

## Livelihood Resilience and Diversity in the Face of Socio-economic Challenges: Exploring the Experiences of Urban Youth in Harare (Zimbabwe)

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**Abstract:** *The article is aimed at unearthing the livelihood and survival strategies which the urban youth in Harare (Zimbabwe) have adopted as a response to socio-economic challenges which have been witnessed in the country over the past decade and a half. Deteriorating socio-economic conditions characterised by high poverty and unemployment levels in the face of reduced and poor economic performance have left young people vulnerable to poverty and unemployment in the country which has led to them adopting various formal and informal livelihood activities aimed at improving their lives. Employing sociological theories on structuration, agency and social organisation, this article argues that the young people in the urban area of Harare have adopted survival strategies which have seen them being able to meet their individual, family and community needs in an environment which has been very difficult and challenging. Using qualitative research methodologies and various data gathering instruments, the article shows how the youth have organised themselves as individuals and groups to make a better life for themselves in the face of what would otherwise be perceived as insurmountable challenges.*

**Keywords:** agency; informal sector; economy; social organisation; youths; Zimbabwe.

### Introduction

Over the past fifteen years, Zimbabwe has faced severe economic challenges which has been a consequence of the culmination of various factors but whose overall impact has been negative on the population. Poor management of the national economy by the ruling Zimbabwe National African Union Party – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), the adoption of disastrous neo-liberal economic policies, a poorly planned and executed land reform programme, an ill conceived and incoherent foreign and domestic policy which was at odds with western countries, participation in an expensive war in the Democratic Republic of Congo, corruption, massive brain drain, an unprecedented inflation record which broke world records are often cited as some of the examples which have made the country to face economic and social challenges (see Addison and Laakso 2003, Bond 1998, Raftapolous 2009, Meldrum 2001). What is important at this juncture is to take note of the negative consequences which poor economic performance has had on the livelihoods of the people in the country in the long term. Social and economic consequences of the economic challenges which the country have faced have resulted in lack of investment in social services, hyper-inflation which in 2008 reached unprecedented

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levels resulting in the abandonment of the Zimbabwe dollar in favour of multiple currency system, company closures resulting in high levels of unemployment, brain drain and a sharp drop in the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) which had a ripple effect of negatively impacting on the lives of the people (see Makochekanawa 2009, Raftopoulos 2009, Pilosof 2009, Crush and Tevera 2010). Of interest to this study is the impact which these economic challenges have had on the young people called the youth who are aged between the ages of 15 and 34. The study seeks to explore the specific socio-economic challenges which young people are facing in the face of the wider socio-economic challenges facing the country.

In the study young people are presented as a group of people who are just starting their lives having for years been provided for, cared and protected by their families and communities. This group is seen being in a process of transition from childhood to adulthood but in the process they are seen as being exposed to a real and oftentimes brutal situation culminating from a challenging socio-economic situation in which they have to adjust and embrace as they meet their present needs while preparing for their future roles founded on their dreams and aspirations which need contextualisation to the reality of the socio-economic realities of the country. Against this background the study was aimed at exploring the socio-economic realities and the current situation of the urban youth in the country. Having understood this background the study was interested in getting the views of young people on their perceptions of the current situation and their future aspirations and how they believed they would attain any goals and milestones which they had set for themselves. In the face of high unemployment levels, company closers and poverty; the study had an interest in unearthing the different income generating activities which young people are currently engaging in and the available opportunities as well as challenges which they face. In doing this exploration the study employed the theoretical frameworks of structuration and agency as postulated by Giddens (1984) and that of social organisation. It was conceived to be important not only to understand the current realities of the youth in Harare but also to understand how they as individuals and societal members are dealing with the adverse socio-economic conditions and using individual abilities and societal resources to be resilient and to put in place measures and initiatives which have improved their lives.

This article in its attempt to present on the socio-economic realities of the youth in Harare will briefly present on the theoretical framework employed in the study, the socio-economic realities of the youth, issues on informal activities, the research focus and methodology employed, presentation as well as discussion of results from the study and a conclusion.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study employed the theories of structuration, agency and social organisation in its attempt to understand the youth in Zimbabwe urban areas and how they are surviving under challenging conditions. The theory of structuration and agency is found in the ideas of Anthony Giddens and how he viewed the relationship between individuals and social forces. Giddens (1984) conceptualises structures as rules and resources that actors use in interaction. They are recursively implicated in the

reproduction of social systems resulting in a recurrent patterned arrangement which influence the individual. For Giddens rules are defined as 'generalizable procedures and methodologies that reflexive agents possess in their implicit stocks of knowledge that they employ as formulas for action in social systems' (Giddens cited in Turner 2001: 972) These rules of structure are seen to be informal, widely sanctioned and used in daily routines, conversations and rituals (Giddens 1984). These rules are seen as restricting social action but resources facilitate it (Lamsal 2012). Structures also involve the use of 'material equipment' and 'organizational capacities' which social actors are seen using in order to facilitate social change. Giddens (ibid) indicates that traditions, institutions, religions, social class and moral codes exemplify structures.

In explaining structuration Giddens is seen trying to emphasise the duality which exists between structure and agency. Agency refers to the ability of an individual to work independently and to make their own free choices. Actors for Giddens (1984) are agents who have the capacity to rationally 'transcend the whims' which are seen as being imposed by social structures so that they are able to exercise their own free choice. Emirbayer and Mische (1998:970) define agency as '... the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments – the temporal-relational contexts of action – which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgment both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations.' The duality of structure and agency becomes important when it comes to change and the structuration theory sees agency as important in facilitating any kind of social change. Decisions to act according to (Mestrovic 1998) are seen as consciously and unconsciously creating agency within the social structure.

