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Abstract
The dollarization of the Zimbabwean economy after a decade of economic doldrums has led to a hive of economic activities in urban space. This research analysed the role of social networking in the sustenance of the livelihoods of informal vendors in Masvingo urban. It also examined the challenges faced by informal vendors in sustaining their livelihoods and the ways used by informal vendors to ameliorate their situation. Informal vending is a major livelihood strategy despite being relegated to the periphery. Social capital becomes valuable in sustaining vendors’ livelihoods and transcending the problems they face in sustaining their livelihoods. This study accentuated the need to promote, educate and empower informal vendors to enjoy the gains of the informal sector in the larger economy. This was a qualitative ethnographic study; utilising unstructured interviews, focus group discussions and secondary sources to harvest data, while participants were chosen on the basis of convenience.

Key Words: Social capital, informal vending, dollarization, livelihoods.

1.0. Introduction and background to the study
The dollarization of the Zimbabwean economy in 2009 has had tremendous impact on the growth of the informal sector in general and street vending in particular. The exponential growth of the sector requires novel ways of transcending the daily catastrophes marring the welfare of informal vendors. Taking the city of Masvingo as a case study, this study’s fundamental foundation was rooted on the examination of the role of social capital in the sustenance of informal vending in Masvingo urban. The study was also situated in an on-going evaluation of the challenges faced by informal vendors in sustaining their livelihoods and the assessment of the coping strategies used to transcend those challenges. Informal vending in this study is synonymous with street vending which is referred to in different names like the underground economy, black market, illegal economy, irregular economy, among many others. For working purposes, social capital shall be used in this research to refer to resources grounded in durable exchange-based networks or relationships of persons (Bourdieu, 1986) (1).

Losby et al (2002) (2) contend that the informal sector is as old as industrialisation, although it has not received a close scrutiny especially in the context of sustainable cities. As such, Chirisa (2008) (3) noted that the informal sector warrants constant theoretical interrogation if effective and long lasting policies in relation to the sector are to be established. Mitullah (2004) (4) opines that the informal sector is the backbone of African economies although it is relegated to the periphery when it comes to policy issues. Adiko and Anoh (2003) (5) noted a sexual division of labour where men participate more in the formal sector while women dominate the informal sector. Gukurume and Nyanga (2011) (6) noted that the informal sector also attracts children who reconcile work and school in endeavours geared toward livelihood sustenance. This is sufficient evidence to authenticate the notion that many urban cities sustain themselves through the informal sector. It is imperative to note that research on informal vending mainly focused on issues of actors negating the crucial role of social capital in circumventing the challenges faced by the actors in sustaining their livelihoods. This study becomes illuminating in its ability to anchor emphasis on the above mentioned knowledge gap.

Focusing on policy and associational issues, Mitullah (2004) noted that few innovative cities in Africa, such as Durban, have initiated programmes that integrate street vendors in urban development. Others, such as Nairobi, have accepted the operations of street vendors by setting aside specific lanes outside the central parts of the city for vendors, but are still to have specific policy relating to the informal economy and street trade in particular. Although relocation of street traders is a major step, the sites still lack services, while others are located away from busy areas and the vendors are reluctant to move to these areas since they jeopardise their chances of succeeding in the said business. Dube (2011) (7) propounded that because of the informality tag associated with woman cross-border trade and other informal activities, government programmes to assist women cross-border traders in Masvingo have been very slim. Consequently, most women cross-border traders resort to social networking as a way of learning the germane business etiquette. Abe (2011) (8) noted that despite its attendant benefit, informal vending has been plagued by the dilemma of double tragedy in Nigeria generally and Ibadan in particular. The examination of the experiences of street vendors in vast periods of political transition in Malawi by Kayuni and Tambulasi (2009) (9) brought to light the idea that legal structures in relation to informal vending depend heavily on the political will of the top echelons of the government. Having given valuable snap shots of policy and associational challenges marring the effectiveness of informal vending, the researches under review fell short of specificity on the recurrent theme of this study, that is, the role of social capital in sustaining the informal vendor economy.

