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Politicisation of urban space: Evidence from women informal traders at Magaba, Harare in Zimbabwe

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It is widely accepted, Zimbabwe has undergone a socio-economic and political crisis thereby seriously crippling livelihoods of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled Zimbabweans. In particular, political polarisation has contributed to politicisation of urban space to retain the long lost glory of the ruling party. However, the present study unfolds that the government has deliberately politicised urban space through using state organs: police, militia and customs, these are on vanguard disrupting efforts by ordinary women traders who live through their ingenuity. The study further revealed that despite the adversity they encounter in daily operations, women traders are not 'trapped' in structures but seek to negotiate and manoeuvre their way in and sometimes beyond these structures. These findings were elicited through in-depth interviews and a survey which are a genre of both qualitative and quantitative techniques. These findings are proposed within the Sustainable Livelihood Framework to examine the vulnerability context which complicates the lives and livelihoods of women traders.

Keywords: Politicisation, Sustainable Livelihoods, Informal Sector

INTRODUCTION

There is a general consensus that Zimbabwe has undergone a socio-economic and political crisis over the last decades. The development and character of the crisis is hotly contested among scholars. A handful of scholars argue that this crisis is home grown (internal or domestic processes), particularly mismanagement by the ruling party (Bratton and Masunungure, 2011; Bond and Manyanya, 2002). Others argue that it is externally generated by the imperialist forces (Clemens and Moss, 2005).

The crisis is situated within several events including the long unsolved inherited colonial economy of Rhodesia,

the adoption of neo-liberal policies under the brand name structural adjustment programmes-SAP's (locally known as economic adjustment programmes-ESAP) in the early 1990's, mismanagement of the economy afterwards the inception of the SAP's (Tibaijuka, 2005), the violent seizure of white commercial farms (fast track land reform programme, FTLRP) from year 2000, political polarisation between Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) and Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) and Operation Restore Order of 2005. Compounded by several other events, it led to inter alia, massive retrenchments of skilled and unskilled labour, closure of manufacturing industries, sky rocketing of prices and deterioration of both urban and rural services. Consequently, Zimbabwe's formal economy collapsed at a quicker rate than any other country with the highest inflation rate in the world. In light of the above, Financial

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Standards Foundation (2009:1) concluded that “once the breadbasket of Southern Africa with a relatively high standard of living in comparison to many of the other sub-Saharan African countries, Zimbabwe has been laid to waste by gross economic mismanagement and corruption that has pauperised the population and brought about a breakdown of essential social services”. Consequently informal sector activities blossomed and started to contribute significantly to household income and livelihoods.

Makaye and Munhande (2008:312) state that about 4 million Zimbabweans were earning their livelihoods in the informal sector by 2005. The Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) failed to acknowledge the central importance of the informal sector in urban livelihoods and has often reacted in repressive measures as seen in 2005 clean-up campaign. To date, this clean-up campaign still persists, albeit new forms and shapes to jeopardise livelihoods in the informal sector. The continued political polarisation between ZANU-PF and MDC is in large part to blame for the politicisation of Harare which remains a hotly-contested urban space. The current politicisation has shifted goalposts with regard to day-to-day governance.

This paper seeks to describe and explain the politicisation of the urban space in Harare, particularly at Magaba where a vast number of women derive their livelihoods. Government through city authorities represented by law-enforcement agents including Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) and Municipal Police (MP) have been highly involved in harassing the public including informal sector operators. State militia also brutalises the urban populace who are seen as patriotic to MDC. Traders engaging in cross border activities have to deal with customs officials.

Zimbabwean Crisis and Rise of an Effervescent Informal Sector

The advent of independence in Zimbabwe in 1980 saw the government inheriting a dualist economic development. In a quest to redress the colonial imbalances and antecedents, the GoZ took on board a socialistic road to economic development. This was pursued through a number of policies including Growth with Equity of 1982 and Transitional Development Plans. Consequently, the government was plunged into huge deficit as it attempted to counterbalance uneven infrastructure development, urban-rural divide (Dube and Chirisa, 2012:17). As a result, massive deficits were accumulated and the economy gradually became stagnant. Despite these problems, Zimbabwe’s economy performed reasonably well in the 1990s and the country registered some progress in health, education, agriculture and public infrastructure. Indeed, Zimbabwe was among the ‘top four more industrialized countries in sub-Saharan Africa; it possessed a more diversified economy than

most countries; and it had a better human resource base than most; and it had a middle-income status’ (Sachikonye, 2002:130).

As a general economic predicament was alarming, Zimbabwe turned to international agencies for help to rescue the economy. This reversed the gains of the post independence government as the decade was full of promises. Upon acceptance of conditionalities to qualify for financial aid ‘the Government subsequently launched a fully fledged IMF and WB monitored program of ESAP which aimed to deregulate the domestic economy (prices, employment, and wages), reduce the public deficit, and continue relaxing restrictions on trade...a formal shift away from state interventionism and regulation towards non-interventionism, privatisation and deregulation’ (Marquette, 1997:1143).