This structuration-agency theory was used as a basis for the study in addition to the theory of social organisation. Social organisation is seen as referring to as patterned social interaction and in these social interactions, social actors are portrayed as co-operating to produce a stable social structure which is characterised by social relationships (Charon 1986, Wheelan 2005). Sneath (1993) postulates the view that social organisation is best understood through understanding co-operative activities in societies which are patterned, multiple and fluid which form the basis of social relationships and have their basis on residence, joint resource use, kinship and other principles. Just like the ideas on structuration, social organisation places agency as being at the centre of social relationships which plays an important role in the lives of individuals, families and communities.

For the purposes of the study structuration, agency and social organisation were considered as important and integral in understanding the current circumstances of the youth in urban Harare. Using structuration theory, agency and social organisation it was seen as possible to understand how the youth are using the current social systems, social structures, available physical and non-tangible resources as well as individual and group initiatives to make a living and survive under difficult socio-economic circumstances. The theories were used to show how individual youths use socially acceptable and at times non sanctioned behaviours and activities to make a living in an environment

which at times is unfavourable to their progress and development. Individual youths as 'agents' are seen as using their individual and mental capacity to undertake in various money making and at times innovative activities to raise money and they do this through available social structures or at times they defy these structures and do things in their own way as these structures may be seen to be an impediment to their goals and aspirations.

### **Research area and methodology employed**

The research was conducted in the city of Harare focusing specifically on the city centre. The city centre was seen to be ideal as it has diversity and dynamic socio-economic relationships. The study was grounded in an interpretive research paradigm and it employed the qualitative research approach which entailed the use of in-depth interviews, a semi-structured questionnaire (which was borrowed from quantitative research but modified to suit the research), focus group discussions, observations which also included participant observation and the use of secondary data. The total number of persons who informed the study was 60.

### **Youth socio-economic realities in Zimbabwe**

The research which informs this article was aimed at finding out the survival strategies which the youth have adopted in the backdrop of a challenging socio-economic environment. As stated earlier, Zimbabwe has seen several economic challenges which have been a consequence of various factors and these are seen to have negatively impacted on society especially the youth and the study was especially interested in unearthing these challenges and the response of the youth to these challenges. In Zimbabwe the youth population (15-34 years) according to the 2012 National Census stands at 4 702 406 or 36% of the total population of which they are seen as comprising of 56% of the total economically active population (ZIMSTAT National Population Census 2012). The youth thus form an integral and important part of the population who are seen as relevant not only in the present but also in the future of the country. This importance has been seen in the way they have been portrayed in the National Youth Policy (2000 and amended in 2013) and the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation Document (which is guiding the country from October 2013 to December 2018). Under these policy documents the youths are portrayed as an important constituency who need to be economically empowered and afforded an opportunity to contribute to the socio-economic development of the country. This has been in the backdrop of Zimbabwe being a signatory of the African Youth Charter effectively binding itself to look out for the interests, needs and aspirations of the youth.

By looking at socio-economic indicators in literature and the media one can see several issues socially and economically in Zimbabwe which can be seen as affecting the youth and the study sought to understand these issues and use them as a basis for understanding the current situation of the youth in the urban areas of Harare. According to the Zimbabwe National Statistical Agency (ZIMSTAT) the unemployment rate in the country in 2011 was 10.7%, 11.1% in 2012 and 11.3% in 2014 (ZIMSTAT [O]). These statistics have been disputed and are of major contention and are seen

as not being reflective of the true situation on the ground and are based on unreliable data. The contestations on the data are exemplified by Chiumia (2014) who quotes Morgan Tsvangirai as saying that in 2014 the country's unemployment rate stood at 85%, Japhet Moyo the Secretary General of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions put the figure at 80-90%, ZANU (PF) in its 2013 election manifesto put the unemployment figure at 60% while the National Association of Non-Governmental Organisations in 2011 put the unemployment rate at 95%. The Zimbabwe Labour Force and Child Labour (ZLFCLS) indicated that the average unemployment rate in the country rate of those aged 15-34 stands at 15% while 87% of the employed youth are in the informal sector (ZIMSTAT 2011). ZIMSTAT indicated that in 2011, 5.4 million (84%) Zimbabweans worked in the informal sector while 606 000 (11%) worked in the formal sector. This is the situation which the youth now find themselves in, a situation of high unemployment and available employment opportunities now only being found in the informal sector. This has occurred in a situation where the educational sector according to the ZLFCLS (2011) reported that the educational system was churning out approximately 300 000 school leavers a year of which only 10% were being absorbed through employment showing low employment generation capacities by industries.

Youths in Zimbabwe now find themselves in a socio-economic environment which is very much difficult. Despite high educational levels, most of the youth find themselves unemployed and have to make a plan in order to survive. Lack of income can become a source of many social ills like crime if uncontrolled and it brings to the fore social inequalities and social stratification which can be a basis of societal imbalances. It can also be a burden to families, communities and the government as they are forced to provide for an otherwise economically active social group whose capacity to take care of themselves is seen as being curtailed by existing socio-economic conditions. Lack of income and effective social support in an unfavourable environment has forced the youth to seek alternative survival strategies so as to meet their current and everyday needs while preparing them for the future. The situation of Zimbabwean youth is not much different from the youth in other African countries who face similar socio-economic challenges. Due to these challenges there can be seen initiatives by the African Union to enhance the capacity and efficiency of the labour market in order for it to absorb young people while at the same time developing their ability and skills.

It is in this context of socio-economic challenges that the majority of urban youth in Zimbabwe have now resorted to working in the informal sector which is seen offering more opportunities. The section below briefly explores the literature on the informal sector in Zimbabwe.

