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**A Qualitative Analysis of the Informal Social Networks of Street Traders in the
Pretoria Central Business District, South Africa**

By

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PLAGIARISM DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

A Qualitative Analysis of the Informal Social Networks of Street Traders in the Pretoria Central Business District, South Africa

The study investigates informal social networks' role, contribution, and significance to street traders within the Pretoria Central Business District (CBD). This locale was considered ideal for this study because the City of Tshwane is the single-largest metropolitan municipality in South Africa. Furthermore, the metropolitan is centred around Pretoria, which is a capital city. As such, the city attracts a diverse and large amount of street traders, both local and foreign. Strategically located at the city's centre, the Pretoria CBD is a bustling locale where multiple street trade discourses are constantly at play. Furthermore, there is a high volume of commuters (entering or leaving the city). As such, it is a crucial hub for transport networks.

Street trading is deeply embedded in the urban fabric of most societies, especially in developing nations, contributing to the livelihoods of millions worldwide. However, due to its informal nature, street trading necessitates adaptive coping strategies, where social networks emerge as a pivotal factor influencing traders resilience and success. Therefore, the study focuses on the unique relationships of solidarity developed by informal street traders to mitigate unfavourable social and economic circumstances. Informal traders exist in an uncertain environment characterized by vulnerability because of 'illegality', lack of financial security and exclusion, among other factors. The study argues that perceptions of vulnerability shape street traders' participation in social networks. Vulnerability arises in multiple and complex factors experienced at the global, national, and local levels. The complexity manifests in multiple issues that render street traders vulnerable, ranging from rising unemployment, exclusionary government policies and legislation, and socio-economic deprivations.

Armed with these challenges, risks and threats, informal traders have an arsenal of innovative ways to sustain their livelihoods. This study analysed the link between vulnerability and street traders' use of social networks to adapt to constantly changing circumstances. The resilience of street traders in the Pretoria CBD is highlighted through their ability to canvas a range of innovative informal networks. Self-organization by street traders in social networks represents the coping and livelihood strategies deployed as a survival toolkit. These networks also help street traders to get by and represent the benefits of sociability.

It adopts an ethnographic approach to investigate how vulnerability extends beyond the economic aspects to the social element, which has long been the main survival tool kit for

informal street traders in urban spaces. As such, informal street trading emerges as a complex social space of interaction where social networks are a crucial part of a street trader's life. The streets are highly contested economic spaces and are spaces of vulnerability where social capital is crucial for survival. This study has adopted a qualitative approach set within the constructivist paradigm. It is based on a single case study of the Pretoria CBD using participant observation, nonparticipant observation, and open-ended interviews. Thematic analysis is applied to the qualitative data to discern common patterns and emerging themes.

The findings reveal that social networks among street traders are a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that have the power to benefit traders in several ways. These networks facilitate resource-sharing, access, agency, resilience, a sense of belonging and mutual support. The study also identified challenges and disruptions within social networks, such as vulnerability to external pressures derived from the COVID-19 regulations. Based on the findings, key recommendations and policy implications are proposed to enhance the resilience of street traders. Policymakers are urged to expand targeted and tailored social protection mechanisms. For example, integrating those networks focused on skill development or financial literacy into urban development strategies. Furthermore, fostering an inclusive and supportive regulatory environment can reduce the negative impacts of external shocks. In the wake of COVID-19 pandemic, and possible future shocks, government is encouraged to facilitate and provide accessible and inclusive socio-economic relief. The study recommends that street traders enhance the positive aspects of social networks as a tool to increase socio-economic security and reduce vulnerability.

Key words: social networks; solidarity; sociality; street traders; vulnerability

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this PhD to Prof Vasu Reddy, Khaya and Omero who have been the cornerstones of my success. To you I say, it is done!

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List of Acronyms

AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
ANC	African National Congress
BBB	Batho Bathusa Batho
CBD	Central Business District
CD	Compact Disc
COGTA	Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs
COVID-19 SRD grant	COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress Grant
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
DA	Democratic Alliance
DVD	Digital Versatile Disc
ECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
Et al.	And others
FORLAC	Formalization in Latin America and the Caribbean
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
ID	Identity Document
ILO	International Labour Organization
KG	Kilogram
QLFS	Quarterly Labour Force Survey
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SAITA	South African Informal Traders Alliance
SASSA	South African Social Security Agency
Stats SA	Statistics South Africa
TMPD /Metro Police	Tshwane Metropolitan Police Department
TREP	Township and Rural Empowerment Programs
TV	Television
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USA	United States of America
WIEGO	Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing

Chapter One - Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction

This study was motivated by the debates and publicity generated by COVID-19, the national state of disaster and the containment measures introduced by the South African government between March 2020 and April 2022. At the core of the debates and discussions in the media, public and literature, were diverging views on social inequality and vulnerable populations; poverty and deprivation; food insecurity; informality – and the links between these and vulnerability to natural shock and legislation. Of course, these elements, which have become a defining characteristic of post-apartheid South African society, were radically exposed after the South African government locked down the country and introduced new regulations that curtailed freedoms, economic activities, and mobility (Republic of South Africa, 2020a). The strict lockdown regulations arose from tough choices, not taken lightly, by the South African government to limit the spread of the virus (Fouché *et al.*, 2020).

However, in all South African cities, poor sections of society faced many challenges, ranging from food insecurity to difficulties maintaining social distancing (due to overcrowding and contest over space). It was, however, vulnerabilities related to the informal economy that became more pronounced (Nanda, 2020; Lemanski and de Groot, 2021). While the informal economy has a much longer history concerning informal economic activities and providing livelihoods and employment to a large population of people that cannot be accommodated in the formal economy in Africa general and in South Africa more particularly (see Moyo, 2018; Fourie and Skinner, 2018; Chen, 2014; Le Roux, 2014), it also has a history of discrimination because South the African government policy is still firmly tilted in favor of big business and the formal economy (Segatti and Pons-Vignon, 2013).

In South Africa, literature has often characterized informality as troublesome because of the legislation guiding the sector, and is generally identified through “repression, omission and ambiguity” (Skinner, 2019: 412). It has been stigmatized as cumbersome (Chen, 2012), a nuisance (Guha-Khasnobis *et al.*, 2006), and unmanageable (Schech, 2019). Economic activities such as street trading are often stifled, loathed, and criminalized through bylaws, regulations, and frameworks that discourage legal and moral recognition (Skinner, 2019; Rogerson, 2016; Benit-Gbaffou, 2016).

Several observers have noticed that through the regulations guiding the lockdown, informal street traders' exclusion and lack of recognition became apparent as their situation was not considered, which exacerbated their vulnerability. For example, the regulations neglected important context specific socio-economic realities of poor and vulnerable communities. On one hand, the regulations separated informal traders from their often only source of income which adversely impacted their livelihood strategies. On the other hand, the stay-at-home regulation forced millions of individuals to spend extended periods of time in close proximity in overcrowded conditions, thus making them more vulnerable to the pandemic. The lockdown regulations denied them access to trading spaces and their clientele (Rwafa *et al.*, 2022; Chen *et al.*, 2021; Thulare and Moyo, 2021; Khambule, 2020). There were relaxations to the regulations, and certain registered informal traders, selling specific goods could trade if they could obtain a vending permit from their local municipal authority (Khambule, 2020). However, the relaxed regulations became another form of exclusion as this avenue remained largely inaccessible to most traders that were not registered before the regulations instituted in March 2020 and had been operating without permits (Khambule, 2022; Skinner *et al.*, 2021; Skinner and Watson, 2021). Thus, the argument on informal traders fell within the growing narrative of economic deprivation and the precarious situation of informal traders (Skinner and Watson, 2020; Wegerif, 2020).

Covid-19 regulations manifested in the South African urban informal landscape in ways that deepened and escalated pre-existing inequalities. For example, food insecurity and unemployment have increased the precariousness of street trading (Mlambo and Khuzwayo, 2021). According to the above narrative, the failure to trade deprived informal traders of income, yet they also fell out of the categories that could benefit from COVID-19 relief funding (Republic of South Africa, 2020). Inevitably, the ongoing challenge arose in how informality is defined by authorities and the nexus between exclusion and public health regulations by the government. Such a narrative is backed by literature on street trading and the vulnerability of street traders (e.g., Brown and Mackie, 2018; Pieterse, 2017; Willemse, 2011); on the role and link between the broader (formal) economy, the state, and the informal economy, differentiating between the marginalized informal groups and the haphazard, contradictory, and inconsistent nature of state policies and regulations (e.g., Crush *et al.*, 2015; Rogerson, 2015; Segatti and Pons-Vignon, 2013).

The deprivations (pre-existing and Covid-19 linked) extended beyond the economic aspects to the social element, which has for long been the primary survival tool kit for informal street traders in urban spaces, and this had allowed street traders to navigate adversity and the draconian measures adopted by the state (Crush and Skinner, 2017; Skinner, 2014; Meagher, 2009). The importance of social networks in the everyday lives

of individuals, from family, friends, business, and a wide range of other aspects, is widely researched (Borgatti *et al.*, 2018; Lim and Putnam, 2010; Meagher, 2010). However, informal social networks within street trading have remained ignored and under-researched, and yet their importance to livelihood creation and mediation for traders in times of crisis cannot be overstated.

The decision to join a social network is impacted by several factors (local, national, global) for vulnerable groups such as street traders who constantly adapt to shifting realities. Following this conceptualisation, street trading emerges as a complex social space of interaction where social networks are a crucial part of a street trader's life. It also reveals an urgent need to understand the significance of social networks developed in public spaces in any attempt to understand street traders' vulnerability and survival strategies and the social life of street trading. Previous studies of street trader's social networks focused on the link between traders and government policy (Kuépié *et al.*, 2016; Meagher, 2010). In contrast, this study considers how social networks affect street traders' work and, more generally, their livelihoods and social and economic circumstances.

A knowledge gap exists regarding the social side of street trading, particularly the significance of social networks in navigating illegality and as social mechanisms for both social and economic support. Even fewer have contemplated the possibility of social networks overcoming the internal and external vulnerabilities of street traders within the context of the informal economy in South Africa. External factors arise from weak socio-economic indicators, increasing inequality, and poverty, to name a few. Internal factors arise from haphazard and exclusionary policies, repressive and punitive regulations, and intense competition among street traders (Skinner, 2019; Benit-Gbaffou, 2016; Rogerson, 2016; Crush *et al.*, 2015). Concomitantly, debates on the impacts of COVID-19 have not extended to the social sphere of informal trading, even when street traders have long used urban streets as spaces for social interaction.

However, these are central issues in street trading, where most street traders are unregistered and tend to situate themselves where there are large volumes of pedestrians, which not only generates envy from registered traders (Horn, 2011), who are mostly confined to trading bays but also, leaves them exposed to police raids (Khuzwayo, 2018). Under these trading conditions, solidarity alliances tend to develop between the two groups – registered and unregistered – and among unregistered traders. These alliances have become a significant resource in a competitive and precarious environment, where informal traders are constantly on the lookout and pool resources to enjoy economies of scale or achieve some investments.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Focusing on the realities of individuals involved in street trading is often characterized as working in uncertain and precarious environments. These precarious environments are generally caused by several embedded determinants, including historical, socio-economic, and political contexts (Schneider *et al.*, 2021; Nshimbi, 2018; Crush *et al.*, 2017; Medina *et al.*, 2017). These contexts can be expanded to include but are not limited to; poor working conditions; no social protection; irregular and low incomes; low levels of education and skills; dwindling or lack of fiscal resources; and punitive government regulations, policies, and frameworks (Chen and Carre, 2020; Bonnet *et al.*, 2019; Lund, 2019; Meagher, 2018). The precarious nature of informality makes workers particularly vulnerable to shocks, especially since they are rarely covered in national governance structures. It further reveals complexities that arise from intersecting local realities; a highly competitive environment; differences between registered and unregistered traders; complicated registration procedures, among others, that have crucial implications for social relations for individuals involved in street trading.

In a South African context, research generally pays little attention to the nuances of informal social networks and relations within the informal economy. As evident in the literature, several factors push individuals into the informal economy – but once there, they deploy unique strategies to sustain and maintain their livelihoods (Schneider *et al.*, 2021; Moyo and Gumbo, 2021; Mlambo and Ndebele, 2020). Informal social networks in this study emerge as an alternative toolkit that traders utilize and take advantage of to mediate threats to their activities and socio-economic life. It is important to understand that informality does not exist within a vacuum but arises from a complex myriad of internal and external factors for individuals and groups (Moyo and Gumbo, 2021). As the world progresses rapidly, informality should keep pace as new challenges and realities unfold.

Inevitably, the impact of the lockdown regulations implemented by the South African government on street traders exacerbated existing challenges and extended beyond the health risks of the virus. It included the implications of the regulations on carving out livelihoods for street traders. The current debates on informality led the researcher to think more deeply about social networks, specifically the topography of networks to street trading and livelihoods. By drawing on social network qualities and characteristics, this study provides a lens to understanding and theorizing on how and in what ways informal traders cope with societal imperfections (state or market dominated). Imperfections have become a defining character of post-apartheid South African society, shaping how informal traders manage and sustain livelihoods. Researching social networks from street traders' perspectives provides a unique opportunity to understand the complex role of

socio-economic and political factors and their influence in changing the social structure of street trading. Beyond focusing on how informal traders make sense of the world, the social network perspective highlights the agency created through social ties to mitigate the vulnerability.

Street traders face numerous challenges, including economic vulnerabilities, regulatory hurdles, and social marginalization. To navigate these obstacles and enhance their resilience, street traders strategically utilize social networks as a crucial survival mechanism. This study aims to delve into the underlying reasons and dynamics driving street traders to engage in networking practices, seeking to unravel how these networks serve as effective tools for mitigating the multifaceted challenges inherent in street trading. The study argues that the contribution, role, and significance of social networks are essential features of the survival tactics employed by informal traders to sustain their activities. However, the importance and influence of social networks have remained out of scholarly interest. These are central issues in street trading, where the life of a street trader revolves around the street spaces. The streets are highly contested economic spaces and are spaces of vulnerability where social capital is crucial for survival.

1.3 Research Objectives

1.3.1 Aim of the study

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the contribution, role, and significance of informal social networks for street traders within the Pretoria central business district. Therefore, the purpose of this study seeks to understand the social dynamics and relations of street traders through social networking. Such alliances and acts of solidarity cannot be seen as simply embodying the key characteristics of entrepreneurial gains, but rather as informal combinations of social, economic, and political strategies that go beyond.

Instead, social networks need to be viewed as social transformation processes that arise from a myriad facets of the socio-economic and political organization of global, national, and local society. The study explores these factors that push street traders to engage in social networks, and their effects on these actors to achieve livelihoods. To investigate the importance and value of social networks to street traders, the study explores the following research objectives.

1.3.2 Research objectives

To operationalize the aim, the specific objectives have been set as follows:

1. To understand the topography of social networks by examining the situational factors that explain a street trader's decision to join networks.
2. To analyze the importance and significance of social networks to street traders and examine the benefits that accrue from social networks.
3. To explore the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the street trader's propensity to engage and reap benefits from social networks.

1.3.3 Research Questions

The key question to this study is, "what are the socio-economic significance of social networks established on the streets by informal traders?" This fundamental question can be further broken into four specific questions that address specific thematic areas:

1. What factors determine and influence the formation of social networks in the urban informal spaces within the Pretoria CBD?
2. What social, economic, and political benefits are derived from these social networks by street traders?
3. How and to what extent were social networks impacted by the COVID-19 government regulations in the Pretoria CBD?

1.4 Contribution of the Study

This study sought to answer the following research question: what role and significance do social networks have to street traders? It was an important question, as it directly correlated what motivations contributed to how street traders' decisions are made. Decisions are not made in isolation but following a variety of circumstances. Therefore, social networks have a significant influence on street traders' lives. Theoretically, this analysis adds to the discourses on the coping mechanisms employed by street traders. It elaborates on the social network theories (Granovetter, 2011; Borgatti and Halgin, 2011; Travers and Milgram, 1969) by presenting them as practical concepts in analysing the complex web of interactions between street traders. Moreover, it introduces a new dimension of knowledge on street trading based on social networks formed as survival tactics.

Pre-existing empirical evidence in the field of informality consists of a multitude of dimensions. The most abundant research stems from; the nexus between formal and informal economies, the informal economy and the state, and discourses on the regulatory environment guiding informality. Following the above, this study contributes to a less

explored understanding of the informal economy through a social network lens. Specifically, how informal traders use social networks to sustain their activities and livelihoods.

Following the above research questions, the theory and empirical findings contribute to the literature on urban informality. The empirical and theoretical contributions also add to our understanding of the interplay between informal traders and the informal coping mechanisms they deploy to sustain their livelihoods. Therefore, the study can make several distinct contributions to the literature on street trading, especially in a South African city.

Policy level contributions

Concurrently, in a matter of weeks and months, COVID-19 has materially, socially, and economically transformed the world as we know it, and the impact thereof remains unimaginable at this point. It is becoming increasingly clear that COVID-19 is dramatically expanding cycles of poverty, inequality, and vulnerability. From a policy perspective, the study contributes to a new theory on street trading and how street traders form social ties to mitigate complex socio-economic risks and threats. This is important work that can inform future policy regarding part of an economy that is amply known to generate work for hundreds of millions of people universally (ILO, 2018; Chen, 2012). In addition, future policymakers could draft more synergistic policies designed for relevance and impact concerning street trading.

Governance

As governance systems transcend the framework of the state, the dynamics of informal social networks are becoming an important aspect of conceptualizing empirically. This study analysed how internal and external factors influence and shape the decision-making processes of street traders. The study also offered insights into how social networks are impacted due to government-instituted regulations that limited or brought to a grinding halt informal economic activities. By assessing how street traders' new realities affected the social relations established for mutual support, it shed light on their organization's ability to adapt. This has implications for how bureaucratic entities understand survival tactics and coping mechanisms within the informal economy. In doing so, the study draws attention to how informality is governed in South African cities.

Community-level

This study addressed the issues and challenges, both external and internal, that informal traders simultaneously face daily. These challenges can be sectioned into vertical pressures, namely; global shocks such as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic; government policies and frameworks that marginalize informality; weak socio-economic indicators in the context of South Africa. Simultaneously, the following can be sectioned as horizontal pressures; stiff competition between traders vying for the same customers; lack of access to formal financial institutions; lack of start-up capital. The above lists a few of the daily pressures under which informal traders carve their livelihoods. Thus, this study contributes to understanding how internal and external pressures translate into the daily lives of informal traders.

Street and individual street vendor level

One of the practical contributions of this study is the detailed insight provided by the case study of a group of street traders in the Pretoria CBD. By focusing on the social networks created, street traders emerged as key actors engaged in forging alliances for various reasons. The study further elaborated on the nuances involved in assembling social networks, particularly for a group that is amply known to coexist in a precarious and highly competitive environment. This study, therefore, expands on our understanding of the heterogeneity of the informal economy and its survival strategies. The analysis of social networks contributes to street trading literature in the following way. It demonstrates the complex social relations regulated by informal traders for multiple purposes that include social, political, and economic benefits. Thus, the study contributes to the current knowledge of what regulates the informal economy in the developing world.

Future of research

Although this study focused on the Pretoria CBD in particular, the research questions had a broader relevance as street trading is the most prevalent form of informality, especially in developing economies and beyond. The importance of analysing how informal social networks are formed and regulated has an important implication for future research. It implies that engaging in networks makes a difference in the lives of informal traders. This narrative has critical connotations for the conceptualising agency in the informal economy literature. The study expands on the idea of agency to include social support (in the form of network members attending to another sick member). By providing this analysis, this study shows how the agency is distributed across economic, social, and political spheres to mitigate challenges.

1.5 Towards a Comprehensive Understanding of the Concepts of Informality and Social Networks

1.5.1 Concept: The informal economy

Understanding the meaning and significance of networks to street traders demands that we look more closely at the concept's *informality* and *social networks*, and how their relationship shapes street trading dynamics and norms of solidarity. The researcher begins with a critique of *modernization theory* which gave rise to the binary assumptions about the formal and informal economies (Matunhu, 2011; Escobar, 2011). The basic assumptions of this theory purported that the 'traditional sector' was inferior and should be graduated to the 'industrialized sector', which is superior. This narrative assumed that all countries worldwide would follow the same path to industrialization, from an inferior traditional society to a superior modern society (Wallerstein, 1998). Initial assumptions of the informal economy were premised on the same idea that the informal economy phenomenon would disappear once it was formalized (UN, 1997).

However, these assumptions did not consider that the challenges and disadvantages continue even in the formal economy for certain races, classes, and gender. The emphasis on beginning this section in this manner benefits our understanding of informality and debunks the notion that it is a marginal economy that would disappear once countries achieve certain levels of economic growth (industrialization). These nuances are essential for understanding that there is no linear path between the informal and the formal economy, especially where developing countries are concerned (Chen, 2005).

Modernization theory dominated development practice during the 1950s and 1960s (Matunhu, 2011; Gardner and Lewis, 1996). Put differently, this theory equated development with modernization. At the core of modernization theory posits that Latin American, African, and Asian countries are universally classified as traditional and rural – not modern and industrialized. A proponent of modernization theory viewed the informal economy as a remnant of the traditional society (Moser, 1978). In his writings, Rostow (1960) purports that the economic growth experienced by developed nations should be taken as a model for developing countries. Additionally, for development to occur, developing countries must accept foreign aid from developed nations to expand beyond local industries to reach global markets. This, he further wrote, required a shift from the 'traditional stage' to 'high mass consumption' where a country would achieve modernity.

By the late 1960s, scholars realized that the one-size-fits-all perspective of the modernization theory was problematic in the development process, especially that of developing countries (Scott, 2009). One of its critiques asserts that the theory did not

consider the culturally heterogeneous nature of each country. Furthermore, the theory ignored the types of work practiced within each country and the different localities that define developing nations (Escobar, 2012; Ferguson, 1999). Economic growth in developing countries was slow despite large amounts of foreign aid. Also, poverty levels were on the rise, with some scholars blaming foreign aid for the increase by arguing that it made the rich richer and the poor poorer (Ferguson, 1996).

This brought into question the aphorism 'a rising tide lifts all boats' associated with the notion that the economic growth of developed nations would trickle down to all less-developed nations, so long as they followed the same models. Consequently, the optimism of modernization theory gave people a false sense of belief that traditional forms of work would cease to exist as developing countries achieved economic growth (Escobar, 2011). The failure of modernisation theory, particularly in developing countries, led scholars to conduct in-depth analyses of what was then called the 'traditional sector'. This led to pioneering work by academics and economists challenging the notions of modernization theory and economic development. This gave birth to the 'informal sector' (later known as the informal economy or informality), first introduced by British anthropologist Keith Hart (1973) in a paper presented at the Institute of Development Studies. The initial conceptualization stimulated important theoretical undertakings to define and characterize the informal economy. The scholarly research confirmed that the so-called 'traditional sector' had persevered and increased in size and scope in certain contexts.

This concept was borrowed and reworked by the International Labour Organization (ILO, 1972), which saw the potential of the informal economy to reduce poverty by creating employment. At its conception, the ILO (1972; 6) understood the informal economy as being "largely ignored, rarely supported, often regulated and sometimes actively discouraged by the Government". Castells and Portes (1989) defined it as informal activities operated outside the state's regulatory framework. However, this definition was problematic as it lumped up all informal entrepreneurship with illegal activities (such as those in the black market) since both function outside the purview of the law.

In 2003, the ILO redefined the informal economy as "all economic activities by workers and economic units that are - in law or in practice - not covered or insufficiently covered by formal arrangements". Although the informal economy encompasses a diversity of situations and phenomena, for this study, the informal economy is defined as

Economic activities that circumvent costs and are excluded from the benefits and rights incorporated in laws and administrative rules covering property relationships,

commercial licensing, labour contracts, torts, financial credit, and social systems (Medina *et al.*, 2017).

Based on the above definition, the concept of the informal economy is used in this study as an umbrella term to refer to all activities, businesses, and employment excluded from any legal protection by the state. The concept of the informal economy is also used interchangeably with informality.

Almost 50 years later, informality remains a permanent fixture in developing and developed worlds. Although hard to measure, the ILO (2018) estimates the informal economy as accounting for over 60% of the world population's jobs. 93% of informal activities are reported to take place within emerging and developing countries. In the same report, the ILO suggests that 85.8% of employment in Africa is informal. Thus, the informal economy is a lineament of largely developing nations, noticeably in Latin America and Africa (ILO 2018; Chen, 2016; Hart, 2007). This burgeoning economy hosts a complex supply of activities ranging from informal waste pickers, casual work, subcontracting, and street trading. Attempts to decipher the dynamics of informality are complicated by differing sets of ideas encapsulated in four dominant schools of thought. At the core of these debates are diverging definitions, ideas, and characteristics of what constitutes informality, discussed in Chapter Two.

1.5.2 The development and resurgence of social networks in economic development

Networking and its methods have long been essential for understanding social and economic life within societies (Granovetter, 2018; Wallis *et al.*, 2003; Putnam, 1993). The concept of 'social networks' originated during the end of the 19th century by the principal architect of modern social science and renowned sociologists Emile Durkheim in his theories and research of social groups. Durkheim (1893) wrote *The Division of Labour in Society* to conceptualize the theory of the development of societies. He argued that two categories of societal solidarity exist, namely *organic* and *mechanical*. In the mechanical form, cohesion is based on individuals feeling connected through similar work while operating in small-scale societies based on familial ties or networks. In comparison, the organic form is explained as social cohesion created by individuals' dependence on their specialized work (Durkheim, 2010).

Six Degrees of Separation, or Small World Theory

A few decades later, Travers and Milgram (1969) took this theory further by examining social networks and the lengths of the paths between individuals interconnected by a complex web of connections. They hypothesized that everyone is connected to others by the 'Six Degrees of Separation' or 'Small World Theory'. Using a cluster of people in the United States of America, they hypothesize that any two random individuals ought to be connected through at least one chain of various lengths or pathways. Their social experiment involved passing a document from one individual to others they thought might know the intended recipient. They then counted the number of people the document passed through between the sender and receiver.

This theory also analysed the kind of actions or decisions taken through these connections in a social network. The efficacy of their work championed the role networks have in sharing ideas and innovation and the effect of different types of social ties in achieving this (Schnettler, 2009). This body of work explored what individuals understand of their networks and broader social structures, and how they go about manoeuvring through them. The six degrees of separation theory has important implications for understanding the dynamics of social networks, the spread of information and ideas, and the potential for social influence and impact. It implies that everyone is entangled in a complicated web of connections and that even those who appear to be far apart can have a big impact on one another thanks to the networks that link them.

The Strength of Weak Ties

Granovetter (1973) further developed the above theory further by proposing that *The Strength of Weak Ties* involves 'weak' and 'strong' ties across networks. He asserts there are 'weak ties', which are your acquaintances and 'strong ties', which are close friends. The 'weak ties' are the stronger ones as they are less likely to be socially involved. In his research, he argues that there is a higher probability of people hearing about new job opportunities through acquaintances (weak ties) instead of close friends (strong ties). He posits that acquaintances are more likely to be privy to information and knowledge not already known by friends. Thus, people are socially disadvantaged if they do not embrace 'weak ties' (Granovetter, 2012).

Borgatti and Halgin (2011) declare that this theory expanded from the determination to understanding the process of finding employment. However, it also speaks to wider social networks that describe the spread of disease, for example. This confirms that the concept of social networks cuts across different fields, from the natural sciences to economics to the social sciences. In 2017, Granovetter wrote *Society and Economy: Frameworks and Principles*, in which he confirmed that the economy is not a sphere separate from other

human activities but is deeply embedded in social relations (Granovetter, 2017). In this wide-ranging book, he discusses how society and the economy are connected, entangled, and intertwined. Furthermore, he analyses how these overlapping structures shape human behaviour. Thus, according to him, the network of relations in which collaboration takes place influences the strength or weakness of that social network.

On Network Theory

More recently, Borgatti and Halgin (2011; 2) observed that social networks had developed to describe

A set of actors or nodes along with a set of ties of a specified type (such as friendship) that link them. The ties interconnect through shared end points to form paths that indirectly link nodes that are not directly tied. The pattern of ties in a network yields a particular structure, and nodes occupy positions within this structure.

According to this definition, the central focus is the relationship between different actors and what ties them together. In contrast to previous authors, Borgatti and Halgin (2011) consider the different relationships that actors are embedded in and that they could either constrain or provide opportunities for individuals/groups.

As with any theory, the social network lens is naturally susceptible to criticism. A criticism echoed by (Rubio, 1997) concluded that social networks could be so binding that destructive obligations, such as extremist religious groups, become burdensome on communities. In short, social networks can manifest themselves as an advantage and disadvantage. They can also deny individuals access to critical resources, which have crucial ramifications for socio-economic development as people compete for limited resources (Lin, 2017)

Social capital and how it manifests in social networks

The concept of social capital took hold in the 1990s, although the ideas around the term had been around for decades. During this time, the world was faced with irrefutable evidence that orthodox development theories could not answer for the enduring weak economic performance and unstable political institutions (World Bank, 1998). As such, the weak performance imposed serious socio-economic outcomes such as the persistent scourge of poverty and rising inequality. The rising socio-economic inequalities gave rise to and generated the popularisation of the concept of social capital (Ferragina and Arrigoni, 2017).

Defining social capital is an elusive prospect as it has many different yet similar definitions. Lin (1999) asserts that “social capital is captured from embedded resources in social networks” where the “investment in social relations [comes] with expected returns”. Adler and Kwon (2002) propose that social capital arises from the resources available to actors based on their social networks. This literature suggests that social capital is found within social networks and arises from interactions between actors within a network. Therefore, the study considers social capital as a crucial network asset. Social capital cannot be measured like other forms of capital (such as land or financial) because it is found in relationships (Borgatti *et al.*, 2018).

The endeavour to understand economic development, or lack thereof, gave rise to a body of literature to address the social aspects of development. Evans (1995) argued that a state is viewed as ‘developmental’ or ‘predatory’ based on two factors using a sociological perspective. This includes the capacity of its public institutions and the inherent features of its state-society relations, which are all mutually reinforcing. Fukuyama (1995) used a political science perspective to argue that networks of trust are neither easily created nor shaped by public policy, as the factors needed to cultivate them lie outside the control of governments. However, he does offer some tips on how a country can increase or strengthen its stock of social capital, including through educational institutions. From an economics perspective, Stiglitz (2000; 59), a renowned Economist and Nobel laureate recipient, asserted, “social capital is a concept with a short and already confused history”. In his analysis titled *Formal and informal institutions*, he understood social capital as encompassing networks that produce social cohesion. This, however, arose from narratives about social capital from an organizational point of view.

Some key benefits of social capital include access to information, the ability to influence and control one’s livelihoods (by raising financial capital, for example), and power relations. Power is exerted from the collective bridges that individuals and groups build with one another. In this way, groups can add more value to their networks by banding together to accomplish goals. Additionally, social networks can be converted into economic gains (Adler and Kwon, 2002). A disadvantage to social capital is that it cannot exist outside the links between actors in a network. Similarly, social capital can also have adverse outcomes. Adler and Kwon (2002) observe that it can lead to a sense of over-obligation, which breeds corruption within a group.

Whether one ascribes to social networks or social capital literature, one defining theme that cuts across is that they both connect people through various forms and norms of collective organizing based on trust. According to various scholars, trust is critical for the

functioning of societies (Borgatti *et al.*, 2018; Granovetter, 2012; Putnam, 2000). Social capital engenders trust and ultimately links people - including civil society, business, and the state - to work together (Woolcock, 2001). The above factors are intrinsically linked to socio-economic performance. Since social capital ideas converge with social networks, the two are used interchangeably in this study.

1.6 The Structure of the Thesis

This section outlines the structure of the forthcoming dissertation, which aims to provide a comprehensive exploration of the role of social networks in mitigating socio-economic and political challenges street traders face. The structure is designed to facilitate a logical progression of ideas, insights, and findings, contributing to a holistic understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Chapter One is the introduction, which contextualizes the study by providing a general overview and background. After that, a problem statement is presented, leading to the objectives and research questions the study addresses. Chapter Two reviews relevant literature outlining the theoretical and conceptual framework. It also identifies the gap in the literature and the study's contribution to addressing it. Chapter Three introduces the research methodologies employed in this thesis, including the research philosophy underpinning this study, the research design, and the data collection tools and techniques. It concludes by discussing the data analysis techniques and tools used for interpreting the findings.

Chapter Four is the first empirical chapter to present the research findings focusing on the factors that shape network formation by street traders in the Pretoria CBD. This chapter and the two data chapters that follow provide an in-depth analysis through case studies and narratives from street traders. Chapter Five is the second empirical chapter focusing on the socio-economic and political benefits that street traders procure by engaging in social networks. It looks at how street traders use social networks to facilitate social cohesion, mutual support, and a sense of belonging. Chapter Six is the last empirical chapter that addressed how and to what extent COVID-19 regulations disrupted the benefits accrued from social networks. Chapter Seven is the concluding chapter, which provides the overall findings gleaned from the study, flowing from the central research question. A discussion of the implications of the research findings for policy, practice, and community development is put forth. Following this, a formulation of recommendations and considerations for the future of research is discussed.

Chapter Two - The Making of Vulnerabilities: A Review of Literature to Understand the Effects of Inequality, Poverty, and Unemployment on Street Trading

2.1 Introduction

The chapter analyzes and reviews the literature on the informal economy. It is intended to serve as a catalyst for the data chapters and, subsequently, to assist in developing recommendations that are well-focused. This chapter addresses a gap in contemporary studies of how perceptions of vulnerability shape street traders' participation in social networks. The vulnerability arises from multiple, complex, and overlapping factors experienced at the global, national, and local levels. The complexity manifests in multiple issues that render street traders vulnerable, ranging from rising unemployment, exclusionary government policies and legislation, and socio-economic deprivations. As such, the chapter analyses the body of literature on some of the most salient aspects of informality. Despite the growing body of literature on networks, critical studies of how street traders in the Pretoria Central Business District (CBD) have adopted an arsenal of innovative survival strategies to sustain their livelihoods are not reflected. This is surprising for two reasons. First, networks arise from a set of internal and external factors that are reflected in literature. Second, these dynamics engender a deeper understanding of informal urban politics and the coping mechanisms employed by street traders.

The researcher begins with an overview of the factors that influence and drive the socio-economic life of street traders in the Pretoria CBD. The literature review encompasses a hybrid approach drawing from two types of literature review, i.e., systematic and methodology literature. A systematic review provides an overview of existing literature on informality and social networks. The methodological review provides a framework for understanding how scholars have framed informality and social networks. This chapter is twofold and proceeds as follows. The first part examines the literature on the term 'informal economy', highlighting the heterogeneous definitions recommended by scholars. As an antecedent, the researcher begins with a critique of 'modernization theory' as a crucial starting point to critically appraise the theory's assumptions. Four critical characteristics of informality are explored, including some examples of their manifestations. Lastly, key debates guiding informality are outlined.

The second part introduces the theoretical and empirical literature on social networks. The section begins with an outline of the development of ideas of social networks as a method for understanding interconnectedness. A section examining social capital and how it is a by-product of the interaction of groups or individuals within networks follows. Thereafter,

a growing body of literature highlighting social networks and their ties to the informal economy is analyzed. The chapter concludes with summary statements on how the literature reviewed provides valuable insights for the subsequent chapters. It will argue that although seminal work has been written on informality, very few shed light on informal networks to sustain livelihoods within the informal economy. Furthermore, these social networks provide benefits and opportunities that help street traders get by.

2.2 The Informal Economy: Definition, Characteristics, Manifestations and Debates

Definition

As outlined in Chapter One, the concept of the informal economy was first coined in the 1970s and has since undergone numerous descriptions by scholars. The initial concept of the 'informal sector' was coined in a pioneering study by Keith Hart (1973), describing poor households' subsistence activities and how they survived at the margins. Specifically, the dichotomy between traditional (rural) and modern (urban) economies. Subsequently, some economists articulated the underground or shadow economy (Gutmann, 1977; Feige *et al.*, 1994; Frey and Schneider, 2000) to describe the activities undertaken to circumvent taxes and regulatory restrictions. This led to the widespread use of the term 'informal economy' (Medina *et al.*, 2017; Guha-Khasnobis, 2006; Portes and Haller, 2010; Chen, 2012).

The literature is marked by an evolution of descriptions over the concept of informality across decades. In part, this is because, conceptually, informality cuts across disciplines. For example, some scholars focused on the regulation of the economy (de Soto, 1983). On the other hand, other scholars were broadly focused on informality as a resource for cohesion and a survival strategy (Portes, 1993). The widespread use of the concept of informal economy presented a dualistic dichotomy between formal and informal economies, especially in developing countries. In this regard, Chen and Carre (2020; 5) articulate the "formal-informal dichotomy as being too binary".

Nonetheless, they stress the importance of defining informality as economic activities and workers that fall on a spectrum between formal and informal. The evolution of labels describing informality gives us an idea of how challenging it has been for scholars to agree on a single term of use. While attempts have been made to adapt the term (e.g., ILO, 2018, 2021d; Medina *et al.*, 2017; Portes and Haller, 2010; Hussmanns, 2004), a standard label is still unavailable. However defined or labelled, the critical takeaway of informality is that it involves diverse situations and phenomena generally operating outside the

purview of the law. In addition, activities are not limited to a 'sector' but encompass almost all unrecorded economic activity across and within economies.

The golden thread that cuts across the different terminology defining the informal economy are elements of marginality, economic deprivations, cooperation, and illegality. The informal economy as a ubiquitous phenomenon has been around for a long time - with places where it is growing and places where it is shrinking - in the context of rising unemployment, inequality, and poverty (Elgin and Elveren, 2021; Berdiev *et al.*, 2020; Chen, 2012; Hart *et al.*, 2010; Rogerson, 1996). In a report by the ILO (2018), livelihoods created in the informal economy constitute 61.2 percent of the world's economic activity. In comparison to other regions, informality is most prominent in sub-Saharan Africa, accounting for over 90 percent of the labour force (World Bank, 2019a).

Characteristics

Extensive theoretical and empirical research has been undertaken on the nature and characteristics of informality (Dell'Anno, 2021; Chen and Carre, 2020; Bonnet *et al.*, 2019; Portes and Haller, 2010; Hussmanns, 2004; Meagher, 1995). In terms of characteristics, informality as a phenomenon is fluid in that there is no specific geographical place in which it occurs and no designated time in which it occurs. The common themes regarding the characteristics of informality are precarity of activities and working conditions, and low and irregular income. Generally, activities are undertaken by individuals with low levels of skills within insecure environments with no social protection and a lack of access to financial institutions and markets. De Soto (1986,1989) articulated that activities within the informal economy were undertaken to evade state intervention and legalization processes. However, Portes' (1983, 1993) research argued for informality as a means of survival and shelter from poverty among the urban poor in South American cities. Both these scholars provided seminal empirical work in the field. The golden thread across different contexts characterizing informality is that activities are unregulated by state apparatus.

Manifestations

In this chapter, understanding informality may benefit from an overview of the manifestations that classify the heterogeneous nature and activities in the informal economy. The informal economy manifests itself in a broad and diverse range of informal activities across and within developing and developed economies. Some examples of activities include the proliferation of informal waste pickers in Brazil (Dias, 2020). Thailand has many tuk-tuk drivers who operate three-wheeled motor taxis (Kamalipour and Peimani, 2021). In Guha-Khasnabis and Chandna (2021), we learn of the plight of migrant

workers. In highlighting the significant role played by the informal economy in India, Guha-Khasnobis and Chandna (2021; 1) assert that

India's US\$2.87 trillion economy is fuelled by a labor force of around 518 million workers, 80-90 percent of whom are employed in the informal sector. Domestic migrant workers make up approximately 20 percent of India's total labor force and are therefore key stakeholders in the growth prospects of India.

In Kraemer-Mbula and Wunsch-Vincent (2016), we learn of traditional herbal medicine sold in Ghana's informal economy. Portes and Haller (2010) in Latin America capture the odd jobs or services, such as car repairs or home renovations, provided on an ad-hoc basis by individuals for which they are paid in cash. These examples demonstrate the different forms and diversity of the informal economy.

Informality encompasses diverse goods and services where workers generate unregulated incomes perceived by the state as *de jure* illegal. States refer to the 'informal economy' as informal because most activities are not formally registered or regulated by national governments. Chen and Carre (2020; 25) assert

Historically, most governments have treated the informal economy as a problem to be dealt with, as being non-productive, illegal or even criminal. The result, as noted earlier, is that most existing policy and legal frameworks are inappropriate for, biased against or outright hostile towards informal workers, their enterprises and activities.

Individuals in the informal economy are often characterized as working in uncertain and precarious environments. Several national determinants, including economic, social, and political contexts, generally cause these precarious environments. These contexts can be expanded to include but are not limited to, poor working conditions, no social protection, irregular and low incomes, low levels of education and skills, dwindling or lack of fiscal resources, government regulations, policies, and frameworks (Chen and Carre, 2020; Bonnet *et al.*, 2019; Lund, 2019; Meagher, 2018). The precarious nature of informality makes workers particularly vulnerable to shocks, especially since they are rarely covered in national governance structures and receive no social protection.

The World Bank (2020) report recently suggested that external shocks in response to the Covid-19 pandemic threatened many people, especially in developing countries. In the first four months of the global pandemic, an ILO (2020; 1) report confirmed that "almost 1.6 billion workers in the informal economy have been significantly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic". For example, in Nigeria and India, street traders experienced deprivations

associated with food insecurity, unemployment, and poverty (Chen, 2020; Mishra and Rampal, 2020). Meanwhile, South Africa had some of the most stringent regulations, devastatingly impacting the informal economy (Skinner and Watson, 2020).

Dominant Debates Guiding Informality

Over 40 years of research on the informal economy have inspired a few dominant schools of thought or debates to understand the development of the informal economy. The body of literature on the prominent debates views the informal economy from varying perspectives with differing fundamental attributes. The differentiation attempts to explain the causes and persistence of the informal economy across contexts. Three dominant debates guiding informality are briefly outlined in the section below.

- *Dualist*

The perspective asserts that informality arises as a function of poverty and encompasses autonomous and marginal activities distinct from the formal economy (Chen, 2012). These activities and workers lack the necessary skills to be fully absorbed into the formal economy. Therefore, workers in the informal economy are seen to provide goods and services for people experiencing poverty by engaging in low-income generating activities. Tokman (1978) was one of the first scholars to advance the dualist perspective by viewing the link between formal and informal economies. He defined informality as subordinate to the formal economy. In addition, this perspective views the marginal informal activities as resulting from poor people's lack of access to resources and markets. Other scholars perceive the relationship between formal and informal economies as one where informal workers provide cheap labour for the formal economy. As Bromley and Wilson (2018; 11) explain of the South American economies and exploitation of workers by the formal economy, they assert "the informal economy works as...a supplier of low-cost labor to the capitalist firms". Thus, the dualist perspective is intimately linked to the modernization theory of development that purported a transition from the traditional (informal) to the modern (formal) economy (La Porta and Shleifer, 2008). In this perspective, informality was considered a temporary phenomenon that would disappear with economic growth and absorption of the informal into the formal economy.

- *Structuralist*

The structuralists view the informal economy as a segmented subordinate to the formal economy. According to this perspective, informal micro enterprises and workers reduce

the labour costs of formal enterprises based on the collusion of the state (through unfavourable policies) and formal businesses (by cheaply employing low-skilled labour). Therefore, the structuralist perspective subscribes to the notion that the state and formal businesses mutually exploit informal businesses and workers. In doing so, they expand and increase the competitiveness of formal enterprises (Portes,1994; Davis, 2006). Therefore, this perspective also highlights an exploitative and inextricably interconnected relationship between the formal and informal economies. This perspective was initially popularized in the works of Castells and Portes (1991). More recently, Peterson (2010) confirmed that the link between formal-informal enterprises persists as formal economy accumulation still depends on informal economic activities or workers. The exploitation persists because the informal economy receives little government intervention and limited or no social protection. Consistent with this viewpoint, the formal economy exploits informal businesses and workers excluded from government support.

