

Why Flood Traditional Place Markets with Unprocessed Foodstuffs in Harare? The Case for Value Addition at Source

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Abstract

The importance of traditional place markets in Harare lies in their role as vital nodes linking smallholder agriculture with urban consumption, forming the foundation of the city's informal food economy. Despite this significance, these markets are dominated largely by unprocessed foodstuffs such as grains, legumes, fruits and vegetables. Their prevalence underscores deep inefficiencies along Zimbabwe's agricultural value chain, where limited local processing capacities, poor infrastructure and fragmented policy implementation perpetuate economic vulnerability for both producers and vendors. As a result, opportunities to enhance livelihoods, reduce post-harvest losses and stimulate rural-industrial synergy remain underexploited. Addressing these structural deficiencies is essential for transforming Harare's food systems into productive and sustainable economic sectors capable of supporting equitable development. However, a persistent research gap exists in understanding why traditional markets continue to circulate raw produce despite ongoing industrial and urban development initiatives. Most prior discussions focus on market access and food safety but overlook socio-economic, institutional and behavioural factors that discourage value addition at the source. These limitations necessitate deeper qualitative exploration to reveal underlying structural and cultural dynamics influencing current market

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practices. Without addressing these foundational barriers, interventions focused solely on infrastructure or technology may fail to effect meaningful transformation across local food networks. The main objective of this qualitative study is to explore the dominance of unprocessed foodstuffs in Harare's traditional markets and examine strategies for promoting value addition at production points. Data were generated through a qualitative desk review of scholarly studies, official policy documents and organisational reports. Textual analysis was employed to interpret patterns and relationships across diverse evidence. The analysis reveals that: market informality and weak policy enforcement sustain traditional trade practices; limited capital, technology and cooperative organisation inhibit small-scale processing; and consumer preferences favour affordability over processed goods. The findings suggest that localised processing models, micro-financing schemes and coordinated urban-rural linkages can reposition Harare's traditional markets as engines of inclusive economic growth and sustainable food system resilience.

Keywords: Informality, economic growth, value addition, economic sectors, Harare, microfinancing.

INTRODUCTION

The prevalence of unprocessed food items in Harare's conventional markets indicates the level of inefficiency in the agricultural marketing chain in Zimbabwe. Despite the good agro-climatic status of the country, most of agricultural products, such as fruits, grains and vegetables, are commonly sold in raw form, thus low earnings for smallholder farmers and market vendors in the country (FAO, 2022). As explained by Jaravaza (2015), the failure to develop efficient processing mechanisms to reduce the income of farmers makes them rely on market prices that fluctuate constantly. Market vendors in Harare, who go to Mbare Musika markets, mostly depend on

agricultural products from peri-urban agricultural farms and domestic sources, contributing to most of Harare's food resources and structures. Nevertheless, the absence of cold storage, transportation and packaging technology has resulted in extensive post-harvest food losses in the country (FAO, 2025). Therefore, the marketing of unprocessed food items not only creates more problems of market efficiency in the country, but also overlooks progress toward efficient Harare food systems in Zimbabwe. However, in recent policy measures, there has been an attempt to change such a paradigm by encouraging agro-processing and value addition in the agriculture sector in general (FurtherAfrica, 2025). The Zimbabwe National Industrial Development Policy promotes the development of integrated value chains between farmers and small agro-processors, targeting the urban market (Ministry of Industry, 2025). Value addition involves the process of adding more value to low-margin raw commodities to become higher-value commodities, improves food security and improves exportability to the global market. Despite the above opportunities, structural challenges in terms of financing, market infrastructure and competition from South Africa and Kenya continue to offer challenges to the growth of the sector in general (FurtherAfrica, 2025). The above explains why there is still unprocessed food in the Harare markets in general that relates to challenges associated with the modernisation of the agricultural sector in the city.

The primary objective of the study is to examine the reason behind the continuing trend of Harare markets being characterised by unprocessed foodstuffs and to suggest the importance of value addition at the source for the achievement of food system resilience. Based on the study on smallholder farmers' engagement in post-harvest practices, it analyses the constraints in local processing practices in smallholder communities with insights from Dube (2016). The study is in line with Zimbabwe's vision to enhance regional agricultural

