

The Urban Informal Sector and Workplace Insecurity for Women in Nigeria: Evidence from Port Harcourt City

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Abstract

This work is an evaluative analysis of the role of the informal sector in the national development of third world economies in general, and Nigeria in particular. The study found not women contribute the bulk of the work force in this sector and in the course of their contribution face daunting challenges related to insecurity in their workplaces. These insecurities include: flagrant evictions and expulsions, confiscation of merchandise by local authorities, exposure to the elements, sexual harassment local authorities and general substandard safety measures, especially for the informal employees of formal enterprises. Specifically, the study found that Port Harcourt, which is at the heart of the Niger Delta and where there are exponential security risks, fostered the worst security for these women/girls in ways that have significantly hampered their effectiveness. The recommendations provided in the study offer veritable channels for tackling this social problem.

Introduction

One of the most profound transformations in the global economy over the past thirty years has been the increasing incorporation of women into the global work force. New opportunities to pursue careers have enabled some women to enhance their command over limited hold resources, take advantage of increased physical mobility and develop their technical and entrepreneurial skills. Nonetheless, in the developing world, the majority of these activities take place within the informal economy, where women face a wide range of insecurities. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example 87 % of non-agricultural women workers are informally employed (as compared to 63% of men). In Latin America 58% of women work informally (versus 48% of men) and in Asia 65% of women and men are informally employed (ILO, 2002:182; Roever, 2007:21).

A comparative study of the informal sector in Africa and Latin America shows that the proportion of the urban working poor in the informal sector in Latin America was estimated at: Bolivia 66.2%, Brazil 66.4%, Costa Rica 63.5%, Guatemala 93.3%, Honduras 84.9%, and Venezuela 52.4%, while in the region as a whole it was 68.7%. The study went on to note that rising poverty and unemployment levels have

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resulted from the weak employment creation capacity of the formal sector as there is evidence to suggest that the formal sector has failed to generate sustainable employment opportunities for the growing urban poor (STEP, 2006:12).

In Nigeria, the informal sector has remained the stronghold of the economy. The resilience of this sector is, in fact, the key to the survival of the economy in the face of unprecedented levels of mismanagement and corruption in government circles. Official economic indicators over recent decades paint a gloomy picture. Per capita income has fallen to its present level of \$300 from more than \$1000 in 1980, although the 2008 estimate, while controversial, restores the 1980 value, apparently as a result of income from oil revenue and somewhat successful macro economic records so far (Daily times, 1992:32; Obadina, 2006:44; CBN, 2008:76). Indeed, the recent global economic crisis and the crash of world oil prices have exposed the vulnerability of the Nigerian economy which is consistently at the mercy of a volatile global oil price mechanism. The only hope for the Nigerian economy for now is the anticipated rebound of oil prices. Whether this trend is sustainable remains a matter of conjecture.

The contrast between the apparent lack of growth of the national economy and the enduring spirit of ordinary people is evident across Nigeria, Africa and other parts of the underdeveloped world. The pessimistic images of starving Nigerians and other Africans, hapless and despondent, often seen in the western media mainly reflect the conditions of victims of war, famine and of course, maladministration. The vast majority of Nigerians and Africans are poor by western standards yet they remain dignified, vibrant and largely productive.

The informal sector, also known as the underground economy, provides a wide range of services and produces a variety of goods for markets used by all classes of consumers, but mainly by the poor and increasingly the pauperized middle class. Offerings in these markets range from young boys and girls selling drinking water in small plastic bags to mechanics to communications vendors, foreign exchange traders, shoe makers and tailors. These activities of the informal sector play a crucial role in the economies of all developing nations. This sector is the main source of employment, both in terms of self-employment and hired labour paid in wages or profit sharing (Obadina, 2006:47).

According to the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the informal sector accounts for about 72 % of non-agricultural employment in sub-Saharan Africa. Estimates of the contributions of the informal sector to the region's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) vary widely but conservatively put contributions at about half of the GDP (UNECA). In a similar survey by the IMF, the sector accounted for some 77% of Nigeria's economic output. While, as a result of its size and nature, the underground economy is difficult, perhaps even impossible to measure, there is no doubt that it employs many more people than the formal economy where government invests most public resources. This is one of the

absurdities of prevailing public policy, as in many ways the informal sector is the real economy where the most potential for entrepreneurial development exists (IMF Survey, 2004:64).

Be that as it may, the informal sector is far from perfect, as it is fraught with some serious and harmful consequences including the use of child labour, lack of labour rights, poor working conditions and low wages/income and above all, indices of workplace insecurities for the women who dominate this sector.

