



Vendors Struggle on the Streets

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Vending has become the major source of employment to most unemployed citizens in Zimbabwe due to the economy that is not performing. The City was once very clean with very few vendors selling their wares in the central business district. The clean up under Operation Murambatsvina in 2005 and the 2015 forced evictions of vendors partly decongested the city of vendors. The situation now has become worse than it was at anytime before, with the vendors now operating from everywhere, hindering the free flow of both traffic and pedestrians along the pavements and on the roads. However, all this cannot be blamed on the vendor, but it comes directly to the Government's socio-economic policies, and the responsiveness of the local authority in its attempt to address the situation.

The city council has legal vending sites in the Central Business District (CBD) but illegal vendors have taken up every open area and pavement in the city. Poverty is driving people back into the streets as most companies are retrenching and many people are losing their jobs. During the old days vending was only for women but with the harsh economic situation one notices that men, women and youths are heavily involved. Vending has become a source of income for many where they sell fruits, vegetables, second hand clothing, cell phones, screen guards, cosmetics, groceries, cooked mealies, shoes, pushcarts with different kind of fruits. The Harare Residents' Trust (HRT) had time to interact with vendors in the CBD and the following were some of their views;

One lady told the HRT that: "I am a widow, I sell vegetables and tomatoes along Robert Mugabe Street. Vending is the only source of my income, I have to take care of four children and relatives at the rural areas as well".

One vendor who sells tomatoes along Chinhoyi Street said: "I have been a vendor since 2013 but business is now low as there is too much competition these days as more and more vendors are coming in the CBD. I have rental arrears as the mark up is now little, at times I reduce my prices to attract more customers".

A hawker who sells second hand clothing said she gets her stuff from Mozambique in Chimoio and Beira. "I used to have a table at Mupedzanhamo so I could not afford both smuggling and rental fees so I came to the streets where there are no rental fees."

The HRT observed that the council once chased flea market operators who were operating at Copa Kabana Bus Terminus but they are back again. We observed that when the city municipal police come with their lorries the vendors blow whistles, warning each other to run with their wares. If they are caught they go to the Harare Central Police Station where they either get locked up or they are asked to pay a fine. Vendors said they lose their stuff especially vegetables, tomatoes, fruits when they are chased.

One vendor said: "I pay \$1.00 or \$2.00 to the corrupt municipal police officer who will be chasing us to get my stuff back but at times if you meet a hard one all the wares will be taken." The vendor said the municipal police patrol in the morning, afternoon and in the evening. The vendor said it takes

time for them to recover financially if their goods are taken by the police and afterwards they go back to the streets.

The city council needs to restore sanity in the city. Vendors leave the city dirty as they throw away banana peels, husks of mealies, used airtime cards, peeled peas, stale vegetables and rotten tomatoes papers, etc. Yes, the economic situation is very bad for the vendors, but also for everyone. There is need to take responsibility of the environment.

The International Best Practice Document for the United Kingdom “Regulatory Guidance and Best Advice for Food Business Operators” states that hands should be washed and dried before food is handled. City Health has also been giving additional information in the interest of public health. Vendors are not adhering to health standards that are set out in the by-laws through the Urban Council’s Act especially those who sell cooked food.

The HRT would like to inform residents that if they wish to use a stand or stall in a vending site as a vendor they have to make an application to the Director of Housing and Community Services. Upon application, a permit may be issued or a lease agreement may be entered into between the applicant and Council. A vendor who is issued with a permit or enters into a lease agreement with Council shall pay a fee as outlined in Section 10, (Harare Vendors By-Law 2014).

It is also important for vendors to maintain hygiene especially to those vendors who sell foodstuffs in the streets. According to the city bylaws, a vendor of foodstuffs in a vending site shall cause every container, storeroom, preparation room or trade equipment used in connection with his or her business to be maintained in a clean and sanitary condition and in good repair and take adequate precautions to safeguard the food from dirt, dust, pests, vermin or other contamination and ensure that he or she is clean and dressed in clean over clothing at all times, (Harare Vendors By-Laws 2014).

Though the council has registered vendors and advised them to operate at their vending sites many of them have trooped back into the CBD, citing poor location and unfamiliar with their customers. The City of Harare insists that the vending sites they have created can only become popular if the vendors remain there, and every one of their clients will look for them.

The council is busy chasing vendors in the streets yet they are failing to include the vendors when planning the sites, and the sites are just open grounds where there are no sanitary facilities, like toilets and water taps and there is no shelter for protection from the scorching heat.

The HRT notes that the current economy is not favorable. Therefore the Harare City Council should be lenient with the vendors because it is their only source of income to fend their families. But the vending has to be organized and orderly for easy of movement of both traffic and human beings.

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