- *Legalist*

The legalist perspective articulates that individuals engage in informality due to over-regulation and to circumvent the barriers to entry associated with the cost, time and effort needed to formalize enterprises. As opposed to the dualist and structuralist perspectives, the legalist view asserts that individuals engage in informal activities or work as a choice to avoid the legal regulatory environment. In particular, activities are undertaken to avoid tax and administrative costs. Simultaneously, scholars articulate that some push factors into informality also result from overly restrictive state regulations (De Soto, 2000). This perspective was initially popularized by De Soto (1989), who researched informal activities and workers trying to create livelihoods in the face of stifling government bureaucracies and a formal economy that advocates for policies to protect their interests. In addition, De Soto (1989, 2000) recognized that activities and work were also context-specific, articulating that informality in Mexico cannot be similar to that found in Egypt, for example. Therefore, advocating the crucial need to not apply a blanket approach in viewing informality but rather a nuanced and context-specific perspective.

Based on the above mentioned debates, the study aligns itself with the dualistic debate or theory which posits that the existence of a formal and informal economy side by side is a characteristic feature of developing societies. This theory suggests that the informal economy emerges as a response to the limitations and failures of the formal sector in absorbing the entire labor force. One key aspect of the dualistic development theory that aligns with our study is the idea that individuals engage in informal activities out of necessity due to the social, economic, and political inadequacies and vulnerabilities within

societies. Therefore, the chapter uses this theory to scrutinize the motivations, challenges, and dynamics that drive individuals to participate in the informal economy, acknowledging the structural factors that contribute to the coexistence of both sectors. In parallel with the dualistic theory, the study also draws inspiration from social network theory, recognizing the influential role of social relationships and networks in shaping informal economic activities. Social network theory emphasizes the significance of personal connections, trust, and social capital in facilitating economic transactions within informal settings. This theory is discussed further in the chapter. By drawing on these debates and theories, the study aims to offer a nuanced understanding of the dualities inherent in the informal economy and the pivotal role of social networks in shaping its dynamics.

To conclude this section, the informal economy lacks a universal singular conceptualization. Instead, it encompasses a range of perspectives with several diverse causes and normative implications. Whichever school of thought one prescribes, it is undeniable that informality significantly impacts livelihood creation and income generation. The informal economy remains a viable and critical solution for people experiencing poverty and a permanent fixture of the urban economy. Worldwide socio-economic uncertainty has served to underscore the shortcomings of the development project. Governments must look beyond the perspective that the informal economy merely exists to contribute to urban management challenges (Zulu, 2020; Brown, 2017; Timalsina, 2011). Instead, it enables access to economic opportunities, mitigates unemployment challenges, and provides social assistance.

2.3 Informality within a Global Context

Engagement in informality is largely imbued within rising socio-economic and political contexts, illustrated by inequality, poverty, and unemployment (Piketty, 2014). However, these environments are varied and context-specific. They also manifest in a various ways within the informal economy at a global, national, and local level. The analysis in this section provides an overview of the relationship between informality and key socio-economic indicators (inequality, poverty, and unemployment) and other existing dynamics. The purpose is to examine the co-relationship between these factors and informality rather than determining the causal link between them. The body of literature suggests that patterns of informalization have a co-relationship with herculean socio-economic deprivations and vulnerabilities in rural and urban environments (Kruijt and Koonings, 2022; Meagher, 2018; Medina *et al.*, 2017; Roy, 2011). These problems reveal limits, gains (economic and non-economic), and fragilities of the global socio-economic system that lead individuals to engage in informality. For example, Oluwatayo and Ojo (2018) assert that 75 percent of countries with low human development are found in Africa. The

analysis is vital for understanding informality not as static but as a fluid and dynamic phenomenon that provides solutions to systemic socio-economic and political contexts.

2.3.1 The influence of inequality, poverty, and unemployment on informality

Current literature suggests that societies are creaking under the strain of deep and systemic inequalities which have taken centre stage in most global discourses (Chancel *et al.*, 2022; Royce, 2022; Chen *et al.*, 2018; Oluwatayo and Ojo, 2018). Therefore, this section examines some of the drivers influencing engagement in the informal economy for millions of people globally. The United Nations (2015; 1) defines inequality as “the state of not being equal, especially in status, rights, and opportunities”. As such, inequality poses a threat to human development as it leads to disparities and disproportionate economic arrangements between countries and communities, among other factors (Therborn, 2014; Sen, 2014). In his article titled *The Dynamics of Social Inequalities in the Present World*, Stiglitz (2017; 115) asserts

It is apparent that not only are there high levels of inequalities within most countries, but those inequalities have been growing over time. They are much larger today than they were a third of a century ago. It is also clear that there is far from equal opportunity.

Similarly, Stiglitz (2017) argues that most of humankind exists under unfair conditions marred by inequitable and skewed income distributions under the present world order. The above manifest themselves in income inequality or the deprivation to realize one’s potential, as examples. Based on the above literature, inequalities manifest in informal livelihood activities due to the limited or non-existent opportunities within formal economies. A report by the United Nations (2017) Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean concluded that income inequality was rising in Latin America, with Brazil being the highest in the region. The report noted that barriers, such as structural inequality in the labour market, prevent people from escaping poverty. In contrast to income, ‘structural inequality’ describes how governments, institutions, or policies have embedded biases that marginalize some and advantage others because of race, class, and unequal access, among other factors (Royce, 2018).

Similarly, in the region of Africa, a report from the ‘Africa Progress Panel’ (2012; 8), led by Kofi Annan and his colleagues, warned that “the deep, persistent and enduring inequalities in evidence across Africa have consequences”, that would lead too many people into extreme poverty. The report added that rising inequality in Africa would “weaken the bonds of trust and solidarity that hold societies together. Over the long run, they will undermine

economic growth, productivity, and the development of markets" (2012; 8). Based on the report, little progress has been achieved in addressing the scourge of socio-economic challenges. According to the latest research, UNDP (2020) placed the Sub-Saharan region of Africa as having the highest income inequality in the world. This is also evident in research conducted by Oluwatayo and Ojo (2018) depicting Africa's socio-economic situation. They describe African countries as "walking through a tightrope" as depicted in the article title (Oluwatayo and Ojo, 2018; 59).

In recent times, there has been an increase in research literature focusing on the relationship between poverty and informal economy participation (Bonnet *et al.*, 2019; Canelas, 2019; Gaiger, 2019; Fourie, 2018). The literature puts forth livelihood reasons and the need to survive systemic and persistent poverty as some of the main reasons for perpetuating informality. In 1998, the UN Statement on poverty defined it as "...insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households and communities. It means susceptibility to violence, and it often implies living in marginal or fragile environments" (UN Press Release, ECOSOC/5759). While some debates view the informal economy as a coping mechanism out of poverty due to a lack of economic freedom, others argue that poverty arises from a combination of other freedoms lacking in people's lives. Therefore, Sen (1999; 87) demanded that we view poverty not only as an economic development issue but rather as the "deprivation" of a person's capabilities to live the life they have reason to value. In this way, poverty can be viewed through the lens of lack of access or exclusion from a variety of factors to opportunities. As a guide, Sen (2014) proposed the following freedoms to deter poverty:

1. *Political freedom*, including fair elections, civil rights.
2. *Economic facilities*, which include access to credit and global markets.
3. *Social opportunities*, which include arrangements for access to health care, education, and other social services.
4. *Transparency guarantees* in relations between people and between people and governments.
5. *Protective security*, which includes social and economic safety nets such as unemployment benefits and emergency relief.

Based on the above guiding principles, Sen (2014) argues that poverty arises from overlapping and intersecting factors, including socio-economic vulnerability, poor economic opportunities, repression, and exclusion. As such, income should not be used as the primary indicator of poverty, as many other essential factors hinder a person's capabilities and agency. Within this context, very few within the informal economy have

access to the mentioned freedoms, which may explain why they seek shelter in informality, as evident below.

First, Okafor's (2017; 209) findings on political freedom in West African countries confirmed "that terrorism, poor governance, social unrest... have negative impacts on the economic growth of the ECOWAS member countries". Second, the lack of access and exclusion of poor and marginalized people in the global markets and financial institutions has repeatedly been cited in various literature as an impediment to development (Mpofu and Sibindi, 2022; Allen *et al.*, 2019; Floro, 2019; Meagher, 2018; Tan and Guo, 2017). The barrier to entry into formal markets often leads poor people to take on riskier informal economic facilities and markets with high lending rates. Third, the lack of social security propels many poor people to find alternative informal means to supplement access (Quagraine *et al.*, 2019). Fourth, some literature highlights citizens' discontent and mistrust of their governments resulting from corruption, lack of accountability and transparency (Ezeibe, 2020; Huntington, 2017; Orre and Ronning, 2017). The above-mentioned political economy literature suggests that the quality of relationship and transparency of the state in dealing with its citizens is important. This is crucial for enhancing cohesive decision-making. In addition, decisions made by governments should be enforced in a manner that is fair, especially to those affected. Fifth, a decline in trust can thus fundamentally challenge the quality of good governance and the ability of political institutions to deliver social and economic services, rendering many vulnerable. Hence, many poor people find alternative livelihood strategies to overcome and deal with the poverty Sen (2014) alluded to, often by engaging in the informal economy (Chen and Carre, 2020).

Propelled by persistent socio-economic realities and inequalities, the informal economy remains a primary driver of poverty alleviation, especially in developing countries (Fourie, 2018; Rogerson and Saarinen, 2018). Although the informal economy involves work and enterprises outside the purview of the state, its accumulative activities contribute to urban employment and poverty alleviation. Along with crippling inequality and poverty, the sub-Saharan region is identified using data from the World Bank (2019) as the only region in the world where the number of poor people has risen steadily. They further forecast that the number of poor in the region increased by 9 million, with 413 million people living on less than US\$1.90 a day in 2015, more than all the other regions combined. If the trend continues, by 2030, nearly 9 out of 10 extremely poor will be in Sub-Saharan Africa. Based on the above, the creation of livelihoods will pose a significant threat to governments and citizens across many contexts. However, according to literature, the informal economy has consistently remained the main source of livelihood for poor people, with earnings

strongly impacting survival strategies and household livelihood creation (Chen and Carre, 2020; Khambule, 2020; Bromley and Wilson, 2018; Fourie, 2018; Meagher, 2018).

Within the context of weak economic growth, the creation of employment in the formal economy cannot keep up with the increased demand, leading to massive unemployment. This also aligns with the dualist paradigm that views unemployment and lack of economic growth as a driver of informality. Dualists argue that lack of economic growth leads to unemployment, leading people to the margins where they depend on survivalist activities found in the informal economy. The notion that growing unemployment leads to the growth of informal workers and inadvertently contributes to exclusion, vulnerability, and marginalization is a point exemplified in the following statements. An ILO (2017) article stated that a wave of slow economic growth in Latin America led to a sharp rise in unemployment. The worst affected were women, who averaged 12 million unemployed workers and found relief in the informal economy. However, estimates amongst these workers showed that “almost half of the female labour force works under... conditions [of] labour instability, low incomes, and a lack of protection and rights” (ILO, 2017).

However, the following statements show that economic growth is not the only precursor to unemployment. Other external factors that influence the risk of unemployment are cyclical and structural, for example, and can manifest in the form of a global pandemic. According to Stats SA (2020, 2021), South Africa’s unemployment rate increased from 28.5 percent in 2019 (pre-pandemic) to 29.2 percent in 2020 and 34.4 percent in 2021, respectively, during the pandemic. The reports from Statistics South Africa cited a steady and sharp increase in the unemployment rates, with the informal economy housing the second largest total employment in the country. In addition, the literature also gave an account of unemployment statistics by population group, with black Africans accounting for almost 40 percent of the rate. Therefore, the black African group remained vulnerable within the labour market.

Additional analysis of employment dynamics in a country with similar colonial and Apartheid history showed similar results. In Namibia, it was estimated that in 2018, 57.7 percent of the employed population operated in the informal economy, with black African women playing a significant part in its activities (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2018). Still focusing on Namibia as a case study, the World Bank (2020) asserted that high unemployment rates are caused by the labour market dichotomy (between formal and informal economies) and poor job growth. Therefore, the contribution of the informal economy to livelihoods cannot be underestimated. Based on the above, unemployment is not synonymous with economic growth (or lack thereof) but can arise for various reasons. As a response to the global coronavirus pandemic, both developed and developing

countries imposed some form of lockdown regulations that slowed or shut down their economic activities. As a result, the ILO (2020) estimated that 305 million jobs in the formal economy could be lost worldwide, with 1.6 billion forecasts for the informal economy.

2.3.2. Other dynamics within the informal economy

Gender dynamics within the informal economy

Drawing on seminal global research focused on the conditions of the informality, WIEGO (2019) found that engagement in the economy is highly differentiated by gender. In the analysis by WIEGO (2019; 5)

Informal employment is a greater source of employment for men than for women at the world level (63 vs 58 per cent), in developed countries (19 vs 18 per cent) and in emerging countries (69 vs 64 per cent). However, in developing countries the percentage of women workers who are informally employed (92 per cent) is substantially higher than the percentage of men workers (87 per cent).

The evidence above makes a critical point that globally, men participated more in informality. However, a different picture emerges when the scope is narrowed to look at regional and national statistics. In developing countries especially, women overwhelmingly participated in the informal economy. In Latin America, Bromley and Wilson (2018) assert that women are more engaged in the informal economy than men, especially in the non-agricultural sector. In Namibia, own account workers and communal farmers are the most vulnerable in employment, with female workers generating more income than men (Charmes, 2019; Nickanor *et al.*, 2019). Other categories of work highlighted in literature propelling women to contribute to the majority participation is discussed next.

Due to the heterogeneous nature of informality, engagement in domestic work as an informal economic activity is one major source that makes women lead in participation in some contexts (Chen and Carre, 2020; Jansen, 2019). Pitcher (2015) supplemented the analysis of women dominating informality in their interviews with sex workers in Great Britain. Their findings concluded that women predominated informal self-employment. Similarly, Meagher (2018) utilized case studies of micro-insurance in Sub-Saharan Africa to illustrate the exploitative nature of formal enterprises in utilizing more women informal workers for their benefit as cheap labour. While some of the literature using a gendered approach to investigate women's participation in the informal economy maintains that men are marginally higher in terms of participation. It does challenge numerous research that confirms women participate just as much, if not more than men. Additionally, conclusive

evidence and statistical figures within the informal economy are notoriously difficult to quantify (Feige, 2019; La Porta and Shleiffer, 2014; Chen, 2012; Schneider, 2002).

Level of education within the informal economy

Within informal urban politics, literature on the linkages between the level of education and engagement in informality has previously been contemplated by many (WIEGO, 2019; Fourie, 2018; Medina *et al.*, 2017; Gillespie, 2017), and the evidence is evident. According to the WIEGO (2018; 18), “the rate of informal employment decreases with levels of education”. They further note that informality is more prevalent in developing countries. Similarly, in his articulation of informality in Burkina Faso, Rossier and Ouedraogo (2021) assert that “the majority of working people in the informal sector have no education (88.5%)”. They further argue that a multitude of factors, including inequalities in the level of education, constrain the antecedents of formal work. Similarly, ILO (2019; 18), who conducted a paper on the links between informality and education, argue

Globally, the rate of informal employment decreases with levels of education: from 94 per cent of those with no education, to 85 per cent among workers with primary education, to 52 per cent for those with secondary education, to 24 per cent for those with tertiary education.

The above quote illustrates that those with no education or less education are more likely to engage in informality. Second, the rate at which this happens is higher in developing countries than in developed countries where most citizens are educated. This is evident in Gillespie’s (2017) research on street hawkers in Ghana. He concludes that most street hawkers in Ghana “have no more than an elementary level of education” (Gillespie, 2017; 980). Therefore, as predicted by many scholars, most operators in the informal economy have low levels of education and, thus, skills, which makes entry into the formal economy more challenging.

In other countries, as evident in the South African context, the low levels of education are rooted in historical racial inequality (Etim and Daramola, 2020; Schneider, 2018; Rogan and Skinner, 2017; Gamielien and van Niekerk, 2017). These scholars assert that South Africa’s apartheid policies had long-term impacts, undermining the current socio-economic human development of many black South Africans. In his research, Schneider (2018; 318) asserts

The implementation of neoliberalism in the isolated, fractured South African economy preserved the worst economic elements of apartheid — i.e., vast racial

inequality and segregation and poor education, skills and infrastructure — while undermining the prospects for economic development.

Evidence from South Africa suggests a clear link between racial inequality and the overwhelmingly poorly educated black communities that operate in the informal economy (Rogan and Skinner, 2017). The literature further contends that, despite empirical evidence of inequalities, legislation has done little to obfuscate the uneven growth in society in general and education in particular. Drawing on research in South Africa, the body of literature shows that history and racial inequality influenced and perpetuated informality as it is synonymous with the nation's poor.

Immigrant status within the informal economy

Literature conducted by several researchers across different contexts highlights that the large number of workers employed informally are migrants. For example, in India, we learn that

Over 90 per cent of Indian migrant workers, most of whom are low- and semi-skilled workers, work in the Gulf region and South-East Asia...[which] has led to India becoming the top recipient of remittances in the world (Khanna, 2020; 184).

The above informal migrants generally serve as a cheap labour workforce, especially for big and formal companies that pay less for their services. As such, it is important to understand their working conditions. In her paper titled *Cannibalizing the Informal Economy: Frugal Innovation and Economic Inclusion in Africa*, Meagher (2018) argues that formal businesses exploit informal migrants. She used case studies of M-Pesa and micro-insurance to argue that formal enterprises use informal businesses “to reduce costs and increase corporate profits” (Meagher, 2018; 2). Put differently, the formal economy uses the concentration of informal urban dwellers as cheap distributors of their products and services. The above form of exploitation is consistent with the structuralist paradigm, which asserts that an unequal exchange exists between the formal and informal. Therefore, the non-complementarity of the relationship between the two economies devalues the informal strategies millions adopt to carve a livelihood. Similar results of a largely immigrant workforce were found in other studies (Portes and Guarnizo, 2019; Bromley and Wilson, 2018; Romero-Daza and Himmelgreen, 2018; Thebe, 2017; Claassen, 2017).

Some studies argue that immigrant's participation in the labour market can be attributed to in-country migration from rural to urban areas, for example, in India (Khanna, 2020), in

Tanzania (Bagachwa, 2019), and in cities in Latin America (Bromley and Wilson, 2018). These communities of traders often bring goods, such as handicrafts or fruits and vegetables, grown in the rural areas to sell in the informal markets in the city. Another cohort of literature highlights the innovative strategies informal immigrants use as cross-border traders. Between South Africa and Zimbabwe, Rogerson (2018) describes an inward and outward stream of cross-border traders coming in and out of South Africa to buy and sell goods in the formal and informal economies. In their analysis, Crush *et al.*, 2015 discern that cross-border traders are among the most enterprising and energetic of contemporary migrants.

Furthermore, we understand from Bensassi and Jarreau (2019) in their study on cross-border traders in West Africa that associational bribes are paid by traders, often to government agents or officials. It is important to note here that corruption and bribery are synonymous with the informal economy with all actors, be it local or immigrants, as confirmed in numerous studies (Berdiev and Saunoris, 2018; Neef, 2018; Ouédraogo, 2017; Crush and Skinner, 2017). Further findings reveal that bribery and corruption are features in formal economies as well, especially between business and government officials worldwide (Jain, 2020; Fisman and Golden, 2017; Gardiner, 2017). Therefore, bribery and corruption cannot be attributed as a phenomenon within the informal economy, but existing in both formal and informal economies.

2.4 Informality within a South African Perspective

2.4.1. The informal economy

South Africa is characterized as a developing country (or emerging economy) on the rise in the continent of Africa and within the Global South. However, South Africa's socio-economic performance remains a challenge and has become increasingly intersectional, with persistent inequalities, a low economic performance by the formal economy, and rising unemployment. The term 'intersectionality' was introduced by the black feminist theorist Kimberle Crenshaw (1989, 1991) to explain the complex ways in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect, especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups. Her main argument is that discourses about inequality, power relations, and social and political identities combine to create unique forms of discrimination. Although this theory originates from America to explain the oppression of women of colour within its society, it evolved to provide a theoretical framework for analyzing social identities in other contexts. This theory is now applied across a diverse spectrum of disciplines, including politics, healthcare, and economics, among others (Cho *et al.*, 2013). In this context, and key to ensuring livelihoods for the marginalized, the study moves from the point of view that the

informal economy acts as a socio-economic buffer for the poor. However, the social composition is mainly of black disadvantaged and underdeveloped communities resulting from the legacy of Apartheid (Ntuli, 2020; World Bank, 2018; Neves and du Toit, 2012). Apartheid ensured white minority privilege through a structured system of oppression, revealing a damning legacy that has persisted. Against this historical background, black communities were excluded from socio-economic and political freedom. The significance of this can be seen almost three decades post-democracy in a report by Chatterjee *et al.* (2020) highlighting the brutal realities of Apartheid and how these have manifested in South African societies. The report confirms that “the top 10 percent own more than 85 percent of wealth” in South Africa (Chatterjee *et al.*, 2020; 26). The persistent chasm along racial lines in South Africa shows that disparities are profoundly entrenched and structural.

Accordingly, people engaging in informal economic activities are generally from poor and low-income black communities (Rogerson, 2019). Similar views are evident in Phillip (2011), who confirms that three key factors define the contemporary South African informal economy. These include the *structure of the economy*, *spatial inequality*, and *inequality in the development of human capital*. The ‘structure of the economy’ is a centralized and vertically integrated monopoly favouring the core (formal) economy. Therefore, it contains a highly skewed distribution of assets and capital that negatively impacts unemployment and local economic development. ‘Spatial inequality’ speaks to the racialized geographical planning by the Apartheid government that created townships and homelands located far from economic opportunities. The last factor, ‘inequality in the development of human capital’, addresses the racialized legacy in acquiring skills and education (Phillip, 2011).

As one would expect, education plays a significant role in development, especially in improving the socio-economic circumstances in developing countries. The youth make up the most significant percentage of the population in South Africa, and as such, acquiring the necessary skills and education to function and develop as members of society is attached to their access to education. However, this access to education was exacerbated in 2020 because of the rising global concerns about the spread of COVID-19 and the subsequent South African government-mandated policy initiatives that followed. Some scholars (Dube, 2020) note that restrictions created a digital divide between urban and rural students at all levels of education, revealing unprecedented vulnerabilities in the education system. Urban students were privileged by relative and easier access to the internet and technology infrastructure. However, many students in rural areas had to contend with added difficulties as they lacked access to adequate infrastructure and technology needed for online learning (Monareng *et al.*, 2020; Lembani *et al.*, 2020). In

some places, there was none to mobilize distant learning. This view is supported by other authors who, based on an education survey conducted, postulate

that the possibility of schooling from home is greater for wealthier households, in part because they have higher levels of access to the internet. It is now widely accepted that remote schooling in the context of the pandemic is neither feasible nor fair in developing countries (Gustafsson and Deliwe, 2020; 25).

Beyond the immediate impact of COVID-19 on education, it is yet to be seen what overall long-term consequences shape the socio-economic landscape in the country.

The abovementioned issues are immersed in deeper-level factors typically found in historical and contemporary South African politics. Friedman (2019) reflects on the lasting impact that South Africa's history of racially exclusive policies had on its people. He critically analyses the current political economy by arguing that the democratic project has failed many, but primarily black communities. This claim is evident in Tshishonga (2019; 168), who asserts that Apartheid

was not only the foundation for racial and discriminatory policies, but also had a negative impact on all aspects of life, socially, economically, politically and culturally, especially amongst the black population.

Therefore, the failure of the democratic government to address institutional and structural challenges has perpetuated socio-economic challenges, especially along racial lines. The core argument of Friedman (2019) is a call for collective action as a route to social justice instead of reliance on institutions. Practically and normatively, this book empowers ordinary citizens to think differently about the concept of democracy.

In similar work on democracy, Reddy (2016) highlights the failure of conventional approaches in understanding the complexities of South Africa's democracy. He argues that democracy (ushered in post-1994) reconfigured racial and citizen identities as observed during the Apartheid era, during the democratic transition. These previously disadvantaged citizens' identities were not erased but reinforced by privileging those with power. A point also echoed by Chatterjee *et al.* (2020; 1), who assert, "despite having a progressive constitution and policy mandate, post-apartheid democratic society seems to have reproduced inequality along the same [racial] lines". The World Bank (2018), in an article titled *An Incomplete Transition: Overcoming the Legacy of Exclusion in South*

Africa, argues that particular strides have been made. However, these have not been enough to address the exclusionary nature that persists from the Apartheid legacies.

The above literature is vital for understanding that informality intersects and is distributed across various factors in the context of South Africa. These include race (black people), class (poor and previously disadvantaged), and gender (primarily women). The intersection of circumstances keeps people at the bottom as by-products of a discriminatory system that made South African society very hierarchical. As such, it is important to understand the overlapping factors that anchor and perpetuate vulnerabilities and exclusion when writing on informality in South Africa. However, the existing literature does not do enough to point this out since few use intersectionality as a lens of analysis when looking at the informal economy (Osirim, 2018; Groenmeyer, 2011). This is important research as identities in the South African political economy are exercised and executed by institutions. Race, class, and gender, among others, are lived through everyday practices in various social spaces, such as informality. However, intersectionality is not explored in this study but is mentioned as a valuable concept of understanding informality within a South African context.

The informal economy houses a myriad of activities varying across the globe and specific to each locality, with worker vulnerability as a constant trend. Nevertheless, based on the above literature, the South African informal economy encompasses workers engaged in a continuum of informal work. This comes from historically racially exclusive policies, weak socio-economic performance, and external global crises, among other factors. Within this context, millions of people, excluded from the core economy, find alternative ways to create livelihoods. Benit-Gbaffou (2018; 397) supports this idea by arguing that individuals in the informal economy do not make choices in “isolation from political, social and urban contexts”. As such, informal workers are bound by the specific contexts within which they sustain their livelihoods. Thus, the researcher situates the study’s analysis within the historical legacies of racially segregated policies. The researcher also expands on the post-democracy processes of transformation. This framing is critical to understanding the systemic poverty and cascade of the unemployment situation in the country. These are discussed further in another section.

2.4.2 The state, regulatory frameworks, and socio-economic challenges

The policy context: regulatory frameworks

The informal economy is sanctioned by national bylaws, regulatory frameworks, and municipal bylaws. Literature responses towards some of these policies will be discussed to understand the environment in which informal traders attempt to carve out a livelihood.

The section argues that government legislation and policies, although sometimes well-intended, tend to attract criticism for their lack of clarity, ambiguous nature, and inefficiency in implementation (Skinner, 2019; Crush *et al.*, 2015). Moreover, some policies, especially those guiding street trading, are popularly perceived as draconian, repressive, and exclusionary as governments aim to maintain law and order in the streets (Crush and Skinner, 2017; Crush *et al.*, 2017; Rogerson, 2016).

As discussed in this section, the policy context guiding street trading is widely documented in scholarly works as punitive and marginalizing specific communities, especially within street trading. According to Skinner (2018) and Rogerson (2016), informal economy regulations possess a heteronomous disposition. The bylaws that the Metro Police enforce, for example, are implemented through confiscations, fines, and other similar penalizations. The government's approach toward street trading is evident in the following studies. Skinner (2018; 16) highlights a significant deficiency within the regulatory approaches by local governments. She asserts

city-level actions have revealed an ambivalent, if not actively hostile, approach to street traders in particular. In late 2013, the Johannesburg City Council violently removed and confiscated the inventory of about 6000 inner-city street traders.

Rogerson (2016; 210) confirmed that the Johannesburg City Council "at times imposed a tough regulatory environment using bylaws, restrictive licensing and a coercive law enforcement". Similarly, Devries (2018; 45) highlights the eThekweni's local government approach toward street trading and asserts that "despite well-intended municipal perspectives, planning, and policy, current practice is increasingly punitive toward informal traders". A recent study by Scheba and Turok (2020a; 84) describes the City of Cape Town's local government approach toward street trading as "hampered by the oscillation between a laissez-faire approach of continuing neglect and the strict enforcement of existing laws and regulations".

In most cases, regulations do not require the approval or appeal of those they apply to. Occasionally, regulations are met with non-compliance (Benit-Gbaffou, 2018; Brown and Mackie, 2017). Furthermore, regulations are enacted by the state through its agents to coordinate the informal traders' actions and practices. They are not concerned with the socio-economic cooperation of street traders and are, thus, ultimately perceived by traders as intrusive and exclusionary. Furthermore, antagonisms between state policies and street traders are complexly constituted. This is partly due to the diverse nature of street trading, use of public space, different types of activities within street trading, gendered differences, and local and foreign traders, among other characteristics.

A barrage of normative bureaucratic regulations also hinders the efficacy and acceptance of street traders of government policies and regulations. These include the legal intricacies that surround obtaining a street trading license. In addition, the systematic application process (on pain of waiting months or longer for a decision). Having met these requirements, what follows is the inexorable inspections and enforcement of bylaws by government agents in the form of Metro Police officials, which the intended beneficiaries perceive as marginalizing them even more. These stipulations are not exhaustive but serve as a guideline to emphasize the state's haphazard and ambiguous nature of some policies (Benit-Gbaffou, 2018; Rogerson, 2016; Valodia and Devey, 2012).

Fuelled by the perceptions mentioned above, street traders have commonly clashed with government agents in the form of Metro Police (Mottiar, 2019; Skinner, 2017; Benit-Gbaffou, 2016). The clashes are partly due to street traders' perceptions of informal urban spaces as a resource for livelihood creation. Following this logic, the regulatory landscape enacted by the state creates ambiguities within informal urban politics. Consequently, the ambiguous environment contributes to the precarious nature of informality, where traders face constant daily threats to their entrepreneurial pursuits.

The efficacy of the state: Bylaw enforcement and clean-up operations

Urban planning across South African cities is the government's central and fundamental function. However, literature often characterizes government planning as ambiguous and repressive (Skinner, 2019; Moyo, 2018; Fourie and Skinner, 2018). Specifically, bylaws value and devalue certain forms of informality, and some are even criminalized. Within this regulatory context, arbitrary operations are conducted by law enforcement officers to consolidate and put into practice local and national laws. This was most evident in the clean-up operations instituted by local authorities to evict informal traders (Benit-Gbaffou, 2016).

For example, the government's efforts to keep street traders out of the CBD in cities like Johannesburg were met with stiff resistance (Benit-Gbaffou, 2013). Using local bylaws, the state attempted to order the streets by tasking Metro Police officers to evict traders. The evictions of informal traders in the CBD were not exclusive to unregistered but also to registered traders. These clean-up operations hinged on what the government propagated as management of spatial order predicated on creating cleanliness and first-class cities (Benit-Gbaffou, 2016; Bokasa *et al.*, 2014). For the government and its bureaucracy, street trading is often synonymous with being disorganized, chaotic, and an act of illegality (Benit-Gbaffou, 2018; Pieterse, 2017).

The role of street trading in mitigating persistent socio-economic challenges

South Africa's urban politics should be understood against the backdrop of racially exclusive policies, including segregated urban planning. The synergy between colonial and post-colonial policies in South Africa is key to understanding poverty, unemployment, and inequality. It has been nearly three decades since the dawning of South Africa's first democratically elected government. The ruling party, the African National Congress (ANC), pledged itself to the transformation and development of South Africa. At the helm, the transformation sought to address the socio-economic and political imbalances and legacies of Apartheid (Moyo and Gumbo, 2021). However, South Africa persistently remains an unequal country globally, with a score of 0.63 on the Gini index (World Bank, 2020). This score was reported in the World Bank's (2020) *Poverty and Shared Prosperity* report, which estimates global trends that drive poverty and inequality worldwide.

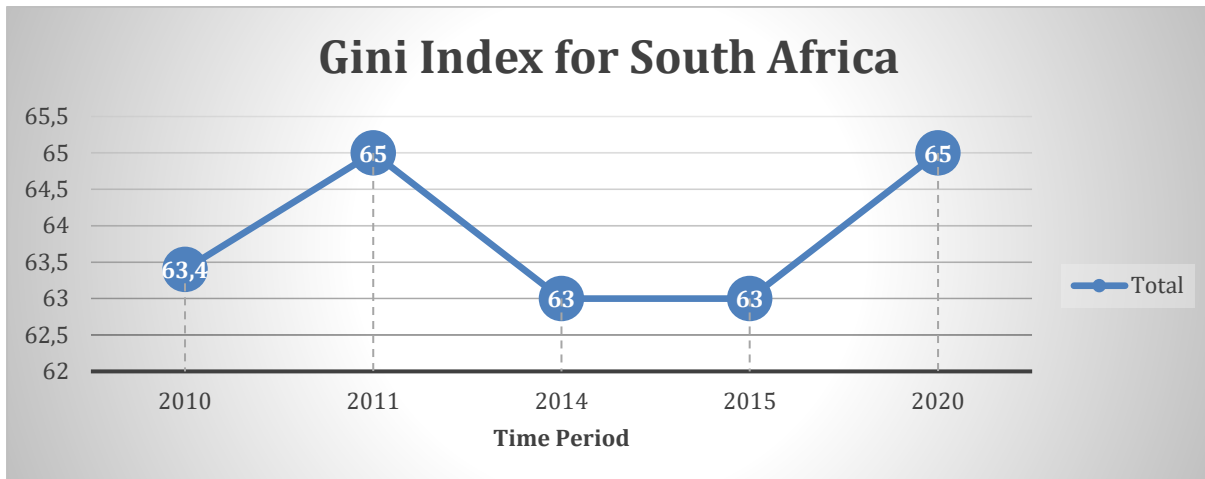
In a South African context, inequality is part of the societal imperfection due to the Apartheid and colonial history, and the subsequent asymmetrical distribution of equal civil rights for all races (Friedman, 2019; Tshishonga, 2019; Sonneborn, 2010). In a recent World Bank (2022) report titled *Inequality in Southern Africa: an Assessment of the Southern African Customs Union*, South Africa remained the world's most unequal society. The bleak economic outlook explains the concomitant socio-economic challenges, including high levels of inequality and record-high unemployment rates (Oxford Analytica, 2021; Khambule, 2020; Rogerson, 2018).

In their analysis of inequality in South Africa, Fintel and Orthofer (2020; 577) confirm that "one percent of the South African population owns about 50% of all the country's wealth". This is also supported by a damning report by Chatterjee *et al.* (2020), who assert that half of the adult population in South Africa survives on near-zero savings. They confirm that wealth inequality in South Africa has become a crisis, leaving millions in abject poverty and indebtedness. In this sense, inequality is a destructive violation of human development, leading to harsh realities for global, regional, and local landscapes. The linkages between the state and its policies, institutions, and economic actors make inequality inextricably embedded in economic structures.

Figure 1 represents the overall national trajectory, looking specifically at inequality trends. Post-democracy in '94, inequality has persisted as a defining and salient characteristic of South African society. This is mainly due to the country's history of Apartheid and colonization. South Africa has consistently maintained the highest levels of inequality across the world. High levels pose a challenge as large populations of society may be

vulnerable to economic exclusions, limiting their opportunities. This narrative is supported by Stiglitz (2017, 2012), who asserts that deeply unequal societies are prone to be economic underperformers. The perplexities of inequality also generate social and political instability.

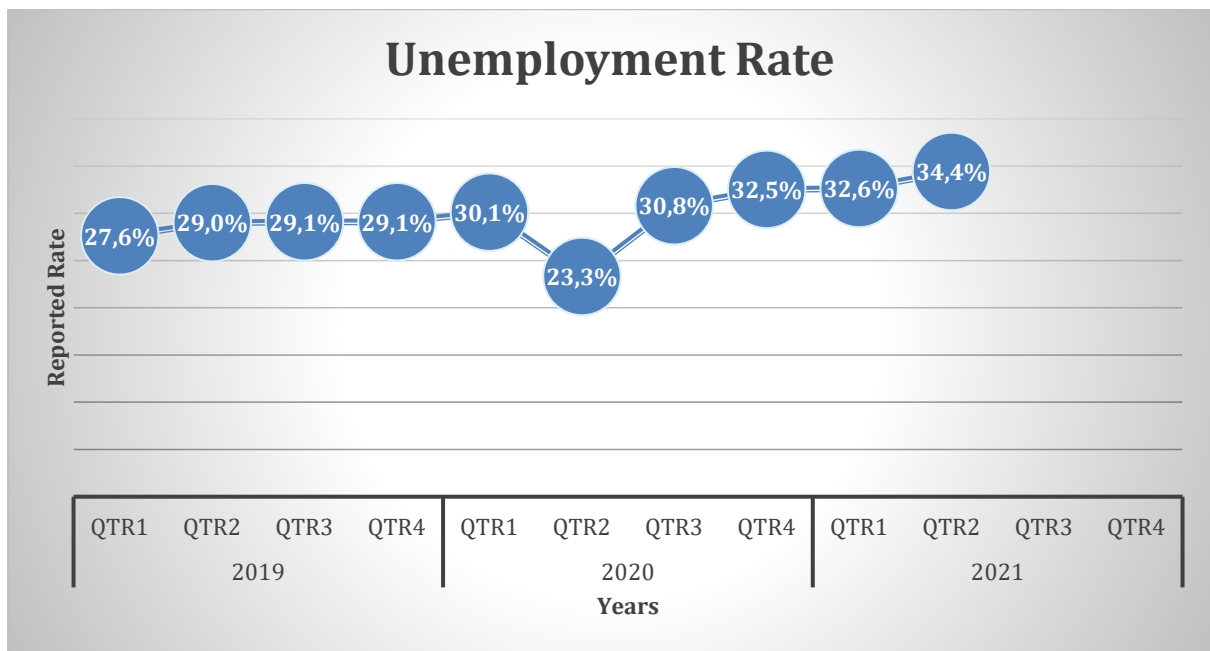
Figure 1: Inequality trends in South Africa



Source: Authors own (figures extracted from the World Bank at <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI?end=2014&locations=ZA%29-ZA&start=1993&view=chart>)

In addition, stagnant and slow economic growth has not generated sufficient jobs, leading to chronic unemployment figures. According to the Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), the current unemployment rate in the second quarter of 2021 surged to 34.4 percent (Stats SA, 2021). Concurrently, according to the expanded definition of unemployed, South Africa recorded another record high (since the inception of the QLFS in 2008) at 44.4 percent. Based on the above statistics, almost half of the employable persons in South Africa are economically inactive. Therefore, the informal economy is accessible for livelihood creation and employment opportunities. Many scholarly works have reflected South Africa's unemployment challenge, including Mahadea and Kaseeram (2018) and Mohamed (2018). These authors posit that high levels of unemployment marginalize individuals by forcing them into self-employment as necessary survival and coping strategies. The unwelcome record is also supported by a report by Bloomberg (2021), which tracked South Africa's unemployment rates as the highest in the world. The figure below highlights the unemployment statistics from the first quarter of 2019 to the second quarter of 2021. Figure 2 shows a steady increase in South Africa's unemployment rate, with a dip in 2020 due to the national lockdown regulations (Stats SA, 2021).

Figure 2: Unemployment trends in South Africa



Source: Author's own (statistics from the Quarter Labour Force Survey)

South Africa's development challenges remain negative as far as vulnerabilities, deprivations, and inequalities are concerned. Historically, the systematic and racially exclusive policies impoverished many black communities. These policies remained post-Apartheid and reinforced inequalities along racial lines (Steyn and Mpofu, 2021). From 2020 onwards, the negative outlook has been significant in South Africa as it was further exacerbated by a global pandemic which brought socio-economic challenges - of record level inequality and unemployment statistics, and rising poverty levels to the fore (Dagume, 2021; Nnaeme *et al.*, 2021; Noyoo, 2021; Tshishonga and Matsiliza, 2021; Mukumbang *et al.*, 2020; Francis *et al.*, 2020). Street trading, therefore, emerges as a space of opportunity and livelihood creation.

Many studies have indicated the positive role of street trading in creating job opportunities (Fourie, 2018; Charman *et al.*, 2017; Medina *et al.*, 2017; Skinner, 2016). However, street trading comes with its own context, where traders still face many socio-economic challenges that have persisted over time. South African informal traders have not escaped these challenges, including lack of funding and infrastructure, regulatory and policy challenges, and issues of entrepreneurial survival. In an article focusing on street trading, Nkrumah-Abebrese and Schachtebeck (2017; 137) assert

Factors influencing the growth of street trading in the Tshwane CBD included rampant levels of unemployment and poverty, increased levels of urban migration and urbanisation, a prevalence of survivalist types of entrepreneurs, and entrepreneurial intentions on the part of street traders.

The above provides a brief overview of the current realities for many living in South Africa, especially those within the informal economy. This is despite the fact that the country's Constitution delineates a commitment to advancing social justice and fundamental human rights.

2.4.3 Street trading in South African cities and its challenges

Faced with unfavourable socio-economic challenges, as illustrated in the previous section, and national-level challenges, as highlighted in this section, many individuals committed to sustaining livelihoods, look to the informal economy for survival. One of these survival activities within the informal economy manifests in street trading. Street trading is ingrained in the socio-economic landscape of developing and developed cities worldwide, including South Africa. It is the most visible activity within the informal economy, prevalent within Central Business Districts (CBDs). It occupies a significant role in the livelihood creation for people with low incomes and is ingrained in the economic landscape of urban cities. Street trading is, therefore, one subset of the various forms of informality that sustain poor households. CBDs provide spaces for heterogeneous actors (e.g., registered and unregistered traders, local and foreign traders, male and female traders, and young and old traders from diverse backgrounds, selling and providing various goods and services). These actors and their activities are regulated through local municipal bylaws and policies on behalf of the South African government. The responsibility of *inter alia* law enforcement is carried out by the local Municipality via the Metro Police officers.

Despite its capacity to sustain livelihoods, many socio-economic challenges are confronting and perpetuating street trading in South Africa, resulting in unstable, unfavourable, and unprotected working conditions. These include, for example, rising inequality, unemployment and poverty levels, limited access to credit or start-up capital, over-regulation, and intense competition (Skinner, 2019; Nkrumah-Abebrese and Schachtebeck, 2017; Benit-Gbaffou, 2016). Also, Mokgatetswa (2014) highlights that urban migration has exacerbated street trading in South African cities. This results from both rural communities moving to the urban areas and foreign immigrants entering South African cities. Therefore, the challenges that give rise to the development of alterities within street trading in South Africa are analogous to those found in other countries - poverty, unemployment, global crises, and imperfections of global markets.

Street traders face many survival challenges in their daily operations and operate under constant insecurity, complicating an already precarious life. Studies have indicated that street trading, often, is a coping strategy by marginalized groups to mitigate the desperate measures they find themselves in (Lindell, 2019; Pearson and Sweetman, 2011; Willemse,

2011). These range from vertical structures imposed by the government through regulatory and policy means that manifest in barriers to entry and harassment by government agents. Horizontal structures manifest themselves through a lack of access to resources and infrastructure, and high competition, especially between registered and unregistered traders or between local and foreign traders.

