

Vulnerability and Resilience for Second Hand Clothes Informal Traders in The Wake of Covid-19 Lockdown Restrictions in Mkoba South, Gweru (2019-2021)

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Abstract: The premise of this study was anchored on vulnerability and resilience mechanisms faced by second hand clothes informal traders in the wake of covid-19 lockdown restrictions in Mkoba South, Gweru from 2019 to 2021. Its main objectives were: to explore the vulnerability of second hand clothes informal traders' in adapting to the Covid 19 lockdown restrictions and to explore the resilience mechanisms utilized. An interpretive research paradigm triangulated by a phenomenological research design was adopted. Interviews and non-participant observations were used as the main data gathering instruments. The overall findings from the study revealed that the second hand clothes informal traders were vulnerable. The vulnerabilities included fear and stress; lack of government support; reduced profits and harassment by municipal and national police. Due to the above vulnerabilities, the second hand clothes informal traders developed resilience mechanisms which include selling from home; moving door to door; selling to familiar customers, friends and relatives on credit; use of Whatsapp to advertise; bribing municipal and national police; use of cross-border transporters/malaitsha for supplies and many more. The resilience mechanisms were all largely effective in ensuring business survival and sustainable livelihoods. The study recommended that a wider multi-stakeholder consultation in the promulgation of policies to control health pandemics like the Covid 19 in the future be instituted. There is also need for capacity building to the informal traders on general business management and contemporary trends in business marketing using technology as well as helping the second hand clothes informal traders to move from the 'informal' tag to formality through registering of their businesses.

Key words: informal traders, second hand clothes informal traders, adaptation strategies, covid 19, vulnerability and resilience

I. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The outbreak of the Covid 19 pandemic has devastated the world in all aspects. With first detected cases in the Wuhan Province of China late in 2019, Covid 19 has since then, rapidly spread around the globe (Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC), 2020). The swift increase in Covid 19 cases to all corners of the earth

prompted the World Health Organisation (WHO) to initially announce it as a public health crisis in January 2020; and eventually a pandemic in March 2020 (WHO, 2020). According to Worldometers (2020a) in Chitsamatanga and Malinga (2021) as of November 2020 there were more than 55 million recorded infections of Covid 19 with fatalities exceeding the 1 million mark around the world. As of November also, the continent of Asia reportedly had the highest infections surpassing 15 million, followed by Europe with more than 14 million, North America had exceeded 13 million, South America with more than 10 million, Africa above 1 million and Oceania slightly more than 42 thousand (ibid).

Since its advent, all nations of the earth have been grappling with how to reduce infections of Covid 19. Thus various measures to contain the pandemic have been promulgated. Most of the countries took a cue from China where the first case of Covid 19 was detected and the infections surged. According to Bouey (2020) the discovery that Covid 19 was infectious and transmitted person to person led to the lockdown of the Province of Wuhan. Public transport, including road, railway and airports were systematically closed. All cities and provinces in China eventually implemented lockdown measures which enabled local governments to employ social policing mechanisms to enforce self-quarantine, cancel public events, and prohibit crowd gatherings across the country (Bouey, 2020). People were asked to stay home as much as possible, business and recreational facilities were closed and residents were required to wear face masks outdoors. The government of China, in the meanwhile, rapidly mobilised resources, medical personnel, public health teams, and testing kit productions to support Wuhan where the Covid 19 cases were concentrated (ibid). The above case reaction to the pandemic became blue print with contextualized alterations for other countries in Europe and America where cases quickly surged.

The continent of Africa had the Covid 19 pandemic reaching it later than all others, with the first case being recorded in

Egypt on 14 February 2020 and another in Nigeria on 27 February 2020 (Shabir and Aijaz, 2020). According to Schwettmann (2020) all 54 African countries have confirmed Covid 19 cases with the highest figures reported in South Africa, Nigeria and Cameroon. Like other countries where the pandemic first struck, African countries also put in place measures in a bid to contain the spread of the virus. These included lockdowns, travel bans, border closures, systematic quarantines for incoming visitors, stay-at-home orders, night curfews, ban on public gatherings, closures of markets, shops, restaurants, hotels, bars – amongst many other measures (Schwettmann, 2020). Essentially all African countries took the different measures although to varying degrees as well as eased them at different times and contexts.

