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Street Trade in Africa: A Review

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Contents

Introduction	1
Street Trade: Theoretical Frameworks and Conceptual Tools.....	2
Street Trader Trends Over Time	3
Policy, Planning and Governance Trends.....	6
Persistence of Colonial Approaches to Urban Planning.....	9
Spatial Planning, Infrastructure, Licences and Taxes	9
Collaborative or Participatory Approaches to Urban Planning.....	10
The Perceptions of the Role Street Traders Play	10
The Nature of the State.....	11
Trends in Organizing Among Street Traders.....	12
Conclusion and Priorities for Further Research	15
References	17

Introduction

Despite the advances in modern retailing, millions of people throughout the world still make their living partly or wholly through selling goods on the streets. This is particularly the case in Africa. A vibrant array of traders selling everything from fruit and vegetables to clothes, traditional medicine and even furniture is what characterizes African cities. This paper, rather ambitiously, aims to go some way in outlining broad trends about these activities in Africa. It hopes to go some way in assessing what is known about this phenomenon in the continent and how it has been understood over time, with a view to assist in framing future research.

Four key areas have been identified corresponding to the four core chapter sections. The first section considers the theoretical lenses employed in analyzing street trading in the academic literature. It starts by considering how street trade is dealt with in the debates of the 1970s and 1980s arguing that these debates still have resonance today. It then reflects on the conceptual tools increasingly being used – livelihoods and social capital and the implications of post-modern ways of understanding informality. The second section reviews street trade statistics. These are contextualized in urbanization, migration and economic development trends. The little data that is available is reviewed. The evidence suggests that the surge in numbers of street traders, partly caused by economic restructuring processes, is likely to continue. The third section concentrates on trends in policy and planning. Research on the issue suggests that state responses to street trading form a continuum from violent sustained evictions on the one side to a more inclusive approach on the other. This paper, having reviewed available city and country case study material, identifies five cross-cutting themes. What is clear from this material is that the processes of incorporation or exclusion of street traders is part of everyday political struggle. The ways in which street traders are organized, articulate their concerns, and wield power is therefore critical. The fourth section thus concentrates on trends in street trader organization.

This paper was commissioned by the research and advocacy network Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO). It draws on a review of existing literature framed by WIEGO's concerns with statistics, urban policies, global markets and organization and representation¹. Since no additional primary research was commissioned, the review is biased by what is available. As will be detailed below, there have been substantial studies on street trading in West Africa (Senegal, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast and Ghana), Central Africa (the Democratic Republic of Congo), Sub-Saharan Africa (Zambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Lesotho), and East Africa (Tanzania, Kenya). This leaves substantial regions in the continent un- and under-explored. The most striking gap is the absence of research on North Africa, but also no research was found on street trading in Africa's biggest economy – Nigeria. The literature search was confined to research written in English, and there is thus a bias towards Anglophone experiences. The broad trends identified need to be qualified by these biases.

¹ This review also does not address the substantial literature on support services for the informal economy – microfinance, business development services and training. With entire journals – like the Small Business Development Review, among others, as well as substantial coverage in development journals – dedicated to these issues, it was felt that justice has been done to these issues elsewhere. In this literature, street trading is seldom dealt with separately but as one segment of the informal economy.

Street Trade: Theoretical Frameworks and Conceptual Tools

Keith Hart's (1973) original anthropological work in Accra, Ghana, during which the term "informal sector" was first coined, made much reference to small-scale distribution (1973:71-3). He justifies a disproportionate focus on this due to "its significance in urban economic life" (1973:72). His work drew international attention to the phenomenon, challenging the notion of the urban "unemployed and underemployed" in cities like Accra constituting "a passive exploited majority" with informal activities having little autonomous capacity to generate growth in the incomes of the urban poor (1973:61). His detailed description and analysis of the multiple economic activities of the urban poor and the important part they played in supplying many of the essential services in Accra constituted a serious challenge to the way development economists had previously approached employment issues in the developing world. He poses questions like "do we want to shift the emphasis of income opportunities in the direction of formal employment for its own sake or only to reduce participation in socially disapproved of informal activities and those in informal occupations whose marginal productivity is too low?" (1973:82). These questions forced a revision of previous approaches to employment policy.²

The International Labour Organization quickly rose to Hart's challenge in its employment missions. The ILO mission to Kenya popularized the idea of an informal sector. The mission's report acknowledges street trade as an important component of the informal sector but does emphasize that the visibility of street activities tends to lead to the neglect of other segments of the informal sector like manufacturing (a point that is often made). The team (1972) particularly picked up on the regulation of informal traders. For example, the team found 35 types of licences listed in Nairobi's hawkers and street traders' regulations. Noting that this has the effect of creating monopoly profits for licence holders and discouraging investment by other informal traders, one of the core policy suggestions is a simplification of the licensing system. Policy prescriptions like these led to a flurry of critique during the next two decades. Bromley, for example, commenting on the speed at which the notion of the informal sector was adopted by the ILO and other international development institutes, argues that the notion "offered the possibility of 'helping the poor without any major threat to the rich', a potential compromise between pressures for the redistribution of income and wealth and the desire for stability on the part of the economic and political elite" (1978:1036).

Moser (1978), in the same edition of *World Development*, drawing on Marxist theory, expands Bromley's critique. She challenges the notion of two-sector dualism used by the ILO and others, rather pointing to a continuum of productive activities in the cities of developing countries with "complex linkages and dependent relations between production and distribution systems" (1978:1055). Adapting Marx's notion of petty commodity production, she draws on Marx's theory of different modes of production and their mutual articulation. She argues that the petty commodity sector is "articulated as *part* of the capitalist mode of production with its development controlled by, and linked to, the capitalist mode" (1978:1057). Petty commodity production is argued to play a number of important roles within the capitalist mode of production – like maintaining low levels of subsistence and the low cost of labour reproduction. Moser thus notes that "the 'political dimension' of development planning can no longer be ignored" (1978:1061). The policy implications of her analysis are fairly bleak. Although recognizing the need for grassroots interventions, she states that it must be recognized that the function of these measures "is no more than to alleviate some of the worst anomalies not to change the overall structure," which she argues is essentially exploitative. The empirical material used to substantiate hers and other neo-Marxist analyses tend to focus on production rather than distribution of products. No explicit mention is made of street trading, but the implication of her analysis is that street traders are part of the capitalist distribution process.

² More recently, Hart has criticized how the notion of the informal sector "allowed academics and bureaucrats to incorporate the teeming street life of exotic cities into their abstract models without having to confront the specificity of what people were really up to (2004:14)."

Despite the fact the term “informal sector” stemmed from an analysis of African urban economies, the ensuing theoretical debates tended to draw on experiences from Latin America (MacEwen-Scott 1979, Castells and Portes 1989, De Soto 1989). De Soto continues to be very influential in policy circles and his research institute – Instituto Libertad y Democracia (ILD) – has been commissioned by a number of African governments. During the 1980s, his work primarily focused on Peru and other Latin American contexts. In *The Other Path: The Economic Answer to Terrorism*, he devotes a whole chapter to informal trade. He records the numbers of street traders and outlines their high dependency ratios. His researchers posed as informal traders and attempted to negotiate the state system; the chapter outlines the numerous restrictions those involved in these activities face. He demonstrates vendors’ ability to rise above these restrictions through calculating that vendors had built or acquired 274 informal markets in Lima, which, at the time, he valued at US\$40.9 million (1989:13). He concludes that legal institutions have ceased to provide the means to govern society, stating “the existing legal system – the red tape, the widespread mistreatment on waiting lines, the bribes, the rudeness – are a Kafkaesque trap which prevent (the informals) and the country’s resources from being used efficiently” (1989:243).

