

A “war against livelihoods”: Contestations over the government of Zimbabwe’s response to street vending in selected cities

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ABSTRACT

From the mid-1990s, Zimbabwe experienced an escalated economic decline epitomised by de-industrialisation, depressed job and livelihood opportunities and increased aggregate poverty prevalence. This culminated in the growth of street vending, dominated by illegal and unlicensed hawking. Using a mixed methods approach, the study interrogates the response of the government of Zimbabwe to street vending. The study reveals that street vending in Zimbabwe cities is anarchical and thrive on chaotic governance. This presents a locus of conflict between the state’s measures of maintaining public order and governability and the citizens’ efforts to sustain livelihoods. The presence of exclusionary neo-liberal municipal by-laws have relegated street vendors from the mainstream economy. Military assisted violent evictions, confiscation of wares, torture, arrest and detention of vendors forms part of government’s response strategies. The study recommends reform of by-laws and urban planning to entrench vending into the mainstream economy.

1. Introduction

The era post-1995 defines the escalation of a protracted decline of Zimbabwe’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) due to a myriad of factors, inter alia, violation of human and property rights, collapse of the rule of law and international exclusion (Research and Advocacy Unit (RAU), 2016; Nani, 2016; Mazhambe, 2017). The long stretched economic decline has been evident in massive de-industrialisation and capital flight, unemployment and the growing poverty levels due to a serious dislocation of livelihoods. Bhila and Chiwenga (2022) submits that Zimbabwe’s economy has since then been characterized by instability and volatility, both of which are hallmarks of excessive government interference and mismanagement. Massive corruption and disastrous economic policies have plunged the country into poverty. An inefficient judicial system and general lack of transparency severely exacerbate business costs and entrepreneurial risk. In the ensuing, a rise of street vending (viewed by the Moyo (2020) as nomadic vending) has been noted as an alternative source of livelihoods (Kumari, 2015; Njaya, 2014; Mazhambe, 2017). Leandro Medina and Friedrich Schneider (2018) rank Zimbabwe as second in the world on the largest informal sector behind Bolivia. Studies (Hove et al., 2020; Mazhambe, 2017; Mitullah, 2003) have shown a positive correlation between the rise of street vending and the rate of unemployment, as people seek ways to sustain themselves. As the informal sector is exponentially growing, the

state has failed to develop relevant frameworks or modify municipal by-laws to entrench this new economic paradigm (Bhila & Chiwenga, 2022; Mazhambe, 2017; Rogerson, 2016). This is compounded by the state’s tendency to reduce street vending to a nuisance within the urban mileau and a direct catalyst to urban risk accumulation (Mazhambe, 2017). According to Rogerson (2016) street vendors are thus subjected to state orchestrated arbitrary arrests and harassment. It is from the aforementioned strands that this paper offers a valuable descriptive and empirical analysis of the government’s response to street vending in the cities of Harare and Bulawayo.

2. Literature review

For purposes of systematic analysis, this section is divided into 3 sub-sections: conceptualisation of street vending, global trends and factors contributing to street vending and economic reform and the growth of street vending in Zimbabwe. These sections are interwoven to provide a comprehensive literature review on the concept and context of street vending and the approaches that governments around the world have taken to respond to street vending. The section further interrogates how key economic reforms in Zimbabwe contributed to the growth of street vending.

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2.1. Conceptualisation of street vending

According to Cross (1998), the term street vending was first used by Hart (1970, 1973) to describe the activities of petty entrepreneurs who sought to increase their earnings by investing their savings in panoply of temporary business ventures. Hart argued that these activities were largely ignored in the broader development context as they were relegated outside the dominant paradigms of 'modern development'. Hove et al. (2020) gave a broader definition of street vending with a wider economic value to the phenomenon. Kumari (2016) conceptualised street vending as the wholesale or retail trading of goods or services on streets and in other related public places such as avenues, alleyways, and boulevards. To Jiang and Wang (2022) street vending is a phenomenon that falls within the category of economic activities generally referred to as the informal sector.

Kusakabe (2006) categorise literature on street vending into four groups. The first set of literature focuses on the economy of street vending, placing street vending as a vital source of livelihood for the urban poor. This literature on the political economy of street vending brings two important paradigms. On one hand is the analysis of how street vending provides efficient services for the urban poor; and on the other hand is how such income contribute to the economic autonomy of women (McGee, 1977; Roever, 2014; Sekhani et al., 2019). The second set of literature represents the expansion of the political economy school. It broadly conceptualise street vending, and present an analysis of street vending as an expression of motherhood. This defines the contestations of patriarchy and gender discourses as women vendors are indicted as a threat to patriarchy and socially punished for going out of their homes where they traditionally belong (Roever & Skinner, 2016). The third anthology defines a rights discourse and looks at the liberties of street vendors in the context of rampant and diverse forms of harassment and abuse at the hands of the state. Mazhambe (2017) argues that this literature interrogates policy issues around street vending in the context of ambiguities, uncertainty and ambivalent legal frameworks. This literature justifies the rise of representative bodies for street vendors, and in Zimbabwe these include the Bulawayo Vendors and Traders' Association (BVTA), The Zimbabwe Chamber of Informal Economy Associations (ZCIEA) and the National Vendors Union of Zimbabwe (NVUZ). The fourth set of literature principally presents an urban planning perspective particularly the usage of urban spaces and looks at how street vending can revitalise urban spaces and bring life to human activities (Rogerson, 2016). De Luca (2012) argues that when this perspective is applied in the context of a developed country, it often translates into 'beautification; of the city using vendors as tourist attractions.

There is growing acknowledgment of the position of street vending in the political economy of developing countries. In terms of the available statistics street vending accounts for 15–25% of the total informal employment in Africa's major cities and contributes between 46% and 70% of cumulative trade value added in Zimbabwe, Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Kenya, Mali, and Tunisia, (IMF, 2018). According to Mazhambe (2017) in Zimbabwe, street vendors account for one third of the total population with 100,000 of these operating in the CBD of Harare. Studies have shown gross violation of the rights of street vendors by the government of Zimbabwe manifesting through arbitrary restrictions and harassment (Hove et al., 2020; Mitullah, 2003). Roever and Skinner (2016) added that despite the rise of street trade in most parts of Africa and Latin America, as one of the most visible occupations, very few cities have successfully developed systems to balance the need to support livelihoods with the need to manage public space. Kusakabe (2006) argues that street vendors and their rights to space have not been integrated into urban space usage and planning. Bhila and Chiwenga (2022) collated these arguments and concluded that legal frameworks, policies and models of urban planning anchored on the modernist paradigm are inclined towards creating towns and cities constituted entirely of formal settlements. Other activities regarded as informal are excluded from the

urban landscape through the execution of rigid and restrictive planning and development control mechanisms.