Zimbabwe recorded its first Covid 19 case on 21 March 2020 and its first death on the 23rd of the same month; by month end a total of 8 persons had tested positive for the virus (WHO, 2020). As of the end of February 2021 the country had recorded 36,179 confirmed cases of Covid 19 and 1,478 deaths (Worldometer, 2021). In response to the surge in Covid 19 infections, Zimbabwe – like all other countries – has, since March 2020, instituted restriction measures to combat spread. According to Price (2020) a national lockdown was initially announced on the 30th of March 2020 for 3 weeks which entailed the holdup of all public activities as well as closure of most non-essential businesses, unless involved in manufacturing, supplying, or providing essential goods or services. Colleges, universities and schools were closed (these opened briefly before the outbreak of the second wave, only to close again) (Price, 2020). Gatherings of more than 50 people were suspended and Zimbabwe's borders were also closed to all human traffic except for returning Zimbabwean nationals and permit holders; they also remained open for cargo (ibid). Screening checks were instituted based on WHO regulations, including thermal scans and review of travel history within the previous 14 days. Wearing a mask in public was made mandatory (Machivenyika, 2020). Public buses were the only mode of public transport allowed, and these were required to be disinfected twice a day and commuters had to wear masks, have their temperatures checked and hands sanitised before boarding. Intercity public transport was banned, as were taxis and kombis. Restaurants and bars were also closed and curfews imposed (Machivenyika, 2020). The measures were extended at intervals and have been indefinitely extended since 16 May 2020 with reviews and alterations every two weeks. Alterations to Covid 19 restrictions were noticeably made when there was an increase in infections (the month of August recorded a surge of infections), and more recently in January 2021 when a second wave caused a spike in infections (Worldometer, 2021).

It is important to note that measures promulgated to curtail the spread of Covid 19 affected the political, economic, social, cultural and environmental aspects of people's lives worldwide. However, the effects are more palpable in the economic sphere at both the macro and micro level.

According to Mashapure, et al. 2021) there was a slowdown in economic activities in 2020 due to lockdowns and a continuing severe downfall of trade globally. The World Trade Organization (WTO) has estimated that the global trade fell by up to 32% in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic (Asudani, et al. 2020). Consequently, the Covid-19 pandemic continues to affect the global economy in various spheres including, supply chain, production, disruption of the market and the financial sector (Mashapure et al. (2021).

At the community level, despite the fact that the measures promulgated to curtail the spread of Covid 19 were intended to protect public health, they have resulted in direct and indirect economic impact on livelihoods, particularly for the most vulnerable subsistence segments in both rural and urban areas throughout the world that eke their living in the informal sector (CGAP, 2020). According to an OECD/ILO (2019) study an estimated two billion people work in the informal sector worldwide which makes up about 61.2% of the world's employed population. In countries like India almost 90% of the 500 million workers are part of the informal sector, contributing to at least half of the national gross domestic product (GDP) (Mashapure et al. 2020). Bangladesh has more than 85% (over 25 million) of the labour force in informal, amounting for almost 50% of the GDP. In Pakistan, up to 72% of the jobs outside agriculture are in the informal sector, contributing a third of the GDP (ibid).

According to OECD (2020) the situation of the informal sector in developing countries in general and Africa in particular is made even more precarious because the informal sector is dominated by vulnerable women and youths. COVID-19 has also exacerbated the situation of women and girls with disabilities in informal work, resulting in negative economic impacts from the pandemic in the immediate and long term (Meaney-Davis, 2020). In a nutshell, many informal traders have experienced reduced hours, increased costs, inability to transport goods/access markets and faced reduction in customer demand (Alfers, 2020). The plight of informal traders in the face Covid 19 pandemic helped inspire the current study.

An International Monetary Fund (2018) report contends that the informal economy of Zimbabwe is the largest in Africa and second only in the world to Bolivia. According to Chagonda (2020) the informal sector in Zimbabwe constitutes at least 60% of all economic activity in the country. The sector is not only a source of employment for many, it also helps sustain many families' livelihoods as many who work in the formal economy augment their income through informal sector activities (ibid). According to LEDRIZ (2017) in Price (2020) women and youth constitute the bulk of actors in the informal economy and they participate mainly in cross-border trade and vending (LEDRIZ, 2017). The lockdown restrictions to combat Covid 19 infections seriously affected the Zimbabwean economy in general and livelihoods of informal traders in particular.