While the centrality of the informal sector in the third world cannot be over emphasized, it does present some challenges in certain regions of Africa. This is because in addition to the traditional inequalities inherent in the informal economy, some urban centres are becoming increasingly violent as a result of pervasive war and conflict (Okaba & Nte, 2008:41). The implication of this is that women and girls in the informal sector become victims of magnified insecurity in their workplace. In the Niger Delta region of Nigeria where Port Harcourt city is located, the situation at the administrative headquarters is atrocious. Given the general level of militancy, hostage taking, kidnappings, rape and terrorist acts, the security of women and girls in the informal sector is under serious threat. This is in addition to the often perverted activities of Local Council officials, touts and security agents perpetrated against these workers.

This paper purports to examine the pervasive insecurity in the informal workplace. In doing so, this study will focus on street vendors, home based workers and informal employees of formal enterprises. Specifically, this study will investigate the hazards faced by women and girls at the hands of government official, touts, criminals and the entire gamut of urban policies as they affect the informal sector. This study will also examine the vulnerabilities of women operators in this sector in the increasingly urban city of Port Harcourt, Nigeria, where women (and others) face an endless struggle for survival in an increasingly harsh economy.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to embark on an analytical investigation of the informal participation of women in the informal sector; the strength of the economies of most third world countries including Nigeria. In the course of doing so, the work will investigate the different dimensions of workplace insecurity faced by these female players of the informal sector in the growing city of Port Harcourt, in the Niger Delta, Nigeria.

Consequently, the study will strive to provide answers to the following research questions:

- ❖ What role does the informal sector play in third world economies?
- ❖ What are the impacts of the informal sector on the Nigerian economy?
- ❖ What role do women play in the informal sector?

- ❖ What are risks and security threats faced by women operators in this sector?
- ❖ Are there peculiar forms of insecurity women face in the informal sector in Port Harcourt city, Nigeria?

Theoretical Perspectives on the Urban Informal Sector in Developing Countries

Available literature has shown that third world urban environments manifest contrasting systems of production and distribution. Most scholars have attempted to conceptualize these forms of duality. According to Geertz (1963:19) the urban economy of the third world approximates a bazaar sector and a firm-centred arrangement. The International Labour Organization (ILO) (1972:43) and Hart (1973:54) have conceptualized it in terms of 'formal' and 'informal' sectors while Santos (1979:43) introduced the concept of circuits of production and distribution and went on to divide third world employment into upper and lower circuits. Dependency theorists and Marxists, including Gerry (1979:74) and Gerry and Birkbeck (1981:115) used the concept of 'mode of production' in which they refer to the informal sector as 'petty commodity production'. Before moving onto the methodology and data analysis, this paper will explore these different perspectives.

In examining the key components of the dualistic theories, Geertz (1963:26) noted that in Indonesia, most town commercial activities fit into the 'bazaar' sector. The major feature of this arrangement was extreme "marketization" also known as 'pasar'. The pasar is an economic institution, pattern of life and commercial arrangement that becomes prevalent across the entire society. People meet in the market for commerce and sometimes fraudulent exchanges, small-scale hawking and processing activities. The bazaar trading system is characterised by unrelated person-to-person transactions and employs a large pool of people on marginal levels of living and profits are usually small with no prospect of capital accumulation (Geertz, 1963:28-30).

In studying this phenomenon, Geertz examined the small market town of Modjokuto in East Central Java. In Modjokuto, Geertz (1963:29) observed something slightly different - progress towards effective patterns of economic activity. This tended to depart from the bazaar type of economy towards the firm type of economy, consisting of firm-like distributive institutions of small stores, shops and factories. He observed that in a difficult and individualistic market place, a few of the more interested members of the town's trading class were trying to organize themselves into a guild of local entrepreneurs. Geertz identified retail stores (Toko) and factories (Perushan) as the two commercial features showing the most significant evolution from the "bazaar" to the "firm-centred" economy. This categorization of third world urban economic activities into bazaar and firm-centred sectors remains significant in understanding urban systems in developing countries. However, it seems as though Geertz has failed to offer an analysis of the

nature of the dynamism and development that carries an economy from the bazaar to the firm-centred structure.

