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About the Journal

JOURNAL PURPOSE

The purpose of the *Ngenani - Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University Journal of Community Engagement and Societal Transformation Review and Advancement* is to provide a forum for community engagement and outreach.

CONTRIBUTION AND READERSHIP

Sociologists, demographers, psychologists, development experts, planners, social workers, social engineers and economists, among others whose focus is on community development.

JOURNAL SPECIFICATIONS

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SCOPE AND FOCUS

The journal is a forum for the discussion of ideas, scholarly opinions and case studies of community outreach and engagement. Communities are both defined in terms of people found in a given locale as well as defined cohorts, like the children, the youth, the elderly, and those living with a disability. The strongest view is that getting to know each community or subcommunity is a function of their deliberate participation in matters affecting them by the community itself. The journal is produced bi-annually.

Guidelines for Authors for the *Ngenani* Journal

Articles must be original contributions, not previously published and should not be under consideration for publishing elsewhere.

Manuscript Submission: Articles submitted to the *Ngenani - Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University Journal of Community Engagement and Societal Transformation Review and Advancement* were reviewed using the double-blind peer review system. The author's name(s) must not be included in the main text or running heads and footers.

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Language: British/UK English

Title: must capture the gist and scope of the article

Names of authors: beginning with the first name and ending with the surname **Affiliation of authors:** must be footnoted, showing the department and institution or organisation

Abstract: must be 200 words

Keywords: must be five or six containing words that are not in the title **Body:** Where the authors are more than three, use *et al.* Italicise *et al.*, *ibid.*, words that are not English, not names of people or organisations, etc. When you use several authors confirming the same point, state the point and bracket them in one bracket and in ascending order of dates and alphabetically separated by semi-colon e.g. (Falkenmark, 1989, 1990; Reddy, 2002; Dagdeviren and Robertson, 2011; Jacobsen *et al.*, 2012).

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<https://www.herald.co.zw/hararecity-could-have-used-lockdown-to-clean-mbare-market/>. Accessed on 24 June 2020.

Reflection on the During and Post -COVID-19 Experiences, Response Strategies: The Case of Informal Traders in Masvingo URBAN

TENDAI MAWERE¹, GODWIN K ZINGI¹, LEONARD CHITONGO², DAVID MAGO³,
BEATRICE
HICKONICKO¹ AND FORTUNATE JENA¹

Abstract

The research evaluated the Zimbabwe's City of Masvingo's response to the impacts of COVID-19 on informal traders. The research shows the resilience strategies which have been adopted by the informally employed and the sustainability of the strategies therein. A sample of 94 informal traders were selected to participate in this research. Key informant interviews, questionnaires and observations were used in data collection as they support the mixed approach. Key findings reveal that appreciation of the Sendai Framework by the City of Masvingo that agitates for resilience and protection of livelihoods and productive assets throughout the supply chains, ensure continuity of services and integrate disaster risk management into business models and practices. Most strategies employed by the planning authority to counter contingencies were skewed towards the physical response such as renovations and demolitions of marketplaces, water and sanitation rehabilitation and the hierarchy of controls, whilst the socio-economic dimension has been kept at bay. The research recognises that social and physical distancing are essential response mechanisms to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, there is need to for integrative planning that takes human factor into consideration by guaranteeing safety nets.

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Keywords: pandemic, informality , local government, policy, resilience¹²

