



Integrating Street Food Vendors into Zimbabwe's Economy: Policy Approaches for Economic Inclusion and Social Security

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Key Messages

- ❑ Urban street food vending is an important economic activity that contributes to incomes, food and nutrition security in Zimbabwe.
- ❑ A diversity of commodities sold include fruits, vegetables, cooked food and processed products.
- ❑ However, many participants do not operate in designated areas and are not registered.
- ❑ This is because the policy environment as dictated by the Urban Councils Act (Chapter 29:15), the Public Health Act (Chapter 15:17), Regional, Town and Country Planning Act (Chapter 29:12), Food and Food Standards Act (Chapter 15:04), Municipal Hawkers By-laws including the Statutory Instrument (SI) 159 of 2014 imposed a regulatory burden.
- ❑ Despite the informal nature of this activity, many are able to generate between US\$280 (females) to US\$480 (males) per month.
- ❑ Nonetheless, this poses health, environmental and security hazards among vendors.
- ❑ There is a need to reduce the cost of compliance to promote formalization.
- ❑ There is a need to focus on the provision of proper physical spaces where business operations can take place including the provision of clean water, lighting, clean marketing stalls and ablution facilities.

1. The Context

Globally, urban street food vending is considered as an alternative livelihood source for more than 2 billion unemployed urban people (Onodugo et al., 2016; Maksimov et al. 2017; Thompson et al. 2017; Yasmeen et al. 2018). In Zimbabwe, over a million people rely on vending, with more than 80% of the participants depending on street food vending as their main source of income (Madziba, 2017). This activity is dominated by women with anecdotes showing that there are more women (65%) who participate in urban street food vending compared to men. However, regulatory requirements often limit their ability to operate formally, highlighting the need for supportive policies. The policy and regulatory environment affecting urban street food vending is governed by numerous laws, and statutes including the Urban Councils Act (Chapter 29:15), the Public Health Act (Chapter 15:17), Regional, Town and Country Planning Act (Chapter 29:12), Food and Food Standards

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Act (Chapter 15:04), Municipal Hawkers By-laws including the Statutory Instrument (SI) 159 of 2014. These compel street vendors to acquire trading licences (under the Urban Councils Act (Chapter 29:15), pay stand rental fees, health related certificates and also food shop licences. There, is however, a lot of non-compliance among urban street vendors with women often being exposed to multiple risks on the streets of Harare. It is therefore important to conduct a formal analysis to determine how this activity contributes to individual men and women, the emerging gender issues faced and develop responsive policies to integrate informality into the mainstream economy. This research was mainly conducted in major food and vegetable markets in and around Harare. These included Mbare Musika, Highfields, Hatcliffe, Norton market, Chikwanha in Chitungwiza, and Ruwa urban markets. The research was therefore anchored on a multi-stage sampling approach that integrated qualitative and quantitative aspects to triangulate the data collection process.

2. The Problem

Since the year 2000, Zimbabwe's economy is now largely informal with millions living from these activities that include urban street food vending. However, the government of Zimbabwe has been emphasising the need for illegal urban street food vendors to formalize their activities and daily operations. To this end, a robust policy architecture along with stringent set of bylaws and statutes was enacted with the aim of ensuring formalization of these activities. Due to the perceived high cost of compliance, many urban street food vendors still prefer to operate informally. As a result, they have exposed to a variety of risks mainly emanating from the run-ins with municipal police (Sepadi and Nkosi, 2022). Women, in particular, have faced several risks on a daily basis. The most common form of risk faced by female street vendors is linked to a dearth of licensing and permits which often leads to fines or even imprisonment (Thanh and Duy, 2024). This often precipitates into other gender issues that are not often visible but borne by women. This activity remains critical to the survival of many individuals and households. Subsequently, this research analyses the contribution of urban street food vending to male and female street vendor incomes, and specifically how men and women balance productive and reproductive roles. Furthermore, the research determines how the policy environment is related to the regulatory burden faced by urban street food vendors in Harare, Zimbabwe.

3. Findings

Economic significance of urban street food vending to individuals

- ❑ Males earned about 1.5 times more income (US\$464) when compared to their female counterparts (US\$280) per month. However, these earnings were compromised and not guaranteed because of the high risks (for example, goods taken away by municipal police and rotting of food, fruits and vegetables) faced by vendors on a daily basis.

