

# Street Vending in Zimbabwe: An urban scourge or viable enterprise

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## ABSTRACT

This paper investigated the efficacy of street vending as a means for achieving economic sustenance by those engaged in the business with special interest to those operating in the central business district of Harare. A sample of 225 street vendors was decided on and questionnaires were used to gather data. The questionnaires had a response rate of 89.7%. The paper also adopted the descriptive research design. The study found that most of the street vendors under study are earning less than \$2 per day which is very low. Moreover, the majority cannot afford decent homes and are renting or still living with their parents and relatives. The study also found that street vending could be a means for achieving economic sustenance by those engaged in the business if proper support structures are put in place by the government.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Street vending has been on an upward trend in major cities across the World in recent times, particularly in the developing world. Studies have identified a myriad of reasons that have been associated with this phenomenal growth of street vending as a profession. The reasons include among others: unregulated operating environment, bureaucratic structures that hamper the processes involved in starting a new business, rural urban migration coupled with high levels of unemployment, shortage of rental spaces for business and where such spaces are available, high rentals make them inaccessible to many individuals seeking to start small businesses. Other studies have also linked this staggering growth of vending to the flexibility that is inherent in the occupation. This is said to be serving as a pull factor, particularly for women who are then able to combine their work with other household chores such as childcare. Furthermore, this form of occupation is characterised by low investment requirements, which makes it

comparatively easier to start, hence more attractive for even the poor to enter the trade. Meanwhile, vending in the Cities all around the world is plagued by numerous problems that seem to be more or less common across the globe. The vendors are regarded by public authorities as problematic as they tend to take up space on the most prominent and busiest public and private spaces. These include: the sidewalks and pavements, street islands, bus termini, train stations, traffic intersections and shop fronts, where they display and sell their wares. In the process their activities unwittingly create substantial disruption and discomfort for both the owners and users of these spaces and indeed the traffic in the streets along which they carry out their work. In recent times, the streets of Harare have become clogged with masses of street vendors displaying their wares on the floor, on makeshift tables, in push carts, vans or boots of various types of vehicles. The situation has become so dire some streets have been rendered unusable by motorists, particularly in the evening hours. Motorists and pedestrians seeking to make their way home after work have to navigate their way through the mayhem of displayed wares, pushcarts and those standing at traffic junctions, all jostling for customers. Many people are quite frustrated by how a simple walk in the city has turned into a complex and arduous task of navigation. In some streets it has become impossible to walk straight without bumping into those coming from the opposite direction. In such cases people have to walk in the road, which makes both driving and walking in town a dangerous exercise. However, although street vending is providing one of the largest employment opportunities in Zimbabwe at the moment, real incomes from the trade are said to be significantly low. Research shows that this is not peculiar to vendors in Zimbabwe only, but that it is a general trend in this trade. It is against this background that this paper would like to investigate the issue of the efficacy of street vending as a means for achieving economic sustenance by those engaged in the business.

## **2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The specific objectives of the current study are:

- To evaluate the socio-economic characteristics of street vendors
- To determine the significance of street vending as a strategy for reducing hunger and vulnerability
- To analyse the cost structures and levels of earnings for street vendors

- To determine other support structures available to street vendors to ensure their wellbeing

### **3. LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### *3.1 Definition of Street Vending*

According to Bhowmik and Saha (2012) a street vendor is “a person who offers goods or services for sale to the public without having a permanent built-up structure”. On another not, Harlan (2007) describes street vendors as that group of workers who are “living on the edge of subsistence” because of the low profit margins that are realized by their trade. The researcher is of the opinion that street vending is but a simple response to the forces of demand and supply. The demand is filled by the poor urban dwellers who make their purchases from street vendors and depend on them for low and affordable prices. The supply side receives its sustenance from the unending influx into the cities of a pool of unemployed able bodied people who are desperate for an opportunity to earn a living. In Zimbabwe, statistics indicate that up to 300 000 graduates arrive onto the labour market each year, only to be confronted with a situation that is offering few or no employment opportunities. Additionally, Nirathron (2006) describes the occupation of street vending as “survivalist strategy” for the less privileged people most of whom live on the edge of subsistence. The characteristics of the sector are identified by Jimu (2004) as including: being small scale, labour intensive, low fixed costs, use of simple technology, reliance on family labour, use of personal or informal sources of credit, non payment of taxes and licences, easy to establish and exit.

