

# Innovation and the Exercise of Agency in an Informalising Economy: An Analysis of the Lived Realities of Entrepreneurs at Chimusana Market in Masvingo Urban

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**Abstract:** *The ensuing study dwells on the informal economic activities adopted by entrepreneurs at Chimusana market in Masvingo urban in response to a myriad of challenges afflicting them. It reveals the new socio-economic impediments confronting these traders in light of the formation of the Government of National Unity and the subsequent dollarization of the economy as well as the extraordinary levels of informalisation of the Zimbabwean economy. The findings made herein show that inasmuch as the said social structures are constraining the livelihood capabilities of the poor, the residents of Masvingo are far from being conceptualized as passive victims of their social and economic situation. On the contrary they are exhibiting unique innovative spirit and the exercise of agency to transcend the constraining structures, simultaneously dictating the form and shape these structures can take. In the same vein, it hinges on the various livelihood assets or capitals utilized by the actors in question to strategically deal with their socio-economic vulnerability. To meet the objectives of the study the researcher adopted qualitative methodology and unstructured interviews, Focus Group Discussions and transect walks were used as the main data soliciting techniques. The researcher triangulated the Structuration thesis, the Strain theory and the Sustainable Livelihood Framework in order to explain and understand the challenges and the nature of responses to the challenges bedeviling the residents of Masvingo urban.*

**Keywords:** Informal economic activities, structures, agency, innovation, livelihoods

## Introduction and Background to the Study

What is indisputable is my observation that ever since the turn of the new millennium, that is the post 2000 era, the Zimbabwean economy is continuously declining to deplorable levels, culminating in one of the highest levels of informalisation of the economy in recent times. This is attributable to an avalanche of social, environmental, political and economic factors that are insistently haunting the nation. For Mleya in Mutami and Chazovachii (2013) this economy plummeted to the 1950s levels whereby the country's GDP fell from US\$620 in 1998 to as low as US\$268 in 2008. To exacerbate the already precarious situation the unemployment rate for Zimbabwe is hovering above 80% and industrial capacity utilization has also dwindled to around 60%. Henceforth, in real terms the Zimbabwean economy is experiencing de-industrialization, which has a ripple effect on the employment rate, in spite of the fact that the country boasts of one of the highest literacy rates in the region. Such an uncouth development is obvious having a knock on effect on the livelihoods of the generality of the Zimbabwean population who used to depend largely on formal employment.

For Nhodo *et al.* (2013) the aforementioned economic impediments date back to the era when the Zimbabwean Government adopted the abortive Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP), which had calamitous impact on the livelihoods of ordinary citizens particularly in the urban setup. This economic prescription by the World Bank and The International Monetary Fund (IMF) culminated in industrial rationalization, which entailed massive retrenchments in industry as well as public service, with the ultimate goal of reducing expenditure for the government and industry and in the worst scenario some infant industries closed shop altogether, relegating former employees into the informal sector. Over and above this the poor became increasingly vulnerable as the cost of living skyrocketed

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owing to the removal of subsidies on such basic provisions as health, education, transport, food *inter alia*.

This callous state of affairs is not however peculiar to Zimbabwe as countries like Malawi, Zambia, South Africa and Mozambique experienced the far reaching effects of neo-liberalism or Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPS). In Zambia Ferguson (2002) observed that the dislocation of the once glamorous economy from the global economy through SAPS resulted in abjection of formal employees-referring to the process of being thrown aside, expelled or discarded from the formal livelihoods. To further buttress this point he believes that this process does not simply imply being thrown out but being thrown down thus expulsion but also debasement and mortification. Through this process, citizens generally lose dignity and esteem, a scenario which also obtained in Zimbabwe during the early 1990s and the late 1990s as the informalisation of the economy reached its zenith. Whereas such findings are illuminating, the said author nevertheless denigrated the Zambian citizens to passive entities and glossed over the capacity of these social actors to respond to the informalised economy through various informal economic activities, which therefore becomes the hallmark of this study.

