

Questioning governance of urban informality: A study of township economy in Alexandra, Johannesburg



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Background: This study presents informality as a center of in-depth analysis by referencing current studies to demonstrate how this perspective foregrounds new and emerging pragmatic literature developments on urban informality, notably informality as a strategy for livelihood earning for disadvantaged groups.

Aim: The purpose of this study was to examine the approach of the city of Johannesburg in its inclusive policy of urban spatial planning and management. This study interrogates what regulatory frameworks are in place that govern urban informality, notably informal trading.

Methods: This study utilised in-depth interviews and policy document reviews. This study focused on township economy in Alexandra. The data collected were analysed using correlation and cross-tabulation methods.

Results: Findings reveal that measures adopted by city authorities to govern informality are largely fragmented and uncoordinated; especially, the procedures on licensing, permit application and infrastructure access and provision for street vendors are intricate, cumbersome, and costly.

Conclusion: The city of Johannesburg still overlooks the crucial economic role of township economies by clamping down on informal trade and forcing the informal traders to formalise their practice.

Contribution: This study contributes to the emerging urban informality scholarship by exploring how city regulations and management conceptualise and engage with urban informality.

Keywords: informality; urban spatial planning and governance; street food vendors; township economy, informal food sector, regulatory framework.

Introduction

Johannesburg is a dual city consisting of a socio-spatial polarisation, where on the one hand, is a planned, clearly laid out and predictable modern city visible with its monumental architecture, sophisticated infrastructure and a booming economy controlled by the elite, while on the other hand is a spontaneous and unpredictable informal city characterised by a high population density, mushrooming slums and dilapidated infrastructure inhabited by the majority urban poor comprised of heterogeneous groups of people who are excluded from the city's treasures (Totaforti, 2020). The example of the residents of Alexandra township and that of Sandton is a clear-cut example of two different worlds that coexist in one city, and how the urban poor and the rich elites coexist within the city but are physically separated by spatial urban design and infrastructure development (Banda, 2021). Alexandra is an overcrowded township with narrow, heavily potholed streets, serious housing challenges and is a breeding ground for informality, anarchy and lawlessness (Nyapokoto, 2014). Residents live in fear of being annihilated because of their questionable rights in the city. The M1 highway separates Alexandra from the affluent city of Sandton (a financial powerhouse of Africa) with its tall buildings and expensive housing visible mostly in leafy suburbs such as Sandhurst 'where the cream of society lives' – where South Africa's most elite, that have always enjoyed full citizenship rights of liberty, autonomy and a clean environment, live (Skurie, 2013).

This study argues that Johannesburg is a city that depicts both the utopia of growth and development, as well as the dystopian torture of marginal realities experienced by the urban poor

who live in squalor. Murray (2017) suggests that the city of Johannesburg thrives to reinvent itself as a 'world-class city', but simultaneously portrays an ugly history of socio-spatial inequalities that still stubbornly persist. Totaforti (2020) contends that the city of Johannesburg in its attempt to reshape the urban landscape has been battling with governing urban informality and addressing the infrastructure backlog that has been exacerbated by the sprawling of informality resulting in the mushrooming and widespread slums in the city and informal economy. These have alarmingly raised serious developmental and governmental issues related to 'informality governance' and the 'right to the city' as intended discourse terms for inclusive governance, urban development and citizenship rights. Johannesburg's spatial transformation of overlapping and twisted non-linear model of spatial transformation model has fabricated a sprawling and polycentric landscape of creeping informal cities linked to the historic apartheid cities by a network of bridges and freeways and highways. This model adopted by the city has invaded and consumed the urban space that creates a social platform in which urban users meet to express and share tensions and contradictions, memories and cultures (Murray, 2017; Totaforti, 2020).

Johannesburg is one of the favourable destination cities attracting millions of migrants annually who see South Africa as the destination of hope and opportunity. The city houses the financial powerhouse, Sandton and the industrial belt and telecommunication service sector that pillars the economy of Gauteng region, Midrand and Kempton park. It continues to attract both international migrants and internal migrants (rural-urban migration) because of its booming industrialisation and central geographical location that connects Botswana, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, creating an easy transit point for migrants from these neighbouring countries (Rugunan, 2020). The city of Johannesburg acknowledges that urbanisation is a key challenge in the city South Africa (CoJ, 2018). Approximately 30% of its population is made up of internal migrants, people born in other provinces, while about 10% consists of international migrants- people born outside of South Africa (CoJ, 2018). The city estimates that close to 12 500 internal migrants and 3000 cross-border migrants come into the city every month including illegal migrants (CoJ, 2022). Because of the high cost of housing in the city, most of these migrants end up settling in Alexandra Township, and because of the township's proximity to the city centre, housing is also reported to be affordable. The city of Johannesburg is battling to manage informality in the city and provide service delivery, especially in Alexandra Township that lies very close to Sandton – the financial hub of the country. This compels the city authorities to ensure they address the informality problem so that it does not overlap to tarnish the desired image of building a modern 'world-class city' (Murray, 2017).

This study was motivated by the following devastating events that took place between 2020 and 2021 in South Africa.

First was the outbreak of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic in 2020, which led to the South African government declaring a state of emergency on 26 March 2020 and implementing a lockdown. The lockdown saw tough regulations being enforced, thereby prohibiting the informal business sector to operate in public spaces including streets (Barrett, 2020; Fihlani, 2022; Rwafa- Ponela et al., 2022). The lockdown regulation measures caused major disruptions to township economic activities and urban food systems in South Africa, affecting the food supply chain, availability, access, pricing and quality of food (Barrett, 2020). The lockdown shocks witnessed the closure of informal food retail outlets, particularly street food vending, which the government saw as a 'non-essential service provider' and spaces for possible disease transmission (Moseley & Battersby, 2020). This move reflects a 'formality' bias in public health and food policy, which proved to be disastrous to the urban poor who are more reliant on informal markets for food (Moseley & Battersby, 2020).

This uncalculated move that was witnessed during the first lockdown also led to: (1) a sharp decline in business activities in the informal sector, (2) increased food costs, (3) reduced product demand, (4) spoilage and loss of stock, as well as (5) severe loss of incomes and livelihoods for the urban poor (Battersby, 2020). Although these informal markets were eventually allowed to reopen after a series of engagements and consultations from academics and civil society, the damage caused was severe and irreversible (Barrett, 2020; Battersby, 2020), especially to street vendors who often have no insurance or any social security to boost their livelihoods (Rwafa-Ponela et al., 2022).

