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Informal Traders in **BeitBridge**



Editorial Note

As we continue to advocate for the development of better working conditions for informal-cross border traders in Beitbridge, this newsletter brings to awareness the challenges faced by informal-cross border traders, and the need for the development of policies that are pro-informal traders. The newsletter also highlights the importance of informal traders associations in protecting the interests and rights of informal traders. Since informal trade is a large sector that comprises of different informal traders selling different kinds of products, in this newsletter, we advocate for the creation of more associations. We show the need for the formation of informal traders associations at Ward level that will work with the Beitbridge Informal Traders Association to deal with the specific issues of each Ward. To expand awareness on the challenges faced by informal traders, we show how CYDT used podcasts to bring informal traders issues to the fore.

CYDT raises awareness on informal traders' challenges

The prevailing conditions require innovative, creative and modern ways of interacting with the target audience, as a result, CYDT has developed a talk show called the "The Vendor Podcast" that seeks to provide relevant knowledge to young men and young women involved in informal trading.

The vibrant talk show has enhanced online visibility on the plight of informal and cross border traders in Beitbridge. It has provoked a fruitful debate that will surely put pressure on the government and local authorities to improve the working conditions of informal and cross border traders resulting in localized policy formulation for informal traders in the border town.

Led by an expert in podcasting with informal traders and stakeholders as guest speakers, two podcast episodes have been produced so far. The first one focused on the challenges faced by informal traders in general while the second one highlighted the importance of informal traders associations in



standing up for the rights of informal traders.

In rating the importance of the podcast, a Beitbridge youth informal trader, Siboniso Dube said, "I do not remember the last time I listened to a radio show. I honestly prefer podcasts now. I only go online and search podcasts that tackle issues that I like. Therefore, this is really a creative move by CYDT. Now, I will be able to download these podcast episodes and listen to them at my own time. That is the advantage of podcasts."

"It is important that the plight of informal traders in Beitbridge be heard at both local and national level so as to have policy change. I encourage young people to never miss these hugely enlightening episodes."

Another informal trader from Beitbridge, Bhekimpilo Mbedzi said the show has capacitated informal traders with information that will help them survive the prevailing conditions.

"As result of the show, we got to learn about the essential protocols we must follow, and practices to avoid to prevent us from getting in trouble with the border and immigration officials. If the protocol says we must provide a valid COVID 19PCR Test not more than 48 hours from the time of our departure for Zimbabwe, we must make sure we comply and avoid buying fake certificates which will

lead to possible conflicts with the authorities," he said.

He added that the shows is also helping bring to awareness the need for informal traders' associations in Beitbridge that will represent and stand up for the rights of informal traders.

The talkshow will continue to empower young men and young women involved in informal and cross border trading about their social rights; how to protect and defend these rights once violated.

Visit our website and social media platforms to access these episodes.

CYDT, informal traders continue to lobby for an enabling environment



Despite efforts of informal traders, CYDT and other like-minded organisations such as the Bulawayo Vendors and Traders Association to create an enabling informal cross-border trading environment in Beitbridge, local authorities have been slow in addressing the critical issues raised.

As a result, CYDT together with informal traders saw it fit to identify policy gaps in relation to the experiences and

challenges faced by informal and cross border traders. This was followed by proposed policy amendments development meetings in which proposed amendments to policy and legal frameworks governing the informal sector were developed in Beitbridge.

Some of the proposed amendments include the need for local authorities to allocate trading sites that are easily accessible, visible and economically viable that will improve the profits of informal traders.

Currently, informal traders do not have specific locations to sell their wares; they just get to a corner and sell their wares. This has caused conflicts amongst the traders and the municipal police who confiscate traders' wares in the process. Therefore, having a localised policy that

clearly spelt out the need for specific locations where informal traders can carry out their operations could help change the behaviour of local authorities towards informal traders.

The traders also called upon duty bearers and policy makers to consult them on the trading sites and anything that speaks into informal traders so as to avoid clashes and further conflicts.

They said their inclusion in all policy and decision-making platforms will enable them to share their input on the decisions that have a direct effect on their operations. They advocated for the decriminalization of informal traders' services by authorities most specifically the council and the police.

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Informal traders advocate for more associations



owing to the economic collapse and high levels of unemployment, informal and cross border trade has become an integral sector that has sustained many families in Beitbridge. However, its role in alleviating abject poverty is crippled by the limited support of the government which has made informal traders' operations difficult by way of introducing unfriendly policies, rules and regulations.

One of the main approaches to solving challenges faced by informal traders is the formation of informal traders' associations responsible for defending the rights of the traders by taking part in policy formulation processes as well as securing access to basic needs of informal traders.

In Beitbridge, there is only one association identified by CYDT called the Beitbridge Informal Traders Association. Informal traders engaged by CYDT proposed that there is need for the Beitbridge Informal Traders Association to regularly meet and discuss with informal traders the pertinent issues affecting the sector.

"There is need for the Beitbridge Informal Traders Association to engage informal traders on weekly or monthly basis which will ensure that the association is timely updated on the current issues affecting informal traders," Sthandekile Ncube said.

Informal and cross border trading has become the primary employer of Beitbridge with over 60% of its population involved in

informal trade. For that reason, informal traders strongly believe a single traders association cannot fully serve the interests and expectations of every single informal trader.