This paper adds to the conceptualisation, by exploring what Sekhani et al. (2019, p. 121) referred to as the "liminal and fluid nature" of informal or unregulated and formal or regulated categorization of street vending. This categorization stems from the legality of the operations of street vendors. The majority of street vending activities are informal and unregulated as their operations are not licensed by the relevant government authorities. Thus Cross (1998) in Ndlovu (2011) defines street vending as the production and exchange of legal goods and services that involved the lack of appropriate business permits, violation of zoning codes, failure to report tax liability, non-compliance with labour regulations governing contracts, work conditions, and/or legal guarantees in relations with suppliers and clients. In addition, Sekhani et al. (2019) submits that street vending as an employment opportunity is viewed as part of the informal sector because.

- Street vendors have limited access to formal market spaces and can't receive state-level support for formal training and education, including help from credit institutions etc.
- Street vendors are unrecorded and unregistered in the data collection activities including census and other official statistics thereby, giving them an unrecognized status by the government (hence the term invisible entrepreneurs).
- Street vendors are compelled to operate outside the legal framework and beyond the pale of social protection, labor legislation or protective measures, even if they had registered and respect certain aspects of the law
- Street vendors receive limited legal protection from labor rights, often facing poor working conditions.

2.2. Global trends and factors contributing to street vending

Rapid urbanisation is the contemporary trajectory the world over. The strength of urbanisation is that at least 50% of the world's population was already residing in urban centres by 2007 as the world transforms from a "global village to an urban globe" (Jones and Nelson, 1999, p. 1). Projections are that over 67% of the world population will be living in urban areas by 2025 (OECD/ILO (2019). Bhila and Chiwenga (2022) added that whereas the global North is the most urbanised, the highest urbanisation rates are experienced in developing countries where in excess of 90% of the anticipated population growth is projected. Trends in African cities show not only rapid but chaotic urbanisation with attendant implications for the region's long-term development trajectory. Although debate exists over whether Africa can be accurately classified as the fastest urbanising region of the world (Mlambo, 2017; Ndawana, 2022), it is undoubtedly true that many more Africans now live in urban areas than at any other point in history. The World Bank predicts that by 2030 Africa will finally be an urban continent, with more than 50% of its population living in cities (Madziba, 2017). Increasingly, much of this urbanisation is fuelled more by natural population growth in cities or urban-to-urban, rather than rural-to-urban migration (Bhila & Chiwenga, 2022). With the growth in urban populations, questions have emerged over the quality of urban public infrastructure and the capacity of urban environments to generate employment and the range and variety of employment and livelihoods. One key observation is that there has been a negative correlation between growth of cities on one hand and the capacity of those cities to provide formal job and livelihood opportunities for their residents.

DeLuca (2012) argues that debates on street vending across the world demonstrate incredible similarities notwithstanding differences in geographical and historical contexts. Key debates about street vending involve registration and taxation, legality/illegality, competition, consumer protection, individual versus collective rights, health and safety regulations especially where food is involved and urban planning and

governance (Bhila & Chiwenga, 2022; Muchadenyikaa, 2017; Njaya, 2015). Studies found that street vendors face increased hostility worldwide as they vie for access to public space (Al-Jundi et al., 2021; Ndawana, 2022).

Around the world, the informal sector in general and street vending in particular tends to proliferate where formal job opportunities collapse due to a myriad of reasons including bad government policies, war and conflict, natural calamities to mention a few. A study of conflict and war-torn regions show that their political risk indexing is very high and as such they lack environmental stability which is key for formal business development. Al-Jundi et al. (2021) argues that in Iraq street vending increased dramatically in the last 15 years largely due to political changes. Following the US-led alliance occupation of Iraq in 2003, the state and its key institutions have collapsed. This has severely damaged political and social stability and the state has mainly allocated financial resources to fighting terrorism and resolving sectarian tensions. In the same context, the new regime shifted to a free-market economy and hence replacing the state as the major employer as was the case during Saddam Hussein's regime. Resultantly, unemployment has increased, especially among young people, with one-fifth of the population falling below the poverty datum line, despite the country ranking fifth in the world oil exports. The number of street vendors has increased sharply, and the public authorities have been unable to formalize their status (OECD, 2019). Attempts by the government to evict street vendors and/or destroy vending stalls has often triggered protests, for example, the major demonstration at the beginning of October 2019 against corruption, unemployment, and poor public services.

For North America and Europe, the majority of informal traders are immigrants. In North American cities, Latin Americans represent the major categories of migrants who carry out informal street vending activities. (Bhila & Chiwenga, 2022; Peimani & Kamalipour, 2022). In the European context, the majority of informal street vendors are from South-East Asia and North-African countries (DeLuca, 2012; Kumar, 2012). The close relationship between informal street vending and immigrant status highlights how in many developed countries, migrants, mostly irregular, suffer from socio-economic discrimination, which drives them to find work in unskilled segments of the labour market, often in the informal economy (Jiang & Wang, 2022). As aforementioned, the informal sector becomes an alternative form of employment and livelihood when the development program fails to provide employment opportunities in the formal sector. The informal sector of Indonesia is growing as a place for workers who lack the skills needed in the formal sector (DeLuca, 2012).

