

*Full Length Research Paper*

# The geography of informal sector operations (ISOs): A perspective of urban Zimbabwe

Innocent Chirisa

Department of Rural and Urban Planning, University of Zimbabwe, PO Box MP167, Mt Pleasant, Harare, Zimbabwe.  
E-mail: [ichirisa@mdpafrika.org.zw](mailto:ichirisa@mdpafrika.org.zw).

Accepted 4 March, 2009

**Informal sector operations in the urban sphere of Zimbabwe, like in any other developing countries, continue to rise astronomically. The chief reason for the growth of this sector is nothing but the plummeting economy explained in terms high urban unemployment rates and consequential urban poverty. By way of a qualitative methodology, this paper gives a geographical description and explication of the ISO phenomena in the country. It is noted that geography of this emerging quintessential sector is analyzable in both spatial and non-spatial variables and parameters including location, operator composition, organisation and support engaged, returns realisable, services offered and value added. Different urban centre - whether urban proper or rural-based - shows different patterns of distribution of ISOs. Understanding the dynamics of ISO patterning and growth is critical for conceptual development, theorisation and policy direction. This is the thrust of this short paper.**

**Key words:** Poverty, institutionalization, growth, extra-legal, micro-entrepreneurialism, reforms.

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The informal sector in Zimbabwe is characterized by a diverse range of small-scale and micro-activities, usually with no corresponding institutions such as banks and with none of opportunities for growth and accumulation, which typify formal small-scale enterprises (Kolstee et al., 1994; Matsebula, 1996). Paradza (1999) defines Informal Sector Operations (ISOs) as all enterprises not registered under the Companies Act or the Co-operatives' Act and those which are not assessed for taxation by central government. Legally speaking, the implication is that no tax payments are made to the governing authorities. Specifically, the sector is marked by easy entry of operators, reliance on indigenous resources, family ownership of enterprises, labour-intensive and adapted technology, skills required outside the formal school system, smallness of operations (micro-entrepreneurialism), and, unregulated and competitive markets (Bromley, 1979; Matsebula, 1996). UNCHS (1998) has observed a close link between human settlements and the informal sector, advocating for a careful merger between the two. This means that human habitats should be so designed to accommodate micro-to small-scale business operations, dealing with convenient items and goods – fruits, vegetables, repairs and mainte-

nance, to mention but a few.

In Zimbabwe, the growth of the informal sector is synonymous with the adoption and implementation of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) from 1990 to 1995 (Government of Zimbabwe, 1991a). Before this period, the formal sector was booming immensely such that the informal sector had very little role to play, especially in the urban centres. Yet, it must be admitted that there were many traces of it. For example, the famous Siyaso Magaba home Industry was opened as far back as the 1950s as a way of promoting self-help employment for those excess African populations who could not be absorbed in the formal system. At the country's independence in 1980, the home such home industries had increased in number, and located within African suburban areas, for instance, Gazaland in Highfield in Harare. It must also be underscored that the government policy to promote the idea of growth points in the countryside was a move towards encouraging micro-entrepreneurialism. It was hoped that new entrepreneurs would be established at the same time taking the established small entrepreneurs to greater heights of investment. How three decades after the initiative have lapsed and a number of these centres have been dete-

**Table 1.** Estimates of Zimbabwe's employment rate, 2003-2008.

Year	Unemployment rate
2003	70.00 %
2004	70.00 %
2005	70.00 %
2006	80.00 %
2007	80.00 %
2008	80.00 %

Source:  
[http://www.indexmundi.com/zimbabwe/unemployment\\_rate.html](http://www.indexmundi.com/zimbabwe/unemployment_rate.html).

riorating.

It is also worthy stressing that the advent of independence in the country saw some kind of rural bias, at the expense of the urban arena, with regard to socio-economic development (Paradza, 1999; Wekwete, 1987; Cormack, 1983). The main argument advanced in support of this rural approach to development was that rural areas (particularly communal lands) had, for a long time, suffered been neglected by the white racist regimes. This was one of reasons for the engagement of an armed struggle (1966 to 1979). At independence in 1980, there was a contra-directional flow of the two forces in development – people and resources. While the majority migrated to urban in the hope of getting employment and better welfare fortunes, the public investment thrust was towards the resources (Wekwete, 1987; Paradza, 1999). Evidence shows that a lot of these early independence rural investments, especially in terms of public infrastructure – schools, clinics, dams - have turned into white elephants. It is possible to find now schools without [many] pupils and dams where the intended irrigation projects are at a very negligible scale.

The rural-urban drift, on the other hand, saw an oversaturation of the formal employment sector (Comarck, 1983; Wekwete, 1987). The Zimbabwean economy then had a well-ticking large-scale manufacturing and commercial industries base. Up until the early eighties, there were very few small to medium size enterprises and were insignificant in terms of their contributions to the country's economy.

By the end of the first decade of independence, however, the country was trading on a precarious road of recession. This saw the rationale for adopting the economic reform programme, which was in the form of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). The majority of African countries had treaded the same path beginning from the 1970s through to the 1980s – decision which left most of them in the crisis of indebtedness and sufferings of the citizens. In Zimbabwe, the SAP version, the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP),

was operationalised from 1990 to 1995. It dictated for the downsizing of economic structures [firms, industries and public institutions] resulting in retrenchments, an uncompromising situation surfaced where thousands commissioned into unemployment by a search for a living and had no option but to be self-employed (Kamete, 2002; Chirisa, 2004; 2007). Urban poverty became a phenomenal reality as evidenced by the mushrooming of the informal sector operations in the country's urban sphere (Tevera and Chikanda, 2000; Tevera and Chimhowu, 2000; UMP, 2000). Needless to stress is the fact that ESAP brought with it many hardships on urban households. Chirisa (2004) has emphasized that women were the hardest hit (Shabbir, 1995); they form the biggest constituency of the sector. Furthermore, children also fall victim and find refuge in the streets (UMP, 2000). Unemployment has remained a big challenge to the economy of Zimbabwe (Table 1).

