



The Role of the Informal Sector in Epworth's Food System, Zimbabwe

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INTRODUCTION

The informal sector refers to economic activities that take place in unincorporated, small, or unregistered enterprises that are not assessed for taxation by a central government (ICLS, 2013; Paradza, 2009). The economic activities undertaken in this sector generally occur outside the rigid confinement of formal sector regulations and guidelines (Njaya, 2015). The greater proportion of the employment in the informal sector is without social protection. The informal sector is an important component of the global economy, as it provides employment and income to millions of people and also contributes to economic growth. The International Labor Organization (ILO, 2018) estimates that more than two billion people work in the informal sector worldwide, while Johannes

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Jutting and Juan de Laiglesia (2009) put the proportion of the workforce engaged in informal employment at 60% globally. This proportion, however, differs between regions: 69% in South Asia, 57% in East and Southeast Asia (excluding China), 53% in sub-Saharan Africa, and 34% in Latin America (Vanek et al., 2014). The contribution of the informal sector to the economy varies globally, but Mohammed Yelwa and A. J. Adam (2017) estimate that it accounts for 40% of the gross national product of most low-income countries. The informal economy accounts for approximately 50–80% of the gross domestic product (GDP) in Africa (Steel & Snodgrass, 2008).

In Zimbabwe, the informal sector is important, especially in the absence of any noticeable growth in the formal sector in the past two decades. Leandro Medina and Friedrich Schneider (2018) posit that Zimbabwe's informal sector is the third largest (60.6%) in the world, after Georgia's (64.9%) and Bolivia's (62.3%). The rapid growth of the informal sector in the country can be traced back to the adoption and implementation of the Economic Structural Adjustment Program (ESAP) from 1990 to 1995 (Chirisa, 2009). While the informal sector already existed in the country before this period, it was small in size. The implementation of ESAP and the consequent shrinking of the economy increased unemployment as industries shut down. By 2008, industry capacity utilization had declined by close to 90% (Ndiweni & Verhoeven, 2013). While the informal sector employed only 10% of the labour force in Zimbabwe in 1980 (Labour & Economic Development Research Institute of Zimbabwe, 2017), by 2007–2008 the figure was estimated at between 80 and 94% (Dekker, 2009), as huge numbers of people entered the informal sector to earn their livelihoods. The Growth and Equity through Micro-enterprise Investments and Institutions (GEMINI) Study, 1991–1993, showed that micro and small enterprises increased in the country as the economy deindustrialized (Daniels, 1994).

In the post-2000 period, the economy further contracted due to the implementation of the fast-track land reform program. Close to two decades of political disagreements in the country also negatively affected the formal economy and have given further impetus to informal sector growth. A 2011 Finscope Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprise Survey estimated that there were close to 3.5 million micro, small, and medium enterprises in the country, with an estimated turnover of US\$7.4 billion, employing about 5.7 million people (Njaya, 2015; Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency, 2011). It is the informal sector that has enabled the

country to survive during a period of economic crisis (Ndiweni & Verhoeven, 2013). The food system accounts for a large share of informal sector activities. Its dual functions of creating income-earning opportunities and providing food to city dwellers are both critically important for Zimbabwean households during the protracted crisis. Clainos Chidoko et al. (2011) investigated the economic impact of the informal sector in the country and concluded that, despite numerous challenges (e.g., lack of capital and a shortage of accounting and managerial skills), the sector was indispensable to the economy of the country. Assessing the contribution of the informal sector to poverty reduction in Rusape Tatenda Saunyama (2013) concluded that income from informal sector trade enabled households to meet their food, medical, housing, and educational needs. Takunda Chirau (2012) researched women's livelihoods in Magaba, Harare and highlighted that although most women were operating in highly vulnerable sociopolitical contexts, they were nevertheless able to construct stable livelihoods in the informal sector.

