

Street Multi-functionality and City Order: The Case of Street Vendors in Harare

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Abstract

The current invasion of the city center in Harare by street vendors has resulted in a plethora of urban headaches with varying responses from the city authorities. This paper examines the repercussions of street vending to city planning and order in Harare. This study uses mixed methods but is dominantly qualitative. Guided interviews and focused group dimensions (FGDs) were used to solicit rich qualitative data from thirty vendors operating in the city center. In addition, a mini-questionnaire was also utilized to collect quantitative data. Data were analyzed through content analysis and comparative analysis. The study found out that street vending in undesignated sites has caused pandemonium in the city despite being a source of livelihood to the majority of urbanites who have been plunged into poverty by economic doldrums. The vending market dynamics have played a part in the location of vendors in the 'undesignated areas' since these seem to give better returns as compared to the city's designated vending sites. The efforts by city authorities to restore order has been partly hampered by political interference that seems to support street vending. In light of this, it is recommended that addressing the chaos in the city center does not require city planners alone, but the generality of socio-economic practitioners who should create a functional state that provides economic opportunities to the urban poor. Apart from that, licensing of all the vendors operating in Harare will greatly assist the move to make them pay taxes and levies that will help boost the revenue of the city. However, the levies should be kept at minimum level such as 'a dollar a day'.

Keywords: Street vending, urban poverty, urban livelihoods, vending markets, city revenue

1. Introduction

This paper is based on an on-going survey on the implications of street vending on city planning processes and outcomes. Urban planning has always strived to maintain city order and acceptable public health standards. In fact the urban planning profession emanated from the city disorder of the industrial revolution in Great Britain which resulted in overcrowded slums and outbreak of diseases such as cholera and dysentery. The need to control human settlements and plan city activities is the hallmark of 'good' city planning and development. However urban planning has always assumed a functional nation state with appropriate socio-economic opportunities, which can be modelled into patterns of social behaviors. These behavioral patterns are assumed to be rational (objective) and are then modelled into predictable functions and elements which are then assigned space in urban settings. The whole idea being the desire to uphold acceptable order - at least in the eyes of the urbanites.

Unfortunately the reality in urban Zimbabwe is defying the logic of 'good' city planning. The economic wheels of a functional nation state have derailed. A survey by the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) among its half affiliates noted that in 2014, 75 companies closed down throwing 9 617 workers out of employment (ZCTU, 2015). This is also corroborated by the National Social Security Agency (NSSA) which estimated that close to 400 companies were closing down every month in the last quarter of 2014 (The Standard, 2015). These dire statistics show that formal employment in Zimbabwe is on rapid decline. It should be noted though that the decline of the formal industrial sector in Zimbabwe started in the 1990s with the introduction of the structural adjustment program. Thus the current economic recession in Zimbabwe is an outcome of long term economic malfunction since 1992 which have increased exponentially over the last decade. This has resulted in the majority of workers engaging in informal activities such as vending, carpentry, welding and other activities to sustain their activities.

2. Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

This paper, explores the interface between city planning and street vending through an in-depth analysis of the poverty profiles and vulnerability contexts in urban Zimbabwe. The ultimate goal is not only on conceptualizing street vending as a fringe economic activity but also on finding out how urban planning can be pro-poor, human centric and adaptive to social economic contexts of nation states. Therefore, the paper was guided by poverty and vulnerability theories - structural, cumulative and cyclical interdependences and spatial theories and the Capability Approach. The first three mentioned theories helped the researchers to understand the nature of poverty and vulnerability contexts in urban areas. The Capability Approach was used to assess the effectiveness of street vending in reducing urban poverty and vulnerability. The study concluded by providing policy recommendations on how to improve welfare of city's poor under the current development framework - ZIM-

ASSET and the discussion of the recommendations was shaped by different social protection conceptual frameworks.

