

Policy responses to informality in urban Africa: the example of Maputo, Mozambique

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Published online: 28 July 2016
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Abstract In the global South informality constitutes one of the leading issues for urban policy makers. The planning challenges around informality are particularly relevant in urban Africa as most Africans make their livelihoods in the informal economy. This paper examines issues of state policy responses to informality through the lens of street traders. Under scrutiny are policy responses towards street trading in Mozambique’s capital, Maputo, a city that has experienced the advance of informalization. It is argued that the dominant approach towards informal trading across urban Africa is of a ‘sanitising’ policy response by the local state which is rooted upon traditions of modernist urban planning in search of ‘ordered development’. The research discloses that in Maputo national and municipal authorities have adopted a more tolerant approach to the informal economy, mainly because it provides a livelihood to so many of the city’s poor and because of potential social unrest likely to be triggered by a repressive approach. In Maputo the core narrative is of an urban informal economy viewed by officials as an important livelihood for the city’s poor, albeit one which is subject both to periodic harassment and encouragement to ‘formalize’. The analysis represents a contribution to the expanding corpus of writings on

Africa’s informalising cities and specifically concerning policy responses towards street trading.

Keywords Informality · Policy response · Street trading · Urban Africa · Maputo · Mozambique

Introduction

Informality is one of the most distinguishing traits of cities in the developing world. Baumgart and Kreibich (2011: 12) observe: “Urban informality has become a constituent component in the growth dynamics of most societies in the global South and as such transcends and modifies all aspects of urban livelihoods, foremost access to employment and shelter”. Across much of the global South informality “is not going away—it is growing” (Ghani and Kanbur 2013: 24). In particular, for sub-Saharan Africa several researchers stress that informality “looms large” (Grant 2015: 135) such that it now represents “the main game in town” (Crush et al. 2015: 10). During 2015 the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and the Economic Commission for Africa (2015: 35) submitted that informal economies and everyday livelihood practices “are the dominant modes of economic life in most sub-Saharan African cities”. Likewise, the Cities Alliance (2014: 6) identifies informality as “by far the largest characteristic of African cities”. This said, it has been

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documented that many African cities have long been marked by the presence of an informal sector (Rogerson 1997). But, as a result of policies of liberalisation, the slowdown of formalization and the continued march of urbanization, the continent has experienced recently a fresh wave of informalization (Lourenco-Lindell 2002; ILO 2009; Parnell and Pieterse 2014; Grant 2015). The march of informalization in urban Africa has been so extensive that Steck et al. (2013: 145) view informality as “emblematic of the African city”. Indeed, these authors go so far as to stress that “when thinking of African cities, one almost automatically associates them with the idea of ‘informality’ (Steck et al. 2013: 145). Currently, the majority of poor city dwellers in Africa work outside the formal economy, reside in informal housing, and often go about daily struggles for a livelihood by evolving their own ‘governance rules’ outside of the gaze of authorities (Grant 2015). Among others Kinyanjui (2014) stresses the special role of the informal economy for understanding women’s lives and livelihoods in urban Africa.

Overall, it can be argued that informality constitutes now one of the central policy challenges facing cities in the global South during the twenty-first century (Xue and Huang 2015). Arguably, planning and management issues surrounding informality—especially of the informal economy—are of critical policy relevance for reconfiguring the landscape and urban geographies of contemporary Africa (Potts 2007; Parnell and Pieterse 2014; Cities Alliance 2014; Grant 2015). However, Ghani and Kanbur (2013: 26) identify questions about expanding informality in the wake of rapid urbanization as “fairly new to the research and policy-making arena”. It is against such a backdrop that this article examines one particular facet of policy responses towards informality in African cities. The specific focus is upon the activity of street trading which is an economic form of informality and widespread in urban Africa. It is stressed that street traders constitute the most vulnerable of informal activities with their livelihoods fundamentally dependent upon access to public space which is commonly a terrain of conflict and competition (Skinner 2008a, b; Brown 2015). Under scrutiny are policy responses towards street trading in Mozambique’s capital, Maputo, a city that has experienced waves of informalization (Jenkins and Wilkinson 2002; Brouwer 2010) and is the most concentrated

focus for informal livelihoods in the country (Jenkins 2012). Recently, state involvement in urban land use planning in Maputo has been examined and stylized as primarily a matter of guidance and facilitation rather than of direct control or ‘ordered’ practices (Andersen 2015a, b). Policy responses towards the informal economy in Maputo however have not been extensively interrogated.

The analysis draws upon a set of original qualitative semi-structured interviews completed during 2014 with key stakeholders and policy makers in the informal economy of Maputo. In addition, documentary analysis was undertaken to capture the range of existing urban scholarship on the city’s informal economy. The contemporary everyday challenges facing informal traders are illustrated with detailed interviews conducted at three markets in Maputo with 16 informal entrepreneurs engaged in cross-border trading. Two further sections of material are given. The next section provides a brief international overview of key issues in street trading and of local state responses towards the growth of informal trading in urban Africa. It is argued that the predominant narrative is of a ‘sanitising’ policy response by the local state in urban Africa. This response is anchored upon traditions of modernist urban planning which seek to ensure ‘ordered development’ by the management of change in the cityscape (Cross 2000; Kamete 2013a, b; Rogerson 2016a). The review on international research on street trading and policy responses provides an appropriate context for an examination of the shifting policy responses in Maputo which is undertaken in section three. Overall, the analysis represents a contribution to the expanding body of writings on Africa’s informalising cities and more specifically on policy responses towards street trading.

Street trading: an international overview

As far back as the 1950s and 1960s scattered research material was produced mainly by anthropologists and historians on the activities of street traders in various parts of the world. This said, the volume of scholarly research on street trading only began an upward momentum from the early 1970s. Several explanations have been put forward to account for the limited research on street trading prior to the 1970s and most relate to considerations that scholars considered such

activities as irrelevant for development studies (Bromley 1978a). According to Bromley (1978b: 41): “The widespread neglect of street trading as a research topic can be attributed both to such negative assessments of its importance, and to the research problems which result from its principal characteristics: transience, mobility, the lack of large stable establishments, and the poverty and relatively low level of education of most of its participants”.

