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Informal **TRADERS** **NEWSLETTER**



Beitbridge informal traders face numerous challenges in their daily operations that include lack of trading and storage facilities, lack of support from local authorities and the government. For these challenges to be properly dealt with, there is need for regular engagement between stakeholders and informal traders to come out with ideal strategies and policies that will mitigate these constraints.

Like formal workers, informal traders also have rights that must be observed by authorities especially considering the fact that informal trade has contributed immensely towards the economy. Informal trade is no longer just a survival strategy to escape poverty, but the biggest employer that has given thousands of Beitbridge youths a chance to make it on their own in the economic world.

We have testimonies from Beitbridge informal traders who share stories of how informal trade has helped shape their careers for the better. It is in this regard that in this newsletter, informal traders lobby authorities to recognise their contributions by expanding their working spaces and providing financial support for informal traders whose services were affected since the enforcement of the first Zimbabwe national lockdown in 2020.

The decision to reopen land borders has pleased informal traders who immediately resumed their operations, however, there are some who are struggling financially, and are in urgent need for financial support to jumpstart their operations.

Last but not least, young women in informal trade have their own specific challenges which authorities needs to focus on, these includes gender based violence and sexual abuse. In this newsletter, women informal traders are advocating for the formulation of a gender responsive policy that will help young women realise and enjoy their rights.

calls for proactive efforts to promote women in informal trade.

"To achieve the Millennium Development Goals, gender equality and women's empowerment must be realised in all communities, as a result, there is need to move fast in developing gender responsive legislations that will protect the interests of cross border traders in Beitbridge," she said.

Linda Moyo said they are calling for engagement and collaboration among stakeholders to deal with all issues affecting informal traders.

"Engagement between stakeholders and informal traders will provide opportunities to propose concrete solutions to situations common in informal trade," she said. "They will offer a wide range of options to respond to matters affecting the generality of female and male informal traders."

Meanwhile, young women informal cross border traders have lobbied the government to relax or temporarily lifts import restrictions on some basic

commodities which they alleged are overcharged.

The female cross border traders that spoke with CYDT said the government must allow cross border traders to consider reduce import fees so as to increase their profit.

"We are forced to pay tooth and nail for some goods which affects our profits at the end of the day" one of the crossborder traders, Silinganiso Ngwenya, said. "There is a need for the government to be supportive of the sector and relax import restrictions so we can freely import our goods."

Ngwenya alleged that local producers took advantage of import restrictions to increase prices of basic commodities.

"The lifting of import restrictions will force local producers to reduce their prices knowing if they fail to do so, cross border traders are free to import those commodities at competitive prices from South Africa and other neighbouring countries," she said.

In Zimbabwe, the importation of some goods can be restricted,

unrestricted or prohibited. The Ministry of Industry and Commerce restricts the importation of certain goods like building material and old cars. Informal traders said the government

must take into consideration the economic contribution of informal trade to allow cross border traders to freely import their goods.

Informal traders seek government Funding



Cross border traders in Beitbridge have challenged the government to provide the informal sector with financial support that will help traders purchase stock to jumpstart their normal operations after their services were disrupted by the outbreak of the COVID 19 pandemic.

Since land borders have been re-opened, informal traders said they urgently needed capital to restart, rebuild and improve their businesses so that they contribute to the economy while sustaining their livelihoods.

“It’s common knowledge that the services of cross border traders were

deeply affected by the pandemic since 2020," Fortune Dube told CYDT. "Many of us have used up our savings to start over again. There is need for the government to provide us with financial support that will in the buying of stock and alleviate the negative impact of the pandemic."

Dube said informal traders are often excluded from accessing and enjoying support schemes that are usually launched by the government to support small business and marginalised groups.

"Being an informal cross border trader can be difficult in Zimbabwe because it means you have to be denied access to the benefits enjoyed by those operating in formal setups," said Dube.

Informal traders urged the government to take into consideration the economic contribution of informal traders to

help them with capital to restart their normal businesses.

They challenged the government to review the distribution of loans or funds set aside for marginalised groups to ensure that they are enough to sustain livelihoods that includes those of cross border traders.

The traders also said there was need for local banks to approve loans for informal traders.

"Many banks only grant loans to workers with traceable jobs mostly civil servants and people in the formal sector which makes it difficult for informal traders to access loans," an informal trader said. "There is need for banks to listen to the grievances of cross border traders who can use these loans to buy stocks and make a plan with the bank on how they will pay back the money."

Reopening of land borders bring joy to cross border traders

Crossborder traders in Beitbridge have celebrated the re-opening of land borders to travelers with valid Covid-19 PCR test certificates.

The government said international travelers must have undergone a valid Covid-19 test not more than 48 hours from the time of their departure to Zimbabwe and are fully vaccinated.



The government also revealed that those who have received a booster shot have an entry advantage.

Since the outbreak of COVID 19 in 2020, the country's land borders have been closed for the public with only commercial traffic and returning residents allowed to pass through.

While airports have remained open for majority of the time, a small number of cross border traders can afford to meet the financial requirements of travelling by air.

Speaking to CYDT, the traders said the latest move to reopen land borders will significantly



improve their operations and stimulate the Beitbridge economy.

"Finally, they have been opened. The decision to reopen land borders was long overdue. For a longtime we have been asking the government to do exactly what it has done now, that is, to allow the vaccinated and those with valid Covid-19 test to pass through," an exuberant informal trader said.

