

Law, Religion, Health and Healing in Africa



Edited by
M. Christian Green
Faith Kabata
Fortune Sibanda



16 THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 LOCKDOWN ON THE INFORMAL ECONOMY IN ZIMBABWE: A LEGAL PERSPECTIVE

Lillian Mhuru¹

INTRODUCTION

A World Health Organization (WHO) fact sheet in January 2020 designated the new Covid-19 coronavirus as a “public health emergency of universal concern”.² As a measure to reduce the spread of the pandemic, WHO developed guidelines advising people to maintain social distance and practice sanitary precautions. African countries were not immune to the pandemic. In Zimbabwe, the first verified cases were reported in March 2020. Zimbabwe, like other countries, announced its first 21-day lockdown measures starting on 30 March 2020. Additional measures were promulgated and passed in the form of statutory instruments. Some of the extraordinary measures introduced to combat Covid-19 were considered drastic, as they infringed on basic human rights.³ These include rights such as freedom of movement and assembly, restriction of which halted various business, religious and cultural activities. The lockdown regulations, however, were supposed to be proportionate and reasonable.⁴ Measures that were put in place include but are not limited to: (1) the Civil Protection (Declaration of State of Disaster: Rural and Urban Areas of Zimbabwe) (Covid-19) Notice, 2020, which declared the Coronavirus an infectious disease and a state of disaster;⁵ (2) the Public Health (Covid-19 Prevention, Containment and Treatment) Regulations, 2020, which declared the disease to be a formidable epidemic disease;⁶ and (3) the (Covid-19 Prevention, Containment and Treatment) (National Lockdown) Order, 2020, declared a period of twenty-one days of lockdown, except for essential services and exempted cases.⁷ Despite the measures taken to combat the spread of Covid-19 in the early days, the pandemic continued to spread across the globe, and that led to the extended lockdown and closure of national borders.

1 Zimbabwe Open University, Faculty of Law, Department of Public Law.

2 World Health Organization (WHO). 2020. “Covid-19 as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) under the IHR”, Fact Sheet 16A.

3 Mavhinga D. 2020. “Lockdown laws draconian, excessive”, *The Independent*, 3 April.

4 Harris LB. 2020. “Jail Time for Breaking Covid-19 Regulations”, *CITE News/Center for Innovation and Technology Zimbabwe*, 24 March.

5 Civil Protection (Declaration of State of Disaster: Rural and Urban Areas of Zimbabwe) (Covid-19) Notice, 2020 (Statutory Instrument 76 of 2020).

6 Public Health (Covid-19 Prevention, Containment and Treatment) Regulations, 2020, published as Statutory Instrument 77, 2020.

7 (Covid-19 Prevention, Containment and Treatment) (National Lockdown) Order, 2020, contained in Statutory Instrument 83 of 2020.

The WHO's Covid-19 prevention guidelines on hygienic sanitation and the stay-at-home orders that were issued by the state implied that everyone enjoys access to the requisites of socio-economic livelihood, such as adequate housing and access water and adequate food, yet millions of people in Africa live in absolute poverty, without access to the basic needs necessary to lead a dignified life. According to Lovemore Chikazhe and fellow researchers,⁸ who are experts in the area of service marketing and strategic marketing in Zimbabwe, the pandemic pushed the plight of the jobless to extreme poverty and helplessness. With an unemployment rate of over 80%, many Zimbabweans who depended on informal business for survival found themselves in a futile and untenable situation. The pandemic caused unprecedented economic challenges in people's livelihoods for the economically vulnerable groups in Zimbabwe – especially on the informal sector. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimated that relative poverty among informal workers increased by 56% in the first month of the crisis.⁹