To convincingly expose the efficacy of street vending as a livelihood strategy, it was significant for the researchers to start by having a better understanding of poverty and vulnerability contexts in the cities where vendors operate. This understanding was gained through the use of structural, cumulative and cyclical interdependencies as well as spatial poverty theories. The choice of using these theories has immensely been influenced by the nature of urban poverty and vulnerability in Zimbabwe – which has a structural and spatial character. The structural poverty theory explains poverty as a resultant of socio-economic and political distortions or discriminations (structural factors) which inhibit people's access to opportunities and resources they need to achieve income and well-being (Bradshaw 2006, p 10 and Jordan 2000, p 22³). To understand poverty traps in the study, researchers depended on the notions of cumulative and cyclical interdependencies poverty theory. This theory explains how problems or challenges close the poor's opportunity to escape poverty and create a cumulative set of problems that make an effective response virtually infeasible (Bradshaw 2000 in Bradshaw 2006, p 14). These first two mentioned theories helped the researchers to understand the structural character of poverty in the city centers. In understanding poverty's spatial character, the researchers used geographically based poverty theories. According Bradshaw (2006, p 12), geographically based poverty theory calls for attention to the fact that people and institutions in certain areas lack the resources or means needed to generate wellbeing and income and that they lack the power to claim redistribution. This theory clearly explains why poverty is concentrated in inner cities and low income suburbs.

The paper is further guided by Sen's thinking - Capability Approach (CA). The CA focuses on what people are able to do and be (Hick 2012, p. 2). It views human life as a set of functionings.⁴ Functionings refers to an array of things a person succeeds in 'doing or being' such as participating in the life of a society, being healthy and safe as well as having a self-respect and a good job (Sen 1999, p. 75). Capability refers to a person's real or substantive freedom to achieve such functionings and a good example is a person's ability to take part in the real life of a society (*ibid*). A person is said to be in poverty if he or she does not have, owing to structural retardants, freedom (capability) to attain functionings. To attain real development, Sen (1999) argues, requires the removal of 'unfreedoms' - elimination of poverty, tyranny, lack of economic opportunities, social deprivation, neglect of public services and the machinery of repression. Improving quality of life, using Sen's notion of development, is the overarching development goal. According to Sen⁵ the exercise of measuring or assessing the quality of life takes the form of evaluating the people's capability to function. Therefore, development interventions which seek to enhance quality of life should be primarily evaluated according to the extent to which they promote people's freedom to achieve functionings they [people] value - this makes CA an instrumental concept for conceptualizing livelihood options of the poor. This brief background of the CA justifies the researchers' choice to use the concept to appraise the nexus between city planning and street vending.

3 Research Methodology

The study area is demarcated by Robert Mugabe Road, Sam Nujoma Street, Herbert Chitepo Street and Rotten Row. Within this area a total of 30 vendors were selected using judgmental sampling. Out of the 30, geographical distribution, type of vending wares, age and sex were considered in the selection.

The study utilized a case study approach and is dominantly qualitative though it used multiple methods to collect data from street vendors and city planners in Harare. Qualitative methods were used in the selection of the study areas, respondents and key informants; collection of data through focused group discussions, guided interviews; and data analysis through content analysis. On the other hand, quantitative methods were also used in the collection of data through a mini-questionnaire and analysis of data through comparative analysis.

Multiple methods are used in this study in order to eliminate the weakness of each method by combining their strengths. Reliability is high and validity low in quantitative research, hence combining it with qualitative research which has high validity and low reliability will produce the benefit of having high reliability and high validity of the overall study. As Patton (1990:14) opines, the quantitative approach "...requires the use of standardized measures so that the varying perspectives and experiences of people can fit into a limited number of predetermined response categories to which numbers are assigned". This facilitates comparison and statistical aggregation of the data. Furthermore, Patton (1997:274) posits that "...qualitative data offer detailed, rich

³<http://www.asu.edu/mpa/Jordan.pdf> (accessed on 17/08/2014)

⁴http://morgana.unimore.it/Picchio_Antonella/Sviluppo%20umano/svilupp%20umano/Sen%20development.pdf (accessed on 24/08/14)

⁵http://morgana.unimore.it/Picchio_Antonella/Sviluppo%20umano/svilupp%20umano/Sen%20development.pdf (accessed on 24/08/14)

descriptions, capturing variations between cases whilst on the other hand quantitative data facilitate comparisons because all participants respond to the same questions on standardized scales within predetermined response categories". In light of this, combining the two approaches provides more benefits as compared to using each separately.