As a preamble to street trading, it is important to delineate between registered and unregistered street traders within the informal economy. Registered traders are those who have obtained a trading license from the local authorities. Unregistered traders are those, for whatever reason, who trade in the sale of goods or services without obtaining a license from the local authorities. Horn (2011) aptly reminds us that many street traders are unregistered and situate themselves strategically where there is considerable pedestrian traffic. However, operating without a license, i.e., being an unregistered street trader, means being more vulnerable to harassment, confiscation of goods, a fine, or possible prison time (Brown, 2017; Benit-Gbaffou, 2016). As part of the selection criteria in applying for a street trading license, one of the requirements for South Africans is to produce a copy of an identity document (City of Tshwane, 2015). For foreign nationals or migrants, a 'work permit/refugee letter' from the Department of Home Affairs will suffice. However, many studies have confirmed the notoriety and slow processing associated with applying for refugee status in South Africa, with many waiting longer than the prescribed six months (Schockaert *et al.*, 2020; Masawi, 2017; Fassin and Wilhelm-Solomon, 2017; Khan and Schreier, 2014).

In addition, regardless of whether they possess legal documentation in South Africa, foreign traders have the added disadvantage of being the target of growing xenophobic vigilantism, as seen with *Operation Dudula*. Dudula is a Zulu word meaning 'to push', which implies that illegal foreign nationals should be removed from the country. Therefore, Operation Dudula is an anti-foreign black movement that forcibly removes foreign traders, sometimes at the cost of their lives, within South Africa (Oxford Analytica, 2022; Mthombeni, 2022; Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Moyo, 2022). One of the primary reasons for this anti-foreign sentiment is that informal traders are perceived to be the root cause of the socio-economic disparities, including straining the public system in the country.

In addition to presenting identity documents, there are other license requirements. Examples include a rental fee, an initial fee, and signing a lease form. It is also important to note that due to limited space available for trading sites, obtaining a license is by no means a guarantee of a trading site (Skinner and Watson, 2021; Rogerson, 2018; Kamete, 2017). This cumbersome bureaucratic environment leaves many, both migrant and local traders, without the appropriate documents to apply for a permit, thus leaving them

vulnerable for months on end, if not longer. As a result, some bypass this process and informally procure trading spots wherever they find them available, along high pedestrian routes where customers can lighten their purses.

Another barrier to obtaining a trading license for street traders is the regulation that states that an individual must procure a permanent residential or postal address (City of Tshwane, 2015). However, it is commonly known that street traders usually enter into informal agreements with landlords, renting a back room in the township, for example (Ntuli, 2020; De Vos and Webster, 2015; Mosiane, 2009). These arrangements are entered into verbally based on trust. Even local traders with a copy of an ID cannot acquire a trading license because of their informal living arrangements that prevent them from being able to provide proof of residence. This is also evident in Muiruri's (2010) account of street traders in Kenya, making it evident that this challenge is not unique to South Africa. Similar results are also found in Dhaka, Bangladesh (Lata *et al.*, 2019). These documentation obstacles are some of the many complex barriers that restrict many street traders from being able to procure licenses and thus be recognized by governments as having the right to trade. As a response to socio-economic inequality, marginalization, lack of adequate or any government support, and no social protection, vulnerable communities devise innovative coping strategies to survive.

2.5. Social Networks as Resilient Structures of Informality

2.5.1 The Link Between Informality and Social Networks in Facilitating Cooperation

Polanyi's (2018) analysis of formal economies emphasized the importance of understanding the social and political context in which economic systems operate. He believed that market economies were not natural or inevitable but were the product of deliberate political action. Unlike Polanyi's (2018) analysis of formal economies, this study contends that market economies are created and sustained through deliberate social relationships that result in socio-economic and political action. There have been moments in literature where people in the informal economy have used their collective agency to resist the imperfections of society and the state to safeguard their livelihoods through social networks. For example, collective agency within informality is evident in Bangladesh (Lata *et al.*, 2019).

Researchers need to understand the social skills required for developing an effectively functioning social network. This informs people's position within a network and how they interact and are connected. Knoke and Yang (2019; 38) define a social network as "a set of actors, or other entities, and set or sets of relations defined on them". Thus, social networks function to connect and tie a set of social actors together and vary in strength. These social interactions are crucial for understanding how and why people adjust their

behavior due to ever-changing socio-economic situations (Ferragina and Arrigoni, 2017). This study uses a social network perspective to understand informal traders' organizing and (re)organizing to sustain livelihoods anchored on polycentric relationships between and among traders, and between traders and the state. The study uses the word polycentric in this context to describe the different power dynamics between traders, and between traders and the state. The study analyses the differentiated ways informal traders form mutually beneficial social networks to respond to broader economic, political, and social challenges in the streets.

The streets are an arena where informal traders compete over urban spaces, both registered and unregistered, foreign and local, male and female, young and old, urban and rural. Therefore, they are interconnected. It is also a space of dynamism because individuals are constantly producing and developing planned and spontaneous informal economic activities. Street trading is often characterized as the most visible form of the informal economy, continuously active and evolving. Intrinsicly, the streets where informal traders conduct their business, albeit overtly, encompass a social life. It is here where networks are continuously constructed and reconstructed through daily interactions. Thus, the researcher situates this study on the solidarity networks of informal social actors and the self-organizing associations they have constructed over time. A crucial aspect of social networks is the relations between actors, herein informal traders, who become the driving force of the network created. Generally, informal traders are frequently characterized in the literature as competitive and interact in a cloud of suspicion (Benit-Gbaffou, 2016). However, other less frequently articulated characteristics include acts based on trust and cohesion.

Trust is a critical component in social networks as obligations and expectations on what the associated group or individuals seek to achieve rely mainly on trustworthiness (Granovetter, 2005). It also leads to cooperation and solidarity between and amongst individuals or groups. An example where high degrees of trust are exercised includes the rotating credit networks in developing countries. Trust also affects the extent to which an actor is embedded within a network, as this affects their benefits within the network (Glaeser *et al.*, 2002). The study argues these benefits play a significant role in informal traders finding some refuge and security from the precarious and vulnerable circumstances they find themselves.

Another key component involves facilitating the flow of information within a social network. Some literature looks at the relationship (Coleman, 1988) between individuals across the network, and the other looks at the individual's position (Burt, 2004) and the network's structure. Strong ties within the network benefit access to knowledge and information within this understanding. Granovetter (2005) uses an example of the information

asymmetry between an employer and employee, observing that some may prefer to use their trusted networks to find out about each other instead of using a recruitment agency. In this context, the efficacy of social networks arises as more efficient as the possible recruitment would be within the person's wider networks. This is evident in the work of Msomi (2018; 80), who posits "about 22% of unpermitted [unregistered] vendors secured their trading spaces by speaking to permit-holder [registered] street vendors". This enabled unregistered traders to utilize information from registered traders to negotiate trading spots informally.

The last component to be discussed involves the standards and procedures for breaching predetermined rules and norms (Granovetter, 2005). Societies worldwide have norms and socially accepted rules that connect and tie people. These include laws, constitutions, and unspoken rules of behavior. For this reason, rules and norms form an essential component of social networks. They also regulate and define the levels of cooperation within a network. In similar work, Harrison *et al.* (2011) observed that cooperation would yield most highly when individuals or groups expected direct or indirect reciprocity. However, it would be remiss not to note that networks also generate negative behaviors in individuals. These include dishonesty, for example (Granovetter, 2005).

The informal social networks discussed in this study have emerged and been shaped by a multitude of factors, including historical legacies, deficiencies in government regulation, being ignored by policy and regulatory frameworks, and global and local socio-economic shocks. As such, the networks in this study are diverse and serve multiple roles for informal traders, such as alternative avenues for informal; finance (educational purposes or for start-up capital); insurance (savings for December or rotational savings schemes); support during life-cycle changes (for example marriage ceremonies, attending funerals or checking on ill members). These networks are dominated by principles of trust, solidarity, and interdependence as informal traders are bound together in mutual agreement, collective action, and behavior. These principles influence how informal traders make decisions about coping strategies for dealing with life's challenges and thus have relational importance on their existence. Therefore, networks provide an anchor to coalesce and create social cohesion and economic solidarity for informal traders (Meagher, 2006).

This study draws on social network theory, which focuses on interpreting meanings and understandings of how and why informal networks come about. More importantly, network theory is helpful in this study as an initial construct to explore the reasons why informal traders act in a particular way and understand the nature of their organization within an interface of structural influences. This, in turn, provides the basis for answering the

research questions in this study. Additionally, social networks enable us to grasp the social life of street trading within a fluid environment that constantly adapts to external and internal challenges (Bourdieu, 1985; Putnam, 2004).

2.5.2 Social Networks: Sociality as a Survival Response to Societal Challenges

Social network literature provides valuable concepts that can be applied to understanding the social aspects of informality. The general concept of social networks broadly describes the formation of social groups and is understood to encompass links and shared values. Marsden (2000; 2727) defines it as a “structure of relationships linking social actors”. In social sciences, increasing interest has been evoked in social networks’ role in our ability to theorize social phenomena. This, however, is still lagging in conceptualizing the developing world, specifically informality. Dominant discourses on social networks reflect the reality that our social relationships are an essential means of coping with uncertainties and attaining outcomes that would have been difficult individually (Wellman, 1999). The central idea of social networks is that family, friends, or associates represent an essential asset that can be called upon in times of crisis or leveraged for material gain (Putnam, 2001; Tandler, 1995).

This literature, however, is problematic as it emerged from a milieu of mainly Western research, looking specifically at; the relations between states, poverty in poor communities, or the formal economy as a risk management strategy and a tool for identifying opportunities (Tandler, 1995; Narayan, 1997; Putnam, 2001; Evans, 1995). Therefore, the social network theory exists. However, it is inadequately applied within street trading. Meagher (2009) took a fresh look at social networks by arguing that they provide a more explicit framework for understanding informality. Her work permeates knowledge from economics, sociology, politics, and anthropology. It enables scholars to incorporate concepts such as social capital and embeddedness. Meagher (2009) presented a monograph on the social networks of informal traders in Nigeria. Her empirical analysis focused on how informal enterprises are embedded within a broader social realm, enabling traders to engage in new and diverse forms of networks. The limitation of this study is the focus on social networks as a response only to state institutions. Hillenkamp *et al.* (2013) had a similar study derived from empirical data including the African, Asian, and Latin American regions. The focus of this study describes the strategies that informal traders developed to solve their problems through social networks. Additionally, the study highlighted how informal actors organized and reorganized themselves vis-à-vis the state and its policies, the market economies, and their policies. Thus, the study was limited to market and state policies at national and international levels.

A year later, Meagher (2010) provided a new and empirically grounded perspective on informality in her article titled, *Identity Economics: Social Networks and the Informal Economy in Nigeria*. Her work highlighted the deployment, by informal traders, of a range of personal ties to gain access to markets. In her analysis, she argues that beyond economics, informal enterprises in Nigeria were embedded within a broader social sphere recreated through kinship and religious networks. Overall, Meagher (2009; 2010) confirms that social networks play a pivotal and increasingly important role in business practices and outcomes as new forms of networking arise. This point is also echoed by Granovetter (2017), who argues that “the power individuals wield over one another can have a major impact on economic outcomes, even when that power arises from noneconomic sources”.

Meagher (2010) examines the hostile relationship between informal businesses and state institutions. She asserts, “it is well known that an unregistered firm has no legal standing, giving it no claim to legal protection, as well as making it vulnerable to harassment if authorities are called in” (Meagher, 2010; 136). She adds that state interventions have produced little tangible outcomes and “has been a source of increased conflict and confusion rather than institutional assistance” (Meagher, 2010; 141). This complex interplay of informal economic networks and strategies raises questions about survival relations and how these play out within the informal economy, especially in developing countries. In contrast to Meagher’s assertions, a study by Lata *et al.* (2019; 143) presents the state and informal economy as acting in a mutually beneficial manner. In their study of street traders in Bangladesh, they confirmed that

The only alternative for vendors is to enter into a series of individual or localised informal ‘contracts’ with agents of the state working informally. It is these arrangements, based on extortion and the threat of violence that allow street vendors to occupy public space and maintain a tenuous grip on their livelihoods.

Based on the above quote, traders can access public space and engage in economic activities to provide for and earn a living, while state agents receive bribe money in return. Therefore, both the state and informal actors are embedded in social network relationships.

In South Africa and within the informal economy, the literature on social networks as a strategy to cope with the imperfections of its socio-economic system is heavily under-researched. This is despite networks playing an increasingly important role in understanding different forms of organization. A social network perspective is used in this study to help explain how street traders actively utilize unique networks to mitigate the unpredictable and exclusionary nature of informality. The kind of networks informal traders

create are vital as they are an alternative means by which individuals sustain themselves and engage with the economy and society. Another significance of this network analysis goes beyond the Pretoria CBD but is relevant for analyses of street trading in the Global South. As argued in this research, the continued existence of street trading is embedded in the distinct socio-economic network dynamics that allow informal traders in the Pretoria CBD to thrive and survive. Additionally, these dynamics of solidarity bind informal traders in socio-economic relationships that provide non-material support.

Therefore, the literature on street trading is ignorant of the network relationships that create livelihoods and provide agency to traders. This focus has a particular significance for understanding the plight of street traders and how they leverage social networks to survive. Beyond the trader's survival, it addresses a gap in the literature on using social networks to gauge how to look at the informal economy, particularly street trading. Therefore, networks act as a basis for solidarity and emerge as spaces of activism, dynamism, and transformation within street trading. This study also contributes to emerging street trading literature on the organizing capacity of traders within the informal economy in a South African context.

What are the factors that influence their decision to join networks?

Meagher's (2010) seminal work was shaped by organizations along race, class, and gender categories to analyze the use of networks by informal businesses in Nigeria. This study presented social networks as an activity where street traders develop collectively, regardless of differences or backgrounds. Therefore, social networks represent street traders' toolkit and strategy to address state and market-led deficiencies. In this study, the sociality of street trading has taken this further to include times of socio-economic crises, support when family and kinship ties are far, and social safety net services. Therefore, the decision to join a social network is impacted by a multitude of factors at global, national, and local levels.

This takes the form of self-organizing of street traders for socio-economic benefits discussed in another chapter. Globally, the prevalence of the informal economy may be attributed to several factors, including increasing socio-economic inequalities (World Bank, 2020; Meagher, 2020; World Bank, 2019a; World Bank, 2019b; Mabilo, 2018; Piketty, 2014). Poverty is another crucial factor sustaining the informal economy worldwide (Nshimbi, 2020). In an article on informal cross-border traders across Zambia-Malawi-Mozambique, Nshimbi (2020; 75) confirms that "the triangle was introduced in order to address poverty" in these regions. The high costs associated with the formalization

process are another factor perpetuating informality. Similarly, in a publication by the ILO Formalization in Latin America and the Caribbean (FORLAC, 2015; 7), they noted

Informality, poverty and exclusion end up in a mutually reinforcing phenomenon that generates a vicious cycle of intergenerational inequality and deprivation. In Latin America, the poorest 10% of the population experienced an informal employment rate of 72.5% in 2013.

Armed with context-specific and individual-specific vulnerabilities, realities, risks and threats, informal traders have an arsenal of innovative ways to sustain their livelihoods. This study considers social networks as a survival strategy and coping mechanism for multiple practices in street trading.

2.6. Chapter Summary

The first section of the chapter provided a more general review of the informal economy literature within a global context, looking at the concept and theories of informality. The literature highlighted that most informal work is found in developing countries within the Global South. Dominant debates argue that actors in the informal economy engage for different reasons ranging from tax evasion to poverty, for example. Therefore, the informal economy is a heterogeneous phenomenon highly diversified in activities and motivations in joining. Regardless of which paradigm is used, among the common characteristics and manifestations across the different schools of thought are employment under precarious conditions with no social protection. This makes actors in the informal economy particularly vulnerable.

The chapter also discussed the factors perpetuating informality, arguing that they are linked to socio-economic challenges of inequality, poverty, and unemployment at a global and national level. These represented some of the primary reasons individuals engage in the informal economy. Following this, local-level factors such as the legal regulatory environment, limited skills and poor education, and other deprivations resulted in a lack of access to formal livelihood opportunities. Most informal workers operate in the shadows of the law, which translates to no social protection, leading to added vulnerability. As articulated in literature, informality exists in the space of legislative complexities, making informality considered 'informal'. This differentiation between formal and informal nexus excludes many people, of which many are street traders within the informal economy.

In its introduction of informality within a South African context, the literature depicts three stages. The first involves the historically racially exclusive policies of the government that

made it illegal to operate a business in urban cities. In the second stage, we see a liberated government, post-Apartheid, favouring the formal economy, although still skewed along racial lines. The third stage, and most current, involves a government plagued by contemporary systemic challenges with a larger (unemployed) population. The emphasis on the historical and contemporary contexts in South Africa shows the broader political and socio-economic roots that have resulted in stagnant economic growth. Thus, the opportunities and challenges in street trading in South Africa are deeply rooted in historical and contemporary determinants. The chapter also highlighted that ambiguous and inflexible government policies represented key challenges within informality at the local level.

The second section introduced social networking as a theory to understand the informal economy, particularly within street trading. The section provided an overview of the development trajectory and resurgence of the topic in contemporary literature. The chapter draws on social network characteristics as a framework to analyze how actors in the informal economy use the theory and concepts to adapt and cope with societal imperfections. Therefore, this study is important to analyze how and why informal traders continue to cope and find alternative ways to sustain their livelihoods through networks. The theory is crucial in this study for understanding the role and significance of social networks to actors in the informal economy. This is the overarching aim of this study. Actors in the informal economy have been known to deploy innovative strategies, as depicted in some literature. However, there is a knowledge gap on the importance of sociality and the collective pooling of resources as a survival strategy, not just for economic gain but for social support and political influence. This is particularly significant in conceptualizing South African cities where most literature focuses on the linkages between the state and informality, or the formal and informal economies.

In discussing social network characteristics, the chapter draws on concepts of trust, interconnectedness, and reciprocity. A review of the literature highlighted trust as an essential component that builds networks and makes them resilient. As actors operate in highly uncertain and rapidly changing contexts, resilience is critical in informality. Therefore, adapting or responding to change is more manageable when actors trust each other. That means trust as a concept would be important to analyze within the informal economy. Another component of social networks is interconnectedness. It is vital in this study to understand that actors in the informal economy share similar settings where economic activities take place. They may also share similar demographic or geographical backgrounds and goals. Therefore, it is in their best interest to act according to the norms and rules set by a network. Social network characteristics will also be important in this study to assist in laying the ground for analyzing the value of networks in the informal

economy. This is especially important for analyzing of perceptions of reciprocity, which is another characteristic of social networks.

Chapter Three - Navigating Complexity: Methodological Approaches in Understanding Informal Social Networks as a Resilience Strategy

3.1 Introduction

This chapter delineates the methodology within which the research in this study was conducted. The first section introduces the philosophical stance that grounds this study as suitable for addressing the research objectives and questions. This is important for the study as it significantly impacts the research strategy and methodology. The significance of teasing out the salient implications – research strategy and methodology – helps to conceptualize the research process by positioning the researcher's stance on the nature of reality (ontology), what counts as knowledge (epistemology), the role of value in research (axiology) and techniques used in the study (methodology).

This study has adopted a qualitative approach set within the constructivist paradigm to understand what motivates street traders to engage in the phenomenon of social solidarity found in networks. After that, a discussion of the ethnographic research design developed to complement and enhance the validity and reliability of this study follows. In addressing how to collect and interpret the data, the individual research strategies such as location, sampling design, data collection techniques, and data analysis are mapped out. Finally, the chapter expands on the ethical research norms and principles, outlines the study limitations, and provides some concluding remarks.

3.2 The Research Methods and Design

3.2.1 The Philosophical Paradigm that Underpins This Study

When engaged in empirical research, the importance of epistemology is reinforced by Kuhn (2012), who challenged entrenched philosophical assumptions of how researchers view the world. Specifically, he questioned how positivists viewed the world and knowledge by providing a framework for understanding the world. He founded the notion of paradigms as the lens we use to make knowledge claims in each field. Paradigms consist of beliefs and concepts that form a set of theories and assumptions about the world. Hughes (2010: 35) supports the definition and perceives paradigms as “a way of seeing the world that frames a research topic.” Guba and Lincoln (1994) advocate that researchers should outline their philosophical stance before conducting research. This enables the researcher to elucidate what should be studied, how it should be studied, and how to interpret data.

Constructivism in social science is a philosophical view that knowledge is constructed through collective human experience created by social relationships and interactions (Blaikie and Priest, 2017; Lapan *et al.*, 2012). The researcher, therefore, aligns herself with the constructivist paradigm popular for its efficacy in unearthing multiple truths. As stated previously, this paradigm emphasizes people's perceptions while considering that social realities are context-specific and constantly changing (Creswell, 2013; Levers, 2013). A constructivist approach best explores the factors that influence street traders to engage in social networks. This was suitable because street trading is a multifaceted and nuanced environment where both internal and external factors at both local and global levels influence the decisions of street traders.

This epistemological viewpoint allowed the study of networks as a construct and offered reconstructionist suggestions on how informal traders use social networks to mitigate risks and vulnerability. The deployment of the constructivist paradigm in this study assisted the researcher in accounting for the network phenomenon of street traders pooling resources to enjoy economies of scale or to achieve some investment. These central issues shed light on the interconnectedness of street trading and the meanings that accrue in highly contested spaces and spaces of vulnerability where social networks were essential for survival.

3.2.2 Researcher Perspective: A Reflexive Stance/Positionality

The constructivist paradigm recommends that researchers take a reflexive stance. This is essential as it reflects on the relationship between the researcher, the research participants, and context. With this in mind, the researcher acknowledges that she is part of the social world we study. Hesse-Biber (2007; 17) asserts that a process of examining the researcher's values and understanding of how these "social background, location and assumptions affect their research practice". For Attia and Edge (2017; 33), "reflexivity involves a process of on-going mutual shaping between researcher and research". According to the literature, academic rigor necessitates the researcher foregrounding their "values, beliefs, experience and interest" (Jootun *et al.*, 2009; 45). This is a critical and integral aspect of qualitative research as it promotes openness and transparency in the research process.

I am a black South African female who grew up in what is commonly known as previously disadvantaged communities in the rural areas of KwaZulu Natal. My great-grandmother raised me in a small and segregated village called Maqadini during the apartheid era. This was an era when surpassing mid-high school was inconceivable for a black female child, let alone a university education. Most of my weekends were spent ploughing in the fields,

knitting, and sewing all our clothes by hand. On the odd occasion, my great-grandmother and I set up a makeshift stall on the side of the gravel road, under a Jacaranda tree, about 300 metres from our home, selling fruits and vegetables.

My academic background began with Politics and International Studies, which focuses on understanding local and international relationships between and within states and society. As such, I am familiar with the historically embedded practices of Apartheid in South Africa and the legacy thereof among the majority black population. Furthermore, how these practices impacted the country's socio-economic landscape and its governance systems. Eventually, my academic journey grounded me in the Development Studies discipline where I have immersed myself as a student. My exposure to the realities of cultural, geographic, political, and socio-economic perspectives made me a critical thinker and advocate of enriching public discourse to enable sustainability and community development amongst the marginalized. It is within this context that I was shaped as a researcher.

Furthermore, I have previously researched informal traders for three years. During this time, I learned a lot from street traders, including the view that informal traders are not passive victims but have an agency they exercise in their daily lives in different forms. Through their lens, I learned that most traders, like most people, are individuals trying to make ends meet and have good and bad days, challenges, and opportunities, albeit limited across the spectrum. I listened to stories ranging from educating the next generation to supporting multiple members in large family households, all through street vending. I also learned that some of the economic benefits of street vending assisted families as far as the Democratic Republic of Congo, confirming that socio-economic livelihood pursuits created in one place can have far-reaching benefits elsewhere in the world. Thus, as a researcher, I felt an enormous responsibility to represent this group and their lives authentically and respectfully.

In this sense, I consider myself an insider researcher with a broad knowledge of the group being studied, i.e., informal traders. This limited knowledge was obtained both from my extended interactions with participants and through secondary sources such as books, articles, Hansards, national laws, legislation, and regulatory frameworks guiding street trading. Street traders, along with secondary sources provided valuable and in-depth knowledge of the tensions and exclusionary nature of informality in the broader sense; the politics and trends within the informal economy; among other factors. This was crucial for understanding the deeper and embedded complex issues holistically. These complex challenges involve paradoxes and ambiguities within the informal economy, which the researcher can comprehend from an insider perspective.

3.2.3 Justification for the Qualitative Approach

The above section identified the constructivist philosophical stance as the most suitable for this study. Following this, a constructivist paradigm allowed the researcher to deploy a qualitative approach as appropriate for this study. Research, in general, must involve an explicit and systematic clarification of its approach and methodologies. In answering the *how* and *why* of the research questions, this study utilized a qualitative approach. Creswell (2014: 32) affirms that qualitative research is “an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem.” According to this definition, the qualitative approach allows a researcher to interpret human experiences or social phenomena.

To understand participants’ social reality, qualitative research uses interviews and observations, for example, to obtain, analyze and interpret data. The commitment to this empirical inquiry was ideal in this study because it investigated relationships related to human behavior, the reasons behind them, and the “meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016: 6). Several complex issues perpetuate informal trading ranging from; diverging views on social inequality and vulnerable populations; poverty and deprivation; and the links between these and government legislation. Qualitative research demands that researchers collect and construct data with participants to understand the complexity of issues. Therefore, understanding and knowledge of a phenomenon must be derived from data.

Additionally, this approach was chosen because of the complexity, precariousness, and elusiveness of street trading, requiring the researcher to employ multiple data collection techniques and methodological flexibility. Some of the complexities in street trading manifest over highly contested economic spaces but also spaces of vulnerability where social networks are crucial for survival. Networks were used to navigate draconian and ambiguous government policies and had significance on the survival tactics employed by informal traders. Thus, networks provided an essential source of power and influence. They also provided informal traders with coping mechanisms and represented the benefits of sociability. Therefore, the qualitative approach allowed the researcher to observe the relationships and linkages between informal traders and their individual and collective capacity to manage socio-economic risks.

Other scholars in the field of the informal economy support the efficacy of a qualitative approach. Medina and Schneider (2017) expressed an extended discussion on the endogenous growth of the informal economy worldwide. Additionally, since 1997, the

prominent organization *Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing* (WIEGO) has initiated a proliferation of research activities. WIEGO commissions field research on various topics concerning the informal economy (for example, laws and regulations, and social protection).

Other empirically well-grounded analyses on related topics and discourses on informality have been highlighted by Meagher and Lindell (2013), Chen (2014), and Dias (2016). The literature ranges from analyzing the definitions of informality to focusing on the informal economy's different activities, improving exclusionary government policies, improving socio-economic deprivations, and analyzing informal economy public discourses. The literature mentioned above highlights how the informal economy is embedded far beyond the development of wealth but within a broader social domain of creating and sustaining livelihoods.

Still related to the qualitative approach, although it has valuable benefits, it also has some drawbacks. The researcher notes the disadvantage of the qualitative approach in utilizing large sample participants to generalize over a wider population (Babbie, 2020; Babbie and Mouton, 2007). In this study, the qualitative method, ideal for its actor-focused approach, was preferred as it allowed the researcher to investigate the contribution, role, and significance of informal social networks utilized by street traders. Furthermore, the qualitative approach was thus helpful as it allowed the participants to ascribe and articulate meanings to their social settings (Merriam, 2015; Babbie and Mouton, 2010; Denzin and Lincoln, 2008).

This section offers some salient characteristics of the quantitative approach that made this method unsuitable for this study. The quantitative approach is rooted in a positivist epistemology in that data can be analyzed scientifically, hence its central focus on numerical data (Creswell and Poth, 2016; Matthews and Ross, 2014). Subsequently, the central goal of the quantitative approach is to quantify opinions and behaviors through statistics. Unlike qualitative approaches, quantitative research is primarily concerned with collecting and analyzing data and is designed in controlled settings. The above notion is supported by Gerrish and Lacey (2010: 531), who confirm that quantitative research describes “the broad term used to denote research designs and methods that yield numerical data”. These methods usually take the form of fixed questionnaires or surveys to present behaviors and trends across data sets. Thus, the findings are presented in statistical outcomes. Therefore, social science research offers the following approaches to producing knowledge, between qualitative and quantitative approaches, or a combination of both, called mixed-methods research.

3.2.4 Justification for Adopting an Ethnographic Method

As the section above indicates, the qualitative approach helps researchers understand people's experiences and perceptions of the world. The choice of research approach required the researcher to decide on a research method or what Denzin and Lincoln (2011) refer to as "strategies of inquiry." A research method aims to provide a conceptual framework upon which research is conducted, analyzed, and validated against the research problem. There are a variety of methods within qualitative research that can be employed. These methods include ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, and narrative research, among others. They share a similarity in that they focus on rich meanings from the data but are individually distinct in that they highlight different perspectives (Giorgi, 2009; Wolcott, 2008; Corbin and Strauss, 2007). The following section introduces ethnography as this study's chosen research method of inquiry.

Ethnography is a methodological practice with roots in anthropology but has since spread to other disciplines, such as sociology (Buch and Staller, 2014; Lichterman, 2013; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Watson (2008: 100) defined *ethnography* as "a written account of the cultural life of a specific group, organization, or community which may focus on a particular aspect of life in that setting." A year later, this definition was expanded by Humphreys and Watson (2009) to encompass more than a methodology in research but to emphasize the written account of social settings. This definition is signposted by Calhoun (2002: 424), who provides the following useful definition of ethnography as

The study of the culture and social organization of a particular group or community... Ethnography refers to both the data gathering of anthropology and the development of analysis of specific peoples, settings, or ways of life.

Based on the above literature, ethnography involves a systematic method of studying beliefs, social interactions, and behaviors of a specific group or phenomenon, particularly their way of life. However, Geertz (1973: 6) took another route by defining ethnography not by its methods but by its "elaborate venture into thick description". This suggests that ethnographic research encompasses a broader cultural context that looks at in-depth descriptions and meanings given to a phenomenon by that group. These 'thick descriptions' as defined by Geertz (2008), are embedded in what I have termed the social life of street trading.

Using ethnography as a research method, the study contextualizes how street traders mutually cooperate within the Pretoria Central Business District (CBD) to mitigate unfavourable and untenable working conditions, times of tense economic crisis, and other

socio-economic realities compounding their activities. According to Creswell (2014), ethnography allows the researcher to elucidate a particular group's everyday life, thus discovering norms and values to be studied, described, and interpreted. Other scholars agree that ethnographic research is ideal for understanding human behavior due to rapidly changing contexts and factors (Kumar, 2018; Merriam, 2015; Yin, 2011).

As mentioned above, the main focus of this study is on the solidarity networks of informal street traders, and as such, the researcher collected primary data from these informants in their natural environment. According to Neuman (2003) and, Huberman and Miles (2002), fieldwork in ethnography is done in situ or within the natural research setting. In this endeavour, the researcher engaged in fieldwork to document the norms and practices of the social networks of street traders within their context. The chosen research population for this study was street traders, generally and specifically to understand the various factors and benefits that attract informal traders to engage in social networks.

Ethnographic research was thus chosen as the most appropriate method for this study to provide rich, detailed data on informal traders' engagement in social networks. This ethnographical study was guided by the defining characteristics as stated by LeCompte and Schensul (1999), namely, (i) It is related to intimate, face-to-face interaction with participants, (ii) It reflects an accurate view of participants' perspectives and behaviors, (iii) It is conducted in natural settings, not involved with laboratory, (iv) It uses multiple data sources, (v) It frames all human behavior and belief within a socio-political and historical context, (vi) It uses inductive, interactive, and recursive data collection and analytic strategies to build local cultural theories, and (vii) It uses the concept of culture as a lens through which to interpret results.

3.2.5 Description of Research Design

Merriam (1998) highlights the idiosyncratic features of a case study as particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic. As such, it made the case study a helpful strategy for analyzing groups' social relations within a specific context. She defines a case study as "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit" (Merriam, 1998; xiii). The emphasis on analyzing complex relationships within a specific context, specifically the organization by street traders, makes the case study design a useful methodology. Furthermore, Yin (2009) argues that the case study is well suited for addressing research questions of 'how' and 'why'. Based on the above, a single case study was appropriate for investigating the embedded practices of street traders. In addition, the case study option enhanced the in-

depth nature of the research by drawing on multiple data collection methods, namely observation and interviews employed in this study.

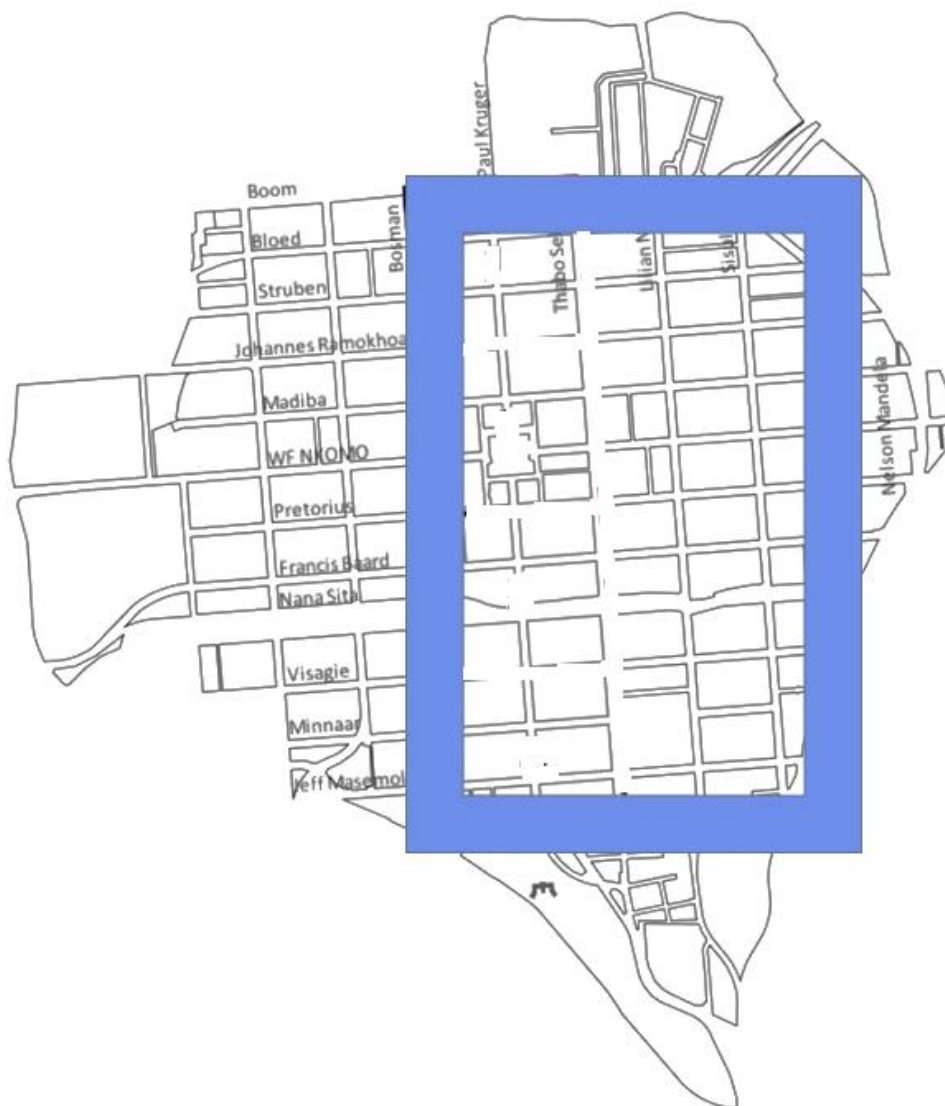
This research used a single case study of informal traders in the Pretoria CBD, looking specifically at the types of social networks that develop and how traders engage with those. The scope of this case study was bound by time and place, specifically, the decision-making process of street traders over eight months within the Pretoria CBD. The study examined a specific social phenomenon to extrapolate emerging themes to elucidate greater clarity and new ways of understanding the social aspects of street trading. The unit of analysis served three purposes: firstly, to understand what shapes the decision-making process of informal traders to join social networks. Second, the formation and benefits that accrue from social networks created by street traders. Finally, to examine the impact of external shocks on social network formation. These units of analysis provided detailed descriptions and practices of street traders. This design was a suitable methodological approach as data was embedded within the lives of street traders and to get their first-hand perspectives. An added advantage to the case study was using multiple sources to gather evidence to develop or expand theories, which is discussed in another section (Creswell, 2009; Nieuwenhuis, 2009; Yin, 2002).

The research setting

The study locale was the Pretoria CBD in the City of Tshwane. Strategically located in the city's centre, Pretoria CBD has a high volume of commuters (entering or leaving the city). It is a crucial hub for transport networks, including public buses, trains, taxis, and private transportation. This locale was considered ideal for this study because Tshwane is the single-largest metropolitan municipality in South Africa. Furthermore, the metropolitan is centered around Pretoria, a capital city. As such, the city attracts a diverse and large amount of street traders, both local and foreign. The site selection was also based on access to the availability of data.

Given that the participant population was small, coupled with the elusive nature of street trading, the researcher opted to strategically use the Pretoria CBD, having had prior access to these participants. Thus, the choice of locale was more suitable due to accessibility and geographical convenience to the researcher, as recruiting new participants would have been constrained by limited time and resources. The researcher interviewed sixteen participants over eight months at the specific site mapped out below in the fieldwork.

Map 1: Detailed map of the streets within Pretoria CBD



*Extracted from Google Maps

Map 1 shows some of the streets within the Pretoria CBD, with the study locale highlighted in green. The box areas marked 1 to 4 highlight the busiest sections, starting downtown on Boom Street till Jeff Masemola Street. The area is constantly full of traffic created by taxis, no matter what time of the day. The actors, specifically street traders, displayed an assemblage of economic enterprises, including food sellers up and down Lilian Ngoyi Street, fruit and vegetable vendors along Helen Joseph Street, and clothing sellers along Stanza Bopape Street. Other actors include retailers along Church Street, mobile traders aggressively sourcing customers for hair services, or selling water and cool drinks all over the Pretoria CBD. A variety of goods and services were also on display, including *umhlabathi* (edible clay or soil); amagwinya (fat cakes); fruit and vegetables; grilled meat

with pap (a kind of porridge made from maize meal); pirated CDs and DVDs; on-site plaiting of hair; fixing appliances and broken shoes, and others.

The Pretoria CBD urban streets include men and women selling all types of goods, such as African cloth material, beaded accessories, jewellery, traditional clothing, bags, and shoes. These traders kept up with current trends by selling similar, just of a lower quality, goods as retail stores. Beyond the variety of products to feast eyes on, the air in these streets was filled with sweet aromas of perfume, the smell of cooked food that tickled and confused the nostrils. In addition to the different smells, there were also many voices from pedestrians rushing to and from their jobs, street traders trying to attract the attention of unsuspecting customers, and the more robust traders negotiating with potential customers.

This included men and women who strategically positioned themselves at traffic lights with a printed document filled with pictures of possible hairstyles. Women, who are more prone to looking for hair salons, are usually the target of these traders. The traders thrust the sheet of paper in their direction and offer them discounts as they perpetually move with the crowds to make a sale. The atmosphere is also filled with clashing sounds of constantly moving taxis and other vehicles. The taxi drivers give the sound of sharp hoots, competing against each other to hail potential customers traveling to and from the city center. Therefore, the Pretoria CBD can be conceptualized as a bustling locale with multiple street trade discourses constantly at play within the research setting.

Data Collection Tools and Techniques

This study employed a variety of tools and techniques to collect data from multiple sources to ensure the integrity and validity of the data. The data collection tools and techniques listed below complemented each other and were the most appropriate methods for this study. Participant observation enabled the researcher to get first-hand exposure to the lived experiences of street traders in their natural settings. This was a critical tenet of ethnography as the case under study could not be observed without the context or research setting. Conversely, non-participant observation allowed the researcher to observe the research setting without actively participating.

Additionally, the researcher conducted open-ended interviews to gain deeper and information-rich insights into social networks within street trading. Various tools and techniques are a hallmark of case study research and supplement data credibility (Mertens, 2018). Congruent to the above, the following section specifies the participant population, sampling process, and data collection process employed in this study.

- Disaggregated data describing the target population

The demographic data below shows a large percentage of females at 63 percent. Another interesting highlight was the many unregistered traders at 69 percent. The age groups 31 to 50 accounted for the most significant number of traders. This highlighted the trends in the Pretoria CBD, specifically, most of the traders were unregistered and disproportionately female. The chosen research setting included many local and foreign street traders in the Pretoria CBD.

Table 1: Disaggregated data of the target population

Disaggregated data of the target population						
Age group	% of female	% of male	% of local	% of foreign	% of registered	% of unregistered
21 - 30	13	0	13	0	0	19
31 - 40		12	19	25	12	19
41 - 50	19	19	12	25	12	19
51 - 60	6	6	6	0	6	12
Total	63	37	50	50	31	69

- Sampling

Selecting an appropriate sample size is a critical aspect of any research endeavour, and in qualitative research, this decision is nuanced and deliberate. Unlike quantitative research, where sample size is often determined based on statistical considerations, qualitative research focuses on depth and richness of information. Therefore, to address the research objectives and questions in this study, participants were selected on the premise of seeking to understand and capture the depth and essence of their lived experiences. Acknowledging the emergent nature of qualitative research and the precarity of street trading, the study embraced the possibility of adapting the sample size during the research process. As themes and insights emerged, the study remained cognizant that additional participants might be necessary to capture the breadth of experiences and reach theoretical saturation.

The criterion used to delineate the sample in qualitative research is defined by Gentles *et al.* (2015: 1775) as “the selection of specific data sources from which data are collected to address the research objectives.” As mentioned earlier, in qualitative research, samples are generally small. This was necessary for in-depth analysis and should be approached

with an understanding of describing the phenomenon of the study within its context. Yin (2003) suggests that participants in a study should have information-rich knowledge of the topic and be relevant to the research questions. Therefore, the sampling highlighted complex issues that are embedded within street traders. Specifically, their experiences, perceptions, and motivations to join networks as they are knowledgeable about the phenomenon under investigation.

Practical considerations played a role in the sample size determination. With limitations in time and resources, the study carefully balanced the depth of exploration with the feasibility of conducting in-depth interviews and data analysis. While a larger sample might provide more diversity, the emphasis was on the quality of information obtained from a manageable and feasible cohort. Therefore, the research fieldwork for this study took place in the Pretoria CBD between January 2021 and September 2021 with sixteen participants. Participants were sourced through snowballing, which was informed by previous research in the same setting. The researcher was introduced to this group of participants through trust built over time during previous research in the city. During the planning stages, consultations were made with street traders for guidance and introductions, ensuring a diverse mix of traders with different backgrounds and economic activities. The population sample included registered and unregistered adult informal traders. The significance of including these two sub-groups was that they generally compete against each other for lucrative and strategic trading locations.

Commensurate with the case study design, and recognizing the diversity within the street trading population, the sixteen participants were identified using purposive sampling. The term 'purposive sampling' describes a set of strategic and intentional choices about participants based on their understanding of a specific phenomenon (Flick, 2017). The selection of where, with whom and how a researcher conducts research is directly linked to the research objectives. This method allowed for the intentional selection of participants based on the specific criteria relevant to the research questions, such as varying vulnerabilities, socio-economic backgrounds, and street trading experiences. The richness of information derived from purposefully chosen participants added depth to the qualitative analysis. Therefore, for this study, the researcher selected participants who met specific inclusion criteria, including a mix of five registered and eleven unregistered informal traders. A set of inclusion criteria was also chosen based on a few characteristics discussed below.

The researcher sought to be exhaustive by including a wide demographic range of informal traders ranging from young adults in their twenties to older adults in their fifties. The study excluded any informal traders under eighteen as ethical issues such as parental

consent would have been a limitation. As highlighted in the global literature (Skinner and Watson, 2020; Rogan and Alfors, 2019; ILO, 2018; Sassen *et al.*, 2018), countries in the Global South account for a disproportionate number of predominantly female street traders within the informal economy. In line with what other scholars have found, women in this study represented an average of 63% (10 out of 16) of the total participants.