Given the population's reliance on the unorganised and informal labour sector in Zimbabwe, it was expected that the pandemic and the subsequent ban on many unofficial activities during the state-imposed lockdown would cause a significant portion of the country's population to fall into utter poverty and increase their risk of contracting Covid-19. Zimbabwe most definitely did not escape the socioeconomic effects of national lockdowns, as sociologists Emmanuel Ndhlovu and Archiford Tembo have noted.¹⁰ Further, research on the effects of the Covid-19 lockdown on the informal trading in Zimbabwe was warranted. The purpose of this chapter is to examine these effects, given the already precarious economic situation of the majority of the Zimbabwean population and the dependence of many in the nation to generate their livelihoods within the informal sector. To accomplish the goals of the present study, in-depth interviews with people running various informal businesses, particularly in the informal trade and informal transportation sectors, were conducted in Harare, using a qualitative design. Three overarching goals were intended to be attained by the question guidelines: (1) to determine the changes the lockdown brought about in the business of informal workers, (2) to examine how the lockdown affected the informal workers, and (3) to identify the survival techniques used during the lockdown. With the help of this design, the researchers were able to investigate and offer in-depth insights into how the Covid-19 lockdown affected the informal sector and how it made those who work in it more susceptible to poverty. The study's design also facilitated taking into account how people felt during the lockdown. The sixteen participants in the present study are members of the informal sector who were involved in informal cross-border trade and informal

8 Chikazhe L, Mashapure R, Chavhunduka D and Hamunakwadi P. 2021. "Socio-Economic Implications of Covid-19 Pandemic to Informal traders Entrepreneurs: A Case of the Informal Sector in Zimbabwe", *Business Management and Strategy* 12(1):1-5.

9 International Labour Organization (ILO). 2020. "COVID-19 crisis and the informal economy immediate responses and policy challenges", *ILO Brief*, May.

10 Ndhlovu E. and Tembo A. 2020. "Gendered socio-economic implications of the COVID-19 pandemic in rural Zimbabwe", *BizEcons Quarterly* 12:21-40.

transportation. Pseudonyms were used in the study to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents as well as to present the practical and ethical issues of the research.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR STUDYING THE INFORMAL ECONOMY

The four main schools of thought regarding the nature and make-up of the informal economy are the dualist, structuralist, legalist and voluntarist theories, but the focus of this study is on the legalist theory.¹¹ The theory of legalism is thought to have originated from a Chinese philosophy whereby people are ruled by regulating the volatile and impulsive behaviour of individuals through strict and stringent laws.¹² This is mainly because it is assumed that humans naturally are attracted to doing wrong over right as they are driven by impulses and selfish interests. Therefore, in respect of the informal economy, legal scholars contend that the self-employed operate formally and create their own informal extra-legal norms as a result of a hostile legal system.¹³ People decide to work in the informal sector in order to escape the formal sector's burdensome rules and high taxes. One could argue that the country of Zimbabwe's sizeable informal sector developed in response to rules and regulations.

In an effort to stop the coronavirus from spreading, the Zimbabwean government introduced policies that indirectly promoted activities that raised the risk of people in this sector contracting the virus as they desperately tried to feed their families. The government also took advantage of the lockdown to enact policies aimed at eliminating the black markets, which led to the sudden and unannounced demolition of many informal trader stalls. According to researchers of the planning and management of human settlements,¹⁴ Zimbabwe's decision-makers have long struggled with urban informality. Similarly, the government destroyed unauthorised urban settlements in 2005 as part of Operation Murambatsvina, as recently described by Abraham Matamanda and his research colleagues.¹⁵ Concerns are usually raised about the way in which power can be abused to stifle unofficial activities in urban Zimbabwe by using this approach to dealing with the informal sector.

11 Chen MA. 2012. "The informal economy. Definitions, theories and policies", Women in Informal Employment, Globalizing and Organizing, Working Paper No. 1, August. Cambridge, MA: WIEGO.

12 Pines Y. 2018. "Legalism in Chinese Philosophy", *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Winter 2018 Edition. Zalta EN, (ed).

13 Pines, "Legalism in Chinese Philosophy".

14 Matamanda AR, Chirisa I, Dzvimbo MA and Chinozvina QL. 2019. "The political economy of Zimbabwean urban informality since 2000: A contemporary governance dilemma", *Development Southern Africa* 37(4):694-707.

