

# Socio-spatial relations of food vending in Harare, Zimbabwe

An analysis of the social relations and spatial manifestations that affect food vendors in their contribution to food access to the lower income and food insecure residents of the city



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## Abstract

Urban life for lower income residents in cities in Southern Africa brings significant challenges with it, threatening their food security. These challenges are more complex than the lack of availability of food. Instead these relate to the income, spatial and structural factors that characterize the urban (food) system. The socio-economic situation in Zimbabwe, with high inflation, currency issues, and a declining economy has worsened food security in rural and urban areas. Food vendors have been found to be responsive to the challenges faced, specifically in Harare in past crises in the country, and are already feeding low-income households in cities at scale. At the same time, these food vendors are criminalized and subject to policy responses, ranging from neglect to destruction. These policies undermine the access of households to affordable and nutritious food by making food vendor operations more difficult, ultimately worsening food security. This research explores food vendors' social relations and social manifestations in Harare, discussing what makes vendors responsive to the challenges of urban residents and to the overall context faced in the country. The responses of vendors underscore the agency and resilience of vendors seen in the relations with food provisioning actors, consumers and governance actors. The understanding generated through this analysis aims to contribute to informed policies so that the food vendors' contribution to food security can be harnessed and enabled.

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## 1. Introduction

Urbanization and poverty are said to be the key development challenges that sub-Saharan African will face in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Combined, they undermine and worsen food security in urban areas (Frayne et al., 2014). Low-income urban residents face distinct challenges in securing food that extend beyond insufficient income. These range from more localized constraints such as inaccessible locations of retail outlets and lack of access to clean water, to more macro-level issues such as national or global economic crises. Informal food vendors have been found to be responsive to the challenges faced and are already feeding low-income households in cities at scale. This responsiveness is seen in, amongst others, the providing of a variety of food in affordable, smaller quantities, at convenient locations and times (Skinner & Haysom, 2016). At the same time, these informal food vendors often find themselves criminalized and subject to policy responses that range from neglect to destruction (Kazembe et al., 2019; Riley, 2014). Such policies undermine the access of households to affordable and nutritious food by making food vendors' operations more difficult, ultimately worsening food security (Skinner & Watson, 2018). Instead, cities need to understand the practices within the informal food sector that make them more responsive to the needs of poorer urban residents (Battersby, 2018). By doing so, the sector's contribution to food security can be harnessed and enabled by more informed policy. As a starting point in generating such an understanding, this research seeks to shed light on how food vendors are operating within the food system of Harare by exploring the relationships that are engaged in and the movement of food that occurs.

### 1.1. Food security in the urban context

Addressing food security is becoming increasingly complex in the backdrop of urbanization and the dynamic food systems that exist in cities. Southern Africa is the most urbanized region in sub-Saharan Africa, with its urban population projected to total 62.7% and 74% by 2020 and 2050 respectively (UN-Habitat, 2014). With this development, the locus of poverty is shifting from rural to urban areas as aspirations of employment opportunities in cities, or lack of opportunities in rural areas, drive rural-urban migration and the expansion of underserved low-income neighborhoods (Battersby, 2011; Dubbeling et al., 2010; Tacoli, 2017). Food security in sub-Saharan Africa has traditionally been framed in terms of rural hunger and increased agricultural production by global institutions such as the FAO and the UN (Crush & Frayne, 2010; Crush & Riley, 2019). However, the urban dimension requires more attention as the availability of adequate quantities of food, through rural production, does not automatically translate into improved access and consumption in urban areas (Frayne et al., 2014). Imports and commercial agriculture feed into the urban food system, rather than rural smallholders alone (Crush & Frayne, 2010). In addition, urban life, particularly for low-income households, is characterized by a distinct set of challenges, discussed below, that affect access to food. The challenges faced in cities point to the need for a more comprehensive understanding of the urban food system to address food security (Skinner, 2016).

Access to food, not availability, is argued to be the major impediment to food security in Southern African cities (Frayne et al., 2014). This access is dependent on several income, spatial and structural factors, which determine the types, prices and quantities of foods that can be acquired. In cities, there is a greater reliance on food purchases and the cash economy, which often makes that fluctuating prices of goods and services, such as rent and transport, translate into decreases in quantity or quality of food purchased (Battersby, 2011; Crush & Frayne, 2010; Tacoli, 2017; Tawodzera, 2012). The location of markets, transport options, dwelling typology, refrigeration options, and place of work also affect access (Battersby, 2011; Skinner & Haysom, 2016). Equally, macro-level processes, such as national economic crises or globalization, affect urban food supply, for example through the imports of goods (Crush &

Frayne, 2010). These factors characterize the urban food system, determining which foods are available, where, and at what cost. Informal food vendors have been found to be responsive to these challenges and to the needs of low-income households in cities through the way they provide access to food (Battersby, 2018; Skinner, 2018), which will be discussed in the next section.

## 1.2. The informal food vendors and urban food security

Informal food vendors play an important role in the urban food system by distributing food to low-income residents of Southern African cities (Battersby, 2011; Kazembe et al., 2019; Skinner & Haysom, 2016). A study of eleven cities in Southern Africa identified the informal food economy as a critical component of the food systems that feed the poorer households of these cities. Of those surveyed, 70 % normally sourced food from informal outlets and the more food insecure a household was, the more likely it sourced food from informal retailers (Crush & Frayne, 2011a; Skinner, 2018). This interplay between food insecurity and informal food sourcing can be seen in the city of Harare, Zimbabwe. At the height of the country's economic crisis in 2008, with hyperinflation and soaring food prices, 72 % of households were found to be food insecure and 96 % relying on informal food sources. These figures dropped slightly in a subsequent survey conducted in 2012, following the decline of inflation and the introduction of a multi-currency regime, to 63 % and 87 % respectively (Tawodzera, 2016). These figures highlight the importance of informal food sources, including vendors, for the lower income and food insecure residents in cities.

This importance of informal food vendors can be explained by the fact that they offer affordable, fresh and nutritious foods, and are more responsive to the needs of poorer city dwellers (Battersby, 2011). This responsiveness is seen in various practices. Their proximity and mobility, seen in their presence at strategic commuter points and distribution throughout townships and informal settlements, places food vendors in locations that are convenient for consumers (Kazembe et al., 2019; Skinner & Haysom, 2016). Operating during later afternoon and evening commuter peaks makes them accessible outside of working hours (Battersby & Haysom, 2019). They also break bulk and sell in smaller, affordable quantities and offer goods on credit, allowing consumers to buy food in times of shortage which they can pay back later (Skinner & Haysom, 2016). These practices explain the continued sourcing from informal food vendors and their responsiveness to the needs of the food insecure in cities.

Despite their contribution to feeding lower income urban residents, informal food vendors often face hostile policy and regulatory environments (Battersby, 2018). These include exclusionary practices that range from neglect, seen in relocations to areas with low pedestrian foot traffic and poor facilities, to harassment, with officials demanding bribes for operation. In extreme cases these practices entail hostility and destruction, such as the large-scale evictions and the destruction of informal businesses in Zimbabwe under *Operation Murambatsvina* (Operation Restore Order) (Kazembe et al., 2019; Tacoli, 2017). The latter entailed the violent and large-scale removal of informal housing and street vendors, destroying livelihoods and the informal food sector that had become so critical to urban food supply in the country (Chigumira et al., 2018; Potts, 2006). The Zimbabwean state's intolerance towards informal traders persists, seen in crackdowns and destruction of markets (Skinner, 2018). Such hostile practices undermine the vendors' ability to provide food and has serious implications on food security that are seldomly recognized or understood (Battersby, 2018).

## 1.3. Research gap and problem definition

The mismatch between the contribution of informal food vendors to urban food security and the policy responses directed at them, requires a greater understanding of how food vendors are providing food at scale. As argued by Skinner (2016), considering the role played by informal vendors in providing food

access and the hostile environments they operate in, might shed light on food security interventions. By examining the practices that make food vendors more responsive to the needs of the food insecure in cities, more enabling policy environments can be created to enhance access to food (Battersby, 2018). The role of informal retail outlets in urban areas, such as food vendors, has been researched extensively in the past. Many have done so in a broader context of livelihoods, focusing on the factors that hamper or support these informal retailers, such as workplace infrastructure, competition, and social benefits (Acho-Chi, 2002; King, 2016; Levin et al., 1999; Otoo et al., 2012; Roever, 2014; Tinker, 2003). Some have focused more specifically on informal food vendors from a food security perspective, showing that vendors are vital in providing food by explaining the sourcing of food from informal retailers and the practices that make it attractive for consumers (Ahmed et al., 2015; Patel et al., 2014; Skinner & Haysom, 2016). Fewer studies, however, have placed these retail outlets within the wider food system to better understand how they are providing food at such a significant scale.

The complexity of the urban food system, characterized by urban growth, uneven access to food, and macro-level influences, calls for a broader systems lens to encapsulate the practices of informal food vendors. This approach is relevant because food vendors do not operate in isolation and are affected by the pathways through which food flows to get from the source to the destination, and by the actors operating along this chain. This interdependence on others in the system determines what, how much and at what cost food can be consumed by urban residents. For this reason, Skinner (2016) identifies the need for a greater understanding of the operations of all the ‘informal’ food actors in the food system, such as producers and transporters. Battersby (2011) highlights that in doing so, it is important to look beyond the dualism of the ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ food economy. Instead, she argues that within the urban food system, the many connections and synergies that exist between what is considered formal and informal make a clear-cut distinction difficult to establish. Therefore, a broader analysis of the operations of food vendors placed within the food system, including the actions taken to run their business and address vulnerabilities, is crucial in understanding how food vendors contribute to urban food security.

Zimbabwe’s current economic situation, characterized by a new currency crisis with high inflation rates, high levels of unemployment and low wages, which is further described in Chapter 4, is once again threatening food security in urban areas (Muronzi, 2019). The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Hilal Elver (2020), warns that 2.2 million of the urban population (approximately 47 %) are affected by food insecurity. The demonstrated reliance on informal food sources by the food insecure in Harare, combined with its history of, and continued, intolerance of informality, makes an analysis of how informal food vendors are operating particularly relevant and necessary.

This research, therefore, explores the practices of food vendors in the city of Harare to better understand how these vendors are contributing to feeding the food insecure residents of the city. It does so through the lens of the food vendor and their own experiences. It places vendors within the wider food system by exploring the interactions that occur with other (food provisioning) actors and the spatiality of the system, manifested in both the physical, such as vending locations, and the contextual, such as political and economic crises. The main question of this research is: *How do food vendors’ social relations and spatial manifestations allow them to provide access to food in Harare?* The city of Harare is used as a case study and the experiences of food vendors are analyzed, primarily based on qualitative data and supplemented by desk research. The research aims to provide a better understanding of the practices of informal food, which can inform more suitable and enabling policies to improve food security, especially amongst the growing urban population. It does not entail an in-depth policy analysis or concrete policy recommendations.

## 1.4. Research outline

The thesis consists of seven sections. Key concepts and theories that underpin the analysis of food vendors and the urban food system are detailed in Chapter 2. This is followed by the methodology in Chapter 3, which details the research questions and the data collection and analysis applied in the research. Major ethical considerations and limitations of the research are also covered in this section. Chapter 4 and 5 present the findings of the research and place them in perspective by reflecting on connections to the theory, avenues for further research, and the limitations of the research. Finally, the conclusions of the research are summarized in Chapter 6.

## 2. Theoretical framework

This chapter discusses the relevant concepts and academic debates related to the study of food vending practices and their role in the city food system as food providers. This is based on a literature review of past research on related topics. First, the debates around urban food security and food systems highlight the importance of looking at these issues with an urban lens and introduce the areas in which food vendors contribute to food provisioning in this urban setting. This section also introduces the lens through which the practices of food vendors will be researched, namely using the foodscape concept. Next, debates surrounding informality and the informal food economy are highlighted to suggest that, although food vendors are adept to contribute to the food security of urban consumers, they face significant challenges in doing so. This is, in part, due to the lack of understanding and invisibility that stems from being classified as ‘informal’ and the corresponding policy responses faced by vendors. The chapter concludes by operationalizing these broad concepts to clarify which concepts will be explored in the research and how.

### 2.1. Urban food security and food systems

In looking at the food provisioning practices of vendors in cities, it is important to begin with an understanding of the underlying concepts and debates surrounding food security and the challenges faced in achieving this in an urban setting. In addressing these challenges, food vendors are put forth as having responsive practices that contribute to urban food security. The complexity of these challenges, which are affected by various scales, actors, and sectors, calls for a systems analysis, namely the foodscape analytical tool, which this section introduces at the end of this section.

#### 2.1.1. Urban food security

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*Food security is “a situation that exists when all people, at **all times**, have physical, social and economic **access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.**”*  
(FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP & WHO, 2019)

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The most widely accepted definition of food security is the above mentioned. It rests upon four critical dimensions, namely availability, access, utilization, and stability (FAO, 2006; FAO et al., 2019). These pillars are described below according to the definitions of the FAO. The pillars provide a useful framework for understanding how food security is shaped by, not only, household factors, but wider systemic issues in both the food system and, more broadly, the urban system (Battersby & Haysom, 2020). They are placed within the urban context to highlight the entry points where food vendors

contribute, whereby their practices respond to the needs of the lower income and food insecure urban consumers.

### Availability

The first pillar refers to the “availability of sufficient quantities of food of appropriate quality, supplied through domestic production or imports (including food aid)” (FAO, 2006, p. 1). This pillar has, traditionally, received a lot of attention due to the prevailing discourse that “food insecurity must be centrally addressed by producing more food” (Lang & Barling, 2012, p. 313). Hunger has commonly been considered the result of a lack of food in especially the rural context, whereby the strengthening of smallholder farmers has received significant policy and programming attention (Battersby, 2013; Crush & Riley, 2019). Crush and Riley (2019) call this a “rural bias” which they say has persisted in various aspects of the food security agenda, as seen in the targets of SDG 2, concerned with ending hunger, primarily focusing on production and sustainable agriculture. Or in the annual reports of institutions working on food security (FAO, WFP, and IFAD) featuring images of small rural farmers and policy suggestions that mainly address the rural economy (Crush & Riley, 2019). It has, however, been argued that this focus on improving rural production implicitly assumes that increased quantities of food will reduce cost and therefore address the food problems of the low income and food insecure urban consumers (Crush & Frayne, 2010; Haysom & Tawodzera, 2018). As the next sections will show, the rural-urban relationship is not that simple, as it overlooks the challenges of access to food, and its utilization and stability that are faced in urban areas. It is in these pillars that food vendors, through their practices, can contribute to food security, as will be explained.

### Access

Food access, the second pillar of food security, refers to the “access by individuals to adequate resources (entitlements) for acquiring appropriate foods for a nutritious diet. Entitlements are defined as the set of all commodity bundles over which a person can establish command given the legal, political, economic and social arrangements of the community in which they live (including traditional rights such as access)” (FAO, 2006, p. 1). The issue of access has been highlighted as early as 1981 with Sen’s understanding of ‘entitlements’. He argued that food insecurity is more complex than increasing quantities of food, but that it is also heavily dependent on the social, economic, and political causes of vulnerability, which he calls entitlements (Battersby & Haysom, 2019; Sen, 1981). He argued that increases in food supply do not systematically eliminate starvation and “some of the worst famines have taken place with no significant decline in food availability” (Sen, 1981, p. 7). This links to the discussion on availability in the previous section, whereby the other pillars, including access, require attention in the urban setting.

Access refers to the challenges of having an adequate income, or other means, to acquire the food quantities needed. As seen in the introduction, for urban areas in Southern African cities, this is argued to be the primary problem faced, as there is a greater dependence on the cash economy to acquire food (Battersby, 2011; Frayne et al., 2014). Access is also impacted by price shifts of other urban household costs, such as increases in cost of transport, rent or water, that affect the sources, quality and frequency of food consumed (Battersby & Haysom, 2019; Crush & Battersby, 2016; Tacoli, 2017; Tawodzera, 2012). The issue of access, however, also goes beyond income-related factors where there is not enough money to buy food (Battersby & Haysom, 2019). Factors such as locality of retail outlets and transport also affect food access (Battersby, 2011; Battersby & Haysom, 2019; Skinner & Haysom, 2016). This is especially important in relation to the lived geographies of lower income urban residents, referring to where people work, live and commute (Battersby & Crush, 2016). Hereby, food vendors’ proximity to homes, workplaces, or commuter points, is important for food access. In urban areas, access is, therefore,

dependent on both income and spatial factors, which food vendors are particularly adept at responding to.

Food vendors have been argued to be more responsive to the needs of lower income urban consumers because of the practices they employ. Spatial accessibility is realized through their proximity and mobility, for example by being located nearby commuter points or throughout lower income neighborhoods of cities (Kazembe et al., 2019; Skinner & Haysom, 2016). The operation of food vendors from their homes in these neighborhoods is an example of this, whereby consumers do not have to travel far to access goods (Tawodzera et al., 2018). The location of vendors in convenient places meets the needs of consumers as transport costs are often high and food is often bought in smaller quantities daily due to low, inconsistent incomes and limited storage space (Skinner & Haysom, 2016). In terms of operating hours, vendors are responsive to consumer needs by working long hours. As explained by Fuseini et al. (2018) the nature of urban employment for poorer residents entails leaving for work early and returning late. This results in the time poverty of these residents, which makes the flexible hours that vendors are active, in the early morning and late afternoon and evenings, convenient for consumers (Battersby & Haysom, 2019). Lastly, in response to the income challenges of urban consumers, food vendors offer goods in smaller quantities (bulk breaking), at affordable prices and on credit, making it possible to buy food even when cash is in short supply (Kroll, 2016; Skinner & Haysom, 2016; Tevera & Simelane, 2016). This also meets the needs of the food insecure consumers; whose low or inconsistent incomes interfere with their ability to purchase food. As seen, food vendors alleviate some of the income and spatial challenges that urban residents face in accessing food. The next pillar looks at the more structural challenges faced in the urban system that affect food utilization, and the role vendors play in mitigating this.

### Utilization

The pillar of utilization considers the ability of individuals and households to utilize “food through adequate diet, clean water, sanitation and health care to reach a state of nutritional well-being where all physiological needs are met” (FAO, 2006, p. 1). This pillar links food security to systemic issues beyond the food system (Battersby & Haysom, 2019). Household scale challenges can also interfere with food security. Food, once acquired, needs to be stored safely and refrigerated, washed with clean water, and cooked using an energy source (Crush & Battersby, 2016). These conditions for safe food preparation extend beyond the food system and deal with infrastructural issues and costs, such as water and sanitation, garbage collection, and housing conditions. These structural challenges have far reaching consequences on food security. As households try to cope, the following practices of food vendors help them do.

The lack of refrigeration and storage is one of these challenges (Battersby & Crush, 2016; Battersby & Haysom, 2019; Fuseini et al., 2018). This results in purchase choices to prevent spoilage, such as perishable foods in smaller units, which requires more frequent purchases. This is made possible by vendors who offer these smaller units and whose proximate location reduces the time and financial costs of these more frequent purchases. Although outside the scope of this research, it is important to note the contribution vendors of cooked foods make. This relates to the challenges of food preparation that result from structural constraints in the urban setting. The high cost of energy and water increases the cost of food preparation, which results in households modifying diets to those that have a shorter cooking time. (Battersby & Haysom, 2019). Time poverty, as mentioned, results from poorer urban residents making long hours at work and from inadequate transport infrastructure that, combined with long distances between home and work, result in long daily commutes (Battersby & Haysom, 2019). This affects how much time is left for preparin. In response, food vendors sell pre-cooked foods or meals, as seen in

Epworth where beans are cooked and sold to consumers (Tawodzera et al., 2018). The next section touches on the more external influences that can disrupt food security.

### Stability

The FAO (2006, p. 1) states that “to be food secure, a population, household or individual must have access to adequate food at all times. They should not risk losing access to food as a consequence of sudden shocks (e.g. an economic or climatic crisis) or cyclical events (e.g. seasonal food insecurity). The concept of stability can therefore refer to both the availability and access dimensions of food security”. The pillar of stability in the rural context can refer to crop seasonality or extreme weather events (Battersby & Haysom, 2019; Crush & Battersby, 2016). The urban context is equally affected by temporal variations, though more commonly those pertaining to income. This is in part due to the greater dependence on food purchases for food security. Periodic demands on income, such as school fees, medical expenses, or cultural events such as holiday and festivals, commonly result in decreases in expenditure on food to cope. This can, for example, be observed in the ‘hungry season’ that occurs in many parts of urban Africa after festivities (Crush & Battersby, 2016). Sudden shocks also play a role, including food or fuel price fluctuations, unemployment, illness or death of breadwinners, and political or economic crises (Crush & Battersby, 2016).

The analysis of the four pillars of food security has shown that, within the urban context, there are specific challenges faced by consumers. As seen the availability of food is not the only determinant of food prices, and price is not the only factor that determines if and what food can be accessed. Instead, intra-city dynamics, such as the locations of food outlets and storage options, and processes outside the city, including trade and fuel costs, influence urban food security. Food vendors have a diverse set of practices that help consumers in coping with some of these challenges. Understanding the drivers of urban food insecurity, and how actors like food vendors are adept at addressing these drivers, is a crucial step in formulating policies that improve food security and enable these supportive actors. In understanding these systemic issues, food systems provide a useful analytical lens, as discussed in the next section.

#### 2.1.2. Urban food system

Urban food security is dependent on a complex set of drivers, as discussed in the previous section, requiring an approach that analyzes the wider, systemic issues affecting urban consumers to encompass these drivers. A food systems approach can contribute to such an analysis as it incorporates different scales, actors, and sectors. Defined by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE), a food system “gathers all the elements (environment, people, inputs, processes, infrastructures, institutions, etc.) and activities that relate to the production, processing, distribution, preparation and consumption of food, and the outputs of these activities, including socioeconomic and environmental outcomes” (HLPE, 2017). This approach places food within the wider system in which it operates. As has been described, this is especially relevant in the urban context given its complex challenges.