In retrospect, the literature of the 1970s and 1980s has been categorized into two broad traditions (see, for example, Moser 1994, Rawkowski 1994 for reviews). On the right, the neo-liberal position, which has a very celebratory view of informality, sees the informal economy as a process of deregulation from below. The relationship between the formal and informal economies is either not looked at or assumed to be benign. On the left of the spectrum is the structuralist position, in which informality is seen as a crisis of capitalist development, demonstrating capitalism’s inability to absorb the mass of unemployed, with research often detailing the exploitative relationship between the formal and informal economies. The informal economy is seen as largely assisting in capitalist accumulation. Although more recent literature often does not address these debates directly, these differences essentially remain.

There are two studies on street trading, drawing on empirical work from Africa, which aim to make a contribution to these debates. Both studies draw on both traditions. Nattrass (1987), for example, considers street trading in Umtata, the capital of the former homeland of South Africa, the Transkei. She draws both on what she calls a reformist (what others might call neo-liberal) and a Marxist approach to the informal economy. She identifies the strengths of the former as descriptively powerful but argues that it shows little understanding of the dynamics of the sector. The strength of the Marxist position, she argues, is its ability to understand the informal sectors economic position and long-term growth prospects (1987:861). She presents an integrative approach, and using survey and interview data from street traders, she demonstrates the strength of drawing from both traditions.

In her study of trade in Guinea-Bissau, Lonrenço-Lindell (2004) reframes these debates in terms of where state-society relations and informal economic activities cross paths. She reframes the neo-liberal position on informality as societal “disengagement” from the state and from formal market channels. Drawing on the works of structuralists like Castells and Portes, she poses an opposing approach as one of “engagement” in which capital uses informality in its strategies to protect profits, often with the complicity of the state. She uses her rich analysis of trade in Bissau to argue for combining different elements of both approaches, stating that the politics of informalization in Bissau has involved instances of both engagement and disengagement:

On the one hand, some components of the disengagement perspective lend credit to the struggles and achievements of popular groups. On the other hand the informalisation perspective gives us the tools to understand current changes and developments in informal economies, including the role of the state and international actors.

(2004: 85)

Empirical evidence suggests that both positions can reflect reality. Given the heterogeneity of the informal economy, the position taken, depends on which segment of the informal economy is assessed. In understanding street vending, the structuralists draw our attention to fact that those working informally cannot be considered in isolation but must be seen in terms of their position within the wider economy. DeSoto and his colleagues draw attention to the workings of the state and provide an interesting method for understanding what impact this has on those working informally.

These debates on the nature of the informal economy are, in the bulk of literature on street trading in Africa, increasingly implicit. A concept that is now frequently referred to is that of livelihoods. Although the livelihoods approach was first developed in analyzing rural poverty, there is an increasing tendency for the approach to be applied to urban poverty. Recent key articles on street trading in Africa as well as edited volumes on the subject either use this as their primary framing concept or draw on it (Lyons and Snoxell 2005a, Lyons and Snoxell 2005b, Brown 2006, Tranberg Hansen and Vaa 2004, Devas 2004, Rakodi and Lloyd-Jones 2002). Rakodi defines a livelihood as comprising “the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living” (2002:3). Five forms of assets are identified – financial, human, natural, physical and social. Many authors identify access to public space as a key physical asset in the livelihood strategies of the urban poor (Brown and Rakodi 2006, Brown and Lloyd-Jones 2002). The features of social organization – the networks, norms and trust that facilitate cooperation for mutual benefit, or Putman’s idea of social capital – are particularly interrogated. Lyons and Snoxwell state “this approach attributes agency to the poor (in as far as they can strategize) and emphasizes their dual dependency on multiple activities and multiple assets, especially social capital, for survival” (2005b:1303). The street trading case material does tend to pick up on the positive aspects of social capital (see, for example, Lyons and Snowell 2005a), with less attention been paid to the numerous critiques of the concept (Fine 1999, Hart 2001, Mohan and Stokke 2000). Not only is the concept identified as unclear – (Fine argues “many things to many people” (1999:5)) – but that it over-romanticizes associational life, paying little attention to the conflict and power dynamics within it.

Post-modernism’s rejection of the existence of a central hierarchy or organizing principle makes it an appealing paradigm for those concerned with informality. This literature celebrates contradiction, ambiguity, diversity, and interconnectedness. No review of African cities and informality would be complete without reference to the work of AbdouMaliq Simone. Drawing on a post-modern tradition, Simone has written prolifically on the issue. He notes that “roughly 75 per cent of basic needs are provided informally in the majority of African cities and that processes of informalization are expanding across discrete sectors and domains of urban life” (2004:6). Rather than characterizing this as dysfunctional, he argues that Africans have long made lives “that work.” In a recent edited volume, he emphasizes “the determination of urban Africans to find their own ways” (2005:1). In discussing the way informal economic activities have previously been understood, he identifies “these studies have not examined the ways in which such economies and activities themselves might act as a platform for the creation of a very different kind of sustainable urban configuration than we have yet generally to know” (2004:9). His detailed case studies discuss the history, macro-economics and policy frameworks that have led to the informalization of large portions of everyday life in African cities, but more particularly how residents deal with this. In essence, his work suggests that any serious attempt to reinvent African urban centres must acknowledge the specific histories and incorporate the existing local knowledge that currently sustains and recreates informal urban economic social systems. These are issues that will be returned to later in this review.

Street Trader Trends Over Time

In Africa, the informal sector as a whole is estimated to account for 60 per cent of all urban jobs and over 90 per cent of all new urban jobs. After home-working, street trading is estimated to account for the largest share of these jobs (Charmes 2000). Trends in street trading over time are integrally linked to urbanization, migration and economic development processes. Therefore, before reflecting on what data there is, each of these trends will be considered in turn.

As Mitullah notes, urbanization in African countries is a relatively recent phenomenon except for in West Africa and in some coastal East African towns (1991:16).³ Table 3, below, presents urbanization figures in 1995 and 2007 as well as projected urban growth rates for 2005-2010.

TABLE 1: Percentage of Total Population Urban

	1995	2007	Urban Growth Rate 2005–2010
Latin America and the Caribbean	74	78	1.7
Asia	35	41	2.4
Africa	34	39	3.2
East Africa	22	23	3.7
Middle Africa	33	41	4.1
North Africa	46	52	2.6
Southern Africa	48	57	1.0
West Africa	37	44	3.7

Source: United Nations 1997, United Nations 2007.