A study by Tichagwa and Maramba (1998) reveals that, due to ESAP, prices of commodities increased while disposable income and consumption declined. As well, a 1995 poverty assessment study concluded that 62% of the populace could not meet basic needs and 46% were unable to access sufficient food. Because of this, the 1990s were characterised by growing labour discontent, involving strikes and mass stay-aways. Tamukamoyo (1999:102) thus reports that ‘the 1997 strike of private employees came on the heels of the 1996 public workers strike as the working class sought to voice their discontent with the impact of structural adjustment, not only on their lives but on their future prospects’. As life became unbearable, particularly in the urban areas (as well in the rural areas) informal sector activities grew at an alarming rate as the only alternative to sustain lives, notably amongst women (Chirisa, 2004).

By the year 2004, 40% of the labour force was said to be in informal economic activities (IDMC, 2009). It is evident that the informal sector became central to the livelihoods of the majority responding to the effects of the economic restructuring. Mupedziswa and Gumbo (2001:12) assert that as far back as 1984, the informal sector in Zimbabwe has accounted for over 64% of job creation compared to the 25% of the formal sector. By the year 1996 the sector employed 1.56 million people compared to 1.26 million in the formal sector. The informal economy (known locally as ‘the black market’) became central as a response to retrenchments and falling real wages. Mupedziswa and Gumbo (1998) rightfully claim that marginalised urban people in Zimbabwe resorted to informal economic activities (including petty trading in vegetables and fruits) as a way of dealing with the economic crisis unleashed by ESAP. A 1980s study of the research site for this paper (namely, Magaba in Harare), and this study pre-dates ESAP (Brand, 1986), identifies significant informal activities such as street trading in food and clothes, and home-based industries such as shoe-repairing.

Like ESAP, Social Development of Adjustment Programme (SDA) and Social Development Fund (SDF)

in an attempt to rescue the economy from collapse, the government of Zimbabwe in 1996-2000 embarked on an economic recovery plan known as the Zimbabwe Programme for Economic and Social Transformation (ZIMPREST). The programme was based on the macroeconomic policies set under ESAP but it emphasised black economic empowerment, indigenisation of the economy and land reform (Dhliwayo, 2001:2). Nonetheless, ZIMPREST was unable to address the high budget deficit, increasing inflation, low foreign currency growth and weak balance of payments (Makina, 2010:105; Chipanhura and Makwavarara, 2000:16). Close to end of the first decade after independent, ZANU-PF political honeymoon was threatened by the formation of Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in September 1999 challenging the hegemony of ZANU-PF. In a constitutional amendment put to a referendum in 2000, MDC defeated ZANU-PF in votes. Against such a backdrop, it led to the wide spread violent seizure of white commercial farms.

From the year 2000, two important and critical events unfolded in this decade had negative significance in the lives of the vast majority in Zimbabweans. First was the launch of the fast track land reform programme in July 2000 under the code name of 'Third *Chimurenga*' (or war of liberation) and secondly, the proliferation of violence (necessitated by the use of soldiers, police and youths-green bombers from National Youth Service) aftermath the presidential election in 2000. Land became "the sole central signifier of national redress" (Raftopoulos, 2005:7) for the supporters of fast track in addressing the remnants of the colonial regime. There are wide disagreements amongst scholars about the causes underpinning the land occupations and fast track (Bond and Manyanya, 2003:76; Moyo and Chambati, 2007:2), but such controversies are not fundamental for this study. Under the fast track land reform programme, resettlement took place in two forms (including A 1 and A 2 farms). Firstly, A 1 farms are small plots for subsistence farmers mainly designed to cater for landless and land-short households through decongestion of communal areas (Moyo, 2004a:22). Secondly, A 2 commercial farms aimed at increasing the number of black indigenous commercial farmers, with many of these going to beneficiaries aligned to the ruling party (Marongwe, 2003; Berstain, 2005; Sachikonye, 2005). Most of the infrastructural machines, finances and inputs trickled down to A 2 farmers and to-date the A 1 farmers have failed to transform settlements into sustainable productive resources (Raftopoulos, 2001:426), but this support was not forthcoming (Jawah, 2009).

As result of such bloody events (land reform and violent elections), the government was heavily criticised, sanctioned and ostracised by the wider international community, this marked a speed economic downturn (Mupedziswa, 2009:1). United Nations Development Program (2008:10) rightfully claim that there was a down

spiral of commercial agriculture after 2000 which affected and robbed industry and the government of its source of domestic inputs whereas contributing to the contraction of economy. This severely affected the national economy including (downstream and upstream industries) in agro-industrial complex, but also other sectors for instance tourism, mining and banking. Consequently, this served to exacerbate the economic crisis. Food riots were recorded across the country triggered by the shortage of commodities such as bread, cooking oil and sugar, which are all direct outputs of farming. The inflation rate skyrocketed such that prices of commodities, when available, changed almost daily.

This had serious implications for livelihood strategies. The informal economy increasingly became the sole provider of employment and income as urban residents took refuge in informal activities. In this sense, the informal sector became an 'employment haven' (Mupedziswa and Gumbo, 2001:12; Tekere, 2001). This was spurred on by the scarcity of basic food commodities in supermarkets but the availability of these, at a price, 'on the street' (as sold by informal traders).

Despite, the central role played by informal sector (from 2000 to 2005), the government of Zimbabwe did not act in a sympathetic manner. This is evidenced through its macro-economic policies including, National Economic Revival Plan (April 2003), Macroeconomic Policy Framework (November 2004), National Economic Development Priority Programme (April 2006) and Zimbabwe Economic Development Strategy to mention just a few. Government attitudes towards informal sector become hostile (and in a draconian fashion) as evidenced by Operation *Murambatsvina* (Operation Restore Order or Operation Clear Away the Trash) in 2005 (Vambe, 2008; Tibaijuka, 2005). Like the FTLRP, the cleanup campaign attracted international attention and wide range criticism. Nevertheless, the government's intent and intention was made clear by way of a state commission report of May 2005. It spoke about the need to demolish illegal structures, cultivation, vending and all other illegal operations on undesignated areas.