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The COVID-19 pandemic brought unexpected exogenous shocks that resulted in global, regional and national responses. The pandemic tested the resilience of governments, leaders, societies, economies and institutions in a way that few crises have over the past century (Morley *et al.*, 2020). To contain the spread of the virus, different countries adopted unprecedented policy measures based on their capacity. The World Health Organisation (WHO) led a response by issuing a press release urging disaster management agencies to prioritise biological hazards. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) made US\$10 billion of zero-interest loans available to its poorest member countries as investment funds for the health care sector, labour market and small entrepreneurs. The World Bank Group increased COVID-19 by US\$14 billion to help sustain economies and protect informal jobs. However, Africa's public and private sectors, individuals and communities had limited response alternatives to COVID-19 commercial lockdowns and disruption of income sources. As a response to COVID-19 for the informal sector, Japan approved two packages of small business loans US\$6 billion and US\$15 billion on February 4 and March 15, respectively. South Korea allocated more than US\$13 billion in emergency funds to stroke economic activities. Singapore set aside US\$4.02 billion to help businesses and households. Under Zimbabwe's indefinite COVID-19 lockdown, informal traders and vendors and their families were highly vulnerable, unable to go out to earn their living. The demolition of their stalls exacerbated an already-desperate situation. According to UNDP, measures taken by Zimbabwe to reduce the spread of the virus led to a 3,8% decline in GDP growth in the continent. The economy became disastrous, disproportionately with the poor and vulnerable, small and informal businesses as well as small agricultural producers. Delayed imports of goods increased the shortage of basic consumer and intermediate goods, thus fuelling further inflammatory pressures in the country. A strict response to the pandemic by the government could dampen growth further and discourage the much-needed investments, thus leading to an increase in the levels of poverty. Zimbabwe is largely an informal economy dominated by small to medium enterprises (SMEs) that are domiciled in the informal sector due to economic decline perpetuated by bad governance.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Urban spaces are epidemiological foci of COVID-19 due to densities and spatial interactions within market places, accelerating people's exposure and susceptibility to this biological hazard, hence there is need for robustness in preparedness and response in cities (Lone & Ahmad, 2020). Local authorities have governance and policy-making responsibilities and play an important role throughout the emergency management cycle – from preparedness and readiness to response to and eventual recovery from COVID-19 (WHO, 2020) . Preparedness in cities and other urban settlements is critical for effective national, regional and global responses to COVID19. Urban market spaces play a significant role in sustaining urban livelihoods in the face unemployment and fragile economy. The Chitima and Chicken market places, prior to the invocation of Statutory Instrument 133 of 2020, had been spaces for spatial interaction, spatial flows of people as well as social interaction. People in market places have inadequate sanitation, clean water is rare and no water storage tanks, electricity connections are unreliable, fire safety equipment is lacking, pathways are narrow and there is limited space between the sellers (UN Habitat, 2020). Such an environment is fertile ground for risk and susceptibility to communicable diseases due to confined spaces and intense clustering. There has been general consensus amongst spatial epidemiologists and disaster epidemiologists that there is need for COVID-19 response and preparedness premised on engineering and management controls that seek create COVID proofing market infrastructure.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

The COVID-19 is a biological disaster of significant proportions, with dire consequences on the socio-economic front, hence any response and preparedness mechanisms should integrate human rights and dignity. However, the hierarchy of controls imposed by the Zimbabwean government as a response and preparedness strategy have a negative bearing on citizens' rights to partake in economic activity and to be protected from exposure and susceptibility. While social and physical distancing are essential response mechanisms to the COVID-19 pandemic, there is need, however, for integrative planning that takes the human factor into consideration by guaranteeing safety nets. There is propensity of the government towards recentralisation local government

due to failure to re-align the Section 264, Chapter 14 of the Constitution on devolution. At the centre of re-centralisation there is evidence of issuance of ministers directives and statutory instruments, thereby subverting the right of citizenship participation in matters affecting their wellbeing. The Sendai Framework, clear on managing the risk of disasters, stipulates that people's health, livelihoods and productive assets should be protected while maintaining and protecting their alienable rights and the right to development. This research focuses on the effectiveness of the response and preparedness within urban settings against the recommended standard operating procedures specified in the Sendai Framework, Constitution of Zimbabwe, as well as pre-established rules enshrined in related legislations and urban by-laws.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK SENDAI FRAMEWORK

The Sendai framework clearly states that to reduce the frequency and impact of disasters, what is to better understand disaster risk and to improve risk governance, thereby minimising new risks.. This is no aneasy feat. It requires establishing consistent access to and collection of disaggregated data and strengthening capacity for contextually analyzing risk assessment and forecasting data. Most importantly, it requires building political will and action to ensure that all development programming and future investments are risk-informed. The response and recovery strategies, while focusing on physical space, the recognition of local markets as the mainstay of livelihoods strategies, have been relegated to the background with little emphasis on inclusivity to risk reduction. There is limited appreciation of the Sendai Framework by the City of Masvingo which agitates for resilience and protection of livelihoods and productive assets throughout the supply chains, ensure continuity of services and integrate disaster risk management into business models and practices.