Inasmuch as the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme was largely accountable for the downturn of the Zimbabwean economy. Mlambo and Raftopolous (2006) attribute this sad development to the time when the Mugabe regime unilaterally authorized unbudgeted gratuities and monthly pensions to the militant war veterans for their perceived indispensable role in the country's liberation struggle from the British colonial masters. The subsequent deployment of Zimbabwean forces to the war beleaguered Democratic Republic of Congo only helped to further compound the already deteriorating situation as this had a huge strain on the national budget simultaneously sliding the nation into a vampire state that invest so much in defense at the expense of other crucial areas such as health, education, agriculture, industry and employment creation, which are nonetheless the pillars of the Zimbabwean economy.

Notwithstanding the effects of the intermediate droughts and the detrimental effects of climate change that continue to besiege the nation, other commentators blame the collapse of the economy on the imperative yet poorly executed Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) in Zimbabwe, which entailed reduced agricultural productivity. This is because the Zimbabwean economy is agro-based, henceforth all the sectors of the economy are anchored by the agricultural sector. Of note is the fact that during the period in question Zimbabwe moved from a bread basket, where she used to produce for the Southern African region and beyond to a basket case reliant on importation of food as well as humanitarian aid from the donor community. This is inexorably coalescing against the expansion and growth of infant industries and ultimately formal employment as well as livelihoods of the citizens who are conventionally dependent on formal employment.

This economic quandary however deepened between the year 2008 and 2009, which I aptly conceptualize as the "lost year" in terms economic growth and human development as the economy witnessed an unprecedented level of informalisation and economic decline. This period was characterised by crisis, confusion and uncertainty over entitlements and basic necessities for ordinary citizens particularly in Masvingo urban. It was characterised by a runaway inflation officially soaring above 231 percent and unofficially well above one billion percent. These challenges had a knock-on effect on industry and production as companies either downsized or closed shop altogether as a rational response to the production challenges haunting the nation. Given this background goods and services became unavailable and where they were available they were quoted in foreign currency

which was way beyond the capacity of ordinary Zimbabweans who were subsequently pushed out of formal employment. (Also see Nhodo and Mafongoya 2012) This period also saw the blossoming of the informal market or the black-market, where the prices of basic commodities were extortionate. Given this backdrop, expectations for the revival of the collapsing economy therefore hinged on the ubiquitous but highly contested political settlement known as the Government of National Unity or Global Political Agreement between the conflicting political parties in Zimbabwe, that is ZANU PF and the Movement for Democratic Change formations. This is because for many Zimbabweans, this problem was seen more as a political problem than an economic one.

Although the inauguration of the much anticipated Government of National Unity in 2009 was a welcome development to revive the butchered economy, it only brought piecemeal economic changes but did very little to ameliorate the livelihoods of many Zimbabweans who have remained outside the formal sector. It has been applauded for arresting the runaway inflation but there is still a lot to be done to bring sanity to the economy as well as the much needed job creation. As argued elsewhere in this paper 80 percent of Zimbabweans remain outside formal employment and for those who are still formally employed the majority of them are earning salaries that are way below the poverty datum line which is currently hovering around US\$600. Given this level of informalisation of the economy, it becomes inevitable that the majority of the affected citizens are falling back on the informal sector to resuscitate the strained livelihoods.

The ability to resort to the informal economy rests on my belief that these citizens are not *tabula rasas*. Instead they are knowledgeable, rational, strategic, resourceful and agentic actors who are capable of dealing with their social environment through manifold tactics. Taking a people centered approach as its axis, this study dwells on the challenges faced by ordinary citizens in Masvingo, particularly those entrepreneurs at Chimusana Market, simultaneously focusing on the survival strategies that they are deploying to deal with their challenges. It also looks at the contributions of these strategies to the survival of these entrepreneurs in light of the said economic impediments.