"Most Beitbridge informal traders buy their commodities from across the borders, hence we commend the government for making this decision. This decision has breathed life to many informal traders whose operation were shut down by the closure of land borders."

Cross border traders said the closure of land borders had unfortunately opened doors for thousands of people to skip borders illegally, with some being swindled by criminals who would have promised to help them cross the border using unofficial entry points.

The Zimbabwean Republic Police confirmed that 89 000 people were caught trying to use illegal entry points between January 2020 and January this year.

The traders said the reopening of land borders will ensure safe migration as they will be using the designated entry points and avoid using unsafe methods of crossing the border.

In a Digging Deeper meeting conducted in Beitbridge, officials from ZIMRA said the body was committed to combat illegal trade activities and ensure that the rights of all traders are protected.

They said they will ensure the smooth running of trading operations in the country's border ports.

They also challenged traders to adhere to all COVID 19 protocols approved by the government to avoid any conflict with authorities and most importantly to mitigate the spread of the pandemic.

Informal traders seek space, recognition in economic recovery



Informal Cross Border Traders have challenged the Beitbridge Municipality and the government to improve trading spaces, accommodation and storage facilities that will help enhance their services making them sustainable. Speaking in a Digging Deeper meeting organised by CYDT in Beitbridge, the traders said poor working conditions were crippling their operations, hence the need for key stakeholders to step up their efforts in ensuring that informal

traders are allocated places that are economically viable.

"It is not a farfetched theory that informal trade is the pillar of the economy in Beitbridge," Tariro Dhuru said. "Majority survive on informal trading, yet local authorities have been slow in their response to ensure that informal traders are fully recognised.

"Even though there are no official statistics that illustrate the massive contribution of informal traders to the country's Gross Domestic Product

(GDP), the sector has been fundamental in helping thousands escape abject poverty and enjoy better lives. Take away informal trade, thousands of lives will be at risk of dying of hunger."

Another trader, Leny Paradza said many informal traders have no access to accommodation and storage facilities to keep their wares especially after work, as a result, they are forced to carry them home every day which becomes a mountainous challenge.

"We have limited space to keep the goods we sell at home since some of us live in one room. There is need for the Municipality to provide enough storage facilities that will be used by informal traders to keep their wares to avoid the task of carrying them on daily basis," Paradza recommended.

The traders also lobbied for the establishment of Beitbridge offices that will specifically deal with issues affecting the services of informal traders. They said, having offices that oversee the smooth running of

informal trade will facilitate the process of dealing with existing gaps in the sector.

The traders also advocated for the creation of Beitbridge Informal Cross Border Traders Information Desks that will be a useful tool for informal traders to access trading updates, information on trade regulations, customs procedures, taxes, important addresses, contacts and other relevant information on informal trade.

They said the desk will also be used to give information about the trading rules of the countries targeted by cross border traders such as South Africa.

An official from the District Development Coordinator, Mr Gugu Moyo who delivered a presentation on Zimbabwe indigenous policies of which he traced the history of the informal sector/ Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) that evolved through phases from the time Zimbabwe attained her independence in 1980 to date, highlighted the contribution of the

informal sector in creating employment in Zimbabwe.

He said according to policies like the Zimbabwe Industrial Development Policy (IDP) (2012 -2016), “the government has to provide

infrastructural support; technology upgrades; quality control and improvement; research and development, market access and financing facilities for the informal sector and SMEs”

Informal cross border traders' rights matter



Informal cross border traders are entitled to their non-negotiable human rights without any form of discrimination or prejudice. They are human beings who deserve fair and equal treatment from the government, local authorities, community and other stakeholders. In Beitbridge, the rights of informal traders are far from being recognised and enjoyed as traders continue to be subjected to unfriendly working environments, and abuse by local authorities who take advantage of the “informal” status to mistreat traders.

As a result, the Community Youth Development Trust (CYDT) embarked on human rights trainings for informal traders designed to impart knowledge about their rights and freedoms.

Guided by an organisation produced human rights training manual, the training offered a spectrum of human rights lessons that capacitated cross border traders with information, so they can demand and defend their rights. Each training was divided into

sessions that had specific thematic focus.

This human rights sensitization program brought to awareness the need for informal traders to start exercising their rights. The traders were trained on how to apply the human rights principles in their day-to-day operations and ensure that they challenge those threatening to break them.

An informal trader said, “The training improved our understanding of our human rights. It helped us understand that there is need to challenge local authorities to value and respect the rights of informal traders. It empowered us in such a way that we now have control of our own lives and the decisions that affects us. With us knowing our rights, we will be able to hold accountable those infringing our rights.”

Another trader said, “This training has really helped me understand that being an informal trader does not mean I should allow being mistreated by authorities. I also have rights and my rights matter.”

The human rights training reminded government, local authorities and stakeholders on the need to ensure that informal traders have access to resources.

“For the realization of informal traders' rights, specific actions from stakeholders must take place. Local authorities are in good positions to champion the rights of informal

traders. The local authority must take the lead in ensuring that informal traders enjoy their rights. Duty bearers and stakeholders must uphold their own rights and that of informal traders. They are responsible for removing barriers that limits the services of informal traders,” an informal trader told CYDT.



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