The government also claimed that the informal sector was facilitating criminality which robbed the state of revenue and foreign currency which was already scarce. With limited or no warning, the government proceeded to literally demolish the physical, economic and social resources of the urban poor in Harare and beyond (Bracking, 2005:341), thereby engaging in the sheer destruction of livelihoods and homes (including backyard shacks and industries) (Bratton and Masunungure, 2006:24). In doing so, the government "was as good, or rather as bad, as its word" (Potts, 2006:275). The United Nations (UN) Habitat, under the special envoy Anna Tibaijuka, estimated in July 2005 that about 650,000 to 700,000 people lost their livelihoods or homes, or both, and that 2.4 million were either directly or indirectly affected. She added that the urban poor are now "deeper

in poverty, deprivation and destitution, and have been rendered more vulnerable” (Tibaijuka, 2005:7). Other studies provide lower and bigger estimates (Action Aid, 2005; Afrobarometre, 2005; Tamukamoyo, 2009).

Despite the international outcry against human right abuse and the need to preserve human dignity, government insisted that it carried out the operations for legal and practical reasons and also acted according to set parameters within the legislation. Among the defensive reasons by the government are, ‘the problems of disorderly and chaotic urbanisation [which constitutes] a threat to public health and safety... the threat to the physical environment and natural resources caused by inappropriate and unlawful urban settlements, industrialisation and agricultural practices ... the problem of social and economic sabotage’ (Kamete, 2009:907). The thousands of victims of the operation did not however become passive, and livelihood strategies in the informal economy did not wither away. Informal operators became adaptable and resilient, and “despite the attack on their livelihoods, the self-reliant occupants of this sector ... quickly tried to recover” (Bratton and Masunugure, 2006:38). The discussion of Magaba in later section of this paper is a testimony of this.

From the year 2006, the annual inflation rate rose to millions of percentage points, while the country’s domestic currency reached quadrillions and quintillions – it subsequently became a worthless national currency (Raftopoulos and Mlambo, 2010:3). Bearer cheques were then officially suspended in favour of the United States Dollar and South African Rand. This examination of events surrounding the crisis of Zimbabwe is not exhaustive but a reflection of some of the events which contributed to the downfall of the economy as well as destruction of livelihoods of ordinary Zimbabweans.

Women Informal Sector Livelihoods by Subsector in Contemporary Zimbabwe

This section disaggregates the informal sector by identifying and examining a range of livelihood strategies pursued in contemporary Zimbabwe’s informal economy and their contribution to the sustenance of urban households. Informal activities remain critical as sources of employment, income and food security in urban centres in Zimbabwe. The levels of reliance on these activities obviously differ from one household to another household.

Urban agriculture is one of the crucial activities conducted in urban areas to enhance food security and guard against poverty through reducing expenditures on necessities like green vegetables and reducing purchases of, the staple food mealie-meal (or crushed maize). During the years of high inflation rate, urban agriculture has acted as a socio-economic safety net. Growing crops in urban centres is important for home

consumption although they rarely unable to store some for future consumption. Other reasons cited include improving household food supply and nutrition, supplementing income and complying with cultural values (Mazuruse and Masiya, 2007). Urban agriculture is confronted with its own problems for instance destruction of crops through slashing by Municipal Police (MP) under directorship of City of Harare. This sabotage of crops is based on the fact that urban agriculture destroy flora and fauna therefore distort the image of the city.

Remittances are of particular importance, they refer to cash or in kind transfers by migrant workers to their countries of origin (World Bank, 2008). At the peak of the crisis thousands of Zimbabweans fled the country to seek livelihoods as economic refugees in countries including (South Africa, Botswana, United States, United Kingdom and many more). In return these migrants regularly send remittances back home through formal and informal channels (Bracking and Sachikonye, 2006) for instance commercial banks, western union, via buses, friends and traders. The effectiveness of remittances in reducing poverty is subject to debate as the usage differs between households and individuals.

Petty trading is one important informal sector sub-sector and is often done in conjunction with detailed above strategies (urban agriculture and remittances) and with formal employment (often a rare case). Petty trading activities are multi-faceted; however street vending and flea markets are the prominent ones in urban Harare (Kamete, 2004) and are part and parcel of the system of commodity distribution in urban areas (Manganga, 2007). This is based on the fact that the pricing of these commodities is affordable particularly for poor urbanites. By so doing, it has enabled a majority of urban poor to survive under thorny circumstances for instance when supermarkets were empty. A number product and services are made available through vending including, fruit and vegetables-mangoes, bananas, apples, maize, perfumes, leather belts, second hand text books, mobile phones, wrist watches, freezits [flavoured ice sticks] and many more (Hlohla, 2008; Manyahaire *et al.*, 2007:179; Makaye and Munhande, 2008:320). Some of these goods are home made by vendors themselves and for this reason there is a productive component of their activities (Kamete 2004). Street vending in Zimbabwe is often deemed illegal when permits are required and as a result it is repeatedly characterised by playing hide and seek with law enforcement agents who at times confiscate the goods and detain the vendors. Quite often, street traders are not licensed by the local council and hence they exist illegally and unregulated by trading legislation and by-laws (Chirisa, 2008; Hlohla, 2008). As a result street vendors refine and alter counter strategies by for instance: starting operations in the morning, deceptive commodity using signals to alert one another and merchant hiding (Chirisa, 2009:274).