Studies have also indicated that the formal urban economy has lost glamour in favour of the informal one as actors have taken advantage of its easy of entry (Chirisa, 2007) (10). With respect to Zimbabwe, despite
efforts directed towards cleaning urban areas of its informal activities through Operation Murambatsvina in 2005, there is an increase in the informal sector activities (International Crisis Group (ICG), 2005) (11). The informal sector activities have re-emerged, and even become more resilient (Dube and Chirisa, 2012) (12), taking new shapes in scope, dimension and variations leaving a clear handwriting on the wall that the bulldozer cannot move informal vendors from the street. Nocturnal vending has been established as the safest mode of operation where the predator (police) would have slept. Crackdowns, clean up campaigns and raids are the main tools employed by city managers in a bid to maintain orderly and aesthetic city environments although corrupt activities are used by municipal police and Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) as they solicit bribe in their self-enriching spree induced by lawlessness in Zimbabwe (Brown, 2006) (13). Little was, however, done in assessing the role of social capital in circumventing the challenges faced by informal vendors. Thus, this study laid specific emphasis on this subject of negotiation in most researches.

2.0. Statement of the Problem

The informal sector is as old as industrialisation, although it has not received a close scrutiny especially in the context of sustainable cities (Losby et al, 2002). As such, the sector warrants constant theoretical interrogation if effective and long lasting policies are to be established (Chirisa, 2008). While acknowledging that the booming of the informal sector was something not unheard of prior to the period of dollarization in Zimbabwe, this study contends that dollarization has witnessed the growth of this sector at an exponential rate. With the increase in the number of participants, novel challenges to informal vending emerge requiring novel solutions, especially considering that informal vendors are still considered shoddy dealers in Zimbabwe’s legal framework (Dube, 2011). The role of social capital in sustaining the informal vendor economy is not given sufficient specificity in previous researches giving impetus to the study in question. More so, voluminous studies on the informal sector in general and street vending in particular were carried out on a global scale. Few researches in existence on the Zimbabwean urban terrain were situated in the capital-Harare, with the city of Masvingo coming to the vicinity of very few researchers. Research on street vending in Zimbabwe is also saturated in the pre-dollarization era where as the adoption of multicurrency (dollarization) in 2009 ushered the nation into novel economic, social and political terrains sufficient for bringing a change to the informal sector in general and street vending in particular. This research was situated in an ongoing examination of the role of social capital in the sustenance of the informal vendor economy in the dollarized Zimbabwe, a largely invisible area in most researches on the subject. A holistic approach was taken to include the challenges faced by actors in the sector and the coping strategies adopted to ameliorate the challenges. Considering the paucity of research on such issues in the dollarized Zimbabwe, this research offers enough lenses for understanding the experiences of informal vendors in the current era of dollarization.

3.0. Objectives

- To evaluate the challenges faced by informal vendors in sustaining their livelihoods.
- To examine the coping strategies used to deal with the problems faced by informal vendors.
- To examine the role of social capital in the sustenance of informal vending in Masvingo urban.

4.0. Theoretical Framework

This research utilised Bourdieu’s theory of structuralist-constructivism, his postulations on the dialectics of habitus and field as well as social capital taking centre stage. Bourdieu (1979) (14) was largely concerned with the dichotomous relationship between the habitus and the field, which he saw as operating in dialectically reciprocated manners. The field conditions the habitus; while the habitus structures the field making it something that is meaningful. This theory was more appropriate to this study since it explains how informal vendors deal with their social world by adopting strategies that help them transcend the problems they face in utilising informal vending to sustain their livelihoods. Bourdieu (1979) noted that the habitus refers to a set of dispositions created and reformulated through the conjuncture of objectives, structures and personal history of the people in question. It was apparent in this study that people’s disposition largely inform the coping strategies they adopt to deal with their problems. The field refers to an arena of contestations and struggles in a network of relationships, in this case, areas of struggles for survival and strategies that are adopted in circumventing the challenges faced by informal vendors in carrying out their daily activities. Bourdieu’s thesis provides a momentous analytical milieu for understanding the dialectical relationship between the structure, in this case the challenges faced by informal vendors as well as the legal framework on informal vending, and agency which denotes the strategies employed by informal vendors to deal with their problems. For Bourdieu (1986), social capital is the sum total of all the resources, virtual or actual, that accrue to an individual or group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationship of mutual acquaintance and recognition. In this study social capital is used to underpin all the networks and relationships manipulated by informal vendors to transcend the daily conundrum posited to their livelihood strategy. According to Bourdieu (1979) the structure constraint and enables at the same time. In the theory
of structuralist-constructivism, he reflects the idea that structures constrain and circumscribe volition, but at the same time people use their capacities for thought, reflection and action to construct social and cultural phenomena. He adds that social and cultural structures also create options, possibilities and paths for creative action and for the construction of new and unique cultural and social phenomena. In other words agents (informal vendors) are not passive recipients of external structural stimuli, but their reflexivity enables them to employ multifarious techniques of adjustment to cope with the prevailing situation. This research unearthed scores of strategies adopted by informal vendors as they thrive to survive in situations of turmoil placed to them by the legal framework of Masvingo urban. The theory of structuralist-constructivism was instrumental in identifying how informal vendors manipulate social capital and other strategies to overcome the challenges they face in sustaining their livelihoods in the dollarized Zimbabwe.