In China, as the economy is recovering from the coronavirus pandemic, the vending economy is in the spotlight with groups and individuals from all walks of life participating. Overall, the sector was projected to provide employment for 9 million people in 2022 if conducive support policies are put into place (Cao et al., 2021; Jiang & Wang, 2022). Technology and e-commerce companies such as Alibaba, JD.com, Tencent and Meituan-Dianping have pronounced support measures to assist those in the street vending sector, such as easy cash transactions, as the government is set to allow more street vendors to return and remove restrictions in an effort to reboot the economy. Cao et al. (2021) submit that, driven by the booming trend, large catering brands such as KFC and Pizza Hut are making moves to embrace business opportunities by launching street mobile breakfast stalls in cities in China. Chinese Premier Li Keqiang addressed a press conference after the third session of the 13th National People's Congress on May 28, 2022 where he praised some cities' policies that encourage mobile street vendors while addressing employment. Roadside vendors have, for a long time been regarded as an expression city atmosphere, an expression of culture, and a popular tourist attraction. For example, Dongdaemun in Seoul, South Korea is famous for its street stalls and regarded as a must-visit place to appreciate the local culture (DeLuca, 2012; Huang et al., 2018). On the one hand, the vending business is popular for its low costs, freedom from taxes and place in grass-roots culture, but on the

other hand, it is a reflection of the high pressure of unemployment and an economic downturn. Jiang and Wang (2022) added that Chinese cities previously tightened management of street vendors because of the impact on the urban environment, so the opening-up of this industry will pose higher requirements for urban management.

2.3. Global perspectives on government intervention on street vending in selected nations

Studies show that government intervention in the informal sector vary from one country to the other. Some countries have restrictive legal frameworks on the informal sector whereas others facilitate the growth and mainstreaming of the informal sector into the formal sector (Peimani & Kamalipour, 2022; Coletto et al., 2021; Gamielidien & van Niekerk, 2017). This section presents experiences in different jurisdictions on the interface between vending as an economic activity and the state either through regulation or enforcement of the regulations. The cases discussed here are mainly from the global south as they have a huge number of their populations in the informal sector.

Lima, the capital city of Peru presents an important case study on government regulation on vending. Whereas, there are a number of scholars studying street vending in Lima, from the ground-breaking work of de Soto (1989), recent attention has focused on the interplay between local government institutions (which are the major actors in defining legal-regulatory frameworks for street vending) and vendors. Coletto et al. (2021) submits that regarding this topic, Lima's policy towards street vending has, over the years shifted from populist support in the 1980s to tighter regulation in the 1990s, policies that continue into present day and are characterized by a strong neoliberal stance. Linares (2018) adds that notwithstanding the neoliberal policy orientation of Lima, Ordinance No. 1787/2014 of 2014 contained some pro-poor provisions. The ordinance gave temporary authorizations for vendors to use public space, with preferential access to vulnerable groups in extreme poverty. Roever (2016) notes that at the national level, the Supreme Decree N° 005-91-TR recognizes street vending as self-employment in response to unemployment, occurring in the context of economic crisis.

Within the context of the above legal framework, street vending in Lima increased in the last 20 years, raising their role as supply markets, especially concerning food. According to Coletto et al. (2021) in terms of the National Census of Supply Markets, in 2016 there were 1232 markets in Lima that include wholesale, retail, and mixed markets, with 110,229 fixed stalls, reflecting approximately the number of regular/formal vendors. The street vending scene is related to the markets because in approximately 50% of the markets, street vending activities are situated just outside them. Linares (2018) cites Peru's household survey of 2015 in which there were an estimated 326,000 street vendors and around 127,000 market traders in Lima.

According to Sekhani et al. (2019), Thailand is a useful example in understanding the importance of informal markets in supporting employment. Roever and Skinner (2016) argues that as a result of Thailand's development policy and the limitation of the formal (regulated) sector in absorbing the excess of labor supply, the informal (unregulated) sector has played a distinct role in supporting the Thai labor market. The government of Thailand has taken an inclusive approach on urban informality by offering necessary support which include land and basic amenities to street vendors. Particularly, after the economic crisis of 1997, there has been a high degree of labor mobility into the (unregulated) informal sector.

Studies on the interface between vending and government institutions in Africa shows that local governments in the continent presents a major obstacle to the development of the informal sector activities (Mitullah, 2003; Njaya, 2015; Recchi, 2021). The majority of local government institutions in Africa use restrictive policies, archaic by-laws and regulatory instruments originally intended to control and regulate the growth of indigenous enterprises under the colonial system.

The restrictions and bylaws simply make vending illegal, supported by a strong view that vending is responsible for making cities dirty, obstructing traffic and therefore a public nuisance. Such provisions were for dealing with cities planned for colonial governors and these policies did not provide for any informal trading within the CBD and hence making street trading activities within those areas violation of legal provisions. Nani (2016) submits that these policies did not appreciate the role of street vending in an urban economy.

In Zambia, Ndlovu (2011) submits that in terms of the law, street vending is illegal and that local authorities do not give trading licenses to street vendors. However, Recchi (2021) submits that all the street vendors would like to have a trading license such as the hawkers' license which allows them to sell goods in streets so that they could be trading freely without fearing evictions from the council. However, a trend is noted in Zambia, Uganda, Zimbabwe and Kenya where restrictive vending regulations and bylaws are relaxed towards general elections as a way of appealing to the votes of vendors. To support this, Ndlovu (2011) gave an example of the 2011 election year in Zambia where politicians relaxed the law enforcement on street vendors for fear of losing votes. This made the population of street vendors in Lusaka's CBD to more than double.

In South Africa, the National Government has demonstrated commitment to creating a conducive environment for small informal economic activities, including street trading. The Business Act of 1991 changed the legal approach to informal trading through acknowledging street vendors as business people who contribute to the economy. Prior to the Act, street vendors were only permitted to trade if they had a license (Mitullah, 2003). The Act removed this requirement. The Act has provided the traders with the right to trade, while local authorities only regulate but cannot prevent traders from trading. The White Paper on National Strategy for Development and Promotion of Small Businesses in South Africa of March 1995, commits the Government to the creation of an environment that encourages and assists the development of all categories of the informal economy. The 1998 White Paper on Local Government requires that local government be committed to 'working with citizens and groups within the community to find sustainable ways to meet their social, economic and material needs and to improve the quality of their lives'. According to the Social Laws Social Law Project (2014) the progress made in South Africa, differs across cities with Durban having the best environment for street vendor operations. In the Municipality of Durban there is a Department of Informal Trade and Small Business Opportunities. The Council has also designed innovative private sector based approach for managing street vending. The approach includes street vendors' organisations leasing land from the Council and further leasing to traders on organisation's terms, property owners applying for sidewalk lease and public/private sector management of markets planned for street vendors. However, a high immigrant population in South Africa and the xenophobic attacks have resulted in foreigners engaged in vending experiencing violence from South African citizens in general and the security institutions as well (Gamielien & van Niekerck, 2017).