Africa, in general is affected by urban informalisation and this implies loss of revenue to the local authorities as most of the operations thrive on free-ridership (Chirisa, 2007). This negatively affects service delivery and consequently, the urban physiognomy. In characterising the African informal sector, Chirisa in (2008: 368) asserts:

Failure to provide jobs to those who are willing and able to work has been the incubatory determinant of the informalisation of Africa's cities. As such, the pre-dominant activity in the africity-scape has been the black economy, better known as the informal sector. The principal problem with this sector is that the proceeds from it are never fully accounted for. They escape official records. This also means that the economy runs with a multiplicity of leakages of possible revenue. Those engaged in the black economy (some-times referred to as the gray sector) practice a lot of free ridership. This bad practice implies that users of services (e.g. infrastructure) continue to enjoy the fruits of gardens they never cultivated. Such practices are compounded by other practices like vandalism of public utilities. In African urban centres, just like the rural areas, there is rampancy of the tragedy of the commons.

This is true of most developing nations. Zimbabwe's urban centres, from the least to the greatest experience most of these challenges though, it may be argued, with differences in scale and degree.

#### SCOPE, METHODOLOGY AND AIM OF THE PAPER

Geography generally refers to the study of the environment and how humankind taps on that environment to make, among other things, livelihoods, habitation, extractions, exploitations and distributions of inputs and outputs in space (Small and Witherick, 1986). Simply put, it is the study of people and their environment. The subject is broadly divided into physical geography (dealing with elements of climate, water, flora and fauna, rocks and soils) and human geography (focussing on the social aspects in space including human numbers, behaviour and productive activities and

outcomes and impacts). Geography concerns spatial distributions and relationships.

Distributions refers to how populations, activities and phenomena are 'dotted' around space such that some areas enjoy huge concentrations (surpluses) while others are marked by dispersal and scantiness (deficits, shortages). Spatial relationships imply that places in a given geographical space are infused together by some forces (visible or invisible) which ensure that there is interaction (Light, 2004; Small and Witherick, 1986). Transport (as epitomised in three aspects of the 'way', 'rolling stock' and 'terminal') makes spatial interaction a liveable reality. So is the advancement of information technologies -specifically telegraphy, cellular phones, video-conferencing, internet, worldwide web, internet, etc (Light, 2004; Small and Witherick, 1986). Yet, with respect to the informal sector, the role of advance information and communication technology remains controversial.

Geography as a subject of study deals with a diverse range of topics and subjects such that it can be grouped as: population geography, settlement geography, political geography, agricultural geography, mining geography, industrial geography, geography of trade and commerce, transport geography, geography of tourism, etc. This paper is focused mainly to the distribution of informal activities as reflected by the situation in Zimbabwe's urban centres. It is assumed that:

- a. For every formal activity there is a direct informal opposite, basing on the informal-formal sector dichotomy philosophy.
- b. Smaller urban centres have a limited number of informal sector activities relative to the bigger centres.

The thrust of the paper is to show spatial distribution of informal sector activities in both the urban and rural centres of Zimbabwe hence try and weave out a taxonomy of these activities with policy implications in view, however, greater attention will be given to urban centres given the predominance of ISOs. Urban areas as regional centres require regular scholarly scrutiny so that engagement in certain activities does not bring with it abhorrent outcomes which come about because they were never thought of. The paper is a direct outcome of the qualitative study of the growing phenomenon of informalisation in urban centres. These are aspects which have been developed in literature, observed and previously documented by the author (Chirisa, 2003; 2004, 2007, 2008). The informal sector *problematique* will continue to haunt most developing countries as long the urban poverty issue is not adequately addressed both in the policy and practice spheres (Paradza, 1999). It must be underscored that not all inequalities in terms of the geography of ISOs in Zimbabwe have been contributed by the government due to skewed development of infrastructure growth. Others have been created by the natural geographical features availability with those 'favoured' areas like Victoria Falls, Nyanga, Chipinge, Gokwe and Hwange enjoying better infrastructure investment; those lacking in the natural advantages suffering marginalization. Such spatial inequalities have had some share in the explanation for the location and propensity of ISOs to thrive or fall.

### Statement on the funding of the study

This study was carried out largely as part of the author's academic assessment that is, dissertation projects for both undergraduate and graduate studies. Apart from the stipend to the tune of about US\$200 equivalent given to him, the bulk of the work was done through do-nations from friends and relatives as well as own savings. With adequate funding, the study could have gained a lot of ground in terms of analysis of observations and inter-

views of informal operators at even remote at marginalised centres.

### Informal sector operations taxonomisation in urban Zimbabwe

Reference for this section will be made to Table 3, extracted from Chirisa (2004). The author developed some illustrative criteria to characterise the nature of urban informal sector operations with reference to Harare. It has been observed that the same criteria can be applied to the other centres of the country, albeit with modifications. For instance, Paradza (1999) identified five types of ISOs, based on location, namely covered markets (provided by local authorities), residences (carried out in the home), shop pavements, roadside operators, and private sector premises. The Ministry of Local Government, Rural and Urban Development, in its 1997 study coined a classification of ISOs, again based on services offered at certain locations and these are motor vehicle trade, wrought iron/metalwork, repairs, construction material production, other manufacturing, retail, carpentry and service (Paradza, 1999).