It is argued that the commencement of the ‘modern’ period of international research debates around street trading can be located in a suite of works which appeared during the 1970s and produced by an influential group of geographers and urban planners. The 1970s was a watershed period in which the activities of street traders garnered the interest of several scholars (Cohen 1974; McGee 1974a, b, 1976; Jellinek 1976, 1978; Bromley 1978a). Overall, this group of research studies involved extensive field investigations on the streets of cities in the developing world and born out of an academic philosophy that ‘dirty boots begets wisdom’. The research contributions by McGee (1973) and his colleagues on street traders in cities of South East Asia and by Bromley (1978a, 1980) on Latin American cities provide the foundation for much contemporary research and debates on street trading and are extensively cited over 30 years after their appearance. Importantly, this collective research work on street traders in South-East Asia and Latin America was informed by the theoretical concept of the informal sector, which, after its initial presentation at a conference in 1971 by Hart (1973), generated extraordinary interest amongst governments, international agencies and planners (Hart 2004). The continued significance of these studies is as a result of the fact that not only were these investigations the first to give a detailed picture of life and work of street traders in the developing world but they appeared at a critical juncture during the 1970s and 1980s of rising international policy interest around the ‘informal sector’ (Forbes 1981; Rogerson 2008).

The most important contributions made by these early investigations by geographers were to expose the sheer numerical size and the characteristics of different forms of street traders for local policy makers. Evidence collected on the large and growing numbers of street traders operating in urban Asia firmly forced street traders onto the policy agenda of city

governments in South-East Asia (McGee 1974a; McGee and Yeung 1977). These studies, along with parallel research undertaken in Latin America, also demonstrated the highly repressive policy environment that confronted the activities of street traders on a daily basis (Bromley 1980). The activities of street traders frequently were “explicitly marginalised, or persecuted by states because of the perception that they are at odds with concepts of modernisation” (Mendelsohn 2015: 13). In urban Asia, at least, there occurred certain small but significant policy shifts and changes in attitude towards the outright repression of street traders as a direct outcome of this early research work. The studies by McGee and Yeung (1977) had clearly demonstrated several positive roles played by the economy of street trading in these cities and argued to municipal governments the case for a more relaxed policy paradigm towards street hawkers.

In a valuable contribution, Bromley (2000) categorizes 11 different arguments in order to justify policy support of street traders. Amongst the most important of these are the contribution of street traders to the overall level of economic activity and to provision of goods and services; their role as potential source of government taxes and fees; role as a laboratory for entrepreneurship; the significance of street trading as a safety net; and, as a self-help and grassroots development initiative. Other scholars stress the overwhelming evidence that the growth of street trading is “symptomatic of larger structural problems in the economy which leave many individuals with little choice but ‘to trade to eat’” (Little 1999: 2). It was disclosed the largest segment of street vendors in cities across the developing world are represented by “those who are unsuccessful; or unable to get regular jobs” (Bhowmik 2004: 2). In particular, in the African context a recurrent finding is that street trading constitutes a vital income niche for women (Mitullah 2003, 2004; Amankwaa 2015). As argued by Cohen et al. (2000: 2): “Street vending is one of the few readily accessible avenues of employment open to women who need to earn a living”. In economic downturns the retrenchment of formal sector workers, either in the public sector or private sector, has swelled the numbers of street traders in many cities across the global South (Anjaria 2006). In Africa the march of landlessness has been a vital additional catalyst for the continued burgeoning of street trading across the continent (Rogerson 1997; Mitullah 2004).

A critical theme in street trading studies relates to locational considerations. The essential spatial behaviour of traders initially was unpacked in rich research by Bromley (1978b) based upon the experience of Colombia and subsequently confirmed by other investigations (McGee and Ho 1978; Bromley 2000). Three major influences impact upon the location of street trader operations: (1) the spatio-temporal distribution of income opportunities (potential customers and consumer purchasing power); (2) the spatio-temporal distribution of complementary and competing traders (other street traders, markets, shops, supermarkets); and, (3) critically, the regulatory behaviour of urban authorities. In addition, the location of street traders can be affected by other factors such as the location of suppliers, availability of stalls, and traders' place of residence. Bromley (1978b) hypothesizes that, upon this logic, traders should seek to concentrate in those parts of the city which have the greatest pedestrian or vehicular densities as these areas offer the greatest income opportunities. In reality, however, whilst street traders do search for locations in such areas, the degree to which they succeed in securing occupation of favoured locations in public spaces is ultimately dependent upon the regulatory behaviour of city authorities (Skinner 2008a; Brown 2015; Zack 2015; Rogerson 2016a, b). Overall, therefore, the tendency is for traders to agglomerate in areas with high pedestrian densities, meaning that often they seek locations in the CBD, main shopping areas, transport arteries or around any building (terminal, railway station) that attracts large volumes of people (Mitullah 2004; Skinner 2008a; Setsabi and Leduka 2008; Mendelsohn 2015). Much scholarship on street trading thus is focussed around 'conflict zones', the struggle for spaces, and contests for space in cities of the developing world (Bromley 2000; Mitullah 2003; Bhowmik 2005; Skinner 2008b; Brown et al. 2014; Brown 2015; Benit-Gbaffou 2016).