4 Profiling Vendors and their Vulnerability (Initial Results)

4.1 Demographic Profiles of Vendors

The study revealed that both men and women are involved in street vending, though women continue to dominate (63%) in low value wares such as vegetables and second hand clothing. The increasing role of men in street vending brings in a total new dimension to poverty and vulnerability analysis of urban households, as it indicates the upgrade of vending in the household activities. Unlike in the previous years (3 years ago, since 79% indicated that they only started vending in the last year) where vending was primarily done by women particularly those above 50 years, current trends show men have also joined their women counterparts. This finding has wide ranging effects on household income, survival and coping in the current economic environment.

Another key demographic finding on vendors is on average ages of vendors. The study revealed that 70% percent of the vendors are in the age range of 20-40 years with the younger ones concentrated in contested streets and spaces where the exercise of power is a daily activity. This can be attributed to the hassle of moving wares from one point to another and the need to defend strategic vending sites from intruders. The dominance of this group in vending activities also point to the lack of 'freedoms' as espoused by Sen (1981) in the form of economic opportunities.

Another demographic finding is on social relations among vendors. In Julius Nyerere Street in Harare, a significant number of vendors indicated they practice vending as couples and combine their income so that they break even. Other vendors indicated that they diversify their sales by sending their partners to other competitive streets so as to benefit on both streets. However women indicated that they also bring in children particularly toddlers in areas where they sell their wares. This has a social effect on the upbringing of children in crowded and dynamic cultural settings.

4.2 Locational Issues

The study found out that there are two types of vendors in Zimbabwean cities, footloose and stationary vendors. Footloose vendors walk about in the city center selling their wares. Footloose vendors sell mobile telecom vouchers, sweets, fruits and some confectionaries. The stationary vendors dominate walkways and pavements which have been demarcated for pedestrian movements in city centers. Stationary vendors are also arranging their wares in front of shop frontages thereby blocking window views from outside (a key grievance of shop owners in city centers). Stationary vendors also utilize pedestrian streets like Speke Avenue in Harare to conduct their business (see figure 1 below).



Figure 1: Stationary Street Vending in Harare

Source: Fieldwork (2015)

An overarching reason for vending locations in the city center is the market. The availability of customers upon a certain walking corridor determine the intensity of vending activities in a particular street. Thus, the bone of contention between city authorities and vendors with regards to location has been the appropriateness of the vending sites. It emerged from the study that the vendors' location is based on the availability of a reasonable market share. Vendors locate themselves in strategic areas where the majority of their customers are found rather than the city's designated vending sites since location plays a vital role in the determination of proceeds from the vending activities. However, the study found out that the city authorities believe that they have to create order in the city by strategically arranging land uses. This results in the location of vendor marts in areas that are shunned by stationary vendors who regard these areas as poor vending areas. In

as much as the city authorities would want to locate vendor marts in what they believe to be ‘strategic areas’ in terms of city planning, the big challenge lies with moving the customers to these new vending sites. If customers do not respond to relocation of vending sites then eventually it is the vendors who will resort back to their ‘strategic’ vending sites thereby disregarding city laws.

The location of vendors along walkways has been described by some pedestrians as annoying especially during peak hours (i.e. from 4pm up to around 7pm) when people are rushing home after work. Since street vending in Harare is concentrated in the southern parts of the city center, parts which are generally frequented by low income earners, temporary congestion along walkways is created during these peak hours. The bulk of the space along the walkways is occupied by vendors who will be advertising their wares thereby disturbing the flow of human traffic. Conflicts do arise in most cases when some pedestrians stumble over the displayed wares. Depending on the courage of the pedestrians, some are asked to compensate for the damage they will have caused to the displayed wares especially if they are perishables such as tomatoes and other green vegetables.

