

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Role of Informal Traders in Contributing to Community Livelihoods in the post-COVID-19 Pandemic era in Zimbabwe

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the role of informal traders in contributing to community livelihoods in the post-COVID-19 era. The African philosophy of sustainability is mainly anchored on community livelihoods supported by Ubuntu heritage. Data collection and analysis were conducted using an exploratory study approach. In-depth interviews with twenty informal traders were purposively sampled and data was thematically analysed. The study found that informal trading created an opportunity for employment and poverty alleviation and acted as an economic conduit for development. Traders contributed to local development by completing the supply chain process in their daily livelihood business activities. Moreover, improvements in infrastructure, training, and capacity-building initiatives are necessary to support the development of management skills within the organization. It was established that informal trading is a substantial source of income that helps to improve livelihoods and reduce poverty. Keeping this in mind, employment opportunities are created by the sector, particularly for people with less formal education or skill set. While the role of informal traders in contributing to community livelihoods is a well-established research area, the focus on the post-COVID-19 era adds a layer of novelty to the study. By examining how informal traders have adapted and responded to the pandemic's challenges.

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## 1. Introduction

Notably, massive caesural changes are salient in new normal environments<sup>[1]</sup>. The dynamics of changes have produced far-reaching consequences on business survival amid the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The economic well-being of people worldwide, particularly health, social life, and poverty, has been dismally affected. Despite the notion that businesses of all sizes have been negatively affected by COVID-19, informal traders have suffered a disproportionately high negative impact on the sustainability of their operations<sup>[2]</sup>. Due to the nature of informal traders, some are partial and

others are not officially recognized by some governments. Bamu-Chipunza<sup>[3]</sup> corroborates that most countries do not indicate them in the governance of informal economic activities. Notably, the local government (city fathers) provides water services and access to physical and space in designated areas for traders to conduct their businesses<sup>[4][5]</sup>. The Informal traders pay daily taxes to municipal metropolitan administrators to recognize the important services offered by city fathers.

The informal sector has been hailed for its contribution to the employment, income, and growth of economies in both developed and developing countries. The informal sector employs more than two billion people worldwide<sup>[6]</sup>. Globally, an estimated 60% of the working population is in the informal sector, while the following employment rates differ between regions: In South Asia, it is 69%; in East and Southeast Asia, it is 57%; in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), it is 53%; and in Latin America, it is 34%<sup>[7]</sup>. Admittedly, ILO<sup>[6]</sup> postulates that over 50% of people are in informal employment in SSA, compared to 46% in Asia and the Pacific and 41% in America. In pursuit of the above, the literature reports that informal businesses play an important role and has shown that economies around the world rely on entrepreneurial ventures or informal trading to eradicate poverty and improve livelihoods. In support of the above argument, Manzana<sup>[8]</sup> confirmed that informal trading has brought about economic redistribution, poverty reduction, income, and is an easy source of employment in developing and less developed countries.

In Zimbabwe, the informal sector plays an instrumental role in reducing the high levels of unemployment. More interestingly, the informal sector has been treated with high prominence in scholarly work because it has become a valve for poverty alleviation and a tool for eliminating hunger in the depressed Zimbabwean economy<sup>[9]</sup>. Building on the above works, the health of the Zimbabwean economy is tied to the fate of small businesses that include informal traders. Currently, the extant literature shows that Zimbabwe has the largest percentage of informal traders in the world (69%), compared to Georgia's 64.9%<sup>[10]</sup>. Informal traders are more often than not vulnerable to COVID-19's negative shocks owing to a lack of social protection benefits<sup>[11]</sup>. It was observed that some governments did not support informal traders because they did not extend any financial support during the COVID-19 era. This situation worsened the vulnerability of informal traders in the post-COVID-19 epoch<sup>[12][13]</sup>. In contrast, some countries, notably Uganda, have taken positive initiatives to support informal traders' businesses by facilitating the formation of associations to enhance the governance of informal trading businesses<sup>[14]</sup>.

In light of the above statistics, it is prudent to note that informal traders in Zimbabwe earn their livelihoods from unregulated businesses, which may be highly vulnerable in times of disruption. However, there is limited evidence on the role of informal traders and the challenges in improving their livelihoods after the COVID-19 pandemic in developing and emerging economies<sup>[15][16]</sup>. This gap can be addressed by answering the following research question.

- Q1: What is the role of informal traders and their contribution to community livelihoods in the post-COVID-19 pandemic period in Gweru?