Food security has commonly been analyzed at either the household scale, for example at income, or at the national scale, through aggregate food production (Battersby & Watson, 2019). However, as Sonnino et al. (2016, p. 477) argue, food security is a “complex, ambiguous, contested and persistent (in a word, ‘wicked’) problem that involves multiple sectors, actors and activities at multiple scales and across multiple policy domains”. The food systems lens expands the often-fragmented approach by looking at the systemic drivers of food security. It enables the connection of the household level with the wider social, political, economic, and spatial processes (Battersby, 2013). As a result, the embeddedness of the local, whether it is the household or the neighborhood, in the global becomes apparent and requires

further attention (Battersby, 2013; Freidberg & Goldstein, 2011; Sonnino et al., 2016). In taking such a broader lens, crucial processes at the national or global scale, such as fuel hikes or imports, are also weighed. As seen, this links to the discussion on the pillars of food security, whereby consumers are affected by more than food shortages (*availability*), but also by income and spatial (*access*), structural (*utilization*) and temporal (*stability*) factors. When zooming in on food vendors, a food systems lens is useful in understanding the practices vendors employ, as they do not operate in isolation and are equally affected by the factors mentioned. By placing them in the wider system, their actions to cope with these challenges can be met with supportive, informed policies. This contrasts with the more common policy approaches to food vendors, as will be discussed in the next sub-section, which often focus on their impacts on the urban aesthetical landscape, rather than their broader contributions to issues like food security and the challenges they face. The multi-actor and multilevel nature of the food system described in this paper, and the way food vendors navigate this food system, can be analyzed using the foodscape concept, which will be discussed in the next section.

### *Foodscape*

The foodscape is a relatively novel term suggested to be useful in analyzing how food, places and people are interconnected and interact (Mikkelsen, 2011). Miewald and McCann (2014) argue that the term conceptualizes the changing social, relational, and political nature of urban food consumption and production. The challenges described in the previous sections, point to the spatiality of food. This spatiality is seen through the movement of food from producers to consumers, the location of different retailing outlets affecting consumer access, the infrastructural constraints of housing and facilities found in cities, and temporal shocks at different spatial scales that can influence incomes, prices or supply. As Sonnino et al. (2016, p. 486) describe it, it is “in and across places that food actors come together”. As a result, researchers have called for a place-based approach to understand this spatiality of food (Battersby & Crush, 2016; Miewald & McCann, 2014; Wegerif & Wiskerke, 2017; J. Wiskerke & Verhoeven, 2018). This place-based understanding of food can be explained by seeing foodscapes as nested and interconnected (Wegerif & Wiskerke, 2017; J. Wiskerke & Verhoeven, 2018). *Nested* in the sense that the domestic foodscape (the food eaten at home) is affected by and embedded in the neighborhood or city foodscape (available food outlets that are present and accessible) which is embedded in the regional or global market space. This links to the discussion of the multiple scales of food security in 2.1.2. *Interconnected* refers to the way places are shaped by the relations between food provisioning activities such as production or distribution. This resonates with the food systems lens, combining the different elements and activities of food by looking at the various actors and processes involved. In this way, the concept highlights the mutually constitutive relationships among various aspects of the food system, as Miewald and McCann (2014) suggest.

In looking at food vendors, a relational understanding of the foodscape highlights how vendors are operating to cope with challenges that exist within the wider (food) system. Such a relational understanding considers the spatial manifestation of and social relations between food provisioning activities (Wegerif & Wiskerke, 2017). This research will apply the foodscape as an analytical tool to map, describe, and analyze the socio-spatial relations of food provisioning in Harare.

This section has discussed the main debates surrounding food security and systems when placed in the urban context. The specific drivers of urban food security and the intricacies of the food system require a deeper appreciation of actors who can mitigate some of these challenges. As seen, food vendors are identified as one of these actors, as their practices are particularly responsive to the needs of the low income and food insecure people living in cities. In analyzing the operations of food vendors in food provisioning, the foodscape is suggested as a useful tool that focuses on food provisioning actors and the spaces in which they operate. The next section will highlight how food vendors face certain

challenges in their operations, despite their contribution to urban food security. It places these challenges in context by discussing debates surrounding informality and common policy responses to informality.

## 2.2. 'Informal' economy and food vending

Considering the contribution informal food vendors make to providing access to food for urban residents and the hostility directed towards them despite their contribution, this section begins with an exploration of the relevant theoretical discussions surrounding informality. This is followed by a description of the extent and contribution of what is considered the informal food economy, of which food vending is a part. The hostile policy environments that vendors are subject to are subsequently analyzed in more detail to highlight how this affects vendors' practices in food provisioning.

### 2.2.1. Informality and the food economy

The term informal economy describes the economic activities located 'outside' of those regulated, controlled, supported, audited and taxed by government (Larsson & Svensson, 2018). Regional estimates show that in sub-Saharan Africa, informal employment accounts for 66 % of non-agricultural employment. Informality has become part and parcel to many African cities. Its vast extent is ascribed to the permanence of informality that recently migrated urbanites experience as cities are unable to absorb and employ them (Rogerson, 2016; Skinner & Haysom, 2016). Despite the importance and extent of informality in African cities, the sector's contribution to the economy is underestimated and trivialized by city planners and policy makers. Rogerson (2016) argues street and market traders are the most visible and make up the largest element of the informal economy in urban Africa. This visibility of informality clashes with what Kamete (2013) refers to as a "fetish about formality", whereby it is perceived that urban modernity ideals of order cannot coexist with the disorder of informality. The trivialization and disdain towards informality is seen in governance responses, that range from licensing or formalization of traders to violent evictions. Battersby (2018) argues that this mismatch between urban visions of order and the lived urban realities, as described in 2.1 in the challenges to urban food security, is most evident in the treatment of food vendors. These responses, such as the attempts to remove or formalize informal food vendors, are discussed further in section 2.2.2. on food vending.

#### *Debates around informality*

When discussing the informal economy, it is important to briefly highlight the academic discussions relating to informality and the implications this terminology has on how vendors are viewed and treated. The concept of 'informal' is under discussion and criticized. Defining an economy as 'informal' risks assuming it is underdeveloped, immature, in need of 'correcting' to be more like the desired and understood formal system (Wegerif, 2017). Discussing the food system in dualistic terms also masks the fact that the formal and informal food systems are inextricably connected. As Potts (2008) argues, the dualism between formal and informal points to a sense of disconnection between the two, while having differing characteristics does not necessarily mean that they are not exposed to the same underlying structural forces. The connections between the formal and informal economies are apparent when looking at food, seen through the products sold in the food system and the purchasing behavior of consumers (Battersby, 2011; Crush & Frayne, 2011). Battersby (2011) illustrates this with the following examples. When following the paths of food from producers to consumers in South Africa, food of the same quality, moves from farms and enters both the formal and informal sectors, whereby distributors blur the boundaries between the two. She adds on that the purchasing patterns of consumers also ignore the dualism of the formal and informal sectors, whereby consumers choose to buy foods from both, depending on the product and their needs. By failing to appreciate the linkages between what is considered formal and informal, a comprehensive understanding of the workings of the food system is hampered. This is because it assumes a lack of underlying logic and ordering principles of the system

and overlooks the differentiation within what is classified as ‘informal’ (Wegerif, 2017). This research will therefore not limit itself to a strict dualistic definition of the informal food vendor, and rather will look at the diverse group within what may be considered informal.

*Informal food economy*

The extent of the informal food economy’s contribution to food security was researched in a study conducted by the African Food Security Urban Network (AFSUN) in eleven Southern African cities. It found that around 70 % of households normally source their food from the informal economy (Crush & Frayne, 2011). In the cities of Harare, Blantyre, Lusaka, and Maputo this was even higher at 95%. A study conducted by Battersby (2011) on the food system in Cape Town found that the informal economy was used more often than supermarket to source food, despite the latter often being cheaper per unit. This indicates that more than price and being a last resort determines food sourcing. Skinner & Haysom (2016) identify five factors that explain continued sourcing of food from the informal economy – spatial accessibility, low price, appropriate quantities, and spatial food geographies, which have been elaborated on the section on the pillars of food security.

Food system activity	Examples of informal economy involvement
Producing	Informal/smallholder agriculture (growing staples, vegetables, fruit); tending livestock; catching fish.
Processing and packaging	Small-scale catering; breaking down bulk supplies into smaller quantities for informal retail.
Distributing	Distribution of food using informal transporters (taxis, small trucks for hire).
Retailing	Street and market traders; home shops/spazas.
Consuming	Informal restaurants and liquor outlets (shebeens) that often also sell food.
Waste disposal (packaging and uneaten food)	Informal waste collectors and recyclers.

Figure 1: Activities in the food system and examples of informal economy involvement (Skinner, 2016, p. 2)

The informal food economy is described by Skinner (2016) using a food systems lens, whereby the various actors and activities involved in food provisioning are identified. As seen in Figure 1, examples of informal economy involvement are present in all food system activities. Skinner (2016) emphasizes the need to broaden our understanding by looking at all these informal players and their role in the food system. This is because the activity of food retailing, specifically vending, has received significant research attention, while the rest are less understood. Research on vendors has detailed its importance as a livelihood source, the challenges faced in their business, and their contribution to food provisioning (Acho-Chi, 2002; Kazembe et al., 2019; Levin et al., 1999; Patel et al., 2014; Skinner & Haysom, 2016; Tinker, 2003). Less attention has been paid to the interactions of food vendors with other food system activities, though the discussion in section 2.1 and the table in Figure 1 indicate that these vendors do not operate in isolation and are affected by other players within and outside the food system. Looking at all components of the system, not just at one angle, complements the foodscape approach, described in 2.1.2., in looking at the relations between food provisioning activities and actors. Though this research also looks at food vendors, it does so using a systems lens as described to understand the role of other actors and activities in food provisioning.

### Conceptualizing food vendors

In focusing on food vendors, it is important to note that the terminology used to refer to vendors is used interchangeably by researchers. Roever (2014) looks at *street* vendors more generally, whereby street vendors are said to provide easy access to a wide range of goods and services in the public spaces of cities. Her research covers a wide range of street vendors, which emphasizes how diverse this group and the products sold are. Within the results, however, a clear differentiation between *cooked* food vendors and *produce* vendors is made. Other research on *street food* vendors in most cases refer to vendors who sell cooked or prepared foods (Acho-Chi, 2002; King, 2016; Njaya, 2014b; Otoo et al., 2012; Patel et al., 2014; Steyn et al., 2014; Tinker, 2003). Ahmed et al. (2015) use the term *food* vendor, noting that this refers to the sale of different food types, including cooked meals, fresh produce, packaged goods, and dried beans or cereals, and different modes of operation, including mobile hawkers, selling on the ground, or from fixed sites like kiosks. The terms informal, small, street, market, or food *traders* are also commonly used in food-related research, whereby a differentiation between fresh produce and cooked foods is not made (Battersby & Haysom, 2019; Skinner, 2018; Skinner & Haysom, 2016). Lastly, the term *hawker* is occasionally used, as seen in the following example. The overall interchangeable use of some of these terms is seen in the reference by Chigumira et al. (2018, p. 146) when discussing food sourcing, “74% Epworth residents access food through vendors/traders/hawkers”. This overview of differing terminologies is given to illustrate and caution for specific unclarity identified in the literature. It also emphasizes the need to delineate the type of vendor this research investigates, as the differences in food type sold and mode of operation bring their own set of challenges and opportunities, which might be lost or poorly understood in generalizations. As seen, food vendors make up a diffuse group, selling a variety of types of food that are processed to differing extents. This research focuses mainly on the subgroup of fresh fruits and vegetable vendors, also known as produce vendors, whilst acknowledging the challenges in making this distinction amongst vendors, as is explained in the methodology chapter. The next section zooms in on food vending by looking at its role in food provisioning in relation to the policy responses vendors are subject to, and the resulting challenges faced.

#### 2.2.2. Informal food vending and policy responses

As described in the introduction and in section 2.1, food vendors are important in improving access to food in cities. They, in particular, meet the needs of the lower income and food insecure inhabitants of cities who face income, housing and other challenges when obtaining and consuming food. Vendors respond to these consumer needs by providing credit, being strategically located in places that are accessible, and offering smaller quantities for those who cannot afford to spend a lot at once or do not have refrigeration or storage options (Battersby, 2011; Kazembe et al., 2019; Skinner & Haysom, 2016). Despite this responsiveness, informal food vendors are often subject to hostile policy and regulatory environments (Skinner, 2018). This hostility is the case for street vendors in general, who operate in public spaces and are more visible (Rogerson, 2016). Though past research on these policy environments has not focused exclusively on food vendors, they are an important subgroup within the group of street vendors, considering the role they play in food security (Skinner, 2018). A brief overview is given of the policy responses to street vending to illustrate the implications this has on the operations of vendors.

Tumultuous relationships exist between street vendors and the cities they operate in, significantly affecting vendors in their practices. Policy responses have ranged from neglect, seen in the underservicing of marketplaces or relocations to remote areas, to harassment and hostility, seen in police operations confiscating goods or the destruction of businesses (Kazembe et al., 2019). Skinner (2018) calls these policy responses ‘exclusionary practices’, whereby vendors are excluded from operating in public space, which she places on a continuum, with different extremes. Violent, large-scale evictions

are on one end, where street vendors are forcibly removed from spaces. As pointed out in the introduction, a well-known example of this is *Operation Murambatsvina*<sup>1</sup> (Operation Restore Order) in Zimbabwe that occurred in 2005. This crack-down on informality saw to the destruction of informal homes and sources of livelihoods at a time when at least 70% of people in Zimbabwe's cities worked in the informal sector (Musoni, 2010). It is estimated that around 700,000 people lost the basis of their livelihoods, their homes or both (Potts, 2006; Tibaijuka, 2005). It is also argued that this severely affected food security, as loss of incomes made food less affordable and destroyed the informal food sector that had become critical for urban food supply (Chigumira et al., 2018; Potts, 2006). Though extreme, such a high-profile militaristic removal practice is not unique. This is seen in similar examples in Malawi with *Operation Dongosolo* (Clean-Up) and in South Africa with Operation Clean Sweep (Kazembe et al., 2019; Riley, 2014). Further along the continuum of exclusionary practices are the relocation of vendors to marginal location with low pedestrian foot traffic and/or inadequate facilities. The purpose of the relocations is to move vendors out of public space, where they are more visible, to off-street spaces, which often lack enough customers to keep vending businesses going (Roever, 2014). On the other end of the continuum are the ongoing lower level harassment vendors are subject to. Officials, who Skinner (2018) describes as predatory, are often facilitated by legislation, as bylaws, and uncertain policy and legal environments in doing so (Skinner, 2018). These everyday challenges include workplace insecurity, harassment, and merchandise confiscation, and are more commonplace than the more extreme measures described above (Kazembe et al., 2019; Roever & Skinner, 2016). This description of the continuum of policy responses to informal street vendors emphasize the mismatch that exists between policies and live realities of vendors. The hostile environments force vendors to incur extra costs to cope. These costs impact not only incomes, but also their time and assets (Roever & Skinner, 2016). When looking from a food security perspective, the challenges faced by food vendors due to the described hostile policy environment are relevant. They have implications on food security by hindering their food provisioning abilities, which need to be better understood.

This section has highlighted that despite its significant contribution to food security in cities, food vendors operate within a hostile policy environment that responds to their operations to differing degrees. The next section summarizes the theories and concepts explained in this chapter that are leading in this research and outlines how they are translated into observable indicators

### 2.3. Operationalization of theories

The contribution food vendors make to food provisioning in cities has been argued in this chapter. These vendors operate within the wider food and urban system, which are not just limited to the informal food economy, shown in the interlinkages with the formal sector, or even just the food system, seen in the impacts of the city infrastructure on their operations and that of their consumers. Instead, the vendors' operations, including the products on offer, the quantities, and prices, are affected by the movement of food through the system, by the actors involved in this, and more broadly by systemic factors, as is detailed in 2.1.2 on food system dynamics. These practices, which make vendors responsive to their consumers' needs, are hindered by the hostile policy environments that exist in the cities they operate in. This has food security implications that are poorly understood, calling for more informed policies directed towards food vendors, whereby their food provisioning practices are captured and enabled. This research seeks to generate a better understanding of these socio-spatial practices that food vendors use to provide food to lower income and food insecure residents of the city of Harare. The following table gives an overview of how this will be analyzed and is explained below.

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<sup>1</sup> Murambatsvina is a Shona expression for sweeping away the filth or dirt (Chikulo et al., 2020)

In looking at these practices, the main concepts summarized are translated into more concrete, observable indicators. The overarching concept of the ‘foodscape’ is used as an analytical lens. It considers the social relations and spatial manifestations of food provisioning, which are broken down based on the information relating to food system characteristics, informal food sector challenges, and wider contextual, systemic influences.

The variables, however, require an open, flexible approach due to the exploratory nature of the research. The research seeks to better understand the experiences and workings of the foodscape, not apply existing models on it. As Wegerif & Wiskerke (2017) emphasize, the foodscape concept should be applied as an analytical tool to map, describe, and analyze food provisioning, which this research does from the perspective of the food vendors of the city. The methodological choices in doing so, and the implications this has on the research, are elaborated on in the next chapter.

Table 1: Operationalization of variables

Variable	Concepts	Indicators
Foodscape	Social relations and interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Food provisioning actors (sourcing, distribution/transportation, middlemen, other vendors; formal and informal linkages)</li> <li>▪ Consumers (who, regulars or passersby, how do they interact, responsive practices such as credit, bulk breaking)</li> <li>▪ Governance actors: city council and police (formal/informal, regulatory practices, vendor coping strategies)</li> <li>▪ Other relations: personal (family, children) and vendor associations</li> </ul>
	Spatial manifestations (physical and contextual)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Context: economic, political, social processes</li> <li>▪ Vending site (strategic, infrastructure)</li> <li>▪ Sourcing location (farms, markets, wholesale)</li> <li>▪ Distribution/transportation of food (public/private)</li> </ul>

### 3. Methodology

This chapter outlines the main research question and corresponding sub questions of this research. It subsequently discusses the methods that were applied for data collection. It indicates the reasoning behind these methods, how they were applied, and how the acquired data is analyzed. In addition, the relevant ethical considerations and limitations will be reflected upon.

#### 3.1. Research aim and question

This research aims to better understand how food vendors are contributing to the food security of the lower income and food insecure inhabitants of cities by exploring the socio-spatial practices of food vendors in the city of Harare. For the social practices it looks at the relationships that vendors engage in with other actors that enable or hinder their operations. In looking at the spatial component, the physical and contextual practices of vendors are analyzed. Mapping the way vendors move food throughout the food system looks at the physical space. The impacts of the context of the space in which vendors operate, such as political or economic crises, are also considered. The research, therefore, uses the perspective of food vendors to look at their engagement with the foodscape of the city, whereby the social relations between and spatial manifestation of food provisioning activities are explored.

The research question is, therefore, as follows:

*How do food vendors' social relations and spatial manifestations allow them to provide access to food in Harare?*

Sub-questions:

1. *What is the socio-economic situation in Harare, and Zimbabwe more broadly, that has shaped context in which food vendors are operating in?*
2. *What are the social relations that vendors engage in and why?*
3. *How and where do these relations manifest spatially (physically, contextually)*

### 3.2. Research methods

The food vendors operating in the city of Harare, Zimbabwe are used as a case study to explore the socio-spatial practices used by vendors in food provisioning. As described in the previous sections, food sourcing from informal food vendors was found to be crucial for the food insecure people living in Harare especially in times of economic distress in the country as was the case in 2008. The country is currently facing similar economic hardship as in 2008, as will be explained in the next chapter, that gives a contextual background on Zimbabwe. This, combined with the city's approach to vending and informality, as is shown in the examples given in previous sections, and will be apparent in the next chapter, makes a better understanding of the practices of food vendors, against this backdrop, relevant and necessary.

Qualitative research methods are used as this is suited to explore vendors' perspectives and daily operations in seeking to understand their experiences and realities (Taylor et al., 2015). A variety of qualitative methods and sources were used, to go into greater depth (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2010), including observation (of the vendors in the streets); semi-structured interviews (using a topic list based on the literature review and tailored to the respondent, e.g. vendor or expert interview), and informal conversations with actors engaged in the food system and with the research assistants. These are further explained in the data collection section.

### 3.3. Data collection

#### 3.3.1. Fieldwork

Data was collected empirically during fieldwork in Harare, Zimbabwe over the course of 14 weeks, from December 2019 until March 2020. In the first stages of the fieldwork, expert interviews were held with researchers on food security in Harare and with a local NGO, Dialogue on Shelter<sup>2</sup> to familiarize with the research area and topic. This gave the necessary background and connections to move to the next phase of the research, where interviews with vendors, spread over the city, were the focus. The last phase of the research was cut short as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. The uncertain situation, with flight cancellations and closing borders, resulted in the researcher's university, Utrecht University, to call back students from their fieldwork. The researcher had planned to stay until the beginning of April, but instead had to suspend her research and return home to the Netherlands around four weeks early. In terms of the planning of the fieldwork, this meant that the last phase of the research, where missing perspectives and information are collected, did not occur. The implications of this on the research are discussed further in the limitations.

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<sup>2</sup> Dialogue on Shelter is the technical partner supporting Zimbabwe Homeless Peoples Federation. Together they address issues of low-income housing in particular as well as poverty in general.