value chain development in boosting crop productivity and market accessibility (FARA Africa, 2024). The study supports that value addition not only addresses post-harvest losses, but can also further enhance income earning opportunities for low-income vendors and producers in food systems (FAO, 2022). Through locating the subject matter in the context of the Zimbabwean economy, it informs contemporary discourses associated with agrifood transformation in sustainability terms.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The Value Chain Theory was proposed by Michael Porter (1985) to identify the chain of activities involved in the production process to enhance consumer values. In agriculture, values associated with production, processing and distribution and marketing processes were viewed to be interconnected (Porter, 1985; IFPRI, 2022). As indicated by Terera *et al.* (2020), there are efficiency and wealth opportunities in every process in the agricultural food chain, from input to consumption processes. The study finds root in the theoretical understanding that unprocessed food trade is in low or poverty-underdeveloped food chains. The study pursues explaining why unprocessed food trade in low-value food chains perpetually generates low economic values among smallholder farmers and vendors (Gebre *et al.*, 2020). The application of the Value Chain Theory to Zimbabwe provides insights on the structural failures in adding values in the food chain processes at source (Shelton, 2024; UNDP, 2025). The concept pays close attention to integrating food chain players to enhance resilience and growth in smallholder agro-economic settings (Porter, 1985; Gereffi, 1999, Kaplinsky and Morris, 2001).

Grounded in the work of Chambers and Conway (1992), the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) has been further developed in the context of capability, equity and sustainability by Scoones (1998) and further by Ellis (2003), to empower

individuals to utilise natural, physical, human, social and monetary resources to effect sustainable livelihoods. The study relies on the SLF to explain smallholder farmers' and market traders' livelihoods in Harare in terms of unprocessed food resources that are relied upon because of the absence of utilisation resources in Harare, including access to capital, technology and knowledge networks that can empower them to take advantage of value addition and diversification in food production and market networks. For the study, support in terms of diversification in agro-manufacturing can be traced back to the work of authors such as Natarajan (2022) and Manyanga (2025) and further in the work of Ellis and Allison in 2004 to empower smallholder farmers to effect diversification in food production to reduce risks and enhance resilience to food insecurity in Harare, Zimbabwe.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section integrates literature on informal economies' dynamics and their contribution to urban livelihoods. It addresses the role of the informal market in urban food security, the entrepreneurship and innovation strategy to survival of small and medium-scale enterprises and governance and policy environments that influence informal urban planning. Besides, it discusses value addition, supply chain integration and livelihood resilience to increase community adaptation in informal economic systems.

THE FUNCTION OF INFORMAL MARKETS IN URBAN FOOD SECURITY

The informal sector plays an essential role in the food security context in urban areas, especially in the developing world where supermarkets might not be easily accessible. The concept of the informal sector involves markets with no institutional control in terms of street vendors, small businesses and open-air markets that play an essential role in ensuring food security in terms of food access and affordability, especially for low-income

communities in times of crisis and displacement in disaster scenarios (Battersby *et al.*, 2011). For example, food vendors are an essential aspect of the food security context in most Sub-Saharan African cities, where urbanisation has challenged the supermarket food security paradigm in most countries, owing to the rapid growth in urbanisation in most of these cities, where supermarket food security has not yet taken root, yet they are on the rise (Giroux *et al.*, 2020).

The resilience of these markets can be attributed to their adaptability to such dynamic change. For instance, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, these markets were crucial in ensuring food security in urban areas despite the disruption of the formal market system (Zimmerer and Haan, 2020). On the same note, studies conducted in Mexico demonstrate that these markets improve food supply, which has special significance for low-income communities who are constrained in accessing food in car-centric cities with more organised market structures (Krstikj *et al.*, 2023).

Social embeddedness is another essential characteristic of the informal market that greatly strengthens food security in urban areas. Indeed, these markets can be an integral component of the community's social and economic structure, not being vital only in food provision, but also in terms of employment and interaction opportunities (Patel *et al.*, 2014). Networks between vendors and clients tend to transcend the mere market level to cover the entire gamut of relationships, including friendship and assistive networks, especially in times of difficulties (Giroux *et al.*, 2020). For example, in Indian cities, street vendors improve food security by giving employment opportunities to themselves and their families in addition to providing access to food that is affordable and amenable to cultural consumption (Patel *et al.*, 2014).