Despite the fact that in 2008, for the first time in history, one in every two people will be living in urban areas, overall urbanization in Africa is lower than in Asia and in Latin America and the Caribbean. However, what is clear from the table above is that there are significant regional differences within Africa. For example, North and Southern Africa are highly urbanized in contrast to East Africa. Further, there are increases over time. In the space of twelve years – a relatively short period in demographic terms – the percentage of the total population that is urban has increased by 5 per cent. Again, there are regional differences, with increases in urbanization figures being particularly pronounced in Middle, East and West Africa. The final column of the table uses current figures to project the urban growth rate. These predictions suggest that urbanization processes in Africa will proceed faster than in other continents. Due to low barriers to entry, newcomers to the city often opt for street trading as a way of surviving. These figures seem to suggest that the current congestion on the streets is likely to intensify.

A further dimension of urbanization processes that swells the number of street traders is international migration. As Landau points out “international migration is an inexorable response to regional economic inequalities” (2007:61). Not only are there significant inequalities between African countries, but Africa has long been the site of a number of political crises and civil wars. Somalia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Ethiopia and Eritrea have generated high levels of forced migration. More recently, the crisis in the Darfur region as well as in Zimbabwe are generating flows of migration both within Africa and elsewhere. In a continent where there is large scale unemployment and underemployment, the trend is for migration legislation

³ She notes that some East African towns had populations of more than 20,000 as early as the fifteenth century.

to be designed to protect locals from competition for jobs. Foreign migrants, like their rural counterparts, often have no choice but to work in segments of the economy where barriers to entry and set up costs are low. Street trading is thus what many foreign migrants opt to do. Another group of foreigners involved in street trading are cross-border traders. Again this is an activity that has been going on for some time. Lonrenço-Lindell points to the Dyulas (2004:87). These are itinerant traders moving goods across borders who have been active in West Africa for centuries. For many villages, these traders are the primary source of supplies. Cross-border traders either supply domestic street traders or sell their goods directly (see Peberdy (2000) for one of the few surveys of this group). Given that foreign migrants are seldom in the recipient countries with appropriate documentation, they are an extremely difficult group to gather statistics on.

A critical factor in increasing the numbers of street traders in Africa is the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) of the 1980s and 1990s. As has been discussed in detail elsewhere (see, among others, Iyenda 2001, Freund 2007, Lonrenço-Lindell 2004, Tsitsi and Agatha 2000), the cocktail of privatization, restructuring of the public sector, and opening up of African economies to foreign goods led to a dramatic shrinking of the formal economy in Africa. This resulted in a substantial increase in the numbers of those informally employed. SAPs, however, did often encourage a more tolerant attitude to the informal economy, particularly, for example, in the former socialist states. Lonrenço-Lindell (2004) details this for Guinea-Bissau and Nnkya (2006) for Tanzania.

Ongoing privatization and liberalization efforts on the continent continue to impact on the size, nature and dynamics within the informal economy in general and street trading in particular. Consider, for example, the implications of the increase in numbers of those working informally on gender dynamics. Although often more dominant in terms of numbers, in many countries, women tend to predominate in areas of trade that are less lucrative. With greater competition, there is evidence that women either get displaced or forced into even more marginal areas of trade (see, for example, Transberg Hansen (2004) on street traders in Zambia). The combination of greater competition among informal traders and a shrinking demand for goods due to shrinking economies has led to individual incomes decreasing. The implications for informal traders of trade liberalization are also complex. Liberalization of African economies has led to an increase of imports with informal traders acting as the final point of sale for many of these goods. This role has become particularly pronounced with the dramatic increase in imports from China to Africa over the last ten years.⁴ The greater availability of a diverse range of goods can be positive for informal traders. But trade liberalization has often had devastating impacts on local industry. Baden and Barber (2005), for example, reflect on the impact of second hand clothes trade on local clothing manufacturing in West Africa. This has not only led to job losses, especially for women, but also to a shrinking customer base for informal trade. The overall welfare implications of recent economic policies for this segment of the informal economy require further interrogation.

The combination of urbanization, migration and economic development trends suggests that there has been a rapid increase in the number of street traders operating on the streets of African cities.

As the International Labour Organization's compilation of informal economy statistics outlines, despite the numbers and visibility of street traders, there are few good estimates of the number of traders (2002:51). A number of reasons are cited. First, many population censuses and labour force surveys do not contain a question on "place of work" with relevant alternative responses. However, street trade is inherently difficult to measure. As the report notes, there is a great variance in the number of street vendors counted depending on the time of day, day of the week, time of month or the season of the year:

The number of vendors can fluctuate from one season to the next, one day to the next, and even during a single day. This is because some vendors only sell in the morning, afternoon or evening; and others sell only during certain seasons. Some may move from one location to another during the day, appearing to settle at each; while others may change what they sell from one season, month or day to another.
(2002:51)

⁴ At the World Economic Forum annual conference on Africa, Africa-China two-way trade was said to have increased by 40 per cent in 2006 to US\$55.5 billion. This is estimated to increase to over US\$100 billion by 2020. (Mail and Guardian, Online June 15, 2007).

A further confusion is that the same vendor family or unit may have several different stalls at the same market or in different markets.

Despite these problems, the ILO managed to compile estimates for selected countries. Using this data, table 2 below represents street vendors in the African countries for which data was available. Table 3 represents the size and contribution of informal trade and women traders in informal trade. Unfortunately, there is no time series data.

TABLE 2: Street Vendors in Selected African Countries

	Number of Street Vendors	Percentage of the non-agricultural labour force	Percentage Women
Tunisia (1997)	125 619	6	2
Benin (1992)	45 591	5	81
Kenya (1999)	416 294	8	33

Source: ILO, 2002:52.

TABLE 3: Size and Contribution of Informal Sector in Trade and Women Traders in Informal Trade

	Informal Sector as a Share of:		Female Informal Traders as a Share of:	
	Total Trade Employment	Total Trade Value Added	Total Informal Trade Employment	Total Informal Trade Value Added
Benin	99	70	92	64
Burkina Faso	95	46	66	30
Chad	99	67	62	41
Kenya	85	62	50	27
Mali	98	57	81	46
Tunisia	88	56	8	4

Source: ILO, 2002:53.

As is clear from table 2, informal traders in the African countries for which data is available contribute between 85 and 99 per cent of total employment in trade and between 46 and 70 per cent of total value added in trade. In most African countries, other than North African Muslim countries, women represent at least 50 per cent, if not more, of the total number of traders. In matrilineal societies of West Africa, there is a long standing tradition of informal markets largely controlled by women (see Charmes (2000), Lyons and Snoxell (2005b: 1308) among others).⁵ In their survey of over 1700 market and street vendors in Ivory Coast, Adiko and Anoh Kouassi (2003), for example, found that over 70 per cent of traders were women. Although there are regional differences, there appears to be a tendency for women to sell food products and men to sell non-food products, which is often more lucrative.

While national data on street vending is scarce, city level statistics are even rarer. The sample sizes of national data like labour force surveys in resource-constrained African countries are not, in most cases, large enough to be disaggregated to the city level with any level of accuracy. Given the trend of increasing decentralization of tasks to a local level, it is increasingly important for planning purposes for local authorities to be aware not only of the number of street traders but also their demographics and

⁵ There has been a long history of women's involvement in trade in Africa. Mitullah, for example, points out the sale of foodstuff by women dates back to traditional African societies, where it was normal for women to sell surplus food crops. She goes onto argue that this pattern was hardly disturbed by colonial interventions (1991:14).

contribution to local economies. Some cities, however, have commissioned street trading censuses. For example, in 1997, the Durban City Council commissioned a survey and census of street trading in the Metropolitan area (Lund 1998). There is also an interesting initiative in Nairobi where a trader organization, with the help of local academics and support agencies, conducted its own census of numbers of street traders (Kamunyori 2007:51). It is initiatives such as these that need further documentation.