The issue of regulation, management or policy responses around street trading is at the heart of much contemporary writing (as well as early contributions) and debates on street trading. Against the list of pro-street trading arguments, Bromley (2000) draws together an alternative chronicle of 16 objections often put forward for the removal of traders. The most common basis for seeking to remove or not support street trading in cities of the developing world, *inter alia*, are their impacts upon congestion due to their geographical concentrations;

considered ugly or unsightly; their effects upon traffic flows and accidents; lack of regular receipt keeping; use of children; and, linkages with crime as well as threats to public safety. The international record shows that arguments in favour and against street trading have clear class and ideological dimensions (Kamete and Lindell 2010). As shown by Anjaria (2006) the opposition to street trading comes mainly from urban elites, residents associations, and sections of big business. By contrast, arguments in favour derive from a discourse of libertarianism in which street trading is portrayed as a classic example of grassroots entrepreneurship, individualism and exercise of civil liberties. In addition, "those who adopt a populist, democratic socialist perspective focusing heavily on the needs, rights and potentials of ordinary people, tend to advocate for street trading because of the income opportunities it provides" (Bromley 2000: 11). Across several international studies most findings suggest that, whilst cities in much of the developing world experience a burgeoning of street traders, governments fail to acknowledge their contributions to urban economic development (Cities Alliance 2014). Kamete points out (2013a: 647) that most conventional planning approaches to the urban informal economy are anchored on discovering so-termed 'technical' solutions to the 'problems' of informality. Bromley (2000: 23) asserts as follows:

The predominance of negative policies in the public realm usually accompanies support for the gradual privatization of public space, primarily for big business, but also creating new spaces for small-scale vendors in off-street markets and malls. Overall, public policy serves to limit the profitability of street vending and to push it down the social scale, ensuring that it caters primarily to lower-income customers and to poorer neighbourhoods.

A decade ago Mitullah (2003: 10) conducted a comparative investigation of policy responses to street trading across African cities and concluded: "Local authorities in Africa are a major obstacle to the development of informal sector activities. Most of them use outdated restrictive policies, by-laws and regulations originally intended to control and regulate the growth of indigenous enterprises. The restrictions make vending principally legal, and view vendors as responsible (for) making cities dirty, obstructing traffic and therefore a public nuisance". These sentiments are confirmed in an

array of research investigations that have been pursued in the past 10 years. For example, Brown et al. (2014: 2234) highlight as “a policy of choice” the relocation or forced evictions of street traders from public spaces in urban Senegal and Tanzania. In a five city investigation of Abidjan, Cape Town, Johannesburg, Lome and Nairobi. Steck et al. (2013: 147) maintain that “the repeated public assaults against street trading can be partly understood in terms of what we call a ‘neo-colonial reordering’ of space” comprising discourses, practices and sometimes legislation from colonial periods “which have been reactivated under the pressure of entrepreneurial competition”. The argument is that “street trading cannot coexist with the modernisation of the city image, which is a requirement to enter global (or regional) competition as a ‘global disciplinary regime’” (Steck et al. 2013: 148).

Potts (2007) correctly notes that cognizance must be taken in policy terms of differences between the local and national arms of the state in Africa in respect of ‘managing’ the challenges of the informal economy. Often there is a disjuncture between the rhetoric and actions of both tiers of the state apparatus. In addition, policies towards the informal economy rarely are static and often can shift in space and time. Notwithstanding the reassertions made by national governments of the importance of the informal economy for economic development and poverty reduction in Africa at the local government level little is done to assist street traders beyond initiatives for formalisation which restrict traders to designated market spaces requiring them to pay licence fees and register with authorities (see Steck et al. 2013; Crush et al. 2015; Rogerson 2016b). The dominant trend across urban Africa is for the local state to “resort to ad-hoc interventions of a ‘sanitising’ character with devastating consequences for the urban poor” (Kamete and Lindell 2010: 890). The core narrative is of the pathologisation of the informal economy which triggers an array of ‘sanitising’ policy measures usually accompanied by interventions that seek to destroy informality (Kamete 2013a, b; Cities Alliance 2014; Crush et al. 2015).

Kamete (2013a: 648) maintains that in Southern Africa the local state deploys “a multiplicity of normalising technologies to correct urban informal economies” in search of urban modernity and the making of so-termed decent or normal cities. According to Kamete (2013b) the different responses to informality can be grouped in terms of active and passive responses

each with differential impacts for communities of street traders. The two active responses are forced conversion and frontal aggression. In the former case the local state strives to ensure that offending informal actors give up certain ‘bad’ characteristics in favour of more acceptable good practices. By de-informalising certain practices the authorities’ goal is to make a perceived threat to the city less so and thereby reduce its danger to the pursuit of modernist visions. The second approach of frontal aggression involves direct attacks on the identified nuisance with the clear goal of permanently excising street traders. A third passive response is of repressive tolerance, considered a temporary measure in which the local state takes no action against the offending actors in the informal economy. Nevertheless, by tolerating what is considered as abnormal and errant the authorities are not signalling their acceptance or permission; instead they are simply not taking any action. This is considered as a regrouping strategy on the behalf of city authorities and may set the stage for a later bout of repression (Kamete 2013a, b).

For Steck et al. (2013) the movement towards more hostile actions taken against the informal economy—especially street trading—in urban Africa is because of the influence of neoliberalism and the corresponding alliance between ruling parties and international capital. Because of anxieties about chaos and disorder, planning is skewed towards formality, order and modernisation in search of “an international urbanism that is equated with the neo-hygienist vision of a modernised/modernising Africa” (Steck et al. 2013: 153). Cases of forced conversion, frontal aggression and repressive tolerance can be found within the policy record of several different African cities (Lyons and Snoxell 2005; Setsabi and Leduka 2008; Skinner 2008b; Adaawen and Jorgensen 2012; Brown et al. 2014; Crush et al. 2015; Zack 2015; Benit-Gbaffou 2016; Rogerson 2016a, b). The outcome is the production of exclusionary cities (McGranahan et al. 2016). It is against this background that attention turns now to an analysis of the recent experience of Maputo concerning policy responses towards economic informality.