### **Issues on the informal sector in Zimbabwe**

Studies on urban income generating activities in Zimbabwe with special focus on residents, governance systems, housing, formal and informal employment, youth and development are so numerous and vast that it is impossible to capture all of the works in this single article but it is important to highlight some of the works which can be seen contributing to understanding issues on urban realities, the youth and the informal sector in Zimbabwe which inform dominant debates on the

subject which inform this article. The nature and extent of the informal sector in Zimbabwe which has become a refuge for most urban youths is captured by Crush, Skinner and Chikanda (2015) who indicate that in 1980 the Zimbabwean informal economy was small absorbing ten percent of the labour force, in 2003 it accounted for 70 percent of the labour force with its contribution to the Gross National Income having grown to 60 percent and 2011 84 percent of the population was employed in the informal sector with the dominant activities being in retail, wholesale trade followed by motor vehicles and cycle repairs then services and manufacturing. These important observations by Crush et al (2015) are complimented by Bukaleya and Hama (2012) who cite William (1999), Jenkins (1998) and Kobb (1997) as indicating that 80 percent of American's find their first job in the informal sector, 97 percent of non-farm businesses contribute to 40 percent of America's GDP. The informal sector contributes to more than 70 percent of Africa's labour force and in Tanzania the informal sector alone is seen contribution 90 percent to the country's GDP and this aptly summarises the importance of the informal sector.

Issues raised by Crush et al (ibid) raise important issues to this article and to the debate on the informal sector. Firstly they raise the issue of whether economic collapse as was experienced in Zimbabwe can result in the growth of the informal sector while the formal sector gradually becomes much smaller. Secondly with the collapse of the economy and the growth of the informal sector Crush et al (ibid) question whether there can be positive outcomes to such a collapse as evidenced by the growth in entrepreneurial and motivational skills in Zimbabwe. These issues are quite important and based on empirical evidence in this article there is an exploration to see the extent which they are applicable in understanding the informal sector and urban youth in Zimbabwe.

The urban social landscape has been extensively researched on and this article seeks to add on to this research while presenting a contemporary outlook to the youth and urban livelihoods in Zimbabwe. An example to existing works on urban livelihoods in Zimbabwe are the works of Mupedziswa and Gumbo (2001) who have undertaken longitudinal studies on the informal sector in Zimbabwe in the years from the 1990's. The findings in their studies are quite well documented as they show how the informal sector in the country has developed over the years and they touch on the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme and its effects on the economy and labour, the economic crises which the country has witnessed over the years and its impact and they show patterns, trends and differentiation which have occurred on the informal market. They also trace government support and interventions that have been put to support the informal sector, its growth over the years, the impact of the informal sector on growth and livelihoods, the role of civil society and banks in the informal sector among other important issues which highlight the importance of the sector as well as its genesis over the years. This work on genesis of the informal sector in Zimbabwe is complemented by the works of Kamete (2004) who also cites the works of Mhone (1995) who explore the informal sector in Zimbabwe particularly the home industries in urban areas which since independence in 1980 have been seen as developing and are enterprises which are centres of production, industry and commerce in urban areas. Though they are important centres for informal trade they are often seen

as areas of illegality and vice and these issues are extensively explored by the works of Kamete (2004) and Mhone (1995). These works while a new understanding of the informal sector and its functions as well as challenges in an African set up also contribute immensely to the debate on the relevance, importance and contribution which the informal sector can play not only in securing the livelihoods of the people who are employed by the sector but also the contribution which the sector can play in the national economy and how it can be a tool for development.

To understand socio-political dynamics centred around the informal sector in Harare, Kamete (2001 and 2002) explored governance relationships in urban Zimbabwe particularly between the governing and political class and the urban poor and he was able to unearth important issues. He shows that despite the recognition of the interrelationship between the central government, local government, private sector and civil society the poor are never recognised or acknowledged as important but they are able exercise some form of power and dictate some measure of control in the flow of events and processes. They to some extent determine their destiny and put in place tactics and strategies which allow them to survive in a difficult urban environment and have a voice in many important issues which affect them and this is despite the perception which views the urban poor as being powerless, useless and voiceless. Kamete explores these perceptions of the urban poor as being labelled as helpless, as liabilities, as useless and as a resource and he is able to dispel some of these notions and is able to show the important roles which the urban poor play as well as the power dynamics that exist in urban areas. In a follow up on urban governance issues, Kamete (2007) focuses specifically on the urban youth and the contribution which they are making to governance issues in urban areas which they view as transient and he shows the interesting relationship between the youth and politicians as well as between the youth and technocrats who can be seen conveniently the youth with no prospects of partnerships or the youth being taken seriously as used generally as 'foot soldiers' or 'pawns' that further the interests of the politicians and the technocrats.

In addition to the works highlighted above there can be found some works which present contemporary issues on informal traders in Harare. The work by Chirau and Chamuka (2013) brings to the fore some of the pertinent issues which affect those that engage in informal income generating activities. Through an empirical study of traders at Magaba in Mbare, Harare they show that traders are also affected by political issues as well as institutional and organisational issues. They highlight how the urban space has become highly politicised through the police; militia and customs officials who play an important and oftentimes authoritarian role in the lives of the traders. They see the government as deploying these institutions to disrupt the activities of the urban traders such that for the traders it becomes necessary to have some form of affiliation or allegiance to these institutions in order for their business to survive or the urban space to remain habitable to them to be able to undertake their activities. Despite the confiscation of goods, destruction of crops and limited profits due to harassment by these government institutions, Chirau and Chamuka (2013) show that Magaba women are able to engage in productive activities and contribute to household income and food security. Other works on the informal sector in Zimbabwe include works by Njaya (2014) and Dube

and Chirisa (2012) who show how there has been an influx of vendors in the Harare Central Business District due to socio economic challenges in the country which has seen constant conflict between the vendors and the City Of Harare especially the Municipal Police who are in constant conflict with the vendors as they seek to enforce the city's by laws with traders found doing their business all over the city's pavements, shopping centres, parking lots and at traffic intersections. In his contribution Njaya (2014) shows how important street vendors have become as they have reduced unemployment significantly, increased incomes and through street food vending urban dwellers have access to cheaper, inexpensive and varied traditional meals.