The lockdown shocks indicate a gap in South Africa's urban policy frameworks governing the city that fail to recognise and consider urban informality (i.e. informal street traders) as having a legal right to be in the city and operate within the city. This has consequently compromised livelihood strategies of the majority of the urban poor who are engaged in informal food sector activities as street traders (Rwafa-Ponela et al., 2022). It is from this notion that this study emerged to identify the approach of the city of Johannesburg in its inclusive policy of urban spatial planning and interrogate the city's regulatory frameworks that govern urban informality notably street trading. This was achieved by exploring the everyday realities of the urban poor (i.e. informal food traders in Alexandra Township), and how they contest for their rights in the city and negotiate for public space to engage in informal sector activities.

This study opens its discussion by positioning urban informality¹ within township economy to give reflections on salient contemporary debates on urban informality across economic, political and spatial spheres, centred on their

1.A multi-dimensional term that is used in divergent domains to represent various urban structures and relations which include among others economic activities, informal dwellings, people as infrastructure (i.e. constant circulation of people, ideas and networks) and informal 'paralegal' governance structures (see Finn & Cobbinah, 2022; Okyere & Kita, 2015).

historical evolution and the conceptual framings rendered by scholars. Rapid urbanisation and poor governance threaten the survival of township economy² (Scheba & Turok, 2019). Township economy is overshadowed by high rates of informality, most of which are born out of necessity for survival, and characterised by: (1) poverty, (2) lower gains and productivity, (3) low incomes and (4) lack of infrastructure access; yet crucial role in raising local incomes, job creation and the provision of affordable foods to local urban consumers (Adekeye & Tabit, 2021; McGaffin et al., 2015; Ngubeni et al., 2022; Nnaeme, 2022). Despite the growing trend of township economy gaining momentum within the New Urban Agenda, urban studies argue that the historical spatial legacy of the apartheid regime is still visible in today's townships by the high rate of informality in the form of sprawling slums, precarious informal sector activities and a serious lack of infrastructure that continues to threaten the growth of township economy (see Charman et al., 2017; Scheba & Turok, 2019; Thulo, 2015).

Conceptualising and positioning informality as a state of being

The everyday lived realities of how we understand, perceive and engage urban informality across economic, spatial and political domains are constantly changing in the Global South (Banks et al., 2020). While some studies conceptualise the informal sector as an adaptive and provisional livelihood strategy (Adekeye & Tabit, 2021; Nnaeme, 2022; Thieme, 2013), some view it as a hinderance to a 'modern' city (De Soto, 1989 cited in Finn & Cobbinah, 2022), and others view it as a form of political protest and contestation (Finn & Cobbinah, 2022). Despite the pivotal role that the informality sector plays in cushioning livelihoods earning of majority of the urban poor, it is often ignored by urban planners, policy makers and city authorities who view informality as an annoyance to 'modern' urban space and neglect it on issues of urban planning and management (Finn & Cobbinah, 2022; Finn & Oldfield, 2015).

Ranganathan (2014, p. 90) describes informality as a negotiated process in which separate groups compete and navigate their roles, relationships and strategies with local, municipal and national political public authorities through multiple channels of protections and legitimacies. Banks et al. (2020, p. 224) also argue that informality is not limited to the urban poor. They suggest that urban informality should be seen as a site of critical analysis in which all inclusive systems and processes of political, social and economic domains are at interplay, and how these influence the conditions on which diverse groups (i.e. disadvantaged and the advantaged) position themselves to negotiate, secure and consolidate for power, opportunities and infrastructures within informal domains that are characterised by exclusion and exploitation Banks et al. (2020).

2. Unregulated micro-economic activities and enterprises occurring within areas are broadly defined as 'townships that meet the needs of township communities' (Du Toit, 2020; Mutongoreya, 2021).

In this study, informality refers to the informal sector activities that play a crucial role in shaping the lives of most urban poor. In South Africa's townships, the informal sector³ emerged as the locality where black South Africans, notably low-income households, were able to find alternative economic activities for survival in the city (Beavon, 2004). These informal economic activities form part of township economy, which has been the primary source of livelihood for the urban poor (Adekeye & Tabit, 2021; Scheba & Turok, 2019). The informal sector permits people to start small, often from their homes, taking advantage of local networks and trust relationships (Krasniqi & Williams, 2020). For many of the urban poor, this is the easy entry point into income-generating activity that makes a vital contribution to livelihoods (Mitlin, 2014). However, apart from a desire for income generation, there are other socio-economic factors that influence the urban poor to engage in informal sector activities. These are located within the site selection and are discussed in detail in the findings section.

The focus of the study is on street food vending.⁴ The researcher understands that street vending is a small component of the informal sector (Skinner & Haysom, 2016). Street food vending in the Global South cities is largely an integral part of the food culture in society, providing income and some level of financial independence to vendors, while on the contrary, providing affordable and convenient hot meals to urban consumers who either hardly have time to cook or lack the necessary infrastructure and facilities to cook (Scott et al., 2021, p. 8). The study's rationale to focus on street food vending is to demonstrate the crucial role this sector plays in addressing urban household food security and the livelihoods of the urban poor, especially in income generation, employment creation and poverty alleviation.

How space is regulated and controlled within the urban context is very crucial for informal sector activities like street vending (Skinner et al., 2018). Chen and Carré (2020) suggest that in the context of street vending, every vendor has its own spatial arrangement and territorial control, depending on the location and the nature of what is sold. These spatial systems of management must be thought of always in conjunction with legal frameworks managing public spaces (Roever, 2016). Informality scholarship points to historic patterns of inclusion and exclusion that remain embedded in the current dominant models of economic planning, labour organising and urban planning (Chen & Carré, 2020). A consensus among modern scholars on informality has been on urban planning laws and land use zoning, which is being critiqued for remaining largely unchanged since the colonial period in most African cities (Chen & Carré, 2020; Rogerson, 2016; Skinner & Watson, 2018).

3. Refers to heterogenic non-formal economic activities comprised of self-wage and non-remunerative employment not recognized, regulated or protected by existing legal frameworks (Becker, 2004; Devey et al., 2006).

4. It is heterogenous in nature involving informal activity comprised of traders who belong to the informal economy and who sell both processed (cooked foods) and unprocessed foods (agricultural products) readily available for immediate consumption on locations that attract large concentrations of people such as streets and other public places (Lund, 2000).

Governing, in the context of this study, is an active intervention mechanism of administering or managing urban spatial planning and implementing urban policies aimed to improve urban economic growth and social well-being of urban dwellers by state institutions. In this case, the ability and capacity of the state and its institutions to govern cities, particularly on how the state institutions govern urban informality, are crucial to explore. This study asks the following question: What do state institutions, such as metropolitan cities and municipalities, govern and how the govern with a focus on street trading? Landau (2006) contends that the practice of forceful expulsion and exclusion of urban informality in urban spaces against their will has become a new form of governing cities in Africa, which has alarmingly drawn a large discourse in urban scholarship that looks at the right of street traders to the city.

