

Why do Female Street Vendors earn less than Male Street Vendors in Harare?

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ABSTRACT: *The study explored the factors that influenced income disparities between male and female street vendors in Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe. Qualitative data collection techniques used in the study included in-depth personal interviews, focus group discussions, direct observations and document reviews. The study observed three categories of street vendors, namely, stationary, peripatetic and mobile vendors. Although street vending reflected the face of a woman in Harare, a majority of the female street vendors earned less than their male counterparts. The reasons for low sales and hence low daily incomes for female street vendors were varied and included disruptions caused by household chores including child-care; stiff competition from rising number of street vendors; men grabbed bigger vending space and more strategic vending sites; low capital investment; a majority of women traded in low volume and perishable goods such as vegetables, fruits and cooked food and less lucrative goods; female street vendors had less access to productive tools and financial capital and worked as commission agents or employees of other vendors; gender bias towards some goods like leather and electronic products which generally required a substantial investment that could only be made by male vendors and female street vendors operated in insecure and illegal spaces where they became easy targets of eviction and confiscation. The major problem faced by women vendors was that street vending was illegal in Zimbabwe. The government should formally recognise the economic activities of the street vendors which would allow them to carry on their work with dignity and freedom.*

Keywords: *Gender; income-disparity; Harare; street vendor; urban public space*

I. INTRODUCTION

Generally, there has been a substantial increase in the number of street vendors in the major towns and cities of Zimbabwe since the turn of the millennium. Harare as the capital city has the largest number of street vendors. That number has increased astronomically overtime and street vendors are estimated to be more than one million. In India, street vendors comprise around two percent of the population (Bhowmik, 2000). Street vendors are the most visible part of an important segment of the informal economy who work on the streets or in the open private and public urban spaces. Chen, Vanek and Carr (2004) identified different occupational categories within the informal economy including casual day labourers in agriculture, and construction, small farmers, forest gatherers, street vendors, domestic workers in Export Processing Zone factories, or small unregistered workshops, homeworkers (industrial outworkers who work from their homes). Other categories identified include casual workers in restaurants and hotels, subcontracted janitors, security guards and gardeners and temporary office helpers or off-site data processors.

Saha (2011) observed that street vendors have a natural propensity to assemble at public spaces because customers find it convenient to purchase them and hence find a 'natural' market for the commodities. Although street vending is sometimes regarded as a public nuisance by those in the middle and upper classes (Bhowmik, 2000), it is a source of self-employment to the poor; it is a means to provide 'affordable' as well as 'convenient' goods and services to a majority of the urban population and it contributes significantly to the urban distribution system. For example, street vendors help many small-scale industries to flourish by marketing the products they manufacture (Saha, 2011). In Zimbabwe, vending had become a respite for many unemployed people. Zimbabwe has over three million vendors representing about a third of the population (Njaya, 2016). According to Njaya (2016), the hordes of street vendors and other informal sector workers who included university graduates demonstrated that under-employment and unemployment had reached crisis levels in Zimbabwe. Ironically, during the 1980s when the economy was doing well, over two million people were formally employed in Zimbabwe. Although street vendors contributed immensely to the economy, they faced humiliation, harassment and confiscation threats from municipal and national police officers and their working conditions are abysmal—with their average working days at least 12 hours long (Bhowmik, 2000; Njaya, 2014).

The informal sector is highly segmented by location of work, sector of the economy, employment status, social group and gender (Njaya, 2016). For example, the conditions of work and the level of earnings differ among the informal sector employees. And even among home-based workers, Chen et al., (2004) observed that there is a difference between those who work on their own account and those who work on a piece

rate basis for a contractor or a firm. A comparison of male-female daily earnings showed that a slightly smaller proportion of male vendors belonged to the lowest income category when compared to that of female street vendors (Njaya, 2016). But what are the major factors influencing income disparities between male and female street vendors? Other factors besides gender helped to explain the income disparities between male and female street vendors in Harare (Njaya, 2016). Chen et al. (2004) observed that men sell non-perishable goods while women are more likely to sell perishable goods such as fruits and vegetables. This study sought to explore the factors that explain why female street vendors earned less than male street vendors in Harare metropolitan.

1.1 Research questions

- What is the nature of street vending in Harare?
- How can street vendors in Harare metropolitan be characterised?
- Why do female street vendors earn less than male street vendors in Harare?

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

The study used qualitative approach (Bryman, 2009). Qualitative data collection techniques included in-depth personal interviews, focus group discussions, direct observations and document reviews. The in-depth interviews were conducted by the researchers at the participants' vending sites where the researchers used that opportunity to start group discussions with the other vendors present. The study adopted a gender approach by interviewing both male and female street vendors.

III. DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

The discussion of research findings of the current study is organised into three sections. The nature of street vending is presented in section 3.1. Section 3.2 characterises street vendors in Harare while factors contributing to gendered daily incomes between male and female street vendors in Harare are provided in section 3.3.