All the participants had a shared background of socio-economic disparities and accounted for both local and foreign informal traders. The researcher spoke English with most foreign traders, although some were well conversant with one or two local languages (particularly Zulu and Tswana). Regarding the local informal traders, the researcher spoke a mix of either English, Tswana, Xhosa, Zulu, or Sepedi. This was possible as the researcher speaks Zulu as her mother tongue. Furthermore, the researcher has lived in Pretoria for over 25 years and am comfortable and familiar with the other languages mentioned.

Additionally, these traders were chosen because they had worked in the Pretoria CBD for at least two years, specifically before 2019, to obtain rich information. The exclusion of newer informal traders was purposive as those traders may not have established sufficient trust with other traders necessary to partake in social networks. Therefore, the study's exclusion criteria included informal traders in the Pretoria CBD, not tied to any socio-economic or political network. These informal traders existed beyond the realms of this study and precisely the phenomenon of interest. In summary, the sample size employed in this study was meticulously selected to align with the study's objectives, theoretical framework, and ethical considerations. By employing a purposive sampling strategy, prioritizing theoretical saturation, and considering practical constraints, the study aimed to ensure a rigorous and meaningful exploration of the resilience narratives of street traders.

3.2.6 Data collection tools

Observation

According to Yin (2009), participant observation is within the purview of data collection methods found in case studies. Furthermore, as observation is at the core of ethnographic fieldwork, it was crucial in this study primarily for two reasons. First, participant observation allowed the researcher to observe the setting of informal traders. Second, it allowed the researcher to collaborate with the participants. This provided valuable insights into informal traders' interaction in their natural settings and written accounts of what was observed. Creswell (2013) articulated four different types of observational methods ranging, on one end, from 'detached observation' to fully 'immersed observation' on the other end. The first type is the 'detached observer' or complete observer, as the researcher

is invisible to the participants and only observes. The second type is 'non-participant observation', where the researcher is visible and known to the participants and takes notes. The third type is 'participant observer', where the researcher fully engages with the participants. Finally, the fourth type is 'complete participant observation', where the researcher fully engages with the participants and participates in their activities.

In line with the research questions, this study chose 'complete participant observation' and 'non-participant observation'. These ideal methods gave the researcher first-hand experience of actions and behaviors that informal traders engage in to address challenges or source opportunities in their daily lives. Although this method presented a paradox of total participation with informal traders while simultaneously observing them from afar, the participants were fully aware that the researcher was researching within a specific time frame, both participatory and non-participatory. To mitigate against this paradox in the fieldwork, the researcher spent the first month as an exploratory observation with limited interaction with informal traders. This purpose was to observe the specific locations within the Pretoria CBD, paying attention to which streets had the most activity. Simultaneously, the researcher had informal discussions with traders about their operations and how they create and sustain their livelihoods.

Complete participant observation

Participant observation, a cornerstone of qualitative research, provides a unique lens into the intricate dynamics of social settings (Hurst, 2023; Lareau, 2021). This method allowed the researcher to observe and record the participants' daily lives, interactions, and embedded culture in their research setting, which was helpful for what was not captured in interviews. To achieve a deep and authentic understanding, an immersive approach of complete participant observation was embraced during the fieldwork. Participant observations took place in the streets of the Pretoria CBD based on its significance in hosting a vibrant street trading community. The Pretoria CBD's diversity, size, and centrality with the urban informal fabric provided a rich backdrop for capturing the multifaceted nature of street trading. The goal was to blend into the daily rhythm of street trading. Significant to this study was the experience of the social life of street trading. In this regard, complete participation allowed the researcher to understand the different associations' informal traders' develop and their significance in their social and economic lives.

Complete participant observation involved spending extended periods with street traders, participating in their daily activities. This encompassed setting up a makeshift stand alongside traders, assisting in minor tasks, and actively engaging in conversations and

presenting customers with products they had bought. The goal was to become an accepted presence within the streets, minimizing the impact of the observer's presence on the natural flow of interactions. While the researcher did not intend to be in the streets daily, she sought to spend as much time as possible with the informal traders to understand the circumstances that tie them together.

Within eight months, formal and informal discussions were maintained with the participants. This included invitations to their meetings, both organizational and support related. The planning meetings were formal in structure, whereas the support meetings were more unstructured and coordinated around physical support. Written field notes detailing what transpired during a particular day were taken whenever possible and transcribed electronically at the end of each day. Written records of informal discussions were also captured electronically to depict the activities, surroundings, the behaviour of traders, and any other relevant interactions surrounding them.

Non-participant observation

The researcher observed how informal social networks were organized by attending some trader's group planning meetings and gatherings. This required the researcher to get additional permission or invitation from the participants to observe their networks. Field notes were also taken, where appropriate, and access to them was made available to the participants at their request. In some instances, it was impossible to write field notes, as some traders found this activity suspicious and asked to see what the researcher had written down. To mitigate this discomfort, the researcher compiled reflection notes for that day once she was back in her home and made them available to the participants the next day to confirm and verify what was written. This was done electronically on a computer, using the Microsoft Word tool, and printed for the participants to make any changes they deemed necessary.

From a discreet vantage point, usually standing up or sitting against a wall but near some traders, the researcher systematically documented the trader's activities, customer interactions, and the overall dynamics within the Pretoria CBD. Maintaining observer neutrality was a key aspect that allowed the capture of the natural ebb and flow of street trading without influencing the participants (Denny and Weckesser, 2022). Therefore, the researcher refrained from engaging in conversations, offering assistance, or actively participating in any aspect of street trading. By adopting a passive stance, the researcher aimed to minimize the potential to alter the behaviours and interactions of the street traders. Therefore, it was necessary to conduct this fieldwork before any of the interviews or complete observation could take place. The utilization of unobtrusive technology and documentation played a vital role in non-participant observation. Beyond the field notes,

photographs were taken, where possible, and video recordings to capture the visual and auditory aspects of the street trading environment. This multimodal approach allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the subtleties and intricacies of the street trading dynamics, from the voice of traders and hooting taxis to pictures of their stalls and interactions with customers and government authorities.

Open-ended interviews

Keeping in line with a constructivist paradigm, the interviews were conducted to explore how individuals understood and experienced the social life of street trading. Open-ended interviews were chosen for their primary strength in allowing greater flexibility during the interview process and as an essential source of data collection in qualitative research (Yin, 2009; Denscombe, 2003). The flexibility allowed the researcher to explore emerging themes in greater detail by asking follow-up questions. Furthermore, using open-ended interviews was critical in this study to understand the motivations of the informal traders within the Pretoria CBD. Thus, the researcher was better positioned to unearth the embedded meanings informal traders assigned to their networks.

The interviews centred around four broad thematic areas: network formation, dynamics of networks, benefits of networks, and lastly, COVID-19's impact on networks. Thus, the developing of an interview schedule arose from the themes mentioned above and was used as a guide rather than a prescriptive tool. The data was collected across three stages of interviews. The first stage of interviews was exploratory to understand the social network formation of networks within the Pretoria CBD. The second and third stages of interviews were more focused, primarily for two reasons. First, it focused on emerging topics or themes that were unclear during observations. Second, and after the initial interviews, questions needed to be refined to address networks' benefits and emerging themes. Finally, the third stage of interviews addressed the COVID-19 impact and gaps that emerged during the data analysis process.

The researcher developed a protocol of simple standard questions that enabled a framework for analyzing the dynamics of social networks within street trading in the Pretoria CBD. This framework aimed to obtain information-rich perceptions and experiences on social network's role in street trading. An interview schedule guided open-ended questions for consistency. Interviews were audio-recorded using a tape recorder or mobile phone and then manually transcribed. It took, on average, forty-five minutes to an hour to complete one interview. These interviews were conducted with five traders per week, amounting to about four hours of interviews. The process was repeated after three

weeks, for eight months. That means each trader was seen roughly fourteen times through a monitoring process of interviews and observation.

The researcher notes that the use of key informants has limitations as the data obtained from participants is generally understood to have limited generalizability (Parsons, 2008). Nonetheless, the generalizability obtained from this study provides important insights into how a subgroup of street traders explain and articulate their decision-making process. The researcher reflects that knowledge is valuable in and of itself, given the likely consequences and influence of decisions made by these actors for themselves and others operating within their space.

3.3 Data Analysis

This section outlines the procedures taken to organize, interpret and make meaning of data (Creswell, 2013; Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2010). Merriam (1998: 178) defines data analysis as “making sense out of the data... [which] involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read – it is the process of making meaning”. In line with this stance, the researcher simultaneously collected and analyzed the data to establish emerging patterns and sub-themes. According to Braun and Clarke (2006; 78),

Thematic analysis should be seen as a foundational method for qualitative analysis. It is the first qualitative method of analysis that researchers should learn, as it provides core skills that will be useful for conducting many other forms of qualitative analysis. Through its theoretical freedom, thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data.

The above quote highlights the advantageous use of thematic analysis in answering research questions seeking to understand experiences, perceptions, and practices. This is particularly important for this study as participants generally understand their research setting, experiences, and decision-making processes better (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

Before delving into the stages of thematic analysis, it's essential to recap the data collection methods employed in this study. A wide range of qualitative data, including narratives and quotes from field notes, in-depth interviews, and complete and non-participant observation was collected in order to fully represent the complex nature of street trading. Upon completion of the data collection, the first stage of the analysis process involved familiarization with the raw data. Interview transcripts, field notes, and

any other pertinent data sources were examined several times in order to develop a comprehensive grasp of the type of data collected. This stage set the foundation for subsequent analysis in the gathered data.

Building on the familiarity gained, initial codes were generated to capture the essence of the data. This process entailed identifying and labelling important words, sentences, or paragraphs that encapsulated key concepts or recurrent patterns and themes. Through an iterative process, codes were applied to different data segments to discern similarities and differences in traders narratives. Data was initially categorized using a thematic analysis that addressed the four main research questions in an iterative process, as outlined in Chapter One. This process allowed the researcher to make sense of the data collected, synthesize it into more manageable forms, and discover patterns and themes (Creswell, 2013; LeCompte and Schensul, 1999). Summarizing the data into themes was deemed useful for analyzing attitudes, beliefs, and opinions of informal traders, and these themes also focused on the network structures within street trading. The above overview allowed the researcher to differentiate the codes, consolidate similar codes, check their frequency of mention and cull redundancies. In this regard, careful thought was taken to avoid duplicating themes highlighted by respondents. Four main themes (network formation, dynamics of networks, benefits of networks, and COVID-19 impact on networks) assisted as a priori code for thematic analysis. These themes also served as a guideline developed during the interview schedule.

After gathering preliminary codes, the third stage focused on searching through the data for overarching and recurring themes. This required putting similar codes into broader categories that represented shared participant experiences or narratives. Emerging sub-themes began to emerge organically, illuminating the complex aspects of street trading, such as challenges faced, coping strategies employed, and the social dynamics at play within the Pretoria CBD. Once potential themes and sub-themes were identified, the fourth stage involved reviewing and refining them. This iterative process included revisiting the raw data to ensure that the identified themes accurately reflected the breadth and complexity of street traders' experiences. Therefore, the themes and sub-themes were developed to capture the nuances within each theme. The ultimate goal of the thematic analysis was to craft a cohesive narrative that wove together the identified themes. Therefore, the fifth stage involved synthesizing the findings into a nuanced story that captured the richness and diversity of experiences. To provide a thorough and accurate representation, each theme was supported by comprehensive evidence drawn from the data, incorporating quotes, observations, and participant voices.

3.4 Ethical Considerations and Methodological Limitations

In predominantly qualitative research, there is a range of ethical principles such as informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, avoiding harm to participants, and so forth (Maxwell, 2022; Kumar, 2018; Merriam and Tisdell, 2015; Creswell, 2013). These ethical principles have a particular resonance based on the in-depth nature of the research, especially in qualitative research. In this study, these concerns became more salient due to the precarious nature of informality and the use of observation and face-to-face interviews of street traders. To mitigate the potential harm and challenges, the below relates some important ethical dilemmas considered in this research.

In preparation for obtaining ethical clearance from the University of Pretoria's Humanities Research Ethics Committee, the researcher obtained a letter of permission from the relevant governmental authorities, the City of Tshwane. Specifically, the Department of Economic Development and Spatial Planning granted the approval letter for research on informal networks in various spaces across the Pretoria CBD. This involved submitting a proposal and a certified copy of the researcher's Identity Document to the governmental research ethics committee. Upon approval from the City of Tshwane, online registration was made to the University of Pretoria's research ethics committee. This included the research proposal and other supporting documents, as stated in the Annexures. On the 27th of August 2020, the faculty ethics committee approved the proposal and for the commencement of fieldwork guided by the research protocols of the university.

3.4.1 Informed consent

Following the codes of behavior and guidelines articulated in the proposal and per the faculty norms when conducting research required the researcher to prepare a consent form for all participants. Informed consent detailed the purpose of the study, confirmed participation as voluntary, and the right of participants to withdraw from the study at any time (Creswell, 2013). The process occurred at the beginning stages of the fieldwork when the researcher made initial contact with participants. The initial contact involved an explanation by the researcher to participants on the nature of the research. Once the participants agreed to participate in the research, a schedule of interviews and observation was agreed upon at a more suitable time for them. Each participant was given a letter of introduction and consent form, which provided explicit details of the nature of the research. Each point was discussed with participants, and they could ask any questions or seek clarity on what appeared on the letter of introduction and consent form. After this, participants were asked to sign the form to confirm their willingness to participate in the study.

In line with the precarious nature of informality, some participants had specific conditions for agreeing to be researched. A few were uncomfortable using a tape recorder or mobile phone on the table or where other informal traders could see. Subsequently, these traders asked the researcher to put the mobile or recorder in her pocket or bag. In other instances, informal traders asked the researcher to refrain from taking photographs that included their faces but opted to have their backs turned to the camera. This was after confirming that all their faces would be blurred out. Informal traders operate under a cloud of suspicion, as discussed in the review of literature in Chapter Two. This was evident in some instances where informal traders refused to sign any forms but opted to give verbal consent, which appears in the recordings, to participate in the study.

3.4.2 Confidentiality

Confidentiality was another essential principle of ethical practice in qualitative research that the researcher considered. Confidentiality refers to the protection of data collected, whereas anonymity refers to a form of confidentiality where the participants' identities are protected during data collection, analysis, and reporting (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015; Creswell, 2013). In this endeavour, confidentiality in this study was achieved by using pseudonyms when presenting research findings. Furthermore, the researcher did not put any names on the interview schedule, which may link any information to any participant. Bearing in mind the agency and autonomy of the participants in this study, each one was asked to confirm if the above was suitable and, if not, the extent to which they wished to remain anonymous. In the end, all the participants were comfortable using pseudonyms.

3.4.3 Protection from harm

Avoiding harm to participants – be it psychological, emotional, or financial – was of paramount importance. Building a good rapport based on trust was critical to the relationship between the researcher and the participants as it minimized the possible harm to participants. As Merriam and Tisdell (2015) posit, building trust with participants across the research continuum is crucial for collecting sound data. A foundation based on trust is likely to produce detailed information (Mercer, 2007), consequently enabling the development of thick descriptions (Geertz, 2008), sequentially strengthening the validity of the research accounts (Creswell, 2014).

3.4.4 Study Methodological Limitations

As the study is qualitative, the case study research design was the most suitable strategy for analyzing street traders' relations and interactions in the Pretoria CBD. The efficacy of the case study allowed for multiple data collection methods, including interviews and participant and non-participant observation. Due to the precarious nature of street trading, especially with undocumented foreign traders, the use of a tape recorder had to be carefully done. To ease the participants during interviews, the researcher sat with them for a period of time having informal conversations. After some time had passed, the researcher took out the recorder to press start and put it back in her pockets where it was not visible to other traders.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, there were delays and challenges in the fieldwork as many traders lacked access to urban public spaces for many months. The closure of public spaces and other COVID-19 regulations, such as social distancing measures, were challenges impacting street traders. Simultaneously, the COVID-19 regulations (lockdowns and travel restrictions) limited the researcher in accessing the study area. Once some participants could return, and government regulations allowed for more mobility, some participants were reluctant to participate in the study due to fears of contracting COVID-19. To reduce these fears, the researcher ensured that she had a mask at all times, that the participants saw her sanitize her hands before sitting down, while maintaining a reasonable social distance. The researcher took the opportunity to further confirm with the participants that she would only conduct interviews under the knowledge that she had no COVID-19-related symptoms.

Most street traders depended on urban public spaces to sell their goods or services to generate income. In turn, the restrictions delayed the study's fieldwork aspect and subsequently extended its timelines. To adapt to the situation, it was necessary to initially reschedule the fieldwork to a later date, eventually starting beginning of February till November 2021. Due to a significant number of participants having delayed return to the streets, the fieldwork had to also accommodate their new timelines, which were not cast in stone.

In addition to the lack of access to public spaces, social distancing measures excluded many street traders from trading. This depended on the type of goods or services sold by the traders and if they were registered or unregistered, as they had to obtain an additional trading license based on having a prior permit in their possession. As a result, some interviews were shifted to virtual platforms and conducted via a mobile device through WhatsApp to mitigate the above issue. A few participants could access the free Wi-Fi services offered by the City of Tshwane municipality. The researcher had set appointments when these participants would make their way to the hotspot area so the

interviews could be conducted online. Despite these challenges, the use of online interviews made it easier to circumvent the issue of secrecy as traders were in the confines of their home environment. This is an exciting contribution to how future studies of this nature can be undertaken in terms of methodology.

The research study derived findings from a case study set in the Pretoria CBD and thus cannot be generalized across other street trading settings in South Africa or across the world. Instead, the analysis provides a localized understanding of the complex interplay between vulnerabilities and innovative coping strategies. Despite this limitation, the salient points of this study offer new insights into street trading politics that can be deployed as useful information in local government planning and community knowledge. Another limitation of this study is that it does not offer a gendered analysis of street trading dynamics in the Pretoria CBD, as this was beyond the scope of the study. For future research, providing a gender-based analysis may add value and enrich further studies, as most of the networks found in the Pretoria CBD were comprised mainly of women.

In some instances, time constraints due to the nature of street trading were an added limitation to the study. For example, when a participant had a customer to braid, and it would have been inconvenient to carry on the interview. Rescheduling interviews was thus necessary, or starting and stopping interviews as participants were always focused on the prospects of potentially making a sale. To minimize the risk, the researcher either waited until the possible transaction was done or scheduled additional interview dates during less busy hours. The precarious nature of street trading meant traders could suddenly become busy, and to align with the ethical procedures of 'protection from harm', I rescheduled the interviews for the most convenient times for these participants. For some, this meant interviews around seven in the early morning hours when potential customers were rushing to work. The period during lunchtime, between 12h00 and 14h00, was when the traders were at their busiest. This was followed by the rush hour commute back home from 16h00 to 18h00. Thus, early mornings proved to be an ideal time for conducting interviews or while potential customers were at work. Therefore, although the fieldwork process was extended due to time constraints and COVID-19 restrictions, the researcher believes that the data retrieved provided an adequate presentation of street traders perceptions and views.

3.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed various aspects of the philosophical underpinnings and methodological elements related to achieving the objectives articulated in this study. Subsequently, this study chose the constructivist paradigm as the most suitable choice to

adopt. The following section provided a rationale for a qualitative approach as the most suitable. As this study is qualitative, the ethnographic research method was chosen as the most beneficial methodology to understand the complexity of street traders' social networks. Hinged on ethnography as a foundation, the case study research design was useful for analyzing groups' social relations within a specific context. The potency of using the case study in this research is twofold. Firstly, it is appropriate in this study as it enables the researcher to draw on in-depth explorations of social networks within street trading. Secondly, it allows the researcher to utilize multiple data collection methods, such as observations and interviews, which are defining features of ethnographic research.

The study was thus designed to encompass a single case study of social networks in the City of Tshwane's Pretoria CBD using participant observation, non-participant observation, and open-ended interviews. The above established a clear understanding of the research design and how the data was collected. Thereafter, the data analysis process description was discussed vis-a-vis a coding method developed for thematic analysis. The process of data analysis and interpretation involved transcribing oral, written, and recorded interviews from audio into text and saving them electronically. The chapter concluded with a reflection on ethical guidelines and limitations throughout all stages of this study to ensure the protection of human subjects. This chapter argued that positionality was an essential consideration in social sciences research, especially in qualitative research. Thus, the researcher must outline their research assumptions and methods.

Chapter Four - Informal Actors, Contested Spaces, and the Indeterminate Search for Livelihoods

4.1. Introduction

Despite past and ongoing efforts to formalize and regulate the informal economy, including street trading, informality remains a persistent fixture in developed and developing nations. Following more than five decades since its inception by Keith Hart (1972), the informal economy has grown exponentially in size, scope, and significance. Although hard to measure, the global estimates from an ILO (2018) report place the size of informal employment at over sixty percent of the world's population. With the most significant portion per region, eighty-nine percent of informal activities are reported to take place in Sub-Saharan Africa. Therefore, street trading is a widespread economic activity that takes place in many cities and towns around the world. Despite its prevalence, the informal economy is often subject to government regulation. The central broader discourse surrounding informal economies and their place in society is that they are a problem because they operate outside the purview of the law. However, many argue that the informal economy is a significant source of livelihood for poor communities, those who lack or are in between employment and thus excluded from the formal economy (Bonnet *et al.*, 2019; Skinner and Rogan, 2019; Omoegun *et al.*, 2019). In addition, informal economies offer cheap goods and services local communities need.

In a study by WIEGO (2019) in South Africa, the informal economy contributed to thirty percent of employment, of which street trading is one subset of its activities. Street trading's contribution to income generation and gainful employment makes it one of the most important livelihood activities, especially for poor people. Nevertheless, most of its workforce still operates informally under precarious conditions, without trading licenses, social security, lack of access to financial institutions, and other challenges. Street traders are primarily self-employed, often forced to partake in their income-generating activities with limited resources and restricted potential for economic growth. However, informal work is employment not covered or inadequately covered by formal arrangements, leading to traders adopting innovative coping mechanisms to support their activities.

As discussed in this chapter, diverse and dynamic factors drive street trading in South Africa, from poverty, unemployment, and acute fiscal challenges locally and globally. These societal imperfections rapidly increase the vulnerability of poor urban communities, undermining the capacity for livelihood creation and continuity. For this reason, many street traders (as explored in this analysis) engaged in social networks as coping and survival strategies as they were crucial to fostering a sense of continuity, community, and

support. The chapter revealed that social networks played an important role in the persistence and survival of informality in local communities. Therefore, the chapter analyzes the link between the broader discourse issues surrounding street trading and how traders use social networks to survive and thrive in local communities. Specifically, it aims to understand the profile of street traders in the Pretoria CBD, why they use social networks, what these networks look like, and how they enable traders to create a home away from home environment in urban public spaces.

Of central importance is that street trading in the Pretoria CBD provided a lens through which to view the role of social networks in shaping traders' survival and coping mechanisms. Therefore, it is crucial to identify and deepen our understanding of the social relations and interactions between traders producing and shaping innovative coping mechanisms found in social networks. The chapter begins by providing an overview of the actors involved in street trading in the Pretoria CBD. Although the research setting was fixed to one geographical location, the actors were inherently different in demographics, motivating factors for partaking in networks, and possessed their own set of preferences on which networks to join. As a result, the chapter takes off from the premise that it is crucial to delineate and profile who the actors are, where they negotiate their livelihoods and some of the reasons for doing so. What follows is an in-depth analysis of the factors that contribute to street traders joining networks as the main objective of this chapter. The following section discusses how traders perceive their setting and social relationships within the setting as a home away from home. This is followed by a discussion on traders' structure, governance, and types of networks. A summary is offered to conclude the chapter. This chapter, therefore, argues that most traders engage in networks for survival purposes, needing immediate means to subsist and survive. Therefore, networking was an essential resource and tool for maintaining income and livelihood generation for the poor.

4.2. Reimagined Urban Landscapes: Weaving the Everyday Struggles of Street Trading

Negotiating urban spaces in the Pretoria CBD

Under apartheid, Pretoria was a capital city and the central authority of urban planning and designated only for the white minority segment of its population (du Plessis and Boonzaaier, 2015). As discussed later in the section, the majority black population was relegated to the periphery in the townships. Post-democracy, the urban population fled to the distant eastern suburbs and gated communities, leaving the inner city largely the cohabitation of government offices, property owners, and formal and informal businesses.

The informal businesses, mainly street trading, are the focus and scope of the study. A walk through the diameter of the central business district of Pretoria takes less than thirty minutes. However, navigating the city space requires awareness of the different and, on the surface, paradoxical trajectory through which Pretoria has changed. Horizontally, dynamics of contestation between registered and unregistered traders assigned to different trading spots across the inner city. Vertically, the paradox of local, provincial, and national authorities operating alongside street traders they regulate through bylaws. In addition to how Pretoria has changed historically, depending on which street, the environment changes from dilapidated, under repair, and redeveloped and well-maintained buildings and infrastructure.

For example, a walk from Boom Street to Nana Sita Street takes about twenty minutes, stretching over a kilometre and a half. At the bottom end, commonly called downtown, is a strip of bustling streets overcrowded with taxis and people getting on and off to various locations. Most of the streets in the CBD, especially those found downtown, are constantly filled with taxis waiting at all times of the day for commuters. Other people are on foot to or from the train station that transports commuters from the townships into the city centre. The concentrated availability of people has resulted in concerted efforts by businesses and a proliferation of multiple malls, including Bloed Street Shopping Centre found downtown. They were characterized by derelict and neglected buildings, and general urban decay coupled with different forms of crime (from selling drugs, racketeering of street traders and formal businesses to pick-pockets). The government is on the mend in repairing some of these buildings. For example, the national Department of Health building is moving from Civitas, situated downtown, as it was deemed unsafe after a court ruling. Most street traders concentrated in the downtown areas did car and electronic repairs, and makeshift salons on the pavements.

A walk just two blocks up, the buildings and infrastructure changes significantly having undergone recent fixes. Further up, the Tshwane House (the City of Tshwane Headquarters and Council Chamber) houses over a thousand city employees, and where many street traders articulated they go to be served and to present their grievances. The busiest section parallels Madiba Street and Francis Baard Street, where increased pedestrian traffic increases the possibility of multiple traders vying for customers' attention. These range from fruit and vegetable sellers to mobile traders biding their time till the next sale. Another mall, Sammy Marks Square, is also found here, where formal and informal businesses compete for customers. Most registered traders are also found in this section, neatly sprawled across Helen Joseph Street, and unregistered traders occupy the intersecting Lillian Ngoyi Street. Crossing Pretorius Street, going further up, is another mall called The Tramshed. Between these streets converges multiple government offices (all spheres of government), police, formal and informal owned businesses, and property,

developed and frayed buildings as commercial and residential property, among other defining characteristics.

Therefore, the Pretoria CBD can be conceptualized as a bustling locale where multiple street trade discourses are constantly at play. Strategically located in the city's centre, Pretoria CBD has a high volume of commuters (entering or leaving the city). It is a crucial hub for transport networks, including public buses, trains, taxis, and private transportation. A cluster of registered and unregistered informal traders negotiate livelihoods on the streets. These actors displayed an assemblage of economic enterprises including, but not limited to, food sellers along Lilian Ngoyi Street, retailers along Church Street, and mobile traders aggressively sourcing customers for hair services or selling water and cool drinks all over the Pretoria CBD. Picture 1 below represents some street trader activities in the Pretoria CBD.

Picture 1: Various economic activities found in the Pretoria CBD



An informal waste picker



Informal second-hand clothing business



Informal trader selling traditional items such as *mopani* worms



Informal trader selling fruit and vegetables

Source: Author's own

Some informal income-generating activities in the Pretoria CBD include conductors (male-only runners) who position themselves at intersections or lean out of taxi windows, calling for customers traveling to and from the city. Others offer services, including male and female intermediaries who walk around the main streets haggling with potential customers with an A4 sheet of paper displaying on both ends for possible hairstyles. If they manage to convince a customer to have their hair done, they escort the customer to a nearby salon, primarily found in the surrounding arteries inside one of the floors at a nearby building. Most foreign street traders congregate in these hidden buildings and floors. As one walks through, the halls are crowded and pulse with foreign music and singing. The stalls inside are lined with hundreds of makeshift notices for hair, sewing, repairs and offering rooms to rent. As 'go-betweens' direct customers to the stores, some traders mill around, looking for local authorities who may arrive at any moment to conduct inspections. These instances highlight the intricate contestations for urban space and the relative insecurity within which traders operate in these spaces. These middlemen either braid the customers themselves or make a commission from bringing them into the salon. Another set of overly energetic intermediaries included both male and female fruit and vegetable sellers. Some were middlemen, while others acted as both enterprise owners and intermediaries. These middlemen or sellers positioned themselves strategically on pavements along the main streets, with their fruit and vegetables stacked in pyramid shapes screaming "fruit and veg". With the constant hustle and bustle, bargaining, and negotiation over informal spaces, customers, and prices in the Pretoria CBD, one could mistake the scene as chaotic and unorganized. However, this is far from reality as multiple layers of order and organization begin to emerge.

For example, registered traders are designated specific or demarcated built-up stalls along Helen Joseph Street (between the South African State Theatre and Sammy Marks Square). The large focus on business compliance pushes registered traders in these areas to occupy the street pavements in an orderly fashion. This is affirmed by the local government, which asserts that "the main function of the City of Tshwane's bylaws is to ensure that Tshwane is an orderly city to live and work in". In this endeavour, Metro officials arbitrarily check registered and unregistered traders' stalls for compliance with local bylaws. For street traders, the procedures for applying for an informal business street trading permit are articulated on the Tshwane government's Business Licence Renewal page. First, the prospective trader must lease a trading spot at a cost. Second, the intending client would follow the arduous application procedure that includes presenting an official identity document, providing a permanent residential address, and making an up-front rental fee covering three months, among others. Third, considering a trader secured a spot as the land area is limited, they would be issued with a renewable trading license each year, linked to the particular area and type of goods sold. Only after the

issuance of a trading license are they registered traders and can prepare to sell their products.

The rest are unregistered, making up the bulk of traders situated randomly all over the city streets, and particularly along Lillian Ngoyi Street. These traders include a mix of some who refuse to obtain a trading license as they find the procedure cumbersome. Others articulate a range of barriers to entry, including start-up capital for the bureaucratic fees, issues with identity documents and literacy levels. Due to complex and costly clearance procedures, some traders perceive the costs of obtaining a trading license as prohibitive. A few traders also prefer the flexibility of what and where to sell, which would otherwise not be there with a trading license as officials designated an area and type of goods to be sold. Unregistered traders also make informal arrangements with building or property owners or their managing agents, either for storage space for their goods, rental space for their business, or rental space for residential purposes. Some used the rental for a combination of all three: as a storage, business, and home. However, access to the Pretoria CBD without a trading license makes unregistered traders vulnerable to ongoing harassment from Metro Police officials. The Metro Police act on behalf of the local government to confiscate, fine, chase away, or arrest traders under the auspice of creating order and cleaning illegally occupied spaces (Benit-Gbaffou, 2018; Nkrumah-Abebrese, 2016).

The picture below shows the precarity of registered and unregistered traders. It shows a random inspection by the Metro Police to ensure that the street trader's stall setups align with government regulations and bylaws. These inspections generally confirm that the stall, type of goods, and cleanliness are according to the municipality's standards. Failure to meet these standards generally results in a fine or dispossession of goods imposed on the street traders or a combination of both.

Picture 2: A random site inspection by Metro Police officials



Source: Author's own

The value of space and location: Trader's choices of location and trading spot patterns

The location selection for street traders in the Pretoria CBD resulted from the agency they exercised as individual and group decisions, based on a few factors such as types of goods or services sold. The analysis of the Pretoria CBD revealed that in the bid to compete for customers, some creative traders opt to become mobile to increase the likelihood of a potential sale. However, these traders were limited in the type of goods and services they provided. Typically, these traders walked around the Pretoria CBD selling water, cool drinks, or ice lollies. They generally targeted taxis as they stopped to offload people. If demand was low in one area, they swiftly moved to another area, searching for opportunities to increase profitability.

When exploring further reasons for location choices, the assessment of the Pretoria CBD showed the grouping patterns between registered and unregistered traders. These patterns showed that the busiest streets were the Pretoria CBD's most lucrative trading spots. These included Helen Joseph and WF Nkomo Street horizontally and Lilian Ngoyi Street vertically. The traders situated along WF Nkomo Street are mostly registered traders, whereas those situated along Lilian Ngoyi Street are mostly unregistered traders. Due to their proximity to the main road, since the road along WF Nkomo Street is closed

to public transport, the traders on Lilian Ngoyi Street get the bulk of the transport and pedestrian traffic at all hours of the day. This makes their trading spots more desirable for some registered traders. However, once the local government assigns a trading spot, they are bound to it and their registered type of activity. Unregistered traders have the freedom to trade in any type of goods at any given time as they are not bound by registration procedures with the local authorities.

The consequence of clustering in the Pretoria CBD invariably creates competition between registered and unregistered traders for lucrative trading spots. Trading spots become currency for traders covering the busiest parts of the Pretoria CBD, which means increased consumer interactions, thus increasing the potential of a sale. In the Pretoria CBD, although unregistered traders received a higher level of activity during the week, on weekends, the level of activity was spread more equally as pedestrians had more time to seek out products they were interested in, thus supporting both registered and unregistered traders alike. Based on the above, proximity to customers was highlighted as the primary consideration when choosing a trading spot and its availability. Closeness to potential customers simultaneously increased the potential for more income. To customers, convenience and affordability ranked highest of their considerations when interacting with street traders. Therefore, the streets and subsequent locations within the Pretoria CBD provided traders an essential and valuable space to conduct their informal activities.

From an urban informal economy perspective, street trading is rooted in the actualization of space. Spaces in this context refer to the locations (specifically intersections, pavements, sidewalks, and others) that provide economic and social meaning to informal traders. The street locations provide an informal 'place of work' for city traders and embody a unique locational and spatial dynamic economy. Therefore, street traders strategically position themselves in and around spaces that promote optimum interaction with potential customers. In the Pretoria CBD, street trading is ubiquitous, and its distribution patterns correspond with the city's busiest and most central locations. Thus, the appropriation of public space makes the streets ideal for trading transactions. Concurrently, the streets are a social space where traders set up a home away from home.

To explain the complexity of location patterns in the Pretoria CBD, the data links the choice of location with survival mechanisms (materially and socially) to augment the understanding of space as a workplace location and a space of sociality for street traders. Most traders confirmed using temporary storage units in and around the Pretoria CBD. The key reason was that all the participants travelled from far, using public transportation and typically could not travel with lots of goods in hand. Therefore, the Pretoria CBD, as

a space, was critical and necessary to street traders for the following overlapping reasons to their business: firstly, it was a space for traders to store their products; secondly, it was a space for traders to sell their products; and finally, the Pretoria CBD represented a space where they could plan their business activities and livelihoods from the available locations. Space and location were thus an integral spatial part of trader's lives. The convenience of having traders' products in and around their workplace also served the function of easy access should goods run out.

Profile of participants in the Pretoria CBD

Prior to 1994, the Pretoria CBD had a thinly dispersed population. The omnipresent threat of apartheid policies precluded the presence of large black populations in the city centre. As a result, black communities were resigned to the townships or rural areas with little to no likelihood of entrepreneurial attempts in the cities. However, following the disintegration of Apartheid and the dawn of democracy, the Pretoria CBD, as with many other cities across the country, experienced an influx of street traders. Traders came from different parts of the country and outside the country, attracted by the search for employment and opportunities for a better life. As a capital city and the single-largest metropolitan municipality in South Africa, the Pretoria CBD was also attractive for street traders for its proximity to business hubs and government offices. Some traders were drawn to the capital for its diverse and dynamic opportunities for employment.

The bustling streets of the Pretoria CBD provide a vivid backdrop for a portrait of the vibrant and diverse street trading community. A labyrinth of informal stalls mixed with a kaleidoscope of colours, scents, and sounds, traders converged here to display various wares. Street traders, hailing from various backgrounds and walks of life, add to the distinctive fabric of the unique tapestry of Pretoria's urban landscape. The complexity of the street trader community in the Pretoria CBD is explored in this section. Specifically, the study distinguishes between the general profile delineated in the previous chapters and the specific participant profile found here and from which the data emanates. The study delves into the intricacies of the studied population of street traders, shedding light on who they are, where they come from, their motivations for informal trading, and their significant role in the local informal economy.

The street traders in the Pretoria CBD are diverse, representing a spectrum of cultures, ethnicities, and socio-economic backgrounds. They encompass men, women, and sometimes even children, reflecting the multi-dimensional nature of street trading. However, due to preferred ethical procedures, children were explicitly excluded from this studied population. Of sixteen participants, nine were female, and seven were male. Nine

were foreign, while seven were local. Many of these traders were migrants who had journeyed from rural areas within South Africa and neighbouring regions within the African continent in search of better economic opportunities. They brought a myriad of skills, talents, and traditional knowledge that contribute to the city's cultural richness.

In most cases articulated by these participants, a mix of factors, such as financial necessity, a lack of formal employment opportunities, and the desire to escape rural poverty, were among the main reasons highlighted. For some street traders, informal work was a lifeline, having escaped extreme conditions in their home country, such as war or severe climate conditions that displaced them. Therefore, according to Curtis*, "informal work is a way for me to survive and support my family". Regardless of the decision to engage in street trading, the overarching theme was that traders used informal trading for income and livelihood. Therefore, beyond the collection of infrastructure, the Pretoria CBD was a living organism fuelled by its inhabitants' ambitions, connections, and passions. The Pretoria CBD was where formal and informal entrepreneurship intertwined with culture and where social life transcended boundaries. As the city's pulse echoed through its streets, its bustling heart was a reminder that within the cacophony, a community of street traders was dancing to the tune of the city to create and sustain livelihoods.

The street traders in the Pretoria CBD include people from historically disadvantaged communities in South Africa, especially those from the rural areas where poverty levels have become more extreme. Other traders come from townships in and around Pretoria and overcrowded and previously disadvantaged communities. The last group of street traders originated from other countries in the African region, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, and Zambia. Most of these traders were forced to flee their homes due to conflict or climate-induced pressures that displaced them in other countries. It is important to note that some traders may have other reasons not mentioned here. These street traders come from poor communities impoverished by socio-economic disparities, political instability, and environmental challenges. They are particularly vulnerable to spacial and socio-economic inequalities, high levels of poverty and unemployment, and pernicious effects of climate change, leading to a dependence on insecure income-generating activities and livelihoods.

In a recent publication by Lemon (2021), he dispels the realities facing many living in townships by confirming that the physical character and social geography of apartheid cities are still a part of our lives. A large, marginalized population living in post-apartheid South Africa calls the township home. Nowadays, townships are still characterized as densely populated areas on the outskirts of major economic hubs with limited access to socio-economic opportunities. All the participants lived either in informal urban settlements

or rented a room as tenants in one of the surrounding townships (Mamelodi, Atteridgeville, Mabopane, Soshanguve, and Hammanskraal). The general living conditions are characterized by insecure and inadequate housing and infrastructure, and little to no access to services such as electricity, sanitation, or water (Wilson, 2021; SERI, 2018; Huchzermeyer and Karam, 2006).

Most traders had travelled far from their homes, from other provinces within the country, or from other countries. The informal type of activities that street traders are engaged in precipitated insecure housing due to the heterogeneous and shifting dynamics of street trading. The market and prices are also not fixed, leading to shifting dynamics where traders cannot guarantee how much money they could make in any given month. In their efforts to remain competitive, a trader selling fruit may offer a 'good price' to their customers, which suggests there is no fixed amount, but instead, prices are negotiable. All these traders had in common that they came to the cities from different geographical places and backgrounds due to their inability to fully reap the benefits of economies of scale in their homes.

Street traders in the Pretoria CBD engage in diverse activities to meet the needs and requirements of the local population. Their operations included a wide range, ranging from selling fresh produce, handicrafts, apparel, and electronics to providing services, including street food vending, repair services, and informal salons. Therefore, street traders in the Pretoria CBD were involved in informal activities that span a broad spectrum. The majority of participants were involved in selling clothing or accessories, followed by fruit and vegetables. Due to their diverse background and skills, these street traders not only fulfil everyday needs but also contribute to the city's vibrancy, offering unique and sometimes culturally significant products and services.

The participants were strategically positioned in various parts of the city. They could be found on bustling street corners, near transportation hubs, in designated and undesignated trading locations, and even around tourist attractions (specifically the Pretoria Zoo). Their locations were carefully chosen to capture foot traffic and engage potential customers. The spatial distribution of street traders was influenced by market dynamics and local bylaws and regulations that shaped the geography of street trading. Therefore, depending on whether they had street trading licenses, most registered participants were situated between Lilian Ngoyi Street, Helen Joseph Street, and Pretorius Street. The other streets along the Pretoria CBD had a mix of registered and unregistered, with the latter accounting for the most traders.

4.3. Factors that Contribute to Street Traders Joining Social Networks

Street trading operates in a precarious environment and setting with many complex challenges. Alongside those, as mentioned earlier, global and national challenges within informal employment, the factors that propel street traders to engage in networks are varied. The data from this study revealed a multitude of social, economic, and political reasons that affect traders' decisions to join networks. Therefore, a few prominent themes were derived from the data that present traders' motivations.

4.3.1. Networking due to lack of official documentation

Many street traders experience vulnerabilities resulting from the lack of documentation needed to comply with the regulatory legal environment and access to financial institutions. These dynamics are apparent in the participant narratives illustrated below. According to one participant

My mother never registered my birth and I do not know who my father is. I'm South African and have lived here all my life but I do not have an ID document. It's been 13 years since my mother passed away. Even though I have tried to investigate in the villages who my father may be, I cannot afford to wait for that revelation. I have children and a wife to take care of back home in the rural areas. Meanwhile, I'm also hungry and need to pay rent while sending money home. The only choice I had, knowing my circumstances was to join a network that would protect and cushion me from raids and confiscations of my goods from the Metro Police (Mason, interview, Pretoria, 10 August 2021).

Based on the above statement, statelessness was the motivating reason for joining a network for Marselle*. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees defines statelessness as people "not recognized as a national by any state under the operation of its law." These are people born in South Africa but not considered nationals in the legal sense as their birth was not registered for one reason or another. They often encounter barriers to entry that prevent them from accessing their rights. These include the right to own property, basic health services, or employment in the formal economy. The impact of this challenge extends primarily to previously disadvantaged communities because of outdated citizen policies and legislation in South Africa (Khan, 2020; Bloom *et al.*, 2017).

Based on the above, what emerged from the data was an overwhelming number of traders, almost all participants, illustrated that they either currently did not have permits or struggled for months or years before obtaining one due to documentation issues. Nono*

asserted, “I have a permit now, but it took over a year and four months before I could get the necessary documents”. This lack of documentation often led traders in the Pretoria CBD to find alternative solutions to ensure economic opportunities and livelihoods. When asked what unregistered traders did to get by, it emerged that many traders engaged in informal networks of shared information on when raids or inspections would occur in the city. The primary reason suggested by all these traders was that they operated their businesses without permits due to a lack of documentation, putting them at more risk of confiscation or fines by the police. They formed networks to sustain their activities to avoid or mitigate the threat to their business. These networks were formed among traders but predicated on at least one network member having a direct link to one or more government agents with the necessary and relevant information needed for unregistered traders.