5.0. Research Methodology

The study was grounded in the qualitative methodology on account that it was hunched upon people’s perceptions on the role of social capital in the sustenance of informal vending, the challenges faced in such endeavours as well as the coping strategies employed, all of which are rather unquantifiable. The study was based on an ethnographic field work involving fifty-two participants selected on the basis of convenience in Mucheke high density suburbs in Masvingo urban. The sample size was based on saturation rather than representativeness since the goal of qualitative research usually is not to make inferences about the underlying population, but to attempt to obtain insights into particular educational, social, and familial processes and practices that exist within a specific context (Connolly, 1998) (15). In this case the goal was to obtain deep insights on the role of social capital in the sustenance of informal vending. Unstructured interviews, focus group discussions and secondary sources were triangulated in harvesting data to gain an in-depth understanding by corroborating different narratives on peoples’ perceptions on the issues under investigation.

Unstructured interviews are one to one in-depth interviews which the researcher (interviewer) used to gain valuable information from discussing issues with participants (interviewees). The interviewer prompted the interviewees to give more information by joining in the interviews, discussing what he thinks on the topic. Body language was utilized by the interviewer to gain more understanding from unspoken words. Twenty-four (24) people were interviewed, two (2) of whom were members from Small and Medium Enterprises Development, two (2) others from ZRP, three (3) from Masvingo City Council while the rest were informal vendors. The power of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) in the research was in providing rich and spontaneous information by triggering multi-vocal perceptions on the challenges faced by informal vendors in their day-to-day operations, how the challenges are dealt with and the value of social capital in the sustenance of informal vending in the dollarized Zimbabwe. The tool also helped to check and balance ideas coming from unstructured interviews since the presence of others in most cases helps to authenticate views raised by other respondents. Four (4) FGDs of seven (7) people each were conducted, one for males, one for females, the other one for children and the last one for males, females and children so as to capture the ideas of all categories of participants in informal vending. The ethnographic approach enabled the researcher to easily conduct Focus Group Discussions and in-depth interviews. Secondary sources of data were of paramount significance in providing written and therefore easily accessible information on the challenges faced by informal vendors as well as the ways used to ameliorate them. Consent was always sought and the assurance of privacy and confidentiality given to ensure safety of participants since the research would unravel corrupt activities by legal watchdogs from the police and municipality.

6.0. Presentation and Discussion of Findings

Presentation and analysis of data obtained from this research followed a thematic format. Bourdieu’s theory of structuralist-constructivism and related literature offered the required analytical lenses to the discussion of findings.

6.1. The history of informal vending as a livelihood strategy in Masvingo urban

Street vending in Masvingo urban, like in many African cities, is as old as industrialisation. At different epochs in the history of the city, the informal vendor economy was adopted as a livelihood strategy by many households living in abject poverty. Informal vending which is understood as the obverse of the normal sector in terms of being unregulated, unregistered and untaxed, is just one component of a wide array of activities doomed illegal, and therefore informal, inclusive of illegal transport operating, money changing, informal settlements, urban agricultural activities, educational informality and unregistered small enterprises. To understand the impact of dollarization to the growth of the informal sector, it is essential to trace the background history of informal vending in Masvingo urban. Wild (1992) (16) noted that even in colonial Zimbabwe informal vending was prevalent. All sorts of trade and self-employment were referred to as ‘businesses’ and the participant ‘businessman’/’businesswoman’. It was established from the same source that businessman or businesswoman during the colonial era travelled from their ‘respective kraals’ to sell hawk fowls, eggs, pumpkins, grains, etc. This is enough evidence to suggest that the recent boom in the informal sector in general and informal vending in particular is a result of decades of evolution from the colonial period...
Despite the variance in the terms used to refer to the sector. The same was also observed by Losby et al (2002) who submitted that the informal sector is as old as industrialisation although it has not yet received a close scrutiny in the context of sustainable cities.