### Criteria and Forms of informal sector operations

The paper applies criteria for classifying operations of informal sector in the urban sphere. These include definition by spatial location, support engaged, composition of operators, returns realised, services offered and value-added. Under each type there are different characteristic forms which are explained and discussed.

### According to spatial location

In this criterion three basic forms of Informal Sector Operations are identified: the neighbourhood-based, those that take place in industrial sites or their vicinity and those that take place in the central business district (CBD). The neighbourhood-based operations take place near the home. It is somewhat residence-tied. Examples include women who sell vegetables at the roadsides in different residential areas of urban centres. In the pre-Economic Reform era in Zimbabwe, there were market stalls designed by local authorities in each urban centre. Operations are done by way of licence from the local authority.

The post-Economic Reform period saw many operators leaving the designated market stall opting for the roadside ones. The sector became so flooded that, before 2005, it was so highly unmanageable that 'regularisation' seemed the only option available. The majority of those who joined the informal sector spelt out that: It is better to sell than to steal. Street vending became rife in every urban centre (Tibaijuka, 2005). One can imagine the kind of neighbourhoods that resulted. At almost

**Table 3.** Classification of urban informal sector activities.

Criterion measure of business	Form	Characteristics	Comment
1. By spatial location	a) Neighbourhood- based	Majority of operators are in the vicinity of their homes	Constant interruption from the home. Earnings are mainly to supplement the conventional wages and salaries by a member of the family
	b) Close to or in conventional industrial sites	Operators mainly walk from their homes. They may travel by motorised transport from distant suburbs. The market of commodities is the employees in industrial firms.	Goods are, mainly, of the form of convenient goods and largely food items. Activity is drawn by (as opposed to drawing from) the clientele. Complimentarily is the by-word.
	c) In the CBD	Items are diverse and the operators take advantage of the great 'mix' of the threshold	Those with licences and operated from council designated zones are stable in their operations. Institutions give certainty to activities.
2 By the mode of support	a) Family-based	The predominant source of capital is family savings. In some instances it takes the form of remittances. The husband and children have the leverage of giving both material (e.g. providing labour) and / or immaterial support (e.g. inspirational).	Family members mainly support because they see that the business makes a difference to the household.
	b) Institutional	Entities get support in the form of funding.	Those that meet the requirements are taken aboard. (like those who can guarantee the loans).
	c) Organisational	Support is normally through holding a membership card. Support ranges from training to marketing	Service (administration) fees and subscriptions matter. Tends to create elitist or aristocratic 'regimes' with time. The hoi polloi suffer exclusion
	d) Social alliances	Proprietors attend to the clients in the absence of the other when they are in the same site.	This is prevalent where individual stands or stalls are small and they are just some few metres apart (typical of those in the clothing flea markets and food 'outlets'. The notion of relationships as an asset holds (social capital).
3 By composition of operators	a) Sole proprietors	The majority of these lack in the support by institutions and are unaware of means to expand their businesses	Operators go merry-go-round for protracted periods and feed from hand to mouth. Savings become an area that needs revisiting. However, some of those in the productive sector seem to do exceedingly well especially owing to their artistry.
	b) Employing others	As the business expands, owner-operators engage people they reward with earnings. Investors also have jobs elsewhere (e.g.) in the formal sector. They therefore are most of the times absent from the locale of the business,	This is typical of expanding businesses.
	c) Co-operative	This is normally where the players share in the skills contributing to one or related products e.g. weaving and crocheting co-operatives in Avondale.	Specialisation and division of labour within the co-operative group are the fundamental keys.

every residential stand there was some kind of business in operation – a barbershop, a tuck-shop, a vegetable vending stall, a small garden, a 'pri-

vate' school, a hair saloon, an electrical repair shop, to mention but a few. Needless to say were innumerable unsanctioned connections from the

electricity grid or water grid. Backyard out-buildings or extensions were also built to boost incomes of home owners (Tevera and Chikanda

Table 3. Contd.

4. By nature of net profit and returns	a) Low	Below \$500,000 a month net income	Typical of neighbourhood businesses which largely deal in least rewarding items like tomatoes, fruits, repackaged sugar, tea, etc.
	b) Medium	\$500,000 - \$999,999 net income per month	Typical of second hand clothing items.
	c) High	\$1000,000 and above net income per month	Items may be new (art and crafts, posh goods in flea markets e.g. accessories and entertainment bits) or second hand (from auctions or outgoing whites.).
5. By nature of goods and services provided	a) Foods	A result of the multiplier effect.	Everywhere people are on more than five hours of the day, there is bound to be a food market.
	b) Arts and Crafts	-	Innovativeness and design is key. Art is the 'persuasive ability inherent' in an individual, artefact or features.
	c) Clothing	New or second hand clothes are the goods on sale	Retailistic
	d) Labour	This is largely engagement by some institution in the form of one being hired as in public works programme like grass cutting and cleansing by the city of Harare. This tends to be seasonal or done as a fire-fighting activity of some situation getting out of hand	Choice of the actors is questionable. Politicians normally hijack the selection and rewarding of the 'workers'. Disasters happen but they do not always happen. Issues of the sustainability of activities are key.
6. By whether or not value is added	a) Value-addition	Productive-sector-liked The sector is largely left devoid of willing partakers. Issues of standards and designs and patents are critical	Activities are process-based. Many people are after 'quick buck'.
	b) Non value-addition	Predominantly typical of retailing	This the broader way with minimum obstacles compared with the productive sector. Individual are propelled by the quick returns they get. Goods can both be perishable or imperishable,

Source: Fieldwork, 2004.

, 2000).