For the informal food sector specifically, several studies have detailed the key contributions of the sector to the overall economy and to food security. O. I. Manyanbare et al. (2007), while investigating the gendered dimensions of vending activities in Mutare, indicated that women dominated in food vending and that food vending constituted the women's largest source of income. Besides employment, the informal food sector serves to distribute food to consumers in areas not well-served by the formal food system. In most of urban Zimbabwe, the distribution of vegetables is primarily through the informal food system. According to Blessing Chitanda (2015), informal vegetable markets are embedded in the social and cultural spaces of the residents and thus serve not only the important food needs of the residents, but also enable residents to interact as they transact and bargain over quality, pricing, or other such aspects regarding the food. Hence, Tavonga Njaya (2014) argues that informal food trade is responsible for the upkeep of thousands of households that would otherwise struggle to survive in the challenging city environment.

The informal food sector includes cross-border trading. Thubelihe Jamela (2013) indicated that a significant proportion of cross-border traders in Zimbabwe were trading in food. The food items that are generally imported into Zimbabwe include cooking oil, rice, salt, sugar, powdered milk, maize-meal, and tinned foods. Although a small proportion of the foods imported by informal food traders may be sold to formal food retailers for resale, the majority of the food is generally sold on the

informal food markets, contributing substantially to the food system of the urban areas. Thus, Peter Makaya and Constantine Munhande (2008), studying the contribution of informal food trading to food security in Gweru, argued that food trading is important because it increases food access. The importance of the informal food sector can therefore not be underestimated.

Despite the significant contributions detailed above, the informal food sector in Zimbabwe continues to be suppressed by governments. Periodic raids are carried out on the sector, which is projected as being unhygienic, dirty, and a constant source of disease, hence warranting destruction. While politicians at times support the existence of the sector, such support is conveniently voiced during election periods when the traders' support is needed. Thereafter, most politicians rejoin the bandwagon of those calling for the sector's destruction and advocate for the clean-up of the city to "international" standards (Potts, 2006). In the process, the crucial role that the sector plays in the economy, as well as the food system, is forgotten. Against this background, this chapter examines the role of the informal food sector in the food system of Epworth, Zimbabwe.

A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE INFORMAL SECTOR

The political tensions exposed through Zimbabwe's informal sector mirror tensions in academic discourse on the subject as a development problem. Discussions on the informal sector are generally controversial, based on the different viewpoints from which one can observe the sector (Njaya, 2015). Ralf Hussmanns (2001) outlines several of these viewpoints. First, the informal sector can be viewed positively as a provider of employment and income. Second, it can be seen negatively as an ungoverned sector operating outside the dictates of existing norms. Third, the sector can be romanticized as a breeding ground of entrepreneurship which, if left unencumbered by regulation and bureaucracy, could thrive and enhance prosperity. Fourth, it can be condemned as a vast area of illegality, backwardness, poverty, and unsanitary conditions.

Despite decades of debate, Cathy-Austin Otekhile and Oluwatoyin Matthew (2017) argue that knowledge about the structure, conduct, and performance of the informal sector remains limited, as little factual information exists, due to lack of interest from governments, academics, and public administrators. Debate on the sector has largely been polarized

and two major discourses can be identified: the reformist and the Marxist perspectives.

The reformist perspective takes a positive view of the informal sector. It is rooted in the idea that the informal sector's contribution to the economy is largely positive. Drawing from the various studies commissioned by the ILO in the 1980s and 1990s, reformists believe that the informal sector has vast potential in creating employment, providing opportunities for on-the-job training, honing entrepreneurial skills of people in the sector, generating income, and spurring economic growth (United Nations, 1999). The role that the informal economy has played in sustaining livelihoods, especially in countries whose economies are in crisis, has solidified the reformists' contention that the informal sector is crucial to overall economic development (Lubell, 1991). It is not seen as a transient sector that operates in periods of economic crisis, but as one whose effects on the economy can be increased by enhancing macro-economic conditions to strengthen its viability.