According to the data, it emerged that the process of information sharing in the Pretoria CBD began with street traders forming a network. Apart from two networks that were either exclusively for locals or foreign traders, several included a mix of foreign and local traders. In every one of these networks, one or more members had connections with a civil servant or government official within the Tshwane Metropolitan Police Department (TMPD). According to several participants, this was often either a family member, neighbour, or official with some connection to at least one trader within a network. Marselle* confirmed, “some of the Metro Police live in the same communities as us, so we know each other”. Therefore, once the connecting link to the TMPD was made within a network, typically, that person acted as a middleman between government officials and street traders. They monetized their position in the network to provide pertinent information to fellow street trader members at a fee. This fee would then be split between them as the middleman, with the government official getting the bulk. Their main task would be to keep constant tabs on when raids or inspections would occur within the city centre. Once the information gets to the trader, they are responsible for quickly disseminating it to all network members for their quick action. Therefore, joining networks was a means by which traders deployed for business continuity, particularly those unregistered due to lack of documentation..

The lack of a birth certificate and ID document was prevalent among forty percent of the locals. In addition, many other traders lacked the necessary documentation to access permits for other reasons, some due to circumstances beyond their control. According to Olu*, who operates an unregistered stall as a foreign trader, “I am still waiting for the status of my application for asylum documents as it takes a while”. After consolidating information from participants in the Pretoria CBD, the data revealed that the average wait for foreign traders to receive the necessary documents to operate legally in the country is one year and two months. The issue with access to documentation for locals and migrants is also evident in the scholarly works of Rogerson (2018), Thebe (2017), and Crush *et al.* (2017).

Subsequently, being undocumented in the street economy means being more vulnerable to socio-economic exclusions. A relatively large portion of traders, specifically unregistered, associated a lack of official documents in the form of a copy of an identity document (commonly known as an ID) as the main reason for not applying for a trading license. This is an issue that came up for both local and foreign traders. Foreign traders may be undocumented persons for several reasons: in the process of seeking asylum, entering the country as refugees and awaiting supporting documentation, or illegally in the country. The data shows that over two-thirds of participants fall into the above categories. Regardless of the category, foreign traders face ongoing challenges in obtaining local official documents, which limits their ability to apply for a trading license. Exacerbating the above challenge is an illustration by a participant who states

Even when you try to apply for documents, getting those papers as a foreigner takes months or years. Immigration issues are a serious problem here as you wait forever. Unfortunately, our stomachs cannot wait that long so we must hustle and find other ways to make money to survive (Curtis, interview, Pretoria, 13 March 2021).

Therefore, foreign traders are met with added challenges. Due to systemic and capacity issues, the Department of Home Affairs historically has many asylum backlogs pending adjudication (Mukumbang *et al.*, 2020; Khan and Lee, 2018; Fassin *et al.*, 2017; Gordon, 2016). This was further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in 2020, resulting from the closure of refugee reception offices, thus increasing the backlogs with longer processing times (Mukumbang *et al.*, 2020). This resulted in the deprivation of thousands of asylum-seekers of valid documentation, as highlighted by almost all foreign participants.

While other traders illustrated a lack of birth registration, ID and asylum or refugee documents as an impediment, the documents needed for applying for a trading license were another major issue. As highlighted in the previous chapter, most traders live in insecure housing environments with informal arrangements with landlords. Therefore, most of them do not hold any form of proof of residence, which is a prerequisite for applying for a trading license. Some foreign traders networked with locals, specifically South African citizens, to circumvent this challenge at a fee. The informal arrangement involved citizens applying for a trading license in their name and using their proof of residence. Once received, the foreign national would use the license to present to regulatory authorities during the random spot checks. If asked, the foreign trader would say they are an employee of the owner of the stall. This was another popular pre-emptive tactic of informal business sustainability that involved traders leveraging social networks as a survival tool. In addition, traders articulated that they utilized networks for fear of

harassment, confiscation, fines, or imprisonment from the Metro Police and the insecurity of not having the documents to operate legally.

4.3.2. Networking to gain access to urban public space

The City of Tshwane's local government uses bylaws to discourage unregistered traders from accessing urban public space in the Pretoria CBD. However, the resilience of unregistered traders is evident all over the city as they occupy undesignated and sometimes even designated trading spots. The findings from the Pretoria CBD suggest that access to public space and key strategic locations was another pertinent reason traders engaged in social networks. According to Sandra*, "a good trading location means your stall may be seen first, and you can make more money than your competitors". According to all participants, the issue of location was an essential ingredient for business success. Access to a bad location meant inadequate access to customers, and money lost in stock, which translated to less income. Therefore, the data revealed that trader's presence of location decision-making tactics were closely tied to accessing strategic locations within the city. Bhekizenzo* illustrated how he joined a network that allowed him access to a trading location he perceived as 'lucrative' due to the heavy pedestrian traffic. He gained informal access to an official to secure a trading site through his information-sharing network between government officials and street traders. He adds, "the access to this trading site has boosted my business as there's a lot of people walking past who want to buy".

Access to public space is a topic frequently recognized in informal economy literature as vital to informal workers (Skinner and Watson, 2020; Gillespie, 2017; Brown, 2015). For example, the United Nations New Urban Agenda (2016; 13) declares

We commit ourselves to promoting safe, inclusive, accessible, ...quality public spaces, including streets, sidewalks, ...that are multifunctional areas of social interaction and inclusion, human health and well-being, economic exchange and cultural expression and dialogue among a wide diversity of people...that are designed and managed to ensure human development.

Therefore, the need to access public space has great significance to traders. It is thus unsurprising that they would deploy any means necessary to accomplish this. In the Pretoria CBD, as with many other contexts, street trading operates within a highly competitive space for trading locations and customers. Subsequently, trading locations were deemed by traders as a source of currency and value. The need to secure a strategic

location was also evident in Wami*, who used his network to position himself at an advantage. According to him

As a street trader, being able to switch gears is important. You have to adjust to the changing times and needs of customers, which being bound to one trading location doesn't allow you to do. At the same time, you have to position yourself at the best place to get the most customers. For this reason, I reached out to a network that I knew could provide me with access to better trading locations, at an annual fee of course, as nothing is for free. It costs me less to get a trading spot than what I would have paid the city with no hassles for documents or long lines not knowing when you might receive a permit. At the same time, I can move to another spot if I see that there's more pedestrians at another location. (Wami, interview, Pretoria, 4 November 2021).

For Wami*, it became clear that the need to access multiple urban public spaces was tied to his desire to maximize profit or income.

Another emerging subtheme linked to key strategic locations was networking with fellow traders to access customers within the public space. The data revealed that some traders had "repeat and loyal customers" as Nomvula* described, who bought certain goods from trusted traders. However, these repeat customers often requested referrals for other goods they did not have. Under these circumstances, traders would refer them to traders they had made friends with or socialized. To tap into these networks, traders saw an opportunity to market their activities through existing networks. The data revealed that over two-thirds of participants engaged in these networks as they provided the needed support to market their activities. Customers had a critical role to play in street traders' economic activity, which is a fundamental vehicle for daily survival and livelihood. Mechanisms for survival through social networks translated into access to key strategic locations within the city.

Therefore, as Nomvula added, "we use our networks for advertising our goods". The networks these traders were involved in were not directly to advertise each other's business, but rather, this aspect came as a sub-objective of an existing network with a different main goal. For example, Lushomo*'s network is for an educational scheme where they contribute R150 monthly towards their kid's fees. The network also provided access to credit to members at an agreed interest rate. At the end of the year, the accrued interest is shared equally among the members. To increase their profit margins, as part of their network objectives, they also agreed to refer customers to each other, and the trader who referred the most at the end of the year would receive an incentive prize. According to

Lushomo*, “this is either a bottle of whiskey to the price of no more than R150, which all the members contribute towards, or receiving R150 in cash”. Based on the findings, traders used their networks to connect and cluster their business activities to supply customers in public spaces. In turn, traders accessed a bigger pool of customers and thus economies of scale. Furthermore, the findings revealed that access to urban public space was important to street traders attempting to secure a source of income and livelihood. Therefore, accessing key strategic locations and customers was of vital importance and better achieved and enabled through engagement in networks.

4.3.3. Networking to gain access to government and their agents

Access to urban governance and management in the Pretoria CBD involved intricate local government politics and an often hostile legislative and regulatory environment, leading traders to individual and collective action through networks or forums. Among these is the *Barekisi Forum*, formed in 2012 to articulate the collective voices of traders with the local government. Members of this network included nine out of sixteen participants, representing over half of the participants in the Pretoria CBD. Among the most frequently mentioned reasons put forth by participants on why they joined this network are the following

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1. We needed a platform to voice our concerns and open dialogue with the government.
 2. Desire to be involved in designing policies that affect street traders’ everyday lives.
 3. Accessing government programmes, initiatives, and incentives for business growth.
-

The decision-making process of local authorities was of great importance to traders as legislation and policies impacted their informal business activities and livelihoods. Therefore, local authorities significantly impact trader’s lives as they provide frontline access to essential public services. However, the policies also depend on which political party is in charge and their mandates. This was evident in the data as expressed by one participant who observed that keeping updated with party politics at the local level was vital as it affects the

Political parties may change, but our shared challenges as traders remain the same. It’s important that whichever government is in power they know our circumstances and requests of them. When local government campaigns for our votes, we are also in a good position to trade votes for our business interest and make demands to influence their policies (Thuli, interview, Pretoria, 08 December 2021).

Based on the above statement, it's evident that traders use their networks to leverage local government changes in power to negotiate, improve, or sustain their businesses. What emerged as a subtheme from the above was the patron-client networking with street traders offering votes in exchange for access to urban public space. The reasons for joining these kinds of networks were also tied to the need for basic infrastructure managed by local governments.

Consequently, according to the data, engagement with local government was particularly important to traders as a way of helping their informal business activities become more stable, productive, and a means to unlock new opportunities. This follows many views expressed by participants that included the following. Wami* expressed, "we need access to toilets and water". Similar overlaps were shared by Nomvula*, who asserts, "we spend long hours in the streets exposed to the weather with no shelter, so we're petitioning the government to assist". Based on the above, traders envision that networking with the government will enable them to influence policy planning and implementation processes. Participants further believe networking with government officials fosters cooperation, as noted by Nono* in her statement below

Being able to voice our opinion to the local government is very important. It helps the government to understand what matters to us, how they can help, and how through dialogue, we can solve challenges that affect our daily lives. It also builds trust between us and the government if we can see change. Then we know and can see that they listen to us. The benefit is for all of us as we share the streets as traders, meaning we share a lot of similar challenges.

Other traders noted that local government had programmes they occasionally rolled out to assist traders, some in the form of business skills to transform them from informality into formal businesses. However, information on these was generally filtered through local trader forums, associations, and networks. Hence, the need to be part of one of these networks for easier and quicker access to the information. Consequently, networks with government bodies, officials and institutions significantly influenced the possible livelihood creation of street traders.

At the same time, the presence of street traders in the urban public space challenges political conceptions of order assumed to be a defining feature of modern cities. As a result, street trading is often subjected to what Bhekizenzo refers to as "crackdowns of public order". Similar perceptions were expressed by Ivy*, who asserts, "on random occasions, local authorities enforce their power by conducting street raids". According to

all unregistered participants, these take place in often punitive fashion. Due to the insecure nature of informal trading and work environment, traders are often vulnerable to officials enforcing municipal bylaws and police harassment. The evidence from the Pretoria CBD highlighted that most unregistered traders inevitably networked with local officials as a crucial avenue to get by and ensure that their goods were not fined or confiscated. In this regard, Sphelele* noted

When I started selling on the streets six years ago, I realised that harassment by government agents was the grim norm. Knowing that I did not have a license, I decided to network with fellow traders to see if I could avoid confiscation of my goods. What I found out was that you need an inside man to notify you when the police were coming. The day after the raids, that person will come and collect their fee for giving you the information. Sometimes there's no time for a warning but they let you go or return your confiscated goods once the coast is clear. Although I make a modest profit in the streets, I always have cash on hand to pay bribes because the loss to officials is less than the possible loss in stock”.

Based on many street traders' perceptions, the regulatory policy environment and governance structures considerably impacted informality, especially in urban contexts. These impacts were mainly through urban public land use and spatial planning management. South Africa, as with most other nations in the Global South, has comprehensive national development planning laws and policies. However, these are frequently carried over from previous colonial and apartheid governments, representing European or Western ideals of what contemporary cities ought to look. In addition, these cities were generally established as administrative and commercial hubs to support and cater to a relatively small elite (Lemon, 2021). Therefore, the urban poor population threatened these principles and the added challenges they brought with them.

However, informality is everywhere across cities and in the Pretoria CBD. Therefore, the government strongly focused on compliance, order, and cleanliness. This followed modernist traditions highlighted in Chapter Two that view informality as chaotic and disorderly, presuming it should be repressed or eradicated. Inevitably, this thinking has led the South African government to enact 'clean-up operations' in cities to force out thousands of informal traders. The most notable example in South African cities includes – Operation Clean Sweep in Johannesburg (Benit-Gbaffou, 2018). Other examples of forced removals of street traders are noted in the scholarly works of Roever and Skinner (2016; 362). They assert

On the exclusionary side, the evidence suggests three dominant practices. At one extreme are large-scale, violent evictions where street vendors are simply removed from public space. In less severe cases, some or all vendors are relocated, but often to more marginal locations with low pedestrian footfall and/or inadequate facilities. Finally, there is lower-level, ongoing harassment of vendors by predatory state officials, often facilitated by legislation.

Inevitably, street traders in the Pretoria CBD were found to use networks to circumvent a hostile regulatory environment. Knowing many of them were without licenses to trade, they found alternative informal means to sustain their activities. These street traders operated in a constant state of alertness. Thus, they were prepared to exert themselves with extensive measures of fluidity in their networks to exchange knowledge and information with local officials. This sense of preparedness had significant implications on street traders' decisions to engage in networks and the gains and losses within the city based off these.

4.3.4. Networking for economic reasons

The data also revealed other ways in which engaging in social networks had significant implications for street traders and the possible gains and benefits they could reap. From saving money through networks that operate as rotating credit and savings schemes, with members contributing fixed sums of money to a central fund weekly, fortnightly, or monthly. Lack of access to financial institutions and banking structures propelled traders to engage in informal credit schemes. Some of these were with loan sharks, but as Wami* illustrated, "they come with high interests which we can't always afford. They are just too risky". Therefore, many traders in the Pretoria CBD source informal mechanisms to access credit. According to Nono*, "we look to our own networks as we are sensitive to our shared circumstances, so the interest is more reasonable". Similar sentiments were shared by Priscilla*, who asserts, "engaging in rotating credit networks allows us to stretch the little money we have". She further adds, "there are penalties served to defaulters to make sure that no one acts outside of the agreed rules of operating".

Several participants highlighted the lack of access to insurance institutions, especially funeral policies, as the main motivation for engaging in networks. Of these, the need to plan for the future repeatedly became a constant cause for concern. Ntombi* confirmed, "life is so unpredictable. You can do all you can to live, but death will still come". Therefore, traders join these networks out of concern for themselves and their families in case of death. The data also revealed that the concern arises from a family obligation to provide a funeral that reinforces a sense of community. In the African context, funerals are seen

as an important social event to bid farewell to the person who has passed. All participants confirmed being involved in at least one such informal burial network or 'society' as they commonly call it. In addition, the data also revealed another level of support that traders target with these networks of human support from their fellow members. Nono* highlighted how "death happens so suddenly sometimes that family or friends can't support for various reasons, so our network has at least two people on standby". She added that these people are on rotation each month to assist with errands or any aspect of the planning. The network planned a year ahead which members would be responsible for which month, and should they be unavailable, the onus is on them to find suitable replacements.

Another emerging theme in the reasons for networking by street traders was the need to diversify traders' skills to attract more customers and access better discounts. According to Sandra* "I'm learning from a fellow trader how to track which items sell more, so I can stock up more on those". Another participant added

If you want to survive in these streets, it's important to speak to other people who may know better than you because they have more experience with how things work here or how to work the system. They know where the good deals are. Some people also have good relationships with wholesalers and get discounts if they refer people. It all depends on the kinds of relationships you have with fellow traders and with wholesalers. Some of them even allow you to buy on credit once you have built a good reputation with them (Nomvula, interview, Pretoria, 22 April 2021).

Based on the above illustrations, traders engaged in social networking for learning and business development. Due to the constantly evolving nature of customer trends and preferences, traders would inevitably need to keep up to date to satisfy demand. Concurrently, traders used networks to get discounts on their stock to maximize potential profits. Therefore, traders in the Pretoria CBD canvassed a range of informal tactics to maintain and sustain their business activities.

4.4. A Tapestry of Resilience: The Formation and Governance of Social Networks

In the intricate fabric of society, the threads of informal social networks woven by street traders serve as a testament to human adaptability and resilience. This section tells the tale of how such networks emerge, evolve, and are governed by the very people they sustain. It explores the challenges street traders face, the innovative ways they establish connections, the structure that binds them, and the governance mechanisms that ensure their survival. The analysis used participant narratives to understand the network structures that sustain the functioning of street trading within the Pretoria CBD. These

actors engage in collaborative social networks to sustain their livelihood strategies. Inherently, the Pretoria CBD was an economic space premised on the exchange of goods and services. However, intrinsically, it was a social space where the continued persistence of street trading in the Pretoria CBD was anchored on distinct informal social networks. The analysis of the Pretoria CBD was helpful as it provided a conceptual framework to understand how street traders survived. In the Pretoria CBD, networks operated differently, with specific objectives, and served multiple purposes and outcomes. Therefore, networks in the Pretoria CBD were configured with social relationships interwoven with meaning.

In the heart of the bustling and vibrant city centre of the Pretoria CBD, a vibrant tapestry of commerce, politics, and social life interwove to create a dynamic urban landscape. Towering commercial and residential buildings kissed the heavens while the streets hummed with life, forming a symphony that echoed the diversity and energy of its inhabitants. Within this milieu, a community of street traders struggled to make ends meet, which the data highlighted as the genesis of solidarity and informal social networks in the Pretoria CBD. Limited access to resources, employment, and education compounded their challenges. Nevertheless, the street traders of the Pretoria CBD learned the power of solidarity amid adversity. Amid shared challenges, informal social networks began to emerge organically. According to Ivy*, “when we exchanged stories of our struggles with each other, we started to slowly form bonds and mutual understanding”. Through regular interactions and sharing everyday experiences, ties developed among street traders, forming a web of interconnected relationships.

The data highlighted that, in the Pretoria CBD, social connections served as the fundamental building blocks of networks. Street traders created them as dynamic networks of reciprocal expectations between network participants or between network participants and outside parties. Through membership, network members construct personal relationships comprising norms, values, and mutual interests. These unique relationships influenced the management of street trading and even traders’ personal lives. Therefore, the structure of these social networks was fluid, dynamic, and driven by necessity. The connections made by street traders were based on location and proximity, but also shared circumstances, challenges, and goals. In the Pretoria CBD, these connections extended across traders, uniting registered and unregistered traders, local and foreign traders, and male and female traders of all ages in a collective pursuit of survival. Therefore, informal social networks in the Pretoria CBD welcomed members regardless of permits, geographical background, or gender.

Beyond the factors that propel street traders to engage in networks, this section proposes three models of the development of social networks established on three general principles: (1) social connection occurs between street traders at a higher rate due to the precarious and insecure nature of street trading; (2) the efficacy of the network decays over time if members do not fulfil their obligations; (3) the more members within a network, the higher the risk of failure or non-compliance.

To illustrate the case that social networks are composed of individuals, the views expressed by the following participants were pertinent. For instance, according to one participant,

We come from all over the country to pursue a life for ourselves and our families. All of us here have different motivations for selling on the streets. What we have in common is that we all need money, but we have to respond to constantly changing conditions to survive, which makes it difficult. When you arrive here, it's clear that there are specific patterns of people that group themselves together. I was curious to know why this was happening, that's how I found out about networking. It's tough in the streets, so I decided to join a network to make it easier to cope with difficulties. I knew that through my network, I would have access to information that affects my business (Ivy, interview, Pretoria, 24 May 2021).

Another participant added

As a member, there are rules you must abide by otherwise, you get penalized for acting outside the agreed rules. It can't work if everyone doesn't act according to the rules we have set together. That's why charging members who don't pay with interest is important, so they think twice before not doing their part (Khulu, interview, Pretoria, 10 June 2021).

In addition, Bhekizenzo* articulated, "our networks are small in size because the more people there are, the harder it is to manage them". Based on these participant narratives, the governance of these networks mirrors the principles of democracy, albeit without the trappings of bureaucracy. Decision-making is participatory, with each voice being heard and considered. When members defaulted in the Pretoria CBD, they were charged with a penalty to circumvent repeat offenses. Norms and rules were collectively reached through consensus. Therefore, these social networks reinforced a sense of agency, reaffirming that street traders' survival depended on their collective efforts.

Therefore, the Pretoria CBD demonstrated that traders could enjoy economies of scale from their interactions and engagement in social networks. According to the data, social networks typically begin with an individual actor within a particular social context. These actors decided to group themselves with other individuals in similar circumstances based on their challenges and interests. Decisions were precipitated by the individual's circumstances and the opportunity to secure benefits from their membership within a network. This created a snowball effect that would lead to a group being formed (the size depending on the network's objective and goals). The governance structure of each network played a crucial role in determining the possible benefits. Furthermore, how networks were organized also determined how likely it was to survive if actors defaulted.

Social networks have long been suspected of shaping actors' adaptability, resilience, and survival trajectories, even after adjusting for socio-economic challenges (Meagher, 2010). Nevertheless, empirical evidence in the case of the Pretoria CBD is often neglected. Therefore, this chapter highlights that social networks created by street traders play a strategic and integral role in shaping survival tactics. One of the salient characteristics was that social networks in the Pretoria CBD both mitigated and moderated the impact of street traders' socio-economic and street trading challenges. This was most evident in the case of Duko*, who confirmed, "joining a network is a way to survive what you're going through, but also plan for what you may go through in the future". Challenges manifest in various ways within urban informality, significantly where relationships and activities are often moderated through interpersonal ties. Therefore, social connections played a significant role in street traders' lives.

Other forms of connection were found in the Pretoria CBD beyond sharing the same setting. Nomvula* expressed, "I joined my network because I wanted support and information that concerns my business, so it had to be with people I trust". Inevitably, trust was a critical component in how networks were established, functioned, and were structured. Trust was the main reason the most participants put forth as to why they opted to keep the size of a network relatively low (generally under 20 members). The two main reasons offered were avoiding conflict if members default on their commitments (trust issues may arise) and keeping administration to a minimum with fewer numbers. The option to keep the size of these networks low was a strategic move by street traders to minimize the risks associated with mistrust and coordinating larger groups. Several caveats concern administrative and trust issues the more members there are, which may diminish the efficacy of the network. The findings in the Pretoria CBD revealed that trust was weakened as the size of the network grew beyond twenty members. This finding was similar to what other authors illustrated (Putnam, 2004; Rodriguez-Pose and von Berlepsch, 2014) in their observations of social networks.

Trust and loyalty were the glue underpinning street traders' networks and network cooperation. This is supported by Putnam (2004), who highlighted that principles of cooperation, trust, and loyalty have long been essential prerequisites for social networks to accomplish mutual benefits. These social networks worked because all members had shared common interests in its success. The relationships formed by the actors contribute gradually to the development and diffusion of a network. This mutually beneficial solidarity holds firm as street traders share the benefits of its growth. The success of these networks is, in part, strengthened by the potential cooperation between street traders, as they share similar goals. Therefore, how social networks are balanced is a constant process of juggling social cohesion and opportunity. They are crucial aspects of street traders engagement in networks from different walks of life.

Siphelele's* network has 11 members, females only who are close in age to being pensioners. According to them, they specifically capped the number at 11 so they could each take turns hosting the monthly meetings (shared equally among them from January to November). December was deemed too busy a month and a time for family, so they could not exceed 11 members at any given time. In addition, they purposely opted for a female-only network for two reasons. Firstly, part of hosting a meeting included catering a meal for the group. According to Siphelele*, "it's easier to expect a female to cook in our culture, so we don't invite males as it would make us uncomfortable to expect him to cook". Second, one of the agenda items during their meetings included giving each other cleaning and cooking advice for maintaining their households. Based on the above case, social networks provided traders access to wide-ranging resources, not only relations that underpin livelihoods. Within these networks, traders also connected to learn more efficient aspects of maintaining and running households.

All participants highlighted that trust and reciprocity were their networks' most important structural. Street traders used these two central concepts as the cement to produce and reproduce cohesion within networks. In turn, this cohesion enabled street traders to cope with socio-economic challenges, fight vulnerabilities and deprivations, and present participants with the possibility of sustaining and enhancing their livelihoods. Engagement in social networks thus provided a vital strategy to mitigate socio-economic challenges. The chapter suggests that social networks benefit street traders when they make meaningful social connections as coping strategies. However, few participants said traders were wary of some network structures. This was due to what Sandra* perceived as "favouritism". She added, "if a member has their family in the group, they will always act in their best interest first because they are family". The above sentiment was shared by Marselle*, who expressed, "some members have a previous relationship or links with

local authorities, so they get first preference with information”. Consequently, as evident in the data, these network structures’ drawbacks included perceptions of nepotism, favouritism and clientelism. Participants viewed these acts as undermining the successful functioning of their networks.

There were occasions during the group meetings when certain members failed to meet their organizational obligations. In such situations, the efficacy of the network was at risk of failing. This was indeed the case, as confirmed by Lushomo* that he was part of a network savings scheme with nine other members. The purpose of his network was for nine members to receive money in bulk per term by pooling in R250 each per month. The total amount would be given to each member monthly on a rotational basis. The selection of who would receive proceeds and at which month happened through a process of each member picking a folded piece of paper. Each piece had one of the first nine months of the year written on it. The process was then repeated for the remaining three months, plus the first six months of the new year. The selection of who was picked first was on a first-come-first-serve basis at that meeting. In a later interview with Lushomo*, he confirmed, “our network did not survive the second year because one of the members kept failing to give his share of the money and we had to dissolve the group”. Thus, the failure to meet the organization’s procedures may adversely affect the whole group. As noted above, the lesson of Lushomo’s* case is that norm observance is vital as one network actor may constrain the development and outcomes of the whole network.

The participants met monthly, bi-monthly, or quarterly in their networks, depending on the needs and availability of most members. In most networks, this was a quorum of at least 60 percent of the members in attendance for the meeting to proceed. Where a large group of members existed, they nominated one member for every five people to manage the administrative tasks. These include collecting bank receipts of money deposited and keeping a logbook of which members contributed, when, and how much. When they met quarterly, the meetings were longer, allowing time to review the ledger books to match what appeared in the bank. It was evident from the findings that each network had its norms and practices disseminated across the network. Based on the above, a crucial factor in social networks involved the relationship between members as they were integral to the success and continuity of the organization. Thus, the axis on which social networks were legitimized was through their members and the social embeddedness within networks.

The networks discussed in this section were fluid as they actively shaped and reshaped themselves according to shifting times and opportunities. They were informally constituted and focused on the organizational capability of street traders in responding to threats.

Thus, their structure was vulnerable to change, and therefore, the analyses made here are subject to time and place. Street traders engaged in social networks for socio-economic benefits and addressed potential threats to their livelihood endeavours. Evident in the Pretoria CBD was the capacity of social networks to provide socio-economic support to its members – particularly in circumstances where the realities had not been propitious. In addition, the networks found in the Pretoria CBD were not just a response to adversity, they became an integral part of street trader's daily life. Beyond providing emotional support, these networks facilitated resource sharing, knowledge dissemination, and the distribution of opportunities. Members supported one another, from moral support to cope with life's challenges to livelihood creation. Thus, these informal traders understood that their strength was amplified when shared.

4.5. Home Away from Home

Street trading in the Pretoria CBD is economically constituted, but inherently, it is a social domain where urban informal discourses are perpetually constructed and reconstructed through daily interactions. These interactions are governed by informal norms and practices structured by street traders themselves. Street traders organize and constantly reconfigure networks based on the mutually beneficial networks established with specific functionality and purposes. Street trading occurs in a highly competitive, precarious, and volatile environment. At the global, national, and local levels, several factors, such as weak socio-economic challenges, significantly influence the development of social networks within the Pretoria CBD. This makes street traders particularly susceptible to external shocks, a vulnerability exacerbated by street trade politics. Traders in the Pretoria CBD come from diverse backgrounds, each with specific characteristics.

As mentioned earlier, the Pretoria CBD streets are not just a space of economic activity but represent a social environment where informal traders manage their businesses and livelihoods as individuals and as a group. According to the data, most traders came from far, either outside the city or the country. As such, most had left their homes and travelled far to secure job opportunities in the Pretoria CBD. The patterns found in the Pretoria CBD articulated the dynamics of rural-urban migration. Many local street traders came from different parts of the country, fleeing the restrictive rural life that no longer offered them the hope to improve their livelihoods. This was evident in the example of Ivy*, who hails from a rural village in KwaZulu Natal called KwaNongoma. Her late husband worked in the mines in Johannesburg as the primary caregiver sending money home via remittances monthly.

During this time, Ivy* tended the fields growing, staple goods like corn, yams, sweet potatoes, and a variety of fruit, which she sold or shared with her community as part of their communal cohabitation. As such, the demand for her goods was not very high and often did not translate into income. Facing financial ruin resulting from the loss of income from her husband's passing, rural life was no longer sufficient to fund their household. With the urgent need for more income, she was propelled to move into the urban areas, starting first in the city of Durban before settling in Pretoria with the ambition of more income. According to Ivy* "we have for too long been situated and isolated in the rural areas with little to no means of a life". This highlights the historical legacies designed to prevent Black South Africans from accessing economic reproduction capacities. Additionally, from the analysis of the data, few local traders in the Pretoria CBD were born or natives in Pretoria. Most street traders came from rural villages in the Eastern Cape, Free State, KwaZulu Natal and Limpopo provinces.

Other traders came from both rural and urban contexts but were foreign as they originated from other countries. The foreign street traders were a mix of traders from rural and urban environments. Some fled conflicts in their countries (mainly from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mozambique). The remainder of these traders came to South Africa with dreams of making enough money to enable them to return home with notably higher purchasing power and income, which, according to participants, rarely happens. In lieu of low income, the norm for street traders to save and remit money back home to support an entourage of family members was evident. As articulated by Olu*, "it can take years of toil for little income in South Africa before you can go back home". In addition, many foreign traders paid bribes to local authorities and unofficial surcharges to various individuals, such as property owners, to maintain their businesses. Lushomo* revealed, "we pay bribes if our goods are confiscated". The above emphasizes ongoing debates and dynamics of corruption between law enforcement and vulnerable groups in many localities (Kiaka *et al.*, 2021; Moyo *et al.*, 2018; Rogerson, 2016). The endurance of foreign traders – especially in South Africa, underscores the challenges they face being far from home.

Most street traders in the Pretoria CBD, both local and foreign, live in temporary homes, typically via rentals or informal agreements. In their reflection on the informal housing dynamics in South Africa, Scheba and Turok dispel (2020b; 109) "the government's neglect of this sector has contributed to the strong persistence of informality, with its associated risks". It is within these informal arrangements with landlords that street traders deflect unofficial rental fees and develop a range of tactics to secure housing. A few traders living in informally arranged housing within city buildings highlighted the exorbitant deposits charged to them for not having official documentation. Mason* affirmed, "we are living like homeless people but paying rent. The landlord knows you can't report him".

These occurrences vary depending on the willingness of the landlord to comply with generally accepted rental agreements as these are not formalized. Again, being far away from familiar territory and circumstances, street traders had little choice but to abide by and conform to the new status quo.

The balance of street traders in the Pretoria CBD revealed they were renting, often half-built, makeshift, or overused rooms in the townships. These were typically in the form of a separate room in someone's backyard, lacking basic services such as water or efficient access to sanitation. According to most participants, the quality of rooms varies significantly in terms of quality. To supplement the statement, Ivy* added, "I managed to secure an RDP [government subsidized housing] house made from bricks, but many people use shacks". For other street traders, primarily those new to the city or country, without networks to provide them with information, referrals and support, rooms made of corrugated iron material are usually the most readily available. Almost three-quarters of participants confirmed renting a back room in someone's yard at some point while operating as an informal trader in the Pretoria CBD. These participants highlighted affordability as the primary reason for using this type of housing. Lack of documents was again expressed as the second major reason, as informal housing generally required an upfront deposit only. The data revealed that different names are used to describe this type of dwelling depending on the languages spoken by the participants. The Zulu and Xhosa participants called this type of housing 'umjondolo'. The Tswana, Tsonga, Pedi, and Sotho-speaking participants referred to it as 'mokhukhu'. Whichever terminology is ascribed, they denote the same informal housing structure. Far from home, street traders utilized informal backyard housing in response, inter-alia, to the limitations and challenges imposed on them by low-income levels and other constraints.

To this end, social networks played a vital role in mitigating the quality of housing gaps. Nevertheless, even this relative stability could change at a moment's notice due to the informal nature of the arrangements. For example, one foreign trader expressed

Without valid documents, I must pay extra fees, including three months' rent as a deposit, to secure a place. To make matters worse, the landlord can decide to increase the water or electricity bill before the year is even up, complaining of increasing rates. Our money is being chopped from every corner before it even reaches our homes (Priscilla, interview, Pretoria, 10 August 2021).

Another emerging theme discernible from the data was the ability of networks to offer traders housing security through building. Most traders highlighted a key driver of why they join networks as the prospect to build. Mavis* articulated, "it's better to pay towards your

own house than to pay someone else and still suffer". Similar sentiments were shared by Nomvula* in the following statement

Having joined my network four years ago, I've been able to join hands with other members as they understand the pain and insecurity of living in the city. You can easily end up sleeping in the streets as well if you are not careful with the little you make selling on the streets. This is why I joined my network to save money on a monthly basis to secure land, which I have bought in Atteridgeville and materials to build. As a group, we rotate yearly who the money is going to. This allows you to save more money quicker, knowing we can't get loans to build. The knowledge that you have a home you can call your own is much better than when I was living paying someone else's debts off. Now, I pay the same amount, but at least I am content knowing the house is mine and will go to my children when I pass on (Lushomo, interview, Pretoria, 13 March 2021).

Therefore, joining social networks played a vital role in traders achieving their objectives of owning land or property. When asked why this was important, most of these traders wanted to own a home in the urban city. In Ntombi's* case, "it's important to me because my children are still in the rural areas and I want to build a home here in the city for them". Fumani* added, "there are more opportunities in the city, which is why I want to build a permanent home here". Based on the above views, it became clear that networks provided more than just economic opportunities or business continuity for informal traders. Networks were the tools by which traders could create temporary or permanent homes.

The Pretoria CBD culminated in an urban space where street traders operate and a domain where traders establish a sense of home away from their homes. The urban space acts as both a natural and imaginary space that keeps street trader's hopes and dreams alive while simultaneously cultivating a restlessness to make something out of the city. In the Pretoria CBD, street traders engaged in collective action through social relationships to navigate complex societal and urban imperfections. They constructed innovative strategies and practices that went beyond individual benefit.

Furthermore, the added value of the urban city streets allowed traders to plan social resources to reach specific goals, be it educational savings for their children or the annual pooling of resources to ease the burden of financial commitments. Therefore, street traders leave their families to come to this environment and space to secure and sustain their livelihoods. The space represented a tangible opportunity to support the realization of business ventures and livelihoods. The urban informal space represented opportunities for poverty alleviation and the means to limit the effects of other socio-economic

challenges, especially for poor people. The Pretoria CBD, therefore, represented a quintessential space that became the launching pad upon which traders' potential to create and sustain livelihoods was brought to life. It represented a space where street traders amplified notions of what was possible and impossible as they adopted various norms and practices far from home to sustain their livelihoods.

4.6. Chapter Summary

The chapter synthesized empirical evidence to understand the factors that propel traders to join social networks. The research explored how marginality and vulnerability, coupled with unpredictable and exogenous global shocks, have influenced the operation of street trading within the Pretoria CBD. The significance of the analysis provided context for understanding the social nature of informal economies. The chapter argued that the Pretoria CBD encapsulated how informal trading is distinctly nested in social network dynamics that enable street traders to co-exist and survive. Street traders often engage in various networking formations to navigate the challenges of their informal trade and enhance their economic activities. These networking formations can take on different forms, reflecting the social, economic, and cultural contexts in which street trading occurs. Social networks provided informal traders with coping mechanisms to address daily challenges and ensure their survival. In addition, social networks emerged as lifelines, providing resources, information, and a sense of belonging that enabled street traders to navigate challenges and sustain their livelihoods.

This chapter drew on the findings in the Pretoria CBD, analyzing the experiences of street traders to canvas a range of factors that propel them to engage in social networks. Complexity manifested in multiple challenges and limitations that rendered street traders vulnerable, ranging from rising socio-economic deprivations, a hostile regulatory policy environment, and the need to construct livelihoods. Therefore, complexity arose in factors experienced at the global, national, and local levels. Economic pressure and resource scarcity were at the core of informal social network formation. Street traders often face limited access to formal employment, education, and social services. Thus, it becomes necessary to combine resources, whether financial or material, as a means of survival. Therefore, these various networking formations highlight the adaptability and resilience of street traders as they navigate the complex landscape of informal economies in urban environments. In addition, the specific nature of these networks can vary based on local contexts and the reasons for joining, the socio-economic dynamics of the community and the willingness of the members to adhere and adapt to the networks regulations.

The data showed that participants perceived their vulnerabilities as the root cause to collectively organizing and engaging in social networks as strategies for survival and coping mechanisms. The challenges faced by street traders created an entry point of connection. Shared experiences of poverty, discrimination, and exclusion fostered common understanding within street trading. Informal social networks provided spaces for street traders to exchange, share coping strategies and collectively brainstorm solutions to their problems. In an environment where formal institutions might be inaccessible or unresponsive, social capital and mutual trust play a pivotal role in the development of social networks. In the Pretoria CBD, street traders often rely on interpersonal relationships, where fellow traders provide support and assistance. Therefore, networks helped traders to get by and represented the benefits of sociality. The different types of social networks identified in the Pretoria CBD included networking for resource sharing, mutual support, to mitigate street trading risks, resilience building, access to capital, and advocacy.

The theory of social networks served as the foundation for the conceptual and methodological framework used in this study. Despite the linkages between social network characteristics, the multifactorial analysis revealed that a range of factors converge to drive the creation of these social networks in the Pretoria CBD. These networks constitute crucial lifelines that enable communities to survive, thrive, and challenge the structural inequalities that sustain their poverty due to a complex interplay of factors. Recognizing the nuanced dynamics that contribute to the formation of social networks is crucial to recognizing the diverse benefits and power of collective action. The benefits that street traders' harness and reap are discussed at length in the next chapter.

Chapter Five - Unlocking the Power of Informal Social Networks: Innovative Strategies for Survival

5.1 Introduction

The chapter argues that building and maintaining relationships are fundamental components of social networks. Therefore, relationships play an essential role in street traders' lives. Traders use their networks to form cohesive social organizations that influence the actions of all members connected. Social networks form a coherence of identities based on actors with similar interests. They provide resources (material and non-material) to street traders to develop common structures of support and governance that increase their capacity to sustain their livelihoods. Therefore, the degree to which street traders in the Pretoria CBD associate with social groups is significant for understanding the social life of street trading as a survival response. Furthermore, the process of traders' collective organization and shaping of everyday actions to influence access to social networks proves useful in a variety of contexts.

The central tenet of social networks is engagement in interpersonal ties and social contacts with individuals for individual or collective interest. In the Pretoria CBD, social networks have revolutionized how street traders interact, share information, and develop relationships in their daily lives. With a multitude of users, they provide a platform for street traders to initiate, sustain and grow their entrepreneurship. However, the benefits of social networks in the Pretoria CBD go beyond business potential, offering opportunities for personal growth and a political voice. Street traders in the Pretoria CBD engaged in numerous informal relationships to tackle street trading and personal challenges. Therefore, the chapter explores social network's positive impact and benefits to street traders. As a starting point, the economic benefits, highlighting the sub-themes that emerged from the data, argue that social networks enable traders to access informal financial schemes to invest or save for short and long-term interests. Networks also enable street traders to adapt to changing market conditions and emerging trends.

Second, the social benefits of networking are explored to ascertain how street traders used them to build more meaningful collaboration and collective action relationships. The section argues that social support networks enable street traders to cope with and overcome challenges. In addition, they enhance community building through moral support structures and offer foreign traders' vital linkages to far-away homes. The third section analyzes of the political benefits of networks for street traders. It argues that by participating in political forums, traders increase their political visibility through access to information on labour laws, social protection programmes, and other relevant policies and

regulations. Concurrently, networks were a crucial tool for street traders to advocate for their rights and hold the government accountable for their promises. Following this analysis, a summary is made to conclude the chapter. The chapter makes a main finding that social networks are a vital part of street traders' lives and livelihood creation as they act as they mediate challenges, imperfections, and shocks.

5.2 Economic Benefits of Networking

In this section, the chapter identifies the various ways street traders use networks to satisfy economic needs. The need for skills building and knowledge sharing is discussed as a point of departure. This is followed by an analysis of how street traders use networks to invest in building materials. What follows is a two-part discussion on how street traders navigate their inability to access financial services and how they deal with financial shocks. The section discusses the critical benefits to street traders in addressing these economic challenges.

Skills building and knowledge sharing

Poor populations may lack the skills and knowledge needed to develop or grow their businesses. To mitigate this challenge, street traders in the Pretoria CBD engaged in networks to enhance opportunities for skills-building and knowledge-sharing. For example, it emerged in the data that through practices of skills sharing, street traders developed skills required to outpace their competitors. Additionally, street traders utilized networks to access to a wide range of information to navigate their challenges more effectively and make informed decisions tailored to their needs. Consequently, street traders developed competitive advantages by leveraging their social networks to learn and grow their business skills over non-members. The data from the Pretoria CBD highlighted the common ways street traders capacitate each other to build capacity. First, through informal mentoring, street traders who were new to the city or had less expertise in informal trading joined networks for guidance from more seasoned informal workers. A local street trader confirmed

I moved from the rural areas to the city and got close to one of the older ladies who gave me valuable advice on selecting the right location, keeping a record on how much I pay to buy stock, and negotiating discounts with retailers. She also taught me to budget for what I need to spend per month to track if I could put any money aside for emergencies (Nono, interview, Pretoria, 8 February 2021).

Similarly, another foreign street trader participant explained how his informal social network enabled him to navigate legal, regulatory frameworks within the city as a new trader.

I reached out to fellow foreign traders who have been in South Africa much longer than me and knew how things are done. Having built a good relationship with these traders, I learned about the local regulations for obtaining permits and how to manoeuvre these processes to sustain a living. It was a difficult choice to make but at first I couldn't obtain a trading license due to issues with legal documentation. Luckily, my community network shared with me ways to adapt to the license requirements by agreeing with a local to register the business in their name at a small fee. This was very important information as it allowed me to keep my business (Curtis, interview, Pretoria, 24 March 2021).

Another aspect of skills building highlighted by participants in the Pretoria CBD included the following. A few participants confirmed that within their networks, they included an added benefit of skills-sharing meetings to cover topics such as financial management, marketing techniques, customer service, or product diversification. In addition, they used these meetings to provide a space for sharing business knowledge, discussing challenges, and seeking advice from peers who may be geographically distant but facing similar circumstances. According to one participant

My network offers an added benefit because we provide each other with business support and constructive feedback to improve our businesses. This is so important because we get knowledge from real-life experiences that are relevant to our target market and types of business. Unfortunately, many of us can't afford to pay for formal training, so we learn these best practices from each other and use the skills to grow and expand our business (Mavis, interview, Pretoria, 10 August 2021).

Based on the above statement, street traders engaged in these networks benefit from tailored practical advice. In addition, by utilizing the available informal community resources, street traders in the Pretoria CBD were found to promote collaborative, entrepreneurial ecosystems, where street traders learn from each other's lived experiences, contribute to community growth, and drive economic development.