The evidence suggests that street trading employs large numbers of people and, in many contexts, a disproportionate number of women. Although there is no time series data urbanization and economic development trends suggest that their numbers have increased over time and that this will continue. Although individual incomes are often low, cumulatively these activities contribute significantly to gross geographic product.

Policy, Planning and Governance Trends

The coordinator of the international alliance of street vending organizations, who has substantial direct experience of city policies and street trading across Africa, warns of the following:

There are no policy best practices with street trading. Where there have been windows where better practises emerge, there tends to be a continuity problem. There is a change in the bureaucracy, a big event or an election, and the approach changes... With street vending things are particularly fluid.
 (Interview 16/04/07)

Mindful of the dynamism of state responses to street trading, this section reviews the empirical evidence. Existing research suggests there is a continuum from large scale, sustained evictions of street traders to sporadic event-driven evictions. Then there are instances of lower-level ongoing harassment of traders and, finally, some examples where street traders have been integrated into urban plans. This section first reviews the empirical evidence of various state responses to street traders. The evidence suggests a number of cross-cutting themes concerning policy, planning and governance trends. They are either important in understanding processes of inclusion and exclusion of street traders and /or they are factors to consider in future research and advocacy. These themes are explored in the latter part of this section.

The largest scale and possibly most violent eviction of street traders in the continent in the last decade was that of Operation Murambatsvina⁶ in Zimbabwe in May 2005. Street traders and those living in informal housing were targeted. The UN Habitat mission to Zimbabwe estimated that some 700,000 people in cities across the country lost either their homes, their source of livelihood, or both (Tibaijuka 2005:7). Sites where informal sector workers gathered to market their wares as well as formal markets, some of which had been in operation for decades, were targeted. Potts (2007: 265) estimates that in Harare alone 75,000 vendors were unable to work from late May, 2005. A local civil society support group described the impact of Operation Murambatsvina on street traders as follows:

The Government, under the auspices of the Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises Development, began by arresting 20,000 vendors countrywide, destroying their vending sites, and confiscating their wares. Thousands more escaped arrest, but have lost their livelihoods. This process took one week in the first instance. Harare was among the worst affected cities: police action was brutal and unannounced. ... Vendors, who have been operating in the same places without complaint or interference for their entire working lives, were confronted with riot squads without any warning, were rounded up, arrested, and watched helplessly while their source of livelihood was destroyed. Within days, bulldozers have moved in to take away remains.⁷

⁶ While Government translated this to mean “Operation Clean-up,” the more literal Shona translation of “murambatsvina” is “getting rid of the filth.”

⁷ Source: <http://www.sokwanele.com/node/469>

In explaining these events, many analysts have pointed to the fact that since 2000, the urban electorate had voted overwhelming for the opposition – the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Tibaijuka (2005) estimates that one in every five Zimbabweans were affected by Operation Marumbatsvina. Political affiliations, although critical, are only one part of the rationale behind these actions.

Although not on the scale of the Zimbabwean operation, there are other cases of widespread evictions. In her study of street traders in Zambia, Transberg Hansen notes how in April 1999 “council workers, police and paramilitary in riot gear razed the temporary market structures of Lusaka’s city centre, extending the demolition the following night and weeks all across the city, into townships and residential areas... In June, similar operations took place on the Copperbelt and in the towns along the line-of-rail” (2004:66-67). Transberg Hansen identifies a leadership change in the local authority as a key reason for the evictions. She notes a new mayor and council members had come to office in Lusaka, and they were “bent on cleaning up the capital” (2004:68). In a Ghanaian context, King (2006) reflects a similar finding. She argues that the new system of decentralization, where there are more frequent changes in local authorities, leads to evictions of street traders, which is seen as “a common way to impress the public” (2006:117).

There are a number of historical cases where national governments have established systems of trader repression. In South Africa, the apartheid state’s complex web of national and local laws effectively banned street trading. Rogerson and Hart argued that South African urban authorities “fashioned and refined some of the most sophisticated sets of anti street trader measures anywhere in the developing world”(1989:32). This, however, was in a context of high levels of unemployment and poverty, so traders continued to attempt to operate. They were consistently harassed and periodically violently removed. Rogerson and Hart also point out that until the early1980s, hawkers in South Africa were subject to “a well-entrenched tradition of repression, persecution and prosecution” (1989:32). Treatment in socialist states was equally harsh. In Tanzania, Nnkya (2006) relays how in the mid-1970s, the Tanzanian government rounded up street traders operating in Dar es Salaam and forcibly removed them to villages on the coast. In 1983, a penal code was enacted that branded all self-employed people as “unproductive, idle and disorderly” (Nnkya 2006:82). These actions were justified on the basis that street trading was a subversive activity that challenged socialist principles. Lonrenço-Lindell (2004) describes a similar situation in newly independent Guinea-Bissau.

Sporadic evictions of street traders often precede major public events. In Maseru, Lesotho Setsabi (2006) lists the many times street traders were removed – as in 1988 when Pope John Paul II visited the city and in 1991 when President Nujoma from Namibia came on a state visit – and notes that street traders were threatened with eviction when President Mandela came in 1995. In this last case, the street traders diverted the action by agreeing to clean the streets. In Zimbabwe, Potts notes that street traders were removed just before Harare hosted the Non-Aligned Movement in 1984 (2007:270). There are already cases of street traders being removed in South Africa ahead of the 2010 Soccer World Cup (www.streetnet.org). Bromley (2000) in his review of street trading, drawing on over two and a half decades of related research and international policy, confirms this as an international trend. He notes “aggressive policing [of street traders] is particularly notable just before major public and tourist events, on the assumption that orderly streets improve the image of the city to visitors” (2000:12).

Ongoing and low level harassment of informal traders is pervasive across African cities. Lonrenço-Lindell outlines that in Bissau, although a more permissive approach has been adopted since the SAP of 1986, municipal agents have essentially remained hostile to informal traders. In surveys, street traders cite that they are frequently bribed, complaining of the “oppressiveness and arbitrariness of public agents” (2004:94-5). Of the 355 street traders interviewed in Abidjan in Adiko and Anoh Kouassi’s study, 69 per cent feared being chased off their current site (2003:55). A group that is particularly vulnerable to this is foreign street traders. Hunter and Skinner’s (2003) survey of foreign

street traders operating in Durban, South African, for example, found that traders frequently reported that police elicited bribes. Few of these foreigners have proper documentation, nor do they have access to bank accounts and are thus easy targets. Kamunyori reports that in Nairobi, the council inspectors make several times their monthly salaries on bribing street traders (2007:33). She records the monthly salary of these so-called “askaris” as approximately US\$50. This points to a more systemic problem – until local officials in African cities are better paid, this kind of corruption will be difficult to root out.