Tawodzera (2010) has explored the urban poor household survival strategies and how urban people have managed to adopt new strategies and resilience in order to survive in an increasingly difficult and challenging urban environment and meeting their food requirements and needs under conditions of extreme material deprivation. Other important works which have been done on the informal sector in Zimbabwe include works by Hansen (2004), Grant (2003), Jones (2010), Mujeri (2007) and Musoni (2010) among others which have gone at great lengths to explore the socio-economic and political dynamics in urban areas and it is these works which have laid the groundwork for this study which attempts to build on the already existing knowledge base.

Basing on the works done on urban livelihoods in Zimbabwe it can thus be seen that there are many issues and contestations which are at play. In addition to issues captured above, Lindell (2010) on the informal sector brings to the fore important issues in Africa on urban areas and the informalisation and causalisation of economic activities and how the informal economy has grown in Africa and attempts are now being made to regulate and bring this growing informal economy under state regulation. The article by Lindell (ibid) brings to the fore one of the most important debates in urban studies which is the issue of how to deal with the urban informal sector which is increasingly growing and thriving in the face of a shrinking state regulated formal sector. There can be seen to be an increasingly fluid border between the two sectors but which is characterised by confrontations which at times are violent between workers in the informal sector and the state. Using various sources Lindell shows contestations that have arisen in the formal sector as exemplified by their forced removal in Lusaka, Zambia as well as in South Africa before the 2010 World Cup and this brings to the fore one of the old arguments in urban studies which is the beautification of the city against the informal sector which includes vendors who are oftentimes accused of making city's dirty and the holding of premier events like the World Cup with clean up measures being seen as disguised for the events but they would actually be guided by ulterior motives. There can be seen to be existing politics in the informal sector as well as human agency among informal actors which is important for their survival which is very important.

Thus there are a lot of debates and issues in the informal sector in Zimbabwe and in Africa which literature has captured. The main issue is to locate this research in the context of these contestations and debates with the most important issue being to understand how the informal sector has actively



absorbed the urban youth and how they are using it to their advantage to make a living and adapt to a difficult socio economic environment by socially organising themselves and using their agency.

### **Presentation and discussion of findings**

In the face of challenging socio-economic activities, the study found out that young people in Harare are engaging in various income generating activities in order to raise money for their livelihoods. In the different activities which they undertake they are seen as using social structures, their own agency or socially organising themselves and engaging in various economic activities which are briefly outlined in sections below.

#### *Car washing as a survival strategy*

Washing cars has become a popular business that young people are undertaking in Harare city. Young people can be seen washing cars in car parks, parking bays, on the streets and in bus terminus around the city. Youths who are undertaking this activity indicated that one just needed to identify a busy place with high visibility to motorists to set up the business and there was no need for any paperwork or payments to the city council as these car washes are not registered. Not much capital is needed to start the business with one needing buckets, access to water (which is usually drawn from council tapes at no cost), detergents, brushes, cloths and wax polish. Those who would have been in the business for longer can be seen having vacuum cleaners, pressurised pumps and generators which they use to clean cars in the interior and on the outside. The youth who are into this business can be seen working as individuals or as groups usually in two's or threes. Information on youth engagement in the car washing business was provided by Simba who is a young man aged 19 who runs his 'car washing business' along Harare's Speke Avenue at a parking bay. He indicated that he had chosen this business after 5 years without employment after leaving school. Having tried his hand at several things he had settled for the car wash business after noticing some young people who were doing it who seemed to be making ends meet with money which they were generating. He had also noticed that there was a high influx of cars mainly from Japan in the city centre and having people not having the time to wash their cars it was for him an excellent business opportunity. Starting with only 2 buckets, washing powder, mutton cloth, 'a couple of lemons' and free water from the nearby public toilet he had seen his assets grow to seven buckets, two drums, 6 brushes, 2 vacuum cleaners and a pressure pump. He now has 2 assistants who are helping him to wash cars on a full time bases and he has managed to rent a small place at the backyard of shop where he keeps his equipment. Charging on average between \$3 and \$5 per vehicle with prices being negotiable and going down to as little as \$1 for a simple wash without polishing, Simba indicated that he usually took not less than \$15 a day after sharing with his assistants, paying the municipal police at times (to turn a blind eye) and rentals. In addition to doing the car wising business, Simba was seen also selling airtime, cigarettes and directing cars into parking bays for a fee ranging from \$0.50 to \$1 depending on negotiations with the driver and they were usually paid extra to ensure that vehicles were not clamped by the municipal authorities for not having the requisite parking permits. Through the car

washing business he indicated that he was managing to take care of his family comprising of a wife and a child and to rent a small room in the high density suburb of Dzivarasekwa.

Across town at the Fourth Street bus terminus there was Tatenda, a 31 year old man who was washing cars usually the commuter omnibus taxis at the terminus. For him the business was an important means for survival and unlike Simba he did not have much equipment except his 1 bucket and a few detergents, cloths and brushes. His target business was the commuter buses which would be in a queue on the terminus waiting for their turn to load. For anything between \$1 and \$3 he was given jobs to clean the cars and on a good day he could clean up to 11 cars but this differed depending on how busy the terminus was. With the money from the car wash he indicated that he was able to take care of himself and rent a room in Epworth. His family which comprised of a wife and four children was resident in the rural areas of Mutoko at his rural home and he said that he was managing to feed and clothe them with the little money which he was making from the car washing business.

