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Informal
Traders, vendors in
BEITBRIDGE



Editorial

As we continue the fight to empower women and youths involved in informal trade about their social rights and how to protect and defend these rights once violated, this newsletter unpacks the challenges faced by informal cross border traders amidst COVID 19. It also shows that a good working relationship between policy makers and informal traders can help identify gaps in the existing legal frameworks and ensure the formulation of policies that will fully safeguard the interests of informal traders. The newsletter further challenges the government to improve its support of informal traders. It reminds the government that informal trade is key in lowering unemployment rate in the Beitbridge border town.

For the challenges faced by informal cross border traders to be comprehensively dealt with, communication between stakeholders is key. This newsletter points out that more spaces and platforms must be created that will provide informal and cross border traders with any opportunity to regularly engage with the duty bearers regulating informal and cross border trading, so as to facilitate collective problem solving on the challenges characterizing the informal and formal cross border trading. Overall, the newsletter demonstrates CYDT's interventions towards the development of a conducive working environment for informal and cross border traders.

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BEITBRIDGE BORDER CRISIS: WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

January is usually a busy month with informal cross-border traders in Beitbridge doing brisk business in back-to-school products like school shoes, uniforms and stationary imported from Musina town. It is also a restocking month after the festive holiday. Unfortunately the recurring Beitbridge Border crisis which has seen South African security forces tightening control of all irregular movements across the border has greatly affected the informal cross border traders.

The Beitbridge Border post has over the years gained significant coverage due to its

frequent instability owing to the influx of cross borders, especially during the festive season. It is up to date still considered a crisis which needs immediate attention with South Africans pointing fingers as to the evident reason why they are also affected by unemployment in a case where they're natives of their land.

Many Zimbabweans are found desperate to cross the borders in a bid to search for greener pastures, and while others tiresomely queue to get served, others owing to none or inadequate documentations, sadly cross the Limpopo River. It is only unfortunate

that not all of them see the light of the day and get to the land they are certain would have offered them more. They die trying, and as brave as that may sound it is tragic that they wouldn't have enjoyed the fruits of their native land as much as they would have hoped. The ones who get deported from South Africa are also sadly not able to support the lives of those they used to support. Sadly this is a cycle which indefinitely affects informal cross-border trader operations, but what is it that needs to be done?

"The border crisis is usually an inconvenience to us cross-border traders as we will only be wishing to import goods from Musina but end up being inconvenienced by cross-borders surviving in South Africa. I think there should be identification cards for cross-border traders or from two or three members of the Crossborder Trader Association who can buy and import goods on our behalf. Additionally at least two trucks can suffice for the transportation of those goods. That way, most cross-border traders would have had their job eased as compared to spending more time at the border and experiencing slow service", advised one informal cross-border, Mercy Tshuma.

Women cross-border traders trying to use undesignated entry points are prone to falling prey to armed robbers who strip them naked in search of money. There are alleged cases where women have been raped while attempting to move their goods and unfortunately in most cases such reports are not made to the police.

"Corruption and abuse of women are voices that are rampant at our entry and exit points but most women who are regular travellers at the borders do not usually report such incidences. Most of our traders lack information on how to utilize regular border clearance and movement procedures and they therefore end up paying more than necessary to rogue transporters and border officials who offer to facilitate the process", Mr Tabheni advised.

Sadly our nation has been infected with the worst pandemic-corruption- where almost everyone is now a participant. The crisis in our borders will not cease to end as corruption has been proven eminent with people continuing to offer bribes to the border officials or participating in cross-border jumping. It cannot be denied that these occurrences are as a result of the struggles people are faced with in our country and it would help if the government made plans to

reduce the chaotic situation by creating employment and favorable processes and policies towards attaining adequate documentations.

There is however hope that after the completion of the Beitbridge border upgrading, the responsible stakeholders will come up with mechanisms that can facilitate

the quicker and easier movement of market goods across the border. It also need to be highlighted that the introduction of Simplified Trade Regime (STR) offices at Beitbridge will assist informal Crossborder traders to utilize the Simplified Trade Regime.