There are, however, examples where street traders have been accommodated. In Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, by the early 1990s street traders had been issued licenses and were allowed to operate. Nnkya states that “street trading in the CBD is well managed and trader associations have good relations with the city authorities” (2006:88). Nnkya identifies the 1992 Sustainable Dar es Salaam Project (SDP) as a turning point from the state’s previous approach of trader repression (2006). This project, a collaboration between United Nations agencies and the state, identified petty trading as a key issue. By the mid-1990s, as a direct consequence of the SDP, a Working Group on Managing Informal Micro-Trade was established. This group identified constraints street traders faced and made numerous recommendations. An example of its interventions was the development of 24 types of steel shelves for street traders to display their goods. This was a design solution that addressed health concerns of authorities, particularly with food traders, but also facilitated the cleaning of public space. Standardizing tables can also lead to a more orderly aesthetic. Another consequence of the SDP was the Guidelines for Petty Trade adopted by the City Commission in 1997, which set out the framework for managing street trade. Nnkya does, however, point out that there are implementation inconsistencies as management is haphazard in parts and that while some traders are included, others (most notably women traders) are not, particularly in the more lucrative trading sites in the CBD. In comparison to many other cities in Africa overall, he argues, Dar es Salaam has created an enabling environment for street traders.

Another case that has been cited as a better practice in the management of street trading is Durban, South Africa. In last years of apartheid, the South African government adopted a more tolerant approach to the informal economy. During the transition to democracy, the 1991 Business Act was promulgated. This legislation disallowed local authorities from restricting street trading. This led to a dramatic increase in these activities in all South African cities and towns. Although during the 1990s a range of legislative measures were introduced that allowed regulation, local authorities were forced to grapple with the new reality of street traders. Although there has been recent harassment of traders in Durban, there was a period when Durban’s approach was identified as particularly progressive. A particularly innovative approach has been adopted in the inner-city district that contains the main transport node – the Warwick Junction. On an average day, the area is estimated to accommodate 460,000 commuters and at least 5,000 street traders. In 1996, the city council launched an area-based urban renewal initiative. In careful consultation with traders, trader infrastructure was established. For example, nearly 1,000 traditional medicine traders were accommodated in a new market. In addition, corn-on-the-cob sellers and those cooking and selling the Zulu delicacy bovine heads were provided with tailor-made facilities. Through this infrastructure, the Project piloted an economically informed, sector by sector approach to supporting street traders. In parallel with infrastructure development, there was a focus on improving management of the area. The area-based team established a number of operations teams to deal with issues as diverse as curb-side cleaning, ablution facilities, child-care facilities and pavement sleeping. In 2001, the local authority in the city – the eThekweni Municipality – adopted an Informal Economy Policy. This policy acknowledges the informal economy as an important component of the city’s economy and, drawing on some of the lessons learned from the Warwick Junction Project, suggests a number of management and support interventions. This was an attempt to standardize a progressive approach across the city. Like Dar es Salaam, the approach developed suggests inclusive approaches to design, planning and management of public space for street traders are possible.

Persistence of Colonial Approaches to Urban Planning

Urban planning traditions play an important role in shaping local authority responses to these issues. In his reflections on post-colonial African cities, Freund argues that planning ordinances and decrees often show little real variation from colonial patterns (2007:156). This lies at the heart of more nuanced analyses of the rationale behind Operation Murambatsvina. Potts (2007) details how colonial approaches extended on into the post-colonial period. She demonstrates that there was a long history of anti-informality sentiments in both national and local government. She notes that although street traders were present, they were “very contained and on a minor scale in comparison with the bustle and competitive selling of goods and services so typical of cities from Luanda to Kinshasa to Lagos to Dakar” (2007:267-8). She argues that the “adherence to the ideology of planned and orderly cities remained a core belief for many” (2007:283). Adherence to this ideology combined with anger against the urban electorate was a fertile field for those planners who always desired urban “order” to gain ground. As in Zimbabwe’s case, colonial laws remain in place in many other countries. In Zambia’s case, for example, Transberg Hansen states “post colonial regulations on markets, trading licensing, town and country planning and public health restricted trading ... to established markets” (2004:63). Kamunyori points out that in Nairobi, although street trading is legal according to the city by-laws, the General Nuisance by-law, which is a colonial era by-law, is used to supersede this provision (2007:10). The General Nuisance by-law allows city officials to arrest any individual that they deem to be “creating a ‘general nuisance’ in public spaces” (2007:10).

Spatial Planning, Infrastructure, Licences and Taxes

Urban spatial planning – metropolitan-wide but also at a neighbourhood level – has an important role to play in inhibiting or supporting street traders. Most African cities inherit colonial spatial planning where the rich and poor are separated with the poorer residents on periphery of city centres. This separation has implications for street traders who largely live in poorer parts of the city. Further urban design choices made in colonial times, like the width of streets and pavements, continue at times to limit current urban design solutions. At a neighbourhood level, transport and land use planning are critical. Those concerned with processes of inclusion and exclusion of traders need to ask to what extent are traders accommodated in areas of high congestion, like transport nodes and places where there are middle class consumers; for example, are there flyovers built over poor areas, and how is land zoned?

Facilities created for street traders indicate the extent to which they are incorporated into urban plans. Street traders need shelter from the elements, places to store their goods, and ablution facilities. In many of the countries for which there is information, there seems to be an approach in which markets are built to house traders. Although street traders are often desperate for facilities, too often local authorities pay scant attention to the importance of foot traffic in locating these markets. Transberg Hansen outlines how the local authority in Lusaka built a city market that opened in 1997 and, for the reasons outlined above, many years later remains empty. There is much more of a tradition of markets in West Africa. In their study of markets in Dakar, Senegal and Accra Ghana, Lyons and Snoxell (2005b) point to more successful municipal efforts to provide and manage market space.

The case study evidence seems to suggest that licences can be used as an inclusionary or exclusionary tool. Licensing street trading gives traders the right to operate. If traders are to have a secure livelihood and invest both in their economic activities and their trading areas, security of tenure is critical. Licensing and site allocation are key components in better management of public spaces. The critical issue, however, is how many licences as a proportion of the total number of traders are issued. Lyons and Snoxell suggest that in Nairobi, Kenya there were 7000 licences and formal sites even though it was estimated that there were 500 000 street traders operating in the city (2005a:1078). Given that in many African countries demand is constrained, there is a direct trade off between the numbers of licenses and sites allocated and individual earnings of traders. There are very few examples of cities doing careful calculations of the carrying capacity of streets.

A related issue is the how much traders pay for access to public space. In many contexts, particularly in West African countries, fees charged to street and market traders are a key revenue stream for the state. Adiko and Anoh Kouassi's survey in the Ivory Coast outlines the numerous taxes and fees traders are subject to (2003:58). In Ghana, King finds that a significant proportion of total metropolitan revenue in Kumasi comes from trader fees (2006:117). In East Africa, while traders are being accused of being tax evaders in Tanzania (Nnkya, 2006:89), traders in Nairobi have used tax as a bargaining tool. The Nairobi Informal Sector Consultative Forum has argued that street vendors would be willing to pay taxes in return for guaranteed services (or at least the right to demand them) (Kamunyori 2007:17). This offer has been key to establishing more cooperative relations between traders, formal business and municipal authorities in this city.