15 Matamanda et al, "The political economy of Zimbabwean informality since 2000".

UNDERSTANDING THE INFORMAL ECONOMIC SECTOR IN ZIMBABWE

Zimbabwe has the largest informal sector in Africa, accounting for 60.6% of the country's GDP, and nothing indicates that this will be reversed within the next ten years or so.¹⁶ With such a backdrop, the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic wreaked havoc in other sectors of the informal economy in Zimbabwe. Two groups of informal workers represented by participants in the present study, who particularly suffered from the effects of the lockdown, were informal traders and informal transportation workers. The informal traders were mostly women, whereas the informal transportation workers were mostly male. The remainder of this chapter presents and compares the experiences of these two groups of informal sector workers.

Informal trade

The traders in the city of Harare who ran flea markets stopped doing cross-border business during the lockdown, as they were unable to get goods from abroad, and they did not start back up until the lockdown rules were relaxed in 2021. They claimed that city officials, working with the government, took advantage of the lockdown by using it as an excuse to destroy their market stalls while they were following the orders to stay at home. This confirms Prashanth Kulkarni's findings from 2021 that authorities in Zimbabwe's major cities destroyed thousands of vending stalls as part of a campaign to renovate and cleanup workplaces used by informal traders prior to the resumption of business after the lockdown.¹⁷ However, from the time of their demolition in April 2020 until February 2021, these workplaces had not undergone renovations. This backs up the claim that Zimbabwean decision-makers find it difficult to deal with some aspects of urban informality.¹⁸ But when the government relaxed its restrictions in February 2021 and the owners of the privately owned flea markets complied with its requirements, the traders who had stopped operating during the total lockdown started doing so again.

Informal transportation

Nyasha Chinyora and Tanaka Kusi, two of the eight respondents in the present study, worked in the sector of informal transportation as conductors on commuter omnibuses. Four were private car owners, and two were commuter omnibus drivers. Males made up every participant in this industry, which was based out of the Mbare Musika bus terminal. According to the respondents, informal transportation was prohibited during the lockdown in an effort to stop the spread of Covid-19. While the state-owned Zimbabwe United Passenger Company (ZUPCO)

16 Medina L and Schneider F. 2018. "Shadow Economies Around the World: What Did We Learn Over the Last 20 Years?", International Monetary Fund Working Paper, 24 January.

17 Kulkarni P. 2020. "Small vendors hard hit by government ordered demolitions in Zimbabwe", *Peoples Dispatch*, 29 April.

18 Matamanda AR. 2020. "Battling the informal settlement challenge through sustainable city framework: Experiences and lessons from Harare, Zimbabwe", *Development Southern Africa* 37(2):217-231.

16. The impact of the Covid-19 lockdown on the informal economy in Zimbabwe...

and operators franchised by ZUPCO were allowed to operate after the lockdown was relaxed in September 2020, the informal transportation sector was prevented from resuming operations. According to legalist theory, it is precisely this kind of governmental regulation that leads to an increase in illegal undercover activities, as people whose undercover businesses were shut down looked for other undercover ways to survive. Unlicensed drivers were seen transporting people, bribing police officers at roadblocks to let them pass and thus exposing both themselves and their passengers to the virus because they were not abiding by Covid-19 regulations.

EXPERIENCES OF INFORMAL SECTOR WORKERS IN ZIMBABWE UNDER COVID-19

The lockdowns presented a great threat to the country's deepening socio-economic crisis, precisely because of this impact on Zimbabwean informal workers. The informal sector was found to be vulnerable due to the Covid-19 lockdowns.¹⁹ When the lockdown was implemented, stalls of vendors were removed from the streets of Zimbabwe as one of the containment measures. As a result, key socioeconomic rights, such as the right to enough food and the right to work, as provided in the Constitution of Zimbabwe, 2013, were jeopardised.²⁰

The announcement of the lockdown meant that vendors needed to stock up on food and other household necessities, but the majority could not afford to stay home from work even for a day in order to afford these necessities. Going to work or to the markets meant exposure to the virus as well as to police intervention; however, informal sector workers needed to feed their families on a daily basis. Therefore, the impact of the lockdown hit the informal traders the hardest, being the majority of players in the informal economy.