Policy responses to the informal economy: street traders of Maputo, Mozambique

As compared to other parts of Africa, only limited attention has been given by researchers to issues

around the informal economy in Mozambique and specifically to its capital city of Maputo. Existing studies on Maputo include works on the precarious livelihoods of secondhand clothing vendors (Brooks 2012), the organisation of informal trade in medicinal plants (Krog et al. 2006) and of the struggles of airtime voucher vendors and mobile phone kiosk operators associated with the burgeoning supply of mobile phone services in Maputo (Brouwer 2010).

It is argued that in Mozambique the expansion of the informal economy generally is attributed to the period from 1987 onwards when the country implemented a structural adjustment programme after a period of a devastating civil war and a faltering economy (Ahlers et al. 2013). In 1989 the ruling FRELIMO government abandoned Marxism and, accompanying moves towards democracy, there occurred steps towards a market-based economy (Dana and Galbraith 2006: 190). The subsequent neo-liberal reform measures, however, exerted a significant hardship on a large proportion of the urban populace which “provided a further impetus for informalisation of the urban economy” (Ahlers et al. 2013: 474). Xaba et al. (2002: 6) highlight that the structural adjustment programme precipitated a hollowing out of the formal economy, job losses and cuts in services which forced women in particular to work intensively in the informal economy to supplement household incomes. Nevertheless, Agadjanian (2002) shows that the increasing informalization of the economy resulting from structural adjustment reforms undermined men’s economic advantage by relegating them into an array of low-prestige ‘women’s occupations’ including informal retailing. Another influence upon the growth in the urban informal economy was refugees relocating to the cities because of continued civil conflict in the 1990s (Xaba et al. 2002). By the 2000s it could be observed “a large share of the urban population, including rural migrants, former soldiers and retrenched private and public sector workers, depend on unregistered, small-scale income activities” (Kamete and Lindell 2010: 902).

During the 2000s notwithstanding a weak global environment, the national economy of Mozambique recorded impressive rates of real GDP growth which averaged 7.3 % over the period 2005–2012 (World Bank 2014). The post-conflict economic rebound is attributed mostly to the effects of large capital-intensive mega-projects as well as to inflows of

foreign aid which benefited however only a small share of the population (Byiers 2009: 6). One of the shortcomings of the growth spurt has been poor performance of the formal economy in terms of job creation especially in relation to the numbers of job seekers annually coming onto the country’s labour market (World Bank 2014). For the World Bank (2014: 2) the “most pressing need in Mozambique for the foreseeable future will be to ensure that the creation of new employment opportunities keeps pace with the expanding size of the labor market”. With a national unemployment rate of 27 %, the continued expansion of informal activities has been in evidence particularly in urban areas (Byiers 2009; Brouwer, 2010; Jenkins 2012). Dana and Galbraith (2006: 190) record that the “vast majority of the population” engages with small micro-businesses and the informal economy in cities.

The national capital, Maputo City, with a population of an estimated 1.3 million inhabitants (2007), presents a dualistic structure in both its colonial and post-colonial phases of evolution (Paulo et al. 2007; Barros et al. 2014; Andersen et al. 2015a, b). Characteristic of the city’s growth is the co-existence of large swathes of unplanned urban settlement alongside limited formal urban development which is enjoyed by a small elite of changing complexion (Jenkins 2012; Ahlers et al. 2013; Andersen et al. 2015a, b; McCordic 2016). As compared to many African cities where there exists a long-established tradition of street trading, in the case of Mozambique’s capital city the activity of informal retailing is relatively of more recent origin. Little (1999, 2013) argues that until as late as the 1980s private trade in Maputo was heavily constrained. Kamete and Lindell (2010: 901) point to the activities of FRELIMO inspection brigades which “worked to restrict informal economic activities as much as possible”. This activity is reflected in the fact that when Little (1999) was conducting field research in the early 1990s the majority of his participants had been engaged in trade for 5 years or less. The term *dumba nengue* (‘trust your feet’) covers all aspects of street trade conducted in the city, including in order of importance the sale of drinks and foods, agricultural products, manufactured goods, wood and building materials, and arts and crafts. Although trade specialization was apparent, most *dumba nengue* traders often sold more than one of these categories of goods (Little 2013). The expansion of these activities was

inseparable from deteriorating urban economic conditions which compelled growing streams of Maputo residents to resort to informal economic activities. In particular the enactment of neo-liberal economic policies from the mid-1980s degraded urban living conditions and “propelled a rapid expansion of the urban informal economy” (Kamete and Lindell 2010: 902). Over the past quarter-century the importance of the informal economy for the city’s residents has heightened in significance (Jenkins and Wilkinson 2002; Brouwer 2010).

Alongside street trade there are several market places where the main types of trade are agricultural products, foods, beverages and manufactured goods. Traders were active in selling within the markets but more commonly also in open areas outside the market or in adjoining streets. Mainly street traders were described as poor, young (often school leavers) and/or recent migrants to the city; the majority (70 %) at the time of Little’s (1999) research were female. Most traders started their operations in the late 1980s when the government relaxed its restrictions on hawking and petty trade. The *dumba nengue* traders were observed as survivalists and many engaged in relationships of dependent work, reliant upon consignment arrangements, and working for suppliers who paid them a commission on the value of products that were sold (Little 1999).