Collaborative or Participatory Approaches to Urban Planning

Adopting new approaches to urban planning are common to the more inclusionary practices cited above. In Tanzania, the 1992 Sustainable Dar es Salaam project stemmed from an invitation by the state to the United Nations Development Programme to review the Dar es Salaam Master Plan. As Nnkya notes, the UN staff instead persuaded the city council to pursue a new approach to planning based on participatory or collaborative principles (2006:83). The preliminary results from a project documenting the lessons learned from the Warwick Junction suggest that participation was central to the project's success. A street trader leader described the council's staff approach as affording "informal traders the opportunity to participate on a sustained and continuous basis in negotiations about their needs and priorities ... in a low-key way, often on an issue-by-issue basis" (Horn 2004:211). Dobson and Skinner (2007) argue that consultation dissipated conflict, facilitated interventions genuinely informed by user needs, and led to users having a sense of ownership of the area. This in turn led to high levels of volunteerism that resolved a number of urban management issues like crime and cleaning. These are good examples of what Healey (1998) would describe as planning by multi-stakeholder collaboration and planning by negotiation and contract. The dynamism of street vending lends itself to this style of management. Sandercock's arguments, although reflecting largely on contexts in the north, are applicable to the challenges of planning in developing country contexts. She argues for the need to develop a new kind of multicultural literacy, which she explains as follows:

An essential part of that literacy is familiarity with the multiple histories of urban communities, especially as those histories intersect with struggles over space and place claiming, with planning policies and resistances to them, with traditions of indigenous planning and with questions of belonging and identity and acceptance of difference.
 (1998:30)

The Perceptions of the Role Street Traders Play

Kamunyori points out there is a tension between modernization of African cities and what are often perceived as "non modern" activities like street trading (2007:11). This issue of how street traders are perceived recurs. In the case of violent removal of street traders in Zambia, Transberg Hansen points out that these actions were condoned by national government who argued that the presence of street traders were discouraging international investors (2004:70). Further, as previously noted, street traders are often removed prior to international events as part of city "beautification" processes. As Bromley argues, there is a widely held view that street trading is "a manifestation of both poverty and under-development" thus "its disappearance is viewed as progress" (2000:12).

This view is connected to the focus in urban studies, policy and practice on "world class" cities. Beaverstock, Taylor and Smith (2002) is a classic text in this literature. The authors establish a roster of world cities. In their analysis, only one mention is made of an African city – Johannesburg. As Robinson outlines, the notion of "world" or "global" cities has the effect of "dropping most cities in the world from vision" (2002:563). The

position and functioning of cities in the world economy thus becomes the dominant factor in urban economic development planning. The implicit economic development policy prescriptions are that international investment should be pursued above all else. Informal activities, like street vending, in this paradigm, are seen as undesirable and their contribution to local economies is not recognized. Robinson argues that the notion of world class cities imposes “substantial limitations on imagining or planning the futures of cities” (2002:531). This imposition is particularly the case in the developing world.

Shifting these perceptions remains a critical challenge. Research that calculates the contribution that street traders make to the economies of cities is a critical first step. This research would speak to economic development planners. Further, documentation of those cases where cities have included street traders in urban plans, creatively resolved conflicts between different users of public space, and developed approaches that have resulted in improved street trader management may help to introduce new possibilities particularly in the minds of spatial planners and urban managers. This introduction would go some way to addressing Robinson’s concern about the current limits on how we imagine cities. Finally, both research but also literature and art that celebrates the diversity and vibrant dynamic that street traders introduce into cities would also go some way to changing perceptions in the general public. This recognition is part of the contribution that Simone and other urban scholars who draw on post-modernism are currently making.

The Nature of the State

A final area that warrants critical reflection is the nature of government bureaucracies and the implications of this for street traders. An issue a number of researchers have raised is the role of national versus local government. As Lyons and Snoxell note, national governments largely ignore street trading issues, with the responsibility of dealing with informal trade falling largely on urban managers (2005b:1302). Bromley concurs that national governments are seldom concerned with street traders and adds “street vendors are usually perceived as a problem and occasionally as a potential, but they are rarely high in the governmental list of priorities” (2000:17). This perception is reinforced by recent international initiatives. Little space, for example, is devoted to economic management of the informal economy in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers. National governments, however, remain critical role players. On one hand, the large scale evictions of street traders cited above were at least condoned, if not motivated, by national government. On the other hand, in the examples of inclusion of street traders, changes at a national level in either policy or legislation have played a key role. This level of government must remain a critical site for analysis and advocacy.

At a local level, further analysis of the implications for street traders of the nature and structure of bureaucracies is needed. Bromley suggests Lipsky’s idea of “street level bureaucracy” is particularly pertinent in understanding how street vendors are regulated. He explains this idea as follows:

The key point is that there is a wide gulf between the broad aims and directives of senior administrators and politicians, and the ways policies can actually be worked out on the street. Regulating street vendors...requires interactions between dozens of local officials and literally thousands of vendors, with enormous potential for misunderstandings, avoidance and deception. The inspectors, police and extension workers who perform such functions are usually at the bottom of the administrative hierarchy, and regulating and promoting street vending is one of the lowest-status and most difficult tasks that they have to perform.
 (2000:17)

This explanation certainly helps to explain the inconsistencies that traders report experiencing. None of the existing studies in street trading in African contexts, however, pick up on these issues. Analysis of bureaucratic processes in cases of inclusive planning is particularly needed.

Trends in Organizing Among Street Traders

There is an increasing focus in urban studies on the notion of urban governance in which local government is understood to be more than just an administrative function and is instead one part of a relational interaction with other organized constituencies and interest groups acting in the city (see, for example, Beall 2001, Beall et al. 2002). This focus draws attention to collective action among street traders. Further, where traders have been incorporated into urban plans, traders are comparatively well organized. Nnkya (2006) identifies this as a factor in Dar es Salaam where there is an umbrella organization – the Association of Small Scale Businesses – which “acts as a lobbyist and pressure group and is involved in the selection of public space for business activities.”⁸ He points out that by 1997, about 240 self-help groups representing 16,000 members had been formed, “enabling traders collectively to address problems and access services”(2006:84). In Durban, street traders were well organized during the redevelopment of the Warwick Junction area. Traders were organized into product groups and block committees (Interview with an official working in the area 12/11/07). The Self Employed Women’s Union (a sister to the much larger Self Employed Women’s Association in India), was also very active in the area (Devenish and Skinner 2006). In both cases, organization meant that there were negotiating partners for local authorities. In this penultimate section, trends in organizing street traders are reviewed.

Unfortunately, existing information is patchy since the few studies that have conducted on street trader organizations have been done only in a small number of African countries. Based on existing evidence, trends are indicative. No conclusive claims are being made for the continent as a whole. The research that is available suggests that many traders are not affiliated to any organization at all. Where trader organizations do exist, they focus on one or more of three concerns – financial services, lobbying and advocacy, particularly at a local level and concerning product-specific issues. The role of trade unions appears to be increasingly important. Concerns about internal organizational dynamics have also been raised. Each of these issues is considered in turn, with a focus, where possible, on regional trends.