However, despite the importance they hold, informal markets face challenges such as marginalisation in urban planning, policy neglect and being underappreciated in general food security discourses in urban areas (Davies *et al.*, 2020). The importance of these markets can remain marginalised in policies that tend to emphasise more formalised retail options in urban areas (Crush and Frayne, 2011). There is an acute need for policies to acknowledge and mainstream the contribution made by the food sector in general food security policy in urban areas in terms of food security in general. Enhancing food security in general can be achieved by leveraging the strengths that these markets offer, such as flexibility, community inclusiveness and accessibility in general.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP, INNOVATION AND SURVIVAL IN SMEs

The importance of entrepreneurship, innovation and adaptable strategies in helping small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and manufacturing clusters such as the Glen View Area 8 Industrial Complex in overcoming challenges in economic volatility to survive and grow can never be overestimated. These manufacturing communities are able to survive and thrive by leaning on available resources in the communities and exploring methods of innovation to survive the challenges in the market (Terziovski, 2010). The agility and resilience that can be experienced in SMEs can be attributed to the enterprises' effectiveness in tapping into resources in the communities, such as labour and materials, to continue to survive even in times of economic constraints (Flaminiano, 2024). The entrepreneurial spirit with attributes such as creativity and risk-taking pushes the enterprises to survive in the economy despite market fluctuations (Fairoz *et al.*, 2010).

Learning in organisations in SMEs is yet another key aspect that promotes resilience and innovation in such organisations. Learning networks in SMEs involve the utilisation of networks

in the sharing of knowledge and best practices that improve the innovation efficiency of these organisations which is essential in ensuring resilience in turbulent markets (Ibidunni *et al.*, 2020). Learning in the informal manufacturing clusters aids in accelerating the process of learning via apprenticeship learning models that not only ensure the sustainability of knowledge in the sector, but also the promotion of innovation in the industry through the adoption of models such as in Ratten (2014).

Innovation processes in SMEs can involve entrepreneurship to facilitate economic and societal growth. In fact, SMEs can be viewed as innovation incubators where new ideas are encouraged to flourish in an entrepreneurial culture to develop new innovation-driven products and services (O'Cass and Weerawardena, 2009). The innovation process in SMEs goes beyond technological innovations to market and customer interaction strategies to enhance market coverage.

Finally, SMEs and the so-called unofficial clusters play an essential role in facilitating employment and socio-economic progress. The significance of SMEs in employment opportunities, especially in areas where large industries are not greatly prominent, has been recognised in numerous studies conducted in the past (Bajdor *et al.*, 2021). Through the involvement of the community in terms of employment and entrepreneurial opportunities, these businesses help enhance the socio-economic context and improve the general standard of living in urban areas (Ebrahimi and Mirbargkar, 2017). The agility and flexibility of SMEs in reacting to market requirements make them essential forces in the achievement of economic sustainability and diversification to attain sustainable socio-economic progress in the face of the current risks in the global economy.

POLICY, GOVERNANCE AND URBAN PLANNING IN INFORMAL ECONOMIES

National and regional governmental policies are essential in controlling, structuring and facilitating the growth of the informal economy. The application of improper frameworks or rigid requirements for formality can result in the flourishing of the informal economy, resulting in most economic activities being conducted in the unstructured manner of the informal economy (Loayza, 1999). The growing importance of the informal economy in developing countries is valued in contributing massive amounts to the GDP while not being properly captured in policy formulation on the matter (Musara and Nieuwenhuizen, 2020). Policies in place to reduce the level of informality and strictly require compliance can end up deteriorating the situation if supportive structures are not in place to facilitate businesses to become formalised (Nataraj *et al.*, 2013).

The inclusion of the informal economy in the mainstream has to be done in an organised manner so that there can be a balance between regulation and assistance mechanisms. For example, SME policies aimed at alleviating restrictions while ensuring resource access, can facilitate inclusion (Portes and Schauffler, 1993). The master plan in urban areas can include policies related to malleable zoning regulations that identify the importance of the informal economy in economic terms to invest in physical infrastructures to facilitate market functions (Slonimczyk, 2014). Social protection schemes that include the informal economy can provide safety nets to make these prime economic functions stable in times of economic crises or downturns (Baruah, 2004).

Approaches to governance can offer space for the inclusion of voices in the policy formulation process to suit the realities of the players in the informal economy. Good governance practices

should involve engagement in dialogues for policy formulation, resulting in more relevant and viable policy solutions for the players in the informal economy (Portes and Schauffler, 1993). Engagement in participatory planning can offer solutions in market infrastructural overhaul to suit the needs of the players in the informal economy, improving economic and public welfare activities (Early and Peksen, 2018).

The effectiveness of intervention measures in the informal economy is greatly dependent on public-private and state-society collaborative engagements. The development of market infrastructure, legislative recognition and support mechanisms, ranging from entrepreneurship start-ups to microfinance schemes, can greatly improve the efficiency and sustainability of the informal economy's productive activities (Ayentimi *et al.*, 2022). These activities not only serve as the backbone of sustainability, but can also empower such sectors to perform optimally in the macro economy, thereby serving their purpose in social and economic roles in urban areas (Sultana *et al.*, 2022). There is great importance in recognising the significance of the informal economy within mainstream economic policies for sustainability and growth in urban areas.