INCLUSIVITY OF URBAN POLICIES

The aim must be to devise robust, flexible and resilient adaptive systems that work in harmony with all sectors. To attain the expected outcome, there should be reduction of existing and prevention of new disaster risk through implementation of integrated and inclusive economic, structural, legal and social measures that prevent and reduce hazard exposure and vulnerability to disaster, increase preparedness for response and

recovery and thus strengthen resilience. There must a calculated endeavours for more multilevel governance that engages with various stakeholders and to support grassroots and community level networks There has to be a broader and more peoplecentred preventive approach to disaster risk. Disaster risk reduction practices need to be multi-hazard and multi-sectoral, inclusive and accessible to be efficient and effective. While recognising their leading, regulatory and coordination role, Governments should engage with relevant stakeholders, including women, children and youth, persons with disabilities, the poor, migrants, indigenous peoples, volunteers, the community of practitioners and older persons in the design and implementation of policies, plans and standards. There is need for the public and private sectors and civil society organizations, as well as academia and scientific and research institutions, to work more closely and create opportunities for collaboration and for businesses to integrate disaster risk into their management practices, enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response and to build better cities in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction.

METHODOLOGY

The mixed method approach allowed the use of a wide array of data collection tools than when using either qualitative or quantitative only. By using qualitative data to explain quantitative data and vice versa, mixed methods provided answers to questions that could not be answered by either qualitative or quantitative research only. The mixed approach led to the adoption of the exploratory research design so as to develop an understanding of the local government authority's response strategies to COVID-19 in urban settings. The sample size calculator (<http://www.raosoft.com/samplesize.html>) was used to determine the sample size of 94 from 4 000 registered informal traders. The key informants were purposively selected for this research. Research instruments included questionnaires, desktop review and key informant interviews.

RESULTS

City's response strategy to COVID-19 on informal traders

PHYSICAL DIMENSIONS

DEMOLITIONS

Municipal police and council officials demolished illegal market stalls and cabins in the City of Masvingo. The intention was to help prevent the spread of the virus by minimising hotspots. The premises were considered likely to harbour the spread of COVID-19 due to intense clustering.

COVID-19.

EXTRACTS FROM KEY INFORMANTS

A participant from the Department of Spatial planning highlighted that:
the designs of the existing market sheds were no longer in line with the RTCP Act regulations on how buildings in the CBD should look like so the council had to demolish and renovate the existing infrastructure.

The city council complied with a Cabinet resolution that during the national lockdown, local authorities should clean up and renovate workspaces used by informal traders.

Figure 2 and 3 show how the designs of the vending structures were improved into market sheds that are strong and resistant to natural disasters, thus building resilience.



Figure 1: *Market sheds being demolished by the City Council.*

RENOVATIONS

THE government, local council and development agencies committed resources to renovating market and vending stalls, making them safer for both traders and citizens within the jurisdiction of Masvingo. Figure 2 shows the Chitima marketplace after it had been renovated. The new building designs were spacious and allowed physical distancing in the face of infectious diseases. The city improved in terms of solid waste management and sanitation. The council managed to renovate public toilets and provide hand-washing basins at all public vending markets.



Figure 2: *The improved Chitima Musika after renovations*

BUILDING BACK BETTER CITIES

The city is trying to build back better cities that are resilient. Mucheke Hall and Rujeko Hall were renovated to be used as evacuation centres in case of disasters (biological and natural disasters). The city improved the provision of services as well, to build back better cities that are adaptive and resilient to shocks.

A participant from Masvingo City council argued:

The city improved the provision of services, public toilets, Jojo tanks and hand-washing basins in public places, for instance, Chitima, town flea market also bus stop markings to ensure social distancing

To improve water supply, solid waste management and hygiene (,ASH,) the city renovated public toilets and provided hand-washing basins at all vending places, e.g Chitima, Tanaiwa, Sisk and Gomba. There was a constant supply of water and relocation of dumpsite from Vic Range to 10 km away from town.