There is some evidence that organization densities among street traders are low. Lund’s re-analysis of data in South Africa, for example, found that in the two large surveys of street traders that had been conducted, 15 per cent belonged to an association in Johannesburg, while in Durban 12 per cent of the men and 16 per cent of the women traders were members of associations (1998:33-4). Alila and Mitullah’s interviews with over 300 street traders operating in four different Kenyan cities found that 67 per cent had no knowledge of associations that addressed street vending issues (2000:18). More recently, in Nairobi there has been the formation of the Nairobi Informal Sector Confederation (NISCOF). According to Kamunyori, NISCOF was registered in 2005 and as of 2007 had 23 member associations representing approximately 15, 000 individual traders (2007:14-15). Although this is a positive development, Lyons and Snoxell suggest there may be as many as 500, 000 street traders operating in the city (2005a:1078). NISCOF thus represents 3 per cent of the total number of traders.

There is evidence of a high prevalence of rotating savings and credit associations (ROSCAs).⁹ As is the case in other parts of the world, through these associations, members deposit a mutually agreed sum with the group at regular intervals. Each member has a turn to receive the total money collected. Some ROSCAs also provide loans to their members. As Lyon and Snoxell note, this guarantees the periodic availability of a capital sum, through peer pressure to save (2005a:1089). In Lyon and Snoxell’s study, of the 124 traders interviewed in Nairobi, 58 per cent were part of a ROSCA (2005a:1089). Lyon and Snoxell conducted a similar study in two markets in Ghana and found that 49 per cent of 144 traders interviewed were members of a savings group (2005b:1312).¹⁰ Although not quoting exact figures, Alila and Mitullah and Tsitsi and Agatha find a similar situation in Kenya and Zimbabwe respectively (2000: 11, 2000:10). All of these studies note that there is particularly high prevalence of membership of savings groups among women.

⁸ Unfortunately, he does not detail how the organization is constituted nor how representative these organizations are, particularly of poorer and women traders.

⁹ These are called *tontines* in francophone West Africa, *susus* in other parts of West and East Africa, and *stokvels* in Southern Africa.

¹⁰ Lyons and Snoxell (2005b) also surveyed a similar number of traders in two markets in Senegal and found only 17 per cent were member of a savings group. The majority of these traders were men. This reinforces again the importance of avoiding any blanket generalizations.

In the face of poor access to banking services, these systems of financial services and support play an important role. There is also evidence of funeral benefits being offered.

In 2005, War on Want, in collaboration with the Workers Education Association of Zambia, conducted research explicitly focused on the organizing and advocacy strategies of informal economy associations in Ghana, Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia. Interviews were conducted with 62 organizations, the majority of which were street or market trader organizations (2006). This research concluded that the majority of organizations were established in specific markets or trading areas and dealt with urgent issues arising in these locations such as harassment from the police and solving disputes and conflicts among vendors. The relationship between organizations and the state were examined, and the researchers concluded that street trader organizations largely had confrontational relations with local government (War on Want 2006:31-2). Lund and Skinner's study of 22 organizations of street traders in five cities in South Africa found that many of them focused on negotiating with local authorities (1999). These organizations were, however, not formally structured and tended to be vocal when issues arose but often difficult to find in between. These trends were confirmed in more recent studies (Thulare 2004, Motala 2002).

There is evidence to suggest that traders are comparatively well organized in West Africa. King, for example, reflecting on the situation in Kumasi Ghana, found that trader organizations were well established and widely respected (2006). She notes that the Market Traders Association – an umbrella group of various product associations – has a representative on the Kumasi Municipal Authority's General Assembly. This association launched a successful challenge in court when the local authority threatened to increase market fees by 300 per cent (King 2006:108-9). The Ghana Trade Union Congress (GTUC) has had an informal sector desk for many years. In February 2003, the GTUC initiated a national alliance of market and street traders – the StreetNet Ghana Alliance. As of 2006, StreetNet Ghana had 19 trader associations with a total of 5,810 individual members (War on Want 2006:36). The Adiko and Anoh Kouassi study in the Ivory Coast found that organizational membership was high among traders – varying between 36 per cent and 42 per cent of interviewees depending on their location (2003).¹¹ Traders were members of a range of organizations including unions, co-operatives and ROSCAs.

The research pays less attention to collective action that directly supports the business of trading. Lund and Skinner's study found that a number of street trader organizations in South Africa's hold a primary focus on the bulk purchase of goods (1999). Similarly, War on Want found a number of product-specific trader organizations in Ghana, Malawi and Zambia, such as a banana sellers' association,¹² the primary aims of which is to ensure regular and adequate supply of wares and to renegotiate terms of trade with the main suppliers. Although not explored in any detail, the Adiko and Anoh Kouassi study in the Ivory Coast suggests co-operatives have been formed among traders (2003). This area remains a research gap.

Given the decreasing numbers of those formally employed in Africa, there is evidence of trade unions, particularly the national federations, paying increasing attention to organizing among the informally employed. These initiatives either entail direct organizing efforts, encouraging appropriate affiliates to organize, or supporting or expanding on existing organizing efforts. In May 2002, the Zimbabwean Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) launched an informal sector desk that is tasked with directly organizing street traders among other groups (Tsitsi and Agatha 2000:12).¹³ The Malawi Congress of Trade Unions assisted in the formation of the Malawi Union for the Informal Sector. This Union has street traders among its members. As previously noted, the Ghana Trade Union Congress has been very actively involved in encouraging its affiliates to organize in the informal economy. The Mozambique Trade Union Federation (OTM) played an important role in forming the Association of Informal Sector Operators and Workers (ASSOTSI). ASSOTSI has 26 branch committees within 59 markets in Maputo and in 2005, claimed

¹¹ It should be noted that a number of traders were reluctant to report on their organizational membership.

¹² This is an organization of wholesalers that supply traders.

¹³ The ZCTU is aligned to the opposition in Zimbabwe. Given the current repression of the opposition, it is difficult to get any recent information about, for example, how many informal worker members the ZCTU has organized.

membership of over 40,000 (War on Want, 2005:43).¹⁴ The War on Want research does, however, find that there are often tensions between the national federations and informal worker organizations.

Concerns are raised in this literature about two aspects of internal organizational dynamics – how organizations are constituted and the role of women. The War on Want research found that trader associations “often show low level of participation and leadership accountability” (2005:30). For example, of the 20 trader organizations interviewed in Ghana study, nine reported that their method of choosing leadership was by appointment rather than by election (War on Want 2006:95-96). Lund and Skinner’s study raised a concern about organizations not being formally constituted (1999). At the time of their study, there was only one organization – the Self Employed Women’s Union¹⁵ – that had functioning democratic structures and regular elections.

Although members are often predominantly women, the leaders of street trader organizations are often men. This was found in studies of street trader organizations in Malawi, Zambia and Mozambique (War on Want 2006) and in South Africa (Lund and Skinner 1999). For example, in Malawi, of the 16 organizations interviewed, only one had a majority of women in leadership positions (War on Want 2006:97-8). Lyons and Snoxell’s study of markets in Nairobi found that both market committees were compromised entirely of men and that no women had ever been an official (2005a:1082). The opposite, however, held true in Ghana where of the 33 organizations interviewed, 22 had women in the majority of leadership positions. Women seem to play a much more dominant role in leadership positions in markets in the matrilineal societies of West Africa. However, again there are exceptions particularly in predominantly Muslim states. In Senegal, the Mouride Brotherhood largely controls trading activities and is very politically powerful.