CHRONICLES OF INFORMAL TRADERS DURING THE PANDEMIC TIMES.

The plight of informal traders under the COVID-19 pandemic, toppled by the ailing Zimbabwean economy; continues to see Beitbridge based general informal traders and informal cross-border traders struggling under the inconvenient conditions.

The informal traders have had to regularly close shops during the national lockdowns which had been implemented by the government as mandatory measures to help curb the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this regard, there are varying aspects of

their operations which proved inconvenient if they were to continue surviving both the pandemic and putting food on the table. The fear still remains that the virus can unexpectedly cause another lockdown.

In an interview with Chairperson of Beitbridge Informal Cross Border Traders Association, Mr Mafios Macheka, it was revealed that the spaces within which informal traders operate from put them at a disadvantage when lockdown restrictions are being operational. This is so as the

restrictions are most stringent to people operating within public and open spaces and are therefore left with no choice but to entirely close their trade.

“The infrastructure which most informal traders operate within is an open infrastructure and we have always been of the suggestion that our council should partner private players who can invest in infrastructure that can house these informal traders”, Macheka highlighted.

Lack of infrastructure can also be the reason for the crippling corruption as some informal traders are then found wanting when they operate illegally. As a border town, informal traders actually operate till the early hours of the morning and this proves a dangerous opportunity for hooligans masquerading as customers to commit inhumane crimes like rape.

Mr Macheka further revealed that the pandemic times have been heavily felt by the traders as they were now forced to live on hand to mouth putting a strain on their businesses.

Beitbridge based informal trader, Nomphendulo Masuku, gave an account of how strenuous most informal trader’s activities have been since the first lockdown.

“We are facing many challenges especially during this COVID-19 time. Borders are closed and most of us survive through cross-border trading and as such we are facing difficulties in managing our businesses. Another challenge is that during the first lockdown most of the traders used up their profits and the money for their purchases to a point where it is now a struggle for them to come back up.

Another challenge we’re facing as traders is the need to have PPEs like sanitizers at which point it is a huge dilemma deciding to get a sanitizer when we will still be short of money to increase our orders”

“Some of us have managed to survive in an atmosphere that is not so encouraging. We have fears and are uncertain of what can happen next as the environment is unstable and unpredictable. Markets are temporary, import procedures change time and again and the constant restriction of certain goods is unfortunate, not to mention the unstable exchange rates which continue to affect our operations. We can no longer engage in sustainable trade as we survive hand to mouth”, another informal cross-border trader, Melody Siziba, shared her plight.

Apart from feeling the weight of the pandemic, some informal traders also

expressed that they're still in need of permanent market places where they can securely do their trading.

“We are constantly being moved from one street corner to another. We have always had expectations but we have lost hope that the council will be able to construct permanent markets. More so we're made to pay as much as 20 Rands per day by council, their toilets are at a 3 rand cost and this becomes expensive especially for pregnant women who usually frequent the toilets,” highlighted another informal trader, Susan Nyimbo.

The disappointed informal traders and the Informal Crossborder Trader Association have reason as the informal crossborder

traders are the major source of revenue for the local authority.

“Last year the Municipality of Beitbridge collected over R2 million from our traders but they have failed to provide basic services like tap water and toilets in our markets. Our traders erect their own temporary structures of poles and tents or roofing sheets for those who can afford. Our expectation now is that they engage private investors to construct the required infrastructure,” equipped Mr Tabheni, Spokesperson of Beitbridge Informal Cross border Traders Association.

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INFORMATION CAPACITATION REQUIRED TO STOP CORRUPTION IN CROSS BORDER TRADE

The COVID-19 restrictions have reduced official movement of individual informal cross-border traders across the Beitbridge border. However, much movement is happening at undesignated entry points where some informal cross-border traders are paying security personnel to facilitate smuggling of their goods.