Meneses-Reyes and Caballero-Juárez (2014) assert that governing urban informality within the context of 'informal' is subjected to three contrasting views. The first viewpoint is a legalistic view condemning informal practices of urban poor, and it usually holds the law with high regard. The second viewpoint uses regulations to control and manage urban 'informality' by criminalising and deterring informal sector activities that are viewed as unwanted urban practices and opposed to a 'modern world-class city'. This regulatory view can: (1) decide what form of informal practices to allow in the city, (2) determine at what degree these should occur and (3) how they are to operate (Delaney, 2010). The third viewpoint claims to observe 'informality' as a technique of spatial management and control, which is not fully understood by the legalistic view. This perspective, as suggested by Devlin (2011a), views the law as a composite and repressive that is sometimes difficult to enforce. Meneses (2013) also contends that this view also claims that street vending as an integral segment of urban informality, especially in the Global South, is misunderstood by government structures, legal framework and the public in general who are of the assumption that street vending is entirely against the law.

The legalistic perspective believes that the law should be enforced by government and policing institutions such as municipalities against those who violate the enacted regulations such as the use of public space and infrastructure. Contrary to this view is the regulatory perspectives that do not certainly seek to 'obliterate' street-vending activities, but to accommodate them somehow and offer them an alternative place to be part of the city (Meneses-Reyes & Caballero-Juárez, 2014). In the recent planning theory developments, a new approach that focuses on informality as part of the city and has a right to belong to the city is being championed. This approach aims to incorporate informality needs into urban spatial planning (see Devlin, 2011a). According to Devlin (2011a, p. 54) and Valverde (2008), both the regulatory and legalistic perspectives have failed to offer a blueprint that restructures urban culture and the spatial framework which have contributed to exhibit street vending activities in the city as an illegal, unorganised and temporal practice subjected to surveillance, control, relocation, penalty and arrest.

The researcher argues that street vendors, like any urban dwellers, have a right to have access and use public spaces, such as streets and sidewalks, for either social functions or for trade. In practice, the regulation of street-vending activities accounts to a current debate about who has the right to operate in the city and on what circumstances this right should occur.

Evidence in this study shows that the city's by-laws on informal trade have been viewed as a regulatory mechanism that collects revenue and infringes informal traders' rights to actively participate in economic activity through bureaucratic measures (red tape). The study questions the city of Johannesburg's repressive approach to governing the city especially in informal trade. The city has a history of suppressing informal trading and has been largely criticised for not being consistent with the Constitution, and suppressing the constitutional rights of informal traders through restricting informal traders of what products are allowed for trade and where to trade, impounding or confiscating informal trader's good without proper channels followed (SERI, 2018, p. 9). This is evident in the two court cases of Makwickana and South African Informal Traders Forum (SAITF) where informal traders took the municipalities to court for unfair treatment. Looking closely at the case of SAITF versus City of Johannesburg, where street vendors were brutally evicted by the city of Johannesburg in 2013 through a clean-up campaign known as 'Operation Clean Sweep', the Constitutional Court ruled in favour of informal traders and granted them the right to conduct informal activity in the city as is envisaged in the Constitution as their right to human dignity. The Constitutional Court argued that the evictions were unconstitutional and undermined the livelihood strategies of the urban poor who have a right to work on the streets, although under certain circumstances as stipulated by the regulations (Béni-Gbaffou, 2016). In the Makwickana case, between informal traders and the eThekweni Municipality, the High Court condemned the municipality for non-compliance with the Constitution to impound informal traders' stock. The case of Makwickana and SAITF demonstrates a failure of meaningful engagement between local government structures and informal traders, and this reflects a non-compliance approach by city authorities towards the Constitution. Since then, the judicial system has encouraged urban authorities to develop a comprehensive regulatory framework that is inclusive and accommodating to urban informality, especially street vendors.

Methods

A qualitative research design informed this study, which comprised 39 participants, who were purposefully selected based on their engagement in informal food sector activities for livelihood. Purposive and snowball sampling was used to identify key participants who satisfied the study's benchmark. This included informal traders operating on public spaces and streets who use various forms of infrastructure, such as energy fuels to prepare foods and meals sold and consumed by urban dwellers. The study also interviewed other informal traders who do not use energy fuels to cook but who are involved in

street food vending to get their views and engagement with their everyday realities on public spaces to secure livelihoods. The selected respondents covered a varied cross-section demographics including: (1) nationality, (2) age, (3) sex, (4) educational level, (5) size of the family household, (6) household income, (7) employment status and (8) livelihood activities. Of the 39 participants, 31 were female participants and 8 were male participants. All participants were above the age of 18 years, with most participants (15 out of 39) falling between the ages of 26–35 years. Of the 39 participants, most of them (22) were South Africans, while 17 were non-South Africans; mostly African migrants from Zimbabwe, Malawi and Mozambique. Most of the participants in this study were educated (34 out of 39) with at least a form of certification to show their level of knowledge and competency.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews with key informants were also conducted with the city of Johannesburg administrators from the following departments: (1) Economic Development, (2) Environment and Infrastructure Services and Health, (3) Development Planning and Policy Relations, (4) Johannesburg Metropolitan Police Department and (5) ward councillors. These interviews served to supplement the data gathered from the in-depth vendor and household case study interviews. These key informants were deliberately selected for interview based on their office bearing, which provided key information regarding infrastructure provision and access to the urban poor, particularly street vendors.

The study relied on in-depth interview sessions to gather evidence; this was done with all selected participants until data saturation was reached. The fieldwork was conducted between November 2022 and February 2023 in Alexandra (also known as Alex or Gomora) township located in region E of the city of Johannesburg (CoJ, 2022). This site was chosen as the case study to argue for township economy because of the acute levels of poverty, economic inequalities and socio-spatial polarisation that have persisted since the apartheid era. The spatial polarisation is arguably reflected in Alexandra's informal economy which is predominantly characterised by a high rate of informality and sprawl of illegal slums (Mbanjwa, 2018; Ngubeni et al., 2022). Alexandra is an iconic township that was born out of the apartheid-era urban planning. The township lies 12 km from the city centre of Johannesburg and approximately 5km from Sandton and separated by the M1 major highway (Banda, 2021). The township is only about eight square kilometres in geographical size, and at the time of its establishment, the plan was to accommodate a capacity of only 30 000 people; however, today Alexandra has an estimated population of between 750 000 and over a million people residing in this township (Mbanjwa, 2018; Nyapokoto, 2014).