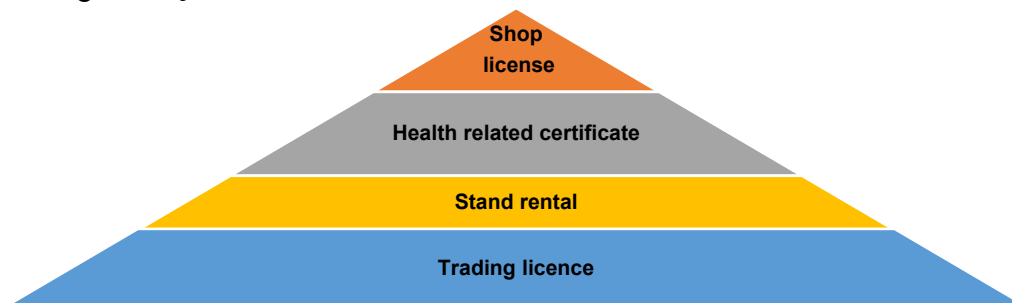


Challenges faced by urban street food vendors

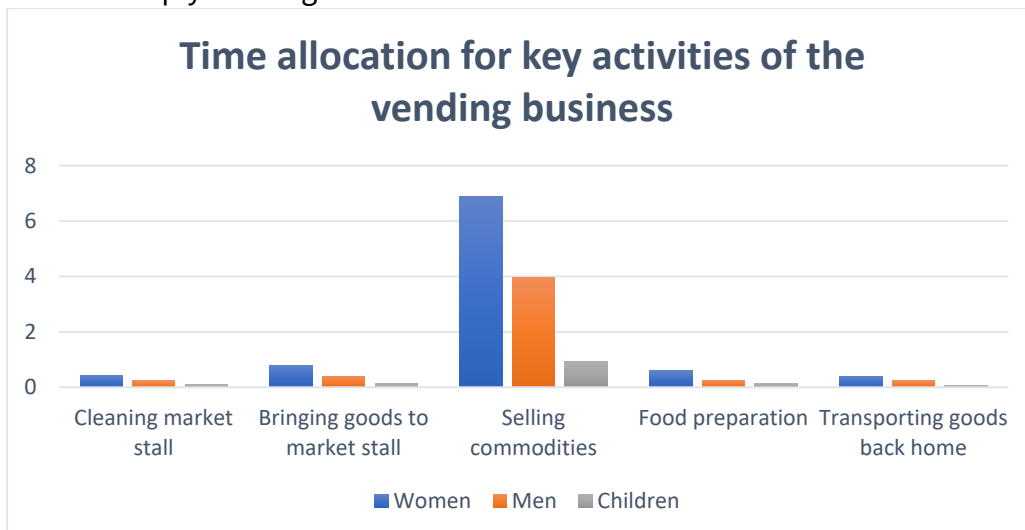
- ❑ **Overcrowding:** High numbers of vendors in limited market space increase health risks, particularly during cholera outbreaks (2023–2024), highlighting the need to establish designated vending zones to reduce congestion and enhance public health
- ❑ **Lack of infrastructure:**
 - Toilet facilities were available but, in some cases, these were not in a functional state.
 - While borehole water was accessible in selected markets, it was not clear whether the water was clean for human use and consumption.
 - The nearby waste dump and garbage sites further exacerbated the situation with flies roaming all over the place.

- Generally, the lighting facilities were also compromised thereby creating personal safety issues, especially for women who work into the late hours of the day.
- ❑ **Confiscation of goods by municipal police:** There were also incidences of goods being confiscated by the municipal police thus increasing the risks faced by both women and male street vendors.
- ❑ **Dearth of training opportunities:** Many of the street vendors did not have access to training on business, marketing, finance, and hygiene because of the illegality of their operations.

The regulatory burden



- ❑ The total cost of compliance is about US\$60 per month. This accounts for 30% of the gross income by urban street food vendors. This may explain why many do not comply with regulations.



- ❑ On average, female vendors spent 0.42 hours cleaning the market stall before goods were brought to the market. An additional 0.8 hours was spent bringing the goods to the market per day. Women further spent about 7 hours selling various commodities at the market. Approximately, 0.61 hours and 0.39 hours were invested in food processing and transportation of wares back home. This implies that women spent

an average of 9 hours in the vending business. They also spent at least 4 hours on reproductive roles including cooking, washing, and childcare. Therefore, women experienced a gender burden (13 hours) compared to men (5 hours).

4. Implications for Policy Makers - Conclusions and policy recommendations:

Short-term recommendations

Infrastructure and Food Safety Conditions:

- ❑ To consolidate the position of street vending in the livelihoods of the urban poor, there is a need to focus on the provision of proper physical spaces where business operations can take place.
- ❑ In this regard, urban planners need to consider the associated infrastructural amenities necessary to enhance food safety including the provision of clean water and ablution facilities.

Reduction in the cost of compliance:

- ❑ There is a need to reduce the cost of compliance to promote formalization. This research showed that urban street food vending contributes to the generation of significant revenue flow for individuals involved in the activity. However, female vendors earned less income compared to males as this could be related to the need to strike a balance between productive and reproductive roles.

Medium-term recommendations

Access to training and registration of vendors:

- ❑ Training in business and marketing management is critical in enhancing the financial profitability of urban street vending. However, such trainings could be offered through registered street vendor associations. By registering their activities, the government is able to identify the urban street vendors in terms of numbers, gender and the types of commodities that they sale.

Long-term recommendations

Harmonization of bylaws and statutes:

- ❑ Many laws, and statutes including the Urban Councils Act (Chapter 29:15), the Public Health Act (Chapter 15:17), Regional, Town and Country Planning Act (Chapter 29:12), Food and Food Standards Act (Chapter 15:04), Municipal Hawkers By-laws including the Statutory Instrument (SI) 159 of 2014 pose a heavy regulation burden on urban street food vendors and need to be reviewed and harmonized.

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