Despite that Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) aided the growth of the informal sector in Zimbabwe; informal vending in Masvingo urban began to boost a new swell than ever at the beginning of the new millennium as a result of increased inflation and unemployment rates. Fruits and vegetables were the most known products in the informal sector prior to the new millennium, but thereafter, more products penetrated the market including grains, clothes, electrical gadgets, kitchen ware and hardware, among a wide array of commodities. A certain participant clarifying the multiplicity of products on the market noted that, “change chasarakutengesawumunhuchete” (only a human being could not be sold). This prompted the government to initiate a clean-up campaign called Operation Murambatsvina in 2005 which contributed little in bringing the informal sector to a halt. In less than half a decade later, the street was flooded again with informal vendors zealous to eke a living from the easily accessible sector indicating the ineffectiveness of brute force in bringing informal vendors to their heels. This was largely a result of the Consumer Council of Zimbabwe’s 2008 price control measure which led to the succumbing of quite a considerable number of indigenous companies thereby worsening the unemployment situation. Inflation rates also skyrocketed to unanticipated magnitudes injuring the affection of those who remained in formal jobs. In the face of such catastrophes, no coercive measure could move informal vendors from the street.

The multicurrency system, termed dollarization in this study due to the dominance of the United States dollar over the South African rand as well as the Botswana pula, was adopted in an environment where the formal sector had been eroded and the informal sector assumed its zenith. Dollarization brought the hopes of economic rejuvenation paving the way for all government departments to resume operation. Consequently, the registry’s department under the ministry of Home Affairs began to clear backlogs on passports and made the Temporal Travel Documents easily accessible and cheaper. The South African Visa waiver of April 2009 also compounded the situation since many people could easily migrate for business purposes. Since accessing formal jobs was still a far cry for many unemployed youths, the informal sector became a fertile ground for livelihood sustenance. Like the period prior to dollarization, a wide array of commodities existed on the market, but food staffs especially meat and meat products were dominant. Many cross-border traders specialise in chicken cuts, chicken feet, chicken offal, eggs, sausages, among many related commodities.

6.2. Dollarization and the exponential rise of the informal sector

While acknowledging that the booming of informal vending was something not unheard of prior to this period, this study contents that dollarization has witnessed the growth of this practice at an exponential rate. It emerged from the study that the upsurge in informal vending was catapulted by the forces of urbanisation. As opposed to counter urbanisation which assumed its zenith during the period of Zimbabwe’s economic quandary, dollarization revitalized the economy thereby rejuvenating the hopes of many who have resigned to fate by going back to the countryside. Erratic weather patterns, leading to poor harvests, added a toll to the welfare of the Zimbabwean rural folk who were thrown into vicious circles of absolute poverty and deprivation. Effects of climate change and the subsequent lack of productive activities became push factors in the countryside. Seeking shelter from the urban areas which seem to be now lucrative as a result of dollarization became the response mechanism adopted by many.

Apart from that, many immigrants who have crossed borders, mostly to South Africa and Botswana, in search of greener pastures as the nation was caught into a seemingly inescapable conundrum of poverty emigrated hoping to enjoy the benefits of a rejuvenating economy. This researcher contends that during the era of dollarization in Zimbabwe, nearby countries where most Zimbabweans used to flock to have become unfriendly environments which can only be relied upon for cross-border trade as opposed to permanent residence, which is at par with Dube’s (2011) findings that nearby countries recently offer lucrative reserves for woman migrant traders. Memories of xenophobia were still fresh in the minds of Zimbabweans in South Africa when the multicurrency system was adopted. This necessitated immigration by individuals hoping to make a better life at home, especially those with unutilised professional skills. In a situation where it was difficult for those who have left jobs especially in the public service to be reengaged, informal vending became the livelihood option for many due to its ease of entry as also noted by Dube and Chirisa (2012). As noted earlier, the rural areas have lost glamour due to lack of productive activities stemming from low rainfall as well as the effects of climate change. Thus, Masvingo urban was massively invaded by citizens flocking from the rural areas and nearby countries. At the same time, those in formal employment were subjected to meagre earnings not commensurate with the costs of living. This means that even school children could reconcile work and school to sustain a living in the easily accessible and most flexible informal sector (Gukurume and Nyanga, 2011)

This is enough evidence to support the claim that dollarization of the economy led to an exponential hike in the informal sector.
It is deplorable to note that the city of Masvingo has turned into a large pool of unemployed masses in the recent epoch than ever before. Against this backdrop, the costs of living especially rentals have never remained constant at any given time. It was noted in this study that cost of rentals, school fees, rates, food, among other basic necessities rise at unprecedented levels to an extent that even the formally employed cannot support their families. One respondent vehemently stated that, “vanhu vachangobva mukuburner saka vano vechakawanda” (people are used to the Zimbabwean dollar era where prices changed on daily basis and the US dollar came while people had just left the practise of money burning prompting them to burn prices to gain more money).