Contrary to this perspective is the Marxist perspective. According to Otekhile and Matthew (2017), the Marxist perspective focuses on the structural dependency and exploitative relations between the formal and informal sectors. It sees the informal sector as marginal and petty, producing low-quality products, and supplying cheap labour that creates conditions for exploitative labour practices (Tokman, 1978). The sector is seen as problematic, as it reverses economic advancement and makes workers vulnerable. The fact that workers and employers in the sector are rarely registered makes it difficult for authorities to monitor or enforce compliance with policies (Chen, 2005). Marxist theorists thus see this sector as being "subordinate" to the formal and believe its eradication would not affect the national economy much because its contribution to the national fiscus is marginal. It is this view that some governments and local authorities use to advocate for the eradication of the informal sector.

This study is partial to the reformist perspective and argues that the informal sector in Zimbabwe is an integral part of the national economy, especially in an environment where economic growth has long stagnated and unemployment is high. It is imperative that efforts be made to better understand the sector, and the informal food sector in particular, as it plays a significant role in distributing food, "bulk-breaking," and generally increasing food access for the majority of the poor people who may otherwise remain on the fringes of the city's food system.

THE STUDY AREA

The study was carried out in Epworth, which is a peri-urban settlement located about 15 km to the eastern side of the Harare metropolitan area. The settlement was started by the Wesleyan Methodist Mission Trust in the late nineteenth century (Rakodi, 1995). Most of the initial inhabitants were farmers and were joined by church converts who sought sanctuary from the predominant traditionalist society in the surrounding area. In the 1970s, Epworth grew rapidly as refugees arrived from rural areas that had been rendered insecure by the intensification of the liberation war. At independence, the removal of influx-controls regulations resulted in more people moving into the area (Chitekwe-Biti et al., 2012). One of the major attractions of the area was its informal nature (Butcher, 1998), which allowed new migrants to settle without adherence to the regulations usually encountered in formally structured settlements. The population of the area increased from 20,000 in 1980 to 120,000 in 2009 and to 167,462 by 2012 (Zimbabwe Central Statistics Office, 1992, 2002; Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency, 2014). The Methodist Church passed ownership of Epworth to the government in 1986 and the Epworth Local Board was constituted to oversee administration.

Epworth's rapid growth in the late 1990s and the post-2000 period is attributable to economic challenges that forced large numbers of people to move away from Harare, where rentals are expensive (Marongwe et al., 2011). Epworth is divided into seven administrative wards. While the government's vision was for Epworth to eventually integrate it into Harare, this did not happen, presumably because Harare did not want to be saddled with the development challenges facing the area. Epworth has sparse infrastructure: only two main tarred roads, few service centres, low water and electricity connection, and a poorly developed sewer system. It is one of the poorest urban centers in the country, with a poverty prevalence of 64.5% (ZIMSTAT, 2013). The formal food system in the area is also poorly developed, with only a few shopping centers available. The food system of the area is thus largely informal.

STUDY METHODOLOGY

To investigate the importance of the informal sector to the food system of Epworth, this paper used data collected from four separate but inter-related surveys conducted in 2016 and 2017: a retail mapping census; a

retail survey; a household food security survey; and a value chain analysis. The collected data enabled a better understanding of the role that the informal sector plays in the food system of Epworth. For the retail mapping census, research assistants identified and mapped all food retail outlets in Epworth. The aim was to get a picture of the various retail enterprises that operated in the area, the range of goods traded, operating times, and food distribution patterns. In total, 1,607 food retail outlets were identified and mapped. This information was necessary to understand Epworth's food system, especially which areas were better served and which ones were not, hence influencing food access.

Questionnaires were administered to a systematically selected sample of 297 retailers. Information sought included: the demographics of food traders, food sourcing, business income and expenditure, foods traded, and business challenges and opportunities. This enabled a better understanding of the central role that the informal food trade played in the overall food system of Epworth. A standardized food security questionnaire was administered to a systematically selected sample of 483 households in Epworth. Among other things, the questionnaire captured information on household demographics, poverty, income and expenditure patterns, food insecurity experiences, dietary information, and household coping mechanisms.