Through networking, mentee street traders benefited from this by building their business abilities and made informed decisions through the insights offered based on their mentors' lived experiences. Therefore, the above examples illustrate how networking through mentorship and information sharing can assist street traders in drawing practical guidance

and valuable skills necessary to succeed in their entrepreneurial endeavours. By leveraging these informal networks and resources, street traders learned from each other, strengthened their business skills, and collectively improved their chances of success in street trading.

The above was evident in the following narratives of street traders in the Pretoria CBD. Some networks offered their members business capacity training. For example, Curtis*, remarked, “I learned which are the busy times of day, on which days, and even time of the year that customers buy certain things”. Through this analysis, Curtis* was able to diversify his products according to current trends and adapt to seasonal trends to maximize profit through the potential increase in sales. Similarly, Olu* observed, “as with many other traders, I added masks to my products because of COVID-19 as people were buying them”. Therefore, the benefit of network to traders enables them to determine their target market, the type of goods customers typically buy, and at which time of the year, as some are seasonal. This enables traders to calculate the likelihood of certain goods being sold and at what rate.

Other traders illustrated different ways in which they shared best practices and pertinent information necessary to improve decision-making for their business. Street traders often face space constraints that hinder their ability to store belongings, supplies, and other essentials. In response, some street traders utilized their networks to join forces. Nomvula* confirmed, “in my network, we band together to share storage units instead of each one paying the full amount”. The benefit for these members is the collective saving in using one unit for multiple purposes. In addition, by contributing to the shared storage, members achieve a cost-effective solution that meets their storage needs. In densely populated areas, such as a CBD, optimization of limited space provides a practical solution, especially for informal traders with limited options. By collectively sharing storage space, street traders also reduce their financial burden. This approach is particularly advantageous for street traders with limited disposable income, allowing them to access storage facilities they might not afford individually.

Another benefit of knowledge sharing that emerged from the Pretoria CBD was the use of social networks to inform street traders of raids. Due to the precarious nature of street trading, traders are often exposed to local government raids and evictions. In response, street traders in the Pretoria CBD have developed innovative strategies to circumvent these raids by leveraging informal social networks. Most participants highlighted how information was a currency on the streets. According to Mavis*, “as an unregistered trader, you need to know when the police will come otherwise, you risk losing your goods”. Based on this participant’s narrative, she benefitted from this type of social network by

obtaining critical information about government actions, ensuring her survival and livelihood in the face of constant uncertainty. Therefore, some street traders formed social networks to protect themselves from possible confiscation of their products. By banding together, they provided each other with crucial information in case of raids, which acted as an early warning system. This was best articulated by one participant, who noted

When one trader learns of a planned operation, word quickly spreads around the group of members like wildfire. The message is sent out through word of mouth mostly, but since some members may be a bit further, we use phone calls or buzz them three times then they will know that is the sign to pack up and go (Ntombi, interview, Pretoria, 21 October 2021).

Based on the above statement, street traders within a network mobilize collectively upon receiving information about an impending raid or eviction,. Important to note is that these are unregistered street traders who partake in these networks due to their exposure to fines or evictions due to lack of permits or applicable licenses to trade. They pool their resources to develop tactics that reduce their vulnerability, such as temporarily relocating with their goods. The collective action by street traders exemplifies the strength and benefits of social networks. In addition, their collective organizing shows the innovative strategies they use to continuously adapt to the challenges posed by the local authorities.

While others used the information to access information on raids, some traders used information as an opportunity to make informed decisions on their businesses. As mentioned in Chapter Two, street trading is characterized by competition, limited space, and a constant struggle for lucrative trading locations. In this context, street traders harnessed the power of informal social networks to navigate the complexities associated with street trading. Duko* revealed, "I used my network to negotiate a better trading post where there are more pedestrians, which means the possibility of more sales". He adds, "the camaraderie you have in your group, it helps to negotiate for favorable locations should they become available. Your fellow member may tell you first before others". Therefore, these types of networks serve as conduits of vital information. Street traders benefit from this information as it allows them to make better-informed decisions about relocating to maximize their chances of success in competitive markets. Street traders in the Pretoria CBD forge a path toward economic empowerment through networks.

These types of networks gave street traders greater economic mobility over non-members through information and skills sharing. In addition, these networks were essential for planning and improved decision-making purposes that directly affected street traders' business activities. Street trader's use of these networks highlights their resourcefulness

and adaptability in challenging urban environments. As street traders navigate the complex urban landscape, the strength of their informal networks highlights their ability to strategize, protect their livelihoods, and challenge the structural inequalities that often perpetuate their vulnerability.

Investment in building materials

In many poor communities worldwide, access to quality housing and infrastructure is a significant challenge (Schwartz, 2021; Scheba and Turok, 2020b; Andersen, 2019; Bank, 2018). In the Pretoria CBD, most street traders highlighted limited financial resources and access to credit, which often hinder individuals and families from acquiring adequate building materials to improve their living conditions. However, within these communities, a remarkable spirit of collaboration and resource-sharing exists. Through informal social networks, street traders leveraged mutual support and collective action to overcome financial constraints by collectively investing in building materials.

The data from the Pretoria CBD showed that members often developed informal networks built on trust and shared experiences to address common challenges. One participant remarked

Living in the township makes you feel forgotten by the government. We may be poor, but we are not helpless. This is the reason why we work together to improve our homes. Each year, we rotate who we will contribute money towards for their building project. Some members have experience in building and give us pointers on what to do and how to mix materials so you don't have to spend so much on materials as it's very expensive (Sandra, interview, Pretoria, 8 February 2021).

As per the above case, in their pursuit of better living conditions, street traders engaged in informal social networks where they shared knowledge and pooled resources to demonstrate determination and resilience. According to the data, traders in the Pretoria CBD initiated these networks with other street traders by identifying common needs for building materials. According to Bhekizenzo*, "I started the network with just my friend's seeking advice on how to build cheaply, but now my neighbours and fellow traders are part of it." In his network, they met once every three months to discuss progress on existing building projects, new opportunities for cheaper building materials (benefiting from lower prices), and their targeted building materials for the year to purchase in bulk during sales.

In addition to sharing information and resource pooling, the data showed that one of the key pathways in which street traders invested in building materials was through collective

saving. Mary* reveals that in her network, “each member contributes R50 as a once-off admin fee, and then R200 every month”. A few participants noted that some networks allow room for individual capabilities, but the norm is for a standardized contribution to the common fund. In highlighting the benefits of this type of network, Duko* added, “by pooling money together, we can access building materials that would have otherwise been unaffordable on an individual basis”. Based on his statement, traders engaged in these networks had more options available to them through collective action.

In delineating how the pooled money would be spent, according to most participants of these networks, meetings generally happened four times a year. Members engaged in collective decision-making during their meetings to determine how the pooled funds would be utilized. Based on the outcomes of one of their meetings, discussions were held to identify the building materials needed, project prioritization was discussed depending on the members’ needs in that year, and the allocation of funds needed to execute the purchases. During this process, each member was given a platform to voice their opinions through democratic exercise. After two rounds of calls for opinions, a decision was made and written down in the minutes for all attending members to sign as adoption of the decision. When asked what would happen if the majority of members disagreed with the decision, one of the members noted that the issue is carried over to the next meeting, where a final decision has to be made to avoid any further delays.

Once a decision is made, members with some background knowledge of construction or building materials are tasked with sourcing potential suppliers. To ensure that checks and balances were attained, at least three members were tasked with identifying potential suppliers. The goal was to negotiate with suppliers and seek discounts to obtain building materials at affordable prices while ensuring that their quality met the requirements of the projects. According to participants and based on the feedback analysis from the data, these networks leveraged the collective buying power to negotiate favorable prices and discounts with suppliers. By purchasing materials in larger quantities, they often secured better deals, reduced costs compared to individual purchases, and thus benefitted by maximizing the value of the pooled funds.

Another sub-theme that emerged from the data was that while street traders engaged in resource and cost-sharing within their networks, members also shared tools, equipment, or transportation for material delivery. Sphelele* highlighted

Tools are expensive, so we take stock of which member has which equipment we can borrow when building. There’s a person assigned to keep check which tools are available and where they are being used at any given time. Some of the equipment

belongs to all of us in the network, while some belong to individual members of the group, but they allow us to use them when available. If they get lost, unfortunately, the last user has to pay or all of us from the common fund.

According to other participants of these networks, they found other ways to save on cost by consolidating orders from the same supplier. In some communities, the network allowed non-members to bring their building material orders to benefit from a reduced delivery fee. However, the network charged them a transportation fee at generally half the price of the delivery fee had they undertaken an individual purchase. Therefore, the network also doubled up as an informal business of its own by charging non-members a reduced fee for consolidated deliveries, depending on the space available. Duko* confirmed, “with large orders, we sometimes qualify for free delivery, so the charge to non-members benefits our common fund”.

According to the data analysis from the Pretoria CBD, once the building materials are acquired, the implementation or usage process is generally twofold. The first option is when network members receive their building material and individually plan how, where and when to use it. As evident in the statement by Nomvula*, “some of the material we collect to build back home and take it to the rural areas bit by bit”. The second option, involving almost half of the participants of this type of network engaged in collective construction efforts and mutual support. The data revealed that this was the most popular option as it involved members volunteering their labour or skills to help each other with the building projects. By pooling resources, street traders accessed skills and labour that might have been difficult due to financial constraints. Another benefit that emerged from the data was the informal social network mechanisms established for monitoring the progress of building projects and ensuring accountability.

Transparency and trust are essential components of social networks. Consequently, as highlighted by several participants, regular meetings are an important aspect of trust-building. One participant revealed

We have a designated person responsible for overseeing the use of the common fund. Someone else prepares progress reports on where we are every month. This includes what material has been used, how much of it, which members are helping, and whose turn we are assisting to build. All this is written down for our books (Sphelele, interview, Pretoria, 10 August 2021).

In addition to keeping reports on funds, usage thereof, materials, and labour support, street traders in these networks asserted that they held once-off commemoration meetings

after completing a building project. They further asserted that this was possible only if the home improvements or a house was built in Pretoria. Generally, this involves a social gathering by the network members to congratulate their fellow members. Sphelele* further adds that

The first meeting after we have completed a fellow members project, we put on the agenda a time to reflect on the process, what worked and what didn't work, and lessons learned. This is very important for us to see what we can improve next time (Sphelele, interview, Pretoria, 10 August 2021).

Based on the above statements, street traders capitalize on the use of informal social networks and the community's collective strength to invest in building materials. Street traders in the Pretoria CBD employed various informal strategies to improve their circumstances. They organized themselves into informal networks to collectively purchase building or invest in building materials, generally in bulk. This allowed them to take advantage of wholesale prices, negotiate better discounts, and benefit from economies of scale. By purchasing larger quantities, they accessed materials at lower costs. In addition, they utilized innovative strategies of cost optimization and resource sharing. Some social networks paired their deliveries with those in need within the community at a discounted delivery fee rate of half the store charge. Based on the feedback from the participants, this allowed the network to access additional funds for their activities. Street traders employed network members to contribute their building skills and labour towards construction projects to reduce costs. By utilizing skill and expertise sharing, they significantly reduced the need for labour costs. In addition, they empowered other traders to learn construction skills, reducing the need for external contractors and lowering the cost associated with construction and labour. According to Sphelele*, this approach allows them to "allocate their limited funds primarily to purchasing building materials". Finally, their engagement enables them to refine areas of learning to enhance their networks' overall effectiveness, thus improving their living conditions.

By pooling their resources, sharing knowledge, and supporting one another, street traders demonstrate resilience and determination in their pursuit of better living conditions. By collectively investing in building materials, street traders can overcome financial constraints, improve the quality of their construction projects, and create better living or working conditions for themselves and their communities. It is crucial to note that the capacity of street traders to contribute money to invest in building materials and construction projects depends on the ability of the social network to mobilize themselves collectively. Thus, collaboration, trust, and a sense of shared responsibility were highlighted by participants as playing crucial roles in achieving their network goals.

Other traders in the Pretoria CBD enumerated other uses for joining networks to fix or extend their homes or engage in related building projects. Speaking about her home in the city, Sandra* boldly declared, “I bought tiles and curtains for my house”. As highlighted by most traders involved in this type of networking, most home improvement projects took place back home, typically in the rural areas for local traders. Similar occurrences were articulated by foreign traders who only took up temporary homes in South Africa, intending to return home. The above was evident in the statement by Olu* confirming, “I managed to put a fence back home with my lump sum. Before that, cows and goats would walk into the yard and destroy our crops”.

Based on the above illustrations, the need for street traders to network was accompanied by a desire to enable and improve housing conditions. As mentioned in Chapters Two and Three, street traders generally come from poor and disadvantaged communities, lacking basic services, among other ills. The above is also evident in literature, for example, in African countries (Lall *et al.*, 2017), in Arab nations (Chen *et al.*, 2017), in Asia (Rasul *et al.*, 2021), and across Europe (Coote and Percy, 2020). The issue of access, especially to better living infrastructure, plagues poor communities worldwide, especially within the informal economy. For this reason, it is clear why traders in the Pretoria CBD utilize innovative coping strategies through social networks to enable their access to improving living conditions. In the Pretoria CBD, the data illustrated many street traders implementing substantial building projects through social networks. Traders used their collective agency to sustain the process of capital and material value accumulation for their homes either in the city or back home in the rural areas for building projects, which they otherwise would not have access to due to the nature of their activities.

By engaging in social networks, analysis of the data from the Pretoria CBD highlighted that street traders benefited in various ways through informal investments in building materials and construction. The pooling of monetary and non-monetary resources enables street traders to improve their housing conditions. They can repair or renovate existing structures, build new homes, or expand their living spaces. Street traders can get building supplies at lower prices within social networks by combining their resources and buying power. As such, they can obtain more building materials at lower costs than buying individually, thanks to bulk purchases and negotiating discounts. This makes building projects more financially feasible and cost-effective.

According to over two-thirds of this type of network participants, their networks often create income-generating opportunities within the community. Local community members, not part of their network, pay for the use of delivery drop-offs for bulk purchases by paying the

network cheaper fees than they would have paid the wholesalers for individual purchases. This infusion of external income into the social network helps stimulate economic activity. It also aids in diverting more resources into investing in more building materials, boosting network activity and allowing members to pursue broader network goals collectively. In addition to the extra source of income for the network, some network members had prior construction or building skills, which they used for the collective benefit of their networks. Members benefited from the skills and labour of their fellow members and the added benefit of skills development through their networks related to building techniques and other related practical skills. Through this, street traders had more control over their lives and enhanced their skills.

As evident in some participant testimonials, informal investments in building materials foster a sense of ownership and pride for street traders. Since they voluntarily contribute their limited financial resources, labour, and skills, street traders have a direct stake in the success of these social networks. One participant highlighted the need for more space as the family grew, so she built a room in the family home's backyard. By investing in this type of social network and building a home, Ivy* improved her family's living conditions. Therefore, the overall benefits had a long-term impact not only on Ivy* individually but also on her family. Through social networks, street traders in the Pretoria CBD have woven a tapestry of unity and cooperation, despite limited resources and the challenges they face, for socio-economic benefits that may have been otherwise inaccessible to them.

Informal savings schemes such as pooled funds

As mentioned in Chapters Two and Four, street traders lack access to formal banking institutions for access to credit or loans. Concurrently, street traders operate in insecure environments, lacking socio-economic protection in the form of insurance. Based on the above, street traders often participated in various savings schemes to achieve specific goals and improve their financial security. The primary reason highlighted by almost all participants was that these types of networks help provide a safety net, especially during times of crisis. These savings schemes are meant to encourage regular savings as they provide an opportunity for individuals who lack access to formal banking institutions. In the Pretoria CBD, many street traders articulated value-added benefits for joining networks to mitigate various savings challenges. The most prevalent types of savings networks found in the Pretoria CBD were for education, bulk groceries, and emergency funds, which will be discussed in the following sections.

The majority of street traders in the Pretoria CBD come from poor backgrounds. As such, they come from areas where formal education financing options are limited. To ensure

that their children have access to better educational opportunities, over two-thirds of participants confirmed that they were part of this type of network designed to collectively save money to prioritize higher education or vocational training. According to Sandra*, “we make contributions every other month depending on each member’s pocket”. She adds, “sometimes we have to make an early withdrawal for school fees or uniform, but then you pay a penalty”. Similarly, another participant noted

I completed my High School education with good marks, but my parents could not afford to put me through university with their pension money. It was such a sad moment for me and till today it haunts me. That’s when I vowed that whether my children do well or badly at school, I would prepare in time for them to have the funds to at least go to university or a technical college. I don’t want another child in my family line to say they could not do higher education because of money (Mavis, interview, Pretoria, 21 October 2021).

Based on the above statement, these networks benefit their members to plan and save for their children’s access to quality education. They also accommodate the diverse needs of their members by allowing partial withdrawals. By saving in advance, street traders in these types of networks reduce the barriers that may otherwise prevent their children from accessing higher education opportunities. In addition, street traders empower themselves and their families to break the cycle of poverty by prioritizing investing in education. These education savings networks offer street traders families a pathway to invest in their children’s education, empowering the next generation with better opportunities for socio-economic mobility.

Another benefit, as noted by Ntombi*, who asserts, “with my first child, I was paying high interest rates with loan sharks. I learned then to rather save years early in a network”. According to Ntombi’s* experience, joining a network reduced her dependence on borrowing from informal micro-lenders who charge exorbitant interest. Street traders avoid falling into debt traps and financial hardship by reducing reliance on borrowing money. Furthermore, street traders could engage in long-term financial planning through education savings schemes, setting educational goals for their children’s future and taking steps to achieve them. Therefore, their main benefit is their vital role in promoting educational access and improving socio-economic conditions.

Traders in the Pretoria CBD also participated in social networks to mitigate food insecurity. These types of networks represented the community-based informal coping strategies comprising self-selected group members (or through referral) that meet every month and share an equal amount of savings towards a common fund. The common fund was used

to buy bulk purchases of essential food items at the end of the year. In South Africa, these networks are generally referred to as stokvels. They represent a crucial tactic practiced by poor communities as a critical poverty-alleviation strategy and an avenue to ensure food security.

Of these networks, nearly half of the participants described utilizing at least one. Interestingly, all the participants engaged in these networks in the Pretoria CBD were women. When asked why there was a significant prevalence of women in these networks, Sandra* revealed, “it’s us women who know what’s needed at home when speaking of food”. The above narrative shows that traders perceived women as contributing more to the general well-being of their households, particularly food security. According to Ivy*, “when we buy together in bulk, we get discounts, especially during the festive season”. Therefore, traders engaged in these networks leverage collective buying to purchase more basket items than would have been possible as individual purchases. In addition, one participant engaged in these networks emphasized

There’s a lot of pressure during Christmas to prepare huge meals for many family members. It relieves the pressure to know you have groceries coming that will take you to at around February, depending on how many members are in your family (Thuli, interview, Pretoria, 16 July 2021).

Similar sentiments were shared by other participants who expressed the added value of saving throughout the year for December groceries. Khulu* confirmed, “I’ve benefited a lot, I don’t have the headache of spending so much money on groceries in December but can spend it on other things”. Based on the above perceptions, these networks offer traders flexibility to stretch their income to meet specific needs and allow members to adapt to their circumstances.

Sandra* further elucidated that it depends on the type of grocery basket needed at the end of the year, stating, “if you’re buying meat, you pay about R500 a month, but if no meat, then you pay about R300 a month”. A list is drawn up at the beginning of each year by the members who agree on which items each member will receive at the end of the year. Generally, the list includes the following benefits; 12.5 kg maize meal, 12.5 kg flour, 10 kg rice, 10 kg sugar, 5 l cooking oil, 2 kg polony, 1 kg cheese, 5 kg red speckled beans, 500g tea, 1.5 kg coffee, 1 kg powder milk, 410g tinned fish and beans (two each), 1kg peanut butter, 900g jam, 1 l custard, 80g jelly (two flavours), a box of 60 eggs, 5kg washing powder, 5 l dishwashing liquid, 5 l Handy Andy, and 1 kg Bakers Assorted biscuits. For those who can afford to include meat, the benefits include 3 kg beef, 3 kg chicken, 3 kg mince, 3 kg pork, and 750g Russians or Vienna’s.

The data also illuminated that the success of these relations has linked informal networks with formal businesses that now recognize and offer these groups added discounts for purchasing at their stores. They also offer other incentives such as special opening hours and transport of goods purchased by the networks (within a 100 km radius). Consequently, most formal companies compete to get sales from these informal groups, some even offering a 'surprise gift' to lure them into their stores. Therefore, these types of networks mutually benefit actors in both formal and informal economies. Formal businesses benefit from informal social networks in several ways. For instance, through increased sales volume, networks procure large quantities of items simultaneously. Members of these networks alluded to loyalty to specific wholesalers to target discounts. Wholesale enterprises get a steady stream of customers, resulting in assured sales. In addition, members of these networks generally pay with cash, lacking access to bank cards, which is advantageous for wholesale enterprises since it eliminates concerns about credit and collection issues. Therefore, these relations, in turn, shape a kind of informal society shaped by the informal economy, which is partially integrated into the formal economy and partially creates a parallel social structure with its own internal social hierarchies.

Another sub-theme from the data analysis revealed that street traders also used informal social networks to pool money together for emergency savings purposes. In these networks, members agree to regularly contribute a fixed sum of money into a common fund, which is then distributed each month among the participants following a predetermined timetable. The entire pooled sum is distributed to each member in turn on a rotating basis. When it is their turn, a member can utilize the money for unexpected expenses or any other financial need. Therefore, the cycle repeats until each member has received the whole sum. Participants of these networks asserted they targeted six or twelve members as it was easier to manage such a grouping each year. According to one participant, the benefit of such a network was

It made it possible for me to obtain a lump sum of money that I can use instead of having to take out an expensive loan with interest. I'm growing a small business back home so I can eventually go back and have a business. Every year when I get my lump sum, I buy between 4 or 6 goats which I grow more of and then sell (Ntombi, interview, Pretoria, 21 June 2021).

According to this participant, they benefitted from this network as it allowed her to start a small business investing in livestock farming to improve her economic conditions.

Over half of the participants engaged in these networks asserted that they mostly use the funds for emergencies, such as unexpected life events (medical or funeral costs). In these types of networks, members created an emergency fund specifically designated for emergencies. Members made contributions that were either fixed or determined by their financial capacity. According to a participant in this type of network

None of us have a bank account as we live from hand to mouth. Our network consists of a small number of ladies. We put money together to rent out a small locker in a central location. Each of us has access to the locker and every month we write down who has contributed and what amount. If there is an emergency, that member notifies us, and can withdraw their share. If it is very serious, they can withdraw all of it but at an interest, and the money must be returned in full within two months.

In all these examples, the key feature is the solidarity and collective responsibility among the members. Furthermore, since the network members manage the funds, there is flexibility and easy access. Therefore, these networks adapt to their members' specific needs and preferences. In addition, unlike formal banking channels, there is no need for complex paperwork or formal documentation, making it convenient for individuals with limited literacy or identification documents.

Based on the above accounts, the value of these social networks offers members accessibility to alternative methods of saving that would likely not have been there through formal channels. The analysis of the data highlighted that the value of savings schemes was to provide street traders who use these networks with the capacity to build financial resilience and achieve their goals. Therefore, informal savings schemes benefitted street traders to achieve specific group and individual goals through social networks. The data analysis revealed they were a powerful tool in promoting financial inclusion and empowering street traders to improve their socio-economic conditions. However, it is essential to note that informal savings schemes also have risks. Some common ones include lack of formal regulation, potential mismanagement of network funds, and limited protection against defaulting members.

Overall, informal savings scheme networks offer several benefits to street traders. They provide street traders with a safety net as members gain access to financial security, especially during times of need. This lessens the chance of being further entrenched in poverty by lowering the impact of unforeseen costs, shocks, or emergencies. Informal savings schemes offer more flexible terms and conditions than formal financial institutions. In addition, these types of networks can be tailored to suit the specific needs of their

members, allowing for customized repayment plans or early withdrawals. As members are familiar with each other and their circumstances, networks are more flexible for their members to align with individual circumstances. The informal nature of these networks means members have a say in the decision-making process of the network's objectives or goals. This fosters a sense of autonomy and agency, promoting street traders' capacity to influence their financial future. Additionally, these networks reduce street traders' vulnerability and reliance on exploitative lenders as they offer an alternative to such.

Dealing with financial shocks and access to credit

Due to the inherent nature of their work, street traders often experience irregular or unstable income streams. During shocks that disrupt their livelihoods, access to informal credit bridges the gap and helps them cope with income fluctuations. The data revealed that many street traders perceived that their membership in social networks can provide valuable benefits in providing a lifeline to cover basic needs during shocks. These could be harnessed to assist traders in coping with shocks by supporting one another in difficult financial periods. To articulate the nature and practices of sociality within the Pretoria CBD, one participant gave a vignette of the often disparate life to which street traders inhabit and in which their activities are orientated. Due to the inaccessibility to financial institutions, street traders lack access to formal credit opportunities to recover from unexpected expenses. Therefore, they utilized informal associations to satisfy economic needs, especially during financial shocks.

Thuli* is a middle-aged woman who has sold takeaway food in the city since early 2016. She was well-positioned in proximity to commuters and taxis, and her business made as much as R1 800 per week, which she used to put her three children to school (one doing nursing at tertiary level and two in High School). In 2019, she separated from her husband and began the process of obtaining a divorce, which resulted in increased expenses. The expected financial support from her ex-husband was not forthcoming, she explained. Subsequently, she lost her home in the township and had to procure a shack while finding alternative ways to supplement her income and save money to build a new house for her and her children. In 2020, after hearing from her network about an opportunity, she signed up to sell Tupperware in addition to her takeaway store. Thuli* also described how her network extended itself to give her advice during her divorce and advance her some money in anticipation of a reliable repayment as a trusted member. She further articulated

Daily survival dominates our activities and motivation to sell on the streets. However, we have found that through our associations, we can plan for longer-term goals beyond immediate survival (Thuli, interview, Pretoria, 15 May 2021).

Based on the above participant account, financial shocks can be stressful and cause anxiety, especially if there is insufficient money to pay for necessities. Access to informal credit can reduce some pressure, allowing people to concentrate on other crucial facets of their lives. Therefore, access to credit within informal social networks benefits street traders in coping with income fluctuations and maintaining some sense of recovery and stability. In a similar vein, another participant added

After supporting the funeral costs for my late brother, I had no money left for my small business. Although my network doesn't generally allow members to withdraw money till the end of the year, we make allowances for extreme circumstances, such as the death of a loved one. Therefore, I was able to withdraw some money from my network to restock for my business (Thuli, interview, Pretoria, 26 May 2021).

According to the above narrative, access to informal credit allowed Thuli* to sustain her income-generating business after an emergency. Therefore, her network played a crucial role in providing the necessary funds to recover, minimizing disruptions to her business.

For poor communities, access to financial services can be a significant barrier. For example, street traders with low, insecure, and less disposable income are vulnerable to financial crises such as inflation. The vulnerability can erode traders purchasing power with fewer resources to protect themselves from rising prices. There are options available to poor communities in the form of informal lending options (generally known as loan sharks). However, traders in the Pretoria CBD asserted they avoid these options as they perceive them as predatory due to very high interest rates, which lead to a cycle of unmanageable debt. Street traders struggle to meet their basic needs without access to formal channels to acquire credit. Therefore, street traders have found value-added benefits in creating their own networks to adapt to financial crises. In highlighting the impromptu nature of emergencies, one participant added,

One random day, my daughter fell and broke two of her front teeth. I was beside myself as I did not have the funds to take her for treatment. I reached out to my network for credit, and they understood it was an unplanned emergency. It helped that I am part of this group because I would have had to go to a mashonisa [loan shark] (Fumani, interview, Pretoria, 13 March 2021).

Health emergencies can place a significant burden on poor communities. Access to a social network for informal credit, as described by Fumani* above, was a benefit to him as

it ensured that his daughter could receive the healthcare needed. Therefore, access to this type of network allows street traders to address emergencies, reducing the risk of resorting to negative coping mechanisms with loan sharks.

In Lihle's* case, her network pools financial resources to allow its members to access credit of up to R350 a month per person. An accumulative interest of ten percent is then charged to the member who borrows. If they do not repay the credit and subsequent interest at the end of the following month, they get a fine of R100 regardless of the amount borrowed. Other street traders who had access to these types of networks highlighted the following reasons for partaking in credit networks. Mavis confirmed, "store discounts are offered randomly, so I sometimes take credit from my group to buy stock while it's on sale and cheaper". Based on this statement, street traders engaged in this type of networking benefit from access to credit as they can make decisions based on their own entrepreneurial needs and priorities. Instead of being dependent on external assistance, they can tap into their own funding streams. Another important point raised by Fumani* on the benefit of networking asserts, "my network allows me to exercise greater control over my life". Therefore, beyond being a means for street traders to respond actively to financial shocks, social networks enable traders to make strategic choices, especially regarding their businesses.

Therefore, street traders benefited from social networks as they used them as coping strategies to access credit, which assisted them in maintaining socio-economic wellness, business development, and overall quality of life. Networks in the Pretoria CBD provided street traders with the capacity to navigate shocks, which is consistent with the arguments made by other scholars (Davies *et al.*, 2019; Lin *et al.*, 2019; Harris-White, 2017) that networks promote income generation and livelihood creation. The data analysis revealed that social networks facilitated resilience-building efforts for street traders. Through skills building, investments in building materials and housing construction, and accessing informal credit, street traders have the means to overcome immediate challenges, protect their livelihoods, and invest in their future.

5.3 Social Benefits of Networking

The section describes the numerous strategies and new forms of relations developed and used by street traders to meet their social needs and cope with personal and business challenges. In the context of the Pretoria CBD, the sociality of street traders was a crucial element of benefitting from social networks as it eased and softened the pressures of life. Echoing Granovetter's (1983) argument about the strength of weak ties, the evidence from the Pretoria CBD highlights networks as integral to accessing various resources. In an

environment marred by deprivations, ambiguity, and inequality, where street traders face multiple exclusions, traders took refuge in social networks. First, the section discusses referrals as a benefit of networking. Following this and split into two parts are different types of moral support gained through networking. Lastly, linkages between rural and urban areas are discussed in the context of foreign traders and how they benefit from engaging in social networks.

Referrals as a cost-effective way of marketing and advertising

Within a developing country context where economic disparities and social inequalities often constrain opportunities, the impact of informal social networks cannot be understated, especially in underprivileged communities. These networks, built on trust and mutual assistance, are pivotal role in uplifting poor communities. One effective strategy to bridge the gap between street traders and the benefits of informal social networks is through referrals. Based on the data analysis in the Pretoria CBD, referrals served as conduits that linked street traders to a broader range of opportunities, resources, and support networks. According to one participant, access to these networks was vital as

When you're new to the streets, you often struggle to gain full access to these groups because of barriers such as lack of awareness, limited connections, or being excluded because you are foreign (Sandra, interview, Pretoria, 26 May 2021).

Sandra* further explained, "a referral is so important to benefit from word-of-mouth marketing". Therefore, referrals serve as a gateway to accessing social networks that give street traders a competitive advantage in their business. Street traders benefit from this type of networking as referrals can provide more visibility in their local markets. According to one participant, they do this through

Positive referrals from fellow street traders can create a buzz with possible customers. This gives your products an edge as you become reliable for delivering value and good products, which set's you apart from other sellers. Therefore, you attract more customers if they trust your products and have been recommended by other traders (Ivy, interview, Pretoria, 18 July 2021).

Almost half of street traders in the Pretoria CBD confirmed they were referred to social networks by either family, friends, or acquaintances from the streets. They engaged in this type of networking to expand their business reach and build visibility around their product. When asked why this was important, the main reason given by most of these traders was

that it was marketing to advertise their products and establish a presence against other competitors.

Due to street trading generally being illegal, participants have strong incentives to find alternative ways to sustain their business activities. By engaging in social networks, street traders also gain a competitive advantage through insider information. Informal social networks are repositories of local knowledge and experience. Through exchanging information, street traders in the Pretoria CBD learned from each other's experiences. This was evident in one participant's account stating

I spoke a lot to my fellow street trader, my neighbour, as we sold goods right next to each other. As we spent most of our days together, we spoke about our lives and what was happening. I had told him I wanted to learn how to make candles to sell back home in the rural areas as we often walk very far to the nearest shop. He introduced me to a group of women who made hair products, cosmetics, and some candles. We joined our business ideas and now we sell candles in my home, but also in their hometowns. The business is slowly growing (Bhekizenzo, interview, Pretoria, 04 March 2021).

Based on the above statement, Bhekizenzo perceived his network as a means to leverage an existing network to generate new business.

Beyond the benefit of income generation, these informal social networks also brought value to street traders in navigating their illegality. The data illuminated three types of referrals prevalent in the Pretoria CBD. The first type deals with access to the city and trading locations. To access these networks, street traders needed someone close to or within the network to provide an implicit endorsement as surety that the potential member is credible. For example, Nomvula* revealed, "I needed information when I arrived in Pretoria on whom to speak to for a trading spot". Indeed, some participants arrived in the city after being linked up with fellow traders who scouted possible opportunities for them. This may be a relative, friend, acquaintance, or a stranger, as evident in the below participant narrative

A neighbour in the rural areas was working in the city. I had been asking for over a year if she could assist me in finding a trading spot. Eventually, she asked me to come up to the city to introduce me to a member of one of her societies. A space was going to be available as the previous owner was leaving and she wanted to refer me to my possible new stall neighbour as a trusted colleague. Luckily, we got

along at the first meeting, and I have been working here ever since. That is how I started selling here (Ntombi, interview, Pretoria, 1 April 2021).

The above quote illustrates the importance of referrals into networks, as some participants used them as entry points into the city to start their businesses. Therefore, these referral networks benefitted street traders, providing a foundation for ongoing business operations. Due to the informal nature of street trading, public spaces or trading locations are not marketed or advertised. Access to social networks for entry into informal public space within the city, primarily through a trusted source who has vouched for you, is crucial for traders. Therefore, due to the precarious nature of street trading, referrals have a determinant role in entry into networks.

Product referrals were the second type of referral network identified in the Pretoria CBD. As mentioned above, street traders generally do not spend money on traditional marketing or advertising. By engaging in product referral networks, street traders used the power of word-of-mouth to build credibility with customers and increase sales potential. According to Marselle*, “in our network, we refer customers to each other as we don’t always sell the same things, which helps to build a positive reputation with customers”. Similarly, another participant noted

People tend to trust the opinions and recommendations of people they know or trust. You must build those relationships with people because tomorrow they will send business your way. The importance of whom you talk to, and how you build relationships could be the difference between having food on the table or none (Bhekizenzo, interview, Pretoria, 4 March 2021).

Some participants highlighted using these networks to build customer loyalty through customer feedback. Nomvula* observed, “I ask loyal customers what they like or don’t like so I can improve satisfaction for my products by making small changes”. Based on her statement, she was cognizant of the link between customer satisfaction, increased potential customers, and, thereby more profit. She added that “satisfied customers refer other customers” to her business, which increased sales. Customers are the bedrock of street traders, so satisfying their changing needs is important to traders’ income-generating activities. Keeping pace with customers’ ever-changing preferences requires a state of constant learning and adaptation. Therefore, product referral networks in the Pretoria CBD offered street traders several benefits for informal traders’ businesses and their customers. They were a powerful tool for business growth while providing customers with customized products.

The third type of referral networks identified in the Pretoria CBD were those where traders received referrals into other types of networks. A participant using these types of networks noted that social connections were of great importance for reasons of referral. As expressed in Chapter Four, one of the factors that enhances the efficacy of a network is trust. Trust was identified as the primary factor in ensuring the success of a network. Through trust, members gain benefits from referrals from one network to another. In this vein, one participant noted

For a new member to join, they must be referred by one of the existing members. Their names and brief background are brought up in our monthly meetings, and we vote them in or out. Once you join, you can't miss more than three consecutive meetings, or you must pay a fine (Lihle, interview, Pretoria, 20 February 2021).

Based on the above sentiments, referrals benefitted street traders by allowing them greater reach to expand to other networks. Thus, the opportunity to participate in various networks allowed street traders to benefit from multiple avenues depending on their needs and interests. Referrals were deemed a valuable tool in street traders' arsenal of innovative strategies for building relationships, increasing credibility, and promoting their business.

Referrals in the Pretoria CBD were beneficial to street traders as they were a cost-effective strategy to gain access to local markets, for traders to market their products, and increase their customer base. For street traders without the means for formal marketing or advertising, informal referrals can bring in a steady influx of new customers. When existing customers and fellow traders refer their contacts, the entrepreneur's client base increases when current customers suggest their contacts. This continuous stream of recommendations ensures the sustainability and expansion of potential customers.

Harnessing social networks for moral support to cope with life challenges

Informal social networks emerge as a critical resource in the complex web of street trading, especially for traders grappling with multifaceted daily life challenges. Due to the frequent lack of resources, services, and opportunities faced by street traders, social networks are indispensable. This section, therefore, delves into the intricate ways street traders in the Pretoria CBD utilize social networks to support coping and resilience in the face of adversities. The section contributes to a better understanding of how informal social networks impact the multiple dimensions of street trading and trader's lives through sociality.

Within the multiple and multifaceted challenges facing street trading, traders also face what Doreen* refers to as “emotional burdens that can be isolating when selling on the streets”. As a result, some street traders look to social networks to provide a space where members can share their struggles, find empathy, and receive emotional sustenance. Similarly, Nomvula* shared, “the collective empathy helps to lessen feelings of isolation”. All participants deemed moral support as an essential part of why they networked. Perceptions derived from the analysis were that street trading can often be emotionally and psychologically draining for street traders as they cope with life challenges. Therefore, moral support provides a sense of understanding and offers street traders a safe space to express their feelings and share their burdens.

Along with a lack of access to financial institutions, most street traders do not have easy access to psychosocial support. Considering traders spend most of their time in the streets, leaving their homes very early and returning very late at night, even if they could access these services, time would be restricted. Therefore, street traders in the Pretoria CBD harnessed the utility of their networks to share best practices, lessons learned, and offer each other psychosocial support to navigate life. Of these types of networks in the Pretoria CBD, most of them comprised of women. While some networks include mixed-gender groups, others have deliberately chosen only to have female members. Many women in these networks expressed being able to let down their guard among themselves as one of the motivating reasons for preferring to have same gender networks. Lihle* confirmed, “we talk about our problems and how we can assist each other, that’s why we want only women”. Through these networks, participants were able to improve some of the decision-making processes in their households, as evident in the following statements

I learnt a valuable lesson from a fellow member when we discussed how to handle demanding family members who always ask for money. Now, I just use the network as an excuse to tell my relatives that I don’t have money (Sandra, interview, Pretoria, 20 February 2021).

Similarly,

I can save because I feel obligated to pay, which if I didn’t do, that money would just disappear at home. I’ve also learned and benefitted a lot from the ladies because we exchange advice on many things, such as good cleaning products, sharing recipes or freezing some of the food so you don’t have to cook every day. My life has improved a lot as I’m learning while selling on the streets (Lihle, interview, Pretoria, 13 March 2021).

Evident in the above is that participants used networks as socio-economic security but also leveraged the time spent together to find new approaches to solve social household problems. Therefore, the type of networking used by the above participants allowed them to benefit through guidance and advice from their trusted networks. This type of network offered practical solutions and provided insights into navigating specific challenges. By engaging in these networks, street traders benefitted from the collective wisdom and knowledge of others who have faced similar circumstances, helping them find effective strategies for developing successful coping mechanisms.

Life's hardships can be overwhelming, especially for vulnerable communities such as street traders. According to Nomvula*, "the support I get from my network gives me a sense of optimism and motivation that things will improve as I am not alone". This shows that social networks with psychosocial support built resilience and helped street traders cope with adversity. The data highlighted that the moral support gained through networks builds on the values implicit in individuals, such as listening to and comforting each other. All these resources were important for social connectedness and sharing resources. The development of social connectedness was a critical benefit highlighted by most traders as it provided a space to engage each other in various conversations and share experiences. This social life allowed traders to learn from each other's experiences and initiate other innovative ideas to cope with life. For example, one participant revealed

We spend a lot of time on the streets, so it's inevitable we would share best practices. Almost all of us have had encounters with local authorities. Some members who may also be new to the city may not know how to navigate the space. If they join our network, we first tell them not to keep all their stock on them where they are selling. That is a recipe for disaster if you don't have a license. In addition, many traders feel alone when they come into the city, not speaking the local language. Since we spend long hours with each other, we also teach each other the two main languages spoken in Pretoria: Tswana and Zulu. Knowing any one of these two languages can greatly improve interactions with customers. In return, a fellow trader may teach you a skill, such as how to do a budget. This is how we survive in the streets by networking (Nono, interview, Pretoria, 23 August 2021).

Another sub-theme to moral support was indicated in the below statement

You may need support because you are seriously ill, but maybe your family is far. We call each other if we see a member has not come to sell for a few days. When you call, you may find out that a member is in hospital very sick (Nomvula, interview, Pretoria, 15 November 2021)

The above description from the Pretoria CBD was evident in the interview with one participant who recalled a time when she was very ill. The participant stated

I was in the hospital for over a week. Usually, I would have a family member come up to the city from the rural areas to mind my stall, but there was no time as everything happened so suddenly. My network is amazing because we care about each other and don't just take money without caring what the other person is going through. So, after a few days of absence, one of the members called to ask if everything was alright. After explaining I was in hospital, she arranged to go to my house to pick up my stock and for three weeks while I couldn't go back to the streets, the members rotated turns selling my beads and perfume. I could trust them because we weren't selling the same items, and you never know when this might happen to them as well. Even if they didn't make any sales, at least my products were out there. I also know from first-hand experience that some days are good, and some days are bad (Sandra, interview, Pretoria, 26 May 2021).

According to Sandra*, members were given the prices of the items and the minimum amount that it could be sold should a negotiation occur. Based on the above, some networks in the Pretoria CBD took moral support to another level, supporting each other during emergencies to promote each other's entrepreneurship. This was especially important for business continuity as most traders could not afford to lose days or weeks of business while incapacitated or lacking the means to make alternative arrangements. These networks serve as beneficial avenues for street traders to sustain their businesses.

Like the above support mechanisms, most traders engaged in the same networks highlighted the various basic support they offer each other daily. Due to the nature of street trading, almost all the participants highlighted a lack of access to bathrooms or water, even though they spent long hours, up to twelve hours a day, on the streets. According to participants, this necessitates networking and understanding with neighbours or other fellow traders. Thus, mutuality and reciprocity were important support mechanisms traders used to navigate the lack of access to basic services, as illustrated by Nono*, who affirmed "your behavior in the streets, and who is willing to help who is important for survival". For example, traders watched each other's stalls while the owner ran an errand or if they needed the bathroom, as there were no ablution facilities and traders relied on malls or business offices to relieve themselves. However, these are generally far from traders' stalls and often come at a fee. An issue consistently highlighted in the literature (Skinner and Watson, 2021; Ligomeka, 2019; Kazembe *et al.*, 2019; Siebert and Mbise, 2018) in South Africa and elsewhere on street trading deficits of infrastructure.

The above instances show how street traders empower each other to overcome daily challenges. They also reveal that different kinds of support are at play in the Pretoria CBD, which is important in strengthening and enhancing social support. Therefore, the social life of street trading reinforces coping strategies through relationships with others and collective action or agency. What is particularly significant about the above narratives is that they also highlight how interdependent traders are on each other. Furthermore, this interdependence between street traders forms the basis for social networks. The sustenance of effective networks thus depends on the behaviors of individuals and group engagements within the flows that make up the network structure. Therefore, according to the networks found in the Pretoria CBD, social networks moderate the effects and impacts of anxieties and uncertainties associated with the nature of street trading. In addition, participants used these networks as emotional and social safety support nets when they needed them to address challenging household or personal issues.