#### *3.2 The growth of Street vending*

Bhowmik and Saha (2012) has linked the growth of street vending to globalisation. They argue that prior to the onset of globalisation, the developing world operated with protected markets and regulated economies. Globalisation on the other hand brought about widespread trade liberalisation and market deregulation, which opened up these countries to an influx of cheap imports from developed countries. The most affected are those countries which underwent Economic Structural Adjustment Programme under pressure from institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. Mittullah (2004) highlights how the plight of many African economies is forcing them to consider street vending as on the viable ways of promoting the private sector’s contribution to both growth and equity objectives of development. Mitullah also notes how significant attention to street renders originated from the

Bellagio International Declaration of Street Vendors which advocated for national policies for street vendors, and follow up actions and all stakeholders in the sector. The researcher also credits the Bellagio Declaration with having established six common challenges which street traders face around the world. These are, lack of legal status and right to vend, lack of space or poor location, restriction on licensing, cost of regulation, harassment, bribes, confiscation and evictions, lack of services and infrastructure and lack of representation or voice.

Persistent rural poverty is also another factor that has been linked directly to the growth of the informal sector as many move from rural areas to urban centres in search of better options. In Zimbabwe in particular, most rural areas have lost their appeal as a result of continued low rainfall patterns and droughts which have made the land quite unproductive, hence inevitable poverty. Faced with such difficulties, many who had escaped economic hardships in the cities have been forced back into the cities, in the hope of finding some means of earning a living. Perhaps also closely linked with this situation is the rapidly growing group that is composed of those who were previously employed in the formal sector, but have since lost their jobs due to company closures. Being faced with a lack of new opportunities for employment in the formal sector, they opt for creating their own employment in the informal sector due to its relative ease of entry and exit, use of simple technologies, reliance on family labour, amongst the numerous attractions associated with the sector.

### *3.3 Street vending in Zimbabwe*

Informal trading in the form of street vending has become in recent years a common feature in cities across Zimbabwe (Njaya, 2014). Over the last two decades, Zimbabwe has seen an unprecedented influx of street vendors in all its urban centres. Zimbabwean laws do not permit street vending in undesignated places such as pavements, street islands and traffic intersections. Those intending to carry out vending activities are encouraged to apply to council for allocation of space in the designated vending sites. Operating from these designated vending sites incurs a daily fee of US\$3 for flea markets, and US\$1 for vegetable and newspaper vendors. Any form of goods brought into the country without sufficient documentation to prove that payment of duty was made, are prohibited at any vending sites and they are confiscated by law enforcement agents. Furthermore, the local authorities regularly embark on street raids in an effort to contain the growing contravention of this established statutory instrument. Those who are captured are usually released after paying a fine. Their goods are confiscated and later destroyed if the owner

is unable to pay a fine. This has been condemned as inhuman by NGOs and political leaders. Common articles sold by the street vendors are depicted in Table 3.1.

Fruits (a variety of grown as well as wild)	Telephone accessories	Wallets	CDs
Vegetables of all kinds (packed and open)	Carrier bags (masaga bag),	Hand-made shoes and sandals	Books
New and second-hand clothes and accessories	Airtime	Assortment of traditional medicines	Bibles
Torches and watches	Rat and ants poison	An assortment of hardware articles	Bags

**Table 3.1: Common articles sold by street vendors in Zimbabwe**

Marapira (2013), states that in the years prior to the new Millennium fruits and vegetables were the dominant products peddled by street vendors. In actual fact, various studies have noted that not only has street vending grown exponentially in the diversity of its wares, but it has also taken some innovative dimensions in terms of scope, composition, shape and modes of operation. For instance, it is the women who were traditionally known to make up the larger number of street vendors, while men on the other hand preferred to work in the formal sector (Manyanaire et al., 2007). It was also a trade mainly dominated by the poor to whom this was the only means to make a living. Nowadays, it is common to see vehicles packed full with merchandise ranging from clothing, shoes, cell phones, pots and pans to cooked food. It is no longer an unusual sight to have people queuing at a vehicle to buy lunch from a boot of a car at a roadside.

### *3.4 Types of employment for street vendors*

In this study three employment categories of street vendors are identified.