For decades, Alexandra has been a major recipient township of migrations into the city of Johannesburg (Leonard & Dladla, 2020). The rapid urbanisation trends have and will continue to pressure infrastructure access and its provision to Alexandra. The township has witnessed the mushrooming of shacks such as Setswetla informal settlement, especially in

old Alexandra and East bank along Jukskei riverbank, resulting in overcrowding and severe impacts on the environmental ecosystem (Nyapokoto, 2014). Alexandra is reported to have a high unemployment rate estimated at approximately 60%, with most household incomes falling below the poverty data line (Mbanjwa, 2018). Majority of the urban poor in Alexandra, notably in old Alexandra, which is the poorest and most densely populated area, live in slums and backyard dwellings without water, sanitation and electricity (Cirota, 2017). These sprawling slums often damage and obstruct public infrastructure like sewer lines and road networks (Leonard & Dladla, 2020). Most of the participants' livelihoods in Alexandra are based on menial and precarious jobs, notably informal trading, which is the main economic activity for household food supply and income in this township.

Review findings

The objective of this section is to determine the socio-economic factors influencing the motivation of study participants to engage in informal food sector activities in Alexandra. This type of assessment is crucial to gain an understanding of how street vendors navigate and negotiate for their rights to work in the city and gain access to infrastructure services. This section elaborates on key findings of how the city of Johannesburg governs informality in the city. Results were gathered from key respondents (i.e. city administrators and city documents), and narratives from Alexandra's informal traders who were interviewed in are also important to consider. The study reflected on the city's Integrated Development Planning (IDP) and Spatial Development Framework (SDF) to assess the commitment, progress and shortfalls of the city's objectives in governing informality, notably street trading. Key respondents were asked to give their responses to themes that reflect the purpose of the study, especially in establishing how the city governs informal trade, especially in townships such as Alexandra, and the infrastructure services put in place to support township economy. This study also determined the level of responsiveness of local government structures, in particular city planners and administrators, towards the informal traders. The results show that local government regulatory framework, particularly city by-laws, constrains the livelihoods of the urban poor and the growth of informal enterprises within the township economy. Important themes developing from an analysis of the gathered data are discussed below.

Informal food sector in Alexandra is more survivalist than opportunistic

Street traders, particularly those involved in the food sector, represent a large segment of township economy in Alexandra. The study found that most informal traders in Alexandra are survivalist in nature and are characterised by: (1) mobility and no access to permeant infrastructure (shelter with water, sanitation and electricity connection), (2) weak or no legal representation, (3) not affiliated to any membership of a union or organisation to voice their concerns, (4) involved in selling diverse merchandise in small quantities at an

TABLE 1: Motivation of informal traders in Alex to engage in informal food sector ($n = 39$).

Motivation	Number of respondents
Survival	34
Opportunity because of easy entry for entrepreneurial activity	5

affordable price, and (5) concentrated spatially in public open spaces and busy streets (such as taxi ranks, train and bus stations, shopping centres, markets and along the streets, major roads and pavements). Table 1 shows motivations as to why informal traders in Alexandra engage in informal food sector.

The findings show that majority of street vendors involved in informal food sector in Alexandra (34 out of 39) are motivated to join this sector for survival means. Most of the respondents pointed to issues of high unemployment, poverty and recent lockdown regulations that negatively impacted South Africa's economy, leaving majority of the poor without jobs and incomes to earn a livelihood. Hence, the informal food sector has become a cushion to provide safety nets to the urban poor to raise incomes that can address issues of household food insecurity and poverty. For those informal traders who are migrants from neighbouring countries like Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Malawi, their involvement in this sector is attributed to push factors from their home countries, which require them to devise survival strategies upon their arrival in South Africa. Thus, migrant traders' involvement in informal food sector is driven by a need to survive and an opportunity for them to establish an enterprise that can grow and thrive. Results in this study show that street vending as a survival strategy provides the urban poor with alternative and immediate ways to generate income for livelihood, thus providing escape routes from exacerbating unemployment rates and poverty in Alexandra context.

Londeka Mkhize⁵ is a female street vendor aged 45 years, who lost her job as a domestic worker in 2020 during the COVID-19. She says:

'When my employer at the time told me that they can no longer keep me in the job, I thought they were joking. I couldn't believe this was happening; it was like I was dreaming. I had been working for my boss for the last 20 years and everything was okay until COVID hit. I didn't know what to do, or how I would survive to feed my children. This is the only job I knew and had done all my life. I felt like the world was coming to an end. But I had to do something to survive, and street vending was the only available alternative to make ends meet.'

Londeka Mkhize is one of millions of South African workers who lost their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic, and for the past 3 years, she had to find survival means to make a living. This had not been easy considering that the informal sector was not permitted to operate during the lockdown restrictions as it was not seen by the government as a sector

5. A stage name adopted to safeguard the identity of a street vendor interviewed in Duncan township during the in-depth interviews, Case Study No. 28, 16 December 2022, Setswetla Settlement, Alex, Johannesburg.

providing essential services. *Londeka* has six children who are entirely dependent on her; two of her eldest sons and daughters are doing their final year at the university, and the other two boys are in high school, while the last-born daughter is only 3 years old. *Londeka* has no formal education; she dropped out in Grade 7 because of financial struggles and had to assist her single mom raise her siblings. *Londeka* got married at a young age and sadly lost her husband to COVID-19 in 2020. Since then, she had to raise the kids alone through odd jobs and a side hustle as a street vendor selling cooked meals such as: (1) vetkoeks (*amagwinya*), (2) fried fish, (3) samosas, (4) scones, (5) muffins, (6) stiff pap, (7) rice, (8) chicken stew, (9) beef stew, (10) steak and (11) cow head's meat (*inyama yenhloko*) in the busy main street road of Alexandra Pan African Mall, just outside the taxi rank.

Lack of employment is one of the key factors motivating participants to engage in informal food sector activities. Evidence shows that there is a staggering unemployment rate in the city of Johannesburg, especially among the youth. This puts those with the average standard of education, especially those who have attained a tertiary qualification at the same employment level, with those without any formal education. One young female street vendor participant who was interviewed aired sentiments of frustration, anger and disappointment to the African National Congress (ANC) led government for failing young people by denying them equal opportunities to participate in the economy. The respondent further reiterated that she had worked so hard to get a degree in accounting but could not find a job; hence, she ended up selling cooked meals as a street vendor to support her son who was in Grade 1.