Zimbabwean sociologist, Perpetua Gumbo observes that around 80% of informal traders in Zimbabwe work in the informal sector through street vending, flea-market selling, cross-border trading, piece work at people's homes and working in small to medium firms.²¹ Gumbo, therefore, claims that the shutdown resulted in a drop in people's livelihoods in a country that was already poor before the Covid-19 crisis, since the country was food-insecure, had a high unemployment rate and was experiencing economic disaster.

Informal trade

A single mother of four who is a cross-border trader and sells clothes at a market in Kambuzuma, Harare, was interviewed on 22 February 2022, and she indicated that

19 Zhanda K, Garutsa M, Dzvimbo MA and Mawonde A. 2022. "Informal traders in the informal sector amid Covid-19: implications for household peace and economic stability in urban Zimbabwe Informal traders in the informal sector amid Covid-19: implications for household peace and economic stability in urban Zimbabwe", *Cities & Health* 6(1):37-51.

20 Constitution of Zimbabwe, 2013, ss 77 and 64.

21 Gumbo O. 2020. "Covid-19 Lockdown Measures on Zimbabwean Populace", *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal* 7(7):797-814.

she lost more than 95% of her income the moment the regulations were introduced by the government, as social distancing guidelines drastically reduced the number of people visiting the market. These circumstances led a number of people in Zimbabwe to violate the lockdown regulations. For instance, some vendors continued to open their businesses and some shoppers continued to visit the markets without the lawful permission from the law enforcement agents, and they were criminally prosecuted.

A forty-year-old woman with eight children, who lives in Kambuzuma, Harare, was also interviewed on 22 February 2022. She is the owner of a flea market which is not yet registered, and her source of income was drastically reduced due to the coronavirus pandemic. Her clothes were imported, mainly from South Africa, by road transport. With land border closures and restrictions on movement since March 2020, her business suffered a major setback, as she was not able to import her clothes from South Africa. Subsequently, the capital for the business was depleted through diversion to other immediate and household needs. Prior to the pandemic, the woman would earn on average two hundred to five hundred United States dollars per month as profit from sales. Since the lockdown measures were introduced in March 2020, her income dwindled to almost nothing. As a result, she was now struggling to make ends meet, as her only source of income and livelihood was disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic. The most painful thing was that the woman received no assistance from the government, and maintained that the government should have helped them with financial assistance to sustain their families during the lockdown.

Nyasha Mukoweni, a forty-five-year-old woman with two children aged fifteen and thirteen, who resides in Rugare, Harare, was interviewed on 23 February 2022. She indicated to the researcher that as a cross-border trader who sources clothes and kitchenware items from neighbouring countries, such as Botswana, she encountered travelling challenges the moment the lockdown measures were introduced. Prior to the pandemic, she travelled three to four times per month to source goods for resale in Zimbabwe. Being a single mother, the coronavirus pandemic severely harmed her business and way of life, making it impossible for her to send her two kids to school. Despite the fact that schools have resumed operations, it is now difficult to meet basic needs for food and clothing. All her capital was utilised to stock up on food and other household essentials during the prolonged lockdown. Since then, the capital has been totally depleted. Nyasha tried to diversify her business by sourcing and trading goods locally, since she was unable to travel to any country to source goods for resale in Zimbabwe due to border closures and travel restrictions. This was unsuccessful because she was unable to sell her goods on the street because city council officials were constantly pursuing street vendors. She also didn't get any food or financial aid from the government or any other organisation to protect her from the pandemic's effects. An independent journalist, Tonderayi Mukeredzi, correctly questions how traders confined to their homes would be able to feed their families.²²