Cross border trading is not new in the history of

Zimbabwe, for years Zimbabweans have been crossing different borders in search for work. However, the upsurge in cross border trading particularly amongst women was a result of the unbearable living conditions in Zimbabwe. Many people, as noted mainly women, moved across the borders (notably the South African border at Beitbridge) in a bid to supplement income through hoarding products which were scarce in the local Zimbabwean markets (Nyatanga *et al.*, 2000). Like any other livelihood activity cross border trading is counteracted by the Zimbabwe Revenue Authorities who at times seize goods after failing to pay required duty. This has greatly reduced the importation of goods by ordinary Zimbabweans (males and females) who seek to live through their creativity.

Sustainable Livelihood Framework

The sustainable livelihoods framework (SLF), as it is known formally, was initially applied to rural areas but has been more recently applied to urban working people (Rouse and Ali, 2000; Frantz, 2001). The SL framework commences with assets owned, controlled or accessed by a household or individual (Ellis, 2000). These assets are of particular importance to the construction of livelihoods. Hence, women traders need these to construct livelihoods and circumvent poverty trap, various assets include natural capital, physical capital, financial capital, human capital and social capital (Scoones, 2000). Assets 'are not simply resources that people use to build livelihoods: they give them the capability to be and act' (Bebbington, 1999:2029). Moser a prominent writer on livelihoods further emphasise that assets are important elements in the livelihood framework which enables an individual's family to earn livelihood, engage in labour markets and participate in reciprocal exchanges with other households (Moser, 1998:162). Livelihood strategies refer to a range of activities that the poor and less poor people engage in, they can be short term (for consumption or coping with risks) and long term strategies for future generations. Three important livelihood strategies stipulated by the SLF includes agricultural intensification/extensification, livelihood diversification and migration. Overall, the both (short and long term) are aimed at preserving household economic being and social security. To reduce vulnerability households and individuals often diversify their livelihood activities. Ellis (2000:56) argues that trends and processes in the larger economy may create general conditions that provoke livelihood diversification as a response. Nonetheless, the rate of response differs due to several factors which include amongst other, asset portfolio, income availability and labour power. Above all, livelihood strategies are constrained by the institutions and organisations. These set the parameters within which access to livelihood assets are negotiated and as a result

they affect the portfolios of livelihood strategies (Scoones, 2000). For instance, different informal and formal institutions and organisations operate at various levels and in various degrees, extending from the household and community levels to the national and even international levels. These affects peoples capabilities to practice different livelihood strategies and this in turn affects livelihood outcomes. In this respect, Scoones (1998:12) argues that 'an understanding of ... institutions, their underlying social relationships, and the power dynamics embedded in these, is ... vital'. Hence, the livelihoods framework animates this paper and is brought to bear on the lives, livelihoods and constraints of urban women traders at Magaba.

The Present Study

The livelihoods literature is quite substantial globally and in relation to Africa. In the case of Zimbabwe, there are numerous rural livelihood studies but a dearth of urban-based studies. In the case of my research site (namely, Magaba in Harare) there is only one existing study (from the mid-1980s) and this pre-dates even ESAP (Brand, 1986). Most studies have focused on the livelihood strategies and economic challenges while turning a blind eye on the political challenges (particularly the politicisation constraints and the attempts to overcome these). For instance Dube and Chirisa (2012) scratched the surface with regard to how urban space is politicized. This is significant given the economic and political crisis that Zimbabwe has undergone. This paper seeks to fill this existing gap and uncover fresh literature, in doing so; it offers a gendered examination by focusing specifically on urban women (not as passive victims of Zimbabwe's economic and political crises, but as active agents seeking to secure family economic stability and social cohesion). This analysis is framed within the sustainable livelihood framework that acknowledges that livelihood strategies are hampered by institutions and organisation. As Scoones (2000:13) argued, the analysis of the range of formal and informal organisational and institutional factors that influence sustainable livelihood outcomes is central to the SLA framework.

RESEARCH METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

The two main objectives of this study to explore, identify, understand and analyze the current challenges or problems faced by women traders and to examine the strategies adopted for coping with the ongoing challenges at Magaba in Harare (Zimbabwe). The overall research method for the study is qualitative. According to Babbie and Mouton (2001) this kind of research "gives a more in-depth description and understanding of events or actions and this helps the researcher to gain insight into why and

how these events or actions take place rather than just presenting a phenomenon". However, the study utilized both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection in order to complement each other and, in the end, to derive 'thick descriptions' of the challenges faced by women traders. Three techniques were used to pursue the objectives of this study: a closed-ended survey questionnaire was administered, in-depth interviews with women vendors were conducted and participant observation was pursued.