The International Labour Organisation Office (1972:69) and Hart (1973:165), have also conceptualized the same urban organization duality in terms of formal and informal sectors. The ILO (1972:70) outlined its first formal-informal sector definitions in its 1972 Kenya Report using the characteristics of enterprises to arrive at the formal-informal dichotomy (Kenya Report, 1972:6). The informal sector has since been adopted for studies of third world economies by two groups of scholars with different perspectives. For the first group, informal sector activities are sluggish, dependent and do not generate any significant income for the participants and the economy. This approach also attacks third world petty activities and accuses them of being exploitative at the individual level, providing only low earning opportunities, creating intense competition, being discriminatory in terms of gender, depending in foreign technology and resources and giving rise to a petit-bourgeoisie with links to the formal sector. Such enterprises are also viewed as a nuisance to the public, obstructing development and wasting public funds (Mazumdar 1976:321; Damnhaeuser, 1977:98; Longdon 1975:154; Kiplinsky, 1979:105 Bromley 1978:118; Bromley & Rusque – Alcaino, 1979:216, Birkbeck, 1979:137; Gery and Birkbeck 1981:107; Bannerjee, 1981:142 Moser, 1981:106; Norcliffe, 1983:132; Bolnick, 1992:198 and Nand, 2006:33). The general position of these writers is that the informal sector seems not to have inherent and dynamic characteristics of its own, and as such the need for outside forces such as raw materials, finance, markets and technology undermine the accumulation of capital by sector operators.

On the other side of the spectrum are those who believe that the informal sector is replete with success stories, individual excellence and the stimulation of economic development. They contend that the informal sector provides employment and income opportunities, develops skills, uses local and appropriate technology, and assists in the redistribution of wealth. The sector is also viewed as providing a sense of achievement and progress to its numerous participants (ILO, 1972:230; King, 1974:105; Merrick, 1976:112; Jellenik, 1978:76; Nihan & Youndain, 1978:217; Nihan, Demol & Jondoh 1979:282; Hanuofa, 1979:164; Baxter, 1980:187; McGee, et. al, 1980; Watsh, 1982:313; Roger & Beavon, 1982:132; Waldorf & Waldorf, 1983:264). Because of this more optimistic view of the informal sector, some scholars have made useful contributions to ways of improving the welfare of informal sector activities and participants (Yokman, 1989:108; Khundker, 1988 & Chandavakar, 1988:282; Maloney, 1988:233; Dasgupta, 2003:176)

A related dualistic conceptualisation of the informal sector interprets it as “upper” and “lower” circuits. According to Santos (1977), each third world urban system has an employment arrangement that fits into these two circuits. Santos argues that every place is the field of coexistence of two polarizations and two concrete modes of production existing side by side (Santos, 1977:50). This is true for both the means of

production and distribution. Thus, according to him, the two circuits of the economy (upper and lower) and synergy in the third world stand side by side in the urban system.

Each of the circuits in the urban system has the same set of variables, although their characteristics may differ. The two circuits work as a system and have a dialectical or logical relationship in which the upper circuit is dominant (Santos, 1977). Each circuit consists of its own distinctive characteristics. Like the former conceptualisations of third world economies as bazaar and firm-centred sectors or formal and informal sectors, Santos' concept of upper and lower circuit is also an important tool in the analysis of third world urban economic activities. Santos has also made significant contributions to uncovering the nature and dynamics of the relationship between the two circuits. He identified a veritable reciprocity in terms of distribution of goods in the region by the circuits. Because of this, Santos has helped to bridge the gap in academic thought which conceptualized third world economic activities solely in terms of duality. The final part of this section takes a look at the dependency theories and Marxist petty commodity production.

Dependency theorists and Marxists understand new urban economic activities of the peripheral (third world) economies in terms of production and refer to the informal sector as petty commodity production. This categorization demarcates peripheral economies from the major axis of capitalist production and/or market relations (Gerry, 1979:341; Gerry and Birkbeck, 1981:276). These authors opine that petty commodity production is best situated as a distinct economic form found in the context of several modes of production (feudal, capitalist and socialist). For them, it is characterized by subordination, dependency and transition with complex features and relations in petty commodity exchange.

Despite its solitary nature, petty commodity producers are likened to what dependency and Marxist scholars refer to as a "petty commodity bourgeoisie". The provision of raw materials, finances and markets by the national bourgeoisie enable the petty commodity bourgeoisie to accumulate wealth for investment and expansion and subsequently become dominant petty commodity enterprises. This arrangement concentrates wealth in the hands of a few and aggravates the distribution of resources, status and financial capital (Nand, 2006:35).