The covid 19 pandemic ushered in fundamental changes to economies in general and street vending was significantly affected. Governments across the world introduced various measures aimed at containing the pandemic. Such measures included the locking down of public places (either partial or total lockdown), a minimum of 1-m social distance and mandatory wearing of masks. In Peru, for example, Coletto et al. (2021) notes that government declared a national lockdown on March 16, 2020 and the media identified urban markets as hubs of infection. In Africa, major markets were closed as governments grappled with containing the pandemic. Police crackdown on street vendors was intensified in major cities such as Johannesburg, Kampala, Lusaka, Blantyre and Maputo (Ndawana, 2022; Recchi, 2021). In Zimbabwe, the government introduced a series of total shut down of markets in most areas such as Mbare in Harare and Makokoba in Bulawayo, Consequently, street vending was prohibited in all areas surrounding the

markets. The main objective of these measures was the de-densification of the markets. In Lima, government mandated partial lockdown and hence a maximum capacity of 50%, a minimum social distance of 1 m, a clear route of entry and exit, and the mandatory use of masks. Coletto et al. (2021) submits that these directives were mainly applied to the regular vendors in formal markets of Lima; it was more difficult to enforce them for street vendors and informal markets such as La Parada.

Studies concur that the imposition of covid 19 lockdown measures were generally difficult to apply to street vendors (Jiang and Wang, 2022; Ndawana, 2022; Recchi, 2021). Ndawana (2022) argued that lockdown enforcements were a huge threat on the livelihoods of street vendors as streets were generally empty of prospective clients while police were enforcing the restrictions through evicting street vendors or confiscating their wares. However, vendors designed many survival strategies, some of which included moving from streets to residential areas and online marketing of products followed by home deliveries.

2.4. Economic reform and the growth of street vending in Zimbabwe

The growth and dynamics of the informal sector in Zimbabwe largely finds traction in Roy's (2011) work on how the state "makes and un-makes" informality. Fundamentally, government interventions through policy (de)shapes the capacity of the formal economy and hence determining the margin of informality. Over the years Zimbabwe has exhibited a positive correlation between industrial capacity utilization and changes in the size of the informal sector. While the majority of Zimbabweans live in rural areas, the country is experiencing significant urbanisation. Rapid growth in cities such as Harare, Chitungwiza and Bulawayo have seen over 34% of Zimbabwe's population living in urban areas with an average annual urbanisation rate of at least 3% (Njaya, 2015; Zimbabwe Statistics Agency, 2012). Poor economic performance affecting the developing countries in the global south dislocates urban livelihoods especially among the poor and Zimbabwe is no exception to those trends. According to Magidi (2022) the country experienced large-scale de-industrialisation leading to massive losses of formal jobs and livelihood opportunities since the mid-1990s.

The years 1980–1990 witnessed economic growth averaging 5.5%. This growth was driven by "growing domestic demand, as workers' wages were increased due to government interventions, government's redistributive policies that saw a vast expansion of education and health facilities, and the opening up of external markets, among other factors" (Mlambo, 2017, p. 103). Conversely, the socialist oriented policies of the new independence government, corruption and increased regulation of the economy affected formal business and in the process generating unemployment (Njaya, 2015, Magidi, 2022). By the end of the first decade of independence, unemployment had increased and was over 20% (Ndawana, 2022). Government responded by opening the economy in areas that were previously prohibited. The establishment of some sites for doing such business started the expansion of the informal economy. These developments were the earliest signals of the government's tolerance of informality. The situation was exacerbated by the adoption of Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) as government sought to revamp investment and economic growth through an array of liberalization strategies that included price and exchange rate controls, trade liberalization, privatization of parastatals and other public entities.

According to Ndawana (2022) an array of factors culminated in ESAP being unproductive and harmful to the economy. These include poor packaging of ESAP, severe drought of 1992 and poor implementation of the programme by government. This culminated in declining economic growth, slow growth of manufacturing. According to Mlambo (2017) projections for 1990–2000 fiscal years were that Zimbabwe's informal economy would increase to 59.4% of GDP and estimated to support about 1.7 million people. Despite these statistics indicating a growth in the informal sector, the trends outweighed the projections as the economy exponentially contracted and hence pushing a large number of

people outside formal employment. This simply drove people into the informal sector as a source of livelihood.” Ndawana (2022) submits that the net effect of ESAP was to add precariousness of livelihoods through social services commercialization, government and private business retrenchments, economic liberalization, increased unemployment, decreased real wages and rising food and fuel costs.

In the last 21 years, urban centres in Zimbabwe witnessed a phenomenal increase of illegal street vending predominantly in Harare. Kamete (2004) shows that in 2002 projections were that not less than 50% of the national workforce was the informal sector. Tibaijuka (2005) indicated that the unemployment rate in 2004 was at 80% and the deteriorating economic environment led to massive company closures with about 800 manufacturing companies halting operations since 2002, while 25 were stressed and eight faced shutting down in 2004. The Zimbabwe 2014 Labour Force Survey showed that 94.5% of employment in the country is informalized with street vending accounting for 15–25% of total informal employment in major cities of Africa. In 2015, Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (Zimstats) revealed that an estimated 5.9 million people out of a total of the 6.3 million working in Zimbabwe work informally (Zimbabwe Statistics Agency, 2012, 82). An Assessment of the Contribution of street vending to Zimbabwe’s economy in 2018, reveal that 86.6% of street vendors depended entirely on street vending as their source of income. Ndawana (2022) provides that the total number of street vendors in Harare CBD in 2016 was estimated at 20,000 on a daily basis. The central government and Harare City Council (HCC) have periodically, abortively attempted to get rid of illegal street vending activities through the forcible eviction of the street vendors. The vendors resist the evictions arguing that they lacked other livelihood sources (Muchadenyika, 2017). As such the evictions are tantamount to the declaration of war against a key livelihood source. Scholars found the argument of the vendors as sincere as indeed the closure of formal employment meant vending became the replacement source of livelihood (Njaya, 2015; Bhila & Chiwenga, 2022). The exponential growth of street vending as a source of livelihood has generated the intellectual excitement on how, in the face of brutal state response, illegal street vending continues to grow. This is indeed an issue of livelihood and this paper submits that any state sponsored attempts to dislocate such livelihood sources is seen as nothing other than ‘declaration of war against survival’.