### **Methodology**

This qualitative study was carried out between October 2012 and January 2013. To meet the outlined objectives of this study the researcher utilized qualitative methodology. This methodology was chosen primarily because of its flexibility, which then allowed the researcher to probe deeply into the accounts, challenges and livelihood strategies employed by entrepreneurs at Chimusana market to deal with their strained livelihoods. This virtue could not be realized using quantitative methodology, owing to its rigidity. The flexibility of qualitative methodology also allowed the researcher to perceive social reality as it obtains at the said market place, without the complexities of rigid boundaries imposed by other less intimate methodologies. (See Siziba 2009) In order to construe a holistic picture of the issue in question, the researcher went on to triangulate a number of data gathering techniques within the qualitative paradigm. Consequently unstructured interviews, focus group discussions and Transect walks were used in this study.

### *Sampling*

The choice of qualitative methodology made it imperative for the researcher to use purposive or convenient sampling technique. This is a non-probability sampling technique whereby the researcher following his personal judgment selects information rich cases, that is the respondents who are deemed to be doing well in the area under investigation. This daunting task was made easier by the fact that the researcher grew up in Masvingo urban, henceforth the majority of the respondents were known to him. This advantage also made it easier for the respondents to create the much needed

rapport with the subjects. Through purposive sampling the researcher managed to select a total of thirty five respondents for interviewing. Inasmuch as a larger sample was desirable, it was not feasible to select a larger sample owing to the nature of the study, which is in-depth in orientation. Moreover it is neither feasible nor desirable to have a large sample in a case study like what quantitative researchers would do.

#### *Research Methods*

In line with the qualitative paradigm, the researcher utilized unstructured interviews as the main data soliciting technique. The greatest advantage of this method that became apparent in the research is the ability to probe deeply into the lives and livelihoods of the respondents, to unearth new clues, to open up new dimensions of the phenomenon and to secure vivid, accurate and inclusive accounts of respondents that are based on personal experience. (See Burgess 1982) These interviews were highly informal henceforth they developed as mere conversations with the respondents. Unstructured interviews were also held with key informants like the council officials with the goal of ascertaining the official position regarding the issue of informal entrepreneurship in Masvingo Urban. Focus Group Discussions were also conducted to corroborate and augment data gathered using unstructured interviews. Thus they brought about the much needed element of multivocality as respondents were encouraged by the environment to speak up on issues affecting their lives subsequently working to augment each other to increase the validity of the findings made therein. Transect walks were also used and they provided an observational insight into the strategies undertaken by the informal entrepreneurs at Chimusana Market.

#### *Ethical considerations*

All studies that involve human beings ubiquitously call for an adherence to ethical issues, therefore this study was not immune to this professional imperative. Thus from the outset, the research was fully explained to the respondents and they were assured that they will not be harmed since the research was purely for academic purposes. Informed consent was therefore ensured before conducting the research. Confidentiality and anonymity were also observed through the use of pseudonyms so as to avoid emotional, physical and financial harm to the respondents.

#### **Study Area**

Chimusana market is a hive of activities, accommodating close to 1000 traders. It is located at the margins of the Masvingo Central Business District. (CBD) It was an initiative started by the Masvingo City Council to rectify the far reaching damage inflicted by the Government initiated operation that was meant to deal with the informal economy through the destruction of all illegal informal settlements and informal markets which had become rampant in the city. This was done through the Operation Restore Order, popularly known as Operation Murambatsvina in the vernacular language in 2005. Thus as a tacit acknowledgement of the inevitability of the informal sector the Council of Masvingo moved swiftly to regularize the operations of the informal traders simultaneously fostering sanity in the venter beleaguered city. Designated marketing areas were subsequently created where the occupants are expected to pay rentals, water and electricity bills making this area a quasi-formal market. The city of Masvingo is the oldest and historical city in Zimbabwe, founded in 1890 by the British Colonial Company BCC under the name Fort Victoria. It then changed to Masvingo in line with the Great Zimbabwe Monuments in 1980. The city is the cosmopolitan city for the whole of Masvingo province, thereby making it one of the busiest cities in Zimbabwe. The clientele base for the entrepreneurs at the Chimusana market is drawn from the city's high density suburbs of Mucheke, Runyararo, Rujeko and the province at large. Most of the traders at Chimusana market however come from Mucheke, the oldest residential area in Masvingo. This is because of the proximity of this suburb to the CBD as well

as the city's small industrial site. The city falls under the agro-ecological region four along the Beitbridge-Harare Highway. The area is a perennially dry region to the extent that agricultural production is very low, such that people derive their livelihoods from off-farm livelihood strategies, which are also dominant at Chimusana market.