The resultant inadequacy of salaries propel even the formally employed to hire people to work for them as informal vendors or to make their children participate in the said practice. These established dispositions and learned habits, called habitus in Bourdieu’s terms, are very crucial in circumventing the problems faced by urbanites in Masvingo urban. The entrance of the formally employed in the informal sector is not unique to this period alone, but what makes it interesting at this point in time is the pressure it adds to the already growing informal sector. In essence, the dollarization of the economy has led to a massive expansion of the informal sector.

6.3. The efficacy of social capital in sustaining the vendor economy

Social capital is a valuable resource to informal vendors in Masvingo urban both to access goods and ideas as well as to circumvent the challenges faced by the vendors. This research contends that social capital is used in a barrage of ways to sustain the informal vendor economy in Masvingo urban. The massive expansion of the informal sector creates competition for vending products triggering participants in the trade to use ingenuity to create novel ways of accessing commodities for resell. It is now the norm of informal vendors to establish networks with suppliers and other informal vendors so as to access good quality products which are also scarce in the market. Vendors dealing with fruit and vegetables wake up early in the morning to do their purchases before they engage in any household chores. Not all people can manage this so some end up establishing networks with suppliers so as to make them set their products aside. Some vendors have established a habit of befriending those with relatives who supply commodities, while others will even make their relatives bring them commodities like grain from the rural areas. While such ways are not totally new in the procurement of commodities for resell, the form it has assumed in this dollarized Zimbabwe is so pronounced. One lady stated that, “kana ukashaya wekusiza kana kumusika kwacho unobva vakabata naako kusiyi kawungu uchitongona kuriwutumizwa” (if you do not know someone you may even come from the market place empty handed unless if you can wake up early morning). As demand increases, good quality products become scanty at the market corroding the effectiveness of informal vending in sustaining vendors’ livelihoods. The rising demand for vending commodities which has become a novel challenge to informal vendors in Masvingo urban therefore requires social networking if participants are to sustain their livelihoods using the trade. Informal trade, which can be here equated to Bourdieu’s notion of field, has therefore become an arena of struggle for survival where social capital is the most known strategy manipulated for livelihood sustenance. Informal vendors in this study emerged as very agentic and rational in responding to the challenge of scarcity of good quality vending commodities on the market.

Social capital is also instrumental in accessing the most desirable aspect in the field in question, that is, customers. The swelling of the informal sector has inevitably posed a threat of competition for customers to actors in the field. Most informal vendors who participated in the study lamented the shrinking of revenue as competition increases. Compounding the already volatile situation is the fact that the chitimela market place is accessible to all customers even those who do not buy for resell. This reduces revenue earnings of informal vendors as demand falls drastically. It follows that actors in the informal sector, specifically informal vending, show their knowledgeability by crafting new mechanisms to ensure that they stay above their situations. While it has become a habit of many to scramble for customers, trying to lure them to buy from certain individuals, networking is the most effective way of ensuring that one maintains a good customer base. One participant noted that, “nekwanda kwanyakwadzika kudia munhu angango kutengera kuti usaiiirenyika hene? Munhu anotengene kumuzvamutoziva” (considering the bulk of vendors, a customer prefers to buy from someone known to the customer). Other vendors stressed that they now have popular customers whom they give goods on credit to collect the money by the end of the month. This is usually done by those specialising in clothing and clothing materials, hair dressing materials, blankets, among many other related materials of higher value. Thus, social capital is at the heart of the sustenance of informal vending in a competitive environment where the number of vendors seems to exceed the number of potential buyers. The role of social capital to the welfare of informal vendors even goes to ideas pertaining to business. This study evidenced the lack of associations of vendors as well as synergies required for the impartation of business skills. New comers in the sector therefore appeal to those who are conversant with the trade so as to be given information on where products are bought, how to create a big capital base, storage, among many others. This is at par with Dube’s (2011) notion that most women cross border traders resort to social networking as a way of learning the germane business etiquette in situations
where Bourdieu’s cultural and social capitals become very invaluable in determining business nodes. The old ways of doing business are therefore utilised, a clear indication that informal vendors use their set of dispositions created and reformulated through their personal history. Cross border vendors rely on those who have a long history of vending, especially relatives, for acculturation to ensure that they escape Zimbabwe Revenue Authority (ZIMRA) duty charges. This goes hand in hand with Dube’s (2011) notion that some would-be cross border traders have opted to ‘acculturate’ to the art of cross-border trade through skills acquired from close relatives. This is usually done through good choice of transporters who can bribe ZIMRA officials. Once one escapes duty charges, chances of having a big profit margin are high. Those specialising in meat rely on networking to get well required ideas on packaging. A vendor selling chicken cuts has this to say, “Unless someone teaches you good packaging skills, you may sell the whole box for a loss.” This indicates the prevalence of mutual acquaintances as major ways of training new comers. No formal training is undergone for one to join the informal sector making social capital more valuable in informally training the novice. For new comers in the trade, social capital is the basis for knowing where products are bought. Thus it requires a well serviced network for one to acclimatise with the new trade, as also noted by Muzvidziwa (1998) (17) who postulated that cross-border traders in Masvingo manipulated social networks to acclimatise with foreign lands. The sustainability of the network determines how one is to excel in informal vending. This researcher, however, shares similar sentiments with Dube (2011) that such a snowball type of business networking has had varying degrees of success. Having realised that, it suffices to note that no one can underestimate the value of networking in the sustenance of informal vending in the dollarized Zimbabwe.