3.1 Nature of street vending in Harare

The study showed that street vending in Harare was a female-dominated occupation although the proportion of male vendors has been significantly increasing over the past few years. Street vendors were observed in most public and private places including industrial and construction sites, fuel stations, cemeteries, outside schools, clinics and hospitals, colleges and universities, government buildings, bus terminuses, railway station, church buildings, shopping and commercial centres, recreation centres, pavements, open spaces, traffic light-controlled junctions or any road junctions and along virtually every street in the central business district and residential areas or suburbs. These had become alternative shopping destinations where there were no permanent and designated market places for street vendors. In the central business district (CBD), vending took place at popular public locations such as bus terminuses, government and city council offices, parkades and pavements. The main problem with these public spaces was that street vendors were considered as illegal encroachers and hence they became targets of eviction by both municipal and national police. This was in spite that street vendors played a very important role in the urban informal economy by generating employment and by providing urban dwellers with essential goods and services at cheap and affordable prices. Street vendors also helped many small-scale industries to flourish by marketing the products they manufactured. A significant number of Harare workforce bought at least one meal from street vendors. Therefore, the street vendors signified a viable solution to some of the problems of poverty stricken urban dwellers. The debate on the illegality of street vendors and their existence in the city was over open space utilisation. Brown (2006) cited in Saha (2011) described urban public space as all physical space and social relations that determine the use of the space within the non-private realm of the cities. Urban public space, according to Saha (2011) refers to the areas that are used for public activities which include pavements, parks, beaches, sport grounds and so on. For a developing country such as Zimbabwe, urban public space is a valuable physical capital for the urban working poor for their livelihood as well as their living. However, the problem in such cases was that the municipal police tried to prevent the street vendors from using such public spaces for their business enterprises. Street vendors occupy the urban space for their livelihood and the eviction and nuisance start because they are considered as illegal encroachers upon public space (Saha, 2011).

Meanwhile, the Harare City Council constructed vending structures and designated some open spaces as vending sites. However, the designated vending sites were shunned by the street vendors who argued that the sites were far away from the CBD and hence their customers. Besides being far away from the CBD, the vending structures did not have toilets and did not protect the vendors from the vagaries of the weather such as heat, wind and rain. In addition, the street vendors were not happy with the 'high' and mandatory vending fee which was charged by the City Council although their business activity was depressed. If some public spaces within

the vicinity of the CBD were allotted to the vendors along with proper regulations in the form of space demarcations, vending would not become a nuisance and a much problem.

3.2 Characterising street vendors of Harare

Street vendors sold a variety of products including books, newspapers, electronics, braids, handicrafts, trinkets, fruits, vegetables, fresh flowers, mobile phones (both old and new), mobile phone accessories, mobile phone recharge cards, second hand furniture, recharge cards, second hand clothes, shoes and leather products such as hats and belts, stationery, snacks, ice cream, soft drinks, kitchenware, paraffin, petrol and diesel, cosmetics, cooked food, fish (both dried and fresh), grocery items such as sugar, bread, milk and peanut butter. Some street vendors even sold vehicles although these were not part of the study. The services rendered on the streets included hair-plaiting, shoe-shining and mending, sewing clothes, mobile money transactions, car repair, recycling of waste materials, food processing and car-washing. A common observation during the fieldwork was that both male and female street vendors sold a diversified range of products although men tended to sell a more diversified range of products than women. A majority of female vendors traded in perishable goods like vegetables, fruits, snacks and cooked food while their male counterparts mostly sold electronic products, mobile phones although an increasing number of men sold perishables as well. In-depth interviews with some vendors and simple observations during data collection revealed that their working conditions were generally miserable. For example, the business activity of a majority of women vegetable vendors started at 4a.m. and ended around 10 p.m. and they worked every day in the year. Besides long working hours and perpetual boredom, the vendors had to contend with raids and confiscations of their merchandise by both the national and municipal police, harassment and exploitation (through demand of bribes), rough weather (sun, heat, rain and cold) and lifting and hauling heavy loads of merchandise to and from the vending sites on a daily basis. The major problem faced by street vendors and women vendors in particular was their right to exist in the urban informal sector because their occupation was illegal. The existence of street vending on the fringes of the law oftentimes led the government and local authorities to confuse street vendors with illegal activities and therefore subjected them to constant harassment and repression. Meanwhile, street vendors devised various strategies to cope with informality and illegality. For example, those who sold their products in the CBD revealed that they started vending around 5pm after the municipal police finished work for the day

Three categories of street vendors were observed in Harare, namely, stationary, peripatetic and mobile vendors. Stationary vendors carried out vending on a regular basis at a specific location with implicit or explicit consent of the Harare City Council. Peripatetic vendors carried out vending on foot. The mobile vendors moved from place to place selling their goods and services on bicycles, push carts and motorised vehicles. The street vendors of Harare, in a variety of formats sold their items from:

