

STATUS, CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF STREET VENDING: EXPERIENCES FROM THE THOHOYANDOU PLAZA

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14

INTRODUCTION

Street vendors are part of the informal economy, working as employers, employees in informal firms, and self-employed workers (Bromley & Wilson, 2018). They provide affordable goods and services in public places and are central to rural and urban economic systems worldwide (Dharejo et al., 2022), selling goods or services to the public using temporary setups and mobile stalls instead of permanent facilities (Sultana et al., 2022). Street vendors also work from pavements or other public spaces, or they are mobile, travelling from place to place carrying their items on push carts and selling on board moving buses (Sarkar, Hassan & Saha, 2025). According to Basera et al. (2022), street vendors continue to satisfy customers' needs along major tourist routes in the country, where they sell various items such as fruits and vegetables.

Lindell (2019) argues that street vendors use urban spaces to create new working areas where none previously existed, and they negotiate these public spaces with each other and the authorities. However, street vendors in these working spaces still endure challenges affecting their businesses. Constraints such as the cost and poor quality of products, limited access to the market, and a lack of cold storage and food safety measures continue to confront street vendors (Mustapha et al., 2022). During national disasters, access to these public spaces affects their business operations. For example, the Covid-19 lockdown, with strict regulations, prohibited the informal business sector from operating in public spaces (Oloko & Ekpo, 2021), leading to no income for them.

According to the International Labour Office (2018), the informal economy employs more than 60% of the world's workforce. For example, street vendors in Tanzania continue to thrive and grow fast, fuelled by rural-urban mobility (George, 2022).

In South Africa, the biggest economic problem is the escalating unemployment rate. Provinces like Limpopo are not spared from this challenge. According to Statistics South Africa's (2024) Quarter One Report, the unemployment rate in Limpopo is 32.9%, with the

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youth accounting for 44.5% of this rate. Therefore, the expectations that the government will deliver much-needed jobs have not been met (Marire, 2022). As a result, individuals without formal jobs participate in street vending activities as an alternative means of survival (Al-Jundi et al., 2020). Therefore, street vendors need robust business support to sustain their trading activities and to contribute to local economic development by reducing unemployment and supporting other business value chains, which can be achieved through a comprehensive understanding of the economic dynamics in their areas (Malizia et al., 2020). This chapter argues that if street vendors in Thohoyandou are empowered, they could expand their businesses, contribute more effectively to local economic development, and reduce unemployment.

At the Thohoyandou Plaza, street vendors operate in public locations, and street vending is frequently a sensitive issue, with frequent tensions between vendors and municipal authorities, residents' associations, and companies. Street vendors may be fixed, occupying sidewalks and other public or private spaces or travelling with their goods from one site to another (Singh, 2021). They rely on social networks that offer an income for needy families and immigrants without other financial options (Arias & Guerra-Salas, 2019). Therefore, this chapter's objective is to explore strategies for improving street vendors' business activities at the Thohoyandou Plaza in Limpopo Province in South Africa. Thohoyandou was chosen for this study because it is home to various businesses, including street vendors and is the town's shopping centre, and because transportation connections draw people to the vendors at the Thohoyandou Plaza.

While street vending is well-researched globally, focusing on the supply and demand side and its shadowy nature as a subset of the informal economy (Igudia, 2020; Sharma, 2018; Shahid et al., 2022), to the authors' knowledge, studies are yet to focus on how street vendors in Thohoyandou can be best supported to improve their economic contributions. For example, Kativhu et al. (2021) explore the threats to informal business's resilience in the Thulamela Local Municipality. Their study found that the major threats to street vending were poor infrastructure, competition, and inadequate finance. Related studies have been carried out, for example, Mahopo et al. (2022) found that government officials, policymakers, and non-government organisations could target street vendors to offer training and microfinance to improve their business skills while promoting food safety and consumption of nutritious foods, and Anyumba (2019) studied the accessibility of key business areas during emergencies. The current study aims to contribute to the body of knowledge on the informal sector. The results of this study could assist policymakers in formulating policies that respond positively to local economic development and the sustainable street vending sector.

This chapter is divided into six sections. Section two, which discusses the methodology, follows this introduction. Section three focuses on the theoretical framework, while section four presents the literature review. Section five discusses the results, and section six provides the conclusions and recommendations.