22 Mukeredzi T. 2020. "Dying of hunger: Zimbabwe street vendors hit by coronavirus clampdown", *Reuters*, 16 June.

Informal transportation

Participants in the informal transportation industry reported that the country's economic hardship had already made it difficult for them to support their families before the lockdown. Their economic situation deteriorated as a result of the lockdown, with little hope of improvement. One driver of a commuter omnibus in Harare on 27 February 2022 explained: "We found the announcement of the lockdown to be very unfair. Most of us were struggling to make ends meet. Since we haven't been in the wilderness since the lockdown started, there is no food in this economy if you don't hustle, making hunger a more lethal threat than the Covid-19 virus." The statement provides more proof that informal workers were having trouble following the Covid-19 containment procedures.

According to legalist theory, this statement implies that the government's decisions to contain the virus were harsh on the informal economy, to the point where it threatened their means of subsistence. For informal transport providers, for instance, operating was a life-or-death decision because remaining inside during the lockdown meant starving to death. Since the threat of hunger and starvation was just as real as the threat posed by the coronavirus itself, unofficial workers engaged in illegal activities to survive during the lockdown. According to the legalist theory, informal workers use illegal methods to survive rather than rebel against society.²³ In other words, acting outside of the law in Zimbabwe by the informal traders became the only option available because it was more beneficial for their survival to break the law, since the cost of following the lockdown regulations was greater than the benefits. According to economists Louise Fox and Landry Signé, the implementation of a lockdown presents a significant conundrum that forces a trade-off between the lives and livelihoods of informal economy workers, because 68% of informal sector workers in Africa resided in nations that had fully implemented full lockdowns as of April 2020.²⁴ Because of the disruption to their source of income, many workers in the informal economy were forced to choose between the risk of infection and starvation.²⁵

An entire network, including the owners of the vehicles, the drivers, conductors, touts and mechanics, whose livelihoods depended on the informal transportation sector, was upended when commuter omnibuses were removed from the streets. Those who rely on the unofficial transportation network to get to work were also impacted by this situation. Molly Manyonganise describes how the pandemic affected people in Zimbabwe economically in a study she conducted.²⁶ Manyonganise claims that

23 Gano-An, "On becoming creative solopreneurs"; Matsongoni H and Mutambara E. 2018. "An assessment of informal SMEs' potential in an African economy: Theoretical and conceptual framework", *Public and Municipal Finance* 7(2):1-13.

24 Fox L and Signé L. 2020. "COVID-19 and the future of work in Africa: How to shore up incomes for informal sector workers", *Africa in Focus* (blog) Brookings Institution, 26 May.

25 Bonnet F, Vanek J and Chen MA. 2019. "Women and Men in the Informal Economy: A Statistical Brief". Manchester: WIEGO and ILO, January.

26 Manyonganise M. 2022. "When a Pandemic Wears the Face of a Woman: Intersections of Religion and Gender during the Covid-19 Pandemic in Zimbabwe", in Sibanda F,

because of the closure of the informal sector, the lockdown has led to the economic disempowerment of informal traders.²⁷ She continues by describing how Epworth residents were cited in the media as having walked with loads of vegetables to and from Mbare for resale because the human transporters were no longer in operation.²⁸ Buses were unable to provide an adequate or dependable service, despite the fact that the ban on commuter omnibuses was intended to restrict movement to and within urban centres. Once more, the government was to blame for the destruction of the informal sector without providing better living conditions for those who worked in it. As a result, those who were impacted were likely forced to find other (illegal) ways to survive in the informal sector. This supports legalist theory once more, which contends that increased participation in the informal economy is a result of government efforts to make it more challenging for businesses to operate there.

STRATEGIES FOR SURVIVAL USED DURING THE COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

According to the World Bank, legalists view the informal economy as “a rational response by micro entrepreneurs to over-regulation by government bureaucracies.”²⁹ This was evident in Zimbabwe during the Covid-19 lockdown, where informal traders were violating the regulations for survival. This is supported by economic anthropologist Julia Elyachar, who contends that informal workers turn to illegal methods not to act against society or by choice, but to survive.³⁰ Further, she postulates that people base their decision on whether or not to enter the legal system and remain there based on a broad assessment of what it could cost to comply with legal requirements and what they could gain from doing so.