3. Discussion of findings

3.1. Overview of the study cities

Harare and Bulawayo are the largest cities (in both economic and demographic terms) in Zimbabwe respectively. The population of Zimbabwe as at the April 20, 2022 was 15,178,979, of which 7,289,558 (48 percent) were male and 7,889,421 (52 percent) were female, giving a sex ratio of 92 males for every 100 females (Zimbabwe National Statistical Agency (Zimstats), Census Report of 2022). Harare remains the most populous province with 16% of the total population residing in the metropolitan province (Covering Harare City Council, Ruwa, Epworth and Chitungwiza), while 4.4% resides in the metropolitan province of Bulawayo. Given the 2012 population size of 13, 061, 329, the 2022 census results give an annual population growth rate of 1.5 percent. However, unofficial statistics estimate the population of Harare at over 3000 000 and Bulawayo at 1500,000. The growth of unplanned settlements has generally led to the sprawling of urban populations making Zimstats statistics largely disputable.

The average percentage composition of the population by age group and sex is in the 0-30-years age group which comprise 70% of the total population of the two cities (Zimbabwe Statistics Agency, 2012 Census Report, Parliament of Zimbabwe, 2017). In most countries, the flow of migration is largely towards the urban areas as people look for better opportunities for survival. Ideally, population growth must be accompanied by a corresponding improvement in the development of public

infrastructure and the provision of public services. Unfortunately, for Harare and Bulawayo, there has been very minimal development of hospitals, roads, the urban transport system and other public amenities. Both cities were heavily affected by the effects of de-industrialisation, a trend in the entire country. Resultantly, the majority of the active population has been kicked into the informal sector where there are comparably low incomes and poor working conditions. There are no financial safety nets provided by the government to the unemployed, resulting in economic desperation which may drive people into not only informal but also illegal activities. Bulawayo and Harare have an estimated 120,000 street vendors operating in the CBD areas (Njaya, 2015; Mazhambe, 2017, Simango, 2017).

As aforementioned, this paper analyses the response of the Government of Zimbabwe to street vending. The thrust is to create baseline evidence for the development of regulatory/governance frameworks that integrate the informal sector and street trading into mainstream economy. This will entail various processes such as reframing of city by-laws, incorporation of the informal economy into urban spatial and strategic planning process. Tables 1 and 2 present summaries of respondents for focus group discussions and interviews respectively.

The study findings were discussed under the following sub-headings: analysis of the study population and respondents, the demographic characteristics of street vendors in Zimbabwe, dimensions of street vending, an analysis of the legal frameworks governing vending, approaches of the Government of Zimbabwe in dealing with street vendors and a summary of other challenges faced street vendors.

3.2. Analysis of the study population and respondents

The target population of the study was drawn from all street vendors operating within the Central Business District (CBD) areas of Harare and Bulawayo cities. However, the majority of street vendors in the CBD areas of the two cities, as is the case with other urban centres across the country are unlicensed hawkers. This made the identification of a representative sample and the use of probability sampling techniques problematic. 85% and 79% of the respondents in Harare and Bulawayo respectively were not registered and operating as illegal street vendors (refer to Fig. 1).

The common trading points in the CBD are street pavements, street corners, parking lots at shopping centres; some are stationed at traffic lights. Mlambo (2017) stressed that street vendors are blamed for crowding plazas, sidewalks and parks, coming too close on the subway, or selling too close to local businesses. Because of the rampant illegal street vending at undesignated places, there is tension between the traders on one side and the city councils and Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) on the other side who collectively regulate and enforce municipal by-laws. The vendors are therefore in an endless ‘cat and mouse’ with municipal police and ZRP which complicated the use of probability sampling in the study.

3.3. The demographic characteristics of street vendors in Zimbabwe

The study participants were drawn from both genders. 54% of respondents were females and 46% were male. This represents a change from statistics presented in a related study by Mazhambe (2017) where the study had 61% percent of the respondents being females while 39% were males (refer to Fig. 2).

Trends across the world indicate that the majority of street vendors are women. Statistics given by Zimbabwe Coalition on Debt and

Table 1
Summary of respondents for FGD.

City	Targeted respondents	Valid responses	Response rate
Harare	8 FGD	6 FGD	75%
Bulawayo	7 FGD	6 FGD	85.7%

Table 2
Summary of respondents for interviews.

City	Targeted respondents	Valid responses	Response rate
Harare	25	20	80%
Bulawayo	15	10	66.6%

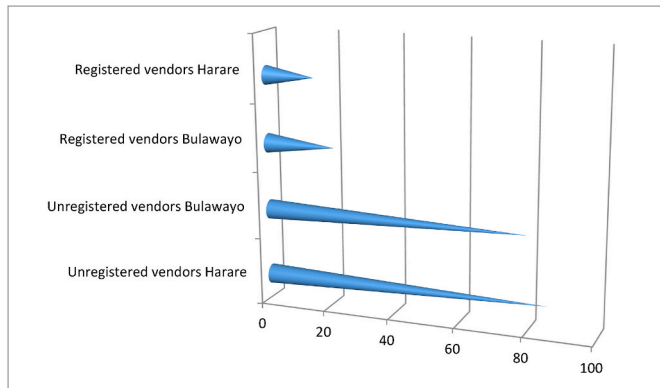


Fig. 1. Population of registered and unregistered vendors.

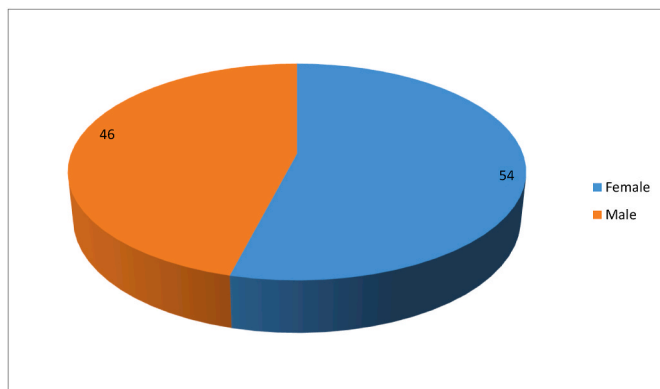


Fig. 2. Distribution of vendors by gender.