6.4. The legal and regulatory framework affecting informal vendors in Masvingo urban

Informal vendors are still considered shoddy dealers in Zimbabwe’s legal framework (Dube, 2011). The informal sector is known by a plethora of names like the ‘underground economy’, ‘black market’, ‘informal economy’, among many others. Such names sow the seeds of notorious upheavals faced by informal vendors as they thrive to emancipate their families from abject poverty. The catastrophes marring their trade as a result of the domineering influence of draconian laws include rounds, brutal harassment and mass arrests by municipal police and ZRP. When caught, informal vendors are fined and the whole lot of products for resell confiscated. Such regulatory and policy environment is inimical to the effectiveness of informal vending in sustaining the livelihoods of urbanites in Masvingo urban. Vendors are thrown into vicious circles of woes as they run away for dear life all day long, some winning and some losing in such endeavours. The increase in the number of officers deployed in response to the swelling number of vendors has now become a cauldron of agitation as vendors become more alert to police rather than customers in a situation where the street has been turned into a battle field where all the ruthless battles against the informal vendor economy are fought. Despite all the harsh ways used to regulate informal vending, the sector continues to boom. At no point has the number of informal vendors decreased because of arrests. The vendors are driven by the saying ‘pane mapurisa nje pane muri’ meaning that ‘money is found where the police is.’ This statement adopted from the ‘blood diamonds’ in Chiadzwa is now used as an invigorating tool to ensure that informal vendors do not yield to the imposing influence of the police. Thus, despite the structural constraints inimical to the development of a sustainable livelihood, informal vendors always employ strategies to sustain their livelihoods. At times the police are deployed in civilian clothing to hide their identity to the vendors as they will act like customers who want to buy. However, vendors are agentic and rational since they are well able to identify them. In most cases they mock such detectives by the names ‘jira’ referring to an officer in civic clothes, ‘ngonjo’ meaning a police officer or ‘ndinindamubata’ denoting a neighbourhood, alerting each other to flee. As noted by Dube and Chirisa (2012), in recent times, the informal sector in Zimbabwe has worn a new face as the actors have designed new adaptive strategies to counteract restrictions and evictions and by-laws imposed on them. This researcher also shares similar sentiments with the aforementioned authors that the urban informal sector comprises multifarious activities and actors in it have a tool kit of strategies they employ to defend and be resilient in their livelihoods. Informal vendors are therefore cognitive beings who can use ingenuity to circumvent the problems they face in their daily lives. As the coercion of police continues to threaten the activity of informal vending, vendors manipulate social capital to ensure their continued existence in the streets. Bribery of police officials, known by the native Shona term ‘kudusa’ in Masvingo urban’ is now rampant. This is supported by evidence from a participant who postulated that “kana zvaka sungu notodusa,” meaning “when the situation is tense you pay.” When asked on the impediments of policy effectiveness, a council official responded: “bribery is the cancer bedevilling the effectiveness of our policies.” Bribery is not only done in the field where street vending is carried out. Cross border traders use the same mechanism to ensure that they escape duty when they cross borders especially South Africa back to Zimbabwe. ZIMRA officials have the prerogative of ensuring that the nation gains some revenue from those who import goods for resell. However, the fulfilment of the mandate is thwarted by the gullibility of some kleptomaniac officials at border posts who display their eagerness to gain at the expense of the
nation to let informal vendors import their goods duty free. Clear from this adaptation by the informal players is that the sector cannot be eradicated in its entirety (Dube and Chirisa, 2012). It follows that social capital is the fundamental base for the sustenance of the informal sector in general and informal vending in particular. In a situation where the informality tag continues to haunt the welfare of informal vendors (Dube, 2011), most successful vendors require social capital to make the ends meet. This is enough testimony to the fact that despite being invisible to the attention of many researchers, social capital plays a prominent role in an era where every actor tries to retain every cent earned for the sustenance of livelihoods. This research accentuates that social capital is useful in transcending the negative ramifications of the legal and regulatory framework marring the welfare of informal vendors in Masvingo urban. This research has also contributed immensely to the realisation that despite the council’s relentless efforts to cast the informal sector into oblivion by introducing formal markets in the form of the chitimela market place as well as a clothing market place opposite Mucheke bus terminus, informal vending continued to establish rhizomes in the city. As the municipality and police quicken efforts to extinguish informality, some vendors resort to what Dube and Chirisa (2012) calls nocturnal vending by operating during the night when predator (police) would have dismissed from work. Some have established habits of coming to the streets after work as they ensure that their formal jobs are complemented by informality. Hives of activities from around 1600 hours to around 2200 hours were realised in Chesvingo drive, a street stretching from Chesvingo business centre (township) popularly known as Sisk to Chiwororo business centre popularly known as Pangolin. Most participants rendered this road the busiest road in Masvingo both during the day as well as the night to the extent of joking that anyone who doesn’t know the road doesn’t know Masvingo. Nocturnal vending is a useful strategy used to override the regulatory framework. This means that instead of persisting with the demonization of the vendors in question on the account of the informality label, new policies need to be put in place to ensure that the sector is integrated into the larger economy. This research advances that unless and until policies towards informal vendors change for their inclusion into the broad array of formal activities, the city of Masvingo will continue to lament untold suffering as a result of informality. More energy and resources will continue to be released towards efforts to bring the informal sector in general and informal vending in particular to a halt, but as have been witnessed hitherto such efforts shall remain relentless since even the bulldozer of the operation clean up campaign or Murambatsvina has failed to remove the informal vendor from the street (Association of African Planning Schools, 2012) (18). Informal vendors have remained agentic in responding to the threats emerging from the police. Policy makers, academics and the government must therefore combine efforts to ensure that the informal sector is incorporated into the wider economy so as to ensure that the nation enjoys the proceeds from the sector