NONPHYSICAL DIMENSIONS

PACKAGES/ GRANTS

A participant from a Focus Group Discussion highlighted that: *Each member was given 200 bond, inokwaneyi.* Furthermore, another participant from FGDs noted that:

Though the government promised SMEs a grant to cushion them during the lockdown, the process has been very slow, halfway through the shutdown informal traders in Masvingo still haven't received any funds.

Based on the information gathered from discussions, the grants offered by the government were not enough and the people had to go through many processes resulting in some failing to receive the money. From key informant interviews pertaining to the issue of informal traders receiving loans, Key informant 1 said; —*It was hard for other informal traders to receive loans as the Ministry of Social Welfare usually offer loans to cooperatives (SACCO)*".

Informal traders faced difficulties in accessing loans from banks as most of them do not have collateral security, yet the Ministry responsible for loans targeted only registered cooperatives and not informal traders. According to Birla (2018), providing loans and credit guarantees with limited conditionality can be one means to invigorate private sector participation in continuing economic productivity, increase the liquidity of small-scale businesses and limit job losses. Thus, the only way to cushion the informal sector in the face of rapid disasters such as COVID-19.

INCLUSIVENESS

According to Key informant 4:

Before the demolitions of Chitima and other market stalls, the vendors were consulted, the council held a meeting and the chairmen of Masvingo Residence Association was present to advocate for the informal group, even on the issue of rentals the sector was consulted.

In this case, there was inclusiveness as the city response to the impacts of COVID-19 included vendors in the decision-making processes.

THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK THAT GUIDED THE CITY'S RESPONSE

The demolition and renovation of vending stalls as the city's response were in line with and guided by several Acts, laws and Statutory instruments (SIs). They include the following

BILL WATCH 18/2020 – 22ND APRIL

Municipal police and council officials were empowered to demolish market stalls and illegal cabins in the high-density suburbs with the intention of preventing the spread of COVID-19. The Ministry of Local Government Public Works and National Housing asked the council to comply with the Cabinet resolution, meaning they had no choice but to carry out the directive from the Minister.

S.I 2020- 077 PUBLIC HEALTH

According to information gathered from key informant interviews, the renovations were necessary as they were guided by SIs and the RTCP Act. According to the SI 2020 section 8 sub (1) I

In pursuance of the object of these regulations, the Minister may (in consultation with the President) by orders published in the Gazette –

...authorise in any local authority the evacuation, closing, alteration or if deemed necessary, the demolition or destruction of any premises the occupation or use of which is considered likely to favour the spread or render more difficult the eradication of such diseasell

IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON INFORMAL TRADERS

Table 1 shows that most of the city's response to COVID-19 has been dominated by infrastructure rehabilitation as represented by 53%, relative to other non-physical dimensions such as livelihoods (18%), job opportunities (12%) and financial sustainability (15%).

Table 1: Impacts of COVID-19 on informal traders.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Infrastructure development	50	53.7	53.7	53.7
Financial sustainability	15	15.9	15.9	69.6
Job opportunities	12	12.8	12.8	81.9
Livelihoods	17	18.1	18.1	100.0
Total	94	100.0	100.0	

INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

Results from Table 1 indicated that most participants on the city's response were biased towards infrastructure provision. They agreed that infrastructure such as Rank town flea markets, Chitima Musika and Tanaiwa Market have improved significantly, building designs in line with the WHO regulations that agitate for spacious vending stalls that reduce the spread of Covid. Moreover, water and sanitation facilities , a vital cog in the spread and occurrence of communicable diseases, have been refurbished and rehabilitated. This was also a way of building back better cities that are resilient, adaptive and can respond to shocks. A respondent from Masvingo City Council highlighted that:

The city renovated Mucheke Hall and Rujeko Hall to be used as evacuation centres in case of disasters; vending stalls were also renovated to allow social distancing, they are well ventilated and the building designs were improved.

Results from key informants indicate that the city's response was focused mainly on the development of the city and neglected social and economic aspects. As a result, the livelihoods of the informal group were disrupted as informal traders were displaced. Results from informal traders and key informants present how each group was affected by the city's response to infrastructure development. The development of infrastructure is also a benefit to the local authority as it strengthens the city's financial sustainability. Also, disaster management of the city was improved and the building designs were stronger and well-ventilated.