Sampling

The Magaba market is rather fluid (with considerable inward and outward mobility) such that it was not possible to draw a random sample of a stable universe. Purposive non-random sampling was employed to identify women participants for survey questionnaires and in-depth interviews. De Vos *et al* (2011) argued that purposive sampling is a valuable kind of sampling used in exploratory research. Babbie and Mouton (2007) further emphasise that non-probability sampling gives the best chance to get 'rich' qualitative data. A survey questionnaire, as a quantitative research technique, was administered to fifty women vendors by the researcher. The central purpose of the survey questionnaire was to provide a broad extensive profile of the Magaba women traders, such that the questions addressed the following issues, amongst others: biographical information, socio-economic status, livelihood strategies, income generation, savings, assets, challenges and urban agriculture. All this was critical in trying to establish the fundamentals pertaining to the construction of livelihoods as well as the challenges encountered by the Magaba traders.

With regard to qualitative data, in-depth interviews (tape recorded) with twenty-four women at Magaba were conducted. Giddens (2006) is of the opinion that in-depth informal interviews allow for greater flexibility in asking questions; therefore the researcher is able to investigate issues in greater detail (compared to survey questionnaires) and to probe for further information. While the survey provides breadth to the data, the interviews provide depth; hence, they complemented each other.

Data Analysis

After collection of data using the in-depth interviews and survey questionnaire data was then analysed. The raw data from the qualitative interviews were translated (initially were conducted in Shona-the local language) and transcribed to trace the emerging themes. The data was thematically analyzed in such a way that their inherent contextual character remains undistorted. Data

collected using the survey questionnaire was analyzed using *Statistical Package for Social Sciences* (SPSS v16). This is computer software that analyses data gathered through a survey instrument. Through the use of SPSS, data generated (such as frequencies, percentages and ranges).

RESULTS

The political polarization between ZANU-PF and MDC is in large part to blame for the politicisation of Harare which remains a hotly-contested urban space. Politics can be defined as power relations wherein power entails the ability to influence one's reality (Chambers 1997). Needless to say, the current politicisation has shifted goalposts with regard to day-to-day governance. In that light, Brown (2006) and Kamete (2010) notes that planning in this respect is said to use power in its mastery of space. According to Foucault (1995) planning for that reason becomes an extra state institution through which technologies of power are put into effect. Results are presented according to the themes that emerged including: harassment by police, militia terrorising vendors and customs. Lastly, attempts to overcome these challenges are uncovered.

Harassment by Police

The Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) and Municipal Police (MP) are involved in joint or solo operations in urban areas against traders and others, despite the fact that officially the MP are responsible for enforcing municipal by-laws. Some urban residents believe that these operations are politically motivated in seeking to regain power over an urban populace which tends to support the opposition MDC (International Crisis Group, 2005). Others believe that the informal sector has congested the city and hence police operations are genuinely motivated to enforce law and order. In this context, the pros and cons of Operation *Murambatsvina* was the subject of intense debate in urban Zimbabwe. The MDC critique of this and other smaller operations is that they are 'designed to destroy the party's urban support base, relocate the people to the rural areas where they would be under the sway of ruling party-aligned chiefs, and forestall popular protests by the poor as the food crisis deepened' (Maroleng, 2005:3). Related to this, a local newspaper, *The Zimbabwe Independent* (29, September 2006) reported that vendors from opposition strongholds in Mbare, and Highfields were threatened with withdrawal of vending permits if they missed President Mugabe's homecoming at the Harare International Airport after one of his foreign visits.

Periodic action against Harare vendors takes place because of the failure on the part of traders to secure a

municipal license. But, at Magaba, those vendors with legal licenses to trade are at times harassed too by the police; in their case, this is because they are failing to trade at an officially-designated place. Some of these designated places are not strategically positioned in terms of attracting customers and were considered unprofitable areas by Magaba traders (licensed or otherwise). Generally, vendors knew that paying a license was a prerequisite for trading, but acquiring a license was seen not only as costly but also as a time-consuming and bureaucratic process. Women traders at Magaba were not opposed to the payment of a license. They simply claimed that the hawkers' license is too expensive (US\$20 per month) and that the profit they generate per day is barely enough to cater for immediate and basic household needs; paying the license is economic-suicide and thus they opt to trade illegally.

Some writers on Zimbabwe argue that harassment (and even the threat of harassment) by police is a critical obstacle to the realization of fruitful livelihood strategies (Mombeshora, 2004; Chirisa, 2007; Muzvidziwa, 2000). In the case of Magaba, some interviewees indicated that they can be raided up to four times during one day by different police officers. According to my survey, 39.6% of current Magaba traders argue that police raids interfere significantly with their livelihoods at Magaba. Vendors were disheartened by the police operations. Inside the police stations, vendors reported that they were brutalised and tortured with baton sticks. One married trader spoke about her experiences in this regard:

'The riot police is ruthless, they arrest us, throw our young babies into their pikidhasi [pickup trucks]; my baby and I once sustained a injury but where am I to report; ... nowhere because it is the police that is doing it... We are tired of running, they just need to stop ... We are not treated as people' (In-depth Interview, March 2012).