### *Research sites*

In the fieldwork, six sites spread over the city of Harare were visited. This included the Central Business District (CBD), the high-density areas of Crowborough, Budiro, Mabvuku, and Damofalls Park, and the main wholesale market of the city, Mbare Musika. The latter was visited primarily for observational purposes, as the expert interviews and informal conversations with research assistants emphasized the importance of this market for vendors. The CBD and the high-density areas were visited to interview vendors in different contexts. The CBD, as will become clearer in the results, is a high traffic part of the city with much activity. Businesses are located here, in addition to bus terminals connecting residents to other parts of the city. Desk research and expert interviews, which are discussed in the next section, identified the CBD as a space with a high vendor population, with many instances of clashes with authorities, and was therefore included in the research. The high-density areas were included as expert interviews indicated that the lower income residents of the city reside in these areas and that many vendors are active in these areas as well. The specific high-density areas were selected based on the familiarity of research assistants with these areas and, in the case of Crowborough, based on connections made through Dialogue on Shelter. As mentioned, the fieldwork was suspended early, so planned visits to other high-density areas including Epworth and Dzivarasekwa did not occur.

### *Research assistants*

During the fieldwork, research assistants were key in helping the researcher with translation and navigation of the sites. Over the course of the research, assistance was obtained from five different research assistants. This allowed for flexibility, with different assistants being available at different times. It was also strategic, as each research assistant was familiar with a different area in the city. This allowed the researcher to visit a variety of areas, which was crucial considering the spatial component of the research. In the case of Crowborough, the research assistant was a member of the community, which helped in finding respondents in this neighborhood and create a sense of trust.

Translation from Shona to English was also necessary in some cases, which the research assistants helped with when respondents preferred the local language, Shona. Before interviews, the researcher assistants were made aware of the purposes of the research and the type of questions being asked so that a more natural conversation could be had with the vendors. This was useful in the interviews that were translated, as the assistant could move to the next question more naturally, whilst the researcher jotted down notes. In the interviews that were conducted in English, the research assistants were part of the conversation, intermittently asking relevant and useful questions.

In addition to translation and navigation purposes, it proved preferable to explore the different research sites and approach the vendors with someone from either the community or who was Zimbabwean. This has to do with a certain degree of racial segregation that has developed in the city, whereby high-density areas and certain parts of the CBD are not occupied and rarely visited by white people. The presence of the researcher, who is a female white European, in these areas and in the public bus system of the city received reactions ranging from curious looks to occasional uncomfortable comments or interactions. In addition, in some areas in the CBD, the researcher's presence and conversations with vendors drew attention. For example, once someone came to ask what we were doing here, another time someone stood by the researcher for some time listening and glancing at the notes being taken. In these instances, the research assistant's presence was preferable in case assistance was needed or to decide to relocate.

### 3.3.2. Case selection

#### *Type of food vendor*

This research chooses to look at the operations of specifically fruit and vegetable food vendors to shed light on the practices they employ to continuously provide food. By focusing on a specific kind of

vendor, the research is delineated clearly, allowing for a more in-depth exploration of the practices employed to provide a general understanding of the group of food vendors as whole (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2010). As mentioned in Chapter 2, food vendors are not a homogenous group and include a wide variety of product types that are processed to different degrees. Fruits and vegetable (produce) vendors are chosen as the focus because this product type has been identified in the literature as a higher risk category, as they are perishable goods that spoil easily, making vendors vulnerable to losses resulting from weather, decreased demands and confiscations by the police (Roever, 2014). In the policy environment described in Chapter 2, these vulnerabilities are exacerbated due to inadequate infrastructure and daily harassment.

In practice, many vendors selling these products also sell other types of food such as processed snacks or non-perishables, such as salt. This made a strict selection less feasible and desirable, as it was found to be a conscious strategy of vendors to diversify and be more resilient, as will be discussed later. These vendors were therefore also included in the research, as fruits and vegetables were still the main product being sold. The interviewed vendors include those selling one type of fruit or vegetable, a variety of fruits and vegetables, and a combination of fruits and vegetables with processed, packaged, and/or dried foods.

### *Sampling methods*

This section describes how the vendors that were interviewed were identified, while section 3.3.3. discusses the process of approaching and interviewing them. A mix of convenience and snowball sampling was applied, the choice of which is elaborated on next. Both have in common that they are suitable in studying vendors, as the ‘informal’ and less regulated nature of vending makes information on the size of the vendor population or on the locations of vendors with specific characteristics, such as the product type sold, less available.

In the locations of the CBD and the markets in the high-density areas, convenience sampling was applied because in these areas vendors can be easily found (Given, 2012). This is due to the market structures in the CBD, located by bus terminals, and in the high-density areas being easily identifiable and found at fixed locations. In addition, in the CBD, vendors can be found on most streets, for example on the pavements or by street corners. The information on the locations of these markets was obtained from the research assistants who were familiar with these areas. In these cases, convenience sampling was applied by walking around these locations and identifying a mix of vendors selling fruits and vegetables. To avoid skewing the responses given by vendors, caution was taken not to interview nearby vendors who could overhear the interviews and give desired responses, rather than their real experiences.

Snowball sampling was used in one of the high-density areas, Crowborough, as it allowed to include vendors who sell from stalls by their homes and are less visible. The research assistant helped identify respondents in these areas as she is a resident of the area and familiar with vendors selling from their homes. She is affiliated with the alliance of Zimbabwe Homeless People’s Federation<sup>3</sup> and Dialogue on Shelter. The latter organization provided information and connected the researcher with the research assistant.

Both sampling methods led to vendors being approached if they matched the type of vendor described previously. When vendors were approached, informed consent from vendors to conduct the interview

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<sup>3</sup> Zimbabwe Homeless People’s Federation is a community-based organization consisting of a network of housing savings schemes found in low-income communities that collectively save for housing and other poverty-related challenges.

was sought out by explaining the academic intentions of the research. It was made clear how the information and experiences shared by the vendors would be used in the research. The granting of permission for asking further questions after receiving this information, was considered informed consent, marking the beginning of the interviews that are discussed next.

### 3.3.3. Interviews

In-depth semi-structured interviews were the main data collection method used in this research. Questions for the interviews were based on the findings from the literature and tailored to the respondent type, resulting in different questions for the vendors and the experts. Due to the exploratory nature of the research, the questions were developed iteratively and continually reviewed based on the findings thus far. The general questions asked throughout the research can be found in Appendix #s. The interview process and the overall topics asked are specified in the next section for the experts and the vendors.

#### *Vendor interviews*

This method was used to uncover the operations of food vendors and their experiences. The data collected with these interviews, form the basis of this research. The interview process is highlighted here, including the note taking process, number of vendors consulted, and the discussed topics and interview duration.

Detailed written notes were taken during interviews to record the responses of the vendors. These notes were typed up shortly after the interviews were conducted to add in any information missing in the notes that could be recalled by the researcher or research assistant. A recording device was consciously not used during the research. The reason for this lies in informal nature of some of the vendors' work. It often took extra explaining of the purposes and uses of the research before vendors agreed to participate. This had to do with skepticism on the part of the vendors, especially the more informal ones in the CBD, who were weary of getting caught by officials. Asking if the conversation could be recorded could be perceived as intimidating or incriminating, as only a limited sense of trust could be created in the research setting, especially in the CBD where interviews were conducted in the streets. As mentioned, the researcher's presence often drew attention which a recording device would have added to. In addition, the informally operating vendors had to remain on guard for potential police raids, limiting the time and setting for creating trust.

A total of 31 vendors were interviewed, of which 27 fit the vendor type detailed in 3.3.2. The other 3 were cooked food vendors by an informal carpentry site in one high-density area that one of the research assistants was familiar with. Considering the amount of research attention paid to cooked (street) food vendors, this perspective was initially sought out, but ultimately not used in the presentation of results to focus the scope. Instead this is a perspective to be considered in future research. The main characteristics of the 27 vendors interviewed are detailed in Table 2. Appendix #4 give some more relevant characteristics. The food vendors' spread over the city is illustrated in a map (figure 2).

Table 2: General characteristics of the food vendors interviewed.

Characteristics			
Gender	Male	Female	
	7	20	
Marital status	Married	Single	Widow
	15	6	3
Children	Dependent children	Older children	No children
	22	3	1
Education	<i>Primary (grade 7)</i>		<i>Lower secondary (O-level)</i>
	8	4	
Vendor legitimacy	<i>Formal (license-holder or renting stall)</i>		
	11	16	

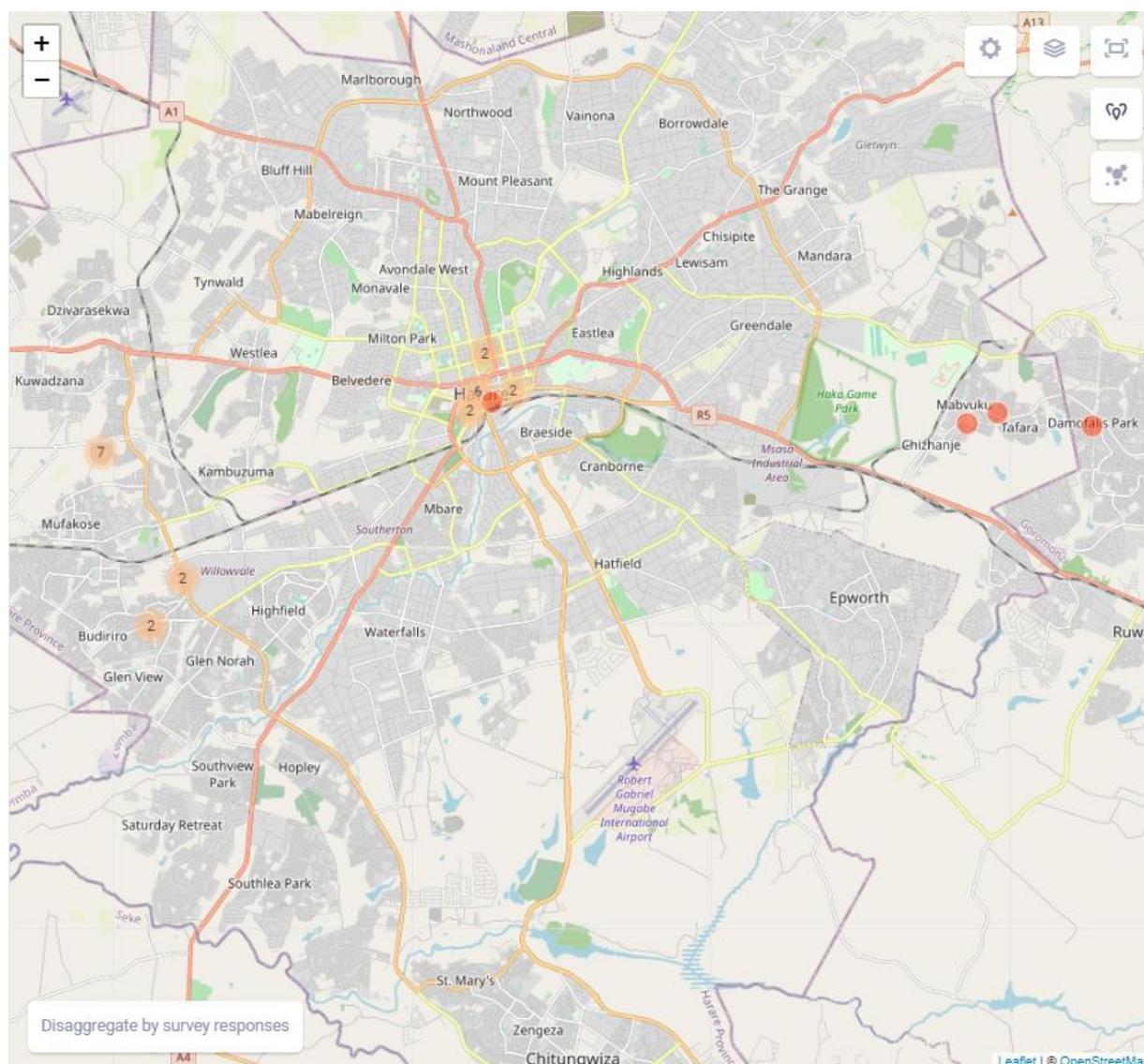


Figure 2. Map of city of Harare with research sites where vendors who were interviewed during fieldwork are indicated.

The interview process is outlined in more detail here, first by highlighting topics discussed and then by detailing how the interviews generally went. In terms of topics discussed in the questions, the overarching themes covered were vendor personal characteristics (e.g. age, education, family), vending business details (e.g. hours worked, time spent vending, motivations for location, products, vending), food provisioning practices and relationships (e.g. sourcing, distribution, consumers, other vendors), contextual influences (e.g. currency, inflation, competition), and personal benefits and wishes for vending business. The specific questions can be found in the interview guide in Appendix #2. Not all vendors were asked the same questions as these were adapted iteratively over the course of the fieldwork based on the findings and responses of vendors and experts. While certain questions were reaching saturation points, others were not being answered with enough depth, hence the questions were also adapted. The information shared by vendors on these topics, informed about socio-spatial relations of vendors and the rationales and implications of their practices. After informed consent was given by the vendors to continue, interviews generally lasted 30 minutes. Some lasted closer to an hour, especially in the high-density areas as it was less busy in terms of customers giving more time for conversation.

### Expert interviews

Expert interviews were held with an NGO working in lower income areas in Harare and with other researchers who have studied food vendors and the food system of Harare extensively. The research experts were identified in academic papers written on related topics in Harare. LinkedIn and email were used to reach out to these experts and set up interviews. These interviews provided relevant background information on urban food security and vending in Harare, and practical tips for conducting research in the research context. The NGO was identified through the snowball method, whereby one of the researchers set up a meeting with the NGO as they had connections on the ground and practical information on high-density areas specifically. Other NGOs working with urban food security and a vendor's association representing informal vendors were contacted for additional expert interviews in the later stage of the fieldwork. However, a combination of lack of response and early departure from Zimbabwe made that these interviews could not take place.

### 3.4. Data analysis

The typed-up interview notes were analyzed in the program NVivo, which facilitated the coding process. Open or inductive coding was applied to make sense of and organize the data collected through the various qualitative methods. Patterns were highlighted and linked to the concepts and theories of the research. Due to the exploratory nature of the research, patterns that emerged from the data were leading, as opposed to pre-conceived ideas stemming from the literature. Kobo Toolbox was used to process vendor characteristics and map relevant research areas.

### 3.5. Ethical considerations

The main ethical consideration is related to the fact that street vending is illegal in Zimbabwe, and therefore the research took certain precautions in protecting and ensuring the anonymity of participants, including anonymizing names in the report. In getting consent from vendors to conduct the interview, the academic intentions of the research were clearly explained, whereby it was made clear what the vendors could expect from the researcher. It was emphasized that the research could not directly help vendors financially, as in a few rare instances this was expected. When requests for concrete help were made it was emphasized again that the research purpose was academic, to gain a better understanding of the vendors' situations and practices. However, since this expectation of help would become apparent towards the end of an interview, it could have had implications for the information that was shared prior.

### 3.6. Limitations

The limitations of the methodological decisions of the research, described above, are considered in this section.

#### *External validity*

A limitation of using qualitative research, specifically a case study, pertains to the external validity of the findings. In seeking to go in depth, a small sample of vendors (27) was consulted, which cannot be generalized for the entire food vending population of Harare, or broader to food vendors in other localities. Instead, the research seeks to highlight practices and experiences of the individual cases that are typical for food vendors in Harare. The findings obtained from interviews with vendors were compared with each other to identify common trends and notable outliers. Hereby the experiences of different types of vendors were sought out, as seen in the site and case selection, to triangulate the findings. Vendors operating in different localities and selling a different mix of food (i.e. only one fruit, a mix of fruits and vegetables, or also certain staples), while experiencing similar challenges were seen to be indicative of trends. In addition, past literature on Harare, was used to triangulate findings. This consisted of a mix of dated (from the 1990s) research, with similar foci as this research, and of more recent, with slightly different foci but useful contextual background. This allowed for the identification of practices in the findings that were similarly found in older research and contextualized by changes caused by recent developments. Lastly, the research aimed to achieve the saturation point during data collection to address the challenges of using a smaller sample size, whereby interviews with vendors did not uncover new information. It also sought to triangulate further by consulting experts, such as other NGOs or the vendors association. However, the reaching of the saturation point and further triangulation of sources was only achieved to a certain extent due to the early suspension of data collection that has been identified earlier on in this chapter.

#### *Vendor types and sites*

As mentioned earlier on, the vendor types, in terms of foods being sold, were not clear cut in practice. Instead, they ranged from selling one piece of fruit to selling a mix of fruits, vegetables and various non-perishable staples and/or processed snacks. Though all selling fruits and vegetables, which is why they were all interviewed, it also resulted in findings outside the scope of the research, such as on the sourcing of processed foods, and in notable differences in business models. This related to the finding that differences in the diversity of food types sold were indicative (to a certain degree) of relative success of vendors, as is discussed later, whereby more capital is needed to offer more goods. This diversity within the group of fruits and vegetable vendors has implications for the generalizability of the findings, as it makes the experiences shared more diffuse. It was, however, chosen to include this wider range of perspectives, as making a distinction was not as feasible and would have resulted in an overly simplistic picture of food vending.

#### *Research assistants, translation, and note-keeping*

During the fieldwork, research assistants accompanied the researcher to assist with translation and navigation. Two important reflections on the implications of this on the research are highlighted here. Translation from one language to another risks that information is lost or filtered out. For purposes of ease and speed, a translator may summarize what is said, rather than literally translating every word, whereby translators make choices on what they think is relevant to relay to the researcher. This means certain interesting points may be filtered out or not explained properly. In the context of the research setting, standing outside in the busy streets or by a market stall, while interrupting vendors in their business operations, increased pressure to summarize certain points or details during translation. This limitation was addressed by reflecting on findings afterwards with the research assistant and asking to

clarify bits not clear in the notes, which at times allowed certain details to resurface. Second, the presence of the research assistant during interviews, similar to the researcher's presence discussed in 3.3.1., could have affected vendors' responses. Biases and presumptions about the research assistant could skew the responses given by vendors, for example talking to female vendors with a male research assistant (or the other way around) or to vendors in a community with another community member (as was the case in Crowborough). These social dynamics cannot be avoided and may have resulted in socially desirable answers. However, by working with a diverse group of research assistants (who differed in age, gender, occupation/status), these implications were minimized as trends were identified despite possible biases.

As mentioned, recordings of the interviews with vendors were not made, instead written notes were used to record the interview findings. The reasons for this choice are detailed in 3.3., however the implications of this are that information or specific details were missed. By typing up the notes shortly after interviews, the amount of missing information was minimized.

#### *Corona crisis*

Although discussed throughout this chapter, the implications of the early suspension of the fieldwork are briefly outlined here. Fewer perspectives than desired were collected. For example, although a few different high-density areas were visited, only one (Crowborough) included interviews with vendors selling from or by their homes. The others were in the markets in these areas. By visiting other areas, trends could have been highlighted and triangulated more accurately. The same holds true with the pushcart vendors near the CBD, of which only two were consulted. These perspectives would have enriched the discussion on licensing and been useful in adding a gender analysis to the research, as only men were observed throughout the fieldwork by the researcher to be selling in this manner. In addition, follow-up interviews with vendors who were particularly open and had shared their contact details were not conducted. This limits the depth that was gained during interviews, for example through established trust, and the ability to verify findings or missing details.

These two main limitations, fewer perspectives and lack of follow-up interviews, made a gender analysis, which was initially the aim, too superficial. The sensitive nature of gendered issues, such as specific challenges faced by women in their interactions with suppliers or police, meant that trust was needed to sufficiently highlight these experiences, which follow-up interviews would have established. In addition, more male perspectives with differing business models and success were needed to meaningfully discuss structural differences affecting women. Therefore, although a gender analysis is needed within this topic, as women have been found to be nearly twice as likely as men to sell produce, while produce vendors are a high risk category due to losses incurred from spoilage due to decreased demand, weather, and confiscations (Roever, 2014), this research could not meaningfully address it and therefore suggests it for further research.

This chapter has outlined the main methodological choices and processes of this research. The research question and aim were discussed, followed by a detailed account of the data collection methods used to obtain answers this question. The vendor characteristics are briefly outlined and include how the data collected from the vendors was analyzed. The chapter concludes with the main limitations of the research and the implications of methodological choices on the findings. The next chapters present the findings of the research. First, a background is given of the research site, both specific to Harare and more broadly in Zimbabwe. This is done to highlight the past and current socio-political situation, which shape and affect the vendors' practices within this foodscape. This is followed by the exploration of the vendors practices through the social relations engaged in and spatial manifestations of their food provisioning. Last, the Corona crisis and the impacts on vendors is briefly discussed as it highlights and emphasizes several of the research findings.

## 4. Zimbabwe's current situation

This chapter gives an overview of the political economy of Zimbabwe and key events affecting the food system and the food vendors operating within this system. This analysis provides the necessary background information needed to understand the context in which vendors are operating and the implications this has on their socio-spatial relations. This chapter is based on desk research, including past research that have analyzed topics relating to food security and food vending, as well as policy responses to informality in Harare, or Zimbabwe more broadly. News articles and reports are also used to supplement the more recent and relevant contextual developments, such as the recent inflation rates and food security challenges. The analysis in this chapter first looks at the socio-economic situation in Zimbabwe, including the current currency crisis and inflation levels. It then zooms in on the relationship between informality and the city, described through the city's regulatory environment and history of clampdowns on vendors. This analysis does not aim to give a complete illustration of the history and current situation of Zimbabwe, and the resulting challenges faced. However, it discusses the contextual challenges that are relevant and related to the issues that fall within the scope of the research. Where possible, it specifies the situation in the city of Harare, though many challenges exist at the national level. The socio-spatial relations of vendors described in the next chapter will be contextualized based on the situation illustrated in this chapter.