Of note is the fact that lockdown restrictions imposed since March in Zimbabwe have not been so kind to the informal sector. While other sectors of the economy were allowed to open at different intervals, when restrictions were revised, the greater section of the informal sector was not allowed to work despite the fact that it supports the livelihoods of the majority of citizens in the country. The national lockdown initially put in place on 30 March 2020 for 3 weeks saw closure of most non-essential businesses, except for those in manufacturing, supplying, or providing essential goods or services (Price, 2020). Notably, the whole of the informal sector was closed here. The relaxation of the lockdown in May 2020 which was prescribed by Statutory Instrument 99 of 2020, emphasised the re-opening procedure for businesses which were only formalised or registered as well as announced the indefinite lockdown (Government of Zimbabwe, 2020). Although some mobility restrictions were eased with the second lockdown extension, informal businesses remained largely closed, except for some fruit and veg markets (Gukurume and Oosterom, 2020). A ZimRights (2020) report observed that the impact of the lockdown on the informal sector hit women the hardest as they constitute the majority of informal workers. Moreover, authorities in Zimbabwe's major towns and cities demolished thousands of vending stalls, purportedly in a campaign to clean up and renovate workspaces occupied by informal traders before post-lockdown business resumes (Kulkarni, 2020). Such actions further confirmed the sidelining of the informal sector since the onset of the Covid 19 pandemic. According to Gukurume and Oosterom (2020) both the pandemic and government measures have impacted heavily on informal traders' livelihoods due to lockdowns which have completely removed and sometimes slowed demand for their services. While the lockdown restrictions were a necessary evil, they have brewed a financial and food crisis for the three-quarters (76%) of the economically active population in Zimbabwe who earn their living in the informal sector (Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency, 2020). Chagonda (2020) affirms to this by observing that the COVID-19 lockdown in Zimbabwe has brought challenges for the informal economy as most traders are subsistence traders and are already mired in extreme poverty.

This study sought to unravel second hand clothes informal traders' adaptation strategies in the wake of Covid 19 lockdown restrictions in Mkoba South in Gweru, Zimbabwe from March 2020 into March 2021. The research study specifically sought to explore the adaptation strategies utilised by second hand clothes informal traders' in the wake of Covid 19 lockdown restrictions in Mkoba South as well as the effectiveness of the adaptation strategies they have utilised. The study also sought to examine the challenges that have been encountered by second hand clothes informal traders' in adapting in the wake of Covid 19 lockdown restrictions in Mkoba South.

II. VULNERABILITY AND RESILIENCE IN THE WAKE OF COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

Literature on vulnerability and resilience mechanisms by specifically second hand clothing informal traders in the wake of Covid 19 lockdown restrictions is scarce not only in Zimbabwe, but in other parts of the world. Available literature refers to adaptation strategies utilised by informal traders' in general.

Scaling down

Reviewed literature noted that many small businesses had to scale down many aspects of their businesses as an adaptation strategy to Covid 19 lockdown measures that were instituted. A survey on how small businesses are coping with the impact of COVID-19 with results from Turkey and the Middle East by Hoorens, et al. (2020) noted that more than half of those who took part in the study (56%) reduced their own salary or scaled back on services. Nearly half (47%) have had to take at least one of the following actions - laid off staff temporarily, requested a payment suspension or reduced or stopped wages for staff. Hoorens et al. (2020) further note that similar results were seen in a survey of young entrepreneurs by the IMF (2020) in the Asia-Pacific, in which over one-third of business owners had laid off staff or reduced their hours. These results highlight the major changes SME owners have had to make to ensure the survival of their company in the immediate future (ibid).

Bribing the authorities

A comparative analysis of street trading, Covid-19 and new street geographies in Harare, Zimbabwe and Kisumu, Kenya by Kiaka, et al. (2021) notes bribing the authorities as a key adaptation strategy by informal sector players during lockdowns periods. According to Kiaka et al. (2021) the lockdown measures expanded the opportunity and space for the harassment of vendors and the imposition of bribes by street-level bureaucrats. In addition, experiences of a number of traders in the CBD of Harare pointed to repression and arbitrary enforcement of bribes by police officers who confiscated their goods and harassed them with threats of imprisonment and charges until a bribe is paid (Kiaka et al., 2021).