## 2. Literature review

This literature review focuses on the conceptualization of the informal sector and informal traders, the sustainable livelihood approach, Sen's capability theory, the role of informal traders in improving livelihoods, and the challenges affecting informal traders. These issues were captured as follows:

## 2.1. Conceptualisation of informal traders

Many researchers have defined the term 'informal traders. Nonetheless, in Zimbabwe, informal traders are perceived as constituting people who trade in or sell second-hand clothes, footwear, snacks, crafts, vegetables, fruits, grains, or metal wares. These commercial activities often take place at undesignated points, such as near shop verandas, street corners, near traffic lights, or at designated points<sup>[17][18]</sup>. Vermaak<sup>[19]</sup> stressed the downslope of informal traders, stating that informal traders do not receive financial support from their governments and, in many cases, are not subject to government regulations for tax purposes. Admittedly, informal trading captures a wide range of business activities, including trading activities at street corners, homes, or the act of moving from one place to another in search of buyers or sellers of consumable or non-consumable items<sup>[20]</sup>. On the other hand, informal trading is characterized by a minimum or lack of government regulations and limited financial support<sup>[19]</sup>. The definition suggests that informal trading does not account for some stable economic activities from which the government might capitalize trading activities and ultimately allow the government to generate revenue in the form of taxes. Lack of government support in the informal sector remains a perpetual problem in many countries.

## 2.2. The sustainable livelihood approach

The sustainable livelihood approach (SLA) is a dynamic concept that provides ways to eradicate poverty, especially in times of shock, disruption, or crisis<sup>[21]</sup>. With this in mind, it is deemed necessary to apply the theoretical lens of the sustainable livelihood approach, as it captures the interaction between capability deficits and poverty reduction, which is the main objective of this study. In this regard, policies should be drafted to enhance the livelihoods of affected people. The objective of this approach is to enable institutions to come up with practical priorities for action to enhance the livelihoods of the affected group. The sustainable livelihood approach can be used to address this troublesome situation by analysing the relationship between poverty and development to improve the quality of life of those who are most vulnerable<sup>[22]</sup>. Ellis (2000, p.10) defines a livelihood as "the assets that are (natural, physical, human, financial, and social capital), the activities and the access to these may be determined by institutional policies and social relations that determine the living gained by the household or individual traders".

This study adopted livelihood strategies (informal traders and their contribution to community livelihoods) and sustainable livelihood outcomes (i.e., improved standards of living and poverty reduction) as the analytical tools that underpinned this study. To achieve sustainable livelihood outcomes, informal traders exploit their resilience strategies by increasing social networking with suppliers of grain foodstuffs. For a sustainable livelihood approach to improve people's living conditions and standards of living, a livelihood path must be sought. People use their capabilities and means of living to secure food, income, and assets<sup>[23]</sup>.

### 2.3. Sen's capability theory

According to Sen<sup>[24]</sup>, the capability of a person can be defined as “that which reflects the alternative combinations of functionings the person achieves and which he can choose one collection.” Drawing from Sen's<sup>[25]</sup> sociological theory, two important themes emerge: capabilities and functionings. Individuals have the freedom and ability to choose (from opportunities) to achieve the ends they desire. From a sociological perspective, Sen<sup>[25]</sup> contends that people can be appraised based on the resources available to them, and these resources determine the capacity to cope with and adapt to prevailing risks and problems, seeking to improve or maintain their living conditions. The sociological approach of Sen's perspective lies precisely in allowing the relativization of the living conditions of different actors, which are informal traders living in the context of deprivation. The traders are somehow in the poverty trap and are deprived of the opportunities of livelihoods that they exploit to improve from the poverty brought about by COVID-19 deprivation.

Using the capability approach of Sen<sup>[25]</sup>, human development can be analysed from multidimensional perspectives, such as consumer goods, housing, or financial resources. Resources and assets are critical because they promote development<sup>[26]</sup>. According to Sen's<sup>[24]</sup> sociological theory, traders manage or succeed in being or to do so. If traders manage to beat hunger and poverty, they become their functions or achievements. Moreover, bringing basic food necessities closer to buyers is an achievement that contributes to community social welfare. More precisely, functionings range from being well nourished, being in good health, being clothed and sheltered, being literate, being happy taking part in the social community, having self-respect, or being able to appear in public without shame<sup>[27]</sup>.