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Results show that financially, 23% of the participants were affected by COVID-19 restrictions. This is because their social networks were disrupted and due to stiff competition in the market, their returns were low. The 2008 multi-inflationary environment showed the vulnerability of these traders in times of crisis and it means they need social safety nets that respond to their needs and circumstance. The social groups were their funding strategy and during this period, they could no longer meet and they had no money to save, thereby affecting their financial status.

Discussions Member 4 stated,

Maround were very important because *munhu waishanda une target uchiziva kuti panopera week, ndikufana kukanda mari yakati, manje nelockdown mari yekutokanda unenge usina nekuti yekudya hapatorina.*

These findings are in line with Horing et al. (2020) who mentioned and explained the importance of rotating savings and credit associations (ROSCAs) and Accumulating Savings and Credit Associations (ASCAS) Informal traders in South Africa should have government-supported schemes that they can contribute to. Such schemes exist for the formally employed and their employers. Schemes such as the South African Unemployment Insurance Fund that has, despite the many challenges, paid out R16.5 billion (US\$916 million) in the first two months of the COVID-19 lockdown (SA News, 2020). The COVID-19 limited market also affected the financial status of the informal traders. The participants were complaining about the issue of the limited market which was resulting in low profits. This is because they were facing stiff competition from vendors who were selling at home and in the streets, charging very low prices because they do not pay any rentals, this leading customers opting to buy in the streets at Chitima Musika.

LIVELIHOODS

The results indicate that 18% of the participants' livelihoods were affected because of the city's response and increased their vulnerability. The closure of light industries, informal economy businesses and vendors deprived them of their sources of livelihood and income.

FDG Member 4, said, "We are facing a hunger crisis and lockdown *yovhiringidza zvanga zvichiita tiwane mari, zvirinani kufa wakaguta.*"

These findings are in line with Calina et al. (2020) who stated that:

Street vending is a source of employment and income for poor dwellers who have limited opportunities in a country where the ongoing pandemic exacerbates the already existing social inequalities.

More so the vulnerable groups were affected to a greater extent as they depend on the informal sector for survival. This is because the informal sector tends to be vulnerable during outbreaks as they have low levels of investments and savings. *FGD Member 7* avered:

Vakawanda vanotengesa they're the disabled and *havasi mutoenda hamusi kudiwa vanhu* that will affect them more because *havana* any other source of income to sustain a living.

Member 8 added,

The closure of *maborders* as well as lockdown *yatoaffector* some of us *vainoita zvekutengesa kunze tichidzoka kumba* something.

These findings show that as a result of the closure of borders, remittances slowed down and had a double impact on fiscal space and household vulnerability to poverty. The findings are agreeing with *Arias et al.* (2019) who also supported the result of loss of income and increased vulnerability of the poor.

JOB OPPORTUNITIES

The results show that 12% of the participants benefited from the new wave of informality. These findings are in line with what *Koroma et al.* (2017) who observed

In Zimbabwe, where unemployment is estimated at up to 90% when considering only the formal economy, has created significant employment opportunities, with an estimated 57 million people currently employed in the informal economy.

Cross-border traders (CBTs), in trying to adapt to the lockdown restriction, used runners to order goods online from abroad and use trucks to transport them overland. Thus, in this case, there was the creation of jobs for runners and truck drivers. The creation of new jobs made it possible for the informal traders to make a living and sustain their families' livelihoods. *Brenton and Soprano* (2018) also supported the view that the informal sector creates employment. They explained that revenues are often the main source of income for the households of CBTs. Then there was the the black market which resulted in many people benefiting and at the end of the day, improving their livelihoods.

COPING STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY THE INFORMAL TRADERS

IDENTIFYING AND CREATING ALTERNATIVE SPACES

The most employed strategy was of identifying and creating alternative spaces. Some (42.6%) were now selling on open spaces and street pavements but these were often raided by municipal police who confiscated their goods, resulting in huge losses in some cases. These victims are vendors who were not allocated vending stalls because of different reasons based on criteria used by the local authority. This attracted fines from council police as the RTCP Act supports the city in the creation of designated vending areas, not open spaces.