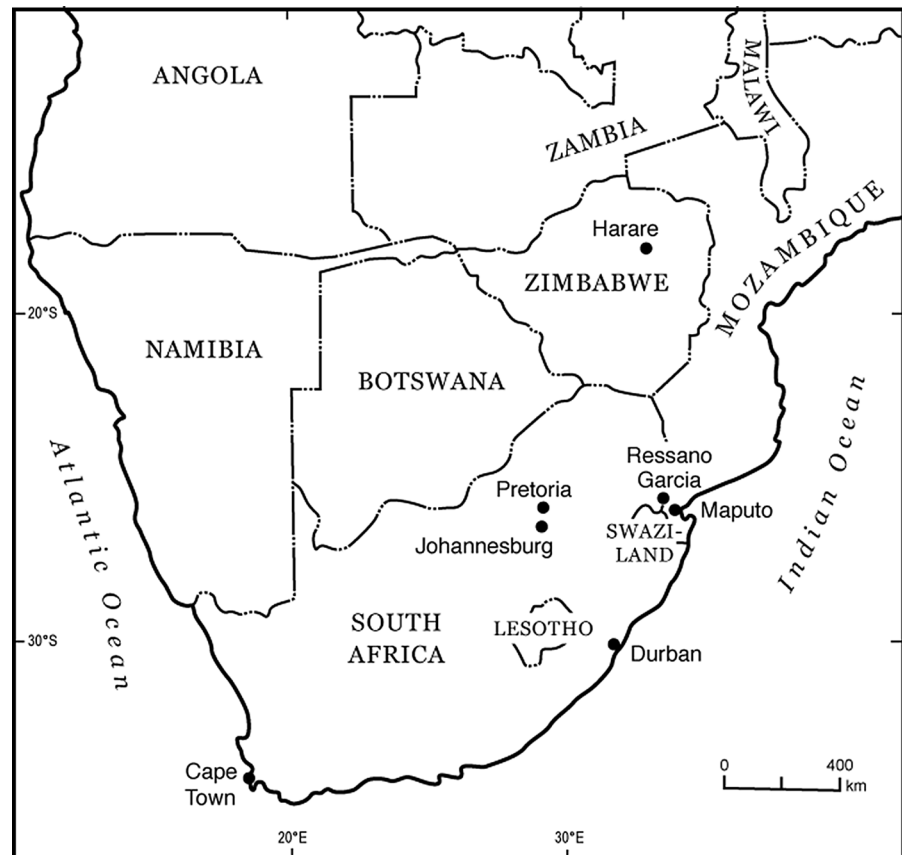
Paulo et al. (2007: 13) suggest that among the economically active population of Maputo City only 35.6 % are engaged in formal employment with 64.4 % in informal employment. Likewise, Brouwer (2010: 137) estimates roughly 70 % of households in the Maputo area are involved in the informal economy. Nevertheless it is acknowledged that in urban Mozambique the divisions between formality and informality are not always absolute (Dibben et al. 2015). The most common form of informal economic operations involve retailing of foodstuffs and other petty commodities, many of them imported goods with trade dominated by women. In addition, many people also are engaged in “*desenrascar* which literally means ‘finding a way out’ and involves everything from small-scale repairs to illicit activities such as theft and prostitution” (Paulo et al. 2007: 38). In particular the informal economy is a vital source of employment and incomes for the poor *barrio* population of Maputo and the adjoining municipality of Matola. In a recent analysis, Raimundo et al. (2014) point out that whilst the city’s informal economy has

been traditionally dominated by women, it is observed that “unemployed men have a growing presence, although they tend to view participation as a ‘stop-gap’ on the road to wage employment”.

The burgeoning of informal entrepreneurship is linked to cross-border trading with South Africa which represents a significant segment of the micro-enterprise economy of Maputo (Peberdy 2000; Peberdy and Crush 2001; Dana and Galbraith 2006; Raimundo and Chikanda 2015). Maputo is situated 555 km from Johannesburg, the economic heart of Southern Africa (Fig. 1) and the two cities enjoy close linkages as a result of excellent road connections following the infrastructural upgrading linked to the Maputo Development Corridor initiative (Rogerson 2001; Piscitelli 2015). Among others, Soderbaum (2004: 7) draws attention to the beginning of the institution of *mukhero* which is “a movement of people, mostly females, buying and transporting all types of goods, vegetables, fruits, clothes and small home appliances, between Mozambique and South Africa and Swaziland along the Maputo corridor to buy products to sell on the informal market”. Recent investigations of the trade confirm that the practice of *mukhero* continues dominated by women entrepreneurs (Peberdy et al. 2015; Piscitelli 2015).

It is within the context of the complex politics of informal markets that the normalisation tendencies and evidence of movements to pathologise the informal economy under modernist planning can be found in the Mozambican experience. Kamete (2013a: 644) draws attention to the actions pursued in Maputo during 2003 in the period prior to a meeting of the African Union in the city. Kamete and Lindell (2010: 909) highlight that the Maputo City Council declared its intent to remove one of the largest of the city’s ‘unplanned markets’ situated in a natural market location on an access road from city centre to the airport. They argue that the African Union Summit was a welcome “excuse for the sanitising operation” and assert that “local government was the main driver of the planned removal of the market”. The market was to be relocated to a new site geographically remote from natural markets, 20 km from the city centre a potential removal that would have devastating consequences upon the livelihoods of local traders as “it did not meet the minimum standards for vendors to settle in” (Kamete 2013a: 644). The outcome was an eventual compromise between traders and council

Fig. 1 The location of Maputo within Southern Africa



“whereby only the stalls that congested the road would be relocated” (Kamete 2013a: 644). This is a case of negotiated rehabilitation as opposed to the processes of eradication as practiced in other African cities such as Harare (Kamete 2013a; Rogerson 2016a). Nevertheless, for some observers, the Maputo 2003 experience is viewed as illustrating also the ‘delusions’ of an elitist minority which is focussed on modernist planning with nightmare consequences for much of the urban poor (Kamete 2013b).

A reconfiguring of Maputo city has been engineered by the burst of informal traders as unplanned market places expanded in both central city and residential spaces and “street vending, such as hawking and selling on the pavement, engages more people, particularly women, migrants, children and youth” (Kamete and Lindell 2010: 902). A recent development has been the growth of communities of foreign traders operating in the markets of Maputo (Piscitelli 2015). Interviewees highlighted the establishment and expansion of communities of traders from China,

Nigeria, Burundi and Rwanda in particular. It was observed that “here in Mozambique the law has made it easy for foreigners to settle and establish their businesses, perhaps Mozambican law is favourable towards foreigners” (Manthusse 2014).