### **Conceptual Framework**

This section outlines the conceptual framework used to analyze the various responses of the respondents to the informalising economy. In order to present a vivid picture of the responses, the researcher triangulated three interrelated conceptual frameworks that is the Strain theory by Merton, Structuration thesis by Giddens and the Sustainable Livelihood framework By the DFID. The strain theory is of great utility in understanding the structural complications in the Zimbabwean society and how this society responds to such complications. Such responses constitute what Merton terms anomie, a scenario where there is an acute disjunction between the culturally prescribed goal (herein referred to as aspirations) and the socially prescribed means of achieving those aspirations. Members of society respond to this change in multifaceted ways but of interest in this study is innovation that is resorting to alternative ways of achieving social aspirations. Of not is the view that the cultural aspirations of many Zimbabweans is to be successful and the socially prescribed means of achieving this goal is through the education system and getting a formal job thereafter. Notwithstanding the fact that the majority of Zimbabweans are educated the formal sector is conversely dwindling leading to a huge strain on such aspirations. A significant number is therefore innovating through entrepreneurship in response to the said incompatibility between aspirations and the socially prescribed means of achieving those goals albeit it is anomie or normlessness.

In tandem with the major propositions of the Strain theory, Giddens' Structuration thesis helps to further illuminate the situation at hand. Focus here is on the dialectical relationship between the constraining structures and agency. What it means therefore is that neither structure nor agency has independent existence but they equally influence each other or more appropriately, they constitute a duality. Herein the structure shall be taken to refer to the Zimbabwe's macro-economic environment and the related structures such as the dollarization of the economy, poverty and the Government of National Unity that has callously failed to provide for the majority of poor citizens, leading to a huge strain on their livelihoods. Agency relates to entrepreneurs at Chimusana market, who are portraying that inasmuch as the said structures are constraining, they are rational, calculative and strategic actors who have the capacity to define and redefine their social environment until it is acceptable to them. (See Nhodo *et al.* 2013) Consequently, through various livelihood strategies, they are exhibiting rationality that is inevitably needed to transcend these constraining social structures.

In line with the aforesaid standpoint the Sustainable Livelihood Framework posits that any society at any given time is likely to fall under the vulnerability context, which marks a huge strain on people's entitlements and livelihoods. This context relates to poverty that has engulfed the Zimbabwean society, particularly Masvingo urban. The framework therefore seeks to gain an accurate and realistic understanding of people's strengths (assets or capital endowments) and how they strive to earn a living through these assets. (DFID 1999) It is also of great utility in understanding the said vulnerability and the way people mobilize a plethora of capitals ranging from human capital, social capital, natural capital, erotic capital, political capital *inter alia*.

## Results and Discussion

### *Structural constraints in Masvingo and the spirit of innovation through entrepreneurship*

As argued elsewhere in this paper, the residents of Masvingo urban, particularly from the poor high density suburbs of Mucheke and Rujeko are facing an avalanche of social-economic problems. These problems are emanating from the macro-economic and political environment that is impacting negatively on the livelihoods of the poor. It emerged that, whilst the industry and industrial production in Zimbabwe is dwindling, the Government of National Unity (GNU) has not helped matters either. More than 80% of the Zimbabwean population remains outside formal employment and to worsen the already volatile situation the Government of Zimbabwe went on to impose a partial freeze on recruitment of employees for all public service ministries except those that are regarded as essential services in 2010. The freeze was subsequently extended to all ministries in 2013, pushing millions of job seekers to the margins of formal employment. This was premised on the desire to reduce the ever increasing government expenditure bill since it is believed that for every US\$1 that the treasury receives US\$ 0.70 is channeled towards the payment of civil servants and employees of state assisted institutions, thereby crippling other sectors of the economy that are in dire need of funding. This can therefore be added to the growing list of structural factors that are pushing urbanites in Masvingo deep into abysmal poverty, as  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the nation is surviving on less than US\$1 per day. For those who are working very few are earning salaries that are above the poverty datum line, which is hovering above US\$600 for a family of six.