In addition, in-depth interviews were carried out with randomly selected households. The value chain analysis identified five food items (maize-meal, rice, *maputi*, vegetables, and offal) central to food security in Epworth. The food items were then tracked along the value chain, identifying the multiple packaging and pricing processes that occurred, as far back as the source or a place where no further information was available. This approach increased the chances of identifying more food suppliers to the area than would have been the case in a traditional "farm to fork" value chain analysis.

A two-day intensive training session was conducted for all enumerators before each survey component was carried out. This training also included piloting and refining of the research instruments. Data were collected and captured using the Open Data Kit technology, allowing for the simultaneous collection and capturing of data. While the four study components discussed above collected detailed data regarding retailing, household food security and food sources, this study extracted and used only data that is relevant to understanding the informal food sector's integral role in Epworth's food system.

HOUSEHOLD LIVELIHOOD AND FOOD STRATEGIES IN EPWORTH

The economic conditions in Zimbabwe in the past two decades have been dire, resulting in the GDP of the country contracting drastically and unemployment levels rising. Survey results indicate that only 13.3% of the sample population was working full time, while 13.4% were working part time. The greater proportion of the sample population (28.5%) reported to be self-employed, while 16.1% were looking for work, 9.4% were not looking for work, 2.4% were medically unfit to work, 0.4% were pensioners, and 16.5% categorized themselves as “housewives.” It is worth noting that most of those that indicated self-employment were generally earning their livelihoods in the informal sector. The dominance of people in self-employment arises from the fact that salary-based employment in the country is limited. Munsaka (2013) estimated that Zimbabwe’s unemployment level was about 95% by 2012. Thus, the majority of people ended up in self-employment in the informal sector. As one household respondent indicated, survival in Epworth largely hinged on eking out a living in the informal sector: “Our survival is hinged on selling our wares at Mbare Market. My husband goes and sells at market. On some occasions he gets some money, but on other occasions the money is not enough. For food to be considered adequate, we have to spend \$100 a month, given the large size of family present” (Interview 7, June 25, 2016, Epworth).

The informal sector therefore formed the backbone of the household economy, and households were using income from this sector to feed themselves. Skilled individuals also worked in the informal sector when they could not find employment in the formal sector, as in the case of one woman who said: “My husband is a driver, with all the papers necessary to be employed as one, but the problem is that finding jobs nowadays is very difficult” (Interview 1, June 25, 2016, Epworth). While the income that some households were getting from their economic activities in the informal sector were not able to meet all their basic needs, it was nevertheless the only reliable source of income in an environment where the formal system had virtually collapsed.

A stable and adequate income is necessary for sustenance in the city because households pay for food and other expenses such as rent, electricity, water, medical fees, and transport, as well as educational costs. Out of 483 surveyed households, the majority (133) indicated that their

major source of income was casual work. While a significant number of households (114) reported that they were getting income from formal wage work, many more earned income from informal sources, including informal wage work (118), informal business-sale of goods (71), informal business-not household produced (14), informal business-rent (13), and other informal business (10). While the total monthly income reported by surveyed households ranged from no income at all to a maximum of US\$3,500, the mean monthly household income from all sources was very low at US\$180.90. This was at a time when the monthly poverty datum line stood at between US\$430 and US\$574 for an average household of five persons (Zaba, 2017). Hence, the majority of the households were earning inadequate incomes. Sources with the highest average income were informal business selling something the household produced (US\$415), followed by formal wage work (US\$250), informal business selling something the household did not produce (US\$193), grants (US\$139), informal wage work (US\$136), casual work (US\$110), and informal rental income (US\$108). These average income levels demonstrate that informal business and employment can be as lucrative as formal sector employment.