Although most of the respondents surveyed were self-employed, the study found that 19 out of 39 respondents relied on social grants (i.e. child support grant, disability grant, older person's grant, care dependency grant, war veterans' grant and unemployment insurance), which they used either as a start-up capital or as additional funds to stock their merchandise and to secure energy and other infrastructure services. Thirteen out of 39 respondents stated that they use their incomes generated from odd jobs (side hustle) such as domestic work, doing people's laundry, being a nanny or caregiver, general cleaning, etc. Five out of 39 respondents indicated that they were receiving pension funds from their savings, and 2 out of 39 respondents were receiving donations from family and friends to boost their incomes although this was not regularly done. The findings indicate that despite vendors and households generating incomes in the informal food sector activities, the income raised is not sufficient to cover their daily livelihood; hence, they need extra income to cover up those costs. The findings support studies by Nnaeme (2021, 2022) who found that the urban poor, notably in Soweto, use their social grants to engage in informal sector activities for livelihood earnings. These studies concluded that social grants were the key enabler for the urban poor to participate in local economy.

City officials' views on governing informal trading, provision and access to infrastructure services to informal traders in the city

The provision of infrastructure development and service delivery remains a huge challenge in the city of Johannesburg, especially in townships such as Alexandra. The city officials that were interviewed proclaimed that the city was doing its best to provide access to basic services such as electricity and water to both households and small business, but the challenge is that the city is constrained with a budget deficit to provide these services at a low rate or free of charge. In terms of section 18(1) and section 21(1) (a) of the city's by-laws, all infrastructure users including both residents and business must pay for the services rendered to them by the municipality, failure to do so a service may be cut or disconnected without a notice.

In an interview with one of the key respondents from the infrastructure portfolio recalls:

'We procure our electricity from ESKOM. As you know our power utility has constantly been hit with a series of loadshedding and the National Energy Regulator of South Africa (NERSA) recently approved ESKOM's proposal to increase tariff. As such, we cannot provide every poor household with free electricity. The challenge we face as the city is that urban residents especially in townships and informal settlements boycott services and illegally connect to the grid, and this cost us millions of rands as the city to recover. As the metro our budget is constrained, and we need to ensure that we also deliver without fail to those customers who are paying for our services. Yes, we do offer a portion of free basic services like water and electricity every month but only to the indigent poor households. Unfortunately, this does not cover street vendors as this requires them to have a shelter connected to the grid with a meter box and falling within the criteria of qualifying beneficiaries for free municipal services.' (Key study Interview, City Official 4, 19 January 2023, Zoom)

Another city official affirmed:

'We have built trading stalls for street vendors in the city centre which provides shelter connected to water and electricity. Unfortunately, vendors are required to pay for these services. Consequently, the trading stalls that we provide to informal traders are underutilised, vendors abandon them and prefer to operate in areas not permissible for trading which is a problem to us in managing the city. South Africa cannot afford to provide basic services at an affordable rate for every poor household including those engaged in informal trade. If you are running an enterprise, you need to be able to pay for the services used. With the ongoing energy crisis in the country, we are all affected. Hence, we cannot afford to lose more revenue to users who want to be free riders, as this affects our capacity to provide services in the city. Our citizens must learn to exercise responsibility and pay their bills and not entirely depend on the government to carry their burdens.' (Key study Interview, City Official 5, 20 January 2023, Zoom)

From these narratives, it is quite clear that the struggles of infrastructure provision and access in the city of Johannesburg are far from over. This is further intensified by the city's

approach towards governing informal trade. The city management's view is that everyone involved in informal economy as either a street vendor or small business can afford to pay for the municipal infrastructure services. The city is failing to differentiate between a small business that is established and a survivalist informal trader making ends meet. It is quite sad to learn that the city administrators believe that informal traders fall under small businesses that can afford to pay for basic infrastructure services. The city management is failing to consider the everyday realities that informal traders face to conduct precarious informal sector activities like street trading which does not generate adequate income to sustain livelihoods of informal traders and their families.

The findings show that street food vending is the main source of food provision for the urban poor especially those that commute to work every day. They stated that they leave their homes early in the morning and often have no time or means to prepare breakfast or lunch; hence, they rely on street food for their breakfast and lunch which was quite affordable compared to restaurants and supermarkets, which are often located far from the urban poor. The study also recorded that street food vending is the main source of livelihood for the urban poor in Alexandra. Results in this study subscribe to a study by Adekeye and Tabit (2021) on street food vending safety knowledge in Johannesburg. Their study argued that street vending serves as the main source of income for informal traders and provides affordable foods for the urban poor, hence serving as a socio-economic pillar for most urban residents with low incomes (Adekeye and Tabit, 2021).

Streets as a conjunction of diverse activities

Streets represent public open spaces and play a crucial role in enabling urban dwellers to connect from one location to another and navigate the urban environment (Carmona et al., 2003). Streets connect people to infrastructure access and provisions. When urban authorities plan and design public transport system that is people-centred, they ought to take an inclusive approach that accommodates all urban public space users such as a school kid on foot, a commuter on a bicycle, a vendor pushing a trolley, a commuter using public transport, an elderly person trying to cross the road, or a person living with a disability and using a wheelchair. The planning, design and provision of networked infrastructure such as electricity, water and sanitation are determined by the availability and arrangement of street networks; hence, poor street networks hinder the provisioning and access of networked infrastructure (UN-Habitat, 2013, p. viii cited in Harber et al., 2018).

Most streets in Alexandra were built during the apartheid era and were strictly designed based on racial and spatial segregation to enable, control and prohibit the movement of people. Streets are also breeding areas for informal economic activities. Evidence in this study recoded that most street food vending were more concentrated along the streets, pavements, roadside and big retail shop entrances where

there were more traffic, commuters, pedestrians. Vendors and walkers were visible in every busy street of Alexandra, selling miscellaneous merchandise. The findings show that streets in Alexandra are considered an asset street traders use to conduct informal sector business. Informal traders often use sidewalks, especially those that are always vibrant with high volumes of people, as marketplaces to target their customers. Many streets in Alexandra are still not designed to accommodate economic activities such as street trade which has resulted in traders encroaching on street pavements.

Respondents also indicated that city authorities and some of the commuters' view street trade as a nuisance activity that invades public open space and denies other public space users' equal opportunity to enjoy the benefits of public space and infrastructure. This study observed that in some areas, sidewalks that were purposefully designed for pedestrian walk have now been infiltrated with street trade, which has become an obstruction to the free movement of other public users who claim they are now denied full access and utilisation of pavements and streets. This finding attests a study by Abed (2010) who argued that contestations around street trade are centred on public infrastructure and space being converted into a place of business, hence robbing urban public spaces of their intended purposes.