Development (ZIMCODD) 2016 report indicate that women vendors constitute 88% in Ghana, 68% in South Africa, and 63% in Kenya. According to Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) (2007:16), women are more likely to be in the informal sector than men for a combination of factors including greater household responsibility, unrecognized or low levels of skills and education, decreasing household incomes and occasionally their desire for greater autonomy and flexibility. Representatives from the 3 vendors' associations interviewed in Harare and Bulawayo indicated that the two cities have an estimated number of street vendors concentrated in the CBD areas of over 120,000 and 15 percent of these are underage children. While this study could not include children below the age of 18 among its respondents for ethical reasons, available secondary data show a high number of underage street vendors. In 2015, UNICEF went on record saying of Zimbabwe's 1.3 million orphans, some 100,000 were living on their own in child-headed households. According to UNICEF, many such children were forced to leave school and find work as street vendors or labourers on tobacco farms, tea and sugar plantations, and in mines in order to support their younger siblings. According to the Child Resource Institute Zimbabwe cited by <https://www.aa.com.tr> statistics indicate that by October 2017 there were 188,356 child vendors operating in towns, cities and rural areas in Zimbabwe. The Coalition Against Corruption, an anti-graft lobby group, also added that every day approximately 114 children crossed from Beitbridge, the Zimbabwean border town to

neighbouring Messina in South Africa to operate as vendors at bus terminuses there. A respondent who is a widow contributing in one of the focus group discussions in Bulawayo said.

Every day, my 10- and 12-year-old children have to help me sell our wares on the streets. I have no money to send them to school and they dropped out of school two years ago. In order for us to have food at home, I now deploy them to different vending points where we have set up market stalls not far from our home.

In a related case a 22-year-old female street vendor who started the trade at 12 years gave the following narration at a focus group discussion in Harare:

My parents died when I was seven and I have two siblings to look after. Owing to lack of school fees, I dropped out of school at third grade and have given the chance to my little sister and brother whom I am sending to a local council primary school.

One of the acute weaknesses of previous literature on street vending is its apparent failure to present a detailed analysis of demographic dynamics of street vendors. However, the Research and Advocacy Unit (2015); Joseph, (2011); Njaya (2014) concurred that there has been a massive shift in the demographic profiles of urban street vendors which warrant extensive scrutiny. These demographic profiles include gender, age, marital status and the level of education. 75% of the respondents had at least a full ordinary level qualification while 20% dropped school at different levels of secondary education. Only 5% dropped at primary school level and the majority of these were former street kids. From these respondents, 35% had a tertiary level qualification ranging from diplomas, higher national diplomas and university degrees (refer to Fig. 3). A comprehensive study of the demographic characteristics of street vendors is yet to be undertaken. However most of the available literature is grounded in the classical perspective where street vending is perceived as dominated by women and the unskilled. Tshuma and Jari (2014) classified street vending as a source of livelihoods for the unskilled and illiterate new arrivals in the city while Chirisa and Muchini (2011) saw street vending as a source of employment for the urban poor. This view is invalidated by the findings of the study as more skilled people who are either being retrenched or failing to secure formal employment are opting for street vending as a source of livelihood. Hence Kusakabe (2006) summed that a cursory view of urban environments with brisk street vending prove that this 'economic activity can be a sponge that absorbs large numbers of surplus labour ...'

3.4. Dimensions of street vending

The study analysed the various dimensions of street vending and the average profit margin per each category from the views of the respondents. 24% of the vendors who participated in the study are air time vendors, 21% are food vendors, 24% are second hand clothes vendors, 5% sell newspapers while 16% buy and sell any items depending on the market dynamics (examples of such items are medicinal drugs and

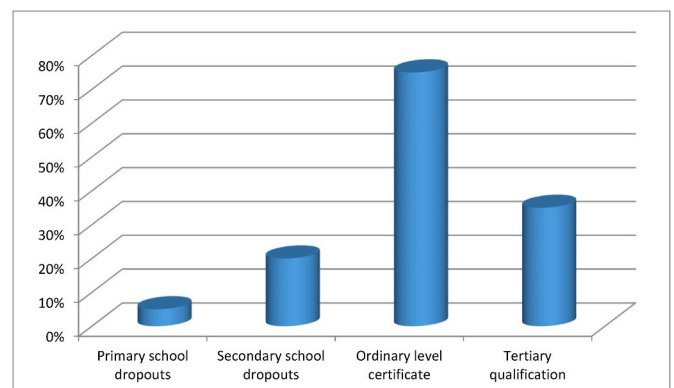


Fig. 3. Education and qualification levels of respondents.

herbs, stationary and other consumables) and 10% are cash vendors dealing in foreign currency trading in the parallel market (refer to Fig. 4). The average daily profit of the above six groups of respondents was 13 United States dollars. 10% of the respondents who are cash vendors reported a daily profit of 60 United States dollars per day. Profit margins were low among those selling newspapers and airtime with a combined average of 4 United State dollars a day. When asked about their daily income, the 9% could not provide an average because they use their earnings immediately after generation to cater for daily expenditure. 75% of the respondents however reported a decline in daily sales due to an exponential increase of the population of vendors and the declining spending power of consumers as compared to previous years. The majority of them cited capital constraints to purchase higher order stock which in turn gives higher returns.

The majority of vendors who sell low order commodities such as sweets, snacks etc recorded very marginal profits per item, as low as 10 cents or even less. One female university graduate who is a vendor made the following contribution at a focus group discussion:

My stock has low order commodities such as sweets, ball points, shoe laces etc and the average profit per item are 5 cents. This means I should push volumes in order to generate reasonable income. However, due to cutthroat competition in the market, the average sales per day are declining.

The decline in income seems to have adverse effects on elderly vendors compared to their younger competitors as noted by one 67-year trader in the Harare CBD:

You should always be alert, to notice an opportunity for a potential sale and run after the client. Dodging other traffic and pedestrians, the first vendor to get to the customer makes the sale. The rest walk back to their strategic posts and continue their stakeout for customers. This is difficult for elderly vendors as they can hardly compete with their youthful counterparts.

The prevailing harsh economic environment has affected the profitability of street vending in Zimbabwe. This is further exacerbated by the fact that a huge number of the street traders are illegal hawkers and are always in endless fight with authorities.