### 4.1. Socio-economic situation

Zimbabwe has been home to a struggling economy for at least two decades. Since 2000, the country has been the site of economic, political and social despair (Tawodzera et al., 2016). The economic structural adjustment program (ESAP)<sup>4</sup> of the 1990s and the Fast Track Land Reform Program (FTLRP)<sup>5</sup> that started around 2000 are argued to have marked the start of the economic decline in the country (Chikulo et al., 2020; Dube & Chirisa, 2012; Matamanda et al., 2019; Musoni, 2010; Potts, 2008). The country went from being a net food exporter, often referred to as “the breadbasket of Southern Africa”, to a net food importer and recipient of food aid (Ndlovu et al., 2020; Tawodzera et al., 2016). Rising unemployment, currency devaluations (of the Zimbabwe dollar), and food shortages also resulted. In urban areas, informal settlements grew, and informal employment rose rapidly (Matamanda et al., 2019; Musoni, 2010). In 2005, the situation in cities was further exacerbated following a massive government crackdown on informality called *Operation Murambatsvina* (Operation Restore Order). As described in 2.2.2., the destructive operation crippled the livelihoods and ruined the homes of more than 700,000 people, worsening the already dire situation of the urban population. It is argued that the operation was politically motivated to eradicate any government opposition that was brewing as a result of the economic challenges faced by the urban population (Dube & Chirisa, 2012; Tawodzera, 2012). As Musoni (2010) describes, by 2005 the formal economy had declined to such an extent that the informal sector had effectively become the economy, with at least 70% of the urban population working in the informal sector.

The deterioration of the economic environment continued and culminated in 2007-2008 into a massive currency crisis with hyperinflation, high unemployment and political unease. As Tawodzera et al. (2012, p. 2) describe, “formal sector unemployment was over 80%, inflation was running at almost 100% per day and the country was still reeling from the effects of the highly contested election of June 2008”.

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<sup>4</sup> ESAP was introduced post-independence to revamp the economy through trade liberalization, domestic deregulation and investment promotion, as economic growth slowed, foreign investment declined, and unemployment was increasing (Tawodzera et al., 2016).

<sup>5</sup> FTLRP was meant to redistribute the country's white-owned farms to indigenous black farmers.

Food shortages resulted, as the formal food system collapsed, with companies failing to access foreign currency to fund imports (Chitanda, 2015). During this period a study on food security for low-income urban households was conducted. It found that almost 96 % of the households surveyed in low-income areas of the city were food insecure, and 72 % severely food insecure (Tawodzera et al., 2012). Following this, between 2009 to 2012, a period of relative economic and political stability was achieved as a result of the formation of a coalition government and the move away from the Zimbabwe dollar, which had lost its value due to hyperinflation (Tawodzera et al., 2016). A multi-currency regime was introduced, whereby the US dollar and, to a lesser extent, the South African rand became the predominantly used currency. The economic rebound was short-lived, however, with deteriorating trade, a severe drought in 2012/2013 and continued political uncertainty causing economic decline (Elver, 2020).

More recent developments have sent the country's economy in a downward spiral, resulting in a similar crisis as detailed above. As mentioned, Zimbabwe had adopted the US dollar as the main accepted currency in 2009. However, high import levels, and limited exports, created a situation over time where US dollar cash was in short supply as more was leaving the country than coming in (BBC News, 2019a). Long queues at the bank resulted, as people tried to get access to their money. The government responded in 2016 by introducing 'bond notes and coins', whose value was supposed to be on par with the US dollar (Aljazeera, 2016). The lack of faith in the currency and black-market speculation made bond notes lose value, where the trading of bond notes for US dollar had resulted in constantly changing exchange rates and inflation (Muronzi, 2020). In 2017, Emmerson Mnangagwa began leading the country, after the military removed the long-time president Robert Mugabe from office. Not much changed in terms of the country's economic distress, as seen in the following developments. In February 2019, the RTGS (Real Time Gross Settlement) dollar was introduced, unpegging the bond exchange rate from the US dollar (African Development Bank, 2020). This put an end to the assertion that the currencies were worth the same, instead the value would be set by the market. However, this did not affect inflation rates much, as seen in the food price inflation levels in June 2019 which were measured at more than 250 % by the World Food Programme (BBC News, 2019b). In June 2019, the government banned foreign currency transactions and introduced the "new Zimbabwean dollar" (ZWL) in November of the same year. This latest currency included a new generation of notes and coins that were circulated to alleviate the physical cash shortages in the country (Muronzi, 2020).

This brings the analysis to the current (at the time of the fieldwork) situation, which started in December 2019. By November 2019, the exchange rate between the Zimbabwe dollar (ZWL) and the US dollar had reached 20 Zimbabwe dollar per US dollar (African Development Bank, 2020). The changes in the exchange rates and shortages of basic goods, such as fuel, food, and electricity, had resulted in high inflation rates in the country. At the time of the fieldwork, fuel shortages were such a challenge that people would queue up for hours or even the whole day. Informal conversations, conducted over the duration of the fieldwork with people living in the city, revealed that alternatively people could use US dollars to buy fuel and not wait in line. This was a luxury that not everyone had considering the foreign currency shortages in country. In either case, the fuel shortages influenced prices of food and transport, as is detailed in the examples given in the next chapter. During the duration of the fieldwork, from December until mid-March, the exchange rates went from 1 US dollar being equivalent to around 16.4 ZWL to 25 ZWL (official Interbank rate) and 22 ZWL to 42 ZWL (unofficial black-market rate)

respectively (Zimbabwe Market Watch, n.d.). Throughout this research, for ease, USD equivalents are expressed using the median black-market rate is used of 32 ZWL<sup>6</sup>.

The words of the UN special rapporteur on the right to food sum up the severity of the situation currently faced in the country, which resonates with the past crises it has experienced, and describes the overall context in which food vendors are operating in:

*“Man-made starvation is slowly making its way in the country, with more than 60% of the population now considered food-insecure due to extreme poverty, high inflation and poor agricultural productivity, among other causes” (Elver, 2020, p. 1).*

## 4.2. Politics of vending

Considering the tumultuous relationship between informal vendors and the city of Harare, as touched upon in Chapter 2 and in the previous section, a brief overview is given of the relevant policy responses to informal vending. The information obtained through desk research that is discussed in this section pertains to both informal vendors in general and food vendors in specific.

The socio-economic situation Zimbabwe finds itself in, with soaring unemployment rates, the hyperinflationary environment in 2007/2008, and the recurring cash crises have resulted in a highly informalized economy (Chikulo et al. 2020). The exact number of vendors operating in the city is unknown. The City of Harare statistics show 30,000 registered vendors, while others estimate that in 2017 at least 1,000,000 vendors were operating in the city, of which 20,000 in the CBD (Matamanda et al., 2019). The city is argued not to have adequate facilities or premises to accommodate the vast number of vendors, resulting in many of them operating ‘illegally’. The term illegally is used, as all street vending was banned on January 2017 based on the premise that it contributed to public health problems such as typhoid (Matamanda et al., 2019). Besides not having enough capacity to accommodate vendors properly, the large number of ‘illegally’ operating vendors is attributed to the expensive cost of licenses and the process of acquiring them, which was found to be difficult, lengthy, and filled with corruption (Tawodzera, 2012; Matamanda et al., 2019). Licensing requirements and the implications of this are discussed briefly in the next section.

Traders selling food are required to hold several licenses. These are described by Tawodzera et al. (2019) to include the following:

*“...a trading license (supplied by trader-related authorities) and a health certificate for the store or retail area (supplied by the health authorities and informed by inspection). In addition, a person selling food must hold a health clearance certificate (supplied by a doctor). A further trading permit may be needed if trading takes place in a designated market area. Each permit is acquired through different sources, valid for different periods and issued for a fee” (Tawodzera et al., 2019, p. 19).*

Though this research does not delve into the specific policies, permits and licenses, the described requirements point to the challenging and trying process of becoming formal, which for many people who turn to vending is unattainable. As the research findings will highlight, only a handful of vendors

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<sup>6</sup> When considering these USD to ZWL equivalents, it is important to keep these extreme differences in exchange rates in mind. As savings lost their value when the switch from USD to ZWL occurred, and the salaries and costs of living have been calculated using different rates, the USD prices may seem low, but may be costlier considering this background.

interviewed held (some of) the licenses described above. One such license is the hawkers license, in which the bylaws specify that hawkers cannot remain stationary while conducting their business for more than 15 minutes and must have moved 100 meters away from this place within that time frame (Rogerson, 2016). These bylaws, which impose challenging licensing processes on vendors, have been criticized in the literature for hindering vendors and, related to food specifically, “doing little to facilitate informal food systems” as they are disconnected from the lived realities of urban residents (Chikulo et al., 2020, p. 8). The legitimacy of some of these bylaws are also questioned, as other research has pointed out that raids, which are common in Harare, have been directed at clearing street vendors from the city, even from sites once designated by the city (Matamanda et al., 2019). The counterproductive and, at times, inconsistent policy responses directed towards vendors hinder them in their operations and often result in extra costs. Harassment and prosecution have become a part of daily life for vendors, seen in raids, confiscations and demands for bribes (Njaya, 2014). The complex licensing structures outlined in this section, illustrate how the relationship between vendors and the city have created a hostile environment that hinders vendors in their livelihoods.

This chapter has sought to provide a general background on the context in which food vendors have to operate in. The socio-economic situation Zimbabwe finds itself in, has implications on the livelihoods of urban residents, which include the food vendors themselves and their consumers. These implications relate to, amongst others, incomes, prices of goods, and ultimately food security. Many have turned to vending in response to the dire economic situation that the country has been plagued with, yet they have been met with hostility and policy measures that challenge their ability to earn a livelihood from vending. As has been argued in Chapter 2, this hostile policy environment faced by vendors has food security implications that require more attention. In doing so, the practices vendors employ to maneuver the context described in this section, are analyzed in the next chapter, as these practices allow them to continue their business of food provisioning in the city.

## 5. Socio-spatial practices of food vendors

The practices of food vendors have been found to be responsive to the needs of the lower income and food insecure people living in Southern African cities, including Harare. By looking at the daily operations of these vendors within the foodscape of the city, a better understanding of how they are managing to provide food to these groups can be gained. These operations are explored through the relationships the vendors choose to engage in, or rely on, in order to sell. The vendors’ interactions with the actors directly involved in food provisioning are explored in 5.1, with the vendors’ consumers in 5.2, and, more broadly, with actors who affect the food system, namely governmental actors in 5.3. The chapter briefly touches on the personal relations vendors engage in and how these are affected by their food vending. Understanding why vendors engage in these interactions will explain how they sell, where, and why. This section also highlights how the vendors maneuver and deal with the socio-economic and political landscape of Harare by placing the vendor experiences in the context described previously in Chapter 4.

### 5.1. Food provisioning actors

The actors directly involved in food provisioning, namely the supplying, transporting, and selling of food, influence the way vendors provide access to food. Vendors are dependent on these actors as they supply and move the foods that are being sold and compete with vendors in selling these foods. The relationships vendors engage with within this group are explored to better understand the choices made and challenges faced by vendors in terms of sourcing, transporting, and in selling. Exploring these social relations and the implications this has on vendors is useful in creating a better understanding of how

vendors are providing food and how they can be enabled to do so. In this section, these food provisioning actors are analyzed through the overarching categories of suppliers, distributors, and other vendors.

### 5.1.1. Suppliers

Vendors were asked about the sourcing of the food they sell and rationales behind these choices. Understanding where and how vendors obtain the food they intend to sell, and why, highlights how food is moved throughout the food system, the actors involved in this, and the impacts this had on vendors in their operations. The most important suppliers, found at the wholesale market of the city, are discussed first, followed by alternatives that vendors have sought out to reduce their dependency on one actor and to better match their business needs. The alternatives highlighted in this section are sourcing directly at the farmgate, at other fruits and vegetable markets in the city, and from formal wholesale companies.

#### *Mbare Musika – wholesale market*

Overall, the vendors' responses concerning their food sourcing reiterated the central role that Mbare Musika<sup>7</sup>, the main wholesale market of the city, plays in food provisioning. Mbare Musika was established in the 1950s, becoming the main vegetable wholesale market for those living in townships (Chitanda, 2015). Through conversations with the vendors, the research assistants, and experts, an understanding of the general workings of Mbare as a wholesale market was generated. Farmers bring their produce to the market in the early morning, sometimes even the night before and spend the night



Figure 3. Mbare Musika (Kuarimi) around 11 AM, when much of the selling has already occurred (author's own, 25 February 2020)

<sup>7</sup> Musika is Shona for market in English. The vendors often refer to Mbare Musika in short as Mbare (the place where the market is located), which this research will as well.

there. Then, they sell directly to vendors, or to middlemen, known as *makoronyera*<sup>8</sup>, who buy in bulk at a lower price and sell with a markup. Alternatively, the *makoronyera* also buy at the farm gate from farmers and use their own transport to bring it to the market. Sales in the wholesale selling space, called *Kuvarimi*<sup>9</sup> (Chikulo et al., 2020), happen in the early morning, from around 2 AM until 8 AM.

Previous research conducted as early as 1994, by Nancy Horn on market women in the city, until most recently Chikulo et al. (2020), have also identified the importance of Mbare Musika in food provisioning. Horn (1994) described how vendors in the city source from Mbare, stating that this informal market was often cheaper for vendors than formal outlets. Research on Epworth, a high-density satellite town of Harare (see figure 2), found that Mbare Musika is a crucial supplier of the produce sold in Epworth, as it does not have a market of its own where farmers can deliver to (Tawodzera et al., 2018). Chikulo et al. (2020, p. 25) describe the market as a “thriving economic center for fresh produce distribution”. The vendors’ sourcing patterns support these findings, with 93% indicating they source from Mbare, of which 44 % sourcing solely at Mbare. The benefits of the market that explain the clear preference for Mbare are explained next, followed by the conflicted feelings voiced by vendors towards it which explain why alternative sourcing patterns exist.

### Benefits of the market

Mbare remains the preferred market for sourcing fruits and vegetables for most of the vendors. The main reason vendors gave for this preference is the variety of produce that can be found at Mbare. The variety offered can, in part, be attributed to the findings of Chikulo et al. (2020), where a preference amongst smallholder producers to sell at Mbare Musika was identified. This is because the market is easy to access with minimal rules and flexible entry and exit. As a result, more farmers sell at Mbare, which provides vendors with the variety they need.

Besides variety, the market provides vendors the opportunity to buy in smaller quantities and is situated conveniently. Sharing occurs so that larger wholesale quantities can be split with other vendors. The buying of smaller quantities is particularly useful for the vendors who do not have much money to buy produce and are not pushing much volume at their vending sites. Instead, they can buy the amounts they can afford and what they expect to sell. This practice of sharing will be explained further in the section on interactions with other food vendors. In terms of location, the vendors working in the CBD, find the location of Mbare preferable as it is closer to their vending sites (see figure 4) This is the case for Nesta<sup>10</sup>, a widow with two children, who sells bananas from a plastic washtub and walks from Mbare to the CBD, selling along the way. She can only carry a limited amount and does not have much credit for her business (interview Nesta, 7 February 2020). Nesta uses the close vicinity of Mbare to her advantage, by minimizing the costs of an extra bus ride from the market to the CBD. The ability to buy in smaller quantities is vital for her to continue selling, enabling her to support her family. Despite being further away from Mbare, the vendors working in the high-density areas reported



Figure 4. Map of Harare highlighting the locations of the Central Business District (CBD) and Mbare Musika (adapted by author).

<sup>8</sup> This research will use the term *makoronyera* to refer to these middlemen.

<sup>9</sup> *Kuvarimi* translates to “where the farmers are” (Chikulo et al., 2020).

<sup>10</sup> All names in this research are pseudonyms to protect the identity of the vendors interviewed.

having access to a direct transport connection to the market. This direct connection is made possible by kombis (commuter omnibuses), which are further discussed in section 5.1.2. Such established transport connections, however, point to the importance of Mbare Musika, as the high demand amongst vendors for trips from the high-density areas to Mbare has been made possible by the bus drivers now offering these routes. The variety offered at Mbare, which can be bought in the needed quantities through processes such as sharing, combined with its central and accessible location, make it a continued crucial produce source for the vendors. Yet, the market is also viewed critically by the vendors due to the presence and actions of middlemen, which is discussed next.

#### Contested actors – the makoronyera

Despite the benefits that Mbare offers, many vendors voiced conflicted feelings towards it. This is mainly due to the role of the previously mentioned *makoronyera* at Mbare, which is contested, both in the literature and in the vendors' experiences. On the one hand, the makoronyera are viewed negatively, due to the influence they have on the high prices of fruits and vegetables that can be bought. On the other hand, it is acknowledged, by both the vendors and in the literature, that they are also trying to make ends meet and that they play an important role in ensuring consistent supply at the market. The contested role of the makoronyera will be discussed in this section.

The makoronyera influence the price paid by vendors for fruits and vegetables at the market. This influence stretches from what the farmer receives up until what the end consumer pays. They are said to “buy low” from farmers and “sell high” to vendors (interviews, Mrs. Shumba, Mrs. Maposa, 28 January 2020; Tonderai, 11 March 2020). This drives up the price for vendors who indicated they cannot negotiate prices with this actor. Especially the vendors who come later than the early morning, deal with the makoronyera as the farmers have left, having sold their produce. Mrs. Maposa, who sells from a market stall in the CBD which she rents from the city council, summarized the role of the makoronyera when asked about her interactions with them:

*“The makoronyera, they hold the power” (interview Mrs. Maposa, 28 January 2020).*

In this statement, she is reflecting on the power the makoronyera have in setting the price for the goods and the limited bargaining power the vendors have. This results in vendors often having to pay significantly higher prices for goods than if they directly dealt with the farmers. The dynamics between the makoronyera and the farmers and vendors are confirmed in the literature. Tawodzera et al. (2019) point out the price-setting power of these middlemen, who are said to control access for farmers and buyers. They argue that these middlemen contribute to the high food-price volatility of specifically fresh fruits and vegetables by operating like cartels, whereby they fix prices and intimidate farmers to sell at low prices and retailers to buy at high prices. This ‘cartel’-like behavior is especially apparent in the description given by Farisai, who sells informally in the CBD:

*“At Mbare you can’t buy straight from the farmer anymore, now you have to deal with makoronyera. They harass farmers to sell to them or even steal it from them, the farmers don’t have a choice. Or the makoronyera will sell for the farmers and give them cut. But they charge us [vendors] too much” (interview Farisai, 7 February 2020).*

Farisai’s view of the makoronyera highlights the behavior that these actors are most criticized for and that cause the high prices that vendors in the interviews have referred to. The rise of the makoronyera is attributed to the challenging Zimbabwean macro-economic environment, with shortages and governance vacuums (Chigumira et al., 2018; Tawodzera et al., 2019). These researchers argue that the makoronyera

take advantage of economic or weather-related shocks to drive up prices. Tonderai, who sells in a market in one of the high-density areas, points out similar behavior of the makoronyera:

*“The current situation opens up opportunities for thieves to steal from everyone. This includes makoronyera, they buy low, forcing farmers to accept these prices, and sell for high prices” (interview Tonderai, 11 March 2020).*

He is commenting on the price-setting power that makoronyera have, which he believes they are abusing to their own benefit. His comment places this price-setting behavior in the contextual realities faced in the country. The current situation he is referring to has to do with the economic despair, including currency struggles, inflation rates, and lack of alternative sources of livelihoods. This makes vendors desperate to earn a living, which combined with a high degree of competition from other vendors, limits their bargaining position. These feelings of not having a choice and being overcharged were affirmed by many of the vendors’ testimonies. The power relations that have developed, in which makoronyera are powerful price-setters, are relevant in the wider discussion of access to food for the lower income and insecure consumers of the city. The high prices that vendors are forced to pay are passed on to the end-consumers through price increases (Tawodzera et al., 2019). The dependence that urban consumers have on food purchases for food access makes the increased prices detrimental to urban food security, as consumers end up decreasing the amounts and quality of goods they purchase.

The power held by the makoronyera not only translates to higher prices for consumers, but also negatively affects specifically female food vendors through diminished profit margins. For the female vendors, the interview findings pointed to an overall lack of bargaining power when dealing with the makoronyera. This threatens their ability to support themselves though the profits from their vending business. The impact of the power dynamics between vendors and makoronyera on specifically female vendors resonates with the findings of research done on the food governance of Epworth (a satellite town of Harare). In this research, female food vendors struggled to access fresh fruits and vegetables due to the presence of the makoronyera (Chigumira et al., 2018). This inability to negotiate is seen in Sarudzai’s interactions with makoronyera. She has specific ones who she always buys from, yet, despite having established a working relationship with them, she indicated that negotiating prices was still not possible. She recounted her interactions with these actors:

*“As women, we face discrimination and name calling. The makoronyera say things like ‘do you think I love you, we aren’t your husband’, when we [vendors] try to negotiate” (interview Sarudzai, 7 January 2020).*

In this instance, women appear to be overruled because they are not taken seriously, which impacts the prices they end up paying. This points to possible uneven power dynamics between men and women in the negotiating sphere, that negatively impact women’s business operations. Other female vendors that were interviewed indicated that negotiating prices was also not an option for them, indicating a trend. Nyasha, who works near a shopping center in a high-density area, would like to source her goods elsewhere, but is constrained by lack of funds:

*“I have to buy from them [the makoronyera] and I am not able to negotiate. If I had more money, I would go straight to the farmer” (interview Nyasha, 29 January 2020).*

The small quantities that Nyasha can sell in a day restricts her from buying directly from the farmer, instead she is forced to buy from the makoronyera as this is the only option for her situation. In contrast, Stanley, a male vendor in the CBD, can talk to the makoronyera and negotiate with them on prices (interview, 28 January 2020). Though the research cannot generalize if this experience resonates with

that of other male vendors, as a small amount of men were consulted, it does point to differences that exist with the general experience of the female vendors spoken to. Further investigation is needed to analyze possible differences in male and female experiences in food vending, and the implications of this. This relates not only onto food vending and security, but to livelihood viability. As mentioned previously, women are nearly twice as likely to sell fresh produce, while this has been found to be a riskier group within vending, due to losses incurred from spoilage due to decreased demand, weather, and confiscations. Overall, the lack of negotiating power for female vendors results in having to buy from these actors at a high price. This diminishes their profit margins (Tawodzera et al., 2019), which for many are already quite low due to the high transport costs, the currency crisis, competition, and overall poor economic situation of the country, as will be further discussed in the following sections.