Seeking solace in networks: how street traders find support during bereavement

Bereavement is a universal experience that cuts across boundaries and affects people from all backgrounds, including socio-economic classes and cultural groups. For poor communities, the experience of bereavement is compounded by the challenges of poverty and lack of resources available to them. In such contexts, the value of social networks is even more apparent as street traders in the Pretoria CBD join together to offer necessary support during times of loss. For street traders, the absence of financial security and social services can exacerbate the impact of grief. Therefore, informal burial society networks act as a conduit for informal savings mobilization for members to benefit during times of hardship, such as bereavement. In addition to the informal savings through these networks, Sandra* revealed that they also come together to “listen to the grieving, offer encouragement, and coordinate burial planning”.

The data revealed that these networks benefited street traders as they could not access formal funeral policies. Formal institutions were also characterized by lengthy procedures and stringent formalities, which informal burial societies minimize. Therefore, the efficacy of these networks lies in members having quick and easy access to support. Because members are part of a network, this process encourages reciprocity as members are obliged to participate in collective action. Ivy* articulates this, “you don’t know what tomorrow brings and may benefit from having support later”. Most traders in the Pretoria CBD participated in at least one burial society network. Due to the demographic mix of street traders in the Pretoria CBD coming from different backgrounds, they also vary in terms of customs between cultures. According to one participant, who is a Zulu trader,

We believe in burying our loved ones back home at our place of birth with our ancestors in a coffin, inside a grave. This thing of cremation is for young people who do not fully understand our rituals and connections with our ancestors. So, we must save and always be ready to send our loved ones off with dignity and our own burial (Doreen, interview, Pretoria, 20 March 2021).

Based on the above participant's statement, these networks also offered street traders the means to preserve their cultural practices and traditions. By participating in these social networks, street traders ensured that their specific traditional funeral customs were upheld, fostering a sense of identity and pride.

The burial societies that street traders engaged in are a mix of largely unregulated insurance schemes that pride themselves in arranging 'dignified' funeral services, in line with what most traders articulated as the main principle they look for when sourcing companies. Traders opted to diversify the risk while increasing the cumulative payout by engaging in two or three burial societies. In the Pretoria CBD, most local traders use Royal Funerals South Africa (or 'Royal' as the street traders commonly use), a burial society providing services across the country. For example, according to Bhekizenzo*, "I pay R280 per month for 11 members with Royal". Additionally, he has another burial society with Ledwaba Funeral Parlour, which he uses to ensure his family will receive a cash payout of R10 000 to buy a cow to be slaughtered at his funeral. This is one of the cultural rituals expected of being the oldest male in the family.

Similarly, another participant articulated

You have to put money aside as funerals are costly. There are no formal invitations as everyone is welcome and you must cater for whoever comes, be it family, neighbours, friends, the entire clan, or even strangers (Ivy, interview, Pretoria, 15 May 2021).

Based on the above reality, most local female traders opted for a burial society with food, particularly vegetables and meat, as articulated in the following option plan. For R315 per month, at the high-end scale, Thuli* receives the following major benefits: a casket coffin worth R20 000, a single hearse, two buses for the mourners and food groceries, including meat and vegetables. She adds that the groceries are generally enough to feed between 50 and 70 people. They include 10 kg of rice, 12,5 kg of sugar, 5 litres of oil, 500 grams of tea, 25 kg of maize meal, 10 kg of Mabele for brewing traditional sorghum beer, 1 kg of powdered milk, and 12,5 kg of flour. She further revealed that the meat includes six quantities of 2 kg chicken and five quantities of 10 kg beef for stew. These are

supplemented by one bag each of onions, carrots, cabbage, beetroot, potatoes, and tomatoes as vegetables. The above grocery basket generally caters to at least three vegetables, two starches, and two different types of meat, which participants perceived as acceptable and adequate for catering purposes. For the above option plan, 13 family members are included in the burial society covering a funeral anywhere in the country.

The bereaved use burials to bring closure for the death of a loved one. According to Thuli*, “I’ve made all the necessary plans for funerals in my immediate family so as not to burden my children and family”. She further reveals that the socio-cultural expectations mean that plans for both their families and themselves to lessen the financial devastation should be made in advance. For this reason, she joined a network to safeguard the financial burden on her family for early preparations and assurance that the financial aspect of the funeral will be in order when the time comes. Thuli* further adds, “my adult children are 27 and 22, and none of them could afford to bury me as they’re unemployed”. Thuli* asserts that once every quarter, they have a mass meeting, usually at a community hall or school hall, that usually lasts about five hours to discuss burial plan options, possible changes and extra levies, and plan options. In these meetings, Thuli* further reveals that she uses the meetings to meet up with fellow network members to take note of which members are required to assist with cooking should a death occur among their members. The above highlights the community-driven networks street traders are engaged in to lessen the pain to the bereaved associated with burying a loved one.

Social networks in the form of burial societies assist in significant elements of social and cultural life in South Africa. These types of networks also represented notions of Ubuntu, which gives rise to collective action. The term ‘Ubuntu’ describes a traditional African worldview that suggests that humanity is not embedded in an individual but through collective social norms and practices. Mugumbate and Chereni (2020; vi) define Ubuntu as

Ubuntu refers to a collection of values and practices that black people of Africa or of African origin view as making people authentic human beings. While the nuances of these values and practices vary across different ethnic groups, they all point to one thing – an authentic individual human being is part of a larger and more significant relational, communal, societal, environmental, and spiritual world.

Based on the above quote, and as evident in the Pretoria CBD, Ubuntu encourages cohesive bonds. It is in the network socialization in which a person identifies with another and, concomitantly through relationships with members, has a vested interest in its prosperity.

According to most street traders, the concept of Ubuntu is most evident when members support each other during the death of a loved one. This was the case for one participant, who explained

When one of our members has a death in the family, we call each other to see who can assist with cooking the day before for people attending the funeral. At least two members should go Friday evening or early morning on Saturday to help with cooking. Otherwise, we send two big pots, two small pots, fifty chairs and a small tent (enough for ten people) that our society [social network] provides (Nono, interview, Pretoria, 26 June 2021).

The data emphasized what drives street traders to build socially cohesive relationships, underpinned by principles of trust, fairness, and compassion as innovative strategies to promote profit and satisfy social support needs. Through long-term relations of integrity and norms of caring and assisting each other during times of crisis, traders articulated that they could cope with life's challenges. This was explicitly illustrated below as one participant confirmed

We fairly rotate the schedule of responsibilities among all the members so no one person is excluded from support. When you take the time to show up for each other, you build a good reputation with members as they see you supporting them. In this way, you also have confidence and trust that if you ever go through a crisis, your members will show up and treat you well. Since we can't always be there, we confirm who is next in line during our monthly meetings. If they cannot make it, the member sends someone else to represent them. This could be a daughter, a son, or a friend. As long as the member is represented, we usually provide support for cooking, cleaning, or maybe supporting the family in grocery shopping. We survive life's hardships by showing up for each other during difficult times. This is not every month, but when the need arises. We also designate a backup person on the off chance that the two members are unable to make it. All in all, anyone in the group can attend and assist, but for the sake of fairness, we make a schedule. (Ivy, interview, Pretoria, 08 August 2021).

Based on the cases mentioned above, it is evident that social networks provided street traders with significant benefits, including access to informal financial assistance through burial societies. These informal burial societies reduced the financial vulnerability of bereaved family members. By contributing regularly to the society, street traders could ensure that they had access to financial support during bereavement to cover funeral

expenses. The networks also served as crucial moral support through solidarity and community cohesion. This solidarity extended beyond financial assistance, as members offered their time, labour, and emotional support to help with funeral preparations, mourning rituals, and post-funeral gatherings. These findings further supported the view that street traders engage in social networks and employ personal values and network norms as a value-laden strategy to cope with the loss of life.

Transnational bonds through social networks

Around the world, migration has long been a dynamic force that has reshaped economies, societies, and cultures. Many poor people, especially in low-middle-income countries, migrate to other nations in pursuit of better opportunities. Generally, this is in response to socio-economic constraints and limited prospects in their home countries. For foreign street traders operating in the Pretoria CBD in South Africa, and amidst the challenges of adapting to new environments, these migrants frequently strived to maintain close ties and linkages with their places of origin. The following section explores the complex interplay between migrant identities, economic goals, and cultural preservation. It analyses how street traders create bonds and alliances in foreign nations to maintain their links to their home countries.

Home was far for these participants, and linkages to their country of origin were often a disparate and complex process due to sensitive legal dynamics, affordability, and time needed to travel. According to the narratives from the Pretoria CBD, with no relatives or friends around, traders found coping mechanisms in social networks with fellow traders either from the same country as them or who had access to someone traveling to or from their country of origin. The data revealed that all foreign traders utilized these networks to provide them with sustained connections to their homes and families. According to Priscilla* “I send money home to Ghana every month as I haven’t been home for four years. I haven’t seen my son in that time, and I am told he is now very tall”. Therefore, one way in which foreign traders benefit from social networks is through economic remittances. All foreign participants highlighted this as one of the most tangible ways through which they maintain linkages to their homes. Their families benefitted from the financial support, fostering a sense of responsibility. According to these participants, these remittances were primarily for their families’ well-being, education, and healthcare.

Beyond remittances, it emerged from the data that traders also send parcels in the form of clothes, furniture, and other general household items. This was evident in Marselle’s* statement: “I want to make sure that my family is taken care of and has the necessities they need to live a good life”. Based on his sentiment, it’s evident that foreign participants perceive links to their home countries as crucial for promoting mutual enrichment. This

was also evident in the following statement by Duko*, “what we manage to send home symbolizes care and love”. Half of the participants sent parcels with fellow traders while traveling, while the other half used networks with informal businesses to transport their goods. Participants who utilized these networks reinforced emotional bonds and represented the enduring spirit of solidarity that transcends geographical boundaries.

Foreign trader’s cross borders into South Africa for personal, economic, and other reasons that may be beyond their control – due to wars, for example. Therefore, travel to their country of origin is not always possible for financial or political reasons, meaning they must make do with their limited options. However, foreign traders’ putative identity within the city is understood as volatile, uncertain and sometimes violent, according to all foreign trader participants, partly due to their legal status in the country. Consequently, one of the challenges they face while trying to create livelihoods on the streets is xenophobic vigilantism. For example, notably and most recently with the anti-immigration *Operation Dudula* movement, which threatens their lives and livelihoods as foreign traders. Put simply, the word *Dudula* loosely translates to force out. These sentiments are visible in the following participant statements, “locals see us as the bad guys taking their jobs or work away from them”, “they don’t want us here”, and “it takes a lot to sell on the streets in South Africa when you’re not welcome”. Social networks thus offered traders opportunities to be accepted members of society.

Based on the above, foreign traders’ use of social networks illustrates their innovative strategies of resilience and provides a unique opportunity to appreciate how they navigate street trading challenges. In addition to street trading dynamics, the astuteness of foreign traders to navigate ambiguous and punitive immigration policies and social protest by locals is a critical analysis that offers insights into their experiences. From this group of participants, all articulated feelings of ‘loneliness’ being far from their homes. Therefore, they depended on social networks to recreate a sense of belonging and mobilized them as socio-economic support to face challenges. Participants articulated that, as foreign traders, they held social gathering networks once a month, generally on a Sunday afternoon after church. These gatherings actively created moments and space within the city that emulated a sense of home through spoken language, music, food, and other related activities. According to Duko*, “it’s one of the few moments we have as foreigners to feel connected to home”. Therefore, through social networks, foreign street traders created a sense of home that mirrors the support systems in their countries of origin.

In addition to the leisure activities to retain roots in countries of origin, members of these types of networks also highlighted the significance of their networks in supplementing the role of family support. As mentioned above, foreign traders frequently face challenges of

incorporation within a particular locale or hostile society. Being far away from home, they also lack family representation during important milestones in their lives. In response to these challenges, the data revealed that some foreign traders developed family-type relationships with each other based on friendship ties. These family-type networks constituted a type of social capital that foreign traders depended upon to facilitate incorporation within the country as an opportunity to benefit from diverse family perspectives. For example, one participant recalled

One of our members from Zimbabwe married a girl from Limpopo [South Africa]. However, he could only afford to have one uncle travel from Zimbabwe. As such, he asked two of our members familiar with Rooro [bride price] to escort his uncle in the negotiations. It was a big advantage because the members had been in South Africa for a long time and were familiar with the customs and traditions of the bride's family, which made the negotiations easier (Olu, interview, Pretoria, 04 November 2021).

The above statement highlights how these social networks empower members to advocate for each other and work towards outcomes that work in their best interests. Traders also utilize these networks to build stronger connections within their communities. This was evident in Duko*, who confirmed, "our families are far away, so we rely on connections made in South Africa for family support. I called one of our members to attend our kid's baptism ceremony". Evident in the above quote is that foreign traders engaged in networks to fill family and kinship gaps while far from their homes. In addition, foreign traders benefitted from social networks, allowing them to navigate between both host and home country's cultures. Consequently, this allowed them to develop a dual sense of belonging.

An added advantage of accessing these networks is the link between being in a foreign country and staying connected with their families in their home country. Therefore, foreign traders articulated that they also used social gatherings as points of entry to send and receive information and parcels from home through their networks. One participant confirmed

Some of our members travel home or know someone who may be traveling. We use these connections to send and receive parcels or messages from home. The person traveling either carries a letter or parcel along with their luggage. To be fair, we don't send big items but something not bigger than a shoe box just so our family knows we're thinking of them. In any case, the most important thing is to send money and word on how you are keeping. You can then carry the big items or gifts when you

have a chance to travel. It's just a way to stay in touch (Olu, interview, Pretoria, 15 August 2021).

When asked what traders in South Africa receive from their homes, most foreign traders illustrated that it is generally a letter that is accompanied by a 'home care kit' filled with items that are native to their country of origin or sometimes even local village that are not easily found in South Africa.

Some traders even risk border control to obtain these items, as illustrated by Duko*, "I know we're not allowed to bring food across borders but it's a reminder of my home, so worth the risk". Similar perceptions were evident in Nono*, who confirmed that her network puts orders every three months with traders traveling back to South Africa from Zimbabwe. Of the items brought into South Africa, popular requests include *matemba* (dried fish), dried vegetables, *maputi* (a popcorn snack), and *mazoe* (a concentrated juice). The onus is on the member traveling to ensure that these products reach their destination. To facilitate this process, some networks had informal arrangements with customs officials to bring them goods from South Africa. However, there was no guarantee that the official with which an arrangement was made would be available at the exact time of the border crossing of the person carrying the items from back home. Where that was not possible, members relied on contingency planning with bribe money prepared in advance to ensure their goods reached them. The data on the networks of foreign trader's sheds light on the intersection of street trading dynamics with foreign traders' lives and how they use networks to mitigate challenges to their livelihoods and existence in South Africa. In addition, the data offered alternative maps of traders in the Pretoria CBD, illuminating strategies that connect them to their countries of origin.

This section highlighted that informal social networks were the invisible thread that bound street traders together, offering information, support, and a home away from home. The networks described were characterized by their localized nature and reliance on social connections, shared experiences, and cultural ties of street traders. Street traders in the Pretoria CBD used social networks as essential support systems that weave comfort, empathy, and resilience into the fabric of street trading. As street traders lean on each other for support, their networks demonstrated their transformative capacity to mitigate street trading and life challenges.

5.4 Political Benefits of Networking

Social networking emerged as a powerful instrument for street traders in the Pretoria CBD to participate in political processes and effect transformative change. Due to the nature of informal trading, street traders often find themselves on the fringes of political structures,

leading them to cultivate informal networks that act as platforms for social mobilization, advocacy, and empowerment. Therefore, these networks foster a sense of community while amplifying street traders' voices that might not otherwise be heard in formal political settings. By leveraging informal interpersonal relationships, street traders disseminate information, raise awareness about socio-political issues that affect them, and collectively organize protests and campaigns to put pressure on policymakers to address their concerns.

This section delineates the political benefits of social networks. It argues that street traders in the Pretoria CBD use social networks as an essential tool for collective action, amplifying the voices of the marginalized and fostering political participation. As a starting point, it highlights how street traders use networks for increased political visibility, giving them a vital platform to share their opinions. Second, an analysis of how street traders engage in social networks to access the city for their informal activities is discussed. Finally, an overview of the value of collective political action and lobbying to advocate and hold the government accountable to street trader's needs is discussed. Overall, the section argues that the types of social networks found in the Pretoria CBD lead to improved socio-political benefits.

Amplifying street trader's voices: the role of networks in increasing political visibility

The politics of the Pretoria CBD are determined by its unique position in the national order and as a capital city in the country. The national government officers sit here, a mixture of local, provincial, and national level authorities. However, political parties have different ideas on how street trading should be regulated and on whose terms. As local authorities change along with their mandates, street traders must keep abreast with political winds. Therefore, street traders engaged in social networks to have a platform and voice to share their concerns with political authorities. By engaging in social networks, street traders can collectively voice their concerns and thus ensure representation at the local government level. In the Pretoria CBD, they do this through regular network meetings to strategically engage local authorities. The Barekisi Forum meets once a month with its members to raise issues, concerns, grievances, and requests. Once collated from individual members, an assigned member of the network tables these at the local government meetings on behalf of the network. According to participants, the result is that their grievances and concerns, which otherwise would be isolated and fragmented, are integrated into local development planning. This is evident in Sandra*, who confirmed, "I cement my voice through the forum so the government can consider our needs". Similarly, another participant noted

Some of our requests to government are slow to be delivered or don't come at all. However, in the past, the government has made opportunities available to us to learn how to run a small business, which some found beneficial for formalizing businesses (Bhekizenzo, interview, Pretoria, 10 August 2021).

Based on the above statement, these networks benefit street traders through access to resources. As their visibility increases by attracting the attention of local governments, the attention can lead to increased training programs and capacity-building initiatives. As evident in Bhekizenzo's* statement, such support can enhance street traders' skills, knowledge, and entrepreneurial capabilities, ultimately improving their economic situations.

The data highlighted that the types of networks used in the Pretoria CBD for political visibility are commonly called 'forums' or 'associations'. These forums were advocacy groups that lobbied the government on street trader's behalf. Simultaneously, they informed street traders about labour laws, available programmes targeting informal businesses, and other relevant policies and regulations. Therefore, being part of these forums benefitted traders in getting pertinent information quicker than non-members and access to other resources. For example, most registered traders articulated ongoing concerns with the local government, as one participant illustrated

We pay an arm and a leg for license fees. However, the government has promised us for years that they will provide toilets and water for us. The experience has been the same no matter which party oversees our municipality, they're always promising but not acting. In our network, these are the concerns we raise, which are then raised in government meetings (Khulu, interview, Pretoria, 10 August 2021).

By engaging in social networks, street traders had a platform to advocate for their rights, interests, and concerns. The data revealed that street traders used these networks to raise awareness with the local government about their challenges, such as lack of access to ablution facilities and water. Therefore, they can collectively push for policy changes that address their specific needs through their forums. In turn, this can lead to improved working conditions and the protection of their livelihoods.

Street traders' reliance on social networks for security and support arises partially from the weakening of trust in the government, which, according to several scholars, is warranted (Koelble, 2022; Maphumulo and Bhengu, 2019; von Holdt, 2019; Wilson and Magam, 2018; Chipkin, 2016). Generally, there has been a decline in public trust in politics. Bhekizenzo* articulated that "local authorities are quick to evict us from trying to

create a life, but they are slow to support us”. Similarly, Marselle* laments, “government treats us like criminals, but we are just trying to survive. They use bylaws to try to get rid of us by confiscating our goods”. Therefore, in the context of Pretoria CBD, such perceptions are borne, for example, of punitive policies and inconsistent regulations in the form of random raids, forceful evictions, recurrent confiscation and imprisonment, and corruption by authorities. The above notions are consistent with street trading literature (see Crush and Young, 2019; Roever, 2016; Lindell, 2009). Over time, the above have eroded the effectiveness of robust urban governance.

In the face of uncertainties and vulnerabilities, political trust is a vital precondition to the quality of institutions. These antecedent absences of trust exacerbate tensions between street traders and local authorities. For example, one participant noted

It has been quiet since COVID [-19], but in the past few years, I have been trading here, there are always Metro Police raids and service delivery protests. The clash between local authorities and us is an everyday experience. We send our grievances through our forums, but sometimes, we have no choice but to take it to the streets before they take our issues seriously. It’s hard for us though, because we lose possible income when we protest. We all want a government that listens to us (Thuli, interview, Pretoria, 18 July 2022).

According to participants, they are sometimes forced to mobilize their networks to collectively organize protests or strikes to advocate and push for policy or regulatory changes within street trading. Thus, the collective negotiating strength of street traders is enhanced through increased political visibility through their forums and protests. Through this unified front, local authorities are more likely to take their requests seriously. The visibility can lead to negotiations, dialogue, and engagement with relevant stakeholders, increasing the likelihood of obtaining favourable outcomes for street traders.

In summary, through social networks in the form of forums, street traders increase their political visibility, which amplifies their voices. In addition, street traders benefit through possible advocacy and innovation opportunities, collective bargaining power, policy influence, and access to resources. Through these networks, traders challenge local governments on negative stigmas associated with informal work. This agency enabled participants to engage with political institutions and shape their own narratives on street trading.

Navigating urban spaces and access to the city

Urban landscapes are dynamic and varied because they are shaped by the interplay between formal and informal structures, among other characteristics. The data from the Pretoria CBD revealed that some street traders, engage in informal social networks to access and navigate the city due to the nature of their work. Without traditional avenues, these networks serve as lifelines, providing street traders with access to resources, information, protection, and a sense of community. This section analyses the benefits street traders attain in using social networks to gain entry to the city, secure livelihoods, and establish a presence within urban spaces. For street traders, access to urban spaces is paramount as it holds the promise of economic opportunities and a chance to create and sustain livelihoods.

Street traders' access to the city is one borne out of many factors that shape the informal urban politics within the Pretoria CBD. It is characterized by a disconnect between opportunity structures for livelihood creation, lack of or inadequate service provisions, haphazard and ambiguous informal urban planning, and regulatory frameworks on the one hand and a large informal population on the other. The city is also characterized by endemic inequality, exclusion, and insecurity. The dichotomy between formal and informal economies, registered and unregistered street traders, and local and foreign street traders all play a role in defining the boundaries of urban exclusion. Therefore, as with other cities, the Pretoria CBD might be considered 'fragile' to the extent that the boundaries contribute to the disconnect of urban informal systems.

With the shifting political environment and limited or absent government support, traders experience a sense of insecurity and political exclusion. In the Pretoria CBD, local-level concerns sometimes become subverted by the national ambitions of the ruling party. For example, the local government must balance accountability to national authorities in their quest for clean cities. One response lamented the difficulties faced by street traders, stating

All they want is clean cities so foreign businesses can invest in the country, but what about the poor people in this country? How do we overcome our poverty? The government doesn't even have jobs for our children who are sitting at home or for us (Curtis, interview, Pretoria, 20 February 2021).

The above highlights the tension between traders and the state who view the city through a developmental modernization agenda (Maharaj, 2015). The above includes the focus and pursuit of the state of world-class African cities, which have become the dominant paradigm in urban economic developmental planning. Thus, street trading is at odds with this agenda as their informal activities are perceived as chaotic, disruptive, and

undesirable (Chen, 2016; Rogerson, 2016). This is evident in sustained forced removals from South African cities and others worldwide, where government officials posited that the occupancy of street traders discourages international investment (Bonga, 2021; Chen and Carre, 2020; Bellucci and Eckert, 2019; World Bank, 2014; Skinner, 2008).

Street traders in the Pretoria CBD also used networks to engage with local government agents in mutually beneficial tactics to retain their position and occupation within the city streets. For example,

I have a guy on the inside whom I grew up with as he stays in my neighbourhood. He calls me to alert me of inspections, so I pack up and leave before they confiscate my things or fine me. We're just trying to make a living here, but so is everyone else. In return for the information, I give him some cooldrink [money] or help if he needs something fixed. So, we look after each other that way (Bhekizenzo, interview, Pretoria, 04 March 2021).

Therefore, by uniting with local authorities, the above participant could negotiate for favourable terms and conditions. Other traders expressed similar narratives. For example, Nomvula* noted, "It's risky because I'm not registered so I need to know when the police will come". For unregistered traders, access to the city was a risky affair, which they mitigated through information networks. Thus, they benefited from early warning to secure their products in time before incurring confiscations, fines, or even imprisonment. Due to street trading activities being outside the purview of the law, traders are isolated and generally excluded from governance structures. Traders utilized their social networks in the Pretoria CBD to bargain and minimize clashes with local authorities. One participant articulated

Getting a trading site is difficult as they are limited, with many of us waiting to be allocated a spot. Through my network, I could confirm, as the information came to our network through a relative of a municipal worker, which areas or streets would be upgraded, as we wouldn't be able to operate from there. Therefore, I could move my business before the local authorities came to move us (Nomvula, interview, Pretoria, 26 June 2021).

Foreign traders used social networks as a game of cat and mouse with the local authorities. Without legal documentation to register their business or obtain street trading licenses, foreign traders had innovative strategies to circumvent these barriers. According to Duko*, "we have an arrangement with a few local people who register the stall in their names and when the police come, we act as employees". Foreign traders also used

networking with locals as capital for their business activities. Participants highlighted that locals are approached through word of mouth. For example, foreign street traders reach out to each other to ascertain which locals would be amenable to using their South African documents to obtain a street trading license. Generally, this information was obtainable during their monthly social gatherings or through informal conversations with trusted members. While obtaining a trading license is one way traders access public spaces, other traders do so without registering.

Street traders generally come from poor and disadvantaged communities, lacking access to rent or purchase formal property to showcase their business. As a result of this barrier, street traders set up on sidewalks or pavements. The data illuminated that through networks, street traders negotiate what they perceive as 'lucrative' trading spaces with ample pedestrian traffic. Street traders set up shop on sidewalks to take advantage of the numerous people passing by who may be more inclined to notice and buy their items. Therefore, the location was deemed a vital factor for street traders in deciding where to set up shop. According to Mavis*, who sells fruit and vegetables on the pavement, "people buy from me because I'm at an intersection and they can find me easily". The data highlighted that street traders used networks to acquire what they perceived as lucrative trading spots. Pertinent to these locations was easy access to potential customers. As a result, the main street cutting along a vertical line was Lilian Ngoyi Street, the busiest street. This street is cut horizontally by the following busy streets: Francis Baard Street, Pretorius Street, Helen Joseph Street towards the West of Pretoria, Stanza Bopape Street towards the East of Pretoria, and Madiba Drive heading towards downtown.

Registered street traders are generally assigned trading spots by the local government along Helen Joseph Street and Stanza Bopape Streets, which unregistered traders perceive as one of the most lucrative trading spots. To gain access to these lucrative trading spaces, some participants utilized their networks in having proximity to local authorities and officials in relevant government departments to secure spots. For example, one participant illustrated

Some government department workers start off as acquaintances. Over time, you build a good rapport because they buy our goods almost on the daily. They see how we struggle and may also be struggling in their lives. Eventually, one can reach out for help in return for a favor. That is how we do it (Khulu, interview, Pretoria, 15 September 2021).

Some registered traders were unhappy with the space allocated to them, citing similar issues of wanting access to 'lucrative' trading spots. This was best articulated by

Bhekizenzo*, who asserts, “they [the state] just want to get rid of us, instead of helping us. They make little provision for us, even if we pay for the license and fees and give us spots far from customers.” Most traders in the Pretoria CBD consider the state as trying to contain their activities in two ways. First, they inconsistently delineate crucial trading spots to a specific number of registered traders, excluding many others, including unregistered traders. Second, they use local agents, in the form of Metro Police, to regulate and sanction traders (even registered traders) not abiding by the local bylaws. Given the nature of informality, there is likely to be many traders that do not comply with street trading bylaws.

The above emphasizes that although urban public space is a significant asset for street traders’ livelihood strategies, access to space is complex for various reasons, including a finite or limited amount of space. Benit-Gbaffou (2019; 3) asserts “the actual practices and choices made by government officials, in a context framed by specific institutions, policy instruments and internal politics.” Consequently, in their planning, the national government, through municipal bylaws, often invokes the need to limit sidewalk trading, arguing that there are limited trading spaces in the city. Often, local authorities prefer to designate trading stalls within a market far from pedestrians, which contributes to tensions between traders and local authorities and may be the reason why street traders look to social networks to overcome these barriers to access.

Access to the city and its public spaces gave street traders, most of whom come from marginalized or low-income backgrounds, opportunities for informal employment and poverty alleviation. Traders can generate income, support their families, and improve their livelihoods through working informally in the streets. Therefore, urban public spaces serve as platforms for inclusive economic growth, giving those who might not have easy access to formal employment options for entrepreneurship. These types of networks serve as essential bridges connecting street traders to the urban landscape.

Empowering the marginalized: holding the government accountable

In politics, the voices of marginalized and poor communities have often been overlooked or ignored (de-Lima-Santos *et al.*, 2023; Francis *et al.*, 2020; Fukuda-Parr, 2019; Tshishonga, 2019). However, social networks have provided a powerful tool for street traders in the Pretoria CBD to demand government accountability and drive positive change. Multiple layers of socio-political tensions exist between street traders, urban public spaces, and the government authorities and bureaucracy. Despite the government’s inability to absorb the country’s high unemployment rates and persistent poverty, street traders and their entrepreneurial pursuits are regarded by the state as a social problem. Across the world, street traders are seen by local authorities as an

embodiment of urban hindrance, unmanageable and disruptive (Benit-Gbaffou, 2018; Roth, 2017; Rogerson, 2016).

Therefore, the state develops strategies to regulate street traders through bylaws. Due to their illegal operations in public areas, street traders frequently face problems with bylaw enforcement. Bylaws are municipal laws and regulations that control how public places are used, and they frequently mandate that street sellers acquire permits, pay fees, and adhere to specific guidelines (Scheba and Turok, 2020b; Gastrow, 2018). However, one of the principal challenges street traders face is difficulty in obtaining trading licenses. According to the participants, the points below were raised as critical reasons why they do not obtain licenses: complicated application procedures, high fees, time-consuming, and limited education to navigate the process. Additionally, some regulations restrict the type of goods or services that can be sold or cap the number of permits that can be issued, further restricting the options available to street traders.

To add to this milieu of challenges and exclusions, these bylaws are frequently harshly enforced through removal, confiscations of goods, fines, or imprisonment. According to most traders, especially unregistered ones, the punitive enforcement of bylaws creates a hostile and unpredictable environment, which is their primary motivating factor in engaging in networks to influence their activities' political and regulatory environment. In their efforts to earn a livelihood, street traders use these networks to lobby the government to provide supportive and inclusive policies and programmes to sustain their businesses. These narratives were captured in the below statements by traders

We have our forum meetings every month to discuss different matters. There's usually a rotation of members, at least five at a meeting, who are tasked with participating in public hearings. They gather information on what was discussed and share it with all the members at the next meeting. When they go to these meetings, they also share our perspectives and motivate for our issues (Sandra, interview, Pretoria, 15 August 2021).

Similarly, street trading challenges also resonated with another participant, who noted

As a foreign national, it's hard because local authorities target us more than they do local street traders. Even some of the policies they come up with, they do not include foreign street traders. This is why I joined my group, who can fight for me to be included in policy decisions as I don't know much about lobbying as it needs people who are good at it (Duko, interview, Pretoria, 20 May 2021).

Lastly, some participants highlighted that during their monthly meetings, they also receive updates on government social services. With limited or no access to the internet or other media facilities, monthly forum meetings were the only place to hear about information on healthcare services, education and other related programs that may be essential for street traders' wellbeing and that of their households. Ivy* confirmed, "during the monthly meetings, they also tell us of scholarship opportunities for our children". Similarly, Nono* revealed, "they tell us about HIV and AIDS campaigns in our areas. I go when they have the counselling drives".

Based on the above, street traders also used these networks to provide feedback on government policies from the root level and leverage them to address their household needs. The evidence from the Pretoria CBD also elucidated that street traders benefited from these types of social networks through collective action. According to Curtis*, "if the government doesn't want to listen to our opinions, then we use the members in our networks to organize strikes". By doing so, street traders hold the government accountable for their actions and demand local government transparency by mobilizing members around political causes to push for policy changes that benefit their interests. Therefore, social networks can provide a platform for street traders to compel the local government to make reforms and policy changes that address their specific challenges and create a more enabling and inclusive environment for their livelihoods. This can help to give a voice to those who may have been excluded from traditional political channels. Networks also help street traders stay informed on the political climate related to their activities and share information. Through these networks, street traders can disseminate information, share updates, and provide guidance to ensure that their members are well-informed and can participate in local politics.

5.5. Chapter Summary

The chapter highlighted how street traders collectively organize under conditions of deprivations and vulnerability to create value through networks. Networks fill systemic gaps in resources and support often missing in street trading for various reasons, including inadequate or inconsistent state support, being far from family, and lack of access to financial institutions. For street traders, social networks transcend mere social connections to serve as lifelines, fostering mutual assistance, emotional support, resource sharing, and participation and influence of local political landscapes. Social networks, therefore, support street traders to cope with daily life and navigate challenges associated with street trading and their livelihoods. The analysis highlighted that social networks operated differently depending on the type of network. For example, some targeted female members only. Others enabled traders to invest in building materials, while others were

focused on early planning in case of loss of life. In addition, social networks were used to canvas a range of benefits for street traders, including increased visibility of products and services to a broader audience, potentially increasing their customer base. Some networks focused on sharing business acumen skills to help traders better understand their customers' needs and preferences, and tailor their offerings accordingly. Overall, social networks in the Pretoria CBD were an effective tool for street traders as they offered distinct social, economic, and political benefits to enable the sustainability of livelihoods. The chapter analyzed these benefits and examined how social networks enable traders to cope with shocks and societal imperfections through collective organizing and mutual aid ties.

Social networks were essential to street traders as they provided resilience-enabling innovations and benefits, especially under constant challenges and threats, where valuable resources are scarce and government support is weak/absent. Street traders deployed a wide range of efforts as innovative coping strategies to benefit from networks. Street traders used their agency to engage in social networks to mitigate threats to their possible gains and livelihoods. The data presented in this chapter argued that networks were significant to traders as they allowed traders to eke out a viable livelihood from the margins. Through mutual support and collective action, social networks (re)shaped multiple features of socio-economic and political activity: mobilization of networks as family support, investments in immediate and future benefits, and a platform for street traders to voice their opinions with policymakers and government. They also used networks to increase the accountability of local governments to demand transparency and access to information. Using social networks to explain informal innovation and survival mechanisms enables us to understand the invisible relations between street traders. Furthermore, for as long as vulnerability and precarity remain, it is plausible that street traders will continue to find innovative coping strategies of acquiescing to socio-economic and political disparities. In light of this, social networks offer street traders a foundation of resources to sustain livelihoods, cope with challenges, adapt to changing environments, and plan for the future.

Chapter Six - Street Traders and the Disruption of their Social Networks due to COVID-19

6.1 Introduction

The informal economy, mainly street trading, in South Africa contributes significantly to livelihood, employment creation, and poverty alleviation as a coping mechanism. In particular, street trading represents a distinctive part of the informal economy and a market of crucial significance in traders' economic and social life. Several studies (Skinner and Watson, 2020; Rogerson, 2018; Moyo *et al.*, 2016; Roeber and Skinner, 2016) suggest that street trading is integral to a developing nation's socio-economic economy. In addition, street traders provide affordable and easily accessible goods and services for poor and marginalized communities. Street traders account for foreign and local individuals, mainly from rural or disadvantaged urban communities surviving on informal trading.

However, informal trading was deeply affected in March 2020, having been exposed to the COVID-19 pandemic that confirmed the economy's vulnerability to external shocks. The pandemic laid bare the complex global interdependencies that reinforce economies. Concurrently, and nationally, the pandemic highlighted societal imperfections and structures that perpetuate socio-economic inequalities, poverty, and unemployment. Street trading was brought to an abrupt halt due to the various containment measures instituted by governments worldwide, including in South Africa. The numerous measures posed a livelihood threat to street trading due to trade restrictions on informal businesses and stay-at-home restrictions, for example. Street traders' vulnerability was amplified by excluding street trading as an essential business – a blow to a vulnerable community reliant on urban public spaces to sustain their livelihoods.

For street trading, which is synonymously vulnerable to external shocks and heavily reliant on customers as its enterprises' bedrock, the government-instituted measures' implications were manifold. The South African government responded with several social and economic protection efforts to support society's most vulnerable populations. However, the uncertain nature and scope of the pandemic made it difficult for governments to develop policy responses suited for all populations. Therefore, this chapter analyses the unanticipated, disproportionate, and heterogeneous impacts of COVID-19 on street traders' social networks in the Pretoria CBD.

By evaluating the policy responses deployed by the government, this chapter raises critical questions for urban informal economy scholars on the impact and role of networks on vulnerabilities and inequities across contexts. Therefore, the chapter introduces COVID-19 as an unprecedented global pandemic with equally unprecedented restrictions. The

following section looks at two national-level policy responses affecting street traders. This is followed by an analysis of the disruption of street traders' networks to adapt and cope with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent regulatory measures imposed by the government. A summary concludes the chapter.

6.2 Background and Context: The Fragility of Street Trading during COVID-19

6.2.1 The government instituted regulations and their effect on traders

On 23 March 2020, President Ramaphosa announced the National State of Disaster and national lockdown starting on 26 March 2020 - for what was supposed to be twenty-one days - to inhibit community transmission (Arndt *et al.*, 2020; Gustafsson, 2020). However, the various national containment measures, including lockdowns and other regulations discussed in this section, had adverse impacts on the livelihoods of street traders. The initial lockdown measures delineated essential personnel, businesses, and activities, for example, health and security workers, hospitals, banks, and traditional supermarkets. The rest fell under non-essential workers, including street traders and any business not formalized. Furthermore, the measures prohibited people from leaving their homes except to access medical care or purchase essential goods (for a complete list, see RSA, 2020a). The restrictive regulatory response by the government subsequently categorized different transitory levels that occurred between 2020 and 2021, respectively.

The hard lockdown and non-essential businesses and workers

The initial lockdown initiated in March 2020 by the South African government to curb the spread of the pandemic comprised five levels, with Level Five being the most stringent and Level One the most flexible. In March-April 2020, the country initiated a Level Five lockdown, including the closure of all economic activity (both formal and informal) other than 'essential' businesses or workers. The remaining businesses and workers were deemed 'non-essential' and directed to stay-at-home, only leaving their homes for emergencies or to obtain essential goods and services (COGTA, 2020a). According to all the participants in the Pretoria CBD, none of them could work during March and April 2020. In addition, the removal from the streets increased their rate of vulnerability, as illustrated in the following accounts. Bhekizenzo* lamented, "the prohibition of street trading during COVID-19 was a terrible shock on our lives". Another participant added

It was a devastating blow to all of us. The government was too strict on street traders, knowing we had no other means of income, no insurance to fall back on, and no access to banking for financial assistance. I had to take a R500 loan with loan sharks as an emergency. My kids had to eat, and I had no choice, not knowing how to repay that loan. Our lives became an emergency situation overnight (Curtis, interview, Pretoria, 6 April 2021).

Subsequently, the regulations translated into the loss of livelihoods for many workers in the formal and informal economy.

The evidence from the Pretoria CBD aligns with the burgeoning literature on the impacts of COVID-19 regulations, specifically on the vulnerable. In an early survey conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) during the first few weeks of the lockdown. The survey confirmed that almost two-thirds of the adult population in poorer urban areas reported difficulty earning an income and meeting other basic needs in the first fourteen days of the lockdown (HSRC, 2020). In a similar report, Visagie and Turok (2021; 54) assert that “the health and economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on South African households has been both severe and far-reaching”. The above is congruent with early estimates from Stats SA (2020) that reported the second quarter of 2020 ended with roughly 2.2 million South Africans in the workforce losing their jobs.

The first manifestation of efforts to contain the spread of the pandemic was two-fold. First, the government designated ‘essential’ and ‘non-essential’ businesses that would operate during the lockdown. Initially, street trading was classified as a non-essential enterprise. According to one participant

Considering that many of us are working informally in the streets because we have no formal jobs that we can depend on for social security, banning our attempts to earn an income hit us like a lightning strike. The government labelled our businesses as non-essential services, which we all looked at in despair, not knowing how else to sustain ourselves (Siphelele, interview, Pretoria, 4 August 2021).

Following this regulation, an analysis of the data from the Pretoria CBD highlighted that all participant’s businesses were inactive for between two and nine months in 2020. This resulted from the national lockdown and the subsequent COVID-19 regulations to curb the spread of the virus. Second, restrictions on the mobility of people meant that traders and their customers were confined to their homes. One participant noted

We live in severe poverty, and COVID-19 has devastated many families as many people have lost jobs and businesses, including us and the little opportunities we must depend on as a livelihood. Every year, we hear about how our government wants to fight poverty, but they are the same people who removed us from opportunities to try to fight and forced us to sit at home. The government can’t absorb us anywhere and does very little to help us in terms of social protection. Last year [2020] was devastating for my four children and me because I couldn’t even explain to them what was happening. On some days, we would go hungry, and I would lie and say tomorrow would be better even though I didn’t know what would happen the next day (Marselle, interview, Pretoria, 10 August 2021).

Similarly, Fumani* noted, “although some of us work illegally in the streets, what we do is a matter of life and death for our lives and the lives of our families who depend on us”. Therefore, the designation of street traders as non-essential workers and businesses was an impractical and seemingly impossible task for the poor and vulnerable, particularly street traders whose existence depended on informal daily hustles on the streets. The initial lockdown measure seriously threatened street traders, many of whom were far from opportunities and excluded from access to formal employment or social protection benefits. Their inequality further accentuated their vulnerability to access social and economic protection resources.

The original containment measures introduced by the South African government in March 2020 ignored informal traders and prohibited them from conducting any trading activities. According to Ivy* “even with a permit to trade, we were not allowed on the streets”. Similarly, Nono* lamented, “I lost a lot of stock which went bad during the hard lockdown. There was nowhere to sell it as I couldn’t leave my home”. Regulations thus denied informal traders access to trading spaces and their clientele. Under the original provision measures, all street traders were to cease their entrepreneurial enterprises immediately (RSA, 2020a). Registered and unregistered street traders were confined to their homes, with heavy restrictions on their entrepreneurial activities, movement, and transportation. The initial measures signified an immediate blow to an already vulnerable group, i.e., street traders. Thus, thousands of street traders’ economic activities were deeply affected as all their goods or services were excluded and isolated as non-essential services.

Meanwhile, almost two weeks after the government announced the initial lockdown regulations and only after receiving a wave of criticism, some traders were partially included in government planning in April (Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, 2020). This consideration resulted from mounting pressure from media, scholars, civil society, and informal trader organizations (Wegerif, 2020; WIEGO, 2020). However, the amendments to the government regulations came with added confusion and challenges. Nono* lamented that

I’m selling takeaway food, which is the same thing as what is being sold by some of the formal companies. The only difference is that those companies pay tax, and I don’t, so the government used this opportunity to punish us by labelling our services as non-essential. Not everyone can afford to go and buy at a restaurant. We are also helping the poor buy at a cheaper price, but our efforts were brushed aside even though we are providing the same services, just at a lower scale and not paying tax.

Similarly, a statement issued by the South African Informal Traders Alliance (SAITA), through WIEGO (2020) publications notes

As if the bleak economic projections, rising unemployment figures, and recessionary forecasts were not enough, we are now being assaulted by a global virus so devastating in its effects and so rapid in its spread that life as we know it has changed virtually overnight...Our sector arguably will be the hardest hit. Any halt or suspension of trade would be catastrophic to the livelihoods of thousands upon thousands of informal workers and their families. Unlike the public and private sector, there is no safety net for us.