Another feature of petty commodity production is the apparent stagnation and perhaps declining income over time even in the face of growth and relevance. This reinforces the position of local small scale entrepreneurs who sustain the predominant political and economic structure for their own benefits. These subjective and complex relations or modes of production remain a snag in the growth of petty enterprise, the bulk of which tend to collapse over time (Gerry 1979:198; Birkbeck and Gerry, 1981:79; Forbes, 1981:154; Norcliffe, 1981:202). The import of these analyses is that to a great extent petty commodity production is inextricably linked to the development of capitalism (Gerry and Birkbeck, 1981:203). Moreover, once these petty enterprises become viable, they cease to be petty. This situation

approximates Geertz's notion of the movement of entrepreneurs from the bazaar economy to the firm economy via the accumulation of wealth and resources (Nand, 2006:44)

Despite the existence of the petty commodity bourgeoisie, most petty producers are not bourgeoisie. The petty commodity production paradigm is not dualistic as it is not made up of distinct groups at polar ends like the bazaar and firm-centred, formal and informal, and upper and lower circuit approaches. There is a more uniform distribution of enterprises, workers and owners of the means of production operating in different modes of production. Relative to the dependency approach, the Marxist perspective pays greater attention to the linkages between these various modes of production. This model is at variance with other dualistic models used to conceptualize third world urban economies.

Based on the foundation established by Marxist and dependency theorists, the transition and linkage of petty commodity enterprises with the organized formal sector has received due analysis. Using an integrative approach, to explain petty commodity enterprises in the informal sector, they have corrected some of the theoretical misconceptions and generalisations about the third world urban system (Nutress, 1987:178; Jaganathan, 1987:358; Maloney, 1998:254). The main thrust of the integrative approach is that there exists a strong link between formal and informal sectors; they work together with overlapping characteristics. Most informal sector enterprises are labour intensive, small scale, unrecognized, and unregulated although a few are more large scale and labour intensive. These enterprises have experienced expanding production but since they still operate outside the zone of official recognition and regulation, their capital accumulation possibilities are limited. These limitations and prohibitive recognition costs tend to confine operators of the informal sector to the realm of informality.

Urbanization and the Informal Sector in Nigeria

According to Ogbu and Ikara (1995:530), Africa's urbanisation is quite pervasive in a world that is increasingly gravitating toward cities. For these authors, Africa has surpassed all other regions of the world in the 1975-80 period, when African cities grew at an average annual rate of 4-9%. Today, the rate is remains considerable – hovering around 6% and making Africa the region with the highest urban population growth rate in the developing world (World Population Council, 2004:129).

Sub-regional demographic fact sheets show that East Africa has the highest growth rate compared with other regions in the world (Torrey, 1998:B6). According to United Nations estimates, by 2025 nearly half of all East Africa will live in cities and almost three quarters of the population of Southern African will reside in urban areas (Hope, 1998:347). Likewise, unusually high rural-urban migration rates reported for some urban counties demonstrate the on going drive to urbanise, as is the case for Tanzania, whose capital Dar-es- salaam has for decades been one of Africa's fastest growing cities (Hope, 1998). Almost

inevitably, the rapid concentration of migrants in African cities raises the spectre of unemployment, especially among women and young girls, pessimistically predicted to rise to 60% to 70% in the next few years (Guardian, 2001:36). In South Africa, part of this urban–pull migratory pattern is predicated on the collapse of the Apartheid regime and the sense of freedom experienced by blacks who feel that the urban area once preserved of the whites need to be experienced after all.

Demographers believe that the dearth of information remains one of the most significant problems in addressing urbanisation in Africa (Rakadi, 1996: 10). The impact of wars and other conflicts stands out as a particularly understudied and overlooked subject. This impact is most noticeable in sub-Saharan Africa. From Angola to Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to Sierra Leone, hundreds of thousand or even millions of people displaced by wars and conflicts have sought refuge in capital cities. Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leonean, showed a dramatic increase, with its population rising from 384,499 in 1985 to 837,000 in 2001 (Africa South of the Sahara, 2002: 926). This astronomical rise of 217% took place during the war years (1991- 2001). Internally displaced persons (IDPs) are markedly drawn to the Freetown area, the number of whom were thought to have reached 500,000 by 1995 (Synge, 2002: 920), and were progressively significant throughout the latter stages of the war. These estimates, experts believe, may be significantly lower than the actual figure, but are clear indications of rapid urban population growth during and after wars, and other forms of conflict (Okaba & Nte, 2008:46). The implication of this for urban Africa is an army of immigrants who must survive in the informal sector since most of them are not equipped to fit into formal urban sector arrangements. Women and young girls tend to constitute the core this army.