As seen, the vendors' ability to bargain with the makoronyera differs greatly. Some have built connections and can to a certain extent negotiate, others say bargaining is not tolerated. As a result, some choose to avoid these middlemen by coming early to the market, when the farmers are still there selling their produce. Rumbidzai (interview, 11 March 2020) and Grace (interview, 11 March 2020) said by doing so and dealing directly with the farmers, they can get a better price. This demonstrates how consciously seeking out alternatives to maneuver the constraints imposed on food vendors, benefits their business through decreased dependency and more negotiating power. Tonderai, a male vendor, confirmed the benefits of this strategy, sharing that he goes as early as 2 AM to avoid competition and to buy from the farmer. He uses a flashlight to inspect the quality of the produce, which are fresher because he goes early (interview, 11 March 2020). By actively choosing to deal directly with farmers at the market, which requires vendors to ensure they are there early enough, benefits them as they obtain better prices. The examples have shown that the makoronyera have an influential role in supplying food to vendors. They, to a large extent, are the price-setters at the market, rarely tolerating negotiation from vendors. The benefits of the market and, for some convenience or lack of alternatives, makes them dependent on these actors in their vending, forcing them to accept paying higher prices in an already strained context of inflation levels in the country. Those who can, seek out the farmers at the market, and are able to obtain better prices. The next section will touch on the need for a more nuanced perception of this actor, as expressed by the vendors and in literature.

The contested role of the makoronyera is seen in the more understanding and positive perspectives shared by vendors on this actor. The makoronyera, despite the negative implications of their price-setting power, provide an important service in ensuring consistent supply to Mbare Musika. These actors take risks to buy produce in bulk from farmers, at the farm gate or by the market, as they are not certain they will sell it all. This benefits farmers who do not have to spend time selling smaller quantities to individual buyers but can sell it all at once to the makoronyera, as pointed out by Mrs. Maposa (interview, 28 January 2020) and in informal conversations with research assistants. Chikulo et al. (2020), in their research on Mbare Musika, reiterate this, explaining that makoronyera ensure consistent supply to the market by collecting produce at the farm gate and entering into agreements with (retail) vendors to ensure demand for this produce exists. The position makoronyera find themselves in was also understood by vendors, seen in the following statements:

*“I would like to see the makoronyera change but realize that they are also making ends meet” (interview Sarudzai, 7 February 2020).*

*“I can negotiate with makoronyera when there is enough supply, however, when it is scarce, I pay more and cannot negotiate. I realize it is not their [makoronyera] fault” (interview Charlotte, 29 January 2020).*

As highlighted in the examples, the makoronyera's actions and price-setting power can be rationalized to a certain extent by some vendors. They understand that, like the vendors themselves, the makoronyera are surviving and making a livelihood, especially considering the context of economic decline, rising prices, and lack of other sources of income. Market dynamics of supply and demand also affect the makoronyera's actions, whereby rising prices of costs they must incur, such as transport, also need to be covered so losses are not made. Further research is needed on the dynamic role played by the makoronyera, as this research, and other literature, has highlighted that the role of the makoronyera is contested. A more nuanced analysis is needed to understand the role this actor plays in food provisioning in the city that goes beyond the scope of this research.

As has been argued in this section, the feelings of vendors towards the makoronyera are conflicted. Their negative influences on pricing and bargaining, combined with their useful role in supplying the market, have been argued to impact vendors in a variety of ways. The food provisioning of vendors is therefore characterized by socio-spatial relations that reflect the needs and abilities of vendors, for example in reducing their dependency on makoronyera by seeking out farmers in the market. This links to the next section, which highlights sourcing practices that deviate from Mbare Musika in response to the perceived role of makoronyera. Considering the concerns raised by the vendors on the way things work at Mbare Musika, around half the vendors interviewed indicated they source either entirely or partially elsewhere. These sourcing alternatives are discussed in the following section, where some vendors choose to seek out the farmers directly at their farms, and others patronize the other fruits and vegetable markets of the city.

### *Farmers*

Dealing directly with the farmers for the sourcing of their produce was practiced by 22 % of vendors, allowing them to skip out on market visits and dealings with the makoronyera at Mbare Musika. Oftentimes, experience, through years of vending, has led to the building of these sourcing relationships with specific farmers in the surroundings of Harare, including Norton, Ruwa, Mazoe, Chitungwisa, Mutoko and Goromonzi (see Appendix 5). By strategically building and utilizing working relationships with farmers, the vendors can get better prices and cut out the middlemen. These relationships are the result of informal interactions occurring over time and are sought out, or created, by the vendors to match their individual needs. These relationships manifest themselves differently for each vendor, for example in the differing areas they source from or the instances in which they choose to source from farmers, instead of from Mbare. Some examples of these differences are given below.

For some vendors, the working relationships with farmers stem from personal connections by living or working in the same area. In these cases, convenience appears to drive these interactions. Hope's sourcing is dependent on her day to day needs, whereby having two options gives her more flexibility. She lives in Goromonzi, where she knows farmers who she phones to inform about prices and occasionally buys from. Prices by farmers are cheaper for her than at Mbare, however her vending site, a cardboard mat placed in front of a supermarket in the CBD, restricts her from buying great volumes. Without storage and faced with regular police raids, Hope prefers small quantities which she can get at the nearby Mbare (interview Hope, 7 February 2020). As a result, Hope balances the sourcing from Mbare and from the farmers to match her day to day needs, giving her more flexibility and less dependency on one supplier. Rumbidzai, similarly makes use of connections to her benefit. Fellow vendors who sell at the same market as her farm in the rural area Mutoko and come to the market in one of the high-density neighborhoods to sell their crops. If their produce is of good quality and price, she buys from them to sell herself, otherwise opting for Mbare early in the morning, around 3 or 4 AM, to buy directly from the farmers there (interview Rumbidzai, 11 March 2020). Rumbidzai, like Hope, makes use of the relationships she has built to her advantage, whereby products are bought directly from

farmers from rural areas if they are suited for her business. However, she is not dependent on these relations, as she has Mbare to fall back on for sourcing. In both cases, the vendors utilize personal connections they have with farmers, depending on their circumstances, to be able to source and sell their produce. These examples show how food is sourced to match differing needs, reflecting the socio-spatial relations that allow vendors to source and sell foods.

In other instances, it is the products on offer, or the pricing that occurs at Mbare by the makoronyera that drives the vendors to seek out the farmers. Stanley, for example, generally sources from Mbare, which despite the higher costs is closer for him. When he cannot find the products he needs, he calls the farmers he knows and goes to collect the goods there (interview, 28 January 2020). Stanley can sell the goods that attract his customers because he is not only reliant on Mbare and the price-setters there to obtain these goods. By seeking out alternatives, vendors are given more options and alternatives to source for their business with. Similarly, for Tadiwa, choosing to go to the farms or another market often occurs when there are too many makoronyera at the market driving up the price (interview, 27 February 2020). Here, the price-setting power that makoronyera have is challenged by the seeking out of alternatives, reducing dependency and the impacts having to pay a higher price has on their business. The two cases have shown that the option of sourcing from the farmers, though less convenient in terms of distance and transport, gives the vendors an alternative that benefits their ability to sell at lower prices and to offer more diversity in their goods. By diversifying their sourcing, the vendors are less dependent on the price setting actors of the market. It gives them more choice, rather than being forced to pay higher prices because of lack of alternatives. Instead, they have the agency to decide what is best for them and their business, on a day to day basis. Similar diversification of sourcing is seen in the next section, whereby other markets in the city are sought out when the prices or offerings at Mbare do not match the vendors' business needs.

#### *Other markets*

Besides sourcing directly from farmers, some vendors have chosen to frequent the other, smaller fruit and vegetable markets of the city to obtain better prices than at Mbare. The vendors who indicated they patronize these different markets are not doing so in homogenous ways. Instead each has their own strategy and rationale for accessing these markets. Machipisa (Lusaka) Market is one of these alternative markets that Rutendo visits. Besides obtaining better prices resulting from the direct interaction with farmers, which is more common at this market, Rutendo (interview, 27 February 2020) prefers this market because “at Mbare coins are worth less, they rate them”. At Machipisa coins are accepted equally to notes. This highlights how the currency challenges faced in the country are translated into daily life, where different modes of payment (coins, notes or even digital money<sup>11</sup>) are not valued equally. Such contextual challenges affect the vendors in their food provisioning businesses. In Rutendo's case, she has to choose between going to Machipisa, where her money is essentially worth more (since coins do not depreciate in value), or going to Mbare, which for her is more accessible due to the direct kombi bus connection departing from the high-density area where she lives. Domboshawa is another market (see Appendix #5) that was identified by Farisai. Here, she can buy directly from farmers she knows, making the produce she buys much cheaper for her. Other vendors she knows who, like her, sell in the CBD, live in Domboshawa and inform her of the prices there. When the prices are too high at Mbare, she will opt to go to Domboshawa (interview Farisai, 7 February 2020). By obtaining the market information beforehand, Farisai can decide if the trip to this market is worthwhile, considering she also has her goods delivered to her vending site which is more expensive for her. Similarly, Martin, who has been vending

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<sup>11</sup> This refers to the commonly used mobile money called EcoCash, which has become an important payment method as cash shortages exist. Withdrawing money from these digital accounts (called 'cashing out') is costly for vendors, especially since only cash is accepted at Mbare Musika.

for 15 years also in the CBD, chooses to frequent different markets for his goods. He calls suppliers at these markets the night before to enquire about prices (interview, Martin, 28 January 2020). In the same way as Farisai, he uses this market information to determine where he will go. He uses social relations to his advantage to maneuver the spatiality of different sourcing options, which may be further away than Mbare and more costly to access due to transport costs. Diversifying their sourcing over different spaces and through different social relations benefits food vendors who can construct these relations or have the means to seek out other markets to obtain better prices for their goods. As will be seen in later sections, high prices hinder vendors greatly in the current economic environment as customers have less to spend and competition has increased, limiting how vendors can raise prices and make profits.

The different cases show that each vendor has his or her own preferred alternative market, which they patronize for often price-related reasons. Some of the vendors have developed working relationships with other vendors or suppliers at these markets to determine if it is worthwhile to source there, as often this entails extra transport costs. Similar to sourcing directly from farmers, the alternative markets and the established relationships that give the vendors access to market information, particularly concerning prices, give food vendors more agency in the purchasing of their produce. This makes them less reliant on price-setters at Mbare and gives them more freedom in the prices they pay for the goods they sell.

#### *Wholesale (formal)*

Besides sourcing from Mbare Musika, farmers, and other markets, vendors were found to have diversified their sourcing by dealing with formal wholesale companies. These companies were found to be actively selling to vendors to distribute their food, highlighting how integrated food vendors are in the food system of the city. Several instances of, specifically, banana wholesale companies, were identified as food sources by the vendors interviewed. The main companies named were Matanuska, Yarnfield, FAVCO, and Sunspun Bananas. The use of wholesalers for the sourcing of bananas was concentrated amongst the vendors in the CBD area. This included the pushcart vendors, who solely sold bananas from these different wholesalers, and the vendors in the CBD operating from both the more formal and informal stalls. The purchasing of goods from formal sector outlets, such as wholesale banana companies, shows that vendors contribute to the local economy (Tawodzera & Crush, 2019). These interactions between companies and vendors also highlight what has been pointed out in the literature, that a clear-cut distinction between the so-called formal and informal food economies does not exist. These linkages between wholesale banana companies, who also supply formal supermarkets, and the food vendors require further research as they support discussions on the inaccuracy of speaking of the food economy in dualistic terms. The limitations of the research in terms of being cut short restricted a deeper investigation of these sourcing relations as they were uncovered in a later stage of the research. However, the next section briefly highlights findings in the research that, although outside the scope of the research, support the need of further research on this topic.

The inextricably linked nature of economies is especially apparent in Zimbabwe, with a proportion of the economy being conducted ‘informally’. Other researchers have observed that formal companies are forced to engage with the ‘informal’ to survive, resulting in the situation that vendors, on all parts of the formal-informal spectrum, are essentially sustaining formal businesses (expert interview Njaya, 11 December 2019). This extends even beyond the scope of the research of fruits and vegetables, to bread in tuck shops in the high-density areas coming from well-known bakeries, to vendors selling cooked foods with meats from major butcheries (expert interview Njaya, 11 December 2019). The interviews with the vendors highlighted this, in relation to the sale of cooked foods and of soda drinks. Though outside the scope of this research, it is relevant in the discussion on the linkages between what is considered the formal and informal food economy. For example, Nyasha, next to her fruits and vegetables, sells soda drinks by her stall located near a shopping center in a high-density area. As she

was telling her story, she pulled out some soda drinks from a cooler box that had been donated by Pepsi when she was selling drinks for them. At the time, Pepsi supplied her with the drinks, coming by to drop them off (interview Nyasha, 29 January 2020). Though too expensive for her now, resulting in the sourcing of drinks elsewhere, it highlights the situation described with the banana companies, where formal companies are actively using the vendors' markets and customer bases for sales. Vendors cannot be seen outside of the system they operate in and cannot be discarded for being informal. The examples highlighted in this section emphasize that the practices vendors employ are mutually beneficial for vendors and formal companies. Vendors give formal companies an additional market to sell through which increases sales, while at the same time sourcing from formal companies allows vendors to diversify their sourcing. This allows them to be less dependent on price-setting actors, strengthens their bargaining position and ability to continue providing food through their businesses.

This section has highlighted how food vendors are impacted by their reliance on food suppliers in their food vending. Price-setting power of actors can result in increased costs of vendors who are forced to accept prices due to constraints they face in their capital, vending sites, or social capital. The socio-economic context makes this situation worse for vendors who must deal with competition and increasing prices. Some vendors have diversified their sourcing to avoid these dependencies and give themselves more agency in their choice of source and price paid. This results in diverse socio-spatial relations being utilized by vendors, who construct social relations that result in a spatially spread sourcing patterns. The next section delves into the next step vendors go through in obtaining food to sell, namely getting it to their vending site using various modes of transportation.

### 5.1.2. Distributors

Vendors are dependent on transportation in their vending practices, given that vendors' homes, food sources, and vending sites are not in the same place. In moving themselves and their produce around, vendors utilize different transport options, depending on their needs, their means, and the options available to them. Transport results in unavoidable operational costs, which impact how they run their business and the prices they can offer to consumers. In the following discussion of these options, a distinction is made between the more common use of the commuter omnibus, essentially the public transportation system of the city, and private hires of transport, including trucks, taxis or private kombis.

#### *Kombi buses*

Commuter omnibuses, referred to as 'kombis', form the main mode of transportation for the vendors. Kombis are used to get from their homes to Mbare and to their vending site, often having to transfer in the city center. In addition to their fares, vendors must pay an additional fee for their 'luggage'. Alternatively, the government funded buses, called ZUPCO (Zimbabwe United Passenger Company), can be used. These are cheaper, however, the high demand combined with the limited supply of rides, results in long queues for these buses, especially in the CBD. The challenges of finding a more affordable ZUPCO bus, and limitations in the routes offered, results in all but one vendor indicating they use kombis as their main mode of transport.

The lack of affordable alternatives makes the vendors dependent on the terms set by the kombi drivers, who set a price and routes



Figure 5. Kombi buses in the city (authors own)

depending on a variety of factors. At the time of the research, kombi prices ranged from 4 to 12 ZWL per ride (rounded to USD 0.13 to 0.40), with prices dependent on the destination, the time of day (e.g. rush hour), and weather conditions (e.g. rain). In comparison, ZUPCO buses were cited to cost around 2 ZWL per trip (rounded to USD 0.07). Routing is also determined by the kombi drivers, which in the case of direct connections that depart from central locations can be convenient for vendors. For example, in the high-density areas visited, a direct kombi connection to Mbare is available in the early morning. In Crowborough there is one that departs from a central location at 4 AM, which many of the vendors interviewed make use of. Having a direct connection to Mbare is more convenient in terms of travel time, as changing in the CBD is not necessary, and cost efficient, as changing buses tends to cost more than single trips. However, finding transportation does not come without risks as routes and bus stops are determined by the kombi drivers, not the vendors. As Rutendo, who frequently uses the direct connection, shared, when she misses the 4 AM direct bus, she must walk to the main road where other kombis stop to go to Mbare directly. She goes in the early morning, since that is when all the activity at Mbare occurs, and it is still dark. The long walk passes by informal maize fields where thieves can hide to ambush those passing by. Sometimes her husband accompanies her, but often she goes alone (interview Rutendo, 27 February 2020). Epiphania, who was translating, later shared that her husband had been attacked and stabbed on that same route (informal conversation Epiphania, 27 February 2020). This highlights that transportation can incur significant risks for vendors, not just financial or time costs. Transportation can be convenient when it takes vendors needs and practices into account, seen in the direct routes from high-density areas to Mbare Musika in the early morning hours when they are needed most. However, when more general routes are used, bus stops can be placed in unsafe spaces or routes can incur more costs by needing to transfer. Since the alternatives, such as the more affordable government buses or personal transport, are out of reach for most vendors, there is a dependence on the transportation provided by the kombi drivers and the terms that they set, affecting how much vendors spend on and the risks taken for transport.

The transportation options available, combined with the rising costs driven by the macro-economic situation of fuel shortages, as described in Chapter 4, were found to greatly impact the vendors in their business. Often this results in having to raise prices and significantly diminished profit-margins. Grace, who has been selling for 13 years at her market stall in a high-density area, reflected on this:

*“Transport is a challenge; costs are put up because of the fuel situation in the country” (interview Grace, 11 March 2020).*

Grace is referring to the fuel shortages in the country that have increased costs for vendors. The lack of alternatives for vendors, makes them extremely susceptible to such price increases. This is confirmed by Mercy and Tadiwa, who both sell out of the same high-density area, who indicated that kombis are raising the prices significantly (interviews, 27 February 2020). Mercy added that there is no ZUPCO bus that goes from where she stays to Mbare, which makes her rely on the more costly kombis who do offer direct transport in the early morning. Hope, who sells on a cardboard mat in the CBD, was the only vendor who said she used the ZUPCO bus, despite the long queues, because it was all she could afford (interview Hope, 7 February 2020). Changing transport costs result in higher costs of operation for the vendors, which some can manage better than others. In Hope’s case, she has to sacrifice her time waiting to get on the more affordable ZUPCO buses. For Rumbidzai, the higher transport costs have contributed to significantly decreased profit margins. Where her business first helped her put her children through school, she is now barely surviving:

*“I used to sell much more, even sugar cane, but I can’t afford that now. Transport has gotten more expensive and we see that reflected in the prices. This, combined*

*with the currency changes [from USD to ZWL], has reduced my profits. Now, I am just living hand to mouth” (interview Rumbidzai, 11 March 2020).*

These examples show that the macro-economic processes in the country, which have resulted in fuel shortages, affect vendors directly, by increasing the costs incurred for transportation, and indirectly, as prices for produce are higher due to increased transport costs earlier on in the supply chain. This results in higher prices for vendors that negatively affect them and their business. There is a dependence on routes and prices offered by kombis that depending on the circumstances can be beneficial or a challenge for vendors in their day to day operations. In response to these constraints, those who are able have managed to find alternatives that better match their transportation needs, which is discussed next.

#### *Private/shared hire*

In addition to kombis, which are restricted to certain routes and specific stops, some vendors have sought out alternatives that match their needs. For example, Stanley, on his trips from the farms, makes use of private trucks that can be hired (interview, 28 January 2020). Other vendors indicated they hire private taxis or group with other vendors to hire a kombi to transport their goods to their vending site (interviews Anesu, Martin, Pauline, and Trevor, 28 January 2020). The benefit of this strategy is summed up by Martin:

*“Kombis charge too much and you still have to carry your stuff from the stop to the site”.*

Using privately or shared hire transport offers the benefit of getting dropped at the vending site, rather than at a bus stop and having to carry the goods, which the use of a public kombi would entail. Additionally, the vendors indicated that prices are more negotiable this way, rather than in public kombis, where charges are more fixed (informal conversation Daniel, 28 January 2020). As these examples show, some vendors have sought out alternatives to avoid the constraints mentioned in the previous section on kombi buses. By seeking out alternatives, they reduce their dependence on these actors and find solutions that better match their needs.

Food vendors need transportation to move their produce from their various sources, whether it is Mbare Musika, the farms, or other places. This makes them dependent on the prices changes and fuel shortages of the socio-economic context, next to the routing and convenience of transport options. As has been described, those who can, seek out alternatives like private hire or make use of convenient direct connections to match their day to day needs.

#### **5.1.3. Other food vendors**

As shown in Chapter 4, the state of the national economy has driven people into street trading (Tawodzera et al., 2018), as formal employment remains scarce. In finding a source of livelihood, people have also turned to informal food vending, which in turn has become an important supplier of food for people. The increasing number of people entering the food vending business is felt in the daily lives of food vendors in the city, where interactions with other vendors are inevitable. Collaborating with other food vendors makes them more resilient to the day to day challenges, while competition, resulting from the significant increase of vendors, negatively affects their profit-margins. The following section illustrates that these interactions between vendors can, therefore, strengthen their position, and simultaneously challenge it.

#### *Collaboration in business operations*

A sense of collaboration or support can be observed in the interactions between food vendors. This collaboration materializes in different ways in the daily business operations of the vendors. This includes

the sharing of responsibilities, such as keeping stalls tidy and secure, of costs, by splitting larger quantities, and of market information, including prices at different markets. These are discussed below and highlight how collaborating relationships help vendors maneuver the constraints they face daily, namely workplace infrastructure and price-setters at markets.