3.5. An analysis of the legal frameworks governing vending

The study analysed the laws governing the informal sector, in particular street vending. 65% of the respondents expressed ignorance of the specific legal provisions governing street vending in the country. 35% of the respondents stressed that the legal framework seems to be more focused on registered small and medium enterprises while leaving out street vending (refer to Fig. 5).

The respondents argued that the perception of the government is that street vending is a nuisance and a threat to political stability as most street vendors have participated in protests and demonstrations against government, particularly those organised by their associations or opposition political parties. A chairperson of one of the vendors'

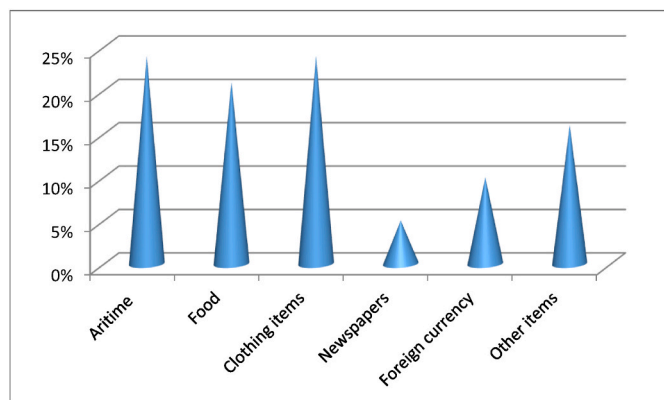


Fig. 4. Categories of street vending.

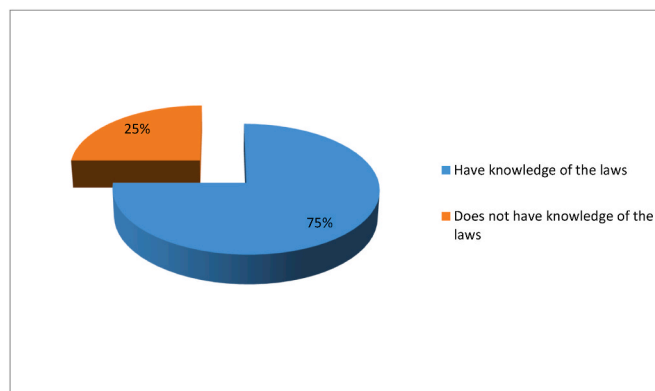


Fig. 5. Respondents' knowledge of the laws governing street vending.

associations stressed that it is prudent to recognise that street vendors are an integral and indispensable component of contemporary urban economies all over the globe that provide easy access to an assortment paraphernalia of goods and services in public spaces. However, it appears that ignorance of the legal framework is more prevalent among female vendors as 77% of the category of respondents who expressed ignorance of the legislation are women. One of the female vendors made the following contribution:

As women we have limited knowledge about the registration and licensing requirements for vendors especially the new vendors and this has made us vulnerable to municipal police, Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) and bogus Vendors Associations who instil fear that we will be evicted from our trading sites and so we are forced to pay fees ranging from Zimbabwe dollar \$20 -\$50. As women, our voices are not heard in public forums and we do not have confidence because no one has taken the decision to empower women vendor leaders.

A member of the BVTA interviewed argued that local authorities should review their archaic hawkers' by-laws, most of which were crafted during the colonial era and are now irrelevant. He argued that Bulawayo city council for instance had very old by-laws that are now impeding operations of the informal sector and impinging on vendors' rights. In the same context a member of NVUZ submitted that the current by-laws of most local authorities are hindering the formalisation of the informal sector. This is contrary to the fact that the informal sector is the source of livelihoods for many jobless people who solely depend on it as an alternative employment. To further worsen the situation, there has been very little effort by the urban councils to educate vendors about the vending by-laws.

The Constitution of Zimbabwe contains provisions that guarantee the support and protection of actors in the informal sector. Section 64 of the Constitution contains provisions guaranteeing freedom of trade, profession or occupation and hence rights that relate to vending issues. According to the Zimbabwe Coalition on Debt and Development (ZIM-CODD) 2016 report, this means that the street vendors are liable to Government and local authorities' support in their pursuit for self-reliance. However, this study concluded that the by-laws for Harare and Bulawayo are stifling the vendors' freedom of trade and hence the need for review and/or alignment with the Constitution. Therefore, instead of harassing vendors, the government must seek to integrate street vending into the mainstream economy.

3.6. Approaches of the government institutions in dealing with street vendors

The study looked at various approaches of the national government and local authorities in dealing with street vendors. Participants in the focus group discussions, drawn from residents unequivocally stated that both national and local government response to street vending was harsh and unjustifiable in the majority of instances. In the contrary,

results from interviews with national government and council officials revealed a litany of allegations against street vending ranging from claims of ‘stealing’ clients from formal business, congesting the urban environments, failure to comply with tax laws and disaster risk accumulation leading to health and sanitation problems such as cholera hazard, crime (pick-pocketing) and walking in the city centre in sheer agony for shoppers and pedestrians. Henceforth, the interface between the law enforcement agencies and the vendors has been antagonistic and characterized by a margin of state brutality on a people without an alternative source of livelihood. The vendors experience various forms of abuse by the ZRP and municipal police and this range from physical harassment to confiscation of the vendors’ goods. 59% of the respondents reported to have been arrested for vending and 42.6% of those arrested lost their wares to the councils who would then auction them or unscrupulously divert the goods for personal use. 41% survived the arrests and loss of goods by bribing the ZRP and/or municipal police or dodging the arrests (refer to Fig. 6). All respondents therefore had a previous confrontation with municipal police or ZRP officers.

Bell and Loukaitou-Sideris (2014) argued that government approaches in dealing with the informal sector in general and street vending in particular serves three fundamental purposes which are to: control, confine and/or extinguish. While sharing the above view, [Bhila and Chiwenga \(2022\)](#) submitted that studies have shown that government intervention in the informal economy either lead to enhanced performance of the sector or work to control or discourage its growth. Results from the interviews showed that the interface between governmental units and the informal sector in Zimbabwe should focus on how government can intervene to support the performance of this sector. Leaders of vendors’ associations claimed that the local authority should assist the informal sector to become more productive. On the contrary, arguments from council officials revealed that a surge in the size of the informal sector and the number of street vendors will lead to over-crowding in city centres consequently increasing urban risk and potential hazards such as cholera.