As much informal street activity is concentrated along the busy streets, pavements and along major routes within the public transport nodes, management of such activities becomes a challenge, especially without proper zoning system and urban design and planning. The study also observed that some streets such as Florence Street, which is one of the busiest streets in Alexandra, are overcrowded leading to contestation and shortage of public spaces for recreational or economic activities.

Lack of trading space is among the major challenges that traders in the informal food sector both male and female are faced with. This study recorded that trading space is competitive in the marketplaces, around busy shopping centres, and that the city authorities only allocate a trading space to traders who have applied for a trading permit and have been approved through compliance checks. The findings of this study show that most informal traders are unregistered and operate without a trading permit in unauthorised public spaces. Street traders often move from one spot to another to avoid being harassed by city officials.

One female vendor selling cooked hot meals stated:

'Business is very slow here in the township, hence I wanted to trade in the city centre, but it was such a struggle for me to get a space to sell my merchandise because I am required to first apply for a permit. I wanted a space close to the taxi rank because it is a busy place with a lot of customers. I tried trading in the city centre but the competition for space and having to run from metro police was one thing I couldn't cope up with. As a woman it was too risky for me to do business in the city hence, I decided to move back to the township where trading space is not that competitive as it is in the city, but still, we require a permit even

to trade here in the township. Despite that, I am managing although business is slow here.' (Case Study No. 17, December 04, 2022, Extension 7, Alexandra)

The above comment from these women traders underscores the importance of space and a location to economic activities. The findings of this study confirm those of Mwau et al. (2020) on planning challenges facing women food traders in Kangemi, Nairobi, and the struggle for women traders, in the informal sector, to secure space to conduct trade. The inadequacy and competition of trading space in many South African cities can be attributed to poor urban planning and management of informality.

Findings also show that vendors prefer to operate in open public spaces where there is a large concentration of people (i.e. mostly commuters in taxi ranks, bus and train stations), rather than to utilise municipal trading sites, which have been reported to be far away from vendor customers. These findings attest to a study by Budlender et al. (2004), who argued that restricting vendors to a specific site of location limits vendor flexibility to operate and shows that the nature of street trade and the needs of street traders are not fully integrated into urban spatial planning. Findings in this study further show that most vendors are not static and often operate at busy sites. The study found that municipal allocated trading spaces are not favourable to vendors and are always situated in areas with low demand for trade; hence, traders abandon these sites in pursuit of the site of operation of their own choice at that specific time.

Contestations of a right to the city and public space: Regulating informal trade in the city of Johannesburg

The observation made in this study is that there are contestations resulting to competing interests over the use of streets in Alexandra.

These competing interest include:

- city authorities focused on cleaning the streets to attract tourism,
- the metro police concerned with clearing any obstruction to traffic including street trade that encroach street and road networks to improve traffic flow,
- the business sector concerns about the general conditions of public spaces and street infrastructure to create a conducive business environment that attracts investment,
- commuters and pedestrians concerns about their rights to free movement, access and use sidewalks and other public spaces without obstruction,
- street traders seek to use street pavements and public spaces for conducting their business.

All these stakeholders with different competing interests claim their rights in the city, especially in the use of public infrastructure.

This study's findings demonstrate that the city of Johannesburg has responded to street trader encroachment

and stakeholder contestation on public space utilisation by enacting repressive by-laws that regulate and manage public spaces including streets to deny the use of these public spaces for any economic activity. They clamp down unregistered traders, restrict traders from operating from some areas, evict traders and relocate them to designated areas of trade, impound trader goods and fine them as mechanisms to regulate and eradicate street trade. This study asserts that the approach taken by the city authorities denies the urban poor who use the street as an economic resource and asset for livelihood earning. This study further proclaims that restricting vendors to a specific site of location limits vendor flexibility to operate and shows that the nature of street trade is not fully understood by those in authority. Evidence in this study shows that most street vendors are not static, and often operate in busy sites.

This study argues that the presence and continuous contestation and negotiations of space by street vendors in Alexandra is not simply a form of survival that needs to be regulated by a repressive regulatory framework but rather it represents the everyday realities of the poor urban populations that are deeply affected by the structural historical injustices of socio-economic spatial inequalities perpetuated by rigid policies that lack social inclusion and often promote urban gentrification that benefits a few elites.

More often street traders find themselves: (1) exposed to legal exclusion, (2) victimisation and (3) access to space utilisation being commoditised, hence leaving them exposed to vulnerability of insecurities. For instance, the city blames street vendors for generating rubbish and garbage that pollutes streets and public spaces. The claim made by the city is that street vendors do not utilise the municipal bins that are provided in public spaces for public use by the public. Instead, street traders are accused of vandalising and stealing municipal infrastructure, thus denying other public users access to hygiene. The city authorities claim that street vendors' encroachment in public places portrays a bad image about the city, which is not good for tourism and business investments, while street vendors deny this claim that they pollute the streets. Instead, vendors who were surveyed in this study argue that they voluntarily clean the streets and public spaces in which they conduct their enterprises. Vendors also claim that the city has neglected most of the streets in Alexandra, especially ones that have a high rate of informal trade by not providing bins or collecting waste. Thus, vendors take turns ensuring they clean the streets, especially spaces that they occupy for trade.

Results in Table 2 indicates that 6 out of 39 of the surveyed informal food traders were authorised by the city to operate as traders in public spaces, while the majority (33 out of 39) were operating without a permit that grants them permission to trade in the city's public spaces. Of those operating without a trading permit, 12 out of 39 traders indicated that they had attempted to apply before for the permits but gave up as the process was cumbersome and costly, while 21 out of 39 traders stated that they had never applied before.

TABLE 2: Street vendors with and without a trading permit or permits ($n = 39$).

Vendors	Have the permit	Applied for the permit but have not received it to date	Never applied for the permit and operate without it
Street vendor and HBE	6	12	21

HBE, home-based enterprise.

Evidence in this study shows that the city of Johannesburg's regulations on street traders are largely punitive and envisage compliance in ways that are out of alignment with the everyday realities of urban life. For instance, this study recorded that Section 13 of the newly adopted Informal Trading Policy of the city of Johannesburg gives the right to law enforcement agencies such as the Johannesburg Metropolitan Police Department (JMPD) to impound goods and remove those that are violating the law and not in compliance with this policy (CoJ, 2022b).

Street vendors without trading permits that were surveyed indicated that they had to dodge city officials on a daily basis and in the process, they often lose their merchandise and equipment. The JMPD was criticised by informal traders for being so corrupt, vile and harsh towards street vendors as they often confiscated their goods and demanded bribes. City by-laws give the right to law enforcement agencies such as the JMPD and South African Service Police (SAPS) to impound goods and remove those that are violating the law and not in compliance with this policy.