- The self-employed, that is, those working for themselves
- Those that work for the family, with or without receiving payment.
- The wage earners: these are employed by other street vendors or shop owners seeking to establish a presence in the street.

For purposes of this paper, all the three categories are together referred as Street vendors/vendors. In these three employment categories of street vendors, the researcher further identified two distinct groups. Amongst the street vendors, the researcher observed that there are those who are stationary and others who are mobile (Bhowmik, 2003). The stationary group is comprised of those vendors who carry out their business on a regular basis at a specific location. In this group you will find individuals who occupy space on the pavements, street corners or other public such as bus stations, taxi ranks, school and hospital gates, or other similar private places. They may operate from either open or covered spaces, having sought and obtained either implicit or explicit consent of the authorities. The second category comprises the vendors who carry out their vending moving from place to place on foot, as well as those vendors that move from place to place on bicycles, or mobile units on wheels, including in buses and trains. Vendors that move on foot are sometimes found carrying their wares on their heads, shoulders or pushing carts, while calling out to advertise their wares, with or without loudspeakers. In some cases they use bells in order to attract the attention of potential customers who may be indoors or at a distance to see them.

### *3.5 Street vending and Unemployment*

It must be noted that street vending was traditionally associated with the unemployed, uneducated who could not find employment in the formal sector. This perception has since changed as many educated personnel are finding it difficult to secure formal employment, while many of those employed are either not being paid, or paid in time or indeed making sufficient income to support their needs. Several studies have explored the causes of growth in street vending in cities across the world, particularly the developing world. Rapid population growth in the whole world, accompanied by rural-urban migration, is named as the number one cause, especially in the developing countries. In more recent times, this situation has been worsened by low industrial growth (Ndiweni et al., 2014), particularly in most Sub-Saharan countries, with Zimbabwe being most affected. The resultant mismatch has seen large populations being unable to secure employment in the formal sector (Jimu 2004). According to the Zimbabwe Independent (January 20, 2017):

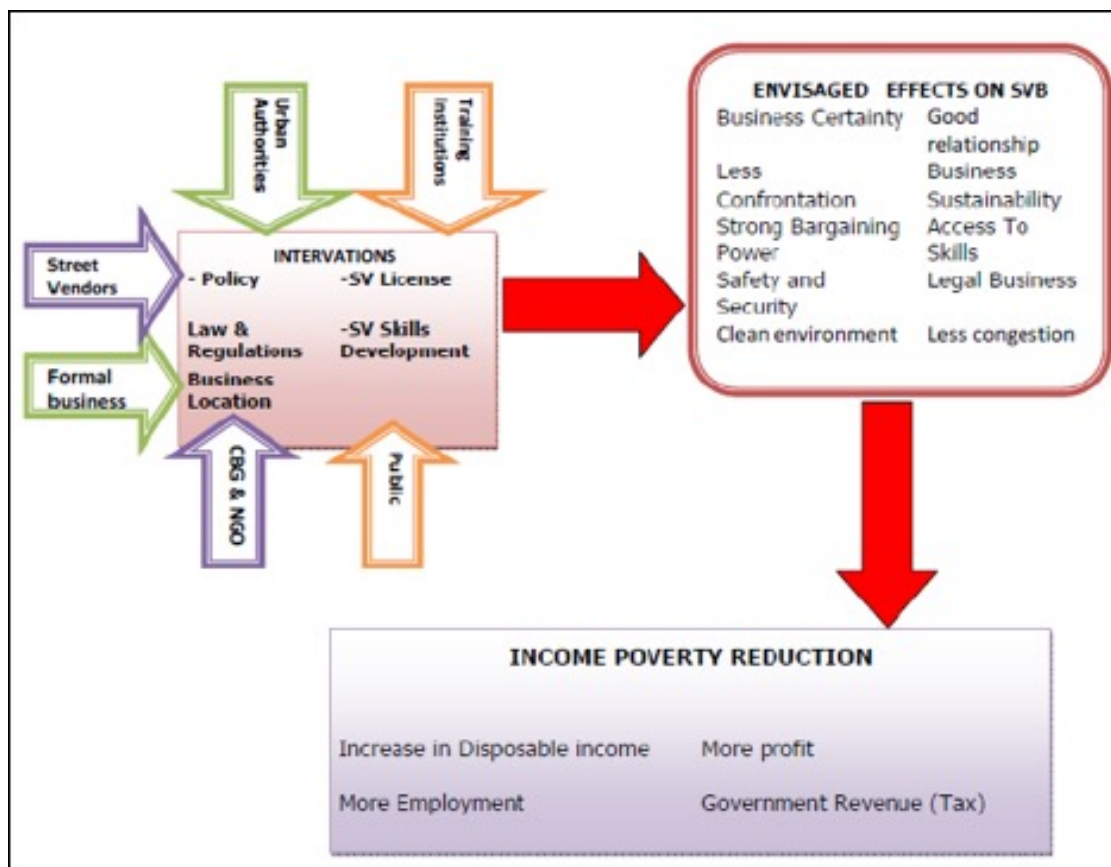
*“Vending in Zimbabwe has become common as a result of the deepening economic crisis reflected in a high unemployment rate. According to the International Labour Organisation, 95% of Zimbabweans are informally employed.”*