The second form, which is operations in industrial sites, is characterised by operators travelling on foot to place of operation. If they carry goods like bread, buns, soft drinks or luncheons for sale,

they usually hire transporters which may be push-carts operators. Normally they establish some kind of 'plastic' relationships with the transporters with flexibility to hire the next if the preferred one is not around. Some operators are commuters and they

travel from other residential areas in town. What attracts them to the place of operation – the industrial site? Normally it is the agglomeration economies of scale of having hordes of customers from different industrial firms buying 'cheap' lunch or

**Table 3 Version 2.** Classification of urban informal sector activities.  
Version 2

Criterion	Nature of Goods and Services	1	2	3	4	5	6
Form	Perishable Food items	F; SP; OS; CB, NV					
	Non-perishable wares of convenient nature		F; NV, CO; AC				
	Mixed items (both foods and non-foods of convenient nature)			F; NV, CO; AC; EO; VA, SP; IS			
	Metal works				F, IS, OS, VA, NV		
	Woodworks					F, IS, OS, VA, NV	
	Electronic repairs						F, IS, SP, CO, EO, VA, SA

#### KEY1

1. Perishable Food items
2. Non-perishable wares of convenient nature
3. Mixed items (both foods and non-foods of convenient nature)
4. Metal works
5. Woodworks
- 6 Electronic repairs

#### KEY 2: Types of Commodities handled

- F - Family-based
- IS - Institutional-supported
- OS- Organisational-supported
- SA - Social alliance-based
- SP- Sole proprietorship
- EO Employment-orientated
- CB Co-operative-based
- FO - Foods-orientated
- AC- Arts and Crafts-orientated
- CO Clothing-orientated
- VA- Value-addition-based
- NV- Non value-addition-based

breakfast from their stalls. Goods are sold to industrial workers, usually wage-earners (paid weekly). Items sold are mainly of convenient type.

The employers can afford the ticket and trust of buying on credit from Monday to Thursday and pay on Friday. This relationship is some form of

local embeddedness. Local embeddedness refers to the ability of an operator to remain operating to remain operating in a given place and area given

**Table 2.** Classification of business enterprises according to the MSME.

Name of enterprises	Description
Micro-enterprises	This is the informal sector class
Small enterprises	Employees 1-50 people
Medium enterprises	Employees 51-75 people
Big/large enterprises	Employees above 75 people

its local advantages –real or perceived. It is a concept and practice enmeshed in geographical inertia (Small and Witherick, 1986; McCann, 2001). With a lot of formal industries having divested in from the years from 1999 to date, most of the formal industrial factory shells have been turned into ‘ghost towns’. Space has generally been compartmentalised into small lots operated by informal manufacturers, struggling to make meaningful contribution to the economy. That has been the plight of many industrial areas of the country in both small and large urban centres.

Operators in the informal sector are attracted to the central business district because of the many advantages that it enjoys relative to other parts of a town. In the CBD, the items sold are of a diverse kind; operators take advantage of diverse mix of the threshold supporting the goods and services on offer. Those who operate with licenses, and in designated points, are usually safer than those without, and who are often subjected to police harassment (Chirisa, 2004, 2007; Hlohla, 2008).

### According to support engaged

In this criterion four essential forms of ISOs are identified. These are the family-based, the institutionally-supported, the organisationally-supported and the social-alliance-based. The family-based ISOs are supported by the savings of the family. Family labour supplements the family capital. If the business is run by a woman, the husband and children usually come to the assistance of her. The motivational factor for the family support to the business is that the business makes a difference to the home. Normally, it is a stopgap instrument to cushion the family against the vagaries of lack before the father of the house gets his next pay.

There are institutions which support micro-enterprises in the country. In Zimbabwe, the public institution of the Small Enterprises Development Corporation (SEDCO) under the Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) is one type of institution which supports micro-enterprises in the country; there is also the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC). Private institutions include banks, for the same mandate. MSME classifies business enterprises into micro-enterprises, small enterprises and medium enterprises (Table 2). The institutional support remains theoretical for ISOs given that the majority fall outside the framework of the support because they

lack in collateral. The result is that politicians often make ‘promises’ of financial and other support especially during election times. The organisational-based ISOs are distinguished from the institutional-based type by virtue of the investment made in bringing together members so that they can be trained, marketed or funded as a group. Members pay subscriptions on top of service or administration fees. Due to these payments made, the poorest of the poor are often excluded since they cannot afford the payments. The organisations become elitist in nature. Examples of nationally recognisable organisations include the Indigenous Business Women Organisation (IBWO), Affirmative Action Group (AAG), and Indigenous Business Development Centre (IBDC). These organizations have been formed and maintained in the spirit indigenization and empowerment. At the basest level, organisations can be in the form of small business co-operatives. Yet, this type of organisation had a bad taste of history as operators tend to have their operations hijacked by politicians, suffer organisational mismanagement among other dysfunctional challenges and constraints.

The forth form in this category deals with social alliances *in situ*. Operators work in trust. Social capital is their binding code. The place of business operations is some kind of protected zone. Although it is conventionally agreed the informal sector enjoys ease of entry by operators, with social alliances early comers make it difficult for new comers to come in. This may only be possible by bribery or other corrupt means. Generally speaking in this form, operators support each other in the spirit of fraternity and company in commonality of the space of operations.

### According to operators’ composition

In the composition of operators there are a number of compartments. There are sole-proprietors, employers and co-operatives. The majority of sole-proprietors operate without any institutional support. Instead the poorest sections are often subjected to empty promises of the politicians. They struggle and very few graduate to become outstanding business people in the community. If these few succeed in their operations then they may become employers of others. Usually these have jobs elsewhere, sectorally or spatially and they are usually conspicuous by their absence from the locale of operations most of the times. In the co-operative mode, operators share in activities to be done. In normative terms, specialisation of skills will see the business booming. However, in real terms, the organisation of available skills is a great challenge.