As the vending site infrastructure for most vendors is minimal, goods cannot be safely left behind overnight. The vendors with stall structures often do not have lockers for overnight storage. This is the case for the vendors renting stalls from the city council as for those who do not pay rent. Anesu, who operates from an informal stall in the CBD, indicated that there is no storage by her vending site. The lack of storage would entail that vendors have to either take their goods home with them every night or risk theft. Instead, the vendors who sell in the vicinity have organized that they will take turns watching over the vending area and the goods left there overnight. They alternate in shifts, sharing the burden, in which they sleep by the vending site (interview Anesu, 28 January 2020). In doing so they protect their products from theft. This organized collaboration benefits the vendors as they do not all have to spend every night there to protect their goods nor do they have to transport their goods back and forth to their homes. Security to protect goods is a common source of collaboration. Instead of ensuring the security of their goods themselves, the vendors renting stalls in the city structures hire security to watch over their goods. They do this because there are no lockers or other form of storage available at the site. The costs for this security are, therefore, shared by the spot renters in the area. If the vendors can store goods overnight, they avoid having to risk it being stolen, sell it for much less at the end of the day, or incur extra costs for having to transport it home and back the next day. By sharing the burden of ensuring the security of their goods, the vendors suffer fewer losses in their profit-margin, strengthening them and their business.

As mentioned earlier, the sharing of larger quantities is common at the Mbare Musika and forms another form of collaboration. Grace described this process, though not needing to partake in this anymore due to the size of her business. Vendors who do not have the funds for a wholesale quantity of goods, or cannot sell that amount, can call out and find someone to share with. She explained you can hear, for example, “share 2”, indicating how many people they would like to share with. They share the costs and divide the products fairly. For example, the vendors sharing, rotate in each taking two pieces of produce so that the better and lesser quality goods are divided equally (interview Grace, 11 March 2020). The described working together and sharing of costs is a response to the challenges described in the previous section, concerning the lack of storage space, and the lack of enough money to purchase larger quantities. This is highlighted in the literature as well, where rising prices and sluggish demand result in limited working capital available for vendors, and in turn restricting the amount of stock that can be purchased. It is pointed out that this is especially problematic for those selling perishable goods, who require daily access to working capital to restock, particularly after confiscations by the police (Roever, 2014). Selling perishable goods entails decreases in quality and loss of freshness over time, especially in the workplace conditions of all interviewed vendors, who are exposed to the elements and lack proper storage or refrigeration options. This means vendors cannot buy more than they expect to sell in around a day, without risking losses or extra transport costs. By sharing costs, they are better able to cope with these challenges by allowing them to operate with the working capital they do have and purchase the quantities that match what they can handle.

Zimbabwe’s hyperinflationary environment has caused increasing prices due to fuel shortages and currency devaluations, as described in Chapter 4. In the backdrop of these constantly changing prices, vendors have turned to each other to keep track of the price changes that affect their business decisions. Vendors highlighted that they often share market information with each other. For example, Mrs. Maposa is part of a small group of vendors who communicate via phone, for example sharing if certain

goods are available at Mbare and the cost (interview, 28 January 2020). Farisai, who works in the CBD, uses her vendor contacts who live in Domboshawa to inquire on prices at the market there. This helps her determine if she will go to Mbare or Domboshawa to purchase her goods (interview, 7 February 2020). The vendors interviewed in Crowborough are part of the same savings group, who they share information on prices at the market with. These same vendors also share market information when commuting to Mbare on the 4 AM direct kombi bus. Prices are said to change on a daily basis due to the high levels of inflation. Therefore, the market information shared by vendors, who, for example, visited the market the previous day or live by alternative markets, strengthens the position of the vendors. By staying updated on the changes that occur at the markets, the vendors can make more informed business decisions that benefit their own interests.

### *Collaborating through savings groups*

Access to financial capital was found to be a vital component in the continuation and success of the vending businesses of those interviewed. Capital is initially needed to start up a vending business and, as has been pointed out in the literature, start-up investments are relatively low for this type of business, which has made it a commonly sought out source of livelihood in places like Harare (Companion, 2010; Tawodzera et al., 2018). However, as has been pointed out in the previous section, vendors need continuous access to capital to restock, either after they sell their produce or when it gets confiscated. Engaging in savings groups, or *ma rounds* in Shona, is a common practice amongst most vendors interviewed to ensure access to capital when they need it. The structures of these informal savings schemes differ, but generally involves daily or weekly contributions that are given to a member of the savings group on a rotational basis. When asked what the money received through the savings group is used for, most vendors indicated it is used to pay for living costs, such as school fees, groceries, and rent. These costs are often high in relation to the profit-margins most vendors have, which makes the saved-up money useful for the vendors. Some, like Hope and Farisai, use the money for the business, for example to start up again after goods are confiscated by the police (interviews, 7 February 2020). Mrs. Shumba similarly uses the money from her savings group towards her business in the month of January. Following increased or overspending during the holidays by her customers, demand is low, and she relies on the extra money to restock her produce. This lean month in January, and sometimes stretching to February, is referred to as “January disease”, as also seen in the literature (Tawodzera et al. 2016). In other months, she can put the money towards building her house (interview Mrs. Shumba, 28 January 2020). By having access to these regular, slightly larger amounts of cash, vendors can cope better with fluctuations in profits and incidental costs. This allows them to continue vending, which benefits their livelihoods by providing an income, while also ensuring continued access to food, as will be detailed in Chapter 5.2 on consumers.

A few vendors indicated that they explicitly choose not to participate in savings groups. This is related to how the vendor, and their business, are faring financially. The research interviewed a wide range of vendors, in which different practices in the vendors’ businesses emphasize the fact that the vendors are not a homogenous group. This can, in part, be attributed to differences in how relatively ‘well-off’ the vendors appeared to be, seen, for example, in the participation in savings groups. The savings groups have been shown to be helpful in making ends meet, ensuring continued funds for costs like rent, groceries, and school fees, rather than having to intermittently suspend these payments. Yet, these savings groups are not accessible to those who perhaps need it most, which are the vendors who are barely getting by. As pointed out by Chamlee-Wright (2002) in her research on savings groups in Harare, these vendors are very poor and cannot, with confidence, commit to even the smallest contributions. For example, Rumbidzai, who has been vending for around 25 years in a market located in a high-density area, no longer participates in a savings group. Now, she said she cannot afford it anymore. The current currency changes in the country have diminished her profits, which previously helped her put her

children through school. She has opted out of the savings group, because she does not always have the funds to contribute her share. In describing her current situation, she said she is “living hand to mouth” (interview Rumbidzai, 11 March 2020). Similarly, Nesta, Sarudzai, and Michelle indicated they were also struggling, making any contribution to a savings group impossible (interviews 29 January 2020; 7 February 2020). As mentioned, these vendors would benefit from the support given by the savings groups, as seen in Sarudzai’s wish to partake in them again:

*“I used to be part of a savings group, but because of school fees and the children I can’t contribute anymore. I would like to, I used to use it for food for the family”*  
(interview Sarudzai, 7 February 2020).

In Sarudzai’s case, the cost of caring for nine children, which are not only her own, but also the orphaned children of her brother, has interfered with being able to contribute to a savings group. While previously this same savings group helped her feed her family. The ability to partake in savings groups is evidently indicative of how well a vendor is doing. Counterintuitively, those who are most vulnerable and need it most, are not able to afford the necessary investment (Tawodzera et al., 2019). At the same time, the structure of payment within a savings group can also point to the welfare of a vendor. For example, Grace has been vending for over 10 years and has even started a side business of chicken-rearing, which she funded with the profits from her fruit and vegetable vending business. She also participates in a savings group with three other members, to which she contributes around 15-20% of her profits at the end of the month. When describing the group, she mentioned they want “business-minded people” (interview Grace, 11 March 2020). This type of savings group and vendor profile was identified by Chamlee-Wright (2002), which she described as the more ambitious monthly rounds that only the relatively wealthy vendors could afford. The differences in who is able to benefit from the savings groups demonstrate the diversity between vendors, with some barely surviving, while others are running successful and profitable businesses. Financial capital plays a determining role not only in the start-up phase for vendors, but in the continuation of their vending business. Losses, resulting from external factors like incidental costs, confiscations, and lowered demand, can set vendors back in their operations. Strategies such as collaborating in savings groups make vendors more resilient to, though do not protect them completely from, these shocks.

Savings groups strengthen the position of food vendors by enabling the continuation and success of vending businesses who generally have access to limited capital. Vendors are able to cover incidental costs and shocks, making them more resilient. Without buffers like a savings group, vendors are much more vulnerable to unexpected costs or dips in demand, threatening their livelihoods. This is seen in examples of less well-off vendors, who paradoxically might need these buffers the most, yet cannot bring up the funds to participate. Savings groups are a form of collaboration, in which, similar to the previous section, vendors support and strengthen each other. At the same time, vendors can also impede each other's businesses, as competition, in the strained economic context, grows.

### *Competition and strategies*

While collaboration and mutual benefit between vendors can be observed, it co-exists with increased competition. The lack of formal employment and the backdrop of increasing economic decline in Harare, as described in Chapter 4, has resulted in an observable growth in numbers of those engaging in food vending. The vendors interviewed expressed their concern regarding this development, noticing a significant increase in competition over the years, felt by the increase in the number of vendors selling in their vending area. This competition strains the ability to sell and profits derived from this, especially when consumers are equally impacted by the economic challenges of the city and have less to spend to

necessities like food. With rising costs and a decreasing customer base, competition makes raising prices to cover costs a challenge, as illustrated in this section.

Many vendors commented on how they used to be the only one, or one of a few, selling in their area, whereas now they are surrounded by vendors selling similar goods. This impacts the hours they have to make for similar, or sometimes fewer, profits than they earned previously. For example, Kudzai used to be the only one selling in the vicinity (interview, 6 March 2020). He has been selling bananas from his pushcart in the upper part of town for 6 years. He used to work from 6:30 AM until 3:30 PM, which was generally when his stock would be finished. During the interview, surrounded by four similar pushcart

vendors (see figure 6), he shared that now his working day lasts until 8 or 9 PM as a result of the competition. The competition has cut into his profits, forcing him to work much longer hours to earn the same. It is the same case for Mercy, who sells by her home in a high-density area, where she says the lack of jobs has forced people to begin vending. Combined with the rising costs of produce and transportation, her profits have gone down considerably since she started vending, only 3 years ago (interview Mercy, 27 February 2020). Competition, driven by the lack of employment resulting in a noticeable increase in vendors, impacts vendors and the profits they can make from their business. This competition makes raising prices, to cover increasing costs, even less of an option, as consumers who are already stretched thin will seek cheaper alternatives. Hope, who sells tomatoes and green vegetables in the CBD, illustrated this dilemma. Surrounded by vendors selling similar produce on cardboard mats, she struggles to compete with other vendors. She says these vendors garden themselves and sell their produce for the price they want, instead of reflecting the cost of buying it, as she does (interview Hope, 7 February 2020). As seen, the competition Hope must deal with, makes rising prices impossible, as this would drive consumers to the vendors next to her. The juxtaposition of rising costs and competition, which spreads customers over increasingly more vendors, are the result of macroeconomic processes like inflation, fuel shortages, and the overall strained economy with few job prospects. This competition makes vendors more vulnerable to the challenges brought about by the economic situation, as they struggle to attract enough customers to cover costs and cannot raise costs by much out of fear of losing or deterring customers. In response, vendors employ certain practices to meet consumer needs and attract business. These practices are highlighted in the next section, which discusses vendors' customers and the ways in which they cater to consumer needs.



*Figure 6. Banana pushcart vendors surrounded by competition (author's own, 6 March 2020)*

## 5.2. Consumer

Like any business, vendors rely on patronage by consumers to continue and succeed in selling. In the context of increasing competition from other vendors, combined with increases in prices of goods and consumers having low to no incomes, makes it crucial to understand how vendors are adapting in their interactions with consumers to continue providing access to food. Vendors have developed practices that allow them to cater to consumer needs and attract customers. In doing so, they keep foods affordable, sell at convenient times and locations, and offer a variety to their customers. This section

begins with a brief overview of the types of consumers identified by the vendors, which is spatially dependent, followed by a discussion of these mentioned practices, based on the experiences of the vendors interviewed.

### 5.2.1. Consumer type

The customer base of the food vendors was found to be diverse, highlighting the vendor practices that attempt to cater to this variety of consumers. The diversity of consumers is for a large degree spatially dependent, whereby the location can be associated with certain types of consumers.

This spatially dependent customer base can be seen in both the high-density areas and in the CBD, leading to different customer relationships and opportunities. Those based in the high-density area are mainly frequented by community members who live in the area. It is much quieter in these locations than in the CBD, as there is less activity and foot traffic. Yet, competition in these areas was seen to be increasing in these areas, as a result of the economic decline of the country. As will be discussed in the next section, this makes them less able to raise prices and sell enough quantities for profit.

The CBD, on the other hand, is a hub, with a certain degree of business activity and, more importantly, where the main bus terminals are located. These bus terminals are located throughout the CBD and connect people with the different parts of the city. The routing of most kombi and ZUPCO buses goes through the CBD, where people must transfer to go to other parts of the city. This makes the CBD a bustling place, filled with people commuting to different places. For food vendors operating here, this means that a large portion of customers are passersby, either en route to the next bus connection, or people who work nearby, for example on their way to work or during their lunch breaks. These passersby were commonly cited as customers by the vendors in the CBD. The specific location of some of the vending sites in the CBD can also be linked to certain consumer types. For example, those located by the bus terminals in the CBD, see the patronage of commuters and kombi (bus) drivers. One notable consumer type linked to vending site location, was identified by Farisai, who is an unlicensed vendor operating nearby the city council building. She indicated that the police and city council members frequently buy from her. They “even ask for a favor, like give me a tomato” (interview Farisai, 2 February 2020), or to buy a good on credit. Her vending location not only determines the types of consumers she gets but leads to the building of strategic relationships. It, however, also subjects her to constant harassment by the city, as often as twice a day, due to her proximity to their building. These two are further discussed in the next section on interactions with government actors but point to implications spatiality has on vendors. In Farisai’s case, the location of her vending site allows her to build a relationship with consumers who at a later stage come to harass her, which she hopes to use to her benefit. However, it also places her near these same actors, making her more vulnerable.

The location of vending sites can therefore be beneficial, providing a host of passersby customers and even strategic relationships. It also limits vendors in terms of raising prices, increased competition, and increased harassment from police. This highlights the impacts of spatiality on vendors in terms of obtaining customers and profits, resulting in vendors employing different practices to meet the needs of and attract these diverse consumers.

### 5.2.2. Catering to consumer needs

The food vendors employ various strategies that allow them to meet and be more responsive to the needs of their diverse set of customers. These practices allow them to attract these consumers to ensure their own livelihoods, while at the same time ensuring continued access to foods. Their business operations are used to highlight these practices, including pricing and providing credit, location and operating hours, and offering variety and smaller quantities.

### *Affordability and credit*

The prices vendors set take consumer needs into account, even as prices steadily rise for the vendors, both at the source as in their costs. The currency crisis in the country, with high rates of inflation and a currency that few have faith in, results in daily price increases at the market. In addition, transport costs, that have risen due to the fuel situation in the country, are reflected in the prices that vendors pay at the market, and subsequently in the prices they sell for. Yet, Grace and Tonderai, who work in the high-density neighborhoods, explained that directly raising prices for the products they sell is not a feasible option. Many of their customers would simply not be able to afford this. Instead, they reduce the quantities given at the same price, this way they still get something (interviews Grace and Tonderai, 11 March 2020). Here, the vendors are aware of the needs of their customers, who are financially constrained. They respond to price increases in a way that ensures that they can continue to sell something and cover costs, whilst their customers are not completely denied access to food as they can at least purchase some food, rather than none. Another vendor in a high-density area, uses pricing to meet consumer needs and ensure sales for herself. Rutendo checks the prices at the supermarket located nearby, so that she can put a slightly lower price on the goods she sells. This allows her to remain attractive to consumers with less to spend, whilst giving her a competitive edge. Both examples highlight how pricing is used to remain responsive to consumer needs in times of economic distress with rising prices and inflation rates.

Besides keeping prices within the means of consumers, some vendors sell goods on credit when customers cannot afford to pay at that moment. Those who give credit often do this for regulars only, to ensure they are paid back. Rutendo says that she mostly sells on credit in the months of January and February because of January disease (interview, 20 February 2020). This a commonly used term to refer to the lean months for most Zimbabweans following the holidays, where overspending has caused shortages in the month(s) that follows. The lack of spending power in this period affects vendors greatly. Savings schemes, discussed in 5.1.3., help vendors cope in these months, as seen in Mrs. Shumba's case who uses the money received from her savings group to support her business and restock. Providing credit and using profits from other months or the money from savings groups to do so, helps vendors stay in business, whilst supporting their customers who would otherwise not be able to buy anything to eat. As discussed in the literature, incomes of urban residents can be inconsistent which makes the option of buying credit suited to meeting their needs. The use of credit, next to affordable pricing, are practices vendors employ to ensure continued sales, even when customers are financially constrained. This supports their own livelihoods because they can make at least some sales, while at the same time ensuring access to food.

### *Hours of operation and location*

In addition to practices that appeal to consumers' financial situations and spending needs, other operational practices, namely vending location and opening hours, were identified in the research. Most vendors indicated they worked a significant number of hours for their vending business. The day for many starts around 4 AM and goes until around 8 PM. This includes the early morning trips to Mbare or other markets for the sourcing of food, allowing them to start around 6 or 7 AM at their vending site. As pointed out in the literature, this allows them to cater to the needs of urban consumers' lived realities, where time is limited due to work and commuting hours. Vendors' operating hours makes them available at times when consumers are free to purchase food.

In terms of choosing vending locations, the vendors indicated this was mainly dependent on where consumers are. For example, areas with high foot traffic are commonly sought out. This has driven some vendors to the CBD, where, as mentioned, there is much activity. Others, located in the high-density areas, can be found by central, convenient places. These vendors locate in front of supermarkets, the



*Figure 7. Food vendors selling a variety of goods from outside their homes (author's own, 27 February 2020)*

local bar, or by busy intersections where people frequently pass by on their way to, for example, their homes, schools, work or bus stop. In the high-density areas, for example Crowborough, vendors were also selling from stalls adjacent to their homes (see figure 7). In the vending group interviewed, this was exclusively done by women and it was found to be convenient for doing household tasks whilst vending. Vending businesses operating from homes was found, in other research, to be a common practice in Zimbabwe, providing convenience to consumers who do not have to travel too far to access food (Chigumira et al., 2018). This highlights how vending in the high-density areas can meet the needs of these lower income and food insecure consumers who can be found to reside there. Overall, the food vendors interviewed in this research are operating at times and locations that respond to the lived realities of consumers, which benefits the vendors through improved selling opportunities and the consumers whose access to food is improved.

### *Diversification*

Besides price-related and spatial practices, vendors appeal to consumers through diversification of goods being sold. This relates both to the offering of a variety within the fruits and vegetable food group and outside this food group, with non-perishable staples, processed snacks, and dried foods. This practice serves multiple purposes that benefit the vendors and the consumers. Offering a variety was said to allow vendors to appeal to different consumers, who may need different products and prefer buying it in one spot, rather than shopping around (interview Sarudzai, 2 February 2020). The degree of diversification was also found to be indicative of the relative success of vendors. Buying different goods requires more capital and demand to buy worthwhile quantities of each at the market. This means that the relatively 'better off' vendors, seen in characteristics like being able to afford costs like school fees, support their families, and expand their business, are the ones also selling a much wider variety. This was not systematically measured in this research, for example by measuring profits, costs, or capital, but an overall trend that was observed by the researcher in the vendors' experiences. The aspirations of vendors

to grow their business was commonly present and often included having more capital to diversify and offer more goods.

### *Bulk-breaking*

The literature on food vending discusses the practice of breaking bulk as beneficial for consumers whose incomes are low and inconsistent. This results in more day to day purchases, depending on what was earned on a given day. In response, vendors who generally buy in slightly larger quantities, sell in smaller, more affordable units. Though the literature does not specify which product types this mostly pertain to, the research observed that this practice was particularly evident in the repackaging of non-perishable staples, such as cooking oil, rice, mealie meal, sugar, and salt. As seen in figure 8, large cooking oil bottles or bags of rice and mealie meal, are repackaged into small (daily) portions. Though these products fall out of the scope of this research, it highlights how vendors' practices meet the needs of specifically the lower income and food insecure consumers, who might be living from day to day earnings.

As seen in this section on vendors meeting consumer needs, the practices that vendors employ in their business operations contribute to making food accessible to those whose lived realities, as discussed in Chapter 2, hinder their food access. These practices allow vendors to secure their own livelihoods as they enable consumers to buy from them. It also benefits consumers because they are given more options that meet their needs, which can differ daily, and their access to food is less interrupted as a result of these differing needs.

The vendors' interactions with their customers highlight how the practices employed in their vending businesses are adept in meeting consumer needs and improving access to food, in particular to those that have low and erratic incomes and are food insecure. They benefit from these practices as it contributes to the viability of their livelihoods through customer attainment. In doing so, they can address the food



*Figure 8. Breaking bulk of non-perishables, including cooking oil, rice, mealie meal, sugar, salt (author's own, 29 January 2020)*

security challenges of urban life, especially in the context faced in Zimbabwe of price increases and competition, as more vendors enter the sector to survive.

### 5.3. Governance actors

Besides the interactions with the food provisioning actors and consumers that have been discussed, governance actors play an important role in the daily operations of food vendors. The relationship between these actors and vendors has been highlighted in 2.2.2 on policy responses to vendors, detailing the hostile environment in which vendors often must operate in. In the context of Harare, these governance actors were referred to as the city councils<sup>12</sup> and police by the vendors. At times they were referred to interchangeably and point out that many of the concerns expressed by the vendors are more general sentiments towards the governance of food vending that they experience. This means that the perspectives in this section are reflections of how vendors experience and interact with governance actors operating in the city, rather than claiming to be an accurate representation of the formal governance structures, laws, and policies that may exist on paper. Instead, this section highlights how, on the ground, the relationship between the vendors and governance actors is strained and oftentimes hinders the vendors in their operations. First, the attempts at regulation by these governance actors that are felt by the vendors are discussed, including licensing, rental of vending stalls, and the, often punitive, responses to ‘informality’. Then, this section delves into the strategies employed by vendors to navigate these interactions and limit any losses and negative consequences that they may incur.