In the wake of these developments policy issues relating to the informal economy in Maputo become significant for the local state. The argument of Kamete and Lindell (2010: 902) is that in the face of rampant informalisation, regulation and urban planning became lax albeit “local government’s attitudes towards informal vending have remained largely negative”. Underpinning negative official attitudes are the linkages of informal activity with crime and the opposition from some propertied groups in the city towards the informal economy. The consequence has been a mix of repressive tolerance and frontal aggression. This is documented as follows:

Harassment of street vendors and confiscation of their merchandise are frequent occurrences.

Unplanned marketplaces are considered illegal, even though the local government collects fees in many of them. These markets are viewed as a transitory feature of the urban landscape, while at the same time the local government ensures their continued provisional form by hindering vendors from investing in permanent market structures. The presage of eviction hanging over some of these markets often generates a sense of uncertainty among the vendors... (Kamete and Lindell 2010: 902).

On balance, it is asserted that the “governance of informal markets in Maputo is thus characterised by volatile relationships, unpredictability and legal uncertainty” (Kamete and Lindell 2010: 904). Nevertheless, it is made clear that the governing party in Maputo’s local government, FRELIMO, effectively organises the local markets and must deal with the contradiction that “politicians are aware of the large number of potential voters involved in the urban informal economy, and of the importance of not severing ties with vendors’ leaders, even as local government actors, also under FRELIMO rule, tend to be hostile towards vendors” (Kamete and Lindell 2010: 905).

The most recent evidence of policy directions towards the informal economy in Mozambique points to the conclusion that there is a degree of recognition of the ‘legitimacy’ of the informal economy and of attempts by the state to engage with the principal organisations that represent informal traders. Dibben et al. (2015) aver that against the backdrop of imperatives for poverty reduction the government has been drawn towards sustaining informality and acknowledging it—perhaps reluctantly—as a permanent feature of the economy. With limited successes of attempts made to remove the informal economy and fears of political and social instability, government is increasingly tolerant of retaining the informal economy for its economic and social contribution (Crush et al. 2015). This has been accompanied also by a movement to extract fees from informal traders wishing to sell goods in markets. Another factor explaining the more tolerant attitude of government is of the greater voice of traders which has come through ASSOTSI, the organization which has a membership of 40,000 informal workers and operators.

Alongside a greater tolerance of informal activities (with the exception of illegal imports and alcohol)

Dibben et al. (2015) point out that the state embraced a modernizing agenda which is aimed at promoting formalization. For observers such as Kamete (2013a) this movement would be conceptualized as part of ‘repressive tolerance’. This description fits well the strands in policy and practices that include reducing informal activity in certain areas of the city, most notably in spaces where new luxury housing replaced areas of former informal fish markets. Arguably, this is a case of serving vested interests through the gradual ‘enclosure of the commons’ pursued in the name of development (Dibben et al. 2015). The formalization agenda in Mozambique encompasses aspects of infrastructural and institutional development with several initiatives for setting up formal markets and inevitably the encouragement to pay market fees. Byiers (2009: 7) stresses that in terms of formalization “the government tends to focus on raising revenues”. However, it is pointed out by Dibben et al. (2015) that the existing taxation regime appears to deter many informal traders from formalization. This is evidenced by large numbers of spaces being available in official municipal markets which are not being taken up by traders (Crush et al. 2015). An expansion of business development services targeted at micro-enterprise actors is also being rolled out. As argued by Kaufman and Parlmeyer (2006) limitations of access to formal financial institutions is one of the barriers to small enterprise development as a whole in Mozambique. New initiatives include the provision of micro-finance (Dibben et al. 2015). Nevertheless, with micro-finance interest loans higher than those charged by commercial banks it is observed the use of informal micro-finance systems is still more widespread than formal micro-finance arrangements.

Overall, this shift towards grudging tolerance of the informal economy in urban Mozambique is accounted for as inseparable from its functionality as a safety valve (Crush et al. 2015; Dibben et al. 2015). Tolerating the activity of the informal economy—and even limited support for certain of its operators—is undertaken in the interests of political stability. As is the case in other parts of Africa, however, the movement towards formalization in Mozambique is contested, likely to be difficult and ultimately involve only incremental change. Indeed, in terms of ‘repressive tolerance’ the temporary nature of the reprieve which it may be for the informal economy was

signalled by events in February 2012 when the Maputo council gave 48 h notice to informal vendors to get off the city's pavements. Subsequently, the Mayor of Maputo retracted this threat, announcing that the city council was not opposed to the informal sector and that the measures it proposed were "merely intended to discipline informal trade so that it does not endanger other interests" (Anon. 2012). It was explained that the intent was never to shut down all street trading rather to stop traders operating outside schools, hospitals and "other sensitive establishments" (Anon. 2012).

A further signal that repressive tolerance towards the informal economy in Maputo is the minimal extent of support measures which was made apparent in an interview with the Ministry of Industry and Commerce (Gobe 2014). It was stressed that the business growth support programme, PACDE (Enterprise and Private Sector Development Competitiveness Project) was only to offer funding support for licensed enterprises and that unlicensed businesses in the informal economy were ineligible for support (Gobe 2014). Simply put "if it is not licensed, it does not exist and the Government will not support it" (Gobe 2014). This stance was reiterated in another interview with the Director of Market and Fairs of Maputo Municipality. Questioned as to whether there were any laws to regulate the informal economy in the city the response was as follows:

This question is strange. There is no law or specific law regulating the informal business. As I said initially let's be clear once and for all, all that is informal is illegal. Everything informal is illegal (Monteiro 2014).

The Director was unequivocal that Maputo Municipality would not recognise or support informal traders or markets that were not licensed. Instead, support would be accorded only to authorized and registered businesses that paid fees and taxes to officers of the city authorities (Monteiro 2014).