This study recorded that the functions of managing street trade in the city of Johannesburg, notably in Alexandra, have been left in the hands of the JMPD. The city's policing agency that enforces the city's Bylaws and manages street trading on a day-to-day basis. Hence, the study asserts that the central role of the municipal or city police in controlling informal sector activities such as street trading in the city gives them absolute powers to abuse informal traders through a series of violent and corrupt measures such as harassment, confiscation of trader's goods, extortion and bribes and – this is also reported to be dominant in other major cities in the Global South (Béni-Gbaffou, 2017).

It is quite shocking that the core function of managing informal trading within cities in post-apartheid South Africa has shifted from municipalities' sole mandate to law enforcement agencies and business development units as reflected in the city of Johannesburg. Informal food traders surveyed indicated that the state institutions only prioritise the issue of informal trade only in theory when mobilising support for political campaigns, or when requiring media attention to garner public approval ratings. The findings made in this study subscribe to a study by Béni-Gbaffou (2017) who proclaims that to date informal trading across South African major cities has not been prioritised as a key strategic issue that requires urgent intervention from the municipal or city leadership.

Evidence from the ground demonstrates that the permit application is tedious and often associated with delays, inconsistency and lack of transparency. Vendors indicated

that they experienced more difficulties during the first lockdown when the COVID-19 regulations were implemented, as they were required to apply for a permit from their designated municipality to justify that they were offering an essential service. Vendors were frustrated and complained that the application process was longer and vague with some reporting that there was favouritism, bribery and extortion in terms of issuing out of permits. The study recorded that during the first COVID-19 lockdown regulations, informal traders in Alexandria were required to justify that they were offering an essential service in order to qualify for a trading permit from their local municipality. For this reason, many of them were denied the right to trade which affected their livelihood. These findings confirm a study conducted by Rwafa-Ponela et al. (2022) and Fihlani (2022), who reported similar findings in their studies on informal trading permit processing in the city of Johannesburg. Skinner (2006) also reported in her study that reflects difficulties experienced by vendors selling cooked street foods who need to apply first for a license to trade, secondly for a site permit and thirdly for a certificate of acceptability from the City Health in terms of the *Health Act 61* of 2003.

One female street vendor selling cooked meals in Florence Street in Alexandria who was interviewed in this study stated:

'During the lockdown we were not permitted to sell cooked foods because of the anticipated high risk of COVID transmission. We were forced to apply for permits that allowed us to trade on certain products. This really affected me because I have never traded other non-cooked products except food. To survive I had to do something and sell vegetables but getting a permit from the city was very difficult. We waited for more than a year to get those permits and I ended up giving up. Most of us were forced to sell without permits because we couldn't wait any longer. Our kids were starting. There was a lot of corruption in the permit approval, others had to bribe to get them.' (Case Study 28, 13 December 2022, Florence Street, Alexandria)

Another young male street vendor selling grilled kidneys and chicken gizzards indicated:

'I have a permit to operate as a street vendor and I use charcoal to cook my products however, we are not allowed by the municipality to use wood fire which is a constrain in this business because some customers prefer gizzards grilled on fire as they say they taste even better. Relying on charcoal alone is much expensive because a small 4kg bag of coal cost about R50.00 and I sell my gizzards for R5.00. So can you imagine how little is the profit I make from this business because of energy cost. We normally use umbrella to provide shed and this is a challenge when its windy and raining as these ruins our products.' (Case Study 29, 13 December 2022, 8th street, Alexandria)

This sentiment shows street vendor's frustration and hopelessness in the city's governance and lack of prioritisation to the needs of the poor. The findings made in this study concede with a study by Rwafa-Ponela et al. (2022) who declared that the application process of street vendor permits was longer and not clear with dubious cases of some vendors claiming that there was favouritism from some municipal

administrators in terms of issuing out of these permits. To further support this claim, Adama (2020) and Devlin (2015) assert that street vendors often struggle to access trading permits and other title documents that authorise them to operate in this city. This study therefore argues that such regulatory constraints that often view street trade as illegal and informal intrude and deny them of their right to livelihood in the city.

This study has argued that street vending as part of the informal food sector plays a crucial livelihood strategy for low-income households in Alexandria to address their food insecurities and income gaps. Despite such an imperative role that this sector plays, this study suggests that existing urban planning designs and regulations that govern informal trade in the city of Johannesburg are often too bureaucratic and unaccommodating to the peculiarities and nature of street trade.

Key findings

This study recorded that there is poor spatial planning in the city, especially in the provisioning of infrastructure access to peripheral areas such as townships. Most spatial development planning in the city of Johannesburg is still based on the legacy of apartheid. The current city-wide planning is failing to change the dynamics of spatial inequality experienced in townships like Alexandria. This study argues that to date there is no development of corridors to integrate the township of Alexandria into the wider urban fabric with adequate housing, energy, road infrastructure, water and sanitation. Public transport remains a critical mode of transport for the residents of Alexandria, connecting the city and this township; however, the challenge in relation to this infrastructure is the cost, efficiency, safety and accessibility.

One of the key strategic visions and outcomes of the city of Johannesburg in its Integrated Development Strategies (IDP) and SDF is to build 'A vibrant, safe, and resilient city where local government delivers a quality life for every resident' (City of Johannesburg [CoJ], 2022a:10). The city's vision is presided by the seven mayoral priorities, which are the key structural pillars that distinguish this city in its governance system. These pillars include building: (1) a city that gets the basics right, (2) a safe and secure city, (3) a caring city, (4) a business-friendly city, (5) an inclusive city, (6) a well-run city and (7) a smart city.

In its IDP, the city of Johannesburg strives to aggressively implement the proposed intervention strategies of enterprise development and growth, especially in empowering the informal sector enterprises through short-term commitments including issuing informal trading permits and getting the city council to approve the informal trading policy drafted in 2019. The city's strategic interventions under this priority 1 to 'get the basics right', the city has allocated a budget of R20 billion investment on infrastructure maintenance such as fixing, replacing, and upgrading roads, bridges, water pipes, wastewater plants and power grid across the city. However,

findings made in this study show that infrastructure in Alexandra is old and decaying with sewage bursts and water pipes, potholes on streets and major roads, etc.

On strategic intervention under priority 2, which is to create 'a safe and secure city', the city of Johannesburg, in its IDP, declares that it's committed to reduce anarchy such as encroachment on public spaces and land invasion through improved by-laws and reinforcing law enforcement units that regularly monitor and ensure every resident of the city adheres to city by-laws and prosecuting those who violate the city regulations. Under this strategic intervention of building 'a safe and secure city', this study recorded that the city's approach to informal trading is restrictive and suppressive in its nature which is enforced through the city by-laws. For this reason, informal traders that were surveyed in this study feel unfairly treated and their rights underestimated by the city authorities.