### According to returns realised

Returns and yields are important to any business venture. With regard to ISOs, returns can be categorised as either low, medium or high. Most ISOs are low-

rewarding in terms of yields and returns, especially the neighbourhood-based operations. Medium-rewarding ISOs can be typified by those operators selling second-hand goods like clothing, furniture and spare parts usually derived from auctions. Finally high-rewarding ISOs include artefacts of art and crafts, posh goods in flea markets (e.g. accessories and entertainment bits) or some higher-order second hand (from auctions). The location of the establishment is usually very important. Better locations which enjoy good marketing tend to attract huge and better profits than poor ones. Normally, ISOs dealing with ISOs operate from a weak-competition standpoint rather than that of strong competition. That is to say, they are forced to reduce prices to customers with the deterioration in quality of the products. Sometimes, seasonality has a role to play as well. For instance, packed iced water can attract sizeable profits in hot dry seasons relative to cool dry ones. Conversely, marketing seasons also exist. Tradition has it that, towards and during the festival seasons as well as during mid-year (from end of March to end of December) sales volumes are high compared to the period soon after the festive season (January to mid-March). Both perishable goods and imperishable ones suffer low marketing during this period, alike.

### According to services offered

Services offered in ISOs include catering and 'ripe and ready' products - foods. During the times of economic hardships contemporary to Zimbabwe, a new breed of food-sellers has emerged and they are in the cross-border-traders' category. They source their items for sale from Zambia, Mozambique, South Africa and Botswana. When they come back they either deliver the goods to customers or market them by internet, telephone or a network of 'friendship'. Prices are usually quoted in foreign currency or local currency equivalence. Sometimes, the operators open some 'tuck-shops'. The majority of the operators are professionals diversifying and supplementing officially known incomes. Operators target, diversify and rigorously market their products. Apart from those that go abroad are those that use the internal means like visiting a farm, buying farms products by wholesale (beef, pota-toes, fruits or packages juices). It is not surprising for one to get a text message on a cellular phone, let: *Cheap beef on sale, US\$5 per kg.*

In addition, in this category are operators that sell clothing (both new and second-hand), depending on the type of market targeted. Those who sell new clothing even make trips to places like Dubai, and suchlike places in other countries. Usually the market is a targeted one. Some goods are sold in flea markets in the central business districts. The next form of operations involves arts and crafts. These include sculptors, knitters and weavers. Sculptors and weavers are usually located in areas that allow them to do the art and craft

while giving them direct access to the market of their products.

Lastly, there are those that hire out their labour especially to public institutions like local authorities in public works programmes. It is informal because the contacts are usually very short-term and operators are allowed to engage other better 'promising employers' as they deem it necessary. With a lot of urbanites out of employment, and having learnt some skills when they were employed, many have opted to 'sell' those skills to willing takers. The majority are in artisans – plumbers, painters, carpenters and woodworkers, carpet cleaners. They strive to get the machinery to make work workable.

### According to value addition

Value addition comes with processing of raw commodities. But, is cooking food materials a value addition exercise? So is 'mining' sand for construction purposes? In the latter operators have a defined role of extracting the material and/or organising labour and transportation for the extracted material, from the source point to the destination. This is typical of peri-urban areas. Owing to the need for specialised capital goods (machinery) which is difficult to acquire, unless well funded, the majority of informal sector operators esteem value-addition as a prerogative of the elite operators. A few manage to break through to own machines like nut-crackers, soap-making machines, hair-saloon kits, peanut butter-making machines, to name but a few. Because many fail to add meaningful value to their items (especially food types), they resort to retailing them.

### Real questions

At rural urban centres, as soon as a bus with travellers reaches a terminal, hordes of vendors are attracted to it with a magnetic pull chanting all kinds of oral advertisements as a marketing strategy. Customers buy the products but deep in their hearts they hold all kinds of questions like: How were these mangoes stored before selling? How hygienic is the packaging? When were these mealies boiled? Is this smell peculiar to these boiled nuts? Are these not stolen goods? What if I get sick after eating them?

Thus, there are all sorts of questions that pertain to public health and ethics. Usually the profits made are very marginal as no proper costing is done. It is a hand-to-mouth business. The drivers are 'quick returns' and extempore household financial needs.

### Urban centres and ISO concentration in Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe, the settlement hierarchy comprises seven centres, and from the least to the greatest are business centres, rural service centres, rural growth points, local boards, towns, municipalities, and cities (Government of



**Table 4.** Cities, municipalities, towns and rural growth points in Zimbabwe.

<b>Cities</b>	<b>Municipalities</b>	<b>Towns</b>	<b>Rural growth points</b>
Harare (Capital and primate city)	Marondera	Norton	Nyika
Bulawayo	Redcliff	Chitungwiza	Neshuro
Gweru	Kariba	Chipinge	Birchenough
Kwekwe	Chinhoyi	Beitbridge	Chimhandanda
Kadoma	Victoria Falls	Rusape	Dotito
Mutare	Chiredzi	Karoi	Wedza
Masvingo	Chegutu ]	Mt Darwin	Sadza
	Gwanda	Shurugwi	Checheche
	Bindura	Zvishavane	Murambinda
		Mhangura	Hauna
		Hwange	Nemanwa
		Chivhu	Mupandawana
		Mvuma	Mahusekwa
		Shamva	Nembudziya
		Beatrice	Mataga
		Kamativi	Rutenga
		Mashava	Jerera
		Macheke	Ngundu
		Nyazura	Kanyemba
		Triangle	Kotwa
		Banket	Nkayi
		Concession	Nyava
			Bikita
			Dema
			Siakobvu
			Mubayira
			Mutawatawa
			Sanyati
			Magunje
			Centenary
			Mvurwi
			Plumtree
			Zimunya
			Maphisa
			Matopos