Narratives from ZRP and municipal police officials indicated that the crackdown on informal vendors is a legal endeavour which is not peculiar to the era of dollarization alone. It was indicated that even prior to Operation Murambatsvina of 2005, illegal vending was punishable by law. Although municipal authorities acknowledge that there is need for the education of vendors on the by-laws they must comply with, it was also clearly stated that most vendor are aware of the municipal by-laws on vending especially stipulations on vending sites and vending licences. Most areas where informal vending is done are not permissible prompting the responsible authorities to apply the law where it must be applied. It emerged from this study that while vending is of economic benefit to the vendors, given high unemployment levels in Zimbabwe, vendors also pose other challenges like pollution in cities, especially in areas not designated for vending. However, the council indicated that vending space in the city was also an issue of concern since all designated sites were flooded with vendors. This means that illegal vending in the city is also promoted by the failure of the municipality to provide vending sites commensurate with the rising demand for vending licences. This researcher unearthed that scores of applicants were put on waiting list to have vendors’ licences but vending space is the major problem inimical to the development of a formal vending sector. However, it was also established that availability of vending space alone cannot bring informal vending to an end since even those with vending licences engage in informality especially through selling unstipulated products at legal vending sites.

6.5. The demonization of informal vending and the prospects for recognition

The informal sector has continued to boost an imperfect track record in Zimbabwe despite its value in sustaining the country’s economy since the year 2000 when the formal economy failed to provide employment and revenue base for the majority of unemployed Zimbabwean masses (Dube: 2011). It is more apparent that the same sector is still playing an instrumental role in sustaining the livelihoods of the nation in a country where the salary of the average person is less than half the poverty datum line. As Dube (2011) noted in his study of woman cross border traders in Zimbabwe, an informality tag is placed on street vending as informal vendors are considered clandestine and shoddy dealers. This study established that informal vendors are considered criminals who are supposed to face the same brutal treatment as thieves and sex workers, the only difference being the sentence. Transpiring in Masvingo urban is a situation...
where the geographical city is given more value than human life as indicated by the demonization of informal trade which is considered a public nuisance. Notions of urban cleanliness are always attached to massive arrests of informal vendors on accusation of pollution while at the same time they are blamed for propagating criminal activities like thieving. Informal vendors have become the easiest target for ZRP and municipal police while the real criminals are let go. It is therefore the contention of this research that the demonization of informal vending must not go without careful scrutiny if the value of informal vending to the larger economy is to be comprehended.