Since its launch in 2002, StreetNet International, an alliance of street trader organizations, has been an increasingly important player in street trader organizing on the continent. Membership-based organizations directly organizing street and market traders are entitled to affiliate to StreetNet. It currently has members not only in Africa but also in Latin America and Asia. One of StreetNet’s primary foci is to build the capacity of street trader organizations so as to strengthen their organizing and advocacy efforts. This is done through providing direct leadership training, exchange visits that allow sharing of experiences among traders, and documenting and disseminating better practices. Another area of activity is assisting with the expansion of organizing efforts to the national level. StreetNet was instrumental in the establishment of both the Alliance for Zambia Informal Economy Associations and the formation of the national alliance of trader organizations in Ghana. These kinds of formations will help traders to play a more influential role in policy particularly at national level. At an international level, StreetNet advocates for the rights of street traders not only within international bodies like the International Labour Organisation but also with the international trade union federations. At the moment, StreetNet’s primary campaign is the World Class Cities Campaign. This aims to challenge the notion of “world class” cities and the trend to remove traders when cities host international events. The campaign has started in South Africa in response to the upcoming 2010 Soccer World Cup (www.streetnet.org.za).

In conclusion, the research on street trader organization suggests that many traders are not members of organizations. Given the importance of collective action to inclusive planning, these numbers constitute a challenge both to existing organizations and trade unions but also to local authorities. Further work is needed on how the state can create an environment conducive to the development of organizations and ensure that collective bargaining forums are not restricted to organization leaders.¹⁶ Concerns have been raised about the internal dynamics within organizations and who is represented in organizations. Bromley claims street trader associations “typically represent older, established and licensed traders” (2000:14). The research reviewed here suggests that women should be added to this list, which in turn suggests future research needs to interrogate who is included and who is excluded in current organizational formations.

¹⁴ It does point out, however, that just under 5,000 of these are paid up members.

¹⁵ This organization has since closed.

¹⁶ StreetNet has started this process. In March 2007, it hosted a meeting in Senegal on collective bargaining and laws and litigation strategies. This meeting was attended by organizations from 14 countries and documented a range of strategies that informal economy organizations can employ to assist their members.

Conclusion and Priorities for Further Research

There are a number of reasons why an inclusive approach to street trading is desirable. Pragmatically, demographic and economic trends indicate that these activities are on the increase, thus street trading is a reality that is unlikely to go away. From a developmental perspective, street traders are often responsible for large numbers of dependents. There are also a disproportionate number of women working as street traders. Research demonstrates that women are more likely than men to spend their income on the household needs (Levin et al. (1999) demonstrate this for vendors particularly). From a planning perspective, street traders provide urban residents and particularly the urban poor with goods and services in appropriate quantities and forms and at times of day and in parts of the city that contribute to the functioning of cities. Economically, although the individual incomes are often low, cumulatively these activities' contribution to local economies and to local revenue collection is considerable. Inclusive planning, however, does not imply unbridled street trading. Local authorities need to balance the interests of many different stakeholders using public space. Traders themselves report not wanting to work in badly managed environments. Further, as previously noted, given limited consumer demand, there is a direct trade off between the number of traders and individual incomes earned. Here, innovative approaches to policy, planning, urban design and management that maximize the gains from these activities are being argued for.

Throughout this review, research gaps have been identified. In concluding, priority policy and advocacy research gaps are identified and/or reinforced.

First, as already noted in the section on street trader statistics, until the numbers of street traders and their contribution to the economy is regularly quantified at a national and local level, it is unlikely that negative perceptions of street traders will change.¹⁷ This data is also critical to informing planning responses.

Second, the issue of the economic dynamics of street trading is under-explored. It has been argued elsewhere that given the heterogeneity of the informal economy, policy analysis and documentation should be sectoral (Chen et al. 2002). The same argument holds true for street traders. Although there are problems like harassment by the city officials that all traders face, there also product/trade specific issues that warrant attention. Traditional medicine traders, for example, face dwindling supplies due to indigenous forests being over-exploited while supply of second-hand clothes is dependent on national tariff regimes. A developmental approach entails exploring these sector specific constraints.¹⁸

Third, the implications of the increased penetration of formal retailers, for informal livelihoods, needs to be explored. No studies were found on the impact of formal shopping centre developments on informal retail in the surrounding areas. Greater understanding of the overall welfare implications of these developments on low income consumers is critical. Where informal traders have been incorporated into these developments, these cases need to be documented. A dimension of this development is that South African and foreign retailers are increasingly establishing themselves throughout Africa. Again, little is known about what this means for informal traders.

Fourth, although import trends between China and Africa are monitored, little is known about the specifics of where informal traders fit into the distribution chain of Chinese goods. Again, the overall welfare

¹⁷ In cases where a more developmental approach has been adopted, statistics have often played an important role. Kamunyori partly attributes the change of approach in Kenya to the multiple local surveys combined the 2005 National Economic survey (2007). The latter survey found that for every one job created in the formal sector, 1,000 jobs were created in the informal sector. The survey calculated that the informal sector contributed 18.4 per cent of GDP. Given that the National Rainbow Coalition was partly voted in due to its commitment to job creation, the informal sector was placed at the centre of the coalition's national economic recovery plan.

¹⁸ There are, however, good examples of value chain analyses that include an analysis of where informal retail fits in. See, for example, Porter, G. F. Lyon & D. Potts. 2007. "Market Institutions and Urban Food Supply in West and Southern Africa: A Review." Progress in Development Studies, Vol 7, No. 2., an analysis of urban food supply in West and Southern Africa. See also Velia M., I. Valodia & B. Amisi, (March 2006) Trade Dynamics in Used Clothing - The Case of Durban, South Africa. Report Produced for the World Trade Organisation. School of Development Studies.

implications of this trade on street traders and low income consumers remain unclear. This information is important for informing trade and tariff negotiations.

Fifth, the issue of legal reform has been neglected in this review. Policies often suggest support interventions like micro-finance and training; however, if traders do not have security of tenure, these interventions can be irrelevant or even destructive. Legal reform and litigation strategies on how best to secure the right to operate and improve working conditions need to be further explored.

Sixth, in the previous two sections, research gaps have been identified regarding urban planning and street trader organization. Keith Hart reinforces some of the gaps raised:

We need to know how formal bureaucracy works in practice and, even more important, what social forms have emerged to organise the informal economy. I would now reverse the original impulse to translate my own ethnographic experience into a language for development economists. We must examine the institutional particulars sustaining the practices that now exist outside of the law.
(2004:14)

Finally, Bromley reminds us of the following:

Pressures on the authorities come from numerous different vendor groups, from a wide range of special interests, and from all sides of the political spectrum. Official responses are diverse, spasmodic, and often contradictory, and their effectiveness is severely constrained by the highly-visible and constantly fluctuating nature of the population involved, and by the operational limitations of a street-level bureaucracy. Policy interventions often have unforeseen consequences, and are rarely implemented consistently. Grand visions and linear causal models are inappropriate, and instead our understanding is likely to be enriched through consideration of interconnections, conflicts, complexity theory and system effects.
(2000:22)

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