What is also irrefutable is my observation that these structural constraints are coalescing against the aspirations of many Zimbabweans, who are incessantly being constrained by the said social structures. It also emerged in this study that the cultural goal or aspirations shared by Zimbabweans at large is that of success. This goal however is proving to be very elusive since it means different things to different people, depending on the class of the concerned people. For ordinary citizens however it entails access to life's basics such as food, shelter, health, education for dependants, transport and other related basic necessities. Thus it becomes the aspiration of young people to be able to meet these requirements upon reaching adult age. The problem however is that the said structural challenges haunting Zimbabwe in general and Masvingo urban in particular have placed a huge strain on the ability of these social actors to achieve their social aspirations. This consequently relates to what Merton conceptualizes as the disjunction between cultural goals and the means of achieving those goals. The prescribed or socially acceptable means of achieving this societal goal in Zimbabwe is through the education system. This explains the robust development of the education system in Zimbabwe as the government was responding to this generally accepted means of achieving the cultural goals or social aspirations of many people in Zimbabwe. Of note is the fact that owing to this response the country is currently boasting of the highest literacy rate in Africa. It is paradoxical that while the education system is continuously producing graduates, the industry and the public service employment market is conversely plummeting leading to a huge strain on the livelihoods of many able bodied Zimbabweans who are traditionally accustomed to survival through the formal economy.

Faced with the aforesaid challenges Zimbabweans are inevitably responding to these challenges through a plethora of strategies ranging from conformity, retreatism, ritualism, rebellion and innovation, (also see Merton 1947) The world over conformity is the commonly embraced strategy adopted by members of society, but in Zimbabwe this has been adopted to a limited extent because generally the Zimbabweans are exhibiting ingenuity and resourcefulness through adopting alternative ways of survival. Conformism is a situation whereby individuals accept the situation and continue to strive for their goals within the confines of the generally acceptable means. Rebellion as emaciated by Merton (ibid) is insignificant in the current Zimbabwean scenario as the respondents in this study downplayed

violent and highly illegal survival options. Innovation as observed in this study was the most fashionable response particularly by the very poor who are maintaining commitment to the said societal aspirations although they devise alternative ways through entrepreneurship albeit in an illegitimate manner. This is because the majority of the entrepreneurial activities embraced by traders at Chimusana Market from a Zimbabwean perspective fall within the realm of illegal activities. This is typified by the crackdown on informal traders by the government in 2005 under the Operation restore order earmarked at fostering sanity in Zimbabwean cities. The municipal police as well as the national police in Masvingo are further cementing this position since they constantly harass and arrest some of the informal traders who are regarded as pathological to the smooth and efficient functioning of the formal economy. Drawing from the Masvingo example, it becomes apparent that innovation is a type of response which is very common among people from the lower classes who are heavily deprived of legitimate means while they still cherish the goal of success in society.

The significance of innovation as a survival option can be captured succinctly by the statement made by one of the respondents who is doing well in the second hand clothes trading at Chimusana market who had this to say,

*“Nyika yacho yaoma sakazvotoda kungwara pakubhindauko, chero usigaiti zvinosungisa”*

(Life is really tough in Zimbabwe, so it takes those with the spirit of innovation to survive as long as what you are doing is not illegal) She went on to say that her business is flourishing mainly because of poverty which has swamped many people in Zimbabwe. This is because many people cannot afford to buy clothes from the formal market where they are very expensive. Given this background many people throng her selling stand to buy cloths to the extent that she makes profit in excess of US\$1000 per month. Based on this survival strategy she is able to meet her family and the extended family needs despite the harsh economic environment bedeviling Zimbabwe. Together with her colleagues, she travels as far as Zambia and Mozambique to buy second hand clothes in bulk, for resell, popularly known as *mabero* in vernacular language.