4.3 Economy - Street Vending Nexus

The continuous decline of the economy in Zimbabwe has greatly affected the performance of industries in the country. The majority of industries have closed down due to operational difficulties. Emanating from this, a lot of people lost their jobs and were left with no option than to go into street vending in order to eke a living. As alluded to previously, it emerged from the study that the rampant closure of industries in Zimbabwe has pushed able-bodied men into street vending thus the changing profile of street vending according to gender and age groups. The widespread ‘gospel’ has become ‘self-reliance’ to such an extent that the economy has become highly informal. Indigenous traders have invaded most open spaces in towns and cities in order to undertake varied informal activities. In light of this, the informal sector has arguably become the backbone of the economy.

The study revealed that an economy dominated by the informal sector has brought about a plethora of challenges to city authorities and the general populace. People have adopted different surviving strategies some of which are legal and some illegal. Amongst the vending wares, some concentrate on pirating local and international music, dramas and films. Surprisingly, the study also revealed that some of the vendors that specialize in pirated material are also in possession of pornographic films that are sold secretly to those who enquire. This is done in the guise of trying to survive in the city where life has become increasingly difficult. Pushed out of work and the livelihood compromised, the street vendors in Harare sell ‘anything’ appropriable regardless of whether it is legal or not. Besides, a lot of counterfeit materials have found their way into the market especially amongst vendors selling soft drinks and other ready-to-drink products hence compromising the quality of the merchandise sold.

5 The Political Overtones of Street Vending

The study revealed that street vending currently taking place in Harare is hinged upon strong political backing. The prevailing political dynamics favour indigenization to the extent that rampant street vending has been defined as an acceptable ill in cities and towns. The support rendered by the first family has empowered the street vendors whilst heavily compromising the city’s chances of bringing ‘order’ into the streets. Any strategies crafted by the city planners have been rendered ineffective by the political influence of the ruling party. Faced with this scenario, the planners have resorted to turning a blind eye to these activities since any move they take that is contrary to the sentiments of those in power will be interpreted as opposing the ruling party. This has consequences that include suspension and in some instances being sacked.

The majority of vendors operation in the city centre use political linkages to frustrate or intimidate those who enforce city bye-laws. It emerged from the study that 75% of the vendors claim to be staunch supporters of the ruling Zimbabwe African National Unity Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) party. This is against a general belief amongst vendors that being linked to the ruling party makes one ‘untouchable’. In addition, they believe they wield some form of political power that allows them the liberty to operate anywhere in the city disregarding city bye-laws. This belief has been buttressed by the current sentiments of the Minister of Small and Medium Enterprises Development whilst addressing vendors in Harare. The Minister claimed that, “...you heard that the army and police were going to be used – during evictions – but myself and Local Government Minister Cde Ignatius Chombo in consultation with Amai and Baba (Robert and Grace), we said ZANU PF is for the people”⁶. This assertion shows that the first family was consulted (concerning the planned eviction of all the vendors in Harare that are operating in undesignated areas) and does not support the move. Emanating from this, vendors become empowered to disregard city planning laws and regulations in the name of being ‘patriotic’ members of the ruling party. On the other hand, city planners that ignore the views of the first family are labeled as members of the opposition parties that support ‘illegal sanctions’ imposed on Zimbabwe. Once that happens, the city planners become powerless or compromised in the delivery of planning services in the city.

⁶ <http://www.newsdezimbabwe.co.uk/2015/06/grace-blocks-vendors-eviction.html?m=1> (Accessed on 17/06/15)

6 Planning Responses to Street Vending

City planning professionals in Zimbabwe have responded in different ways to the rising phenomenon of street vending in Harare. During the first rise in informal activities in city of Harare, planners proffered the promulgation of SI 260 of 1994. This statutory instrument allowed the inclusion of informal traders and cottage industries in residential areas. Activities and use groups which were permitted by the instrument include barber and hair salons, carpentry, vegetable stalls and other informal activities. The city center was wholly excluded in the operationalization of the SI 260. The second wave of vendors happened during the period 2000 to 2009 when the economic conditions in the country continued to deteriorate. Planners responded to this surge of vending in Harare by unleashing the municipal police to arrest vendors who sold their wares in undesignated sites. This practice was also supported by members of the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) who would issue admission of guilty fines to vendors. However the practice of arresting vendors and confiscating their wares was heavily criticized by human rights groups and lately by politicians in the ruling ZANU PF party. This has effectively curtailed all planning efforts to contain the vending situation in Harare. It should be noted that the overall planning approach in Zimbabwe is on providing and allocating vending sites at properly constructed stalls like at Machipisa Bus ranks. However this planning approach has failed as it is devoid of market factors which are key to the viability of vending as a livelihood activity.