Zimbabwe, 1995b; Jordan, 1984) (Table 4). Although the first three are rural-based, the application of town planning standards makes them qualify to be termed urban (Wekwete, 1987; Jordan, 1984). In terms of administration, they are administered under the Rural District Councils Act (Chapter 29:13). But local boards, towns, municipalities and cities are administered under the Urban Councils Act (Chapter 29:15). The centrepiece of all planning, laying out, *inter alia*, the powers of local planning authorities, the wherewithal of master and local planning, development control, and sub-divisions and

consolidations is the Regional Town and Country Planning Act (Chapter 29:12). Urban development and management, which entails town planning and the control of management, are largely synonymous with urbanity. Rural areas are contrasted by urban areas in that with the former there is laxity in how the environs are shaped (save for physical environmental conservation and stewardship, at large) while in the latter stricter measures are put in the design, implementation and maintenance of the built environs (Paradza, 1999; Wekwete, 1987). It has been argued that in rural areas there prevails rural

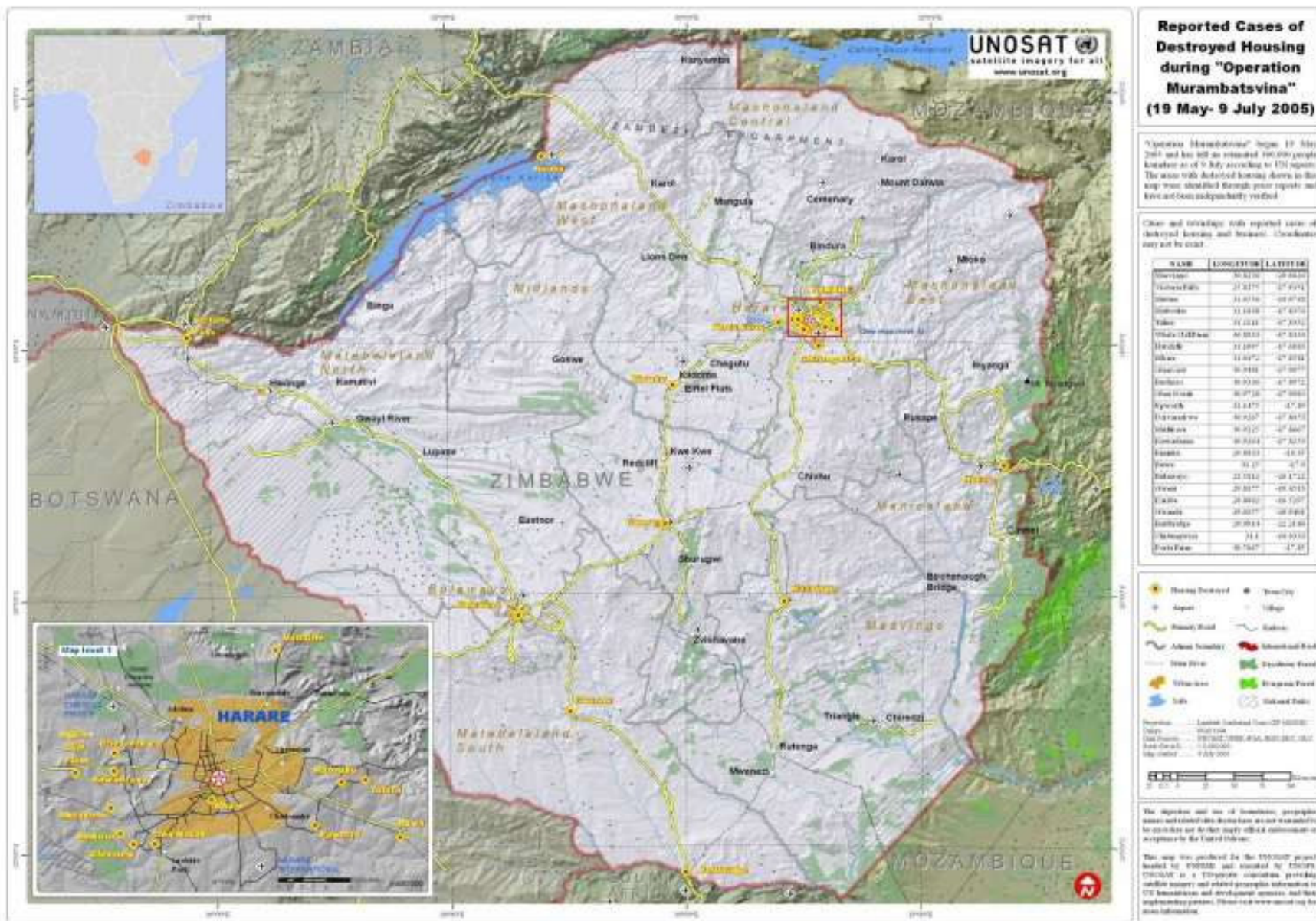


Figure 1. Areas affected by operation Murambatsvina.

development within urban areas; there is urban planning in its strictest sense.

Zimbabwe's land use planning system has been modelled to support large-scale commercial and industrial activities and hence planners find it prepared to handle the challenge. Reaction to ISOs has often taken two forms: The first one is being ruthless to any emerging activities using both the law and land use plans (Kamete, 2002). The second has been the more progressive and supportive of the SMEs with places being identified for them from which to operate. But the rigid land uses classification (zoning) - residential, industrial, commercial, recreational, and institutional has influenced the process and practice of planning. Intolerance with ISOs reached its zenith in Zimbabwe in May, 2005 when the government mooted Operation Restore Order/Operation Murambatsvina. The destructions that took place have been mapped geographically (Figure 1). This is an indicator of the distribution of ISOs in the country.