Women traders seem to live in unceasing fear of being subjected to harassment and excessive force when arrested by police. This also includes the loss of dignity. In this regard, some traders indicated that they experienced sexual harassment and abusive and humiliating language from the police. Some women vendors claim that there is a gender bias in the arrests because, overall, women are mostly arrested; they claim that this occurs because women – unlike men – rarely offer any form of resistance to their arrest. Some of the respondents label the MP as a toothless bulldog as they fail to arrest men and target women. For whatever reason, and they have many, when the police arrive the women vendors at Magaba run for cover to evade arrest. The concerns of the women traders were reiterated by another married trader:

'The police are a problem, they confiscate our goods and sometimes if you are caught they go with you to the police station and you have to pay a fine and paying a fine is no guarantee that you will get the confiscated goods back. Sometimes when they take your goods they can surrender them to the police station or they take them to their houses. Once you lose your goods to the police there is no room to recover them unless you pay them chebasa [bribe]; otherwise you will lose profit for days. It is better sometimes to give them a bribe than losing everything that one has. Otherwise the family will have to starve for days' (In-depth Interview, March 2012).

Women traders at Magaba experienced the loss of their goods, payment of fines and of course loss of business and income. Many traders highlighted that the goods confiscated by the police, especially clothes and foodstuffs, were not surrendered at the police station by the officers concerned as they took the goods straight to their houses. Furthermore, after paying fines (normally US\$5) at the station, no attempt is made by the police to return the impounded wares. Vendors complained that it was difficult to retrieve their goods from the police simply because they are not issued receipts when goods are impounded. The failure to retrieve their goods greatly affected trader's immediate trading activities particularly if the goods in storage elsewhere are depleted.

Besides the party political conflict (between ZANU-PF and MDC), the politicisation of urban space also exists because of resistance to town planning by-laws which hamper vending. Opposing arguments exemplify the relations between vendors and the police, and vendors are resisting by fighting fire with fire to stop police arrests; this resistance has led to some serious clashes. *The Herald* (January 12, 2012), a state-supporting newspaper in Zimbabwe reported in early 2012 the following: 'Police and vendors fought running battles forcing shops in the First Street Mall and Nelson Mandela to close, the stone throwing vendors smashed windowpanes of police post. The police had visited the area following the assault of a member of force by the vendors. Police Chief Superintendent Oliver Mandipaka confirmed that there are some political activists masquerading as vendors or vendors masquerading as political activists who have become so confrontational each time the police want to enforce the law. The police were armed with teargas, canisters and rifles while patrolling, violence erupted after vendor's resisted arrest and pelted the police with stones'. As the quotation highlights, the police (as with the state more broadly) constantly asserts that vendor opposition to local by-laws has party-political motivations behind it.

Besides trading operations directly, the local police in Harare threaten urban-based farmers under the slogan



Photo 1. No Cultivation
Source: Mazaruse and Masiya (2007)

'NO CULTIVATION'. It is believed that the majority of people living in high-density areas in Harare engage in urban agriculture (including women traders at Magaba, as highlighted earlier), and they often do so illegally on unused pieces of land. Harare regulatory instruments do not allow cultivation on open urban spaces and, towards the start of the rainy season in October, banners reading 'NO CULTIVATION' are placed in all areas which are known to be prone to urban cultivation (see Photo). Nevertheless, these signs are regularly ignored and municipal by-laws resisted, as witnessed by the maize crop behind the sign in the photo.

Urban agriculture makes a significant contribution to many urban livelihoods in Zimbabwe in terms of food supplementation and security. Women traders at Magaba cry foul, as they claim that there is abundant vacant land throughout Harare which has not been developed over many years by city authorities yet urbanites are barred from transforming this unused land into productive land. One widow, who relies chiefly on urban agriculture by cultivating maize, said the following:

'We are not allowed to farm in the open spaces but if the land is not used we just farm the land. I still remember two years ago the municipal police slashed my maize and that year I harvested nothing and I had to rely on buying mealie meal, a thing which I had not done a for long time. Sometimes the police wait until harvest time then they can set fire to maize. Police give silly reasons [for destroying maize crops] like fields are hide outs for thieves' (In-depth Interview, March 2012).

Crop slashing by the ZRP and MP is institutionalized. The accounts by Magaba women demonstrate that the cultivation of municipal land without authorization is not done out of ignorance of existing by-laws or because of some will (party-political or otherwise) to disobey urban by-laws, but it is done out of sheer economic necessity with full knowledge of the risks involved. Given the possible benefits derived from urban agriculture, it is commonsensical for Magaba women to cultivate the land despite the potential penalties and losses.

Militia Terrorizing Vendors

Besides the police and their attacks on informal traders and urban farming, militia groups linked to ZANU-PF have been actively involved in politicizing urban spaces by disciplining the supposedly unruly populace. This subsection focus specifically on a group called *Chipangano*. Members of ZANU-PF's youth wing (under the banner of *Chipangano*) have been terrorising urbanites including informal sector workers. These youth are renowned for violence, intimidation, looting and disrupting livelihoods of the urban people who earn a living through their ingenuity and creativity (albeit often illegally). For instance, this militia group obstructed the construction of a \$5US million Bill and Melinda Gates-financed housing project in Mbare and prevented a proposed \$1US million scheme for the construction of a filling station and a food court (*Standard*, 29 January- February 4 2012). Additionally the group has been involved in a dispute with Easipark (a South African parking firm) marshals responsible for parking space, claiming that *Upfumi Kuvadiki* (wealthy to

the youths) allows them to control earnings emanating from the parking space.

