said that security teams would be deployed to move vendors from the pavements. However, vendors are resisting the move, claiming that there is little business in residential areas.

The proliferation of vendors in the CBD threatens Harare City's vision of attaining world-class city status by 2025, and austerity measures should be taken to get rid of the street vendors. Albeit recognizing the high unemployment rates, professionals seem to argue that order and cleanliness should be promoted in any trade in the city. The vendors have made running the city very difficult as their activities represent unfair competition and they are no longer paying rates, which is a serious threat to the city's revenue base. Minister Chombo, who authorised local authorities to remove all illegal vendors from the town and cities across the country, said that the government is aware that times are difficult, but citizens must follow government and council directives. However, the Mayor of Harare, Councillor Manyenyeni, said the out-of-control vending is a stark reflection of the harsh political and economic realities that Zimbabweans are currently facing, and it would be extremely difficult to drive them from the streets without a proper alternative. He said that restoring order in the city would not be easy, because besides the economic need, there was the “political influence” on the vendors. The mayor's response to the crisis virtually takes away any hope that the menace would end any time soon.

The formal business operators are against street vending, arguing that they compete unfairly against off-street establishments, because they do not incur registration and taxation costs and rentals and utility payments. This creates unfair competition,

threatening the viability of off-street establishments. For this reason, they welcome the eviction of the vendors or local government attempts to “formalise” street vendors by relocating them to off-street premises where they would be expected to register, pay taxes and rent or own their workplace. The formal business responded to this rampant street vending by not paying rates to the council, citing viability constraints and some went as far as closing shop.

Conclusion And Recommendations

Street vending in Harare, as in other Zimbabwe cities, has taken centre-stage among the economic activities from which many households draw their livelihoods. This phenomenon, perpetrated by conflicting known and hidden agendas, has ruined town planning principles of order, health, and safety, welfare in the city as well as economic, physical and social sustainability, making street management and development control very difficult. The phenomenon is fuelled by diametrically opposing forces of urban poverty manifesting in high unemployment and conflicting urban management goals of promoting the public welfare. The politicians have worsened the situation by making reckless contradictory statements with regards to street vending. The views of the former Vice-President of Zimbabwe and the Minister responsible for local government on street vendors stands in stark contrast to those of the former First Lady, who questioned the morals of chasing poor street workers and encouraged them to continue operating from the streets.

The views expressed by the former officials responsible for local government are not populist, but that expressed by the First Lady is utterly populist and seems to be dictating the current events. The Minister's view is in favour with the formal business operators and local government practitioners, since street traders are accused of presenting unfair competition to off-street traders, affecting their profitability and the sources of funding of local authorities, since they do not pay rentals, rates or taxes. The First Lady's view works against established business and local authorities, the movement of

pedestrians in the CBD and the environmental sustainability. Street vendors were pleased with the First Lady's statement and vowed to stay on the streets as long as the economy was still underperforming as it was now. The forces of high urban poverty and unemployment have pushed many people to the streets despite threats of eviction from city leaders and environmental management agency. Street vending has become a hot political potato in Harare, rendering development control parameters useless.

Through pictures and supporting literature, the paper has illustrated the consequences of aligning oneself with the First Lady's stance. Street vending results in morass in the city, is in violation of planning principles and has negative effects to public health, as illustrated in plates 4a and 4b, where food is displayed in the streets has implications for established business and for members of the general public, who need to manoeuvre their way around the CBD. The effects of abiding by planning principles and legislation, as expressed in the statements of the Minister and the Vice-President, have also been illustrated. Where street vending is concerned, the latter stance is more sustainable, although there is need to provide sufficient vending sites to which the current illegal vendors can be relocated. Continued street vending has posed and, if ignored, will continue to pose serious problems to off-street businesses/traders, local authorities and the general public. Street traders have reduced the revenue made by off-street traders, making them unable to pay rates to the city council, which has in turn seriously affected the revenue base of the local authority. The major argument is that the urban economies are under serious threat as long as the current morass (manifesting in informality) is allowed to prevail.

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