It emerged from the study that the interference of politics in the street vending issue has forced planners to reconsider enforcement of city bye-laws. Debates have emerged regarding the best way to respond to street vending. On one hand, some planners believe that enforcing bye-laws should be done but it is the timing that is currently not conducive. These planners believe that the growing economic difficulties have forced Zimbabweans into street vending hence enforcing city laws will be destroying the vendors' source of livelihood. Thus, turning a blind eye to these activities would be fine for now then when the economy normalizes full enforcement of bye-laws will be implemented. On the other hand, another group of planners believe that in the prevailing economic difficulties, the city authorities and the country at large should take advantage of the situation and start levying vendors. However, this group believes that these vendors should be moved to designate vending areas. Yet, another group of planners has given divergent views. This group is agreeable to the levying of vendors operating in the city centre, but believes there is need to create vending sites where the vendors are currently located. Rather than trying to move vendors to designated vending sites, this third group of planners believe vendors should be left to operate where they are currently located. In addition, there should be a registration that shows who is operating where so that the city is able to issue vending licenses then eventually start levying the vendors.

7 Street Vending: Implications for Policy

Street vending is an alternative livelihood strategy of the urban poor who are faced with a cocktail of debilitating factors of poverty and vulnerability. Inhibiting this kind of activity in the absence of a viable economic turnaround strategy is tantamount to impoverishing the majority of urban Zimbabweans. In the current setting, where economic growth and development seem to be farfetched, it may be prudent to adopt a transformative agenda for urban development, which views street vending as a social protection mechanisms in the presence of none.

The paper thus conclude by answering the following question: how can street vending be transformative social protection vehicles in urban development under ZIM-ASSET? A policy thrust which answers this question should be based on the ideas from the three different social protection conceptual frameworks – assets and rights based approaches, transformative social protection and social risk management. The assets based social protection mechanism addresses the underlying causes and dynamics of long term persistent structural poverty (Moser 2005, p.18). It is significant to note that, the assets based approach is not only concerned with accumulation of assets by households but also with the ability (capability) of households to utilize assets in a way that allows them to respond to changing circumstances (Tango International 2012, p.5). However, there are other forms of vulnerability the asset based approach scarcely addresses, examples of such forms are social risks like social exclusion and this makes transformative social protection, as noted by Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler (2004, p. 24) a complimentary approach as it deals with such social risks. In fact, transformative social protection aims at changing the relationships which are responsible for the persistence of vulnerability, marginalization and impoverishment (Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler (2004) cited by Devereux et al 2011). The framework supports building of resilient livelihoods by addressing power imbalances and discriminations (unfreedoms) which deter the poor, women and minority groups from having access to livelihood assets and opportunities. The assets based approach and transformative social protection are mainly concerned with assets accumulation and improved households' access to livelihood opportunities. However, assets accumulation and access to livelihood opportunities do not occur in a vacuum but in socio-economic, political and natural environments full of risks. This implies that, the asset based approach and transformative social protection

alone, are not enough instruments for reducing poverty and vulnerability, there is need for a third approach adoption – social risk management. The social risk management approach helps households to prevent the loss of the accumulated assets or recover them when a shock occurs. Thus it becomes important for city planners to understand how their behaviors and large scale economic performance constitute risks and vulnerabilities to the urban poor.

8 Conclusion

Despite the growing noise by vendors (city disorder) and policy makers (crying for city order), street vending is going to be a feature of our planning a long time to come. Addressing the chaos in our city centers does not require planners alone, but the generality of socio-economic practitioners who should create a functional nation state, which is full of opportunities which the poor themselves should exploit. In the absence of a broad based pro-poor development agenda in Zimbabwe, street vending is going to grow, as it has become a coping strategy of many urban households.

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