Markets such as Magaba, Mupedzanhamo and Mbare Musika have been the sites for *Chipangano* activity. In the case of Magaba, these activities are of great importance as they impede the livelihood activities of vendors. The majority of Magaba vendors spoke openly about this group, saying that the group is a law-onto-itself; traders are in constant fear of the group especially during and after elections. When the group visits the general area, trading comes to a complete halt not only at Magaba but at nearby markets and formal trading enterprises. Everyone is forced to attend rallies at the open grounds close to Rufaro Stadium in Mbare. In-depth discussions with vendors also brought to the fore current anxieties and fears because of impending national elections including for the state presidency. Aside from election times, vendors also mentioned that when a national hero dies they are forced by *Chipangano* to attend the funeral service at Stodart Hall in Mbare and the burial too at the national shrine or Hero's Acre. Such activities posed a challenge to livelihood strategies for the traders due to the fact that income is lost during the time when vendors are forced to discontinue trading. One respondent indicated:

'Who doesn't know thugs from Chipango when they come here they leave everyone in shock they can turn down the tables and destroy stalls. I still recall a number of incidents. In 2008 they came chanting revolutionary songs brutalizing vendors asking for party cards and who they were going to vote for in the harmonized elections. Just month [3 March] they came forcing everyone to join the anti-sanction march and we have to abandon our business and march with them. Everyone is afraid of Chipangano' (In-depth Interview, March 2012).

The group has committed many acts of violence against traders without any repercussions. If police and militia activity were not enough, there has been a concerted effort to control and undercut the activities of cross border traders who are a major source of goods for informal traders in urban Harare.

Customs

The Zimbabwe Revenue Authority (ZimRA) has been at the forefront of this endeavour through increasing duties on imported goods and at times confiscating certain goods. As highlighted earlier, cross border traders have played a crucial role in the availability of otherwise scarce goods in Zimbabwe (Chani 2008). ZimRA has disrupted the flow of goods into the country through these traders and has in fact made cross border trading less and less

profitable thereby minimizing its extent. Beitbridge border post into South Africa is one of the busiest border posts and is well-known for strictness by customs officials as well as corruption among these officials. According to the interviewees in my study, ZimRA customs officials accept bribes from Chinese and Indian retailers importing goods while sometimes intentionally delaying or even blocking clearance by small-scale African local traders. In this light, the Magaba women also pay bribes to ensure that they are not searched by officials, arguing that this lowers costs as customs duty is not paid. Women are not apprehensive or nervous about these transactions, as they are part of everyday business. Cross border traders arrange for the payment of the bribe at the border post by the transporter, on behalf of the passengers. One of the respondents explained the process:

'I hate that place [the border post] because you can spend more than eight hours just waiting for clearance while foreigners just come spend one hour and they are gone... I wonder what kind of system they use. Bus operators collect money while you are still far away from the border to quicken up clearance process; without that you rot at the border... We just have to do that otherwise they tighten screws and confiscate our goods' (In-depth Interview, March 2012).

Delays are not a new phenomenon at the border post, plus they worsen during the festival holidays (Christmas and Easter times). It may take up to twelve hours just to have your passport stamped at the border. Often people wait for hours without the queue moving even an inch. Lengthy queues are now the order of the day, both leaving Zimbabwe and returning, and they seem to be getting longer. One unmarried cross border trader reported:

'These days it is worse; it is a habit by the ZimRA guys that cross border traders should spend more than five hours before we are cleared. This affects us sometimes when you have plans in Johannesburg. When you get to Johannesburg it will be already late in the night. And we have to spend money on accommodation and food' (In-depth Interview, March 2012).

During festive seasons chaos is rampant at the border and the police try to enforce discipline by insulting traders. This concurs with the study by Karolia (2009) who argues that travellers from Zimbabwe to South Africa are often subjected to police brutality at the Beitbridge border post. Interviewees in my study confirmed that this is not unique to the Zimbabwean side but also exists on the South Africa side of the border where the police use *sjamboks* (or whips) to control the crowds. Some traders indicate that they have lost their belongings as they run

Table 1. Coping Mechanisms against Politicisation

Coping mechanism	Frequency	Percentage %
Early rise and late keep strategy	12	24.5
Using signals to alert each other	9	18.4
Deceptive commodity and merchant hiding strategy	13	26.5
Bribery	13	26.5
Change of operating place	2	4.1
Total	49	100

Source: Survey Questionnaire, March 2012

for cover when police insult and harass people.

ZimRA recently introduced steep tariffs which leave no room for profit. On that note, ZIMDEV (15 January 2012) reports: Importers of blankets, footwear, refrigerators, stoves and other electrical gadgets now pay 40% of the purchasing price plus a flat rate of US\$5 per unit as duty. Government is also now charging between 10% and 25% duty on basic commodities such as maize meal, cooking oil, potato chips, baked beans and mixed fruit jam. The consignment of goods is also charged according to the weight of the goods, each kilo being charged at \$3. This is a heavy blow for cross border traders, as one divorced Magaba woman highlighted:

'The duty is just too much. You cannot make profits because most of the money remains with ZimRA and when we sale the goods at local markets we negotiate pricing and at the end of the day we get very little. Coming back from South Africa to stock the goods now becomes difficult. The government should consider the fact that our lives and that of our families depend on cross border trading, but now that they are charging us exorbitantly how are we supposed to make a living' (In-depth Interview, March 2012).