In varying economic sectors it can be revealed that the reason there exist corruption at both ends, that of the service seeker and that of the service provider is that most civilians would be ignorant about the processes which they could have pursued

hence exposing themselves to corrupt ideas in order to desperately get out of a stalling process which would have unfortunately presented itself as an inconvenience.

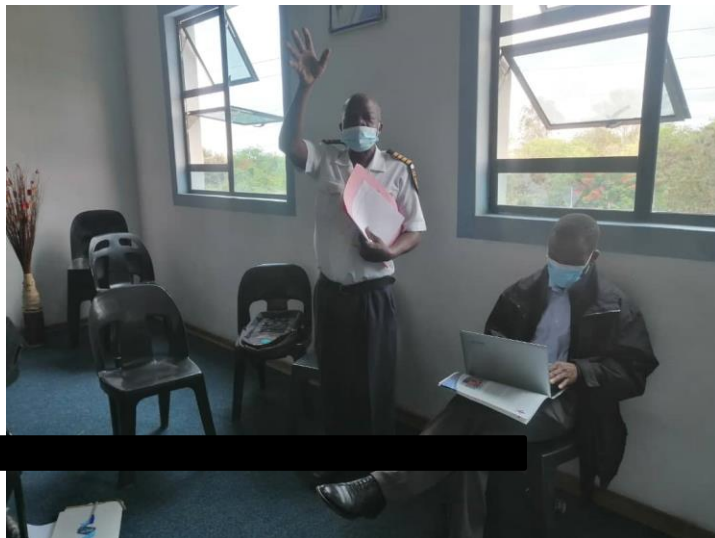
“The government, through relevant departments like the Ministry of Women Affairs, Small and Medium Enterprises, should conduct workshops aimed at informing and educating our informal cross-border trader - especially women- about the obligations and rights of small scale cross-border traders”, advised Mr Tabheni, spokesperson for the Beitbridge Informal Crossborder Trader Association.

Beitbridge female informal crossborder traders have realized the need for information capacitation on the official import and export procedures so that they are well-versed in the processes and can appreciate a safer way on importing and exporting their goods.

“The government should also consider decentralizing the issuing of import and export permits for small-scale cross border traders (SSCBTs) since the centralization of such permit offices in Harare has led to some of our traders opting to use undesignated

entry points instead of travelling to the capital. The application for import and export permits should be available at the border.

The government should inject more funds into money lending institutions like the Women Development Bank and CMED and ensure that women should be able to access the funds with limited collateral requirements. These will ensure they don't have to rely on their spouses or other well-resourced partners as this often leads to abuse” Mr Tabheni advised.



EMPOWERING INFORMAL TRADERS: THE LIFE BLOOD OF A BORDER TOWN

Informal cross-border traders in Beitbridge are currently facing challenges owing to lack of proper markets to sell their goods, lack of business training and lack of correct information on proper import

and export procedures during cross border movement of their goods.

Despite the fact that informal traders contribute a significant percentage, above

40%, to the national fiscal, little is done to empower and enable their operations to be less strenuous. Most of them are failing to access loans from money lending institutions to capacitate growth due to issues to do with collateral security.

In an interview with the Beitbridge Informal Cross Border Trade Association, spokesperson Mr Tapiwa Tabheni highlighted that “In order to assist informal cross border traders, the government through the responsible ministries should consider introducing policies that promote easier means through which the informal cross border traders can be able to import their goods.

There should be increased consultation and interaction between informal cross border traders and government stakeholders like the department of immigration, the department of Agriculture, Beitbridge Port Health and the Zimbabwe Revenue Authority who are directly involved in the import and export of the traders’ market goods.”

The informal cross-border traders are notably still paying punitive import duties at the Beitbridge border as compared to borders like Chirundu and Victoria falls. This is despite the fact that the informal traders contribute more than 40% to the national

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fiscal and the punitive import duties could be because at the other borders import duties are waived from the flat rate of 40% to zero due to the introduction of the Simplified Trade Regime launched in 2010.