In Nigeria, urban growth has consistently been considerable, accelerated by the “bonanza” development introduced by huge oil wealth and attempts to provide basic infrastructure in urban areas at the expense of rural areas. This aggravated the urban–pull migratory pattern resulting in population surges the Nigeria cities of Lagos, Kano, Ibadan, Kaduna, Jos, Aba, Onitsha, Port Harcourt, Maiduguri, and Kaduna. At the same time, the creation of new states in Nigeria in 1987, 1991 and 1996 created new capital cities and new urban /administrative areas. These new cities include Asaba, Umuahia, Yenegoa, Lokoja, Dutse, Damaturu, Birnin Kebbi, Uyo, and Gombe. (Ekpenyong, 1992:148; UN, 2004:328; Nte, 2006:65). These new cities as well as the old continue to attract new immigrants who believe that life is at least marginally better in the city than in their villages.

The consequences of the aforesaid situation are obvious. Just like in other parts of the world and often to a greater extent in the third world, cities face a number of challenges – unemployment, food shortages, sanitation problems and frustrations. Most times, rather than dissuade migrants these frustrations encourage them to adopt novel survival mechanisms including crime and other forms of deviant behaviour. For non-deviants, the informal sector holds the key to their survival.

In a 1980 survey of Port Harcourt and Calabar, both cities in Southern Nigeria, 84% of the respondents said their incomes were irregular and 72% felt their jobs to be insecure or only fairly secure, and complained of their relatively short average job tenure. From their responses, it seems irrefutable that there has been increasing pressure on people in recent years to engage in marginal economic activities. Some respondents, such as street vendors, felt insecure as a result of official and police harassment, others because of competition, or low and irregular incomes (Ekpenyong, 1992:158).

Port Harcourt city, which is the political capital the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, presents an interesting urban scenario. Home to the hydrocarbon industry, the city has one of the highest cash flow levels in the country and is also the most expensive to live in. This harsh reality does not in any way deter the endless streams of migrants from all parts of the country, and indeed the continent, to partake in the pleasure of the largely illusive "Eldorado". Consequently, the city has affluent areas known as the Government Reserved Areas (GRA) and scores of sprawling shanties and waterfronts dotting the city (Nte, 2006:41; British Council, 2004:24; Ekpenyong, 1992:168; 1999:108). These areas are inhabited by hundreds of thousands of the poor and very poor who eke a living in the city. Amongst them are innumerable women and girls who prod the nooks and crannies, hawking or selling in makeshift huts or poorly built and insecure stores all over the city except the posh GRA's. This is in addition to their work in government city markets at Mile 1 Diobu, Mile 2 Diobu, Mile 3 Diobu, Creek Road Market, New Layout Market, Rumuomasi Market, Oil Mill Market etc. These informal urban markets are densely populated by women in the urban informal sector in what approximates integration into a peasant economy. The situation provides a forum for the broadening of knowledge, exchange of ideas and opportunity to define their place in the world outside their local environment. It also provides a social network and integrates peasants into the national and international culture (McGill et. al. 1980:218, Forman & Riegelhanpt, 1970:143; Nand, 2004:213).

These stores, shops, and markets constitute the hub of the commercial activities in the urban informal sector in Port Harcourt. This is in addition to other crafts like dressmaking, hair weaving, the production of ice cream and other similar activities traditionally dominated by women. In the pursuit of these activities which are inevitable for survival, those working in this sector face unprecedented levels of threats, insecurity and related challenges. This work seeks to explore, in particular, the impact of this risk and uncertainty on the women of Port Harcourt.

General Insecurity in the Niger Delta Region and its Implications for the Urban Informal Sector

Anatomical insight into the security problem in the Niger Delta reveals that it is a product of decades of neglect, repression and exploitations of the region due to its minority status in the eyes of the Nigerian State.

This unmitigated suppression by the Nigerian ruling class was often concealed beneath the ceaseless flow of petrodollars pumped out of the belly of the region at a monumental pace and environmental cost (Nwadiaro, 1980:34; Okoko, 1997:36; Mitte, 2007:15). The prolonged indignation lasted as long as it suited the capital interests of the ruling class and their multilateral collaborators in the region.

Initial protests, such as the twelve day Boro revolution was easily crushed and ultimately emboldened the rampaging Nigeria state for further resources and profit. The revenue accrued from oil was at times denied and only grudgingly allocated, falling from 25% to 0% and then back up to 3% between 1970 -2000. This is in sharp contrast to the pre-oil era when derivation was based on a fifty-fifty ratio. The exploitation climaxed when the superlatively brutal regime of General Sani Abacha murdered Kenule Saro Wiwa, an international writer and environmentalist who led a non-violent protest to the despoliation of the Niger Delta and Ogoni land in particular. This was, however preceded by the Umuechem Massacre that tends to define the advent of the violent repression of the indigenous peoples of the Niger Delta (Okoko, 1997:38; Okonta, 2000:67; Ibiba, 2003:164; Nte, 2005:192).