Participants from the focus group discussions pointed out that the national and local government authorities in Zimbabwe view street vending as an interference with the formal urban economy and hence a nuisance. However, available empirical evidence presents an affront to this position as street vending has a specific utility in an economy and hence it is not inferior and invisible, nor does it steal clients away from the formal economy. Street vending should therefore be understood as a specific segment of the consumers which is visible and operating in the open (Ndhlovu, 2012; [Al-Jundi et al., 2021](#); [Jiang & Wang, 2022](#)). In the same context, Lawrence and Castro (2006), [Bhila and Chiwenga \(2022\)](#) concurred that most governments in developing economies have not integrated the informal sector into the mainstream economy. A related study by [Kusakabe \(2006\)](#) concluded that with various forms of

regularisation, street vendors, in most developing countries ply their trade under inhospitable conditions, lacking basic facilities, and under constant fear of harassment and damage to their goods.

The government of Zimbabwe has variously declared its commitment to fighting street vending. Several public statements have been made by senior government officials to denigrate street vending. One interviewee complained that Government officials are acting ultra vires the Constitution when they continue to ‘harass and denigrate vending through derogatory names as shown by former Vice President Mphoko.’ This was in reference to the statements attributed to former Vice President of Zimbabwe, Phelekezela Mphoko during his time in office when he said, ‘I have got my own views regarding vending where you find an able bodied man seated selling tomatoes. There are better things to do for someone who is fit except for those who are indisposed and physically challenged.’ (The Daily News, 4/2/15).

There is also evidence of the deployment of the military in the streets to deal with vendors. In the same context, former president Mugabe made statements ordering the state agents, including the army to evict the vendors from the streets. On September 10, 2017 president Mugabe lamented that even the city centre’s roads named after him and Tanzanian liberation icon Julius Nyerere were ‘covered with dirt’ and that vendors were selling goods ‘everywhere’. He then ordered the city councils to begin processes of collaborating with the ZRP and the army to solve the ‘problem’ of vendors once and for all. The implications of this directive was to deploy the military to deal with civilians eking their livelihoods in the streets. To add to the government’s commitment to deal with vendors, a minister of local government also issued a stern warning to vendors to vacate the streets where he said ‘You are directed to cease forthwith your activities within the next 48 h, failure of which you have no one but yourselves to blame.’ Following up on the presidential directive, the Town Clerk for Harare city council, Josephine Ncube issued the following statement:

The city council, backed by the police will embark on ‘Operation Restore Order - an operation to decongest the city’ ... ‘to bring order and sanity in the Central Business District and other affected areas in light of the unprecedented levels of chaos prevailing in the City’.

The absence of the political will of the national government to protect vendors, as shown in the statements above have justified and heightened the crackdown particularly by municipal police assisted by state agents. Local government officials interviewed justified their actions as a way of bringing order and sanity in the city. An official in the Health department at Bulawayo city council noted that vendors were a risk to the health of the city as they operate at undesignated places that were prone to health hazards. [Zimbabwe Coalition on Debt and Development \(ZIMCODD\), 2016](#) Report stresses that critics of street vending argue that vendors unfairly compete against off-street establishments because they do not incur taxation and registration costs, or rental costs and utility payments. This creates unfair competition which threatens the viability of off-street establishments. This argument presents a picture of vendors as entrepreneurs who dodge tax payment. Following this reasoning, local governments should “formalize” street vendors by relocating them to off-street premises where they would be expected to register, pay taxes and rent or own their workplace”. However, this study established that in Zimbabwe, registration processes have been cumbersome leaving the vendors with the only choice to operate illegally. This negative perception is not exceptional to Zimbabwe alone as in other nations, street vending is often portrayed as an illegitimate and offensive invasion, which inhibits the capacity of cities to modernize and attain a global status. Street vendors are thus perceived as a sign of chaos and disorder; and a failure of metropolitan authorities to instill order within the cities ([Mazhambe, 2017](#)).

4. Conclusion

This paper interrogated the government of Zimbabwe’s response to street vending. Review of literature show fundamental differences

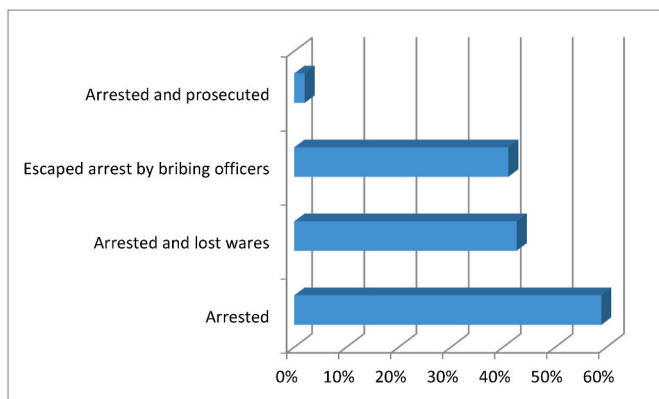


Fig. 6. Interface between vendors and law enforcement authorities and agencies.

between the nature and context of the informal sector in general and street vending in particular between developed and developing nations. The majority of street vendors in developed countries are unskilled immigrants from developing nations. Some of them lack proper documentation to regularize their stay and may be subjected to arrest and deportations. Whereas, studies reveal global experience where a substantial component of street vendors are lowly qualified, unskilled and elderly urban dwellers, Zimbabwe differ significantly as highly skilled and qualified urban citizens join street vending due to limited formal job opportunities. The covid-19 pandemic worsened the plight of street vendors as government introduced tight lockdown measures without accompanying frameworks and packages to support the livelihoods of those dependent on the informal sector. Rather, the measures ended up 'locking down livelihoods' for street vendors who could no longer trade due to strictly enforced government policy. The paper revealed that conventionally, the government has used the state agents including the military complimented by municipal police to drive away vendors from the streets but to no avail. Various cases of harassment and gross violation of the rights of the vendors as defined in the national constitution were noted. Despite constituting a significant component of the urban economy, the urban informal sector has not been integrated into the mainstream urban economy through reframing of neo-liberal by-laws. In the same context the informal trading is not comprehensively incorporated into the spatial planning of the city and hence making the economic configuration of the city largely exclusionary. The paper recommends integration of vending into the mainstream economy through the enactment of the relevant legislative instruments.

Author contribution

Vincent Chakunda: Vincent Chakunda is a sole author of the paper and responsible for all the sections of the paper. All correspondences should be directed to him

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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