“Informal cross border traders who are importing their goods through Beitbridge border post are not benefitting from this Simplified Trade Regime as it has not yet been implemented at Beitbridge.

As the Beitbridge Informal Cross-border Traders Association we call upon the

government through the responsible ministries to implement the Simplified Trade Regime at Beitbridge”, the spokesperson for Beitbridge Informal Crossborder Trader Association advised.

The current situation is that there is no permanent market for informal cross border traders in Beitbridge. Traders are always seen ferrying their goods daily to the markets and back home and this affects their operation costs and exposes them to possible crime like robberies. This is further worsened by that it is difficult to access loans from financial institutions for informal cross border traders who have no permanent trading markets.

Beitbridge based informal trader, Perpetua Mujakachi expressed sternly that the places they’re working from do not have toilets and

water and it would be a great effort if they are built shades which will make it possible for them to work should there be rain.

“We also want infrastructure or spaces which will be secure enough for us to leave our stuff and not incur further costs in the daily transportation of our goods. The place can be fenced and have a tight security so that we do not transport our goods daily as we are doing currently,” she added.

“As an informal cross-border traders association we would like to urge the Municipality of Beitbridge to consider partnership with the private sector so that our informal traders can have proper trading markets constructed for them”, Mr Tabheni pressed.



CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND MANAGEMENT TRAINING: CYDT CAPACITATES INFORMAL TRADERS, AUTHORITIES WITH SKILLS TO RESOLVE CONFLICTS

Informal and cross-border trade is the principal livelihood of Beitbridge, the busiest border town of Matabeleland South Province that separates Zimbabwe and South Africa.

Cross border trade is comfortable the bread basket of many young women and youths as it critically plays a fundamental role in lowering unemployment rate, mitigating detrimental poverty effects and sustaining livelihoods.

With levels of employment extremely low across the country, informal and cross border trade is the flexible sector that has helped breadwinners put food on the table as well as

send their children to school in the various communities of Beitbridge.

However, the lack of support and recognition of the sector by the government has opened gates of unending conflicts between the informal cross border traders and authorities as many decisions that affect the sector are passed without involving informal and cross border traders. Aware of this, Community Youth Development Trust (CYDT) conducted an intervention activity titled "Conflict Resolution and Management Training" that creatively capacitated informal cross border traders and border officials to be able to amicably resolve conflict as well as empower women and youths with information about their social rights and how

to protect and defend these rights once violated.

The two-day Conflict Resolution and Management training conducted by CYDT was seen as an imperative and crucial activity to facilitate peaceful engagement between cross border traders and border officials in addressing challenges and policy gaps that were affecting the cross border community.

The training managed to capacitate authorities and informal traders with information about the sources of conflict and conflict analysis, where they were made to understand key areas of conflict and its stages. All the participants were left with significant information about the root causes of conflict and how such conflicts can be avoided.

One female cross border trader said, "this CYDT program is a step in the right direction towards creating a sustainable and conducive environment for traders to conduct their operations."

Another cross border trader said this program will improve relationships between the

traders and duty bearers which is also essential.

At a time when travelling has been made difficult by COVID 19 and the protocols introduced to curb the pandemic such as the closure of land borders in Zimbabwe, operations of cross border traders have been largely affected. The situation has been worsened by the slow response of the government and other stakeholders to find solutions in which traders can be allowed to carry out their operations which has further caused conflicts between cross border traders and border officials.

At the border, officials have unfortunately used the prevailing conditions and existing gaps to expand their pockets through bribes, further creating conflict as many traders are incapacitated to pay the fee required by these border officials.

During the training, authorities committed to improve relations with cross border traders and praised CYDT for coming up with such a well planned and necessary program which they said will surely improve informal and cross border traders' operations.



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