Faced with very real extermination, the region became awash with social movements fighting against glaring injustice and demanding resource control as the only way out of these socio-economic-cum environmental doldrums. In the midst of genuine agitations, desperate politicians cashed in on the frustrations and desperation in the region and armed unemployed youths in an attempt to capture power in 1999. This arrangement gave birth to the proliferation of small and light weapons in the region. By 2003, when the politicians had succeeded and joined the Nigerian ruling class as “junior looting partners,” the quest to hold on to power necessitated that more arms be supplied to the already insurgent youth. Coupled with the ‘use and dump’ attitude of the politicians and abnormal unemployment rates in the region – well above the national average - the region became heavily armed. According to Edede (2006:14), “politicians of the region armed jobless youth, turning them into political thugs and agents of violence. They armed them with AK-47 rifles and this gave the youth purpose. The politics of the AK-47 soon gave way to the economics of the AK-47 and the Kalashnikov became an economic variable as the Niger Delta youths took to the creeks to engage their tormentors in a macabre dance of molten lead”.

To this day, agitations have continued unabated and the 30 million people of the region, who speak approximately 50 languages and inhabit 185 of the 774 local council areas in the country, are still worrying about the sorry state of their environment, the destruction of their flora, fauna and their biodiversity, and the pollution of the water they drink and the air they breath. And yet oil production in the region still accounts for 90 per cent of the country’s exports and more than 80 per cent of total government revenue (Ekpu, 2007:46).

These situations have created a combination of genuine agitation, nationalism, self-determination and exponential criminality in the region. Presently, the region is known for mindless killings, rape, kidnappings

and hostage taking. So daunting is the situation that most expatriate staff have left the region and oil production has been reduced by about 30 per cent. The devastating effects of this militant, albeit criminal, dimensions of the Niger Delta conflict cannot be over emphasized. At the national level it has depleted the revenue base of the nation, as oil production has dipped massively and oil prices have shot up internationally with severe economic implications.

In the last few years, Port Harcourt has come to approximate Kandahar in Afghanistan and Fallujah in Iraq where cult wars perpetrated by urban terror gangs waste thousands of young lives and commit unspeakable sexual harassment of women in and around Port Harcourt, and other urban areas in the Niger Delta. Added to these gangs, cultists, and militants, are members of the task forces, created by local councils for revenue collection, environmental law enforcement and other such sundry responsibilities of local councils, who prey on women and girls through extortion and sexual harassment. Part of the strength of these "touts" is the power bestowed upon them by the councils and the inextricable link between them and the rampaging gangsters/cultists who in turn act as the foot soldiers of the political class.

The end results of this multifaceted turmoil are magnified insecurity in the region and serious threats to the predominantly women dominated urban informal sector in the region's cities. For Port Harcourt, these crises are particularly reprehensible, as the city graduated from the most peaceful city in the region to the most dangerous and insecure. This study investigates the dimensions of these threats and insecurities faced by women in the informal sector of Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

Methodology

The methodological thrust of this paper is predicated on a combination of observation and qualitative analysis of the data generated. There is also a reliance on extensive secondary sources of information such as text books, articles, and reports.

In terms of observation, the author of this work has been involved in UNIFEM-assisted programmes for women in the informal sector for about a decade. This gave him useful insights into the challenges faced by women in this sector including issues relating to their security and threats from the different quarters of the city.

Population and Sample Selection

The design for this study falls within the realm of descriptive research. One of the methods used in descriptive research is the survey method and this is the method adopted here. The population of this study comprised of one hundred and thirty five (135) female small shop owners, two thousand three hundred and fifty (2350) female hawkers, twenty seven (27) Port Harcourt city council staff, seventy (70) women's rights groups and the police. A convenient study sample size (via random sampling) of four hundred and sixty five (465) of women in the urban informal sector in Port Harcourt city and thirty seven

(37) representatives of city council, women's rights groups and the police was drawn for the study.

The second level of data collection was based on a structured-focused group interview of the different stakeholders of this research. They included female hawkers and small shop owners, local council task force members, the police, women's NGO/civil societies, and the national association of women journalists (NAWOJ). In all 502 respondents were interviewed according to the distribution below.

Table 1: Different Stakeholders

Women hawkers and small shop owners	446
Local council task force	25
Police	17
Women's NGOs and civil societies	10
NAWOJ	4
TOTAL	502

Chi Square and Simple percentage were employed for analysis.

It should be noted however that, in selecting the respondents for interviews, they were selected in a random fashion which helped the author infuse additional ideas, colour and rigour into this work.