### 2.4. Role of informal traders in improving livelihoods

According to the ILO<sup>[6]</sup>, more than two billion people constitute 61% of the total employed population in the world, whose livelihoods depend on informal businesses. This may imply that the informal sector provides the largest source of employment and income<sup>[23][15][16]</sup>. Furthermore, it may be considered a catalytic tool for poverty alleviation worldwide. Admittedly, 80% of sub-Saharan African employees earn their livelihoods in an informal economy<sup>[6]</sup>. Resnick et al.<sup>[28]</sup> argue that the informal economy has become a source of food for more than a third of households in sub-Saharan African countries. It is likely substantial to consider and say that although informal traders may not benefit from adequate financial support from the government in Zimbabwe, they play a significant role in providing food on the table for their families. Unlike countries such as Lesotho, Cameroon, and Togo, they have implemented various interventions during the COVID-19 pandemic era to shield traders from poverty traps<sup>[29]</sup>. Categorically, the role of informal traders cannot be overlooked.

Informal traders are hailed for being considered the backbone of many developing countries because of their role in the economy. For instance, one notable role observed in industries and the central business district (CBD) is to provide supply chains, such as continually selling fresh food and packaged food at reasonable prices, to people who cannot afford modern supermarkets, thereby enhancing food security<sup>[30]</sup>. It is worth mentioning that informal traders provide food security and jobs to most women in urban settings. Consequently, many households rely on informal traders to access a variety of foodstuffs at affordable prices<sup>[28]</sup>. In line with this, cross-border informal traders have commended that their

economic activities make a significant contribution to trade in the Southern African Development Community (SADC)<sup>[31][32]</sup>. In Africa, the informal sector has emerged as a dominant source of livelihood in many countries. According to Ogunde (2019), the informal sector's contribution to GDP was hailed in Nigeria in 2017. Recent evidence suggests that the informal sector makes a remarkable contribution in the world, including in Sub-Saharan Africa, with countries such as Togo, Niger, and Benin, which have a 70% GDP contribution to their economies<sup>[33]</sup>. Of significance in this paper is the realization that the effort put by informal traders to recover from the impact of COVID-19 is a significant business gesture because they work extra hard to have food on the table and, at the same time, roll forward most of the emerging economies.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Research paradigm

The process of conducting research is not provided by a technique, but rather by a philosophy that points to the procedure in a specific direction<sup>[34]</sup>. This study is underpinned by interpretivist philosophy. This paradigm is flexible to both the researcher and the participants in that the reality can be narrated from one's own understanding based on the experiences of a phenomenon in which the participants narrated their roles and challenges in contributing to their livelihoods post-COVID-19. In line with interpretivist philosophy, the researchers adopted exploratory research design since not much is known about role of informal traders in contributing to community livelihoods in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era in Zimbabwe

#### 3.2. Target population and sample

The target population enhances the description of accurately selected participants or members that are relevant to information collected in answering questions in an investigation<sup>[35]</sup>. In-depth face-to-face interviews were used to generate data, aided by document analysis. Due to the lack of data on informal traders in Gweru, there are estimated to be more than 4000 undocumented. The study is based on a qualitative inductive approach, and a purposive sampling technique was employed to select 20 informal traders in the Gweru urban area in the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe<sup>[36][37]</sup>. The rationale for using purposive sampling was that this method was significant in that the authors selected participants whom they knew could avail the information that was being sought. Morse<sup>[38]</sup> confirms that authors have concurred that many researchers have used data saturation as a guarantee to measure the qualitative rigor of research integrity. In this study, data saturation was reached by the 16<sup>th</sup> interviewee. These interviews were conducted between June 14 and 30, 2023, in the Gweru urban area.

#### 3.3. Ethical considerations

The participants were safeguarded against any factors that could cause harm, discomfort, embarrassment, or loss of life.

When the participants demonstrated full knowledge of informed consent, they increased the transparency of the study and free participation<sup>[39]</sup>. The informal traders provided consent for voluntary participation in the study. Documents of consent were signed individually after the researchers explained the confidentiality and informed consent forms. Pseudonyms were used instead of the actual names of the participants. After obtaining consent from the participants, conversations were audiotaped.

### 3.4. Data presentation and analysis

In terms of data presentation, the researchers employed tables to clearly present the results of the study. It is widely acknowledged that tables present information that can be easily understood by readers<sup>[37]</sup>. Going forward, thematic analysis was utilized to synthesize qualitative data from interviews. To ensure the robustness of thematic analysis, the six steps proposed by Braun and Clarke<sup>[40]</sup> were carefully applied in this study.