Although the problem of lack of adequate skills is identified by most researchers as part of the primary causes for failure to secure a formal job, the prevailing situation in Zimbabwe is such that skills and educational qualifications are not a guarantee for a job. The classical view towards street vending was as a profession that strictly attracts those that are unable to find opportunities for employment in the formal sector. In Zimbabwe, however, street vending is increasingly becoming an option for both skilled and unskilled citizens, who are faced with dwindling incomes and opportunities, insecurity surrounding salary payments (dates of payment, amounts being paid). Currently, many of the few remaining companies are staggering salary payments or placing employees on shifts so as to manage the wage bill. Thus, many in the formal sector are reduced to straddling both the formal and informal sector in order to supplement their salaries. Alila and Mutullah (2000) note that even though the sector offers employment opportunities to massive numbers of people, the incomes realised from these activities are generally excessively low. This has a negative effect on the potential for earning a decent living, making investments and upward mobility in their business.

### *3.6 Theoretical Framework*

Most discussions on street vending have been largely embedded in the broader discourse on informal trade. Evidence points to the fact that street vending is indeed an integral and most visible segment of the informal sector. Thus it follows, that any discussion on the subject cannot be absolutely separate from that of the informal sector. However, given its peculiarity as a sector and its current rate of growth, one can argue that it demands and indeed warrants close scholarly scrutiny and debate. This paper however is not seeking to construct a theory on street vending that is separate from the informal sector. Rather it aims at constructing a profile that illustrates the conditions of the life of a street vendor, and thus highlighting their financial and material well-being. There are several established models that explain how the street vending business can help in reducing poverty and promote people's livelihoods. This paper utilizes Mramba's (2015) proposed model on the conception of the street vending business for income poverty reduction depicted in Figure 3.1.

**Figure 3.1: A model for conception of street vending business for income poverty reduction.**



**Source: Mramba (2015)**

According to Mramba (2015) governments should develop supportive policies, laws, and regulations that address the informality and illegality of street vending business in order to strengthen the role of the street vending business in income poverty reduction. Additionally, Mramba asserts that this supports the romantic view of informal economy that, street vending business is the same like other forms of formal business what needed are constructive interventions. According to this view informal firms are actually or potentially extremely productive, but held back by government taxes and regulations as well as by the lack of safe property rights and access to finance. If such barriers were lowered, street vending business would register and take advantage of the benefits of their formal status. Currently the government of Zimbabwe is using a lot of money to remove street vendors, money which could be used to make street vending business be meaningful for income poverty reduction.

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

The population for this study consisted of all street vendors in the Harare central business district. The sample consisted of 225 street vendors operating in the central business district of



Harare. The descriptive research design was used in this study because it provides accurate and valid representation of the factors or variables that pertain to and that are relevant to the research question (Van Wyk, 2012). A descriptive study enabled the researcher to investigate the socio-economic issues related to well-being of the street vendors such as what, when, where and how thus enabling a detailed description of the nature of their livelihoods. Additionally, the study used the quantitative research approach which enabled the responses of the participants to be coded, categorised, and converted to numbers for purposes of statistical analysis. In this study, a mixed approach was used to gather data. Observations, questionnaires and documentary analysis were used in the study. Both primary and secondary data were collected. The secondary data obtained was from books, scientific articles, and internet sources and it gave a better insight and supported the theoretical as well as the empirical part of the research project. Primary data were collected using questionnaires.