I attempted to the best of my ability and resources at my disposal to present relatively balanced and logically precise research. All the same, since no research is completely independent of its normative evaluation of the research problem, this analysis and the results reached and presented may bear the hallmark of our stance. It is my appeal that all subjective postures which were not addressed should be seen as part of the researcher's oversight and should be overlooked (Ololube et al., 2007).

Limitations of Study

In the course of this study certain obstacles were encountered. These include inadequate funds, logistics, and the uncooperative attitude of local council staff and the police. These obstacles may have negatively impinged on the quality of the work. Be that as it may, obstacles are surmountable and the credibility of this study was guarded to minimize compromise.

Data analysis

Instrumentation

Three instruments were used to collect the various types of data needed for this research. The construction of these instruments was guided by the research objectives, and included questions that were relevant to the study. Two of the instruments were Likert-type three-point scales. These were opinionnaires for women and girls and consisted of sets of constructed items suitable for the analysis of the security threats faced by this demographic in the urban informal sector. Each opinionnaire was made up of statements to be rated on a three-point scale of agree, undecided and disagree. The third instrument was an interview guide for the portion of the study comprised of interviews with women, girls, women's groups, security agencies and local council staff. This guide consisted of a set of questions designed to direct the in-depth interviews of these populations on their perception of the dangers faced by women in the urban informal sector in Port Harcourt city.

The validity of the interview instrument had its face validation confirmed by a panel of three validators. The reliability coefficient (r), defined as a measure of the consistency of a test (Wiersma et. al. 2005:176), was obtained using the test re-test procedure. A value of 0.64 was reached as the reliability coefficient (r) for the instrument. Both the validity and reliability of the instrument were determined in like manner. The reliability coefficient (r) for this instrument was found to be 0.63.

Data collection

Data were collected by hand-delivering copies of the two opinionnaires to the respective respondents and seeking help from the leaders of the local Women Traders Association to complete their forms and to ensure that their members completed theirs as well. In addition, face-to face personal interviews were conducted with selected group leaders. Data from the interview sessions was captured by tape-recording each interview. Note-taking during each interview was used to augment the taped interview data.

Data analysis

The responses of the respondents to the two opinionnaires were subjected to a coding system for the purpose of organization and classification of the collected data for subsequent statistical analyses. Once all the responses were coded, the resulting scores were subjected to statistical analysis using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS).

Results and Discussion

Interview responses showed that workplace insecurity in Port Harcourt city is quite pervasive. These forms of insecurity were said to vary in terms of their depth and breadth while the ranking of the degree of the risks faced by women and girls in the urban informal sector is not very clear. Most of the respondents were undecided on the similarity between the traumas faced by unprovoked evictions, extortions by council staff and request for sexual gratifications by council staff for preferential treatments in forced evictions. This could be attributed to the fact that most of the respondents may not have in-depth knowledge of the nature of oppression of women in a relatively patriarchal society. Where they do have such an understanding, the impact of poverty and cultural values may make them gloss over it and see such oppression as normal.

Table2: Chi square analysis details of insecurity of women in the urban informal sector by gender

	Observed Value (O)	Expected Value (E)	O-E	(O - E) ²	(O-E) ² / E	df = 2
female (A)	69	62	7	49	0.70	Value of χ^2 at 0.5 level = 1.386, Calculated χ^2 Value of 15.21 is Significant.
female (U)	26	26	0	0	0	
female (D)	15	15	-7	49	2.23	
male(A)	34	41	-7	49	1.19	
male(U)	18	18	0	0	0	
male(D)	22	11	11	121	11	
$\Sigma(O-E)^2 / E$	=			15.21		

(KEY: A- Agree, U- Undecided, D- Disagree)

The computed chi square value of 15.21 for gender effect on the responses shows that there is a significant difference in the responses of male and female respondents with more female respondents identifying the pervasion of workplace insecurity in urban informal sector in Port Harcourt city. This result is reflective of the beliefs and arguments in most patriarchal societies that tend to ignore oppression of women based on anti-women cultural practices.