Against this unpromising background environment the contemporary challenges of informal entrepreneurs in Maputo can be understood through the findings of a set of interviews which were conducted during November–December 2014 with a cross-section of traders operating at three of Maputo's markets, namely Malanga, Xiquelene and Zimpeto. The voices of the interviewees provide a profile of the traders,

their daily struggles, their perspectives on the major barriers to informal entrepreneurship as well as a number of policy-related issues. All the interviewees at the three markets were involved in cross-border informal entrepreneurship and traded in a wide variety of products including oranges, onions, potatoes, bowls, baskets, brooms, plastic products, blankets, tables and chairs. In addition, all interviewees had been in this business for at least 10 years and in some cases had engaged in cross-border trade for up to 25 years, thus pre-dating the collapse of apartheid.

Most interviewees highlighted the survivalist character of cross-border trading. Typically, one interviewee remarked "in this business of *mukerista* your profit is food...For us, the greater part of profit we make is directed towards the purchase of food". The reasons given by traders for business start-up were familiar in terms of imperatives for household survival and the need for self-employment in the context of the absence of formal work opportunities.

I started the business because I needed something to be able to help the kids at home.

I can only say that it is because of lack of employment. I did not choose to look elsewhere. This is the livelihood of everyday for my family.

I started the business because of the family. My aunt always did these businesses. She worked in Xiphamanine. She made these businesses. So in the end I decided to travel with her to track how did she do business on the weekends when I was not going to school. So I got into the business and here I am.

I got into this business right after demobilisation shortly after I left the army. So I tried to do anything and the only thing that came to me was just doing this business.

I started practicing the business on my own initiative, for survival. I wanted to live an honest life without harming anyone or practising crime.

The challenges of informal entrepreneurs begin early in the start-up phase of business with interviewees stressing the issue of absence of start-up capital and lack of business training or knowledge. Typical responses were "One does not have money to start a business" and that "It is difficult to initiate the business because we have no background". In terms of

cross-border transportation of goods from South Africa to Mozambique the most common mode was use of a rental car or truck. Of 13 traders that offered responses at the three markets 11 were using rental vehicles for transport of goods. The difficulty of categorising their business as formal or informal was indicated by a mixture of responses. Most traders viewed their businesses as informal but made clear that they did pay custom duties as well as municipal fees. The problematic nature of boundaries between formality and informality was highlighted once again in several responses when interviewees were questioned whether their businesses were formal or informal.

Our business practice is formal in the sense that it complies with the provision of the law. The law is saying that the micro-importer has to pay taxes—we also pay the fees in the city where we practice our activities. Thus our businesses are not like other informal activities.

A formal business as I understand it is a business that operates from a formal market, not like ours. A market like ours is an informal market.

It's a little difficult. Only it is a business that is not recognized sometimes as evil, saying that business *Mukherista* are working illegally. You can say at the end that is informal.

I cannot answer that question. I pay fees for me to sell my products at this market. So I can say that my business here in Xiquelene is formal but it might not be considered as such by the government.

The daily reality of the business environment impacting upon these traders is that they are compelled to comply both with national regulations regarding customs payments and municipal regulations relating to market fees (including for downloading goods at the market) and/or municipal taxes. The lack of awareness of certain municipal regulations was disclosed by several interviewees. Two typical responses were as follows:

They (the municipality) know what the laws are. The Municipality does not say anything. They just tell us that we need to pay taxes and use gowns. They say that those who do not buy the gown should leave the market.

No I do not know. The laws are there but we are not made aware of them and how they affect our

businesses. The people of Customs say that you have to pay 30 % of the value of your purchase.

The regular payments exacted by the municipality were highlighted as major constraints on the activities and livelihoods of these informal entrepreneurs. At Xiquelene market each trader was charged a daily fee of 3 Mt as well as a monthly charge of 10 Mt; at other markets the fees were higher and up to 100 Mt daily at Zimpeto. All traders were consistent in their view that such taxes were of benefit to the municipality and with little direct benefit to their business.

I do not know what the money we pay is used for! They do nothing. They do not help us at all. They should give us more space to sell our goods.

Here in Zimpeto market we are not treated well by the municipality. Tickets (municipal fees) are expensive. The municipality makes a lot of money from us and we do not make much money at all. Sometimes the city agents bring tickets before we have sold anything for the day. And when we say that we don't have the money they ask us to borrow money from others. We also suffer when it rains but all they care about is their money.

Fees paid to the Municipality do not help at all in our business as we have no security in the market—our goods get stolen from the cars and from the stands.

I do not know because even the 10 Mt they say it is for cleaning the market. But when I come here I clean the stall myself and I have never met anyone who does the cleaning.

Beyond the daily and monthly payments which were exacted by the Maputo municipality, the traders were subject also to making additional substantial payments as well as enduring a range of other difficulties through regular crossing of the Mozambique–South Africa border (Fig. 1). Cross-border traders highlighted that the cost of passports was too high and the number of pages in the passport was insufficient to allow for frequent border crossings. The range of financial and documentation problems suffered at customs was highlighted by most respondents.

At the Border we faced difficulties such as with Customs because when you get there and begin to negotiate with them you end up paying them a lot of money. They do not give you any documents—they just take the money and pump it into their pockets. When you find another car on patrol they 'hit' you because you did not pay anything. Hitting in the sense

of wanting money. The hit is money as they say you have no paper you have to pay because you do not have the proper paper. This is our main difficulty because if they gave us proper documentation at the border we will be able to travel normally on the road without being made to pay extra fees on the way.

At the border they check the health status of products you purchased and make sure you that you have the necessary documents and sometimes it is necessary to bring a certificate to show the officials at the border. In the case of potatoes and onions they also check the documents of products to ensure that they have not reached their expiry by the time you bring them to Mozambique.

