

A “war against livelihoods”: Contestations over the government of Zimbabwe's response to street vending in selected cities

Vincent Chakunda

Abstract

From the mid-1990s, Zimbabwe experienced an escalated economic decline epitomised by de-industrialisation, depressed job and livelihood opportunities and increased aggregate poverty prevalence. This culminated in the growth of street vending, dominated by illegal and unlicensed hawking. Using a mixed methods approach, the study interrogates the response of the government of Zimbabwe to street vending. The study reveals that street vending in Zimbabwe cities is anarchical and thrive on chaotic governance. This presents a locus of conflict between the state's measures of maintaining public order and governability and the citizens' efforts to sustain livelihoods. The presence of exclusionary neo-liberal municipal by-laws have relegated street vendors from the mainstream economy. Military assisted violent evictions, confiscation of wares, torture, arrest and detention of vendors forms part of government's response strategies. The study recommends reform of by-laws and urban planning to entrench vending into the mainstream economy.