Consumer theory posits that there is a rational way in which limited income is allocated to different goods and services expenses and that such income allocation is done in order to maximize utility (Mafuru & Marsh, 2003). In Epworth, most households allocated their expenditure toward food and groceries (441), fuel (345), rent (240), telecommunications (230), and education (215). This was expected: in conditions of economic crisis, most households will end up focusing their expenditure on food rather than non-essential expenses, hence the limited expenditure on items not central to household survival. The total monthly household expenditure in Epworth was US\$143. While savings had the highest average monthly expenditure of US\$68, this should be treated with caution as there were few households saving on a monthly basis. The major expenses for most of the households were on education (US\$57) and on food and groceries (US\$54).

The informal sector was not only a major source of income for households in Epworth, but the households' main source of food as well. The major food sources for households in Epworth in the year preceding the research were tuck-shop/house-shop in Epworth (78%), hammer-mill in Epworth (58%), and vendors/hawkers in Epworth (42%). While other households indicated sourcing food from wholesalers (34%), informal

food sources were more often patronized daily by household members. The other dominant food source indicated by the households was that of butcheries in Epworth (53%), which households patronized weekly. It is worth noting that while butcheries predominantly sell fresh meat, they were also selling other products such as *matemba/kapenta* (dried fish). Although 33% of the households indicated buying from supermarkets and 18% from wholesalers, these purchases were usually monthly. The trend that emerges here is that informal food sources were patronized more frequently and closer to home than the formal food sources that were generally located further from Epworth. Informal food sources thus played a critical role in Epworth's food system, as most households could access food closer to home. Only 33% of the surveyed households reported making purchases from supermarkets. Residents indicated that the supermarkets were too far away (56%), did not provide credit (54%), were too expensive (46%), were only for the rich (35%), and did not sell the food they needed (17%). The households' partiality toward informal food sources appears to be based on convenience and price.

FOOD RETAILERS IN EPWORTH

Informal food retailers are critical to the food system of Epworth. According to survey results, the dominant type of food retailers in the area were tuck shops (19.5%), followed by market stand/stall vendor (16.3%), house-shop (7.7%), and table at intersection (7.1%) (Fig. 5.1). The dominance of informal food sources derived from the fact that there were few shopping centres in the area, as well as negligible trading infrastructure. Thus, there were only a few wholesalers (0.6%) and superettes (0.2%) or large/independent supermarkets (0.1%). The few wholesalers that were operating in Epworth were relatively expensive compared to the prices paid at wholesalers in Harare. Most residents therefore preferred to purchase from the streets, where the prices were comparatively lower.

An analysis of the spatial location of food retailers in Epworth illustrates some general aspects that are key to Epworth's food system. The first is that informal food retail outlets are spread out across all the wards, including within residential areas. Such location is important for the area's food system: it provides the most convenient location for the poor to access food, given that they have limited time and access to transportation to travel far for purchases. The location allows consumers to access food outside of traditional business hours, as some of these stores open