Along the same line, respondents' perceptions of the forms of insecurity faced by women and girls in the urban informal sector in Port Harcourt city of Nigeria, show that a slightly larger proportion of female respondents, 46%, endorsed the various forms of insecurity faced by women in contrast to only 42.7% of male respondents. This disparity in the responses of male and female respondents is further confirmed when the data is subject to the chi square analysis. The results of the chi square analysis are given below:

Table 3: Chi square analysis on the forms of Insecurity faced by women in the informal sector the city of Port Harcourt by gender

	Observed Value (O)	Expected Value (E)	O-E	(O-E) ²	(O-E) ² / E	df = 2
Male respondents (A)	437	464	-27	729	1.57	Value of χ^2 at 0.5 level = 1.386, Calculated χ^2 Value of 8.25 is significant
Male respondents (U)	320	320	0	0	0	
Male respondents (D)	291	263	28	784	2.98	
Female respondents (A)	571	544	27	729	1.34	
Female respondents (U)	376	376	0	0	0	
Female respondents (D)	281	308	-27	729	2.36	

$$\frac{\sum(O-E)^2}{E} = 8.25$$

(KEY: A- Agree, U- Undecided, D- Disagree)

The computed chi square value shows that there is a significant difference in the opinions of male and female respondents. Hence, one can contend that gender has an impact on responses as more female respondents felt that the forms of insecurity faced by women in the informal sector in Port Harcourt city were exhaustive. The intent of this section of the work is to bring to the fore Nigerian public perceptions about the dangers faced by this important but vulnerable segment of the country's economy with a view to guiding policy development. Interestingly, the inhibitive cultural practice of male dominance has equally manifested here in the relatively slight difference between the perceptions of male and female respondents. Ordinarily, this would have skewed completely towards overwhelming female appreciation of all these forms of insecurity rather than the mild appreciation presented in the data here.

Personal Interviews:

The results of the analysis of responses to the questions in each population's interview are used, as follows, to illustrate the trend in the interview sessions:

Women/Girl Traders

Question One: Have you felt insecure in the course of your business? Ninety per cent of the respondents experienced insecurity, while just over three per cent. (3.3 %) of the respondents claimed that they have experienced insecurity and 6.7 of the respondents claimed that they don't know if they felt insecure.

Question Two: What do you feel is the greatest threat to you now? Ninety-six per cent of the respondents claimed that the greatest threat is that of the militant youth who regularly storm the market to steal, rape and at times kill people, while four per cent did not know.

Question Three: What are the other threats to your business?

(a) Constant demolition of shops and destruction of wares by council staff: ninety-eight per cent of respondents felt that this was a threat while two per cent did not know.

(b) Request for monetary gratifications by local council staff:

Just over ninety-six per cent (96.5%) of respondents confirmed that they were constantly being extorted by council staff, while 3.5% of the respondents did not know. This response pattern highlights the corrupt and extractive nature of Nigerian bureaucratic institutions.

(c) Request for sexual gratifications by local council staff: responses show that 63% of the respondents had received these requests, 30 % of respondents had not and 7 % did not know. It should be noted that this data may be misleading because of the nature of Nigerian society in which sexual harassment is not openly discussed due to its stigmatisation. The percentage admitting to requests may have been higher in more open societies that permit more candid discussions of issues related to sex.

Local Council Staff

Question One: Do you engage in indiscriminate evictions/demolitions of traders stall? Ninety-nine per cent of council staff interviewed confirmed that evictions and demolitions were legally done, while only one per cent did not know. This response pattern is not surprising, given the fact that government agencies will always justify their actions even when appropriate welfare measures are not in place to cushion the pains of urban renewal programmes.

Question Two: Do you seek for gratifications from these traders? All the respondents (100%) denied this allegation in sharp contrast to the claims of the traders. Common sense easily validates the fact that, normally, no one would expect the council staff to accept this charge.

Police Authorities

Question One: Do you receive complaints of harassment of market women/girls? Ninety-four per cent of police officers interviewed confirmed that such reports come to their office while four per cent claimed ignorance of such reports.

Question Two: How do you handle such reports?

- (a) Charge such cases to court: Yes – (56%), No - (45%), Don't Know – (1%)
- (b) Settle out of the police station: Yes – (53%), No - (42%), Don't Know - (5%).

Conclusions

This study has made a modest attempt to review the vulnerabilities of a crucial segment of the Nigerian, women and girls in the informal sector. In the course of its all important contribution to the growth of the national economy, women and girls who constitute a significant portion of this segment of the economy in the urban areas face incalculable risks and insecurities. These risks and insecurities have been validated by this study. Although the study may not have uncovered all the details of the fear and harassment endured, due to the sensitive nature of the issue under review, it has provided useful insights into this relatively understudied area.

This study has shown the need to urgently assist these women and girls in coping and dealing with these risks as they impinge on their individual survival and the growth of the national economy. Port Harcourt city, the administrative capital of the Niger Delta region in Nigeria, has in the last few years been embroiled in unmitigated violence and crises which has further worsened the security of women and girl operators in the urban informal sector in the city. This warrants urgent steps be taken to remedy the situation. Although in the last few months, general security tends to have improved in the region due to

the amnesty granted the Niger Delta militants, most analysts are cautiously optimistic about the sustainability of the programme.

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