A casual walk around the city indicated that there were many young people who were running small car wash businesses around the town and their charges to clean a vehicle ranged from \$1 to \$5 depending on the negotiations made between the two parties of the car owners and car washers. While car owners were busy in their workplaces, shopping or attending to other business in town they would leave their cars at the car washes where they would be given a thorough cleaning and polish. Their work is so informalised that it is done in total disregard of the city's by-laws with law enforcement agents seen as being given a small 'cut' by the car washers in order to turn a blind eye. Over time it was due to frequent visits to car washes it was noticed during the study that there have developed strong relationships between car owners and those who was cars with car owners showing a lot of trust for the car washers whom they leave their cars with and they can negotiate credit in cases where they do not have cash with them and pay later.

#### *Foreign currency trading*

Foreign currency trading is also popular money making venture which young people can be seen engaging in Harare. Observations showed that foreign currency traders are mainly concentrated at the Roadport bus terminus and the nearby Fourth Street bus terminus as well as the Copacabana bus terminus and the Eastgate shopping mall. Holding batches of cash comprising of South African Rands and United States Dollars these foreign currency dealers are easily recognisable with their catch phrase '*tokupai ma rands kana madollars here*' (can we give you rands or dollars). Mai Tanaka who is a 29 year old woman trading in foreign currency at the near the Eastgate mall indicated that selling foreign currency for her was a means of making ends meet after years of unemployment having lost her job three years earlier. She indicated that they took advantage of loopholes in the formal foreign currency system in the country and their main customers are people who are travelling to and from South Africa or those have relatives in the Diaspora who are remitting money home which needs to be traded so that it can be used in the country. She indicated that she made profit for example by

buying the South African rand at US\$5.50 for a R100.00 note which she in turn sold for US\$6.00. The key was that she provided a link between those who wanted a particular currency and those who wanted to dispose of it. She said she had her *ma big dhara* (big men) to whom she provided foreign currency and on average she would take home around \$15 as profit but this changed depending on supply and demand of the foreign currency. With the money she was making, she indicated that she was able to send her child to school, take care of herself and her parents and rent 2 rooms in the Mufakose high density suburb. She indicated that the business was being negatively affected by the very high number of people who were trading in foreign currency whose number continued increasing due to high levels of unemployment in the country. She indicated that some of the people trading in foreign currency were just employees of even bigger persons including business people and politicians who were the 'real' owners of the money while others were in fact working as groups or associations scattered all over town who shared profits after a certain period. Observations from around the city indicated that quite a large number of young people are trading in foreign currency in the city centre where they can be seen seated or standing at different places holding large bundles of cash.

#### *Chihwindi* (touting)

*Chihwindi* is another popular money making strategy which young people were seen to be engaging in. *Chihwindi* involves people known as *mahwindi* (touts) working at designated bus terminuses or undesignated or illegal terminuses popularly known in Harare as the *mushikashika*. At these pick up points for commuters the *hwindis* can be seen being very active in calling and seeking customers to board the commuter buses or cars so as to be transported to different destinations. Observations around the city centre showed that there are a high number of the *hwindis* in town despite several attempts to get rid of these people who are associated with harassment and abuse of commuters looking for transportation or people who would be doing their business in town. Interactions with *hwindis* operating along Robert Mugabe Street and the Copacabana bus terminus revealed a lot of issues on the touting issue in the city centre. Two *hwindis* Tichaona (aged 23) and Ras Weli (aged 34) indicated that touting is a job just like any other job. It involves them being in charge of a commuter loading or drop off bay where vehicles would come to pick up passengers and provide transportation to different destinations. As the owners of the place they charge an average of US\$0.50c to a \$1 per vehicle which would have picked passengers and this was dependent on the time and how busy it was with peak periods being more expensive. Their duties included loading the vehicles and keeping a look out for the municipal police, traffic police and the Vehicle Inspection Department which have vehicle and personnel regularly patrolling the streets and impounding vehicles that are not roadworthy and those which pick up passengers at these illegal loading bays. Tichaona and Ras Weli indicated that they keep a record of all vehicles that would have loaded and depending on the loading bay and the agreement between the *hwindi's* they either share the money at the end of the day or each *hwindi* is allocated vehicles during the day which they load and the money which they receive is theirs. The daily takings differ depending on how busy it is but according to Ras Weli he averages between US\$10 and US\$12 a day and this is subject to how busy the day is

and his brushes with law enforcement agents whom he said he 'greases' with anything between US\$1 and US\$5. Observations around the city showed that *chihwindi* is very popular among young males in the city. They are especially evident in places which were once set aside for the transportation of the public by the City Council in the city centre which have since been changed but which remain accessible and convenient to the public who would rather use these illegal points. The *hwindi's* can also be found along the main roads leading out of town and at the different bus terminus where they are very active in calling out destinations. For Tichaona and Ras Weli, *chihwindi* has meant that they are able to feed themselves and their families and to rent accommodation in Warren Park and Tynwald respectively.

### *Vending*

Vending is the most popular income generating activity which the youth are undertaking in the city centre of Harare. Vending in the city centre has included the selling of vegetables, fruits and other food stuffs as well as the selling of new and second hand clothing as well as other non edible items. In 2015 there was a proliferation of vendors in the city centre when there was a relaxation of the city by laws resulting in thousands of vendors invading the city centre and trading their different wares. Vending in the city centre by the youth has seen some of them applying and being allocated market stalls at designated markets while others have tended to trade illegally in the city centre where they are continuously on the lookout of the municipal police who at times seize their goods and arrest them. The majority of vendors operating in the city centre are not licensed and they sell their goods at undesignated areas making them be in danger of arrests or seizure of their goods. During the study it was noticed that these illegal vendors whose majority are young men and women usually come into the city centre and sell their products after 4pm when they know that there are many potential clients in town and the municipal police officers would have knocked off work. Their goods would be displayed and laid down on the pavements on sacks or cardboard or in two wheeled carts popularly known locally as the (*ngoro*). When the municipal police carry out raids vendors can be seen running and hiding their goods and trying their best to evade arrest.