Informal traders

When their market stalls were destroyed, the informal traders who were vending at flea markets run by the city council said they had to continue doing business from their homes. According to the legalist theory, this demonstrates unequivocally that the Zimbabwean government encouraged the growth of the informal sector and illegal activities during the lockdown period, since they did not give the people whose sources of income they had destroyed any way to survive. Informal traders on social media promoted whatever inventory they had, and customers would visit their homes to buy products. They were unable to buy more stock for resale due

Muyambo and Chitando E (eds). *Religion and the Covid-19 Pandemic in Southern Africa*. London: Routledge.

27 Manyonganise, “When a Pandemic Wears the Face of a Woman”, 236.

28 Manyonganise, “When a Pandemic Wears the Face of a Woman”, 236.

29 World Bank and International Finance Corporation (IFC). 2009. *Doing Business 2010*. Washington, DC: World Bank/IFC/Palgrave MacMillan.

30 Elyachar J. 2003. “Mappings of Power: The State, NGOs, and International Organizations in the Informal Economy of Cairo”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45(3):517-605.

16. The impact of the Covid-19 lockdown on the informal economy in Zimbabwe...

to their limited mobility, which also decreased their income. At privately run flea markets, the informal traders admitted that they had to borrow money to buy new stock. They used *malaicha* (Ndebele slang for the traditional way of sending goods over the border with bus and taxi drivers), who served as go-betweens between them and the police, helping them cross the border illegally by bribing officials. However, this tactic exposed them to the virus because no tests were done, and when they returned home, their families and clients were also at risk.

The most obvious problem is how corruption and, more specifically, bribes, have damaged the rule of law and good governance. The concept of authority is undermined when state employees are corrupt, and it becomes challenging for the state to continue playing a legitimate role in enforcing the law. Actors in the informal economy try to avoid the state or co-opt it through bribes and incentives, resulting in a relationship of “inevitable conflict” between the state and the informal economy. Thus, despite attempts by the government to restrict their business activities, informal cross-border traders were willing to do anything to survive. They would occasionally hire cross-border agents, paying them with money to purchase the goods they desired from neighbouring South Africa. While this activity was illegal, traders would not be able to report theft of this nature, so the main risk was that there was no assurance or guarantee that the agents would bring back the promised goods.

Although they had given their information to the government at the beginning of the lockdown for potential financial assistance, the cross-border traders claimed that they had not received any kind of assistance from the government. Further, the government promised a one-time cushioning allowance to vulnerable people, but more than four months into the lockdown only 208 000 of the 1 million households identified for assistance had received it. Therefore, no one who took part in the present study claimed to have gotten help from the government. Without any help and without any means of support, the informal workers are unable to escape the rising levels of poverty. Since the informal sector is what the majority of Zimbabweans rely on for survival, all of the participants agreed that the government of Zimbabwe should not have used the lockdown to destroy it. They also believed that the traders whose market stalls had been destroyed should have been given access to new working spaces as soon as the lockdown regulations were relaxed by the city officials.

Informal transportation

One private driver who lives in Rugare, Harare, narrated to the researcher that he sold his car and used the proceeds to get through the lockdown, while other drivers, who had no other sources of income, converted their cars into mobile stores, where they sold the scarce groceries that were available during the lockdown. Since this was illegal, he went on to say that they had to sneak into neighbourhoods where they had regular clients to sell their goods. Others, on the other hand, claimed that they were doing whatever was offered to them as long as it generated income. These responses, too, indicated the applicability of the legalist theory, providing

convincing evidence that the government's attempt to suppress the use of illegal transportation led to the emergence of other illegal activities.