Table 2: Coping strategies employed by vendors

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Identifying & creating alternative spaces	40	42.6		42.6
	Middlemen marketing	23	24.5	42.6	67.0
	Adoption of e-technologies	17	18.1	24.5	85.1
	Door-to-door service delivery	14	14.9	18.1	100.0
	Total	94	100.0	14.9	
				100.0	

EXTRACTS FROM FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

CBT traders had different views from questionnaire participants on the issue of coping strategies. For them to survive, they adopted financial coping strategies since the closure of borders led to losses of jobs for many and the disruption of livelihoods.

"We had to borrow money from friends and relatives and sell productive assets such as livestock."

Identification and creation of alternative vending spaces indicate that the city's response to the impacts of COVID-19 on informal traders was not effective. The city focused on the physical aspect which is infrastructure development, neglecting the informal group that sustains their

livelihoods through the informal industry. Vendors had to create other alternatives such as the creation of vending spaces in open spaces.

ADOPTION OF E-TECHNOLOGIES

Adoption of e-technologies was employed by 18,1% of informal traders. CBTs used digital platforms to network with business associates for supplies, advertising on WhatsApp groups, Facebook pages and so forth. It was sustainable as a low fee was charged and no need to travel because people were not allowed to.

EXTRACTS FROM DISCUSSIONS

Member 5:

—We adopted the use of Whatsapp platform to order goods and advertise to customers through whatsapp status.ii

Member 6:

—WhatsApp *ndoyaitoshanda* since *maborder akavharwa* and it was easy because one could order through runners and the goods were transported by trucks and then you deliver to your customers.

Findings from CBTs stated that the use of social media was the best because many people were using the same platforms for communication and it was easy to advertise. Many scholars agree with the use of e-technologies as a coping strategy for vendors during the COVID-19 lockdown. Chikulo *et al.* (2020) indicated the use of digital platforms to network with business associates as a sustainable way of trading without violating WHO regulations.

CHALLENGES FACED BY INFORMAL TRADERS

Table 3: Callenges faced by informal traders

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	High rentals	24	25.5	25.5	25.5
	Confiscation of goods	23	24.5	24.5	50.0
	Stiff competition				
	Harassment	8	8.5	8.5	58.5
	Total	39	41.5	41.5	100.0

HARASSMENT

Although vendors had reasons to justify their presence on street pavements, it is against city regulations. The number of stalls built by the municipality on the market sites was limited, only a few vendors could be accommodated, hence leaving them with no option but to remain to go on the streets.

A key informant said,

Pertaining to the issue of the limited vending spaces, vendors were denied access because of the council waiting list procedure and the city have limited space for such use as compared to the number of people, but are still trying to create more spaces to accommodate them

The findings are in line with what Wegerif (YEAR??) observed when he argued that the city, in trying to create a better city council, have failed to drive the vendors away from the street. —The street is oursll, as one trader once remarked in an interview, is an essential characteristic of the new geography of resistance in which street-induced informality is one of the concessions.

HIGH RENTALS

Twenty five percent (25%) reported that they were facing challenges of high rentals and they were struggling to pay since they were now charged in US dollars. It is hard for them to afford because they are still recovering from COVID-19 shocks.

Extracts from FGDs: "*Many failed kudzoka kuChitima nenyaya yemarentals anga akwira from US\$5 to US\$25*"

Extracts from key informants: "*The criteria that were used to allocate market sheds also verified if the people applying have the capacity to afford the rent.*"

CONFISCATION OF GOODS

Nearly a quarter (24%) of the participants reported that they were negatively affected by COVID-19. In trying to adapt, they lost their goods and loss of revenue, among other things . Mitullah (2003), Ninathen (2006) and Shaiara *et al.* (2015) also supported these findings as they explain how informal traders suffer due to them not being recognised.

"Since street trade is not legitimately regulated in many countries, harassment often results in the confiscation of and damage to their goods as well as loss of money.'

EXTRACTS FROM FDGS

Mabhero edu atakasiya muChitima paka announswa nyaya yema renovations it was too late kuti titore zvinhu zvedu and takaita loss coz vaive paduze ndovakatora.