It must be noted that the destruction of ISOs by means of Operation Murambatsvina was an indicator enough to show the hierarchy and intensity of ISOs. Harare, as a primate city, experienced the worst destructions. Small centres also had matching destructions according to their scale and magnitude of space and populations (Table 5 and Figure 1). Furthermore, the classification of ISOs is important for policy formulation and review. For example, Instrument 216 of 1994 (Use Group Regulations) which emerged during the economic reform period was indicative that households can engage in some manufacturing and service industries in their homes provided they remained within the limits stipulated in the regulations. As such many ISOs sprouted. The question is on whether or not the public acted because they were informed. Two explanations are possible. Firstly, they may have acted on 'instinct', that is, as a reaction to the economic pressure of increasing poverty. As unemployment increased so incomes fell and the cost of living rose beyond the reach of many. Humankind is apt to devising survival coping strategies when it faces excruciating pain and unbearable pressure. Secondly, the public may have acted in fashionableness of the trend. Humanity consists of creatures amenable to imitation - action or behaviour based on the fact that another is doing it so can also do it.

Plates 1 and 2 reveal the state of many urban centres in terms of the ISOs that were found in neighbourhoods. These were removed by the rather violent Operation Murambatsvina also referred to as the 'clean up campaign' or 'operation restore order'.

## Conclusion

The classification of ISOs shows that these activities cannot be lumped in one group, at least from a classificatory analytical viewpoint. As indicated in this discourse, some ISOs are profit-orientated, others labour-

based and others and others location-tied. The location factor is the most outstanding among the rest. The paper has shown that location of ISOs can be rural or urban; it, too, can be much localized. However, ISOs are mostly urban-oriented both in literature and practice. Rural urban centres like growth points play the urban role. In these rural urban centres, ISO functions are rather diluted given the fact that most rural functions that surround the centres, are 'informal' in nature.

A note to make is that some of it is that the various classifications of the criteria and forms of informal sector operations described in this paper: according to spatial location; according to support engaged; according to operator's composition; according to returns realized; according to services offered; according to value-added), though seemingly nebulous, inconsistent, confusing and unconvincing according to the theory of informal sector and conventional wisdom, it is a true reflection of what has been transpiring in Zimbabwe in the last fifteen or so years. This is an economy that has been under a test and trying times, to the extent that the government has, in its own institutional capacity provided windows for the promotion of the sector. The bottom-line is: If the parent (government, in this case) fails to provide for the children by formal means, he can make indications for them to find their own means sometimes extra-legal (but not criminal). Even politicians have grabbed the opportunity sometimes and started 'dishing out money' to would-be voters. In the last days of 2007 through to early 2009, the central bank printed a lot of local currency for sale on the black market, buying foreign currency. With this foreign currency, the central bank (Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe) in its controversial 'quasi-fiscal' policies managed to drive the economy (buying of agricultural equipment through its Agricultural Mechanisation Programme, promoting the farming of jatropha - a crop from which to make bio-diesel, easing urban transport woes by buying midi-buses, mini-buses and conventional buses). There is clear evidence that those who were selling money in the streets were so directed by the central bank. Such are extremes of a formal institution employing informal means to make the national economy thrive. Zimbabwe is a peculiar case for the research and policy on informal sector. The geography of ISOs in the country is marked by a rather crude distinctiveness.

## REFERENCES

- Bromely R ed. (1979). *The Urban Informal Sector: Critical Perspectives on Employment and Housing Policies*, Pergamon Press: Oxford.
- Chirisa I (2003). *A Critical Assessment of Residential Layout Design and Implementation Efficiency: The Case of Sunningdale High Density Suburb (Harare)*, Department of Rural and Urban Planning, University of Zimbabwe: Harare (Unpublished BSc. Dissertation).
- Chirisa I (2004). *Mainstreaming Gender into Economic Empowerment: An Examination of the Livelihoods Strategies of Urban*

**Table 5.** Urban centre-ISO distribution matrix.

Urban centre type		Type of iso and distribution																		
		Spatial location				Support engaged			Operators composition			Returns realised			Services offered			Value added		
Criterion		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
<b>Form of ISO (Urbanised)</b>		N	N	M	H	L	L	M	H	L	N	L	N	N	H	L	N	L	L	H
	business centres	N	N	M	H	L	L	M	H	L	N	L	N	N	H	L	L	L	L	H
<b>Rural</b>		N	N	H	H	L	L	M	H	L	L	M	L	M	H	M	L	L	L	H
	rural service centres	N	N	H	H	L	L	M	H	L	L	M	L	M	H	M	L	L	L	H
<b>Urban (Proper)</b>	rural growth points	M	L	N	H	L	L	M	H	L	N	M	M	M	H	M	L	M	M	H
	local boards	M	L	H	H	L	L	H	H	M	L	M	M	M	H	M	M	M	M	H
	towns	M	M	H	H	L	L	H	H	M	L	M	M	M	H	M	M	M	M	H
	municipalities	H	H	H	H	L	L	H	H	H	L	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H

**KEY 1:** N = Nil; H = High; M = Medium; L = Low.

**KEY 2**

- 1: Neighbour-hood-based
- 2: Indus-trial
- 3: CBD
- 4; Family
- 5: Institutional
- 6 Organi-sational
- 7 Social alliance
- 8. Sole Proprietor
- 9. Employing
- 10. Co-operative
- 11. Low
- 12. Medium
- 13. High
- 14. Foods
- 15. Arts and Crafts
- 16. Clothing
- 17. Labour
- 18. Value Added
- 19.No value added



**Plate 1.** Pre-operation Murambatsvina ISOs. At a road junction in Sunningdale High Density Residential Area in Harare; outbuilding with two room; one room, facing the road, is used as a tuck shop, the other is for residence. Under the tree there is a table with vegetables for sale. Two rubbish bins wait being picked rest on footbridge concrete stalls. The question of public health has been overlooked. A pile of bricks lies in the road reserve.  
Source: Chirisa (2003).