VALUE ADDITION AND SUPPLY CHAIN INTEGRATION

The inclusion of informal players in formal supply chains and the formulation of value addition strategies play an essential role in improving the agro-processing sector. Agro-processing can greatly improve agricultural values by adding value to raw materials to make them marketable, thereby providing diversification of income streams and job opportunities. The importance of integrating the supply chain in improving the efficiency and sustainability of agro-processing techniques has been emphasised in studies. Supply chain integration facilitates the smooth flow of commodities from the producer to the consumer, while ensuring quality inspection and low

transaction costs (Kanyepe *et al.*, 2024). The stress on new product creation and diversification forms the core of staying ahead in agricultural markets (Rasyid and Ningsih, 2024).

Obstacles to the addition of value, for instance, inadequate access to funds and technical knowledge, limit the processing of raw materials to higher-value products. Insufficiencies in finances limit small farmers and processors in rural areas to access technology and requisite infrastructure to process quality commodities (Rose and Chilvers, 2018). On the other hand, adequate technical knowledge equips these players to utilise efficient technology to enhance quality. Furthermore, improving market linkages through cooperative models can aid in integrating small players with the mainstream to access larger markets and macroeconomies (Supply Chain Management for Sustainable Food Networks, 2015). The macroeconomic aspect is essential for benefiting from large markets and economies of scale to enhance market access and expansion to new markets through efficient networks across the supply chain (Farris and Hutchison, 2002).

Technology is very essential in the mitigation of challenges in value addition and efficient supply chain management. The application of technology in general and Industry 4.0-specific technologies has been demonstrated to be revolutionary for agricultural supply chains. These technologies increase traceability, enhance logistical management and improve decision-making processes, resulting in agile supply chains (Sharma *et al.*, 2024). In addition, the application of blockchain technology can ensure an aspect of transparency and minimise the aspect of fraud in supply chain management which is very essential in ensuring trust in the supply chain network (Jha *et al.*, 2024). The application of technology can help ensure an enabling environment where the informal sector is aided to go to formality (Richey *et al.*, 2010).

Policies by the government and infrastructural development play a major role in integrating the value chain. Policies that can effectively resolve issues related to regulation and incentives to go formal can facilitate the engagement of the informal players in the structured chain of supply (Supply Chain Management for Sustainable Food Networks, 2015). Improvement in the rural infrastructure, including roads and warehousing, can further help in adding value to the commodities by mitigating post-harvest losses and the associated costs of transportation (Sandor and Eash, 1991). The key to establishing an environment favourable to the engagement of the informal players in the global agro-industries market lies in these domains and can help in developmental activities with resilience in the agricultural sector (Singh *et al.*, 2022; Polymeni *et al.*, 2023).

LIVELIHOOD RESILIENCE AND COMMUNITY ADAPTATION

Urban and peri-urban communities employ multi-faceted strategies to combat poverty, food insecurity and climatic/economic shocks, hugely relying on building social capital and community networks. In Albay, the Philippines, among other countries, community-based adaptation projects focus on human and social capital building to build resilience to climatic risks (Uy *et al.*, 2011). Similarly, peri-urban resilience can be enhanced by deliberate community interventions that promote cooperation and coordination of resources, hence combining local resources and knowledge (Sumardjo *et al.*, 2023). These types of communities can efficiently leverage social networks to aid in collective adaptation to adversity, making them more capable of absorbing and recovering from shocks (Anum *et al.*, 2022).

Coping and absorption abilities are necessary for these groups to be able to absorb and live through shocks. Good social networks make it easier to access more resources, solidarity

and exchange of information which are crucial during crisis times (Mngumi, 2020). The integration of social and economic activities in urban and peri-urban agriculture has been found to be promising towards enhancing food security and responding to climate change mitigation and adaptation (Lucertini and Giustino, 2021). Demographic conditions and social network membership contribute significantly among smallholder farmers' approaches to adapting to change in Ghana, with collective action contributing to enhancing resilience (Anum *et al.*, 2022).

Migration is an adaptation strategy and a coping strategy for livelihood diversification. In urbanising areas like Wa, Ghana, migration is a significant adaptation strategy because communities undergo land-use change due to urbanisation (Bonye *et al.*, 2020). Such migration trends are both short-term responses to current environmental and economic stress and long-term risk-spreading and household survival strategies. Population mobility, temporary or permanent, aids in the redistribution of pressures and allows for pooling resources across larger networks and strengthening community resilience (Anum *et al.*, 2022).