Trade in pirated DVDs and CDs proved to be one of the most profitable enterprises notwithstanding the legality-illegality thereof. These traders, who are mostly male due to the risks that come with this trade are taking advantage of the fact that the original DVDS and CDs are very expensive in the formal market and are therefore beyond the capacity of many entertainment starved Zimbabweans. It was observed that while the original DVD or CD was costing between US\$4 and US\$8 in the official market, at the market in question they are selling at just US\$1 or even US\$1 for two disks. Given this backdrop, trade in these commodities becomes brisk business for the traders at Chimusana market. Inasmuch as this is a profitable enterprise, traders who were interviewed in this study had some misgivings for this trade. They reported that it is a very risk and nefarious trade compared to other options adopted by the traders in this area. This is because they are bearing the brunt of the police who constantly harass them, beating them up and at worst imprisoning them for the violation of copy rights since nothing is remitted to the authentic owners of the products.

In spite of the said risks, Tanaka a young entrepreneur in this niche area said that he ventured into this business after failing to find a job upon graduating with a university degree in Computer science. He is therefore using his computer skills very well, although in a very informal way. Through this business he managed to buy a residential stand in Mucheke, which is currently under construction, he also bought a Toyota Ipsum and is taking care of his two sisters who are in secondary education. Other popular economic activities undertaken by these entrepreneurs include but not limited to trade in agricultural commodities such as fruits and vegetables, poultry products, traditional and modern meals, basic commodities such as cooking oil, soap mealie meal and traditional and modern

medicines. It is also plausible to find everything that you can get on the formal market at Chimusana market at affordable prices. It was ironically observed that a significant number of formal traders are actually buying commodities for resale at this market consequently making it a quasi-formal market. Based on such findings, it is therefore my submission that members of society who constantly find themselves under serious social, economic and political strains inevitably do whatever it takes to meet their social aspirations. They therefore fallback on anomie as the legitimate means of survival are limited.

The Masvingo urban experience inexorably points to the relative nature of anomie or more appropriately deviant behavior. Prior to the informalisation of the economy, most of the said economic activities undertaken at Chimusana market would have been regarded as illegal and therefore punishable offences. This also becomes clear when one considers the perceptions of the colonial and post colonial governments towards informal trade which erroneously regarded them as dysfunctional and there were deliberate efforts by the governments to eradicate such activities. The establishment of such markets as the Chimusana market in this regard signifies a paradigm shift by the post colonial Zimbabwean government since these markets are now recognized by the state and other relevant stakeholders. It was also observed that even the law enforcement agents are now adopting the *laissez faire* attitude towards illicit economic activities such as trade in pirated DVDs and CDs and the trade in prohibited liquor. This is also a tacit acknowledgement of the ubiquity of the informal elements of the economy. Anomie or deviance is therefore relative in terms of time and location. The findings made in this study are also in tandem with the observation made by The Zimbabwe Human Development Report (2003) that an economy that is malfunctioning is likely to experience high levels of informalisation as affected people try to resuscitate their strained livelihoods through a mixture of innovative tendencies.