Evading authorities

According to Kiaka et al. (2021) informal traders did not always pay bribes, however; some waited for the police to move on, before resuming their trading. Traders also strategically avoided confrontations with the street-level bureaucrats by trading only after their official working hours (Kiaka et al., 2021). This allowed them to pack up their goods quickly when officials were spotted and to minimize losses when confiscations occurred. During the Covid-19 lockdowns, a similar tactic was used as vendors would operate in the late-night hours to avoid confrontations (Kiaka et al., 2021). Informal traders in Harare went to the market at around midnight while the police were unavailable on the road and

would return early in the morning during lockdown (Kiaka et al., 2021) with their goods for resale.

Use of mobile phones and social media

Another adaptation strategy widely embraced by informal sector players during periods of lockdown in different parts of the world was the use of social media as a platform for business. One example of how adaptable informal firms became during the lockdown is story of how a bakery in White City, Soweto shifted to a WhatsApp-based platform (Centre for Development and Enterprise, 2020). Local residents placed orders via WhatsApp and the bakery delivered to people's homes by walking around with a trolley and using pin locations (CDE, 2020). Many fruit and vegetable shops also quickly moved to this pioneering style of trolley delivery. In Harare, some informal traders noted that they took potential customers' phone numbers and called them from time to time so see if they need anything delivered to their homes (Kiaka et al., 2021). In addition, the study by Kiaka et al. (2021) found vendors selling from home, during curfew between 8 am and 4:30 pm. Most informal traders used their phones to find new customers by posting daily WhatsApp status updates advertising the products they had for sale.

Smuggling and use of middlemen syndicates

In Harare the middlemen managed to continue importing their produce by paying substantial bribes (Kiaka et al., 2021). Even though the borders were closed as part of the Covid-19 measures, imported fruits from South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda were relatively widely available (ibid). Bosch (2020) indicates that thousands of Zimbabweans illegally crossing into South Africa during the lockdown period in order to purchase foodstuffs. Over 500 people were noted to have been moving into South Africa daily since the beginning of the lockdown to purchase food items (Bosch, 2020). In line with the current study, Nyathi (2020) points out that the sale of second-hand clothing which has been one of the main sources of income for the informal traders in Zimbabwe continued despite being banned in 2015 to protect the country's textile industry, but relaxed in 2017 as it was/is a major source of income for informal traders hit hard by the economic downfall. The closing of the informal economy in Zimbabwe, coupled with the national lockdown protocol, however, shuttered employment and profits that come with the sale of second-hand clothing (Moyo, 2020). Zimbabwean traders continued to smuggle in bales of second hand clothing from Mozambique despite the national lockdown and the closure of borders (Nyathi, 2020).

Purpose of the Study

In this study we sought to explore vulnerability and resilience for second hand clothes informal traders in the wake of covid-19 lockdown restrictions in Mkoba South, Gweru in Zimbabwe.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study utilised the interpretive research paradigm. Interpretivists accept multiple meanings and ways of knowing, and acknowledge that objective reality can never be captured (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005) and it recognises and narrates the meaning of human experiences and actions (Fossey et al., 2002) leading to realisation that reality is individually constructed and there are as many realities as individuals (Scotland, 2012). Interpretive methodology suited very well as it is directed at understanding vulnerability and resilience mechanisms employed by second hand clothing informal traders from an individual's perspective, investigating interaction among the individual informal traders as well as the historical and cultural contexts which they inhabit. The vulnerability and resilience mechanisms utilised by second hand clothing informal traders differed according to contexts, perceptions and experiences. The interpretive research paradigm was therefore well suited to unraveling these.

The phenomenological research design was added to compliment the study to equip the researchers to describe the lived experiences of the second hand informal traders about the vulnerabilities and resilience mechanisms as described by the informants as description culminates in the essence of the experiences for several individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon. Phenomenological research design allowed the researchers to delve into the perceptions, perspectives, understandings, and feelings of informal second hand vendors who have been actually experiencing the vulnerabilities and living through the resilience mechanisms adapted.