They said while the existing Beitbridge Informal Traders Associations has been working with the likes of BVTA to challenge unfriendly policies, lobby for participation and recognition of the sector by the government as well as fighting for informal traders' right to conduct their operations without any form of abuse by authorities, there is still need for the formation of informal traders associations that will deal with the specific issues faced by informal traders at ward level. These ward level associations will be reporting to the Beitbridge Informal Traders Associations to solve the issues raised by the informal traders.

Considering that Informal and cross border trade is a large sector that consists of different traders selling different products,

informal traders claimed that more associations will bring order to the sector in that, each formed association will be responsible for certain types of traders. For Instance, there could be an association that deals with traders who buy large commodities like beds, stoves and wardrobes for resale, and an association that deals with traders who buy small products like clothes and food for resale. These two types of traders face different challenges at the border, for instance, those traders with large commodities are paying arm and leg to pass through the border therefore, an association that looks out for the interests of such traders will be responsible for negotiating and advocating for fair prices.

The informal traders also suggested that there was need to create a women and youth informal traders' association in Beitbridge that will deal with the specific challenges faced by youth and young women in informal trade.

Working in open spaces under the scorching sun in Beitbridge, informal traders yearn for protective shelter.



Working for many hours under the scorching sun is not only tiring but also a threat to human health. High levels of temperatures can damage human cells and cause skin cancer while in some cases can result to premature death.

Informal traders in Beitbridge are exposed to such terrible hot weathers as most of them work in vulnerable open spaces.

With an average annual temperature of 36.3°C, Beitbridge is one of the hottest destinations of Zimbabwe, hence informal traders need safe and protective shelters to carry out their operations without any hassles.

Speaking in a meeting between stakeholders and informal traders in

Beitbridge, an informal trader said she has to reduce her working hours during hotter climates which means reduced profits.

"I have a problem with fainting when there is too much heat. So I have too many breaks to prevent myself from fainting. These cooling breaks come with a price because you will not be making money," she said.

"How long should we continue braving such hot conditions? We demand action from the local and national authorities. The sector is facing so many challenges yet authorities are slow in their responses," she added.

High temperatures are nightmare to many informal traders, hence the need for the construction of conducive working structures to ensure that the services of informal traders are not disrupted and slowed down by the heat.

With no protective shelter, thousands of livelihoods are affected. Some goods sold by informal traders like potatoes are perishable products. These products easily get spoilt in the sun which further shows the need of better working conditions. An informal trader claimed that sometimes her profits decrease by

90% as her perishable products get spoilt under the scorching sun.

The Community Youth Development Trust (CYDT) has commissioned several meetings with stakeholders that sought to tackle some of the issues faced by informal and cross border traders. These meetings have shown that some authorities agree that services of the informal trade sector have prevented the economy from total collapse in recent years, while some of them still have an attitude towards the sector as shown by the sudden destruction of informal traders' working places and the subsequent illegal arrests of informal traders. Sometimes informal traders' goods are confiscated and never returned to them.

As a result, CYDT with the support of informal traders demanded authorities to start recognizing the economic input of the informal sector by treating informal traders with the utmost dignity. The organisation advocated for the development of protective structures and policies that will enhance the operations of informal traders.

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Informal and cross border trade has over the years proven to be a sustainable sector in which breadwinners have managed to put food on the table as well as send their children to school in Beitbridge, it is imperative that the local authorities swiftly move to work with stakeholders and informal traders in amending policies guiding the informal sector.

Meanwhile, informal traders continue to lobby and advocate for the localized policy in Beitbridge hoping to have it formulated and implemented before the end of the year 2022.

Young women challenge authorities to support informal trade



Informal trade has the potential to become the ladder for women empowerment in Beitbridge. It can help transform and elevate the social and economic status of women starting from the household to national level if only the government and local authorities recognise the sector.

Speaking to CYDT, informal and cross border traders said the government and local authorities must prioritise the services of informal traders which had empowered thousands of women. They said local authorities must decriminalise the sector and stop treating informal traders like they were barbaric people, noting that informal trade actually included young women who passed their ordinary and advanced level examinations which disqualified the

long-held stereotype that informal trade is composed of illiterate people with no qualifications or intelligence to become formal workers.

Rindaishe Chirodza, a Beitbridge informal trader said, "Many people still think informal traders are a group of less educated and poor people who are just desperate to earn a living but that is partially correct. Over the years, people with degrees have become informal traders. Remember Zimbabwe is one of the leading countries when it comes to education in Africa. This means that many people have enough education to conduct businesses. People with expensive cars are involved in informal trade. The sector was a thriving business before the outbreak of the pandemic. As women, we need to stand together and

lobby for the protection and recognition of the sector."

Another female youth informal trader, Faithful Mnkandla said, they resorted to informal trade to survive the economic challenges faced across the country not because they were less educated. She pointed out that, thousands of women with degrees are unemployed in Zimbabwe, hence many of them are adopting informal trade to empower themselves socially and economically. Mnkandla went on to say there are women she knows that are using the

income they get from trading to conduct courses to further elevate their lives.

While informal trade is changing the fortunes of women in Beitbridge, there are challenges that are threatening their operations. Many times, female informal traders find themselves being harassed by local authorities while others are affected by the poor working conditions. Engagements with stakeholders are still needed to find best ways in which operations of women informal traders can be safeguarded and improved.