At the Charge Office flea market there can be found a young man called Amon (aged 30) who trades in *mabhero* (second hand bales of clothing) which he gets from Mozambique as well as new clothes, shoes and toiletries which he buys from Musina, South Africa. At his market stall which comprises of a table for which he pays a daily rate \$15 he has two other people whom he shares with in order to minimise his costs thus the daily rental for the table is \$5 for him. He has an assistant who helps him to sell his wares and shout out to customers so that they know what is on sale and what he has to offer given the stiff competition in the flea market where there are over a hundred tables. His monthly profit ranges between US\$150 and US\$200 but it changes depending on his ability to sell and the demand for goods. Through this business he manages to rent a house in Glen Norah and look after his family of four as well as his extended family. Amon indicated that vending either in town or in busy areas is highly politicised with those who have access to stalls being in the 'correct' party which is ZANU (PF) and being active in the party structures. For him being in the party has had direct and

indirect benefits of which having access to the table has been one major benefit. He indicated that the majority of the people who owned market stalls were influential politicians or businessmen who rented out the stalls to traders thereby realising a profit without putting much effort or even selling a single thing.

Rudo who is a young woman aged 23 is another young person who is into trading in the city centre but her business is very much different from that of Amon. She sells bottled water, sweets and freezits (ice cools) at the Market Square bus terminus, carrying them in a pack and selling them mainly to passengers who frequent the terminus for transportation to different destinations. Vehicle drivers and their conductors are also some of Rudo's big customers. Rudo has never been formally employed before and has been vending since the age of 15 after dropping out of school due to lack of money for school fees. She does not pay anything for fees or licences and the expenses which she has are for storing her products in the fridge at shops nearby and paying off municipal police who sometimes arrest vendors in the city centre. For Rudo expenses are not much and profits on a daily basis range from \$6 to \$8 a day. She had to say the following about her business and life in general:

*'Life is tough there are no jobs and it is worse for us without an education. I have to sell these things here at the terminus but the money which I make is very little it just is enough to try and make ends meet. This bottled water here gives me a profit of US\$0.10 cents so you can imagine that I have to sell ten just to make a dollar. With changes in weather when it is not hot, sales are very low. I live with my husband in Mbare; he too is a vendor so with the money which we make we combine and try to stretch it to meet our expenses but it is not easy. I know I am not educated but I wish I could just get a job so that I don't do this hustling for customers and I am guaranteed of a salary at the end of the month.'*

In addition to packaged products, fruit and vegetables it was noted that young people are also selling beef, fish and chicken pieces on the streets of Harare. The meat can either be raw or cooked depending on individual preference. This is in violation of the by-laws of the city as well as health standards and normally this product should be sold under hygienic conditions in butchery. One of the vendors Sarudzai (aged 33) who sells fish and chicken outside OK Supermarket at the corner of Albion and Mbuya Nehanda Streets indicated that they are forced to do it because *'zvinhu zvakaoma hanzvadzi unotokiya-kiya kuti zvifambe'* (things are tough my brother you have to do what you have to do to make ends meet). She orders fish from Norton with other women as a group and a bucket costs them between US\$15 and US\$20 depending on the season and it is shared equally among them. The fish are then sold for US\$1, US\$1.50 or US\$2 depending on their size to people who would be passing by. In addition to fish chickens are also sold by Sarudzai costing between \$6 and \$8 a bird. For those who do not want the whole bird chicken pieces are sold costing US\$1 for two drumsticks or wings, US\$1 for 10 Chicken necks and feet and US\$0.50 for half a cup of chicken intestines. Sarudzai indicated that they are part of a larger market chain of a small and unique chicken market which has young people breeding chickens at household level in communities like Warren Park, Kuwadzana and Highfield. These people purchase day old chicks for between US\$60 to US\$80 for 100 and they rear them until they are fully grown. They then slaughter the chickens and sell them in bulk to the vendors

and the prices of the chickens differ depending on their size but usually they did not cost more than US\$5. The market chain was seen as allowing for cash to flow between consumers, vendors and breeders at reasonable prices which Sarudzai said was favourable to all people in the market chain in the face of a challenging socio-economic situation.

In addition to chickens, Sarudzai also indicated that they occasionally sell *zvihuta* (quail birds) or their eggs. Further probing about these *zvihuta* showed that they are now very popular in the country with people of all ages scrambling to rear them and sell their meat and eggs which are said to be nutritious and possessing healing abilities for diseases like cancer and diabetes. The birds are being bred in bulk in incubators in the Warren Park Suburb of Harare where their chicks are sold in batches of either 25, 50 or 100 at US\$1.40 each while slaughtered birds cost between \$3 and \$5. Demand for the *zvihuta* is said to be high from individuals, hotels, restaurants and supermarkets. They are then bred as chickens and sold with vendors like Sarudzai taking advantage of capturing them for resale to both meat and eggs or sold to individuals and companies making a profit out of it. According to Sarudzai and basing on investigations undertaken by the study, *zvihuta* have become an important source of income generation by young people in Harare who are using them to increase their income and exploiting the high demand for the birds.

Other young men and women can be spotted around town in the later of hours of the day roasting gizzards, maize, chicken livers, chicken feet and chicken intestines around town on small stands using charcoal. These stands are very common close to bars and nightclubs as well as bus terminuses where there was seen to be a large customer base with many people buying the roasted meat and maize. On enquiry, they indicated that they sell their products for between US\$0.50 and US\$2 and the profit which they were receiving from the sales was fairly reasonable but one could not solely depend on it there was need to diversify into other activities like vending foodstuffs or selling airtime. Additionally outdoor cooking spots have become very are very commonplace at different places in Harare where young women and men cook *sadza* or rice and target workplaces and places where people drink beer. They usually have unique dishes of *mazondo* (cow feet) or *zvemukati* (offals) which are popular with clients at US\$1 for a plate.