#### 5.3.1. Regulation

The city and the police interact with food vendors through regulatory practices, which impact how vendors conduct their business and their ability to provide food through this business. Extra costs are often incurred as a result of these interactions with police, cutting into the incomes and assets of the vendors. These practices, as expressed in the interviews with the vendors, can be categorized in three overarching attempts at regulation. These are the licensing of certain types of vendors, the rentals of vending spots in city-run structures, and the actions or raids against vendors in response to ‘informality’. These are discussed in the following sections, and highlight how, overall, the regulatory practices range from tolerance, which is paired with neglect, to low-level harassment, including confiscations and fines.

##### *Licensing*

When asked about licensing, most vendors interviewed indicated that they do not have any license. For them, obtaining such a license is expensive and difficult. A lack of licensing makes vendors vulnerable to more punitive regulatory action. As a result, some have taken advantage of alternatives, namely the renting of stalls in city structures, where they are tolerated but not per definition licensed. These are discussed in the next sections. One license that was identified by vendors, either by having it or aspiring to have it, is the hawker’s license, described in Chapter 4. This license and the experiences with it are discussed in this section.

The ‘hawker’s license’ allows vendors to sell certain goods in a designated area, which can, to a certain extent, provide protection from police harassment and fines. Two vendors, both males who sell from a pushcart, indicated having the hawker’s license. One of them, Kudzai, sells bananas from his pushcart. He has had his hawker’s license for a year (see figure 9), before that he had been vending without for 5

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<sup>12</sup> City councils are not the same, these differ per area. However, they were referred to as such in interviews and are analyzed collectively to represent general sentiments and experiences, not specific policy and administrative boundaries.

years. He indicated that it cost him 61 USD in 2019 (interview Kudzai, 6 March 2020). This was before the currency that is accepted by the government changed from USD to ZWL, therefore he was unsure how much it would cost him when renewing this year in ZWL. Having experienced selling both with and without a license, he claimed it was worthwhile to have the license, as it meant far less arrests and confiscations. Though he also admitted the license does not fully protect him from getting caught up in police operations, which are discussed in the section on government responses to ‘informality’. Getting caught up in these operations is, in part, the result of operating outside the terms of his license, namely in the CBD which is outside the zone that his license covers. Kudzai said he goes there, despite violating the terms of his license, because there are more customers there, meaning he can sell more of his stock and increase profits. The conscious decision to violate the license terms, points to a mismatch between the needs of the vendor, in terms of operating where customers are, and the city’s aspirations of a ‘modern’ and ‘clean’ city (Njaya, 2014a; Potts, 2006; Rogerson, 2016), which includes a CBD clear of vendors. As a result, though useful in limiting the number of clashes with police, the hawker’s license does not tackle the ideologies at the root of the strained relationship between vendors and police. It fails to understand and meet the needs of vendors, who would benefit from it being affordable, easy to attain, and to allow for the operation in high foot traffic areas where customers are.



Figure 9. Hawker’s license for pushcart vendor, identifying information redacted (author’s own, 6 March 2020)

In addition to limiting where vendors operate, ambiguities in the terms of the license expose license-holders to continued instances of harassment and costs. As Kudzai explained, he can still have run-ins with the police in their operations because his license restricts him from being stationary. According to Kudzai, this means he is vulnerable whenever he is not moving (interview, 6 March 2020). In that case, there is room for arrest or the confiscation of his goods, which includes the bananas and the pushcart he rents. Technically, the bylaws state that he cannot be stationary for longer than 15 minutes. However, Kudzai did not emphasize this detail, which could indicate that he is either unaware of his rights or that, in practice, this does not matter during enforcement. Such ambiguities in regulation perpetuate vulnerabilities of vendors, as they can still be subject to fines and confiscations, which licenses should protect them from. As pointed out by Roever and Skinner (2016), complex licensing regimes are said to create openings for street-level bureaucrats to extract side payments. In Kudzai’s case, this means paying bribes or fines to recover confiscated goods. Rogerson (2016) in his analysis of responses to informality in Harare, reiterates this, stating that this ‘move-on’ clause in the Hawker’s bylaws, which restricts stationary time, creates opportunities for harassment and prosecution of traders. As a result, regulatory ambiguities can limit the extent to which licenses facilitate vendors’ operations, whereby high costs still form a part of the everyday challenges they face.

Licensing, when it can be afforded and obtained, brings with it the benefit of fewer losses as a result of police operations. However, as seen, the terms of the license control the location of selling and restrict vendors from operating in the CBD, where most customers are, and restricts time spent stationary. The contradictions between the vendors’ needs and the city policies, combined with a lack of transparency

in bylaw enforcement, opens vendors up to continued harassment and vulnerability, harming vendors' incomes, assets, and time.

### *Rental of vending stalls*

Besides licensing, regulation can be seen in the collection of rent by the city council for vending spots in certain market structures. This was found in both the CBD, for example by some of the bus terminals, and in the high-density areas. By paying the monthly rent, the vendors secure a section of the market to sell at and are generally left alone by the police and council. The vendors renting these spaces indicated paying 40 ZWL (at the time of the research, around USD 1.25 equivalent) for their spot. The rent also covers the use of facilities available at the market. However, this section will show that toleration by the city, through the rental of vending stalls, does not translate to the meeting of vendors' needs seen in the neglected stall infrastructure. It will also become apparent that toleration, does not equate to acceptance or permission, and therefore does not translate to continued protection from police harassment.

Though the rent paid by the vendors operating in city structures provides access to the stall facilities, what is available at the different markets varies greatly. These differences point to the overall neglect of vendors' needs by the city, often resulting in extra incurred costs to successfully operate and minimize losses. Grace, in one of the high-density areas, said she has access to running water, toilets, and lockers. Overall, she was pleased with these facilities. Having to buy her own light to be able to operate in the nighttime hours did not bother her (interview Grace, 11 March 2020). Another vendor operating in a high-density area, indicated that the local city council had moved her, along with the other vendors, to the nearby location in Figure 10, where shedding, toilet, bathing, and housing facilities are available (interview Rumbidzai, 11 March 2020). Though basic, it is tailored to provide the vendors at this specific market what they need to operate comfortably. This is particularly seen in the housing sheds that have been placed for the market women who farm in the rural areas and come to this market to sell. These two examples of vendors' needs being met in market structures were, however, not the norm, leaving



*Figure 10. Market in high-density area with facilities, including shed, toilet, and bathing area. Also housing shacks for farmers who come from rural area to sell (author's own, 11 March 2020)*

many interviewed vendors with wishes for improvements in the facilities offered in structures they rent. A commonly missed facility were lockers, which often were not part of the market infrastructure, resulting in extra costs for vendors. To cope and avoid losses of goods, security is hired collectively by vendors in a market area, as discussed in 5.1.3 on vendor collaboration. This is the case by Grace and Rumbidzai's market, but also for all the other vendors who rent stalls. For example, Pauline, a vendor at a market in the CBD, participates in the shared security costs since there are no sheds or lockers to use. She, however, had negative experiences in the past with this security system, whereby her goods were stolen, so she opts for the rental of lockers nearby (interview Pauline, 28 January 2020). She therefore incurs double the costs for securing her goods, in addition to the time and effort spent transporting her goods to the lockers she uses. In terms of other facilities, in contrast to Grace and Rumbidzai's stalls, Pauline has no water available by her stall. Her market stall is across from the police station in the CBD. So, she goes to collect it at the police station instead, saying, that "they should provide it at the stall if they do not want me to collect it there" (interview Pauline, 28 January 2020). The sentiment to have more facilities was commonly voiced, with wishes for proper shedding, water, and a locker. Basic necessities are not available at most markets, especially at those in the CBD, which inconveniences vendors by forcing them to find alternatives at the expense of their time and incomes. The negligence of vendors is highlighted in the failure to meet vendors' needs in terms of simple facilities. Though tolerated, these vendors are still subject to policy environments that disadvantage them and their ability to provide food.

The vendors in the previous example, as opposed to others interviewed, are paying some form of rent to the city. This legitimizes them more than those who do not and appears to protect them against police actions. Though the regulatory status of these vendors was not clear, some claimed to be licensed. For example, Grace explained the process she underwent, including vetting at the police station and the local city council taking her fingerprint. She said it took a week and was not too expensive (interview Grace, 11 March 2020). This experience indicates a more formal licensing process in the locality where Grace operates, which was not apparent in the case of the other vendors in similar rented structures in other areas. These inconsistencies introduce an overall trend within the research, grounded in critical notes found in the literature on informality, concerning the overarching question of what constitutes informality. As will be further discussed at the end of this section, a clear distinction was not always apparent in the research. Licensing, as highlighted previously, and the renting of stalls, does not in all cases appear to translate to formality or recognition. The example of Grace, with her apparent formal licensing process, which differs with the experiences of vendors in other rented out markets with no mention of a license, raises the question of what this means in terms of vendor status and legitimacy. Does the incurring of rent translate to acceptance and recognition of vendors by the city? The answer to this question is not clear-cut, as illustrated in the following examples.

Sitting by her market stall by a bus terminal in the CBD, Anesu reflected on her insecure status as a vendor. She indicated that she used to pay 2 USD per day to the council for her vending spot. However, this changed when suddenly her goods, and the goods of other vendors around, started getting confiscated. As a result, they stopped paying, since there was no reason to continue. Now, police harassment is part of everyday life for Anesu, with police coming twice a week to confiscate her things. She does not resist this and lets it happen, out of fear of getting jailed (interview Anesu, 28 January 2020). This demonstrates that the tolerance of vendors, in which legitimacy is perceived through rental payments, can change from one day to the next and is therefore temporary. The inconsistencies of rental payments and legitimacy are seen in the case of two vendors in one of the high-density areas. Both Jameson and Patience pay 40 ZWL for their stall to the local city council (interviews Patience, Jameson, 27 February 2020). They are neighbors, selling at the same market located outside a shopping center, with one other stall in between them. Yet, only Jameson indicated that the police come to confiscate his

produce unless he bribes them, which he does (interview Jameson, 27 February 2020). It appears that paying rent to the council does not, however, protect everyone from harassment. This limits the legitimacy obtained through such arrangements between the city council and vendors, a reality that is perpetuated in similarly planned arrangements as seen in the next example.

In seeking to regulate food vending, the local city council of one of the high-density areas has promised that a formal market structure will be built, though ambiguities in the project highlight the same vendor vulnerabilities demonstrated in the previous section. Financial contributions are already being collected by the city, to fund the construction of the market, though no clarity exists surrounding the completion date or other expectations. Some vendors selling out of their homes and from market stalls in this high-density area have been made aware of the project. They are contributing monthly to its development, with around 40 ZWL since 2019. Patience indicated that this puts her on a waiting list, though she has not received any communication on a completion date or further details (interview, 27 February 2020). Similarly, Rutendo, who sells from a stall attached to her home, is also contributing, though she is not as interested in the promised stalls. Selling close to her home is beneficial to her, as she can sell while doing her household chores. Her vulnerable status becomes apparent when she gives her motivation to contribute to the stall anyway:

*“I pay so that I can continue doing my work and that the city leaves me alone. Perhaps I will rent out the stall I get to someone else and continue selling by my home” (interview Rutendo, 27 February 2020).*

This suggests that she is under the impression that if she does not pay, she will not be able to continue vending or be harassed by the city. By renting out the stall she expects to eventually get, she hopes to earn some extra money and continue selling where it is convenient for her situation. Contrastingly, Tadiwa, who sells down the street from Rutendo, is not aware of the project nor contributing any money to the city council. When asked about the project, she expressed her skepticism:

*“I will wait and see. I have seen such promises in the past and they haven’t delivered” (interview Tadiwa, 27 February 2020).*

The different perceptions of and experiences with the city council in the area where Tadiwa and Rutendo live and work, highlight the inconsistencies that make vendors vulnerable, and force some to incur unnecessary extra costs. Rogerson (2016), when analyzing the responses to street trading in Harare, coins the term “repressive tolerance” to refer to the situation where authorities, temporarily, do not take action against actors in the informal economy, while at the same time perpetuating a hostile environment of threats, condemnations, and the imposition of tough conditions. This sets the stage for future repression, while promoting a sense of formalization to extract revenues from informal actors, such as vendors. Roever and Skinner (2016) add on that hostile legislation and inadequate licensing systems, such as those described in this section, create an environment where predatory actors, such as city officials, can extract rents from vendors who have no legal standing. The examples given in this section fit the narratives in the literature which describe the repressive tolerance, whereby a type of formalization occurs through the rental of market stalls without the guarantee of acceptance and legitimacy, and the predatory environment that have been observed in other research. Equally, inadequate stall infrastructure and facilities are indicative of neglect and perpetuate tough working conditions.

The uneven relationship between vendors and the city has been illustrated in the examples in this section. In some cases, this is expressed in the mismatch between regulatory attempts and vendor needs. In more extreme cases, this relationship is reflected in vulnerability resulting from inconsistent approaches to

legitimizing vendors' operations. Repressive tolerance subjects all vendors, in varying degrees, to governance responses to informality. Hereby authorities act within the hostile environment created, as seen in the next section, impacting vendors practices and hindering their ability to provide food.

#### *Governance response to 'illegality'*

As described in Chapter 4, Zimbabwe, and specifically Harare, has had a historically tumultuous relationship with the 'informal' economy more generally, and with street vendors specifically. The vendors' experiences shared in the interviews reflect the continuation of this uneasy relationship. The confiscation of goods, the paying of fines, and, at times, arrests, are part of the responses of authorities to vending, which are discussed in this section. The responses of authorities to vending are often daily occurrences for vendors, significantly impacting them through losses in income, assets and time. These impacts are also apparent in the next section, which discusses the strategies applied by vendors to avoid the police. This is because the strategies undertaken highlight the extra burden the dealings with the authorities bring and the losses incurred by vendors as a result. However, this section sets the stage by illustrating how the vendors experience the authority responses and, subsequently, by placing these illustrations in the wider discussion on the informal-formal distinction.

The frequency, legitimacy, and severity of governance responses to vendors were found to vary, all of which affecting vendors' operations. The frequency of these clashes with authorities was found to be dependent on the vendors' locations. In the CBD, actions can occur as often as four times a day, such as in Hope and Sarudzai's experience (interviews, 7 February 2020). In other cases, once a week or less frequently. In terms of legitimacy, it was common for some vendors in the CBD, the Avenues, and Budiriro to express the experience of having to deal with, what they called, sanctioned and unsanctioned police actions. Farisai said that, generally, police come in uniform in police trucks or in civilian clothing on foot. She believes that the former is sanctioned and the latter unsanctioned (interview Farisai, 7 February 2020). This results in differing demands that the vendors adhere to. For example, Sarudzai, operating in the CBD, explained that when sanctioned, she must pay 100 ZWL (around USD 3) and her goods remain confiscated. When unsanctioned, she pays a 30 to 40 ZWL bribe (around USD 1) instead and she gets her stuff back (interview Sarudzai, 7 February 2020). Similarly, Tafadzwa, a pushcart vendor, explained that in his case, when the police come in a truck, he pays a 10 USD fine, while on foot this is only 30 ZWL (around USD 1). These three accounts of police actions point to the aforementioned inconsistencies, which only serve to make vendors more vulnerable. Vast differences between fines, during sanctioned operations, and the bribes, in unsanctioned actions, emphasize how the hostile environment, perpetuated by repressive tolerance, opens vendors up to harassment. As Matamanda et al. (2019) point out, police forces use their power to take advantage of vulnerable, desperate vendors by taking bribes. It also points to the more systemic problem of local officials in many African cities, whose low salaries make them continually susceptible to bribery, reinforcing corrupt practices (Skinner, 2018). In reflecting on the actions of the authorities that affect her business, Charlotte stated:

*“The police are hungry, they need it [what they confiscate] for themselves”  
(interview Charlotte, 29 January 2020).*

Whilst being impacted by the consistent confiscation of her goods, Charlotte realized that these police actions are, in part, driven by their own set of challenges. The economic situation in Zimbabwe, especially the currency challenges which have seen a shift from USD to ZWL, have severely impacted government salaries. These have lost their value, since the switch assumed a 1 USD to 1 ZWL rate, which in practice is not the case, with the ZWL losing value daily, as has been discussed in Chapter 4. These contextual realities drive the authorities to seek out bribes, while the vendors' vulnerability places

them in a position to be subject to these actions, as a result from the hostile environment created by repressive tolerance. As pointed out by Roever and Skinner (2016), the everyday challenges, such as the frequent operations that result in confiscations, fines, and bribes, significantly affect vendors. Occurrences go beyond the well-documented and known large-scale evictions, such as Operation Murambatsvina.

The inconsistencies discussed in this section on regulation by government authorities all point to the overall trend within the research, grounded in critical notes found in the literature on informality, concerning the overarching question of what constitutes informality. As mentioned earlier, the ‘formal and informal’ distinction has been criticized in the literature for failing to capture the economic contribution of what is commonly classified as informal and suggesting that it is a sector that needs to be ‘corrected’ through formalization. Seen in the sections on suppliers and consumers, there are many interlinkages that make a clear-cut distinction impossible. The controversy of making this distinction is also pertinent in governance responses to vending. The experiences with regulation expressed by the vendors highlight that there are no “formal” vendors and “informal” vendors, who each have their distinct set of challenges. Those initially thought to be thought of as formal because they are licensed or rent stalls from the city, experience similar uncertain and vulnerable statuses as the vendors who operate without such regulatory connections. Rather, they are better viewed on a spectrum where certain vendors can be considered more formal and others more informal. This matches the fluid, uncertain and divided regulatory environment surrounding street trading, which is a “complex mix of persecution, tolerance, regulation and promotion<sup>13</sup>” (Rogerson, 2016, p. 232). As highlighted in this section, the implications of this informal-formal spectrum are that vendors are subject to repressive actions and continued vulnerabilities.

### 5.3.2. ‘Survival’ strategies

In response to the actions taken by the city and police against the vendors, a variety of strategies are applied by the vendors to minimize losses and continue vending. The strategies discussed in this section are used by the more informal vendors operating on the streets in the CBD, as these are the most visible, criminalized, and targeted group within the wider food vending group discussed in this research. These vendors can be put on the far end of the spectrum of informality and are subject to the more obvious and identifiable form of harassment, namely that of persecution. For the purpose of clarity, this section will refer to these vendors as ‘street vendors’<sup>14</sup>, as the vendors operating from the market structures do not need to utilize these strategies. The everyday challenges of harassment, and the strategies employed by vendors, impact their earnings, assets, and time. The discussion of these strategies and their impacts is divided into the choices made by vendors in their business operations and in their strategic building and use of relations with government actors.

#### *Business operation*

To avoid confrontations with the authorities, street vendors have strategized in their business operations. This relates to the hours worked, displaying of goods, and the overall running away by the street vendors. These are discussed briefly here to highlight how the hostile policy environments hinder vendors significantly in their day to day operations. Overarchingly, these strategies can be described as ‘hide and seek’ (Rogerson, 2016). Since the city officials are only present during working hours, street vending activities in the CBD increases towards the end of the day. Generally, after 4 or 5 PM, this increased

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<sup>13</sup> Promotion, according to Rogerson (2016), relates to the moving of traders to off-street public or private markets and formalization as a means to extract revenue flows from vendors.

<sup>14</sup> However, as is the case throughout this research paper, this term only refers to food vendors, not all street vendors.

activity can be observed, which the street vendors confirmed in the interviews. The chances of trouble decrease after these hours, which allows vendors to more freely operate. This links to the second strategy of ‘hide and seek’, whereby during the day, smaller amounts of the street vendors products are displayed. This allows them to pack up their goods quickly when officials are spotted and to minimize losses when confiscations occur. Farisai, one of the street vendors operating just outside the city council building, employs these strategies as she has to deal with raids as often as twice a day. She stores the rest of her stock by nearby shops, where she has informal arrangements with employees who hide her products in alleys or storage areas by these shops (interview 7 February 2020). At the end of the day, when less to no raids occur, she collects this stock and displays it more openly than the few small piles of tomatoes and green vegetables she had lying on the cardboard mat of her vending site during the interview. Trevor, who sells fruits in another part of the CBD, does the same with his stock, storing it by a nearby store. He has positioned his vending site strategically on a street corner, where he can spot officials coming from all directions, allowing him to get away on time with his goods (interview, 28 January 2020). The examples given by both street vendors are indicative of work arounds that street vendors have found to continue selling, despite the everyday challenges of confiscations, fines, and bribes. In playing ‘hide and seek’ with the officials they have found ways to make running away easier and to limit losses when their stuff is still confiscated.

In coping with the daily harassment that result from the vulnerability created by hostile policy environments, street vendors make use of the time outside of officials’ working hours to sell more freely. This allows them to take greater advantage of the busy activity in the CBD, especially around rush hour. Though these strategies also translate to extra costs for vendors, who must make arrangements with others for storage, make longer hours to take advantage of harassment-free selling hours, and lose time when running away from the authorities. Despite these extra costs, it allows them to continue the livelihoods they rely on and continue providing access to affordable food.

#### *‘Friendships’ & contacts with officials*

Besides the ‘hide and seek’ strategies that are applied, the street vendors make use of relationships built with city officials to avoid losses. This ranges from direct interactions with authorities when harassments occur, most commonly bribing where this is possible, to getting tipped off by authorities about planned raids. As shown in the example in 5.2. on consumers, Farisai invests in good relations with the council and police, who ask her for favors such as free products or products on credit. She shared that she grants these favors, in hopes that when they come to raid, these same officials might “give her a pass or heads up” (interview Farisai, 7 February 2020). The desire Farisai has to get tipped off by officials through the building of relationships is not unrealistic, as other vendors indicated to make use of similarly built relations, for example with friends or family working for the city council (interview Anesu, 28 January, 2020) or with officials through bribing arrangements (interviews Trevor, Martin, 28 January 2020). These street vendors all invest in a type of social capital to avoid losses from harassment by authorities. They build this social capital by developing relationships with actors who can help them incidentally or structurally. Such strategic relations allow vendors to avoid the hide and seek strategies entirely, or to at least limit the losses when their hide and seek options fail and confiscations are feared. Similar to the hide and seek survival strategies, street vendors incur extra costs to develop this social capital, which is preferable to the costs of losses resulting from applying no strategies.