## 5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 5.1 Response rate

225 questionnaires were administered to the sample of street vendors in the Harare central business district. A summary of their response rate is depicted in Table 5.1.

Description	Number of study subjects	Number of responses received	Percentage response (%)
Questionnaires for Street Vendors	225	202	89.7
<b>Total</b>	225	202	89.7

**Table 5.1: Response Rate**

Table 5.1 shows that 225 questionnaires were distributed to the street vendors and 202 questionnaires were returned. This result gives a total response rate of 89.7%. According to Wiesma (1995) 70% is considered to be the minimum acceptable rate of return for questionnaires. Therefore, the response rate of 89.7% is significantly large enough to ensure that the responses received were a sufficient representation of the street vendors in the Harare central business district.

## 5.2 Age and Gender

			Gender		Total
			Male	Female	
How old are you?	15-25 years	Count	45	12	57
		% within How old are you?	78.9%	21.1%	100.0%
		% within Gender	29.6%	24.0%	28.2%
	26-35 years	Count	71	16	87
		% within How old are you?	81.6%	18.4%	100.0%
		% within Gender	46.7%	32.0%	43.1%
	36-45 years	Count	27	19	46
		% within How old are you?	58.7%	41.3%	100.0%
		% within Gender	17.8%	38.0%	22.8%
	46-55 years	Count	7	3	10
		% within How old are you?	70.0%	30.0%	100.0%
		% within Gender	4.6%	6.0%	5.0%
	56 years and above	Count	2	0	2
		% within How old are you?	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
		% within Gender	1.3%	.0%	1.0%
Total	Count		152	50	202
	% within How old are you?		75.2%	24.8%	100.0%
	% within Gender		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

**Table 5.1: How old are you? \* Gender crosstabulation**

Table 5.1 shows that men, who represent 75% of the participants dominate street vending, with the majority of them (48%) being in the 26-35years age group. This is a direct contrast to previous studies in which women were traditionally known to make up the larger number of street vendors, while men on the other hand were found to have preferred to work in the formal sector (Manyanaire et al, 2007). The reason for this new trend could be linked directly to the

lack of formal employment, which has seen many men being either retrenched or being unable to enter the formal employment sector. Meanwhile, the high percentage of male respondents exhibited in the 26-35years age group could be further explained by the fact that this is the age range where men are generally assuming responsibility, for themselves, their nucleus family as well as the extended family. With few companies remaining to offer employment opportunities, many are forced to create their own employment in order to sustain their livelihoods. Within the total population of their age range (men + women aged 26-35years), it is notable that male respondents form the majority (82%). This could be explained by the fact that women in this age group are still in their prime age for marriage and childbearing, which in many cases tends to interfere with meaningful economic activities. While there were men still vending at age 55years and above (1%), there were no female respondents in the same age group.

### *5.3 Education level and Gender*

			Gender		Total
			Male	Female	
What is your highest level of education?	Never been to school	Count	2	0	2
		% within What is your highest level of education?	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
		% within Gender	1.3%	.0%	1.0%
	Primary	Count	20	8	28
		% within What is your highest level of education?	71.4%	28.6%	100.0%
		% within Gender	13.2%	16.0%	13.9%
	Secondary	Count	123	41	164
		% within What is your highest level of education?	75.0%	25.0%	100.0%
		% within Gender	80.9%	82.0%	81.2%
	College/Vocational Training	Count	7	1	8
		% within What is your highest level of education?	87.5%	12.5%	100.0%
		% within Gender	4.6%	2.0%	4.0%
Total	Count	152	50	202	
	% within What is your highest level of education?	75.2%	24.8%	100.0%	
	% within Gender	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

**Table 5.2: What is your highest level of education? \* Gender cross tabulation**

Traditionally, street vending has been viewed as an economic activity for those with low levels of education. Table 5.2 indicates that a high percentage of the respondents attended Secondary education, which effectively enables them to read and write. Approximately 81% of the participants understudy indicated having attended secondary school although most of them explained that they either did not sit for their O' Levels or they sat and failed to attain minimum required O' Level subjects due to lack of school fees. This is against the backdrop of five O'

levels being the minimum requirement for entry into the formal employment sector. Which in turn means therefore that most respondents would not qualify to apply for employment, even where it were available. In Zimbabwe, the unemployment rate is estimated at around 90%, with many companies operating at below 50% capacity, retrenching or closing down, making it a daunting challenge even for those with required qualifications to secure formal employment.