## 4. Results and discussion

This section presents results related to the role of informal traders in contributing to community livelihoods in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era in Gweru. The results are discussed according to themes that emerged from the data, namely food security, employment, and contribution to gross domestic product.

### 4.1. Demographic data

**Table 1.** Demographics of interviewees

Economic activity	Experience in business	Gender	Age	Qualifications
P1.Tyre Service	6	M	44	O'Level
P2.Welding	10	M	43	O'Level
P3.Carpentry	4	M	36	Grade 7
P4.Metal Sheeting & fabrication	9	M	36	O'Level
P5.Second hand clothing	11	F	45	O'Level
P6.Cooking gas	5	M	43	Grade 7
P7.Poultry	5	M	35	Degree in IT
P8.Kitchen ware & blankets	5	F	34	O'Level
P9. Grocery, charcoal, cups, spanners, keys,	5	F	26	A' Level
P10. Small grain agricultural products	9	M	52	Grade 7
P11. Vegetables, onions	8	F	39	O'Level
P12. Grocery food stuffs	12	F	38	O'Level
P13. Hardware equipment	6	M	38	O'Level
P14. Clothes and grocery food	10	F	39	O'Level
P15.Small grain, sun flowers, cooking oil,	7	F	43	Grade 7
P16. Butter nuts, cabbages, carrots, potatoes	9	F	37	O'Level
P17. Tomatoes, cabbages, madora, grain	8	F	46	Grade 7
P18. Selling second hand clothing	7	F	29	O'Level
P19. Vegetables, potatoes	4	F	24	O'Level
P20 Plastics, hoes, ropes, spanners,	18	F	52	Form 2

Source: Authors' compilation: Fieldwork 2023

As shown in Table 1, small informal traders' businesses constitute a variety of food commodities, hardware, and clothing that they sell to improve their livelihoods in the post-COVID-19 pandemic period. Research echoed similar findings in South Africa, in which informal traders were characterized as street vendors, food vendors, market traders, and many other enterprises to earn a better livelihood, and they were bound to come under the COVID-19 crossfire<sup>[41]</sup>. The average years of experience in informal trading businesses range from 3 to 14 years. The ages of the research participants indicate that the youth are in the majority age category between 24 and 39 years. Statistically, Table 1 shows that there are 60% of youths and 40% of adults. In this business, there is a higher proportion of women (60%) in informal trading than in 40% of males. Young people are still more energetic to put up with all the hustles in the struggle to recover from the pandemic. Regarding access to education, the study found that 70% of interviewees had completed formal ordinary-level education, 5% had completed junior formal education, and 25% had completed Grade 7 formal education. In this context, traders are generally educated and literate. Challenges of lack of unemployment are high in Zimbabwe, given that the majority of the youth are in the informal sector; regrettably, their decisions were accelerated by a lack of opportunities for formal employment.

#### 4.2. Role of informal traders in contributing to community livelihoods

## Theme 1: Food Security

Food security is one of the themes that emerged in this study. The participants in this study highlighted that COVID-19 opened up opportunities for traders to fight poverty and hunger in the post-COVID-19 era. In this regard, some interviewees stated:

*“We complemented each other in this business. I sell plastics, hoes, ropes, and spanners. I survive on that small amount than to die from hunger” (Female P20).*

“Some community members prefer to buy tomatoes from their stocks. I make them feel at home and avoid buying from OK, Pick, and Pay. This makes me secure food. They also improve their livelihood because they are able to get many basic services they want from us” (Male P10).

*“Nutrition is the main standard of health as traders we fight to maintain good nutrition for our families and our customers. As you can see, I sell grocery food such as sugar, soap, cooking oil, and other non-perishable stuff. (Female P16).*

Based on the above quotes, it is evident that informal traders play a significant role in contributing to community livelihoods by providing basic food necessities that community households require. In addition, informal trading activities provide opportunities for the urban population to achieve food security through transactions they engage in with traders. Further analysis of the quotes above shows that the informal trading market creates jobs and contributes to local food security<sup>[15]</sup>. Consistent with the sustainability livelihood approach, informal trading activities are considered pathways that enable traders to make their livelihood a small business livelihood system that is crucial for informal traders to escape hunger and poverty after the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>[42]</sup>.