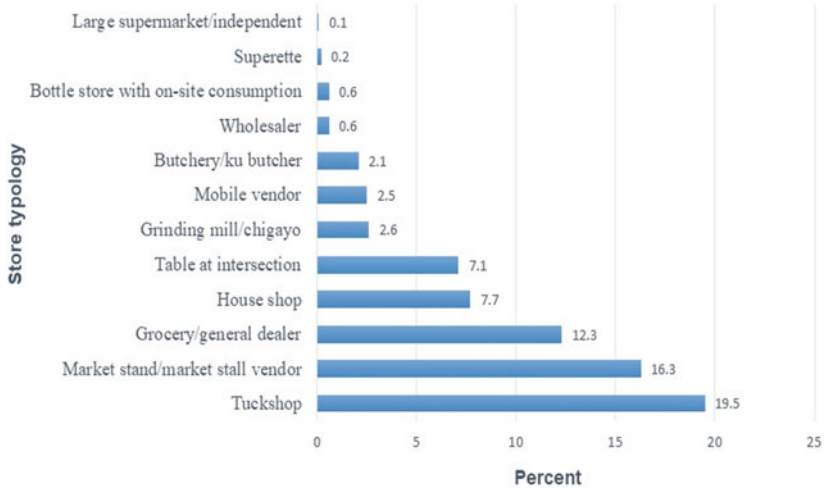


Fig. 5.1 Store typology in Epworth

early and close late. The second aspect relates to the predominance of street vendors, who play an important role in supplying food in Epworth. In a context where the formal food system had generally collapsed, street traders were expanding their stock to include such products as raw meat, traditionally sold in butcheries in the formal sector. Other foods found on the streets included the staple dish of *sadza* (meat and cooked vegetable), as well as other foods one would expect to find in restaurants. The food was often broken down into smaller, more affordable portions (bulk-breaking), commonly referred to as *tsaona*. Almost all food items could be found in the informal sector in Epworth. While the informal sector predominates in the area, the formal sector is not excluded. Rather, these two sectors exist side-by-side in complementarity to deliver food to residents. This symbiotic relationship is clearly seen in the meat trade, where street vendors often buy in bulk from butcheries and break the bulk to sell on the street.

While the formal food system is usually credited with supplying a wide variety of food to the market, thereby satisfying customer needs, an analysis of the food sold by retailers in Epworth showed that the informal sector is equally indispensable. According to survey results, informal retail outlets were selling the following key products: supplier-packed

products (43%), vegetables (42%), non-food products (42%), self-packed items/bulk-broken items (37%), fresh food (34%), refrigerated food items (27%), and mixed foods (25%). Fewer retailers, however, were trading in traditional food items (18%) or in cooked/prepared foods (13%). The lower proportion of retailers dealing in traditional foods is indicative of the westernized diets in urban areas. The lower proportion of retailers selling refrigerated foods results from the challenge of low access to electricity in the area, as most of Epworth has no electricity.

The viability of a food system is closely related to the way in which food is sourced and traded. It is therefore important to understand where the key foods are sourced, as this has implications for the availability of the food as well as its pricing, which ultimately affects consumers' access. Jeremy Swift and Kate Hamilton (2001) argue that retail distribution systems are generally tilted in favour of high-income areas where infrastructure and marketing systems are well-established and more functional than in low-income areas. The reverse value chain analysis carried out in Epworth enabled a better understanding of where food is sourced and the pricing dynamics. The five food items studied were maize-meal, rice, maputi, vegetables, and offal. Their value chains are discussed below in turn.

Maize is Zimbabwe's staple crop, and it is used to make the traditional dish known as *sadza*. The value chain for maize-meal showed that much of the maize retailed in Epworth was imported from South Africa and Zambia. Although the Grain Marketing Board (GMB) was also importing maize, its role was minimal. Much of the maize-meal was imported by cross-border traders for resale to wholesalers. The majority were small-scale traders who brought in small quantities that could be imported duty-free as part of their travelers' rebate. Big importers generally shied away from maize importation, owing to high import duties. The contribution of cross-border traders to maize importation was immense, underlying the key role that the informal food sector plays in the food system of the country. Small traders in Epworth also bought maize or maize-meal from wholesalers in Harare and repackaged it into smaller quantities for resale to consumers who could not afford to purchase in large quantities. While big businesses sold maize-meal in 10-kg or 20-kg packages, the street vendors repackaged and sold maize-meal in packages of 1 or 2 kgs, pricing it at US\$0.50 and US\$1, respectively—an amount that consumers could afford. A number of hammer-mills were dotted around Epworth, supplying residents with maize-meal.