This entire section on the relationship vendors have with governance actors has illustrated that vendors do not have a secure position in the spaces in which they operate. The hostile policy environment that was detailed in Chapter 2 on policy responses to informality can be found in the case of Harare. The sentiments and experiences expressed concerning interactions with the authorities have highlighted that the traditional dualistic terminology of the formal and informal cannot be applied to food vending in

Harare. Instead a spectrum of informality is suggested to more accurately portray the challenges faced by vendors and the insecure position they find themselves in. Even the vendors who could be considered formal because they have licenses or engage in stall rental schemes with city officials, experience different levels of vulnerabilities that are perpetuated by the hostile policy environment that exists. These vendors are subject to what Rogerson (2016) terms repressive tolerance, whereby their presence is not accepted or desired, but tolerated for as long as is convenient. Further along the spectrum are the vendors who are more obviously vulnerable, as they lack all forms of status with no licensing or stall renting schemes. These are termed ‘street vendors’ in the preceding discussion, for ease of clarity, and are subject to more punitive exclusionary practices, than the more ‘regulated’ vendors. The experiences of vendors across the spectrum highlight how the relationship between the vendors and governance actors in Harare is strained and significantly impacts their vending operations. Though the governance practices that the vendors are subject to may differ in terms of frequency or severity, they all force vendors to incur extra costs. These costs result from the practices themselves, which involve fines, bribes and losses through confiscations, and from the strategies that vendors employ to avoid these interactions with authorities entirely. The governance responses that vendors are subject to, and the costs that result from this, hinders them in their operations of providing access to food.

#### 5.4. Personal relations

This section briefly touches on the impacts the vendors’ practices have in the personal sphere. Though outside the scope of the research in terms of food provisioning, it is important to highlight the livelihood impacts vending businesses have. As highlighted in Chapter 4, the state of the economy in Zimbabwe, throughout the years, has resulted in high unemployment rates and a surge in the ‘informal’ economy. Many people have turned to vending to survive and make a livelihood. The vendors interviewed shared that vending has helped them cope with these contextual challenges, allowing them to support their families to differing extents.

Most vendors indicated that they started vending either after losing a former job (interviews Martin, Stanley, 28 January 2020), to supplement their husband’s income or lost income (interviews Sarudzai, Mrs. Shumba, Mrs. Maposa, Anesu, 28 January 2020; interview Nesta, 7 February 2020), or because there were few alternatives for their skill set and level of experience (interview Rumbidzai, 11 March 2020). Some even indicated that vending was more lucrative than their formal sector job, which is why they left these jobs (interview Kudzai, 6 March 2020; interview Grace, 11 March 2020). Despite the challenges that have been discussed in the research findings and initial reasons to begin vending, most vendors enjoy their business and would like to continue with it. This was seen in the aspirations to grow that were expressed, for example, in the desire to have more capital to invest in expanding their business and allowing them to sell more products. It could also be seen in the pride that the vendors had in describing their business and what it has meant for their livelihoods. Many expressed how their business helps put and keep their children in school. The desire to grow and the importance vending has been for her family, is expressed by Rutendo, who has been vending from her home in a high-density area since 2007:

*“I’d like to renovate my shed and sell more products if I had the capital. I enjoy vending, it has allowed me to put my daughter through school and continue to Form 6<sup>15</sup>, even when my husband didn’t have the funds. I plan to keep vending, as I want to send my other child to university” (interview Rutendo, 27 March 2020).*

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<sup>15</sup> Form 6 falls under the final level in upper secondary school education (also known as A-Level) in the education system in Zimbabwe.

Rutendo's story highlights how vending has given her not only a source of income, but a future for her children. This pride in their business is also expressed by Tonderai and Grace, both vendors in high-density areas who are appeared relatively better off than other vendors interviewed, as seen in the following quotes:

*“My last born is now in Form 4<sup>16</sup> because of my onions” (interview Tonderai, 11 March 2020).*

*“My children can go to school and eat what they want. I can support myself and I am more independent. Sometimes my husband does not get paid and I am able to cover household costs” (interview Grace, 11 March 2020).*

These examples show that although vending may be commonly associated with survival, it has the potential for more. Tonderai and Rutendo have put their children through most of secondary education, with Rutendo thinking about university for her children. Grace has achieved independence and supports her family even in times when her husband cannot. These vendors have been able to invest in their business and in their families because of their vending businesses. These experiences were present amongst the different types of vendors, such as Grace who has a licensed stall and Rutendo who sells more informally from her home. A more systematic analysis of the successes of vendors, and the relation to the position occupied on the spectrum of informality and other influential factors, is needed to understand how vending contributes to livelihoods beyond survival. However, this brief illustration of the benefits of vending, despite contextual challenges, highlights the potential of enabling policies directed at vendors. This goes beyond promoting food security for urban residents, as has been argued in the earlier sections, but can promote the viable source of livelihood that vending can be.

## 6. Conclusion

Zimbabwe has been plagued with economic malaise that has severely affected its people and their livelihoods. Soaring prices, currency devaluations, unemployment, and shortages of food, fuel and electricity have characterized most of the last two decades for Zimbabweans. Food security is one of the areas that has suffered as a result of these challenges, with, most recently, urgent warnings being voiced over the man-made starvation that is being faced in the country. This food insecurity is being felt by citizens in both rural and urban areas. The lived realities of urban residents, in the context of these economic challenges, has jeopardized the food security of these residents. This is seen in the most recent estimates that 2.2 million people in urban areas are facing food insecurity, highlighting that food security is not only a rural issue. At the height of the economic crisis in 2008, 96 % of low-income urban households in Harare were food insecure. The challenges of urban life, especially in the troubled context of the country, hinder food access for these households. The socio-economic context that has been described has, in urban areas, also resulted in the growth of a vast informal sector which supports the livelihoods of and provides access to food for urban residents. Food sourcing patterns of the low-income households studied in both 2008, in crisis, and in 2012, in a period of relative economic stability, underscore the crucial role played by informal channels, including food vendors, in providing access to food. This is attributed to the practices of food vendors, which have been argued to be adept at meeting the needs of low-income and food insecure urban consumers. These practices have been developed and adapted to match consumer needs in differing contexts, and, in doing so, have contributed to the food security of those most affected by economic downturns and crises.

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<sup>16</sup> Form 4 falls under lower secondary education (also known as O-Level) in the education system in Zimbabwe.

At the same time, food vendors are subject to hostile policy environments that on a day to day basis challenge their ability to continue vending, and thus their food provisioning. Food vendors are structurally kept in a vulnerable position through complex licensing and regulatory schemes that facilitate and expose them to harassment and persecution. The experiences of the vendors that have been highlighted, supported by critical voices in the literature, have shown that food vendors in Harare can be viewed on a spectrum of (in)formality. It is argued that in this spectrum, only a handful are regulated through formal licenses and around half are operating, as the city calls it, 'illegally', meaning in violation of the regulations against street vending. In between these ends of the spectrum, are food vendors who have arrangements with the authorities, by paying rents, in which they are tolerated. However, across this entire spectrum, vendors are plagued by varying forms of repression, including confiscations, fines, and bribes. The research findings highlight how even the more 'formal' food vendors are not spared in this repressive environment, ranging from neglected needs in stall infrastructure to complex regulations that licensed vendors cannot adhere to. Instead, the spectrum that has been described emphasizes the insecure and fluid status experienced by all food vendors, making them vulnerable to such acts of repression and hindering them in their food provisioning contributions in the city. These findings support critical notes in the literature regarding the dangers of dualistic thinking. This research has highlighted how the hostile policy environment faced by food vendors has implications that go beyond threatening the livelihoods of vendors. By forcing food vendors to incur extra costs, whether it is financial or in time, the food providing practices of vendors are challenged. In the spatial context of the country's economic challenges, where vendors are struggling to keep their vending businesses going while making losses, the extra costs that are caused by repressive policies and actions can seriously undermine the practices of vendors in providing food. Vendors face losses when confiscations occur, especially given the nature of perishable goods making them prone to spoilage, which diminishes their food provisioning capacity.

This research has sought to better understand how food vendors are providing access to food. It investigated this through the socio-spatial practices of food vendors as they operate within the foodscape of the city. As the above has illustrated, food vendors are forced to engage and cope with the social relations and spatial manifestations that constrain them in their vending practices. Yet, the analysis has shown that vendors are resilient, especially considering the persistent challenges and economic despair of the country. Vendors utilize their own agency to seek out social relations that manifest themselves spatially, to continue vending, sustaining their own livelihoods and improving the food access of consumers. In terms of social relations, the analysis of the vendors' interactions with food provisioning actors, consumers, and governance actors, highlighted how vendors are subject to systemic constraints, but also actively shape the responses to these constraints. In doing so, they seek out options that best suit their needs. This often means choices in terms of the options that disadvantage them the least. For example, the hide and seek tactics applied in dealing with authorities, that are preferred over confiscations and fines, or the sourcing from places that offer better prices, despite extra costs in terms of sacrificed convenience or transportation, rather than being cornered by makoronyera who will not bargain. In other cases, the strategies vendors employ actively strengthen their position. For example, by engaging in savings groups to become more resilient to shocks and to be able to invest in themselves and their families, or by using private transport for the convenience of not having to carry goods to and from bus stops and to save time. The analysis also emphasized that the constraints imposed on food vendors by some of the discussed actors must be viewed in a more nuanced light. The socio-economic context that is threatening the livelihoods of many Zimbabweans, forces people to try to survive. The makoronyera and authorities, for example, have been shown to negatively impact the vendors in their daily practices of food vending. However, these actors are, just like the vendors, trying to get by and earn an income. This reflects the state of the economy as police try to supplement their meager incomes

and makoronyera take risks to supply food while having to cover losses from these risks. This links to the analysis illustrating how spatially dependent many of these practices and choices are. Spatiality, in terms of physical space and of context, cannot be overlooked when discussing the food provisioning practices of food vendors. As the beginning of this chapter recounted, the context in which vendors operate makes their vending more needed, as it contributes to livelihoods and food access, while at the same time imposes challenges that hinder food vendors ability to continue providing access to food.

Given the dire situation in the country, and the illustrated challenges faced as a result of this situation, the hostility that has continually been directed at food vendors is counterproductive and actively undermines the food access of urban residents. Better policies are needed to enable rather than hinder food vendors in their contribution to food provisioning and access. As argued at the beginning of this paper, in addressing this issue, a better understanding is needed of how vendors operate and the challenges they face. This research has taken a first step in generating this understanding, whilst, given the complexity and extent of the topic, identifying clear points for future research that are needed to broaden this understanding. The most pressing of these recommendations is the need for a gendered analysis when looking at food vending. Considering the way food vendors are actively impeded by policies, and the contextual challenges faced, the implications on women specifically must be critically analyzed. The analysis provided in this research lays the groundwork for such deeper analyses. In doing so the vendors' social relations and spatial manifestations, which that allow them to continue provide access to food to the city's food insecure and low-income residents, provide useful entry points for informing future policies to improve the situation for food vendors.

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## Appendix 1: Interview guide vendors

**General idea of questions asked to vendors and topics discussed** (as guide was revised several times):

Introduce self and explain research

Sacha Slootheer, student from the Netherlands (Utrecht University) doing research for my masters. Interested in food vending and how vendors are operating their businesses. I would like to learn about how vendors are providing access to food to the city of Harare.

Have some questions relating to your vending business, such as how long you've been vending and where you get your food from. Get informed consent.

First, I'd like to ask some questions about you and then more about your experiences of vending. If there is any question you do not want to answer, that is also fine. At the end I'd also like to know if there is anything that I may not have asked about that you think is important to know.

### Introductory questions:

1. Could you tell me about yourself? Probe: age, family (size?), head of family, from Harare, living where in Harare, education? (see survey app)
2. How long have you been vending? Probe: same place, same foods, how did you start?
3. What are your reasons for vending? Probe: is it by choice? What work before?

### Key questions:

4. What does your typical vending day look like? Probe: hours, customers
5. To what extent can you cover your expenses with vending? Pay for school fees? Food?

### *Spatial aspects:*

6. Where do you typically vend and why? Probe: specific parts of the city, less harassment, closer to...?
7. Have you noticed a difference in new people entering the market/competition, esp. since 2016? Probe: more men? Affected you how? Strategies?
8. Where does the food you sell come from? Probe: Mbare Musika, directly from farmers, from formal businesses (like bakeries, butcheries, supermarkets), urban agri?
  - a. Why there? Have you tried other markets?
9. How do you get it here? Probe: how far away, cost
10. To who do you sell? Probe: regular customers, type of customer, what do you they buy? Credit?
11. Market: hours, what do you do there? Interact with who?

### *Network/relations (social)*

12. Do you have specific suppliers or clients that you use? Probe: formal sector? Farmers? Middlemen? Shops? Supermarket?
13. How did you connect with them and develop relationship? Probe: how does your relationship work?
14. Why do you choose to work with them? Probe: how does it affect or help you?
15. Who make it more difficult for you to do your vending? Probe: police, city officials, kombi drivers, customers, suppliers, etc.
  - a. Do you pay anything to city for your business? Or to anyone else for protection? How does this work?
  - b. Police: how often? What do they do? Difference between sanctioned and unsanctioned? What strategies do you use to cope? Difference between before?
16. Are you aware of any changes in policies by the city? How? How do they affect you?

17. Part of savings group? Probe: With who? For how long? Why? How does it work?
18. Interact with other vendors? Probe: Who? How? Share information? Probe: whatsapp group

*Gender:*

19. What challenges as a woman do you face?
  - a. Division of roles in family? Probe: who takes care of kids, cleans, etc. When do you do this?
  - b. Can you say how many hours each task takes? What would you do with more free time?
  - c. Do you ever experience situations where you feel unsafe during you vending day?
20. Do women diversify products offered? Why yes or no?
21. Have you considered working with a pushcart? Why or why not?
22. Do you experience any tension between male and female vendors?

*Mobile money/technology*

23. Do you use a mobile phone for your business? If yes, for what purposes? Probe: Ecocash, market information, communicate with suppliers and customers, do business from home, etc.
24. How has the cash situation in Zimbabwe currently affected your business? What has changed since 2016?
25. When and why did you decide to accept ecocash payments, how is this affecting you?

Closing questions?

26. What changes do you hope to see that would make it easier for you to run your business?
27. Do you see yourself vending in the future?

Do you have any questions for me/us relating to the research?

## Appendix 2: Topic list discussed with experts

**General topics:**

Vending - what areas in the city, illegality, who is vending, survivalist vs. Entrepreneurial, mobile vs. stationary

Governance of vending – city responses (policies & changes), vendor associations (politicized)

Mobile money – eco cash, technology, payments

Formal/informal linkages

Mbare Musika – times, importance, processes

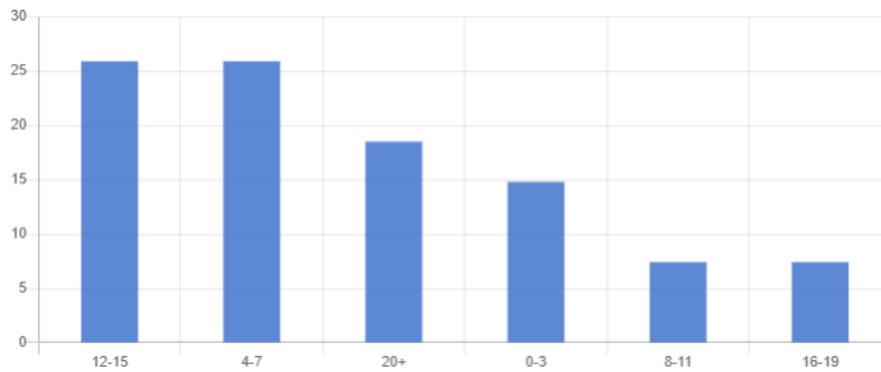
## Appendix 3: Experts consulted

Experts with background and date consulted

Name	Position	Date
Tavonga Njaya	Researcher	December 11, 2019
Godfrey Tawodzera	Researcher	December 16, 2019
George Masimba	Dialogue on Shelter	January 16, 2020
Easther Chigumira	Researcher	February 17, 2020

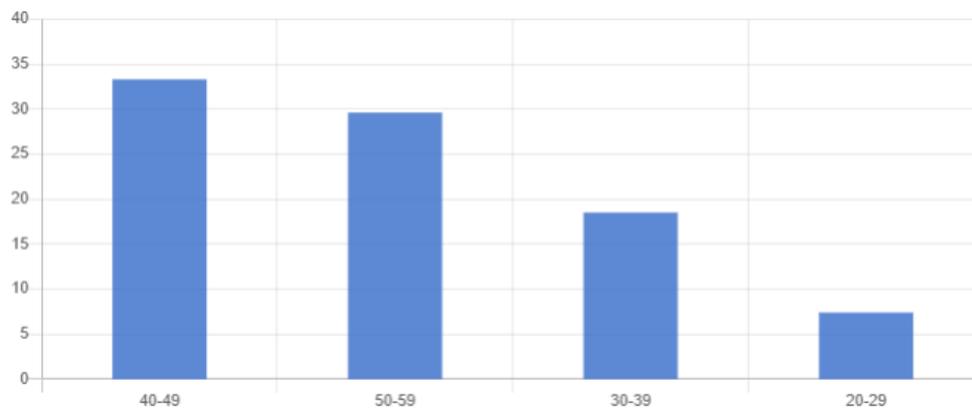
## Appendix 4: Other vendors characteristics / findings

### Vending time in years



Value	Frequency	Percentage
12-15	7	25.93
4-7	7	25.93
20+	5	18.52
0-3	4	14.81
8-11	2	7.41
16-19	2	7.41

### Age



Value	Frequency	Percentage
40-49	9	33.33
50-59	8	29.63
30-39	5	18.52
20-29	2	7.41

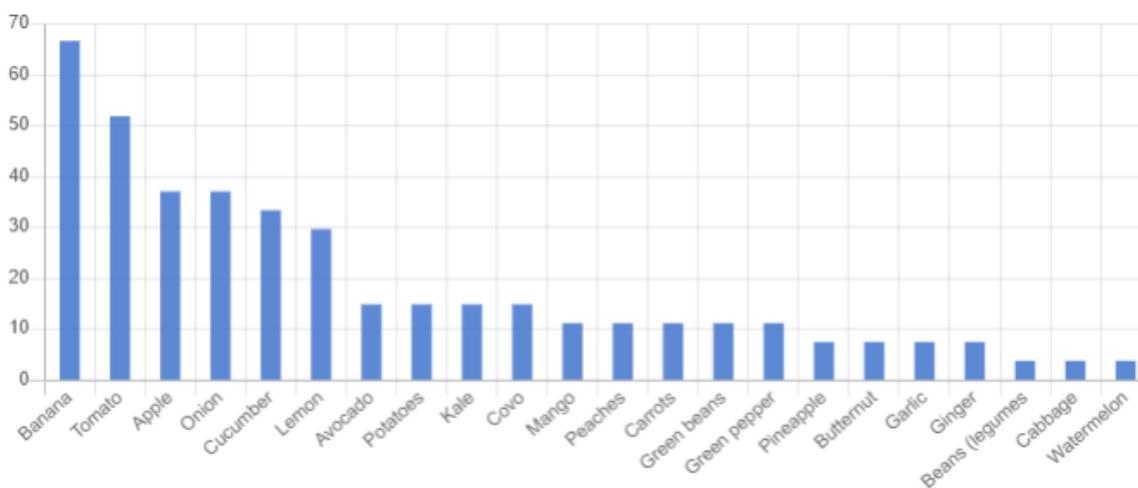
## Vendor's living area

Value	Frequency	Percentage
Crowborough	7	25.93
Epworth	3	11.11
Mabvuku	2	7.41
Budiriro	2	7.41
Chitungwiza	2	7.41
Ruwa	1	3.7
Dzivarasekwa	1	3.7
Waterfalls	1	3.7
Damofalls Park	1	3.7
Glenara	1	3.7
Goromonzi	1	3.7
High Glen	1	3.7
Glen View	1	3.7
Stone Ridge	1	3.7

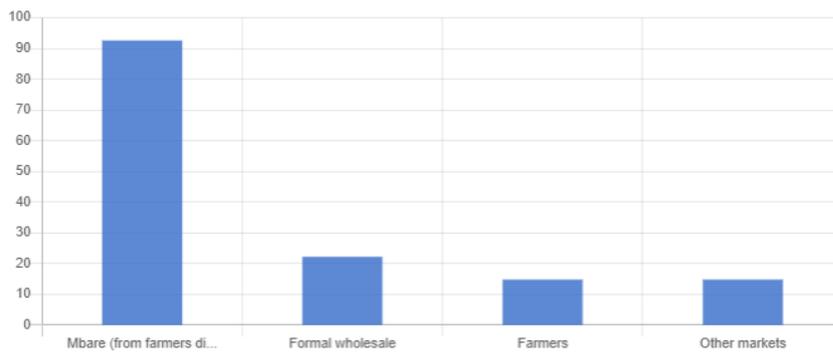
## Location in Harare of food vendor interviewed

Value	Frequency	Percentage
C.B.D.	11	40.74
Crowborough	7	25.93
Avenues	2	7.41
Mabvuku	2	7.41
Budiriro	2	7.41
High Glen	2	7.41
Damofalls Park	1	3.7

## Products sold



## Food sourcing



Value	Frequency	Percentage
Mbare (from farmers di...	25	92.59
Formal wholesale	6	22.22
Farmers	4	14.81
Other markets	4	14.81