**Plate 2.** Pre-operation Murambatsvina ISOs. Along a local distributor in Sunningdale High Density Residential Area in Harare; surgery with parking space for patients; phone shop (people queue at a phone shop) – indicators of public safety endangered; a welding shop (informal industry); down the road window frames for sale. A heavy goods owned by one of the residents in the neighbourhood has been parked for months there.  
Source: Chirisa (2003).

- Women in the Informal Sector: A Case Study of Harare. Department of Rural and Urban Planning, University of Zimbabwe: Harare (Unpublished MSc. Dissertation).
- Chirisa I (2007). Post-2005 Harare: A Case of the Informal Sector and Street Vending Resilience. What options do key players have? In *Local Governance and Dev. J.* 1(1), Municipal Development Partnership –MDP: Harare
- Chirisa I (2008). Population Growth and Rapid Urbanization in Africa: Implications for Sustainability, in *J. Sus. Dev. Afr.* 10(2), Available: [http://www.jsd-africa.com/Jsda/v10n2\\_Summer2008/PDF/ARC\\_1.%20Chirisa-%20population%20growth.pdf](http://www.jsd-africa.com/Jsda/v10n2_Summer2008/PDF/ARC_1.%20Chirisa-%20population%20growth.pdf)
- Cormack IRN (1983). *Towards Self-Reliance – Urban Social Development in Zimbabwe*, Mambo: Gweru.
- GOVERNMENT OF ZIMBABWE – GOZ (1991a). *Second Five Year National Development Plan 1991 – 1995*, Government Printers: Harare.
- GOVERNMENT OF ZIMBABWE – GOZ (1991b). *Report on Development of Human Settlements in Zimbabwe*, Government Printers: Harare.
- Government of Zimbabwe (1996). *Pre-feasibility study on informal small scale/ micro-enterprises for development pilot industrial estates in selected urban centres of Zimbabwe - Report*, Guarantee Trust (Private) Limited: Harare.
- Hlohla P (2008). *Examining the Concept and Practice of Economic Participation with reference to the CBD of Harare: A case of the unemployed youths (UYs)*, Department of Rural & Urban Planning, University of Zimbabwe: Harare, (Unpublished Dissertation).
- Jordan JD (1984). *Local Government in Zimbabwe*, Mambo Press: Gweru.
- Kamete AY (2002). *Governance for sustainability? Balancing Social and environmental concerns in Harare*, Michelsen Institute: Bergen, Norway.
- Kamete AY (2006). *Revisiting the urban housing crisis in Zimbabwe: Some forgotten dimensions?* In *Habitat International* 30(4): 981-995.
- Kamete AY (1997). *Urban governance, poverty and urban housing*. In O. Musandu-Nyamayaro and T. Mubvami, (Eds.), *Urban Governance Outreach Research*, pp. 13–27. Harare: Department of Rural and Urban Planning and the Ford Foundation.
- Light I (2004). *Immigration and Ethnic Economies in Giant Cities*, in Crowley, John (ed.) Blackwell Publishing/UNESCO:Paris. *Int. Soc. Sci. J.* 181.
- Matsebula MS (1996). *The Urban Informal Sector: A Historical and Structural Analysis with Special reference to Swaziland*, SAPES Books: Harare.
- Mccann P (2001). *Urban and Regional Economics*, Oxford University Press: Oxford.
- Paradza G (1999). *The retail and service informal sector challenge to urban design in Zimbabwe* in Brown A and C Davidson eds. *Responsive design and plan implementation*, Department of City and Regional Planning, Cardiff University: Cardiff.
- Nsiah-Gyabaah K (2004). *Urbanisation Processes –Environmental and Health effects in Africa. Panel Contribution to the PERN Cyberseminar on Urban Spatial Expansion*, URL: [http://www.populationenvironmentresearch.org/papers/Nsiah-Gyaabah\\_contribution.pdf](http://www.populationenvironmentresearch.org/papers/Nsiah-Gyaabah_contribution.pdf).
- Shabbir A (1995). *How gender affects business start-up – evidence from Pakistan in Small Enterprises Development: Int. J.* 6 (1), Intermediate Technology Publications: London.
- Small J, Witherick M (1986). *A Modern Dictionary of Geography (Third Edition)*, Arnold: London.
- Tevera DS, Chikanda A (2000). *Urban Poverty, Livelihood Strategies and Policy Responses in Harare, Zimbabwe: The Case of Ward Three in Mbare High Density Suburb*, in *Geogr. J. Zimb.* Number 31, Geographical Association of Zimbabwe, Harare.
- Tevera DS, Chimhowu AO (2000) *Urban Growth, Poverty and Backyard Shanties in Harare, Zimbabwe*, in *Geogr. J. Zimb.* Number 31, Geographical Association of Zimbabwe, Harare.
- Tibajjuka AK (2005). *Report of the Fact-Finding Mission to Zimbabwe to assess the Scope and Impact of Operation Murambatsvina*, UN Habitat: Nairobi
- URBAN MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME – UMP(2000). *Street children and gangs in African cities – guidelines for local authorities (UMP Working Paper Series 18)*, UNCHS (Habitat): Nairobi.
- UNCHS (Habitat) (1998). *Proceedings of the International Conference on Urban Poverty*, 9 – 13 November 1997, Florence, Italy. UNCHS: Nairobi.