## Theme 2: Income Generation

Income generation has emerged as the key theme. The traders espoused that informal trading contributes to community livelihoods through income-generating economic activities in the area. It was noted that traders have a variety of businesses, such as welding, carpentry, metal sheeting, and fabrication and selling cooking gas. The following excerpts were obtained during the interviews:

*“Many Zimbabweans now own cars, and the second-hand tires they use do not last at the end of the day they come to me, which is an advantage. I can get US\$150 or even more on a good day.” (Male P1).*

“I am a welder. Sometimes, I have to drop my prices in order to beat the competition and life goes on. Half a loaf is better than no bread’ (Male P4).



*“Normally, our country has chronic power outage problems, and I sell gas for smart cooking. Sometimes with high demand, I pocket US\$190, not Zimbabwe bond, mind you” (Male P6).*

It is evident from the above quotes that informal trading is a source of poverty alleviation through income generation. Informal trading is the main source of economic activity that can be used to earn a living with little capital to generate revenue. The income obtained by traders was used to buy more food items to complement ingredients they used not to have when they did not have money. Participants mentioned that they provided tyre-mending as a service and offered products such as furniture in various forms. The results corroborate the findings of the United Nations Development Programme<sup>[43]</sup>, which underscored that in line with the sustainability approach, informal traders and communities survive and sustain their lives by crafting ways and making decisions to mitigate poverty. According to interviewees, informal trading is a money-generating venture and a source of community livelihood. Notably, they provide access to food and stimulate a multitude of entrepreneurial activities. Some scholarly work contends that Chinese farmers have ventured into entrepreneurial activities as an alternative way to improve their livelihoods<sup>[44]</sup>.

### Theme 3: Poverty Alleviation

The findings indicate that informal trading activities enhance poverty alleviation among the community members. However, participants expressed the view that the situation in Zimbabwe is unfavourable. Since job opportunities have remained limited many people are court up on poverty circles. For instance, one participant stated that:

*“Believe me, our situation in Zimbabwe is not normal. There are no or slim job opportunities in Zimbabwe. Industries are closed but we need food on the table. It is a survival of the fittest. Selling vegetables and clothing, helps us fight poverty.” (Female, P8).*

*“The economic trading activities are pivotal for our survival. What now counts is to earn a living, despite the limited job opportunities. Selling vegetables, onions and grain is my fall-back position post COVID-19 disruption. Everyone is rising to his knees, and thwart poverty.” (Male P15).*

Participants highlighted the crucial role various trading activities play in helping traders overcome the impact of poverty. In spite of absence of job opportunities, the traders are hustling to bring food on the table. As traders raise income through these activities they support their families and guarantee food supply thus fighting poverty in their households. It is apperant in this study that the communities have been left marginalised by COVID-19 disruptions and many were poverty stricken. Thus the trading activities provide income opportunities, improve livelihoods and reduce poverty<sup>[45]</sup>. Furthermore, Male P9 consolidated that the only way to unlocking poverty was to venture in entrepreneurial activities. Such trading activities propels individuals to succeed despite the challenges and risks associated with the Zimbabwean business environment.

### Theme 4: Employment generation

Another theme that emerged from the data collected was employment creation. The participants expressed that informal trading offers opportunities for entrepreneurship development. Actually, participants averred that the disruptive nature of COVID-19 pandemic has shattered many economic activities and many people lost their jobs. The following excerpts were captured during the interviews:

*“Hunger and poverty were catalysts that induced everyone to turn into entrepreneurial activities. The informal trading activities helps to develop a mindset geared towards embracing something new to survive. I eventually find myself at least doing something entrepreneurial for a living.” (Female P5).*

*“When food supplies ended, you cannot let go because hunger knows no boundary no age and no excuse. Thus when I realise that employment opportunities present themselves. I started vending a thing I had never done before. I started selling vegetables, tomatoes, potatoes to clothing some times. This is now my job and at times I am overwhelmed with customers.” (Female P16).*

The responses above indicate that informal trading activities is a viable business in the sense that it has resulted in employment for the COVID-19 affected people. In the spat of economic food disconnections, people have become more resilient and are able to come up with new ways to sustain their livelihoods. The findings unravelled that despite the vulnerability on traders, informal trading has emerged with new strategies to deal with precarious poverty and hunger. Employment generation is a strategy that has become the main source of income needed to fend for the marginalised communities, such as this one. This is in tandem with the theoretical arguments of Mwangi<sup>[46]</sup> who underscored that employment generation has become a strategy of informal traders to support marginalised communities in many developing countries.

#### Theme 5: Improve Gross Domestic Product

The discussions in the interviews revealed that informal trading improves the gross domestic product of a country. The participants highlighted that they were generating cash streams from the commodities they sold in the community. Participants believed that informal trading plays a significant role in improving gross domestic product.