#### 5.4 Ability to afford Accommodation

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Rented	150	74.3	74.3	74.3
Owned	17	8.4	8.4	82.7
Living with parents / guardian	35	17.3	17.3	100.0
Total	202	100.0	100.0	

**Table 5.3: What is your type of accommodation?**

As shown in table 5.3, the majority of the respondents (74%) live in rented accommodation, followed by those living with their parents or with guardians (17%). Some of the respondents further indicated that of the rented accommodation, they are renting rooms, in houses that designed to accommodate a single family. This gives the conclusion that in those places of accommodation, there are too many people living together since the other rooms will be occupied by other families. In other cases, respondents pointed out that they were renting houses that have no electricity, plumbing or toilet.

#### 5.5 Type of employment

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Self	159	78.7	78.7	78.7
Family	16	7.9	7.9	86.6
Employer	27	13.4	13.4	100.0
Total	202	100.0	100.0	

**Table 5.4: Whom are you working for?**

In this study three categories of street vendors are identified. The self-employed, that is, those work for themselves, then there are those that work for the family, with or without receiving payment. Then there is also another group of vendors that work for a wage. These are employed by other street vendors or shop owners seeking to establish a presence in the street. Table 5.4 shows that the self-employed group of vendors make the highest percentage of the total population (79%).

### *5.6 Earnings*

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Below \$2	171	84.6	84.6	84.6
\$2 - \$10	22	10.8	10.8	95.4
Above \$11	9	4.4	4.4	100.0
Total	202	100.0	100.0	

**Table 5.5: How much money do you earn per day?**

Earnings in this sector is characterised by wide disparities. As shown in Table 5.5, 84.6% of the street vendors understudy earn below \$2 a day, which is commonly known as the poverty threshold. Indications are also that women street vendors earn less than their male counterparts, while those engaged in food vending generally earn less than vendors of non-food products. A handful of them indicated that they are somehow able to earn a decent living.

### *5.7 Reasons for choosing street Vending*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Lack of formal employment	178	88.1	88.1	88.1
	Lack of skills	1	0.49	0.49	88.59
	Low entry barriers	16	7.9	7.9	96.49
	Supplement income	5	2.47	2.47	98.96
	Preferred form of employment	2	0.99	0.99	100.0
	Total	202	100.0	100.0	

**Table 5.6: What are your reasons for choosing street Vending?**

Table 5.6 shows that most of the respondents (88.1%) were involved in street vending because they could not secure formal employment. 88.1% is a huge statistic which clearly shows high levels of unemployment in the country. Only a few respondents were engaged in street vending for other reasons such as lack of skills, low entry barriers and so forth.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

6.1. Street vending is characterised by a life of high levels of vulnerability and poverty. The majority demonstrated a life that is relatively insecure. The majority of the respondents (74%) lives in rented accommodation or with family or guardians. Their assets largely consist of household property which most of them are unable to repair or replace, of those who have some kind of household property, it is bare minimum. Such a life as is typified by overcrowding and lack of valuable property is said to be a sign of poverty (Mpofu, 2012).

6.2. Most of the street vendors understudy (84.6%) live on the poverty threshold as they earn below \$2 a day. With such a low income, they are likely to only be able to access government and council health facilities, which are currently saddled with a myriad of challenges among which include overcrowding, lack of medicines, shortage of staff, emergency services as well as basic necessities such as running water.

6.3. Street vending is clearly not an “employment of choice” for most people as they are pushed to enter the trade by adverse circumstances surrounding their social and economic well-

being. The major one being failure to secure formal employment. This is evidenced by 88.1% of the respondents under study who cited lack of formal employment as their reasons for participating in street vending.

6.4. If current market conditions for vendors prevail which are characterized by low incomes, persistent raids by local authorities just to mention a few, street vending will by no means be able to help those involved to achieve significant economic sustenance. However, with policy reforms and government support to this sector, street vending can be an important source of economic sustenance.

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