The informality label placed on informal vending carries with it negative ramifications as far as the recognition of informal vendors is concerned. The government continues to pay a blind eye to the needs of informal vendors. Education and empowerment has remained a far cry to informal vendors. Even the ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) shows no enthusiasm to incorporate informal vendors into its core business and to assist them with the necessary information required for popular participation in national development. Instead, the ministry is concerned with registered small enterprises as if they are the only ones responsible for sustainable development. The civil society has at no point shown concern for the challenges faced by informal vendors in Masvingo urban, let alone lobby for their integration into the larger economy. Hopes of recognition for the informal sector therefore become fallacious imaginings which abruptly vanish with the brutality inflicted on participants in the sector. Lack of synergies has remained a major problem impinging on the welfare of the informal sector as the voices of informal vendors remain unheard. Considering that most households’ livelihoods are inextricably inseparable from the informal sector, the demonization of the informal sector has huge implications to development in general and sustainable development in particular. This research therefore stresses the need to fully recognise the value of the informal sector and integrate it into the larger economy to make sustainable development a reality. Empowerment of the grassroots is in most cases the panacea to sustainable development.

Despite their lack recognition, informal vendors continue to thrive for survival. To most vendors, social capital becomes the only way to circumvent the problems of lack of association and representation. Bourdieu’s cultural and social capitals become very invaluable in determining business nodes (Dube, 2011). As noted earlier in this study social capital is the fundamental base on which the impartation of business skills in the informal sector is laid. The rule of thumb is used by most informal vendors who manipulate their habitus (historically established habits of doing things) to transcend the turning points they are thrown in as a result of lack of synergies in the field of informal trade. This concurs with Dube’s (2011) notion that most women cross-border traders resort to social networking as a way of learning the germane business etiquette. It was however noted that measuring the level of effectiveness of learning business that way is always difficult. This calls for the placement of newer policies on informal vending, giving specific stakeholders the obligation to fully educate and empower informal vendors.

7.0. Conclusion

The dollarization of the Zimbabwean economy has led to an exponential hike in the number of informal vendors in Masvingo urban. Despite the booming of the sector and its role in sustaining the lives of many households, informal vending has not been given sufficient positive audience in Masvingo urban. Lack of synergies and associations remains a daily reality marring the welfare of informal vendors. The legal and regulatory framework on informal vending has remained unfavourable as most informal vendors lament their subjection to brutal treatment at the hands of ZRP and municipal police. The demonization of informal vending and the informality label associated with the practice still haunts the effectiveness of the livelihood strategy. In spite of the daily catastrophes bedevilling the informal sector, informal vendors have remained resilient and resort to ingenuity to sustain their livelihoods. Social capital is manipulated for the acquisition of relevant skills in the sector, acclimatisation with foreign environments as well as circumventing the challenges of duty payment on border posts as well as arrest by police in the streets. However, the effectiveness of such mechanisms in rescuing the city from the snare of abject poverty is sometimes questionable.

8.0. Recommendations

This study contends that unless and until the informal sector is integrated into the wider economy through creating valuable synergies so as to empower informal vendors, the nation will continue to be walled in absolute poverty. As such, the government and civil society do have the mandate of promoting the sector which is sustaining the livelihoods of many Zimbabweans by ensuring popular participation of the actors concerned in national development. Policy makers should find ways to embrace and incorporate informal vending as it is the largest employer in Sub-Saharan African cities (Association of African Planning Schools, 2012). Legal recognition of the informal sector is crucial if the gains of informal vending are to translate to national development. Policy makers, academics and the government must combine efforts to ensure that informal vendors are educated and empowered to ensure that the nation enjoys the proceeds from the informal sector. It is also recommended that the municipality create more vending sites to respond to growing demand to reduce informality in the city. The ministry of SMEs should be given the mandate to empower informal vendors by imparting to them.
all the necessary requirements for them to join the formal sector.

References