The population for this research study was identified before coming up with a research sample. It comprised mainly of both male and female second hand clothes informal traders in Mkoba South. A few purposively selected key informants from the parent Ministry of Women, Community, Small and Medium Enterprises Development as well as those from informal traders associations were part of the target population. The colossal number of men and women involved in second hand clothing informal trade who could have taken part in the study in Mkoba South, prompted the researchers to conveniently select a limited accessible population. Thus, the researcher settled for 15 participants comprising of 5 male informal traders, 5 female informal traders and 5 stakeholders. The 5 stakeholders were drawn from different organisations, that is, 2 staff members from the Ministry of Women, Community, Small and Medium Enterprises Development and the other 3 from vendors and informal traders associations.

Trustworthiness and credibility for this study was ensured by capturing data through semi-structured interviews and non-participant observations which was complimented with document analysis. The semi-structured interviews transcripts were checked against the recordings and necessary corrections were made. The transcripts were taken to the participants to go through to ensure that what they said during the interviews

had been captured in the transcriptions. The major ethical issues of concern to this study which included informed permission to conduct research, consent, privacy and confidentiality, voluntariness and anonymity were all observed to dot.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Vulnerabilities face by second hand clothes informal traders

The study unraveled a number of vulnerabilities faced by second hand informal traders faced in adapting to Covid 19 lockdown restrictions in Mkoba South. These are presented and scrutinized as:

Fear and stress

All second hand informal traders cited fear as one of the main challenges they encountered in adapting to Covid 19 lockdown restrictions. One of them pointed out the following:

I was afraid of contracting Covid 19, but at the same time I wanted to earn a living as I solely depend on selling second hand clothes. If I contracted Covid 19 I would also pass it on to my family members, it was a real nightmare. However, there was no choice.

Others expressed all kinds of fear ranging from the fear of getting arrested, fear of dying, fear that second hand clothes would spread the disease, fear of being unable to feed the family amongst others. Resultantly, some of the traders operated with fear which caused stress which was unhealthy for business. The findings in this study corroborated those in reviewed literature. Stephan et al. (2020) noted that another constraint faced by informal traders' in adapting in the wake of Covid 19 lockdown restrictions was uncertainty. The authors pointed out that uncertainty that is not being able to know what happens next was seen as fundamentally stressful for everyone including entrepreneurs. Both male and female informants concurred that they were unsure of what would happen next thereby breeding fear and stresses. The study showed that women were mostly vulnerable as compared to men.

Harassment by municipal and national police

The second hand clothes informal traders were also vulnerable to the harassment by both municipal and national police. As the traders set up market at strategic (though sometimes illegal) points they were often waylaid by the police who rarely arrested them, but demanded bribes. Informants from the second hand clothes informal traders' side argued that while it was sometimes necessary to maintain law and order, the police ended up taking up a portion of their profits. Harassment by police and other street-level bureaucrats was also a major feature noted by Kiaka et al. (2021) in their study in Harare and Kisumu.

Reduced profits

Vulnerability manifested itself hitting the second hand clothes informal traders in reduced profits. It was noted that income

of the traders was reduced because they were no longer operating at their usual market places thereby affecting their livelihoods. One of the traders noted the following:

Covid 19 lockdown restrictions affected our income. Even the strategies we used to ensure a steady income through the sale of our merchandise brought in reduced profits. It became difficult to recover from the very start of the lockdowns.

Reduced revenues as a challenge were also made reference to by Partida (2020) who noted that 62% of small businesses in the UK saw a general decrease in revenue due to Covid 19 control measures. Only 12% reported revenue increases. Moreover, 47% said their revenue losses totaled 10%-30%, while 41% indicated they surpassed 30%. Another 13% responded that they had complete revenue losses. In addition, Kiaka et al. (2021) found out that in Harare and Kisumu, significant impacts of Covid-19 for the street traders has been the lack of cash to pay for supplies and sustain their trade. The restriction of movement of people and goods within countries and across borders limited the supply and reduced their sales significantly. Similarly, the closure of markets and consequent evictions of traders led to only a few sales based on local supply networks in the sale of second hand clothes.