The government had urged private transportation providers to join the established transportation industry, but participants noted that not all private providers could comply, because their vehicles would then need to meet strict safety requirements. Additionally, they claimed that when working in the formal transportation industry, their profits were lower and they were unable to support their families financially, let alone pay for the upkeep of their fleets. They added that some commuter omnibus owners who had signed up for the official transportation franchise had already voiced their dissatisfaction with the government for not paying them on time and for paying them with money that had depreciated in value due to inflation. Many were discouraged from franchising their cars as a result. According to the legalist theory, microbusiness owners find it difficult to adhere to formal requirements because they are inefficient, expensive, and burdensome, and as a result they prefer to operate formally. While many people who work in the informal sector avoid these requirements, formal participants in the economy pay costs to maintain their status as such. Many of those surveyed believed that those who follow the law incur additional expenses, and this extra financial burden served as a strong incentive to reject or disobey laws that were thought to be inconvenient.

Participants claimed they had no other means of support and that the government had not offered them any assistance. They recommended that instead of outright banning this industry, the government create an effective system that can accommodate all nonconventional transportation providers. This recommendation, which again supports the legalist theory, indicates that the informal workers were unwilling to leave the informal sector, despite the government's continued efforts to make it challenging for them to do so by the stringent lockdown regulations.

It was clear that the formal transportation model was not the best option for private operators, who were required to provide their own vehicles, but are instead managed by the government under subpar circumstances that have a negative impact on their profitability. Any informal transport provider cannot reasonably expect monthly payments in local currency as the exchange rate in the country continues to decline. Furthermore, the government was already unable to pay the few individuals who had joined the formal sector, and the majority of them have since terminated their contracts with the government.

CONCLUSION

Informal workers and their families in Zimbabwe were severely vulnerable and unable to make a living as they had been able to do before during the Covid-19 lockdown, which resulted in some being charged with crimes and imprisoned as a result. Many people in the informal sector engaged in illegal activities during the lockdown in order to survive, which continued the dominance of the informal sector in Zimbabwe. Most of the individuals were detained and charged with

16. The impact of the Covid-19 lockdown on the informal economy in Zimbabwe...

crimes. The legalist theory contends that the expansion of the informal sector is the result of governmental regulations. The Covid-19 pandemic offers a chance for the government and local authorities to reevaluate their relationship with those employed in the informal sector, according to the study's findings. The socioeconomic crisis brought on by the lockdown has highlighted the crucial roles played by local governments and national governments in responding to emergencies in urban areas. Accordingly, the research findings are used to support the following recommendations, which must be implemented more thoroughly in Zimbabwe in order to reduce the negative effects of crises like the pandemic on the unorganised sector.

First of all, instead of attempting to completely eradicate the informal sector, the government of Zimbabwe should provide a workable policy framework that accommodates it and promotes economic activity by allowing it to operate under restraints during the Covid-19 pandemic. Decongesting markets or other locations where informal workers congregate and ensuring that they adhere to new health regulations can help achieve this. Since the informal sector is the largest source of employment for many people in an economy where formal employment has collapsed, the government should do more to foster its growth and development. The nation will benefit from this as it works to combat poverty and advance the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Above all, the Zimbabwean government must work with local councils to persuade participants in the informal sector to register their businesses so they can receive aid from the government in the event of a similar national or international catastrophe because their operations will be seen as legal. The government can make this process easier by allowing the informal sector to register their businesses for free and by enacting a minimal tax rate that has little impact on their bottom lines.

A weak social contract between the state and those working in the informal sector in Zimbabwe has made them more vulnerable to the Covid-19 pandemic. The public services that matter to informal workers, like infrastructure in markets and safe water and sanitation systems, must be funded with the taxes that informal workers' pay. Doing so would help to contain the effects or spread of Covid-19. Numerous unregistered workers will be encouraged to do so by the increased accountability and transparency. Further, it is also recommended that the government should introduce economic support packages, including direct cash-transfers, expanded unemployment benefits and child benefits for vulnerable informal traders and their families. Direct cash-transfers, which would mean giving cash directly to informal traders who are poor or lack income, can be a lifeline for those struggling to afford day-to-day necessities during pandemics.