The three mobile phone operators in Zimbabwe namely Econet, Netone and Telecel have also given a lifeline to young people in Harare with every corner and the majority of shops in the city centre having vendors who sell airtime. Many young people can be spotted at corners and street intersections wearing reflective yellow or orange bibs with the names of the service providers indicating that they sell the airtime. The vendors will be very busy looking for customers and there is stiff competition for customers. The airtime vendors buy their airtime in bulk and sell it as singles for a profit and an airtime voucher costing US\$1 can give them a profit of between US\$0.08 to US\$0.10 and the more the airtime which one sells determines how much one realises as a profit. Mandebvu who is an airtime vendor aged 24 and sells his airtime along Samora Machel Avenue at the Karigamombe Centre indicated that the airtime vending business is not too lucrative but it can boost

ones income especially during month ends but it has its challenges especially these days when there are too many vendors selling the airtime. Profits from vending differ but according to Mandebvu they are not enough for one to depend on for a living. One has to have other activities which bring in money and to show this Mandebvu had his *ngoro* which was full of bananas which he was selling and additionally he was also selling sweets, flags, belts and deodorants. Mobile phone operators have also given young people in Harare another opportunity by providing them with the chance for them to become agents for their mobile money transfer operations. In every corner and on every street in Harare there can be seen these money transfer agents operating under Ecocash, Telecash and Onewallet brands. For one to become an agent they need to meet minimum requirements as per the requirements of the mobile operator and if they meet the requirements they are given the go ahead and necessary hardware and documentation to begin operations. The agents are given a commission for each transaction in which a person can send or receive money using the agents and basing on observations done during the study it was seen that in addition to selling airtime for mobile phone operators, money transfer agents who work independent of the mobile phone operators have also become an important feature of youth employment in urban Harare.

#### ***Application uploading and phone and computer hardware sells***

*Toisa watsaap* (we can upload WhatsApp), *screen guard foni yese idollar* (screen guards for all phones available at US\$1), *ma earphones ma earphones dollar for two* (earphones available at US\$1 for two), *to flasher mafoni* (we can flash your phones), *ma pouch ma pouch nema face ne ma cover emafoni* (pouches pouches and phone covers) are some of the popular phrases which young people will be seen shouting to prospective customers along most busy pavements in Harare. In addition to shouting some will be holding cardboard boxes where the services which they offer will be written. The phrases are used to lure potential clients to services which are offered by these young people which include uploading and updating applications on mobile phones like the popular WhatsApp, placing screen guards on phones to protect their screens, flashing and repairing mobile phones which would not be performing well and selling all kinds of mobile phone hardware as well as computer hardware and software to the people. Roads like Jason Moyo, Cameroon Street, Robert Mugabe Road, and Mbuya Nehanda Street among others are quite popular with these young people who offer these services. The study on this money making initiative by the young people showed that they usually rent an office as a group with each individual person concentrating on their own line of business. The young people usually have a desk and either a laptop or desk top computer which they use to serve their clients. Given the demand for mobile phone applications like WhatsApp and lack of knowledge by some people on how to upload, activate or update these applications the youth indicated that they are able to make money offering the service.

Wilson who is a young man aged 29 operates along first street in Harare and indicated that he charges between US\$2 or \$3 to upload popular mobile applications like WhatsApp, Photo Collages and Facebook which cost him between US\$0.50 and US\$0.70 to upload making him a large profit. He also puts screen guards on phones at a cost of \$1 and sells earphones for all types of phones which

he buys in bulk and he indicated that he realises a profit of 100% from all the sales which he does. When it comes to repairing of phones he indicated that he has limited knowledge and he uses his friends to repair phones for his clients who would have come to his office. For all repairs made on phones he puts a mark up which acts as his profit. In addition to the mobile phone business, Wilson also indicated that he loads computer software into desktop computers and laptops in addition to buying and selling computers and computer consumables. On top of these services which he offers Wilson is also an agent of the Ecocash and Telecash money transfer systems indicated above and these boost his income and profits as he views his business as being very diversified and offering a variety of services hence when one thing is not performing well he has other things which he can fall back on. For Wilson, working like this is the only means available to him to earn a living as he has tried and failed to secure employment in the past despite having a degree in political science. His situation is very similar to a large number of urban youth in Harare who provide services for mobile phones including the loading and updating of mobile applications, the selling of phone and computer software and hardware and being money transfer agents. The young people who were interviewed indicated that they work as individuals running their own businesses, as groups who share profits made or they work for someone who would be the owner of the equipment and office space who gives them either a daily, weekly or monthly target of a certain amount of money which they must pay to him or her.

#### *Multi level marketing*

The use of the multi-currency system in Zimbabwe has attracted a lot of international companies and brands in the country who are attempting to also reap some kind of benefits from the system. In Harare there can be seen to have arisen a new type of business model or strategy known as multi-level or network marketing which has been joined by a significant number of people. Scornfully referred to as a new brand of a pyramid scheme in the country, the multi level marketing system has nevertheless been a hit mostly among young persons who are either formally or informally employed or those who are unemployed. Sibongile who is a young lady aged 25 exemplifies a young lady who is passionately into multi-level marketing. In an interview she indicated that she has been doing this multi-level marketing for 2 years in addition to her hair salon business and she is the one who explained the concept of multi-level marketing. She explained that the multi-level marketing system involves the sale of products to the public with health and beauty products being the most popular. She said that it involved the marketing products by any means necessary usually by word of mouth while at the same time recruiting potential marketers or distributors as well as selling the product to the public for a commission. For all the sales which those recruited distributors make, a percentage or commission will go to those who would have recruited them and in time with more recruitments it becomes a large network. With more people being recruited distributors attain higher in rankings which bring them benefits. The ranking system according to Sibongile was in the form of a star system with every star bringing with it different benefits. The advantages of engaging in this kind of business was said to be that it did not limit the amount of income which was paid to an individual for example when compared with corporations and the more hardworking an individual was in recruiting



distributors the higher the income. There was also seen to be continuous income flows if one had developed a high distributor network with income from commissions flowing in even when one was preoccupied with other businesses.