Finally, informal institutions' co-production of safety nets plays a crucial role in the delivery of assistance to poor and vulnerable groups. Informal safety nets, often built on community-based organisations and grassroots programmes, play an important role in delivering help during economic and environmental disturbances (Hossain *et al.*, 2024). Informal institutions, in most environments, deliver more convenient and context-specific support than formal institutions which tend to be less responsive to local needs. By building on such informal networks, communities can improve their resilience and responsiveness to adapt to emerging situations, consolidating their capacity for survival of emerging challenges (Anum *et al.*,

2022). Such ways, peri-urban and urban dwellers end up adapting and surviving amidst permanently altering socioeconomic and ecological situations.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilised a qualitative method, most of which was done through desk review. Data were collected from books, policy reports, peer-reviewed articles and other web-based documents. Search engines with sophisticated features to look for high-quality sources for the literature systematic review were utilised. These search engines are Google Scholar, ScienceDirect and Scopus. Boolean searching was utilised to screen the academic documents that were mostly post-2000. The sources provided a complete understanding of the research topic and improved analysis based on evidence-based information. The selection of the material reviewed was made on relevance, credibility and recency as the most crucial requirements to have a good foundation for the study. The English language was employed exclusively in the selection of documents to be reviewed. For data analysis, textual analysis was employed. Applying this analysis, facilitated the study to construct patterns, trends and themes from the literature found. This approach also allowed the thorough investigation of the narratives, arguments and conceptual frameworks of the literature under investigation. Textual analysis and a qualitative approach facilitated a structured yet adaptable system for investigating the research problem and producing well-informed findings.

FINDINGS

Three case studies were used to present the findings of this study. These cases are based in Harare markets and include Mbare Musika, Epworth Urban Food System and Glen View Area 8 market.

CASE 1: MBARE MUSIKA FRESH PRODUCE MARKET (MBARE SUBURB)

Colony-established Mbare Musika has become the largest and most recognised fresh produce market in Zimbabwe, serving Harare city's urban food system and regional trade. Hahlani (2023) documents that the market was legalised during the 1940s when African farmers required urban markets for consumption and, in the process, developed to become an integral node connecting rural producers with urban consumers. The resilience of the market is attributed to *ukama* (kinship) networks and mutuality of trust which forms the essence of trade between vendors and transporters (*ibid.*). Existing literature classifies Mbare as being located in the informal economy, thriving through the formal employment sector and sustaining livelihoods among women and youth (Maketho, 2025). The Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (ZIMSTAT) estimates that informal markets, such as those in Mbare, account for approximately 60% of national employment (ZIMSTAT, 2025). Mbare Musika, despite infrastructure decline, remains the centre of urban food security with fresh products supplied to the majority of Harare households.

Organisation of the market demonstrates adaptive arrangements in informal economies where social capital substitutes formalist control. The Ministry of Skills Audit and Development (2025) describes Mbare as a "hub of uncertified genius" where entrepreneurship happens through unregulated but highly coordinated practices. Farmers and market vendors utilise efficient micro-logistics, vintage grading expertise and value-added processes such as sun-drying tomatoes and peanut butter production (Ministry of Skills, 2025). This local innovation is described by Dhewa (2024) as a living agriculture value chain that connects farmers across the 10 provinces of Zimbabwe. The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) testifies to how markets like Mbare are at the heart of price stability and urban food distribution. As such, Mbare is a

reservoir of indigenous knowledge and entrepreneurial capacity, offering a testament of enduring informal economic strength in urban Zimbabwe.

Government's urban market rehabilitation initiatives have repeatedly highlighted Mbare's strategic position in Zimbabwe's economic transformation agenda. The Ministry of Local Government and Public Works (2024) launched a reconstruction project aimed at modernising the Mbare Traders Market while retaining its informal economy's dynamism. However, there are some challenges like poor waste management, poor sanitation and traffic congestion (*The Patriot*, 2025). Statutory Instrument 130 of 2023 (grain and fresh produce marketing) enables decentralisation of business centres but developed at a slow rate towards implementation (Government of Zimbabwe, 2023). Policy analysts assert that upgrading Mbare without impacting livelihoods demands governance that is participation-based in addition to inclusive investment approaches (Smit, 2016). The case demonstrates broader urban governance tensions between survivalist and formalisation economies—a binary at the centre of post-colonial urbanisation in Zimbabwe (Maketho, 2025).