*The dialectics of Structure-Agency and the survival matrix in Masvingo*

As argued elsewhere in this paper Zimbabweans in general and the majority of the residents of Masvingo's high density suburbs are inundated by a myriad of social economic and political structures, which are constraining them. These structures derive from the collapsing economy, political polarization, dollarization of the economy, the Government of National Unity and poverty in general, which have an inhibitive effect on the livelihoods and capabilities of the urban poor. Of note is the fact that in mainstream research and literature, such actors were speciously conceptualized as passive victims of such circumstances or more appropriately as *tabula rasas*. Just inasmuch as these structures are constraining, it emerged that the residents of Masvingo urban are far from being relegated to passive entities. Instead they have proved beyond reasonable doubt that they are rational, calculative, strategic and resourceful actors. They are deploying their agency to transcend or circumvent the structures and ultimately earn a living out of the same structures. Thus the many livelihood strategies adopted by entrepreneurs at Chimusana market are a reflection and outcome of the dialectical relationship between structure and agency. To further buttress this relationship, it was observed that although the said structures are constraining on the livelihoods of the actors in question, they are simultaneously presenting alternative opportunities which they are manipulating in order to survive the detrimental effects of the economic and political calamity bedeviling the nation.

The strategies adopted by the traders at Chimusana Market as rational actors include trade in second hand clothing, which is arguably the most popular trade, agricultural marketing, occasional cross-border trade, trade in pirated DVDs and CDs, traditional medicines and other commodities that are on demand on the market. The dialectical relationship between structure and agency can also be



captured succinctly by the statement made by another respondent who referring to her predicament said,

*“zvakangofanana nembudzi yakasungirirwa, inotofurira payakasungirirwa”,*

Implying that their situation is like a tied goat but the rope is long enough for it graze on the immediate pastures. Contrary to the traditional studies where these informal economic activities were merely deployed as a palliative measure or only to keep the heads of the affected people above the water, these activities at Chimusana market are more sustainable and most of the traders have managed to move out of the vicious cycle of poverty affecting poor households in Masvingo. Some of the traders are showing remarkable potential to grow into commercial enterprises given time and appropriate facilities and are currently employing a significant number of employees to assist them in spite of the diminishing employment creation rate in Zimbabwe.

The dialectical nature of structure and agency is also evident in the summersault move by the state working in cahoots with the Masvingo city council and other stakeholders to establish Chimusana market as a designated market place, which also had a legalizing effect on the activities of the once highly unorganized traders. This is augmented by the current position of law enforcement agents towards informal traders in Masvingo in general. Habitually these agents were very hostile but they are now more accommodative and supportive of informal trading. This change of position illustrates the capacity of social actors to structure and influence the form and shape of the same structures that are affecting them. Thus the structure becomes a structuring structure and structured structure in this process. (Also see Ritzer and Goodman 2010) This is also in line with my submission that the entrepreneurs at Chimusana market are living under structures of domination but as social actors, they are resisting, and transforming these structures through various economic activities to survive the volatility of the structures (See Nhodo and Mafongoya 2012). However as researchers we need to avoid the risk of reifying agency like the rational action theorists did. This is because as observed by Giddens (1984) these social actors are not exclusively independent from the social structures as shown in their actions, rather these actions encompass the reflexive monitoring of social actions. Just as their activities have changed the form and shape of the structures they revealed to the researcher that they always acknowledge and respect the role of law enforcement agents and city buy laws. Consequently highly illegal and immoral economic activities are shunned, with the goal of fostering sanity at the market place. In addition they pay their rentals and bills timorously which is also a tacit acknowledgement of the significance of social structures. Thus in society neither the structure nor agency can exist independently but the two are dialectically interrelated and influence each other. They actually become two sides of the same coin and should never be analyzed separately.

#### *The significance of livelihood assets at Chimusana market.*

Although the exercise of agency proved to be decisive in the survival of the urban poor in Masvingo, it emerged that most of the traders who were successful in this area had managed to mobilize various forms of assets or capitals in this livelihood matrix. These capitals included social capital, human capital, political capital and natural capital. Social capital and political capital were however revered as the standout forms of capital in this business. Social capital entails various relations of trust and mutual consent, established over time among traders or between traders and their customers. In line with this the traders have developed the spirit of reciprocity which is inevitably assisting them to deal with the adversities in their businesses. Consequently an association was established by the traders, whose mandate is to assist members beleaguered by problems in their respective fields. Monthly contributions are therefore made by each member towards the establishment of this social and economic fund. Merry go round is another strategy devised by traders particularly women to raise the much needed capital in their businesses. Traders who were doing well also revealed that they have managed to developed goodwill with their customers and this has helped to create a huge clientele

base for their products. Owing to this goodwill at times they can just sell their products to their customers on credit, popularly known as *kunyorwa kumusana* and they will pay at the end of the month thereby increasing their daily sells. What this therefore means is that through social capital the traders have inadvertently created a community within the larger society and this community has its own rules and principles that are relentlessly assisting in the success of the traders.