Lack of government support

There was consensus amongst those interviewed that there was a general lack of support for informal traders from the government. The second hand clothes traders pointed out that they were vulnerable and did not receive any form of assistance from the government. Some of them acknowledged that there were reports in the media of a relief fund that would cushion community members from the effects of Covid 19 which never materialized. The major lament of the second hand clothes informal traders was lack of credit facility or revolving fund specifically targeting them as a recovery package. The Ministry of Women Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprises Development representative admitted to the lack of support during the Covid 19 lockdown restrictions for the generality of the informal sector. The vulnerability of second hand clothes informal traders due to the lack of government support was closer to the challenge of legal recognition and protection noted by Shaikh (2020) who pointed out that informal traders are often unable to access social safety nets and labour rights as they are not officially acknowledged as workers. This lack of recognition leaves the second hand clothes informal traders vulnerable as they had no fall back in the face Covid 19 restrictions imposed by the Zimbabwean government.

Resilience mechanisms adapted by second hand clothes informal traders

A number of resilience mechanisms were adapted by the second hand clothes informal traders. The mechanisms as per this study are:

Selling from home

The majority of the informal traders interviewed in the study noted selling from home as the very first resilience mechanism that they adopted when the lockdown started. One of the participants said:

When the lockdown was initially announced the very first strategy was to display my second hand clothes at home. People passing by the road, neighbours, friends and relatives would enquire and choose what they wanted.

The same mechanism was corroborated by all participants who represented stakeholders from the noted organisations. The Ministry of Women Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprises representative had this to say:

Because the initial phases of lockdown restrictions were stricter, most informal traders who sell second clothes plied their trade at home. This was the safest option. Other alternative resilience strategies developed as the days passed by.

This strategy was very much visible and the researchers noted this during observations made as they moved around Mkoba South. The same was also noted in other studies for example, the study by Kiaka et al. (2021) noted that the temporary closure of Mbare Musika in Harare (Zimbabwe) and Kibuye market in Kisumu (Kenya) led vendors to expand their street geography by identifying and creating alternative spaces for trading as an adaptation strategy to ensure continuity in their line of business. Second hand clothes informal traders' resort was to sell their goods indoors (their homesteads).

Mobility strategy

Some of the informants pointed out that they resorted to moving around the neighbourhood as well as door-to-door as a resilience mechanism. This strategy was adopted by the more youthful participants. One of them submitted to the following:

I took advantage that some second hand clothes traders would remain stationary at their homes and other places to move around the neighbourhood to sell my wares. I would put stock in a satchel and then display one or two products on my hands, then move around on foot.

The mobility tactic applied was also observed by the researchers. Interestingly mobility by foot was merely one strategy amongst many. One of the informal traders who took part in the interviews explained thus:

I used my car to carry stock and move around only to stop and display it at strategic places. When the place was threatened by the presence of the police or with fewer customers, I would move on to the next corner.

The above sentiments are in line with the study by Kiaka et al. (2021) who found out that trading from door-to-door and on the streets, as well as in offices, increased in Harare and Kisumu during curfew times. Observations in this study

showed that as a way of building resilience during the tightening of covid 19 lockdown and restrictions, second hand clothes informal traders found it unnecessary to remain in a fixed vending location hence they switched to mobile deliveries as a way of reaching customers and push for a sustained livelihood.

Use of Whatsapp to advertise

One of the most mentioned resilience mechanism was the adaption the Whatsapp platform to advertise. An elderly participant noted the following:

I used to think Whatsapp was just for sending messages to friends as well as gossiping (laughs), but lockdown restrictions made me appreciate it as a tool for business. With dwindling sales and unable to do business at my usual market place, my children urged me to advertise some merchandise on family Whatsapp groups as well as church Whatsapp groups. Surprisingly, I got some orders from the platform.

Other informal traders were bold enough to advertise on wider Whatsapp groups like the Gweru residents' Whatsapp group as well as the Mkoba residents' Whatsapp group. None of the participants mentioned other social media platform apart from Whatsapp. This is similar to the studies done in South Africa where a bakery in White City, Soweto shifted to a WhatsApp-based platform in which local residents placed orders via WhatsApp and the bakery delivered to people's homes by walking around with a trolley and using pin locations (Centre for Development and Enterprise, 2020).

Bribing municipal and national police

In addition, two thirds of informal traders who took part in the interviews admitted to having, at one time, bribed a municipal or national police officer as a resilience mechanism to avoid arrest for selling at undesignated points or to keep trading for a few hours without harassment. An informal trader is quoted here saying:

My friend, we had to pay the officers to sell our wares when caught either at alternative illegal selling points or when selling moving around the neighbourhood. However, as the lockdown stretched the police officers allowed us to operate even at the undesignated places if we made sure that they would get their "ration" every day they passed by during patrols. All traders contributed a specified amount – say \$2 usd per day.