Several lessons can be gleaned from this case study. First, markets like Mbare Musika remain central buffers for food availability and labour uptake during economic volatility (AllAfrica, 2025). Second, policy harmonisation that embraces the socio-cultural rationality of informality can improve resilience while optimising market efficiency. Third, upgrading of informal markets must focus on co-designing infrastructure with traders to ensure inclusivity and ownership (UNFSS, 2021). Lastly, Mbare experience acknowledges the necessity for coordinating national agriculture policy with urban planning policy for increased value addition, waste management and sustainable livelihoods. Mbare Musika is, therefore, an

institutional site of adaptive governance and inclusive economic transformation in urban Zimbabwe.

CASE 2: EPWORTH URBAN FOOD SYSTEM

Epworth, located on the southeastern periphery of Harare, is a prime example of informal market adaptation and dynamics of food insecurity. Tawodzera *et al.* (2019) note that Epworth's food system features informal traders and small vendors, in line with broader urban fringe trends in Zimbabwe. More than half of households in Epworth experience moderate or severe food insecurity, largely driven by low incomes and high dependence on market purchases for food (Phiri, 2024). Informal markets supply essential staples, but food diversity remains limited; many residents rely on non-nutritive foods with adverse health implications (Battersby and Watson, 2018; Tawodzera *et al.*, 2019). The Epworth Local Board, autonomous from the Municipality of Harare, has been pursued relentlessly in the struggle between controls and subsistence requirements for its poor citizens (Chigumira *et al.*, 2018). Policy interventions such as social cash transfers, introduced by the Ministry of Social Welfare and UNICEF, have acted significantly to mitigate harsh food poverty amongst child-headed families in Epworth (Chikoko and Mavuka, 2025).

Epworth's food system shock-absorbing capacity is sustained through high connectivity among low-level traders, consumers and greater Harare markets. Street vendors are key intermediaries, breaking bulk commodities down into affordable units of low prices and spreading access to poor consumers (Tawodzera *et al.*, 2019; Mutandwa, 2025). The district is a site of continuous improvisation, as economic shocks, drought and inflation reshape spending routines and consumption habits. Yet, exploitative middlemen known locally as *makoronyera* impose additional costs on already disadvantaged consumers (Chigumira *et al.*, 2018). Governance reforms suggested in

policy briefs urge greater empowerment of the Epworth Local Board and alignment of by-laws with Zimbabwe's 2013 Constitution to protect residents' rights to economic association and public space, especially for street vending (CUP Policy Brief, 2024). Despite scarce resources, social networks, grassroots innovation and adaptive regulatory institutions provide livelihood on the complex social terrain of Epworth.

Policy analysis illustrates Epworth's informal food economy is still underestimated in planned and formal development arenas. There is also immense potential to leverage this fact more meaningfully: supporting urban agriculture, raising transport and cold chain infrastructure and putting in place supply chain linkages between rural farmers and Epworth's traders (Chirenje *et al.*, 2015; Battersby and Watson, 2018). Group programming by NGOs, government agencies and civil society would amplify food access interventions, nutrition education and school feeding programmes on the basis of FAO and other global stakeholders (HLPE, 2024; Phiri, 2024). Food insecurity also continues in the face of macroeconomic uncertainty; with changing conditions, constant monitoring and targeted social protection (Battersby and Watson, 2018; Tawodzera *et al.*, 2019). Peri-urban and urban food systems must be built—beyond Epworth and also in other such suburbs—to build resilience to poverty and environmental shocks.

Epworth lessons underscore the very important need to recognise, enable and mainstream informal markets into formal food governance and urban planning. The diagram shows how informal players can be flexible but also how limited survival flexibility is in the absence of firm structures and policy support (Chigumira *et al.*, 2018; CUP Policy Brief, 2024). Pluralist food-retailing models, inclusive regulation and local innovation will be critical in the future. By policy, practice and community alignment, Epworth can transition from subsistence-margin

survival to a more secure, diversified and sustainable urban food system. Epworth lessons should inform local and national reforms seeking to address the nexus of poverty, food access and urban economic change in Zimbabwe.

CASE 3: GLEN VIEW AREA 8 INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

The Glen View Area 8 Industrial Complex has also been recognised as one of the informal manufacturing hubs of Harare with over 500 SMEs predominantly engaging in furniture making, metalwork and other artisanal activities (Nyamwanza *et al.*, 2016; Mugog, 2025).