Observations carried out through the city indicated that the multi level marketing system has become very popular with many young people seen attending workshops on the system and soliciting for potential clients and distributors in town. Promises of rewards if someone reached a certain distribution status including trips to China, receiving cash and cars like the Mercedes Benz were seen to be motivators for people to join the marketing networks. Green World International with its natural health products, Forever Living, World Ventures and Table Charm are some of the popular companies which were seen being active with young people working for them as distributors and those who work in these networks are distinguishable by their neat apparel including suits with the logos of the companies in the city centre. Although Sibongile could divulge the exact amount of money which she was making a month as she indicated that it was dependant on the level which distributors in her network worked as well as her efforts, she said she averaged between US\$150 and US\$250 each month and claimed that those who have large networks can gross up to US\$5000 a month although this could not be verified. For Sibongile she indicated that the work which she does and the income which she receives from the multi-level marketing is important as it helps her to meet her expenses and to support her husband to take care of the family. The income is seen as going a long way in feeding the family and extended family and Sibongile felt that multi-level marketing was important and making a huge difference in her life.

#### *Other income generating initiatives*

In addition to the different activities mentioned above there can be seen to be other diverse activities which the urban youth in Zimbabwe are seen as doing in order to earn that extra dollar in the face of the challenging socio-economic environment which is prevailing in the country. During research in Harare, some of the youth in addition to other income generating activities indicated that they belong to credit groups known as *mukando* or they run money lending schemes known as *chimbadozo*. Under the *mukando* system they indicated that they form a group and depending on agreed terms and conditions they provide a certain amount of money to the group on a daily, weekly or monthly basis with the total money realised being availed to a single member with each member being given a chance to benefit from the lump sum cash payments in rotation. The money availed to members is for them to do as they please and members of the *mukando* groups indicated that it helps them meet their expenses and it acted as a kind of informal banking system which was good as it did not have exorbitant service charges. On the other hand the *chimbadozo* system functions in such a way that a person who has money will lend out money to those who are in need of it but the money has to be returned with an agreed interest on top. In Harare those who indicated that they give out money through *chimbadozo* charge interest of between 20 to 50 percent and they usually hold on to items as collateral which they sell in the event that there is failure to pay. In addition to these there were seen to be young people who sell pirated music and videos mostly from international artists with local

music and films not being displayed on their stalls due to fears of arrest and anti-piracy initiatives by the local artists although it was noted that if one requested for local material it was readily available and this business was considered to be quite lucrative.

Some of the youths were seen to be into music especially the new dancehall music which has taken the country by storm. Those who are into this music indicated that they are being rewarded for their efforts through selling their music and performing at live shows but they were experiencing challenges due to piracy and unwillingness by the general population to pay for their music preferring free downloads and sharing of the music on social media with nothing coming to the artists. Some youth in the city centre were seen engaging in illegal activities which included participating in the smuggling, buying and selling of the cough syrup BronClear popularly known as *bronco* which has become a hit in Zimbabwe and is being used as a drug which produces heightened psychological effects. A lot of youths were seen to be involved in trading this product which is very popular and in high demand with young people abusing it and those who were trading in it were seen to be making a lot of money from it. A bottle is being sold at US\$2.50 to US\$3 and it was an advantage to the traders given the weak exchange rate between the United States Dollar and the South African Rand where it was being purchased at R30. Profits were being realised from this product especially from those who were trading it in bulk and this was despite its negative effects on individuals and communities. Lastly another money making craze which was observed as having hit the urban youth was gambling. There was seen to be a proliferation of sports betting shops in the central business district of Harare and these shops were seen spreading their wings to the high density suburbs. Some of the youths indicated that they are making a living out of sports betting with bets being placed on football matches, horse racing and greyhound racing. Knowing the processes and being calculative was seen as important with some individuals claiming to average between US\$30 and US\$100 a day after betting which they were using to take care of their families and meet their needs. There were observed to be some individuals who are not engaging in any form of income generating activities but who spend their days at the sport betting shops and betting on different competitions hoping to cash in if their bets are correct.

### **Conclusion**

Such are the different ventures which youths are undertaking in a bid to make a living in Harare urban. The activities which the young people are undertaking support the point of view in dominant debate that the informal sector in developing countries like Zimbabwe has become very important as a form of livelihood in the face of non absorption of the citizens by the formal sector especially young school leavers. Although this article has not touched on all the different activities which the urban youth are engaging in order to make a living in a challenging socio-economic environment or to explore critical debates on youth employment and informal economic activities it has attempted to exhaustively explore contemporary informal activities which the youths in Harare are resorting to in the face of socio-economic challenges. It has brought to the fore some of the survival strategies which the urban poor are employing just to earn an extra dollar in urban Harare and it has shown the

different political dynamics and contestations which similar studies have highlighted as existing in urban areas characterised by informal activities. The different ventures which the urban youth engage in show how important social structures, social agency and social organisation are in any social system. Given the realisation by the urban youth that the socio-economic system in the country will remain difficult and challenging for a long time to come the youth are seen analysing the social structure and social systems which are in place and they employ socially acceptable and at times unacceptable means to undertake different initiatives which provide them with a means of income. Economic hardships are seen as stimulating and developing agency in the youth which they use to come up with innovative means to make a living. They are seen as studying the situation in the city centre and capitalising on available situations and opportunities. In addition to their own individual initiatives, the youth are also seen organising themselves as small groups or co-operatives which they use to set up their different initiatives which generate income for them. In the face of a difficult socio-economic environment the youth in the city of Harare have developed and adopted diverse livelihood initiatives which are making their lives move forward and they have displayed amazing resilience in the face of challenges.

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