Some of the participants' utterances were captured below:

*“My business is chicken rearing ever since. Zimbabwe is a country that has no job opportunities, so to irk a living, I have settled with this. In doing so, we complete the food chain distribution and positively impact GDP. I am struggling, but I am on the road to recovery from the COVID-19 disruptions. Chicken is one of the most preferred relishes for any special visitor in our culture, and there are many customers” (Female, P7).*

*“I am into second hand clothing. I sometimes do good, especially during winter. People want jackets, and my stock quickly goes out. I employed two workers on weekends to help me. Obtaining orders is problematic. We pay a lot of money through bribes for a bail of clothes to get here” (Female P19).*

From our findings, we understand that various trading activities, such as selling chicken, small grain products, and second-hand clothing, contribute positively to better standards of living after post COVID-19 era. While informal traders desire to raise their income to support their families, there are spillover effects. They guarantee access to food supply in the community, and the country's GDP is indirectly positively impacted. Informal traders sell vegetables, grains, potatoes, beans, rapoko, maize grain, round nuts, and other commodities. According to the SLA, such pathways enable informal traders to make their livelihood a small business livelihood system that is crucial for informal traders to escape hunger and poverty after the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>[42]</sup>.

When traders realized that there was inadequate grain food stuff in the community, the traders became innovative and travelled to far off rural areas where they acquired new supplies from smallholder farmers. Such farmers were motivated to increase the production of grain crops to generate income.

*"I sell hardware equipment, things like hoes, picks, shovels ropes, forks, spanners, pliers, chain, water tanks and many other items. Sometimes, I leave my son here and move around the village by selling personally. I have customers, mainly smallholder farmers. They come here for their requirements" (Male P13).*

However, our problem is that there is no shelter to protect our stuff from dusty, windy, and sunny because it is just an open-air market' (Female P8).

*"There is competition and increased procurement costs this compromised our trading activities" (Female 11).*

Participants said that it was not easy to obtain customers. They had to come up with coping strategies to market their goods by moving around the villages and selling them personally. The element of poverty seems to be easy to overcome. Within this context, Connor and Charway<sup>[47]</sup>, in support of the employment agenda, state that poor people's source of income and employment is in the informal trading sector because they do not have any formal employment. In addition, the role played by informal trading has stimulated agricultural productivity in rural areas to meet food demand in urban settings, thus positively contributing to a nation's GDP growth.

## 5. Conclusion

This study focuses on informal traders and their contribution to community livelihoods during the post-COVID-19 pandemic period in Zimbabwe. Given the limited evidence on the role of informal traders and challenges in improving their livelihoods after the COVID-19 pandemic in developing and emerging economies, this study adds value to the extant literature. Interestingly, one of the main findings of this study is that informal traders in Gweru play a significant role in contributing to community livelihoods. Informal trading activities have contributed to community members' access to food. The traders managed to alleviate poverty, but it was noted that some were still under the poverty trap despite their

involvement in trading activities. This study established that informal trading plays a catalytic role in poverty reduction through food security, employment creation, community food supply, and an increase in gross domestic product.

Similar to other studies, the current study had some limitations. The major limitation of the study is that it was a qualitative study that failed to fulfil the generalizability of the study findings. Moreover, the study used a small sample, and many dimensions of the classified informal employment activities were not studied. Within this context, it should be noted that quantitative studies should be conducted in the future with large samples that cover many views from a large research sample to generalize the findings. In view of all that has been mentioned so far, one may recommend that the government, policymakers, and private organizations streamline policies that recognize and emulate the Ghanaian, Ugandan, and Rwandan governments, who have recognized the critical contribution of informal traders towards improving community livelihoods, as well as in Zimbabwe.

## Statements and Declarations

### Public Interest Statement

This article reports on the findings from a study on the role of informal traders in contributing to community livelihoods in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era in Zimbabwe. Within the context of Zimbabwean cultural heritage, the issue of sustainability is the heart beat of socio-economic transformation. Using the sustainable livelihood approach, the study reveals that the small scale traders create several opportunities for employment, poverty alleviation and acted as an economic conduit for development through complementing the supply chain process in their day to day livelihood activities. This implies that community development is the need of the hour in Zimbabwean economic and cultural development. The emergence of COVID-19 has worsened community and informal traders' livelihoods. Therefore, this study recommends policymakers to assist the small scale traders by developing inclusive policies to address problems that are normally salient during unexpected shocks and threats.

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