The aspect of bribery of the authorities was corroborated by a stakeholder from the Zimbabwe Chamber of SMEs, Mkoba chapter who said:

We received reports of informal traders having to fork out money to be allowed to trade. This affected all traders, including those in the second hand clothing business.

Bribing the authorities has also been noted in earlier studies. A comparative analysis of street trading, Covid-19 and new

street geographies in Harare, Zimbabwe and Kisumu, Kenya by Kiaka, et al, (2021) notes bribing the authorities as a key adaptation strategy used by informal sector players during lockdown periods. The same has been also confirmed by the second hand clothes informal traders in Mkoba South, Gweru Zimbabwe.

Selling to familiar customers, friends and relatives on credit

Another resilience strategy which was utilised by some second hand clothes informal traders in adapting to Covid 19 lockdown restrictions include the opening up credit accounts to familiar customers, friends and relatives. One of the informal traders noted the following in an interview:

I had no choice but to allow customers to take some of my merchandise on credit. Although allowing credit has always been a practice, the extent to which I allowed when the lockdown was in place was even more. My gamble was that it was better to make follow ups on debts than to keep stock without generating any income.

Other informal traders said that allowing credit to familiar customers, friends and relatives on credit was necessitated by the fact that sales were slowed down as they were no longer able to make adequate sales at home or at alternative selling points. This concurred with a global study on entrepreneurs' challenges, resilience, and well-being during the Covid 19 lockdown periods by Stephan et al (2020) who unraveled that social support in different forms helped entrepreneurs from different countries get by. Friends and relatives who bought on credit provided a form of social support in the context of this study.

Use of cross-border transporters/ malaitsha for supplies

Informal traders were further asked to shed light on how they maintained their stock during periods of Covid 19 lockdown restrictions. The use of cross-border transporters or merchants known as "Malaitsha" was mentioned as a resilience mechanism. One of the interviewed informal traders explained in the following quote:

While I used to go to Mozambique or South Africa to get my bales, the Malaitsha guys have proved to be helpful during periods of lockdown restrictions when intercity or inter-country movement has been strictly monitored. I would give orders and they delivered my bales at home during the night.

Some of the informal traders noted that some of the transport merchants who specialise in selling and delivering of second hand clothes bales advertised on social media and one only had to get hold of them through phone. They would deliver as per orders and one would pay upon satisfactory inspection. In the same vein is a study by Nyathi (2020) who elaborate that Zimbabwean traders continued to smuggle bales of second hand clothing from Mozambique despite the national lockdown and the closure of borders.

Seeking out of Gweru markets

Another important adaptation strategy mentioned by the informal traders during interviews was that of seeking alternative markets out of Gweru. Such markets were mainly out of town in areas such as Gweru rural areas as well as surrounding resettled farming areas. One of the participants explained this adaptation strategy in the following quote:

The Covid-19 lockdown restrictions pushed us to seek alternative markets out of Gweru. Our market place at Mkoba 6 shopping centre had been closed and because movement was sometimes restricted we used to walk to Julena – an area about 15 km out Gweru. There are resettled farmers there engaged in farming, there are also some gold panning activities. We found a ready market there. Lockdown was not so strict there as it was in town.

Some informal traders named surrounding areas where there were some gold panning activities like Insukamini and Matobo as being alternative markets outside of Gweru.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that the second-hand clothes informal traders are vulnerable in many ways due to covid 19 lockdown and restrictions. The study confirms that in the face vulnerability, the second-hand clothes informal traders developed resilience mechanisms to cushion themselves and ensure sustainable livelihood activities despite the covid 19 lockdown and restrictions.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that be a need for a wider multi-stakeholder consultation in the promulgation of policies to control health pandemics like the Covid 19 in the future. This will help reduce negative effects of unilateral of declarations on sectors such as the informal trading in which many citizens depend on for a living. There is also need for capacity building to the informal traders on general business management and contemporary trends in business marketing using technology as well as helping the second hand clothes informal traders to move from the 'informal' tag to formality through registering. This will enable access to support from different stakeholders including the government.

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