- On self, for example, mobile recharge cards, mobile phones and cigarettes
- Satchels and canvas bags, for example, second hand clothes (including underwear), hats, belts, cosmetics, mobile phones and accessories.
- Baskets, for example, roasted nuts, fruits, sandwiches, boiled eggs, vegetables, dried beans, butternuts, steamed mealie-cobs, dried fish and sweets.
- Buckets, for example, fresh fish, meat (especially beef), cooked groundnuts and roundnuts.
- Pushcarts, particularly, vegetables, fruits, mealie-cobs and potatoes.
- Backs of trucks or lorries and car boots for example, fruits, vegetables, mealie-cobs, cooked rice, *sadza* (maize meal) and meat, second hand clothes, shoes, potatoes, sweet potatoes, pumpkins and mobile phones and/or accessories.
- Cloth laid on the ground for example, wrist watches, trinkets, cosmetics, soap, vegetables, fruits, indigenous herbs, mobile phones and/or accessories and books.
- Stalls, either individual or small groups of stalls on city sidewalks. Stalls also took the form of mobile markets in designated places on certain days especially weekends and public holidays. Items sold included second hand clothes, mobile phones and accessories, lap tops, electronic goods (such as stereos and plasma television sets), handicrafts, wrist watches, trinkets, fruits and vegetables.
- Open public spaces outside the central business district where durable products such as refrigerators, stoves (from single to 4-plate stoves), furniture (both new and second hand) and second hand motor vehicles as well as building material such as river sand, pit sand and three-quarter stones were sold. This category of street vendors were not part of the current study.

3.3 Reasons why female street vendors earn less than male street vendors in Harare

Although street vending reflected the face of a woman in Harare, a majority of the female street vendors earned less than their male counterparts. Interviews and focus group discussions with selected street vendors in Harare identified the following as the major factors that contributed to income disparities between male and female vendors:

- Household chores often disrupted female vendors' business time.
- Women were regularly obstructed from their vending activities by attending to children whom they had to take to vending sites because no one could look after them at home.
- Men grabbed bigger spaces by using their masculine stature to displace women vendors.
- Men were more daring than women as they were prepared to sell their products in lucrative areas that are prone to raids by both national and municipal police.
- Male street vendors were more aggressive than female vendors when selling and marketing their goods and at times customers buy their goods due to their persistence.
- Men worked from better and busy vending sites or spaces. For example, more male vendors were found at road junctions than female vendors.
- Rising number of street vendors which led to a proportionate rise in competition.
- Men had greater access to productive assets and financial capital.
- Female vendors sold items that required low capital investment, rather only working capital.
- Men were mobile vendors while women sold in one place. That is, men sold from push carts, bicycles or even cars while women sold from baskets on their heads or on the ground or simply from a cloth spread on the ground.
- Men sold non-perishable goods while a majority of women were more likely to sell perishable goods such as fruits and vegetables.
- Female street vendors operated in insecure or illegal spaces.
- Men had better tools of trade.
- Generally, women are unpaid contributing family members while men are heads of family businesses.
- Men sold higher volume and a different range of goods and services than women who sold smaller quantities and a narrow range of goods.
- Male vendors sold high value goods such as leather and electronic goods and even motor vehicles.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The streets, pavements and any available urban space of Harare were jam-packed with street vendors of all demographic profiles throughout the day selling all sorts of wares. Street vendors were observed in most public and private places including industrial and construction sites, fuel stations, graveyards, outside schools, clinics and hospitals, colleges and universities, government buildings, bus terminuses, railway station, church buildings, shopping and commercial centres, recreation centres, pavements, open spaces, road junctions and along virtually every street in the central business district and suburbs. Three main categories of street vendors were observed in Harare, namely, stationary, peripatetic and mobile vendors. In particular, the study identified various types of street vendors including barbers, hair dressers, cobblers, garbage collectors and vendors of vegetables, ice cream, fruits, meat, fish, snack foods and a myriad of non-perishable goods such as second-hand clothing and shoes, newspapers, leather products, mobile phones, trinkets, cosmetics, indigenous herbs, soaps and electronic goods such as stereos, lap tops and plasma television sets. Although women constituted a larger proportion of the street vendors in Harare, they generally earned less than their male counterparts. Street vendors of Harare identified a number of factors as contributing to the income disparities between male and female street vendors. Female vendors typically sold items that required low capital investment, rather, only working capital. A majority of women traded in low volume and perishable goods such as vegetables, fruits and cooked food and less lucrative goods. In addition, female street vendors had less access to productive tools and financial capital and worked as commission agents or employees of other vendors. Meanwhile, there was gender bias towards goods like leather and electronic products which generally required a substantial investment that could only be made by male vendors. Female street vendors faced heightened risks as they were more likely to operate in insecure and illegal spaces where they became easy targets of eviction and confiscation which affected their daily sales. The government should provide female street vendors with viable legal space for their business activities and also simplify the rules and regulations that prevent them from carrying on their work with dignity and freedom. The first step towards formalisation is formal recognition of the economic activities of the street vendors by the government.

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