When Chitima stalls were demolished, many informal traders left their goods on shelves hoping they would go back to work after the three-week lockdown.

Extracts from key informant

The informal traders were consulted on the issue pertaining to renovations and their representatives were present in the meeting, meaning they were supposed to tell the other vendors what the city was planning.

This means that the loss of goods and other stuff because of demolitions by the city was due to the Vendors Association failing to communicate with their members effectively.

DISCUSSION

An empirical study of the impacts of COVID-19 restrictions on informal traders was carried out in Masvingo urban. The main objectives of the study were to discuss the city's response to the impacts of COVID-19, its effectiveness, how the informal sector survived and the challenges faced in employing the strategies. The results indicate that the city demolished vending infrastructures that were regarded as hotspots for the spread of COVID-19. These vending stalls, like Chitima Musika designs, were poor and prone to disasters like floods and biological shocks like COVID-19. The Sendai Framework, which guides cities on disaster risk management, creating back better resilient cities that respond to shocks, was adopted. This indicates that in response to biological disasters, the city is required to better understand disaster risk management, formulate inclusive urban policies and a holistic approach that addresses all dimensions of life to work towards a sustainable society. Also, the city improved the provision of services like the supply of water, provision of hand-washing basins and solid waste management was also improved. The city, in response to the impacts of COVID-19, demolished vending stalls and renovated them and cancelled all leases.

This led to the displacement of informal traders, disruption of livelihoods and social networks that helped the informal group to sustain and eradicate poverty. The closure of borders affected the traders and other members who had been benefitting from remittances. Vendors, in most cases, survive by hand-to-mouth, meaning they do not have any savings that will help and sustain their livelihoods in case of disasters. The informal traders, as a result, employed coping strategies to survive the post-COVID-19 period. Those who were displaced by the city's renovations identified and created open spaces and street pavements as alternative vending areas. Cross-border traders adopted e-technologies to order their goods online, advertise and sell. This was a sustainable way of continuing with their day-to-day running of business, minimising movements to reduce the spread of the virus. Also, they used middle marketing (runners) who would order goods online and then transport them using trucks. Although they tried to buffer against the COVID-19 shocks, the informal group faced many challenges in trying to employ the strategies. Harassment by the council police was a major challenge as this led to the confiscation of their goods and resulted in losses and fines. Also, rentals were now charged in US\$ which was not affordable

since the traders were still recovering from the shocks. The literature revealed the debate on the impacts of COVID-19 has generated mixed responses and views.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been viewed as a blessing and a curse at the same time. The City of Masvingo found an opportunity to develop infrastructure by demolishing vending stalls that were no longer in line with the RTCP Act. Renovations of Mucheke and Rujeko Halls into evacuation centres in the event of floods, increased disaster risk management of cities. Chitima and other vending stalls were demolished and buildings of better quality and designs that allow ventilation and social distancing, were constructed, minimising the spread of the virus. The City of Masvingo's response to the COVID-19 pandemic is deemed a failure as they did not plan for the informal sector. Repressive tolerance is how Rogerson (2016) and (Kamete, 2013b) characterise the

response of municipal authorities to street trading. Repressive tolerance is an —interveningll measure. It is an unofficial response that characterises the authorities' handling of all types of informality (Kamete, 2013a).

CONCLUSION

The study outlined the experiences and response strategies employed by informal sectors during and after COVID-19 within Masvingo. The rapid onset of disaster in the mould of COVID-19, exposed the informal traders to loss of assets and capabilities, hence planning authority provided with the opportunity to build back better in line with the development control and SENDAI priorities. This study outlined how the COVID-19 response strategies were carried out by Masvingo City Council have affected the livelihoods of its informal traders. It has been noted that the response strategies have focussed mainly on the health side of the COVID-19 pandemic, giving less attention on how the livelihoods of the informal traders have been affected in a country with unemployment above 80%. Whilst much of the interventions targeted physical dimension, the socio-economic dimension has been partially addressed in the face of contingency. There is need for the city to come up with a comprehensive disaster action plan that anticipates future contingencies.

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