Magaba traders were deeply disgruntled by the introduction of the new tariff system and emphasized the importance of cross border trading as a life-line for trading activities at Magaba. Many traders have had their wares confiscated in the event that they failed to pay the required duty, and hence the reversion to the payment of bribes to escape custom duties. When this is not feasible, smuggling of goods into the country (in one way or another, preventing detection of goods at the border post) becomes the order of the day. Cross border women traders have been deeply stigmatized. Media reports have always characterized them as prostitutes, notably because of relationships established with long haulage truck drivers. It is reported that women engage in sexual transactions with these drivers; by doing so they avoid transport costs and they are able to carry bulk goods which they could not do via buses. Magaba women, because of this stigma, revealed that their spouses are

no longer comfortable with cross border trading as a livelihood strategy; though they claim that allegations of sexual transactions are baseless. Nevertheless, along with increased duties and general harassment at border posts, cross border trading has been made more difficult because of this.

The above have unfolded the political challenges that women traders face at Magaba and elsewhere. These hinder and disrupt livelihood strategies. Nonetheless, these women are not passive victims (or just passive victims) of the machination of others or of structural constraints, as they respond to these challenges through a number of coping mechanisms and this highlights their agency and ingenuity.

Coping Mechanisms addressing politicisation

Women vendors adopt a range of strategies in confronting the political challenges (or politicisation), given that they operate outside of municipal by-laws and regulations and are subject to police harassment (Chirisa, 2007; Hlohla, 2008). Firstly, they utilize an "early rise and late night" strategy. In this regard, 24.5% of the sampled women vendors reported to be utilizing this strategy (see Table 1). For instance, vendors rise early in the morning to start operations before the police officers start their operations against vendors. To further avoid arrests and harassment by the authorities, they engage in nocturnal vending. This simply means that vendors may at times start operating in the early evening when the police have gone off duty. Respondents claimed that evening time is also conducive because workers will be going home and passing near the market, and they can market their wares without fear of arrest. This practice of nocturnization cut across all the vendors (green and white collar vendors). The findings of this study are similar to the findings of Chirisa (2007) which uncovered that, after police officers report off-duty, vendors lay their wares out openly along the pavements of the Central Business District in Harare.

Secondly, because police operations are mainly characterized by confiscations of goods, many vendors at Magaba have started to use a "deceptive commodity and merchant hiding" strategy (Chirisa, 2009). Instead of

displaying all the goods that are traded, vendors have maximized the use of a hiding strategy; 26.6% of the women vendors utilized this strategy. Vendors reported that each item of the goods they trade in is not displayed in order to avoid losing all their goods (rather than simply the few items on display) when the police arrive. For instance vendors selling clothes will just display one or two items and automatically customers will be aware that the vendor sells clothes. This strategy has enabled vendors to more easily run away when the police arrive and has resulted in the confiscation and loss of fewer goods.

Thirdly, women vendors at Magaba have started using signals to alert each other to run for cover when the police suddenly appear. Whistling has become the major signal to alert other vendors; 18.4 % of the sampled women reported to be using this strategy.

Fourthly a significant number (26.5%) reported to be bribing police when they were caught to avoid arrest, payment of fines and confiscation of goods. Bribery is presumably based on some sort of cost-benefit analysis on the part of the traders. In fact, they claim that it is better to lose a small amount of money (the bribe) than to lose all their goods or at least those on display. Lastly, as indicated earlier in this chapter, traders involved in urban farming continue to pursue their agricultural activities illegally; they refuse to abide by the council's "no cultivation" slogan and programme. These creative responses (and indeed resistance) to the political challenges tend to occur directly within the market sphere. Responses to the economic challenges, which I now set out, are mainly found within the domestic household sphere.

CONCLUSION

This study has offered an understanding of the politicisation of urban space in Harare particularly at Magaba, showing that women traders are not 'trapped' in structures, institutions or organisations but seek to negotiate and manoeuvre their way in and sometimes beyond these structures. Livelihood strategies conducted at Magaba are low profile activities and a handful number of women earn meagre incomes, as such these livelihood activities are central to sustenance of households and individuals. Although women traders subsisted at various levels, full realisation of their ingenuity and hard-work is greatly limited and at times these challenges are beyond women trader's control. The main objective of the paper sought to understand the politicisation of the urban space. It did so by making use of the sustainable livelihood framework. The analysis had revealed the reliance by authorities (government and urban planners) on the use of force and brutality perpetuated by mobilised oppressive state machinery. In great detail the vulnerability context was discussed particularly the

economic and political crises which have marked Zimbabwe for many years. Nonetheless, the data gathered seem to suggest that the political crisis has diffused into state institutions and organisations. Traders faced a series of challenges during operations, the political challenges (politicisation) highlight the issue of institutions and organisations as outlined in the sustainable livelihood framework. The role of the police, militia and customs officials for that reason entail institutional interventions which shape and re-shape the composition of livelihood portfolio (including, in the case of customs officials, withdrawing from any further cross border trading because of the risks involved). For these and other reasons mentioned in the empirical results, one maybe inclined to say the use of these state apparatus save as a political survival strategy. In order for the urban space to be habitable, harnessing unlike exterminating informal activities is necessary. The Magaba women traders continue to make significant contributions to their households income and food security but a grouping, they have strongly exclaimed that they are staggering and are productively hanging in and hanging on in the face of adversity. For instance the destruction of crops and confiscation of goods/wares had greatly limited daily, weekly and monthly profits; such have negatively impacted on the livelihood outcomes. Therefore the focus of the sustainable livelihood framework on vulnerability context have been accentuated and elaborated by the findings of this study.

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