In demonstrating that Johannesburg is 'A caring city', a commitment is made to ensure the youth unemployment crisis in the city is addressed through a youth investment programme including skills development, learnerships and internships. The city acknowledges that to create jobs particularly for youth, there is need for the revitalisation of the township economy which can be done through the enhancement of the small business sector (small, micro and medium enterprises [SMMEs]) development programmes, which the city has declared as its primary mandate. This is done through the creation of entrepreneurship hubs for information dissemination to support and encourage local enterprises. This study observed that the city keeps emphasising on SMMEs development but is silent about the detailed plan on how the city intends to assist informal traders, notably street traders in townships, other than the formalisation process of registration and permit application. This study claims that SMMEs do not give a clear representation of informal trader especially street vendors who operate without trading permit in authorized public spaces.

As 'A caring city', the city of Johannesburg talks of addressing the struggles faced by vulnerable and poor residents across the city through food security programmes that endeavour to end hunger and child malnutrition by partnering with the private sector and non-profit organisations (NPOs). Based on the findings of this study, many of the urban poor residents in Alexandra rely on informal sector for food and livelihood earnings, which therefore makes this sector important in addressing household food security. However, under the city's strategic priority 3, there is no mentioning of the informal sector being prioritised, capacitated or partnered with to address the food security issue.

Under strategic priority 4 of building 'A business-friendly city', the city is committed to stimulate economic growth, which will create jobs and address the exacerbating unemployment in the city. To do this, it aims to encourage entrepreneurship, support and empower local businesses through funding and skill transfer. As part of revitalising township economy in Alexandra and strengthening the Joburg economy, the city plans to inject

R34 million to launch the Alexandra Automotive Industrial Hub to accommodate and capacitate SMMEs that will drive this initiative to create sustainable jobs, especially for the youth, considering that the city has over 54% youth unemployment. This project was to kickstart 2022 but has not been rolled out; moreover, the residents of Alexandra that were interviewed have no clue about this project as they were not consulted.

Results from this study show that there are gaps in the developmental approach adopted by the city to manage street trading. The study found that informal traders in Alexandra were not properly consulted or engaged effectively as to what their enterprise needs including infrastructure needs were and how they would want to be integrated in township economy and urban spatial planning. The city by-laws are punitive and lacked the voice of the informal sector. From the standpoint of this study, it is evident that the city's primary focus is on building a modern world-class African city that is clean, safe, well organised and manageable. This is done by overlooking the socioeconomic needs of the urban poor and vulnerable groups that make their living in precarious and informal jobs within the informal economy. As such, the city is struggling to balance the socio-economic needs of the urban users with that of achieving a world-class city.

The findings of this study subscribe to a study by Zulu (2018) on managing street trading in the inner city of Johannesburg. In her study, Zulu (2018, p.69) argued that the '[c]ity is battling to balance the desire to attain world-class African city status and the socioeconomic needs of the poor and vulnerable. Unfortunately, a trade-off exists between the socioeconomic needs of the poor and vulnerable, and the interests of investors and private business'.

Strengths and limitations

The involvement of participants in this study was very important, as this study provided valuable information not only for the community of Alexandra, but local government and other stakeholders involved on issues of local economic development. Many times, community members raise concerns that their voice is often ignored and are not given a platform to participate on critical matters that concern them. Hence, this study provided a platform for vendor participants to share their concerns, experiences and struggles of their daily lives, especially on how they navigate and contest for public spaces and their right to trade in the city. Although this study is purely for academic purposes, the findings were shared with the city of Johannesburg with the hope that it will give the city some sense of insight on the views of street vendors on the ground in Alexandra and perhaps help them rethink on how they approach informality governance, especially in Alexandra township. The results of this study only generalised theoretical statements that are confined to Alexandra and not to the wider generality of the urban township population in Johannesburg or South Africa. As such, the conceptual generalisations of this case study become crucial to scientific development.

Conclusion and recommendations

This study has argued that although significant progress has been made by the city of Johannesburg in its inclusive approach as a caring city to accommodate street trade in its by-laws on informal trading that acknowledges the constitutional right and freedom to engage in informal sector activities, especially with the establishment of the newly established Informal Trading Policy of 2022, the study contends that the problem is in the implementation of these policy instruments, which are more technical and not submitted to public engagement and review, and as such never materialise in practice or fail to address the intended purpose whenever implemented. It can be argued that it is quite evident from this study that most city instruments to manage informal traders were inherited from early post-1994 and rooted in the government's policy vision to have all street traders moved into designated markets. To date, most of these policy instruments have not been adjusted to cater for the needs of informal traders.

The study concludes that urban governance of informality in the city of Johannesburg has failed to recognise the legitimacy of informal ways of life practiced by the urban poor in Alexandra particularly those who are engaged in informal economy for earning a living. The researcher argues that urban informality should not be seen as a resistance approach to conform to city and municipal regulations but as one of livelihoods. The urban poor who are engaged in informal economic activities are often vulnerable to exclusion and abuse to city and municipal approach towards planning and management of urban space.

The study suggests that there is still more that needs to be done to integrate informal trade properly and fully within the city's spatial development planning. Based on the findings made the city still overlooks the crucial economic role of street traders including the importance of public space, notably streets and pavements, that serve as the interface for urban poor who engage in informal sector activities as street trader's livelihood earnings.

Spatial inclusion on land management and planning must be prioritised to accommodate street traders in the city. City authorities have a mandate to ensure that every stakeholder's rights are considered and enshrined in the design and provisioning of public infrastructure such as streets and other public spaces. Hence, this study argues that urban authorities should not use regulations to deny people's rights to actively engage in economic activities that earn them livelihoods but should act as administrators that they ought to be to effectively manage informality activities and allocate street traders the right space to operate and provide access to infrastructure services to urban informality.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Author's contributions

B.M. is the sole author of this article.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for this research study was also sought and granted from the Faculty of Science at the University of Cape Town. Prior to the commencement of the in-depth interviews with vendor participants, a written consent form was presented, and participants were notified of the study objective and requested to take part in the research project. This study also adopted an oral consent for vendors, because some of these participants were affected by issues of literacy, politics and time constraints; hence, requesting them to sign a written consent was a tedious and quite intimidating process, especially on issues that required their signatures and reading lengthy work. The consent form was presented in the form of a dialogue between the researcher and the participant or participants.

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Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author, B.M.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are that of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of any affiliated agency of the author.

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