The rice value chain supply into Epworth was generally long, with rice coming from South Africa, Mozambique, China, Vietnam, and Singapore. While the length of the rice value chain reaffirms the embeddedness of Epworth's food system into the global and regional food system, it also shows the crucial role that the informal sector plays in importing the product. The major players in the importation of rice were wholesalers and the government, as well as cross-border traders, indicating the multiple entry points for rice into the country's food system. The role of the informal food sector in the rice value chain was significant: while the GMB imported rice in 50-kg bags, they also repackaged rice into smaller 20-kg, 10-kg, 5-kg, and even 2-kg packets for resale to wholesalers. In Epworth, however, traders in the informal sector bought rice in larger packaging at the GMB depot in Msasa, less than five kilometres away. They repackaged it into even smaller quantities (1-kg, 500-g, 250-g, and 100-g packets) that most residents could afford.

Vegetables are integral to the diets and nutritional security of residents of Epworth. While some households were growing vegetables in Epworth, the greater proportion of the traded vegetables was bought from Mbare Market in Harare. The vegetables at Mbare Market are supplied by farmers from nearby communities such as Mazowe, Dema, Marondera, and Mutoko. The vegetable trade was dominated by informal sector players. At Mbare Market, for example, the pricing was determined by middlemen (*makoronyera*) who controlled access for farmers and buyers. While traders would purchase a bundle of vegetables at the market for US\$2, they would later break it down into smaller bundles for resale to consumers for US\$0.10 for five to seven vegetable leaves. Although the street traders almost doubled what residents around the Mbare Market would pay, they enabled Epworth residents to access vegetables that would be significantly more expensive should a resident have to make a return trip to the market by taxi, which would cost an average of US\$4. Selling vegetables in Epworth in pushcarts, wheelbarrows or on bicycles, vegetable traders in the informal market thus increase access of households to this most precious part of the local diet.

In Epworth, offal meat was available from both the formal and informal food economy. Few butcheries in Epworth were trading in offal. Rather, street traders and mobile vendors dominated, moving around with buckets of meat. The main source of offal meat was butcheries in Harare. In Harare, this meat was acquired from local abattoirs. While

meat is part of the traditional dish in the country, harsh economic conditions militated against its consumption by households. The formal food system was unable to supply the offals needed in Epworth and thus the informal sector became the substitute.

Maputi is a type of popped corn that is consumed as a snack. Packaged in 50- to 80-g packets, it was generally sold along the roadside and at intersections by both stationary and mobile vendors. While it was also sold in formal shops, it was more abundant in the informal food sector. Traditionally, most of the maputi sold in Epworth used to be processed in factories in the Harare neighborhoods of Mbare, at Msasa Industrial Park, and in Chitungwiza. However, it was now being locally produced in Epworth by numerous small-scale manufacturers that have emerged in the past few years owing to the easy availability of the production technology. At about US\$0.10 per packet, maputi is an affordable snack whose price has remained relatively unchanged even during the country's economic crisis. Its consumption by the majority of the people in the area, and its production by local manufacturers in the informal sector, means that it has assumed an important role in the area's food system.

CONCLUSION

The informal sector is an important component of the food system in Zimbabwe's urban areas. As survey results have shown, this sector is responsible for ensuring that food is available to residents of Epworth in quantities that are affordable to consumers. Besides supplying food, the informal food sector in Epworth is also providing employment that is critical for the survival of many households, especially in a context where the economy was depressed and unemployment very high. The analysis of the food sources also revealed some key facts. First, that Epworth's food system is indeed linked to the global food system, owing to some of the food that is sourced internationally. Second, even though the value chain for some of the food items consumed in the area (such as maize and rice) spans international boundaries, these value chains are embedded in the informal sector at the local scale. Third, formal and informal food systems interplay in Epworth to supply the area with the food that residents need.

Given these findings, this study makes a number of recommendations relating to the informal food sector. First, the local authority must repeal all laws that criminalize the sector, owing to its crucial role in the area's food system. Second, the local authority must improve the infrastructure

that is available to businesses in the sector so that they can operate in an orderly and sustainable manner. In Epworth, as is the case in other urban areas in Zimbabwe, food vending is no longer just a temporary activity that households engage in during times of crisis. Rather, it is an enduring activity that is an integral part of the food system of the area and the economy at large.

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