We face many difficulties especially here in our Mozambican border. The South African frontier has no major problems but here in our Mozambican border, is full of “goats” (corrupt). What happens here at the border, they do not bother to put the money in the state coffers, their interest is to have the money in their pockets. That’s why I say that business is very difficult and we are treated very badly. We are treated like bitches, dogs—they have no proper way to talk to us.

The Border has many collections, many fees to pay. Each time you enter you have to pay and it hurts us.

In addition to these problems the world of these cross-border informal entrepreneurs is regularly impacted by the ever-present threat of criminal attacks on both sides of the border and of the dangers of road accidents. In particular, the dangers of criminal attacks in South Africa were highlighted with road safety of greatest concern on the Mozambique side of the border. Such constraints on migrant informal entrepreneurship were pointed out by many of the market traders.

We are attacked constantly by thieves within South Africa itself.

There are risks of assaults. Just last week we lost someone in the central market of Johannesburg who was shot down by robbers in cold blood because they wanted money.

This month two people who had gone shopping in Johannesburg were killed. Even here in the market they steal tyres.

There are risks on the road, and threats to our safety are always present. When they see these trucks they

think we have money and they attack us. We were once robbed and luckily I only had 100 Rands.

It is the fear of accidents. We usually travel at night and there are usually several accidents along the way when we travel at night and bandits as well.

Finally, in terms of entrepreneurship challenges several interviewees maintained that the business of cross-border trading was increasingly impacted by the competitive threat posed by the expanding community of foreign traders in Maputo City. Several interviewees spoke about “a proliferation of many foreigners who come and compete with us on the market”.

For people from other countries of Africa it is easy to start business here in Mozambique because they have money.

Competition in the market itself is an obstacle because as can be seen from the current market we are many. We have many foreigners coming to compete with us in the same market so the market becomes small and the Mozambicans are not well capitalized hence cannot compete effectively with the foreigners who are well-capitalized.

The traders argue that government should offer some further means of support to their struggling businesses. The major area for suggested intervention for national government related to addressing the customs and border issues. Other potential support measures related to local government and the need for improving market infrastructure and reducing fees. These issues were aired by several interviewees.

The Government should reform the customs so that it can be sensitive to our needs as traders knowing the business that we are playing has no profit especially in perishable goods. And with the money that we get to pay in Customs you can see that there is nothing left for us.

Well, the Government could help us in some ways. They could set the bank lending rates which are too high for us at the moment. They can also fix the corruption mess at the border.

We are doing the work of *Mukhero* but if the government does not help us we will not success (*sic*) especially with the way customs work poorly at the border.

I have no words to say what the government could do. For we are many and for the government to help us they should build us a formal market because here we

run risks of a day being evicted and we do not know where we will be operating from in future. I have nothing to add except nowadays business is slow because we are already many since many of us practice the business, and that other people are not Mozambicans—that's why the business is not moving.

I think the government should take pity on us and cover the market because we pay fees. They should give us a decent place to practice our business activities. Sometimes we sell only ten bags and make a profit of 100 Mt and we have to pay a fee of 100 Mt to the municipality and we go home with nothing. They should know that when one leaves the house he has to come back with food.

Conclusion

This article represents a contribution to the expanding corpus of writings on Africa's informalising cities and specifically concerning policy responses towards informal trading. In the wake of a rising swell of contemporary debates around the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and specifically about the goal of making cities *inclusive, resilient and sustainable* it is forwarded that informality must be part of the emerging new global urban development agenda (McGranahan et al. 2016; Parnell 2016). Grant (2015: 139) alerts us to the fact that “African economies are different from economies in the Global North in that the informal economy is much more significant in Africa”. Arguably, from the perspective of African urban development, given that the informal economy supports the livelihoods of most Africans, it must represent a critical focus for policy thinking and intervention (Cities Alliance 2014; United Nations Human Settlements Programme and the Economic Commission for Africa 2015). McGranahan et al. (2016: 14) stress that an exclusionary course of urbanization carries the inherent danger of setting in motion a path-dependent trajectory of inequality that becomes hard to alter in the long term. Accordingly, addressing informality must be an essential and integral part of the making of a more inclusive pathway of urban development in Africa (Brown 2015). Ghani and Kanbur (2013) contend that the nexus between urbanization and informalization must be better managed by policy makers in order to integrate the informal economy into urban planning.

This said, in a comparative perspective it is evident only a handful of isolated examples exist of inclusive practices implemented by African local governments to support the activities of informal street traders (David et al. 2013). The complex challenge of accommodating informal activities in urban policy “is linked to a certain conception of modernity, an ideal that many African states have striven to achieve since independence, which impacts directly on capital cities” (Steck et al. 2013: 152).

As compared to the highly aggressive negative policies towards street traders which have been applied in for example, Harare, Zimbabwe, in Mozambique's capital city national and municipal authorities have traditionally adopted a more tolerant approach to the informal economy, primarily because it provides a livelihood to so many and because of the social unrest likely to be triggered by direct frontal attacks on its existence (Crush et al. 2015: 40). In Maputo the core narrative is of an urban informal economy which is viewed by officials as an important and sustainable source of livelihood for the city's poor, albeit one which is subject both to periodic harassment and constantly encouraged to ‘formalize’. Over the past 15 years the local state has wavered between on the one hand actions of frontal aggression and of unleashing bouts of forced evictions to on the other hand a situation of repressive tolerance within which formalisation is increasingly promoted as a means of extracting revenue flows from economically stressed street traders. As has been demonstrated in this investigation of the challenges of informal traders in Maputo the historical and contemporary directions of policy responses signals an uncertain future for the city's informal entrepreneurs engaged in such activities.

Acknowledgments Research funding was provided by the Southern African Migration Project. Thanks are due to Ines Raimundo and researchers from the Centre for Policy Analysis, Eduardo Mondlane University who undertook the interviews in Maputo. Wendy Job of University of Johannesburg prepared Fig. 1, Abel Chikanda provided several useful documentary sources, and valuable comments were offered by anonymous journal referees. Usual disclaimers apply.

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