As a cushion of local economy, the complex traps retrenched Zimbabwean workers from the country's declining formal economy and filled youth and women job positions (*Global Press Journal*, 2019; Mazongonda *et al.*, 2021). Its agglomeration economies and high concentration of producers have shifted Glen View as a destination of migrant workers from Harare suburbs and nearby towns (Kudoma, 2017; Mazongonda *et al.*, 2021). The high rate of unemployment in the country has contributed to the growth of Glen View Area 8 to offer a resistant marketplace that is not susceptible to consecutive economic shocks (Nyamwanza *et al.*, 2016; Mugogo, 2025). Formal training is lacking among most of the entrepreneurs in the complex, but apprenticeship programmes and learning from peers in the complex are employed (Mazongonda *et al.*, 2021). Although crucial, Glen View Area 8 suffers from long-standing infrastructural and regulatory issues that undermine development and sustainability.

The major challenges are limited access to capital, raw material sourcing, ineffective urban law and a lack of adequate training in technical skills (Nyamwanza *et al.*, 2016; Kudoma, 2017). SMEs have been subjected to erratic government policy

intervention; despite the national SME Policy and ZIMASSET master plan proclaiming the sector as central, practice has continued to experience funding shortages, capacity gaps and legislative reform (Nyamwanza *et al.*, 2016; Ministry of Industry and Commerce, 2023). Fires, amongst other risks, have incapacitated operation and calls have been made for increased safety measures and disaster management (Wadzai, 2022). Glen View Area 8 is a study demanding the rewriting of Harare's Master Plan and the reconfiguring of licensing and zoning regulations to accommodate expanding informal manufacturing activity (Kudoma, 2017; Mazongonda *et al.*, 2021). They are findings that make a compelling case for urban development policy to be informed by responding to new industrial agglomerations' needs in Zimbabwean cities. The complex is a centre of local innovation and informal networking, two significant sources of sustainable livelihood under challenging conditions.

Furniture makers and metalworkers are astute because they recycle goods within their locality and build strong networks for the sale of their products in Harare and to nearby towns (*ibid.*). Home industries build robust social capital among their members which allows them to collaborate on inputs and share information regarding market opportunities (Nyamwanza *et al.*, 2016; Mazongonda *et al.*, 2021). Efforts to regulate the industry—through SME clustering, apprenticeships and co-designed infrastructure—have succeeded in building resilience and boosted municipal revenue (Mazongonda *et al.*, 2021; Nhengu, 2022). But touts and middlemen at times interfere with the convenience of doing business, indicating the need for increased protection of business and open service delivery (Mazongonda *et al.*, 2021). The Glen View Area 8 Industrial Complex case provides several policy lessons for Zimbabwe and other emerging economies.

First, informality and geographic agglomeration must be used as productive capital instead of as liabilities that impede development, enabling urban employment and native innovation (Nyamwanza *et al.*, 2016; Nhengu, 2022). Second, the collaboration between the government, SMEs and municipal governments must be aimed at the construction of infrastructure, regularisation of enterprises and technical upgrading to achieve development (Kudoma, 2017). Third, safety planning and disaster response need to be coordinated to guarantee that businesses are protected against recurrence of fires and other hazards (Wadzai, 2022). Fourth, contextual realities of value chains and clustering are to be tailored in municipal law to enable sustainable urban industrial transition (Mazongonda *et al.*, 2021; Mugogo, 2025). The Glen View history shows that local initiative and energetic policy can transform ad-hoc industrial zones into engines of employment, urban resistance and economic empowerment.

DISCUSSION

Mbare Musika Fresh Produce Market illustrates that informal institutional structures remain at the heart of Zimbabwean urban food economies. The resilience of the market is characterised by tight networks of social capital, such as *ukama* kinship ties and shared trust among transporters and traders Hahlani (2023). They enable the market to operate effectively under low formal regulation conditions, as evidenced by research conducted by Maketho (2025) that activities in the informal economy provide jobs for close to 60% of the national workforce. Entrepreneurship is bottom-up and survives on localised value addition operations like sun-drying tomatoes and peanut butter making—living agriculture value chain operations, as the experience of Dhewa (2024) attests and the acknowledgement of their price stabilisation function by the Food and Agriculture Organisation validates. Deterioration of the infrastructure, poor sanitation and excessive delay in policy

implementation, however, constrain more market transformation (*The Patriot*, 2025) and legislative bills (Government of Zimbabwe, 2023). Smit (2016) and Maketho (2025) present participatory governance and inclusive investment for infrastructural market upgrading without diminishing the current livelihoods. Where policy at the national level is in congruence with socio-cultural acceptability of informality, resilience can be built and efficiency of the markets boosted to facilitate adaptive governance and economic transformation in Harare.