Political capital is probably at par with social capital in terms of the survival of traders at Chimusana market. Many traders are thriving through the use of this capital owing to the volatility of the Zimbabwean political landscape. Thus the various connections and linkages to political parties are used as a resource in the access to scarce resources in society. It was observed that for every member to get a selling stand at this market place, they had to be politically correct or should be a ZANU PF card holder, culminating in what I refer to as the *Zanunisation* of informal trading in Zimbabwe. Through political capital the traders will also exercise symbolic violence to scare of potential competitors in this trade. Henceforth labeling has become endemic in this area where competitors or perceived competitors are labeled as Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) supporters (MDC is the strong opposition party) and are dealt with ruthlessly. This situation therefore constitutes what is termed the unintended consequences of intended actions. (Also see Giddens 1984) Here the intentions of the traders are to survive but such intended actions have a backlash in that they are sowing the seeds of mistrust and revulsion among the traders. This callous development emanates from the divide and rule policy adopted by the ruling party to win the urban vote which has customarily gone to the MDC ever since its formation. This however does not mean all the traders genuinely support ZANU PF, instead this is just a front stage to politics where they pretend to fully support the party but their backstage shows otherwise or they clandestinely support the rival party. Responding to this issue Mai Munya said,

*"This is just a game, as you can see everyone here is ZANU PF but not everyone is a genuine ZANU PF supporter"*

A significant number of female traders for that reason joined the ZANU PF Women's League and they are using this as a tool to access small loans that are parceled out by ZANU PF particularly towards election time to buy votes. In line with this, some youths at Chimusana Market have strategically aligned themselves to ZANU PF for them to survive in this business. Through aligning themselves they gain access to benefits that are exclusive to ZANU PF Members. These benefits include access to selling stands, access to loans from various banks as well as moral and financial support from the ministry of Youths through the Economic Empowerment and Indigenization policy. To support this position one young trader had this to say,

*"What else can we do to be safe in this nation, we simply have to be ZANUPF during the day and MDC at night"*

This state of affairs however is not peculiar to the market in question as it is extending to the Zimbabwean society in general. Thus the Chimusana market in relation to politics and economics is just but a microcosm of the macrocosm and the replica of the Zimbabwean political landscape.

## **Conclusion**

The foregoing study dwells on the various challenges faced by poor households in Masvingo urban. These challenges are mainly emanating from the harsh macro-economic environment affecting the Zimbabwean society in general, subsequently leading to the unprecedented informalisation of the economy. This development had a ripple effect on the livelihoods and social aspirations of many Zimbabweans, particularly from the lower classes, who are languishing in abysmal poverty.

Notwithstanding catastrophic impact of these constraining structures, the paper reveals the innovative capacity of the poor in response to the constraining structures. Various informal economic activities adopted by traders at Chimusana market are therefore a reflection of how the poor exude agency and innovation, concurrently mobilizing various types of assets or capitals to earn a living in an informalised economy. The dialectical relationship between societal structures and agency was also revealed through the ability of the entrepreneurs to change the form and shape of the same structures that are negatively affecting their livelihoods, in order for them to suit their conditions as evidenced by the legalization of the once nefarious enterprise. Contrary to the orthodox perception of informal trade as a palliative strategy adopted by households enmeshed in transitory poverty, the study reveals that the activities undertaken by the traders in question are highly sustainable and have the capacity to match the formal economic activities, particularly in Masvingo urban if proper supporting structures are unveiled to the traders.

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