The Epworth urban food system represents survival-level adaptation of informal markets in the face of chronic food insecurity and poverty. Tawodzera *et al.* (2019) and Phiri (2024) describe how more than half of the households in Epworth are moderately or severely food-insecure and they rely mainly on informal small-scale traders. Even though, the variety of available foods remains low, putting residents at unfavourable health outcomes (Battersby Watson, 2018). The Epworth Local Board has a challenge of balancing intervention via regulation with the health of vulnerable groups, as noted by Chigumira *et al.* (2018), whereas government and UNICEF social cash transfers have improved the health of child-headed households (Chikoko and Mavuka, 2025). Adaptation is promoted by grassroots networks and adaptive institutions of governance, enhance community resilience (Anum *et al.*, 2022; Sumardjo *et al.*, 2023). Exploitative middlemen (*makoronyera*) mark up prices for poor citizens, an indicator of economic structural problems to be addressed in market regulation. CUP Policy Brief (2024) advises accelerating local government strengthening and synchronising by-laws with constitutional provisions regarding street vending. Institutionalisation of rural peasant linkages and upscaling urban agriculture and food value chain opportunities exist, enabling long-term resilience against prevailing macroeconomic uncertainty. The Epworth case is

pivotal in drawing attention to the imperative synergy of community adaptation, integration into the informal markets and adaptive governance for complementing urban food systems.

The Glen View Area 8 Industrial Complex envisions the potential of informal production centres as forces of economic empowerment and resilience in the Harare urban area. The compound is home to over 500 SMEs in the majority of metal fabrications and furniture manufacturing and service as the employee retrenchment cushion and source of female and youth employment (Mazongonda *et al.*, 2021; Mugogo, 2025). Migrant labour and local cooperation are spurred by innovation and spatial agglomeration, typical features (Nyamwanza *et al.*, 2016 and Kudoma, 2017). Entrepreneurs depend on apprenticeship, peer-to-peer learning and innovation—within the recycling of products—to survive without formal training. Expansion and sustainability are otherwise limited by infrastructural and regulatory inadequacies like outdated law, poor technical support and capricious government subsidies (Wadzai, 2022; Ministry of Industry and Commerce, 2023). Moves towards formalisation of clustering of SMEs and co-designing infrastructures possess the ability to build municipal resilience and revenue (Nhengu, 2022). Mazongonda *et al.* (2021) believe that the tragedy of the industry, for example, boasts of disorganisation, requires open business protection. Spatial clustering advantage, employing technological skill learning and local government policy formulation for informal value chains needs can realign industrial clusters to be effective urban economic development drivers (Nyamwanza *et al.*, 2016; Mugogo (2025)).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study brings to perspective how Harare traditional markets continue to be inundated with raw foodstuffs by structural

inefficiencies that still plague them, value addition domestic capacity inefficiency and uncoordinated policy regimes. Despite the flexibility and responsiveness of the informal networks, deep-seated infrastructural decline and policy loopholes sustain value addition hurdles, especially in traditional markets such as Mbare Musika. Urban markets are still significant rural producers' and urban consumers' link but underfinanced to finance storage, transport and waste treatment plants. The Epworth and Glen View cases show how social networks and small businesses protect the poor from economic shock, preserve jobs and localise innovation. Exploitative middlemen and antique laws contribute to the hassle, seeing that marginal policy adjustment and investment are to ignite revolutionary change. Overall, institution-building in urban food systems, market deepening and governance reforms need to be undertaken to shift Harare's food system into a vehicle of sustainable development and inclusive prosperity. To overcome these challenges, a set of tangible recommendations become evident. They need to first invest in the development of market infrastructure like roads, waste management and cold storage to stem post-harvest losses and deepen rural-urban linkages.

Second, smallholder producer and trader-preferred financing structures should be promoted to enhance access to low-cost capital and agro-processing at grassroot levels. Third, capacity-building programmes to enhance skills acquisition and entrepreneur development among SMEs and informal traders should be undertaken to enhance market resilience and innovation. Fourth, participatory policy and governance reforms should be undertaken to harmonise municipal by-laws with constitutional safeguards, yielding enabling environments for street vendors and informal enterprises. Fifth, rural producers and urban market traders must enjoy strengthened supply chain coordination through enhanced product quality and market efficiency improvement in cooperative networks and

partnership schemes. Finally, government, the private sector and civil society must strengthen joint programming in nutrition and social protection aiming at prioritised food security requirements and facilitating structural transformation. All these recommendations together enable the vision of adaptive, inclusive and sustainable food systems in Harare.

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