The above quote highlights the national sentiment of street traders about the challenges they met, from the immediate prohibition of their activities to the added challenges of reapplying for permits to trade.

The continuation of stay-at-home measures

In May 2020, South Africa moved to Level Four regulations, allowing for more economic activity. For many street traders in the Pretoria CBD, more than three-quarters were still unable to return because they were unregistered. This is in line with the study's target group, consisting primarily of unregistered and foreign street traders. According to Ntombi*, a registered trader selling cosmetics and perfume, "the stay-at-home regulations eroded our livelihood efforts as it halted access to income-earning opportunities". Similarly, beyond the loss in economic activity, traders reported difficulty supporting households and some of their socio-economic responsibilities. This is evident in the below account from an informal waste picker who stated

We didn't understand why we could not collect waste because we weren't exposed to people but only went to the dustbin to collect what we could sell through recycling. I didn't collect any waste for about two months from when the lockdown began in March having to wait till the government amended the regulations to allow us back onto the street. At the time, I cared for my sick mother and needed the money desperately for some medical supplies, but the government didn't think about what we go through as individuals just to support our families. I had to continue buying, but now there was no money coming in. Before COVID-19, I was able to work and had found the means to do so, but the government was now telling me to sit at home and do nothing. There was just no way to ease the burden the regulations added on us or to sustain our families' livelihoods that depended on informal work. We are not asking for a free hand but are willing to do the work for what we earn. It felt like the government was using the COVID-19 regulations to specifically target us for not paying for licenses to the officials. (Wami, interview, Pretoria, 16 July 2021).

Therefore, although some informal workers could return to the streets, the majority were still unable to because of their lack of registration status with the local authorities prior to

COVID-19 regulations. As a result, many of them had to wait for the government to make announcements that they could return to work or take chances, as articulated by Siphhelele* “the hunger and starvation I was facing with my family couldn’t wait for a directive from the government to recognize our plight”. The above sentiment was also evident in Olu*, who stated, “the government made it very difficult to comply with the stay-at-home regulations as they gave us no other avenues for income or survival”. The comprehensive amended government regulations, gazetted at the end of April, highlight the type of informal workers allowed to operate again, including informal waste pickers, but still excluded many others (see COGTA, 2020c).

The relaxation of the regulations allowed informal food traders selling uncooked food with an existing permit issued before the regulations were enacted to trade. In addition, they had to obtain an additional vending permit from their local municipal authority (RSA, 2020b). It is important to note that foreign-owned stalls were excluded from operating. However, the relaxed regulations became another form of exclusion. This avenue remained largely inaccessible to the majority of vendors, who were not registered as vendors before the regulations took effect on 26 March 2020 and had been operating without permits (Al Jazeera, 8 April 2020; Cape Times, 6 April 2020). Thus, the argument on informal traders fell within the growing narrative of economic deprivation and the precarious situation of informal traders (Narula, 2020; Ataguba, 2020). The above is supported by Skinner and Watson (2020; 6), who conclude

As the application of stringent lockdown regulations in South African cities (and other cities in the global South) has shown, the result is rapid economic collapse, especially in the informal economy, and descent into mass hunger and destitution.

Movement restrictions

Interviews with participants in the Pretoria CBD illustrated that some of the challenges faced by street traders were manifold, resulting from the movement restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 government regulations. One participant noted the gap that street traders fill for poor people in the urban areas by noting that

The movement restrictions led to considerable challenges in my life. I’ve been a street trader for over 11 years, and this is my only source of income. Although I was benefitting from selling in the streets, I was also helping people like me who can’t afford to buy expensive food at malls as they can get the same products for cheaper with a street vendor at the nearest corner. In a way, we are also helping the poor community, but with the restrictions, we all had to buy expensive food at malls with very little money for purchases (Ntombi, interview, Pretoria, 10 August 2021).

In addition, participants emphasized the crucial role street trading had in alleviating poverty. In particular, one participant noted the mitigating role of street trading in alleviating worse levels of poverty

Life was already difficult for us before COVID-19 arrived. We struggled with poverty and ineffective government policies over the years, regardless of which political party oversees the municipality. So, poverty is not new to us, but the COVID-19 regulations quickly intensified our poverty. The government regulations prohibited us from trading and from being mobile. From the outset, the regulations cut us off from being able to earn a living and therefore alleviate our poverty (Sandra, interview, Pretoria, 20 June 2021).

The above quotes illustrate another fundamental contributing dilemma for Pretoria CBD traders in accessing the streets during the stringent COVID-19 lockdown between March and May.

The restrictions on mobility resulted from the regulation enacted by the South African government during the lockdown to prohibit travel unless for essential purchases or emergencies. The loss of livelihood for low-income groups in the Pretoria CBD resonates with what happened in other parts of the country. In a similar trajectory, 97 percent of street traders in the eThekweni Municipality suffered extreme socio-economic impacts with an enormous loss of income, as reported by Skinner *et al.* (2021). According to de Villiers (2022; 68), the “regulations led unexpected and prolonged closures of informal street trading enterprises, characterized by no income”. Therefore, the impact on street traders in the Pretoria CBD and elsewhere was more profound as they lacked social protection. The textbox below summarises some of the fundamental descriptions and perceptions from the Pretoria CBD on the regulations.

“It was a very difficult time.”

“It was a big shock in our lives.”

“I struggled to cope with very limited to no options.”

“Our source of income was gone.”

“We had no rights.”

South Africa’s lockdown measures were hailed as one of the most stringent in the world, with non-essential businesses closed (including street trading), travel bans, and no

movement of persons and goods, bringing the economy (both formal and informal) to an abrupt halt (Bhorat *et al.*, 2020). Consequently, per the accounts from the Pretoria CBD, street traders' livelihoods were especially vulnerable to COVID-19 regulations. For the working poor, the lockdown presented added challenges of food insecurity, loss of income, lack of access to social protection, and lack of proper sanitation in informal settlements, among others (Arndt *et al.*, 2020; Hara *et al.*, 2020; Van der Berg *et al.*, 2020). Against the socio-economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent regulations, the South African government initiated relief stimulus packages to shield vulnerable groups from worse economic downturns.

6.2.2 Social relief measures introduced by the government

During 2020 and 2021, COVID-19 measures to curb the spread of the pandemic negatively impacted economic activity and culminated in the loss of earnings and increased vulnerability for street traders. There is widespread recognition that the measures worsened the situation for unregistered traders who already faced restrictions prior to the pandemic – including access to trading locations, lack of trading licenses, and punitive bylaw enforcement in the form of confiscations, fines, or imprisonment, among others (Wegerif, 2022; Skinner *et al.*, 2021; Reddy, 2021; Skinner and Watson, 2020; Hall *et al.*, 2020). For example, street traders in the Pretoria CBD faced a pre-existing strict regulatory environment, coupled with COVID-19-related regulations, which negatively impacted livelihood creation. Thus, increasing dependency on emergency social relief measures and preparedness initiatives found in social networks to help offset the economic impacts of the pandemic.

In April 2020, the South African government developed and instituted several policy interventions as a response to the impact of the pandemic on society. The government endorsed a three-pronged approach that street traders could tap into. In particular, the introduction of food parcels as social relief, the COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress Grant (COVID-19 SRD grant), and other support to small businesses. These social relief interventions were criticized for not doing enough (Horwood *et al.*, 2021; Khambule, 2020). According to Skinner and Watson (2020; 1), “policy measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 have profoundly disrupted this system” amid the global pandemic. Subsequently, many households and people whose livelihoods depend on informal trading suddenly had no means to support themselves and their families. The extent to which street traders have had access to the above is considered in the following sections.

Food parcels

According to Statistics South Africa (Stats SA, 2019), over half of the population in the country was already moderately to severely food insecure before the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the International Organisation for Migration (2019) confirmed that South Africa had the most significant number of immigrants in the continent, representing an estimated four million informal workers. Gauteng hosted the largest inflow, with one and a half million immigrants calling it their home (Stats SA, 2020b). Therefore, many local and foreign nationals were more vulnerable to the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 regulations, especially at a higher risk of hunger. With the above in mind, the South African government initiated a set of directives “that demonstrate limited understanding of how the poor access food and an ongoing bias towards large scale, formal food systems actors” (Battersby, 2020; 543).

The government made temporary provisions for those needing to access food parcels through the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA). However, these were available to South African citizens, permanent residents, or refugees registered with the Department of Home Affairs. An additional set of qualifying criteria was elaborated, including applications from child-headed households or where adults cannot work for medical reasons for six months. The findings from the Pretoria CBD revealed that most participants struggled with food security, especially in 2020. In her account of the mad rush that was taking place in the country towards the end of March 2020 to stock up on food, Nomvula*, a fruit and vegetable trader, bemoaned

Many people rushed to the stores to stock up on non-perishable items, but I survived from hand to mouth. I don't have a monthly salary or credit cards I could have fallen back on to buy so many groceries. I don't even have the space in my little *mkhukhu* [a small room or house built with metal roof material] to store the food even if I had the money to stock up (Nomvula, interview, Pretoria, 15 November 2021).

Some participants attributed their food insecurity to the lack of access to a healthy diet due to limited earning potential, as illustrated in the account below

Working in the streets means my income is insecure. The government regulations took me out of work, making my family more susceptible to hunger and starvation. There were many nights we went to sleep only on porridge as we could no longer buy meat. We struggled to maintain a healthy diet which led to my children getting sick often. As a man, I felt very bad that I could no longer provide for my family (Curtis, interview, Pretoria, 6 April 2021).

Therefore, factors such as low income and limited purchasing power played a fundamental role in shaping the types of food households could access.

Over half of the participants indicated living in insecure environments in townships with poor water and sanitation, making them more deserving of government assistance.

Nevertheless, this was not forthcoming or was mainly inaccessible to many. As noted in the below illustration, most traders described their local environment as unhygienic, with limited food options and lacking nutritional content. This was evident in the below excerpt from a participant who felt that

Some of the food they sell in the township has expired. If you go around the corner to buy from a vendor, the area is filthy because the sewer is there, and sometimes street dogs are walking around. You hesitate to buy from there thinking about your health because everything around is dirty, and you don't know if the vegetables you buy have been washed. With the movement restrictions, we had no choice but to get our food from the nearest spaza shops and vendors, and take a chance on our health (Nono, interview, Pretoria, 23 August 2021).

With the directive to stay-at-home, many participants envisioned increased government support and believed that the food parcels would be available to all and improve their food consumption. Although some could access the food parcels, many remained excluded as shown in the following accounts. According to two participants who were able to receive food parcels, the process came with many challenges. According to Sandra*, "the queues for the food parcels were long and there were days I couldn't get because they ran out". Another cause of delay exacerbating matters for vulnerable groups was another issue noted by Nomvula* stating, "we were also competing with corrupt officials as there were reports that they were siphoning what was meant to be for us poor people into their homes". Of foreign participants, none of them were able to access the food parcels in the Pretoria CBD. Their accounts are evident in the following statements. Olu* recalled, "although our sources of income were also disrupted, we couldn't benefit from government assistance either". Similarly, another participant highlighted

We were discriminated against for being foreign and asylum seekers in the country. The government was saying we should not encroach on rights made available only to South Africans but make do on our own (Nono, interview, Pretoria, 23 August 2021).

While the food parcels may have positively impacted those who could access them, many more were excluded. The government developed a regulatory response that was exclusive rather than inclusive and plunged many vulnerable populations into exercising negative coping mechanisms resulting from food insecurity (Carciotto, 2021; Moyo and Gumbo, 2021; Khambule, 2020). In addition, most participants suggested four areas that were severely impacted: a healthy diet constrained by limited income and less purchasing power, barriers to optimal nutrition due to the geographical environment, difficulty in accessing food parcels, and food parcels not incorporating an adequate nutritional balance.

COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress (SRD) grant

In April 2020, President Ramaphosa unveiled the special COVID-19 SRD grant launch, culminating in R350 per person per month (South African Government, 2020c). Officially, the grant system opened in May 2020, pending specific requirements. The dilemma faced by vulnerable workers – especially informal traders – is that while the government made provisions for socio-economic relief, street traders remained invisible or not adequately catered for. Additionally, in the South African context, the amount of R350 fell well below the national food poverty line (Stats SA, 2020).

A R500 billion stimulus package was earmarked for economic and social protection. However, only R18.2 billion was for the COVID-19 SRD grant (South African Social Security Agency, 2021). Initially, the social protection intervention by the government was planned to run for six months but was extended, halted, and re-launched a few times, eventually ending in March 2022. At its genesis, only unemployed South Africans between the ages of 15 – 59, individuals with permanent residence, and refugees who were not already registered to receive any other grant support from the government were eligible to receive the R350. The application had to be made through SASSA. However, local SASSA offices were closed due to stringent COVID-19 regulations. In addition, no paper-based applications were accepted, only online applications.

Based on the above, applicants could not register physically. Eventually, a concession was made for applicants to register using their mobile phones, via WhatsApp or online, requiring data and airtime. However, as noted by Khulu*, “we had no smartphones or airtime. It was challenging and complicated to register as we had to keep asking favours from people”. The mobile option allowed Vodacom (a mobile network provider) customers to register for free, excluding non-Vodacom service providers. The application procedure required applicants to provide the following to supplement their application: their ID number or refugee permit number, residential address, and banking details, among other requirements (South African Social Security Agency, 2021). Many of the above documents were unlikely to be readily available from street traders. Thus, many were excluded from the grant.

What was supposed to be a simple process became a complicated and exclusionary exercise. In the first few months of its launch, many system crashes were reported in its initial stages due to the overwhelming numbers of people trying to apply. Personnel support to assist with the application process was not available. Many people had limited or no access to cell phones or computers, especially in rural and township areas. Finally,

the application procedure was exclusively in English, adding to the milieu of challenges (Senona *et al.*, 2021). Only half of the study's participants reported applying for the COVID-19 SRD grant. Less than a quarter managed to receive the government grant from that pool months after it was initiated. This is supported by Kohler and Borat (2020), who assert that the application procedure was affected by numerous challenges, including administrative bottlenecks, leading to many eligible individuals failing to meet the application criteria. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that the COVID-19 SRD grant also had positive effects in keeping many people from plummeting below the food poverty line (Bassier and Leibbrandt, 2020).

In addition, the COVID-19 SRD grant excluded many non-South African citizens (Olivier and Govindjee, 2022; Kavuro, 2022). Therefore, foreign street traders remained vulnerable. Asylum seekers and refugees were further made vulnerable as they were initially excluded from benefitting from the grant. The Scalabrini Centre challenged this at the Pretoria High Court. It was ruled in June 2020 that SASSA should broaden access to asylum seekers and special permit holders (Scalabrini, 2020). Foreign traders needed an official passport with a working visa, or an asylum permit to get the special permit. However, foreign nationals could not travel as cross-border travel was banned, and local government offices were closed, meaning they could not obtain the necessary application documentation.

The process for foreign nationals came with its own teething problems for those able to apply, as SASSA only recognized applications with a South African ID number. A special case was made by SASSA where refugees and asylum seekers could apply. However, this took time for two reasons. First, a unique application portal had to be created, which took time. Second, the Department of Home Affairs had to verify each applicant, which also delayed matters.

Duko* is a 45-year-old who repaired electronic items at home and worked informally on the streets as a middleman trafficking customers toward a formal salon in the Pretoria CBD. He comes from Mozambique, having escaped increased militant attacks in 2017 in the country's northern parts that displaced his family. He recounted his experience as an asylum as

I am living in asylum, so there was nothing for me to receive from the South African government. I was told to come collect my things at the salon where I worked. To make ends meet, some of us risked getting arrested by going to customers' homes to earn some money. I owed my previous landlord rent, which I didn't have, so I moved in with a friend. We had to manage ourselves as we had no right to get those things [to get support from the government]. Even if you have a permit, you can't get

those relief measures unless you have a South African identity document (Duko, interview, Pretoria, 20 June 2021).

For street traders who could present themselves to government authorities, having the correct legal documentation, the application process was intertwined with bureaucratic red tape, leading to confusion and exclusion. The Minister of Social Development availed the following options as payment for successful applicants. Applicants could be paid into their personal banking accounts or choose a mobile transfer sent to the applicant's registered cellphone or cash withdrawal from any Post Office within the country. The option to travel to a local Post Office presented additional challenges due to initial restrictions on mobility and social distancing requirements. Considering the above, the process was not appropriately planned from the onset.

The experiences of street traders in applying for the COVID-19 SRD grant become apparent in the following interviews. Ivy* describes her "difficult" experience of applying for the COVID-19 SRD grant as "confusing because I did not know what they wanted". Her lack of experience in using a smartphone, coupled with technological and financial illiteracy, meant she had to rely on others with her personal information to make the application. In the end, however, she waited for four months from the initial application before getting approved. The person who had applied on her behalf did not know the difference between a current and a savings account. After making a trip to the bank to inquire, she was told what type of account she had and reapplied.

The utility of reaching out to networks to assist with the application process aligns with another respondent, Fumani*, who confirmed that he "had to ask friends to apply because of connectivity problems". In addition, connectivity issues in rural and township areas were compounding matters for many individuals who met the application criteria. As a result, Fumani* had to "ask a fellow trader and friend to go to his local Tshwane Wi-Fi hotspot (a free community-based internet hotspot) to apply" on his behalf. This highlights the lack of access to connectivity as some had access to free internet hotspots while many others were still excluded.

The payment process was also cumbersome as SASSA required applicants to have a valid banking account. This was unlikely to be the case in the context of street trading, where most individuals have no formal banking credentials (Matsebula and Yu, 2020). In addition, additional verification had to be done via the National Treasury and the South African Reserve Bank for those applicants who passed the initial verification process, leading to substantial delays in receiving payments. For some, payments into personal bank accounts incurred bank charges, dwindling the meagre total of the grant.

For foreign street traders, the issue was two-fold: the inability to send remittances home, plus finding alternative ways to sustain themselves in the country. It is generally known

that many foreign nationals work in South Africa (legally or illegally) to send money back home via remittances (Mbeve *et al.*, 2020; Devereux *et al.*, 2020; Thebe and Maombera, 2019). Remittances have been known to play a vital role in lowering poverty and inequality levels in developing countries. This is supported by Curtis*, who asserts, “we come here from far to work and nothing else.” In addition to being unable to send money home, foreign traders also had the added pressure of sustaining themselves in South Africa. According to Mavis* “the COVID relief grant was exclusively for South Africans” highlighting many other perceptions felt by foreign traders on the accessibility of social relief.

Other support schemes for informal businesses

In September 2020, the Department of Small Business Development announced that cooked food and personal care services could trade. Furthermore, the department issued a directive that 40 000 fruit and vegetable street traders would be eligible for a R1 000 grant. The social relief support was intended to reduce the negative impact of COVID-19 on small informal businesses. However, any visit to a street market would reveal a large and heterogeneous variety of goods and services being sold beyond food, fruit, and vegetable traders. In addition, the scheme targeted South African traders with an official ID and trading license operating in township or rural areas. Therefore, yet again, many street traders, including those in the Pretoria CBD, were excluded.

Another support initiative instituted by the government was the Township and Rural Empowerment Programs (TREP), which also targeted informal traders, except this time only in township economies. The support came in the form of half a loan and half a grant. The eligibility criteria for small businesses included registration with the South African Revenue Service, the Unemployment Insurance Fund, the Companies Intellectual Property Commission, and owning a business bank account, among other requirements. It is unlikely that few, if any, informal businesses would have satisfied these registration criteria. Additionally, registrants had to be South African citizens, with almost three-quarters of their employees South African.

With the qualifying criteria and cumbersome application procedures, these minimal funding allocations suggest that street trading is not a priority for government interventions. The exclusionary nature of the policy response omits many street traders in great need. However, as many traders in the Pretoria CBD noted, the right to trade is different from the right to support. The perception from all foreign traders was that the right to support extended only to South Africans and not them as asylum holders or undocumented migrants. In addition, due to immigration issues with returning to their home countries and travel restrictions, foreign nationals were unlikely to leave South Africa

during the lockdown. At the same time, they had no right to support or work while in South Africa.

Foreign street traders could register for permits or support under the auspice of being documented foreign nationals. However, priority would be given to refugees. Asylum-seekers did not qualify as their permits lasted for three months at a time. Therefore, for asylum seekers, the position of the South African government was a concern. This is evident in the following responses, as confirmed by participants

Most of the people working on the streets are having asylum. You can never meet those people in the club or whatever because they are hustling. The government did not concern themselves about us (Curtis, interview, Pretoria, 13 March 2021).

The above sentiment is also supported by Khulu*, who asserts, “for us, we had no right to support because we are not South Africans”. The COVID-19 pandemic, mixed with a lack of adequate support from the government, increased the vulnerability of foreign street traders, especially those on asylum permits or undocumented. In addition, the regulations adopted by the government have remarkably deepened inequalities between local and foreign traders, and asylum seekers and refugees. Despite the government’s laudable efforts to shield vulnerable groups from the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis, the distribution of the relief was disproportionately polarized in the Pretoria CBD.

6.2.3 Summary of the implications of the regulations and social relief measures on traders

Based on the above context and analysis, the conditions placed by the government on street traders to access their income-generating activities and access to social relief measures made it difficult for traders to cope and survive. The evidence from the Pretoria CBD suggests that the COVID-19 regulations and the subsequent social relief measures introduced by the government impacted street traders negatively. These impacts were derived mainly from the lockdown, the restrictive regulations instituted by national and local governments, the limited or lack of access to social relief measures, and the consequential loss of income. Therefore, the government and its apparatus did not recognize street traders’ activities or their rights as poor urban dwellers. Furthermore, the initiatives did not adequately improve or provide safety nets to most Pretoria CBD traders’ livelihoods.

In addition, the importance of access to urban spaces for street traders is generally common knowledge (Skinner and Watson, 2020; Roever, 2016). Therefore, containment measures to curb the spread of COVID-19 particularly infringed on how street traders sustain their livelihoods. This was evident in the following statement by

Duko*, who asserts that the “government’s lack of appreciation for the work we do and the services we provide was evident during COVID”. Furthermore, what emerged from the analysis of the Pretoria CBD is the recognition that although the government is developing capacities to address the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 on vulnerable populations, informal traders still require synergistic and well-designed policies and interventions.

In the Pretoria CBD, street traders’ access to public space and thus livelihoods were denied in three ways: First, through exclusionary regulations that denied them access to operate their economic activities. Second, the restrictions prevented the mobility of goods and people, thus denying them access to customers. Third, street traders’ circumstances were further exacerbated by not recognizing them in the country’s COVID-19 social relief planning programs. The milieu reinforced and accelerated street traders’ vulnerability. Against this background and context, the remainder of this chapter explores the disruption to traders’ social networks induced by the lockdown and regulatory measures.

6.3 Disruptions of Street Trader’s Networks during the COVID-19 Pandemic

6.3.1 Impacts of disruptions in trader’s financial support

Two participants, Nono* and Nomvula*, indicated they had no option but to send their children to the rural areas when the lockdown began, as they did not know whether they could resume street trading operations. Subsequently, the children missed a year of school as they could not find a new school to enrol them. The decision was made primarily because they could no longer afford the rental cost of having an adult and multiple kids in the same dwelling. Instead, they opted to rent out the other rooms as an income-generating opportunity. Nono* asserts, “I ended up sharing the cost and space of the kid’s room and my room with a friend to ease the financial pressure”. She further added

The resources developed for many years in our networks were no longer unavailable because of COVID regulations. I couldn’t work on the streets because the government feared I would spread the virus. This meant months of being at home and not working, and so I struggled to pay my monthly rotating credit contribution. As a group, we opted to pause the network as we could not guarantee that all members would be able to submit their portion of the money. I had budgeted that lump sum for my children so I could pay their fees when my month came around. Unfortunately, this was no longer possible. (Nono, interview, Pretoria, 23 August 2022).

Where rotating credits were available and traders had the relative knowledge that once a year, a lump sum was coming to supplement significant household expenses, these were

no longer forthcoming. Similarly, Tom* articulated significant disruptions to his home improvement plans, stating, “our network didn’t have money to pay the builder, so the building arrangements had to stop, and the builder was also out of work”.

There were other significant pathway challenges to financial resources resulting from disrupted networks, as illustrated by the following participants. The data revealed that many traders struggled to access informal credit as the interest had gone up significantly, as noted by Duko* “I was struggling financially, but the network had increased the interest rate by so much”. The rate of increase was precipitated by the decreased surety that members would pay their due as the same public space no longer bound traders to engage in their activities. Therefore, the pressure of seeing network members daily was no longer a factor to propel members to abide by the rules set. In addition, more than half of the participants engaged in credit borrowing confirmed that less money was available to lend to members within their network. This could be another reason to explain why the interest rate went up. Mavis* noted, “because the government wanted us to stay at home, we were isolated from our network for information sharing on supplier discounts for stock”. While some traders identified information sharing, some revealed striking disruptions to their use of networks for skills development, as illustrated in the below instance

Before COVID, I had started learning other skills through my network members. We spend long hours in the streets, so learning other skills is beneficial if others are willing to teach you. However, we were bound to our homes now and lost valuable time to develop new skills (Curtis, interview, Pretoria, 13 March 2021).

Foreign street traders unanimously highlighted difficulties in sending remittances back home to desperate family members who depend on them to survive. According to one participant,

COVID [-19] presented us with serious challenges. I struggled to survive in a foreign country that is not very friendly to foreigners. At the same time, I am a breadwinner at home and had to send remittances via my network to my family. For this, I needed to work and liaise with my network in person to exchange goods and money. For this to happen, I have no choice but to work. Otherwise, where will I get the money? So, when the COVID [-19] regulations came, it wasn’t just me affected by the restrictions imposed by the South African government, but my family back home suffered the consequences too (Duko, interview, Pretoria, 15 May 2022).

Based on the above instances, street traders depend on the use of public space to address financial needs as a coping mechanism and a means for households to survive, especially when struggling financially. In addition, street traders use public spaces to negotiate survival for their dependents and households through networks developed in the streets.

The absence or disruption of this support means networks cannot be called upon regarding members' financial problems.

Generally, employment in the informal economy is characterized by low and sporadic income. Street trading is particularly synonymous with job insecurity and a lack of social benefits. Nevertheless, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) reported the continuation of exclusion of social protection and the likelihood of losing income during the pandemic (ILO, 2020). Olu*, for example, is 34 years old, and due to COVID-19 regulations instituted in March 2020, he lost his source of income and had to stay at home. He supported a family of six, including a wife and son in South Africa and three family members in Nigeria, via remittances. Like most street traders, he worked long hours for little pay, with no social protection benefits. Street traders feared when they would return to the streets to work to earn a living. Other traders detailed how they resumed their activities after months of no work because of urgent income needs. This fear was shared by most traders, as articulated by the following participant

It took three months indoors. My family had no food, and I had to come back. Every river has some reserves, but now, the river is dry. Come rain or come thunder, I had to be outdoors and go and hunt. There was now nothing, no food, no money, and even the landlord still wanted his money as much as he knew no one was working (Marselle, interview, Pretoria, 26 June 2021).

For some street traders, the loss of work and income from their livelihood activities extended beyond supporting their families to their personal lives. For example, supporting partners economically. Bhekizenzo* is 42, with three children from a previous marriage he supports. He has permanent residence in South Africa, having grown up in South Africa, but his family lives in Zimbabwe. He stayed at home for six months before he was able to return to his trading spot. According to him, his experience was challenging for two main reasons: first, he lost income to support his children adequately, and second, he lost a partner, as highlighted in the statement below:

It was sad because even my girlfriend left me. Why did she leave? Because my source of income was affected, and my network was disrupted with no clear plan of what would happen. As you can see, I'm selling outdoors in the streets, but the government said we must be indoors. Second, the government concentrated on basic commodities, not fashion, which I am selling. People bought fashion to go out, but now there was no source of income as no one was going out. We all had to be indoors, not making any money. I even lost my love, the love I thought was of my life! I felt these negative impacts, and it was very sad (Bhekizenzo, interview, Pretoria, 04 June 2021).

Based on the instances mentioned above, the loss of work and subsequently income or earnings significantly impacted the livelihoods of street traders and, later their networks. It affected their capacity to provide necessities for themselves and their households. The informal nature of their work and activities, with no formal arrangements for socio-economic support in the form of a fixed salary or social insurance, made it impractical for them to stop working.

The data also showed that street traders' significant drop in earnings for 2020 and 2021 was inadvertently tied to other necessities beyond economic survival. For example, this extended to food insecurity. Vulnerabilities had extended to traders' capacity to buy food and other essentials. Nono*, a 38-year-old trader selling second-hand clothing, reasoned, "our purses were thinner. We had to fasten our belts, only spending on the bare necessities, and eating twice a day". Eating three times a day was a luxury many traders could no longer afford. In addition, another participant elaborated

Many network members requested early withdrawals. Eventually, everyone got what they had put in, and we paused the network till further notice. We are still pending a return as 2021 has also been tough, so we haven't resumed our network (Duko, interview, Pretoria, 04 June 2021).

Most traders reported that their return to the streets was prompted by an urgent choice between risking their lives to brave the COVID-19 health risks or having no food to eat or livelihood for survival. However, over three-quarters of traders noted that even when they managed to return to the streets, their earnings were not the same as the number of customers was lower than before. Simultaneously, the lower-than-normal income streams were exacerbated by a rapid increase in the prices of goods. It was subsequently adding a further strain to networks, leading to delayed or cancelled contributions, which assisted in funding specific individual projects and investments in traders' future.

6.3.2 Impacts of disruptions in trader's social support

In this section, the findings from the study are explored with a focus on the disruptions to the coping strategies of street traders during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa. During the interviews with participants, local street traders highlighted disruptions in support from established resources and strategies for coping with the death of loved ones they would otherwise have received from their networks. To illustrate the disruptions in support from network members, one participant asserted

When one of our members has lost a loved one, the norm would be to mobilize two or more members, depending on availability, to assist with the planning of the funeral, for example, with cooking. In addition, the day before the funeral, all available members would host a prayer session at the house that lasts anything from two or four hours. With COVID, many people were experiencing frequent losses, but

we could not go and show our support. All we could do was a very impersonal phone call. It's not part of our culture [black cultural practices] to not show up in person. I lost my mother and cousin, but none of the network members could attend. It was a lonely experience with just a few family members. (Nono, interview, Pretoria, 23 August 2021).

Another participant added

The network we pay into every month is not just for financial support but also emotional support. You have someone to hold you up when you're down, but with COVID, no one was there except for family who were also in mourning. It was such a foreign experience to go through. Till today, it still hurts me as it's not what you think of when you think of a dignified send-off for a loved one. Death is abnormal, but now the burial process was also abnormal. The government asked us to ration how many people could attend the funeral. For my family, that wasn't even a quarter of the family which was hard to reconcile (Duko, interview, Pretoria, 04 September 2021).

Ivy* lamented, "I had to notify family and friends, and confirm their attendance for my uncle's funeral. It felt like I was sending a formal invite to a funeral. It was so unnatural". Based on the above sentiments, COVID-19 regulations negatively impacted social support, specifically street traders' importance to coping mechanisms and social practices during bereavement, which were no longer available to them. In addition, the regulation instituted by the government to curb the spread of the virus complicated the grief process for many social network members. The findings in Chapter Five showed the benefit of members participating in social networks for moral support to cope with loss. Whereas members would rotate assisting the bereaved with cooking, grocery shopping, running ad-hoc errands, or leading singing and prayer sessions, these practices and transfers of mutual aid ties were now absent. In addition, another government instituted regulation stipulated that only 50 people could attend a funeral, leading to the bereaved having to secure confirmations from family and friends regarding funeral attendance, which went against all the participant's cultural norms and practices. Based on the data from the Pretoria CBD, traders' networks were severely disrupted in terms of support, coping strategies, and burial beliefs in planning for the death of a loved one. The added support from networks where members played a crucial role in supporting the bereaved was suddenly unavailable to members.

Concurrently, even those traders who had not experienced the death of a loved one during the first year of COVID-19 in South Africa were nonetheless met with other challenges to their networks. Siphelele* declared, "I was very anxious because I had missed two payments into my burial society network". This was consistent with over two-thirds of

participants who confirmed they suffered anxiety over missed payments to their burial networks. Duko* added, “many people were passing away because of COVID. I felt a lot of pressure to ensure my burial society network payments were up to date”. In the context of COVID-19 regulations, the subsequent loss of income from traders being forced to stay at home disrupted the consistency and structure of networks for traders in the Pretoria CBD.

Another sub-theme from the analysis of the Pretoria CBD was the disruption to migrant network members, with no relatives around, who had found a family in the streets in their networks. The disruption of networks negatively affected foreign street traders through a lack of access to social integration and support, access to resources through the developed street family, and access to coping strategies. One participant illustrated the loss of social connection by stating

The regulations were very disruptive as they forced me to stay home and not interact with others. Understandably we had to keep the virus from spreading, but we could do this by wearing masks and not touching others. Sitting at home doing nothing, I was frustrated and felt isolated. Before COVID, I had lots of time on the streets to better my situation. My network would arrange home skills or business sharing meetings where we had an opportunity to improve or diversify our business activities and share ideas on home life improvements. As a newcomer in a foreign country, you need every opportunity you can get to socialize with other people with better knowledge of the country and space you will be operating in (Sandra, interview, Pretoria, 8 February 2021).

Previous studies have shown that social connectedness provides resources that individuals or groups can organize to respond to and adapt to disruption and shocks (Hogan, 2020). Therefore, social isolation negatively impacts the effectiveness of a network. Traders immerse themselves in social networks to cope with the complexities and socio-economic threats found in street trading. As evident in data from the Pretoria CBD, they base their engagement in networks on the generalized belief that individual actors trust that their alliance will be rewarded through the development of mutual relations. In a context where contingency planning is vital, street traders use social connections to drive the cohesion necessary for cooperative relationships, thus reducing disparities and facing shared challenges. Therefore, the shock of the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted street traders’ networks with new types of barriers to their social connections that impeded the fluidity of social ties.

As discussed in Chapter Five, pre-COVID traders in the Pretoria CBD could tap into informal communications channels with loved ones back home through their networks.

However, due to the COVID-19 regulations, cross-border travel was banned. Therefore, according to one participant,

The disruptions to migrant networks were intensely felt. Before, I could arrange for letters, money, and parcels to and from home through cross-border traders or other networks from church when someone was going home. I went for months without knowing what was happening at home and if my family was still alive with this COVID. My family lives in the villages where there is no network or phones. I relied heavily on postal services and networks of people traveling to and from home. With the regulations, I could not hear from my family, which increased my anxiety and the difficulties I was going through here in South Africa, not being able to travel (Olu, interview, Pretoria, 29 September 2022).

Similarly, another foreign participant confirmed

I have some family that lives in the urban areas back home. However, I had to wait until they could travel to the village before I got information on how my family was keeping up during COVID [-19]. I was in fear all the time, not knowing how my children back home were doing (Duko, interview, Pretoria, 29 August 2021).

Based on the above illustrations, the disruptions to foreign traders' networks were manifold. They led to the loss of opportunities to diversify business activities, learn, and identify opportunities through social interactions, and increased anxiety levels due to stress over the situations back home. The primary reason among these participants was the limited to no access to information from back home. Additionally, the data revealed that traders who would generally receive parcels from back home could not due to cross-border restrictions. Subsequently, foreign traders could no longer take refuge in social networks to ease the pressures associated with informal urban politics and being away from their home country.

Social networks generally represent members' beliefs, norms, values, and practices. Specifically, the COVID-19 containment measures had implications on street traders' norms, practices, and planning – the coming together – that enhanced social development. In the context of the pandemic, the analysis of the Pretoria CBD revealed that networks were (re)shaped with differential impacts on street traders (both foreign and local). Participants overwhelmingly reported that their networks were severely disrupted, in some form, during 2020 and parts of 2021. For example, before the pandemic, most networks in the Pretoria CBD met at least once a month to discuss various agenda items, including coping with life's challenges. During the first year of the pandemic, this dwindled to almost no face-to-face meetings, with most participants confirming their first meeting post-COVID in late 2020 or the beginning of 2021. Based on the meeting frequency, a sense of solidarity among members was created for them to rely on features of networks

for resources. However, trust is an essential component of networks, and a slight decrease may lead to negative consequences for a network.

The conformity of members' behavior cannot be extrapolated to how individuals react in times of crisis. Within the precarious nature of street trading, traders in the Pretoria CBD reacted in several ways when faced with COVID-19 uncertainties. According to Olu*, "our network collapsed because one of the members ran away with our money". In this case, the impact of COVID-19 on the social life of street traders highlighted the fragility of some networks to respond to a crisis effectively. In addition, due to the restrictions on movement, members could not meet in person and thus had little means to account to each other in their obligations. Some participants noted perceptions of isolation from their social networks, reducing their access to vital resources.

The sense of solidarity in informal networks relies on trust, but another essential component is physical contact or interaction and extending oneself to fellow members, which was almost impossible with COVID-19 regulations. Most people and businesses were bound to their homes. Therefore, some critical features of networks were no longer available or severely disrupted, which meant a further loss of support resources. COVID-19 led to many deaths in South Africa, and networks often provided emotional support for traders to cope. COVID-19 led to a multitude of illnesses and the incapacitation of some traders who would otherwise have received support from their networks. However, with the COVID-19 restrictions and constraints, most networks were rendered ineffective, with the data revealing that all participants struggled to adapt and cope.

6.4 Innovative Socio-economic Strategies Used by Street Traders to Adapt to COVID-19 Restrictions

The findings showed that street traders lost many customers due to stay-at-home orders. This is a stark reality with the average twelve hours street traders spend in the streets competing for customers to sustain their livelihoods. Even as restrictions eased, many customers still feared the health risks associated with the pandemic and opted to stay at home. In addition, many people lost their jobs, with unemployment rising to a record high of 35.3% at the end of 2021 (Stats SA, 2022). As such, people had little money to spend, as evident in the following statements from traders. Priscilla* confirmed, "I'm not making nearly the same amount of money I was making before COVID". To highlight street traders innovative coping strategies, Khulu* articulated, "I give additional discounts to my customers because people just don't have money anymore, and we're here the whole day".

As evident in the data, the scarcity of customers is supported by scholars in Rwafa *et al.* (2022) and Babalola *et al.* (2021), who highlight the challenges faced by traders, even those who sell food, for potential customers. The loss of customers limited the possible

daily earnings of street traders who rely primarily on informal trading for their livelihoods. Many traders in the Pretoria CBD opted to diversify their goods to selling essential items such as masks and sanitizers, in addition to the stock they already had, be it fruit and vegetables or clothing items. Not all traders diversified their products. One participant chose to remain with his goods citing

I could not change trends because I already had the stock. Once you are in the business, you stay in the business, even though they [customers] are not buying but they will be knowing you are here. When the time is right, they know where to go (Bhekizenzo, interview, Pretoria, 26 July 2021).

Many traders reported that “people are scared to come out of their homes” reducing the possibility of making sales. For many of the traders in the Pretoria CBD, this reduction was as much as half of the sales made pre-COVID times. Customers also understood the complex situation traders were in, as highlighted by Bhekizenzo*, “it wasn’t easy with fewer customers. One of the customers even said, *“I’m just buying for the sake of supporting, but I don’t need them [glasses], but I know that you need to go home and eat.”*

Beyond customers, many participants highlighted a significant disruption in access to trading forums for network support. In this regard, one participant confirmed

Before COVID [-19], we addressed and voiced our concerns to the Barekisi Forum, which I am a member of. During COVID [-19], we had to find alternative ways to ask our network to help us fight just to get back to the streets. The forum created a WhatsApp group where we could confirm our membership and send our grievances. I had to send the three main challenges, and I can tell you, for many of us, getting back to the streets was number one (Khulu, interview, Pretoria, 26 May 2021).

Based on the data of street traders in the Pretoria CBD, the above opinion highlights the majority point of view and attitude that getting access back onto the streets was paramount. Some traders, whose activity in the streets affords them opportunities for livelihood creation and survival, found some innovative strategies to adjust to COVID-19 restrictions, despite of the challenges and impacts, to realize some benefits from their networks.

6.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter has shown that certain population groups, particularly street traders, were more vulnerable to the socio-economic effects associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. The policy response in the country only focused on specific types of traders, thus excluding many others. However, street traders’ daily operations are primarily contingent on traders

occupying urban informal spaces, which they were now denied. Therefore, it was impractical for street traders to stop working as the policy responses implemented by the government did very little to address their survival. Therefore, the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent containment measures presented street traders with significant challenges to the support structures offered by social networks. Street trading constitutes a significant source of income and livelihood creation for millions of people, especially the poor and marginalized in developing countries. Street trading was not considered during the initial five-week national lockdown period despite its significance. When policy concessions were made, they inadequately covered some traders, were inaccessible for many, and excluded many foreign traders. Therefore, in a South African context, street traders received little, if at all, socio-economic support from the government. According to the data from the Pretoria CBD, the policy interventions on street trading were too stringent. Thus, many households, whose livelihoods depend on informal trading and networks, suddenly had no means to support themselves and their families.

Due to COVID-19 containment measures, street trading was highly vulnerable to significant socio-economic loss, with significant disruptions to trader's networks. Traders are part of the urban ecosystem, but the containment measures heavily impacted their livelihoods. Therefore, COVID-19, beyond its scope of being a health pandemic, impacted how street traders earn a living and, more importantly, the role of networks in mitigating their survival. In instances where traders utilized networks when struggling financially or in terms of investment contributions that assisted in funding specific individual projects, these options were no longer available as viable options. Trader's access to public spaces and customers was severely disrupted, with increased prices of goods limiting their purchasing power and contributions to networks. In addition, the emotional support and the street family that had developed through networks in the Pretoria CBD were destroyed due to stay-at-home regulations. As a result, many networks were rendered ineffective as their roles and functions were disrupted. The data revealed that COVID-19 disproportionately impacted street traders (local and foreign).

Furthermore, the research findings showed that the government instituted measures to safeguard lives and contain the spread of COVID-19 in South Africa had an adverse impact on the population in general and significant disruptions to street trader's networks in particular. Disruptions took many forms, from the absence of emotional support, to significantly disrupted pathways to financial resources and drastically altered means for collective agency. Finally, the data revealed that social networks are important, especially for capacity-building and resilience in vulnerable groups such as street traders, yet COVID-19 restrictions severely disrupted these. The chapter argued that social networks are critical to financial navigation and social support, including providing a family environment and emotional support during times of crisis for street traders.

Chapter Seven - Key Findings and Policy Implications

7.1 Overview

Street trading is an omnipresent informal activity that is part of the daily lives of most workers worldwide. In the South African context of increasing inequality, poverty and unemployment levels, street trading is critical to overcoming some of these challenges. Street traders partake in income-generating activities in an environment of precariousness and uncertainties. Thus, innovative coping strategies are a valuable resource to traders. Street trading often coexists with risks, deprivations, and vulnerabilities that represent a formidable challenge to traders and local government authorities. The study explores street trading within the Pretoria CBD as a contested urban public space consisting of street traders with diverse socio-economic and regional backgrounds. It investigates the existence, access to, and utility of social networks by street traders to sustain their livelihoods. It argues that social networks significantly affect many aspects of street traders' lives.

The study introduces the Pretoria CBD as a contested urban public space consisting of street traders with diverse socio-economic and regional backgrounds. The study adopted a qualitative approach set within the constructivist paradigm. It followed a single case study of the Pretoria CBD using participant observation, nonparticipant observation, and open-ended interviews. The study argues that street traders' ability to sustain their livelihoods and business activities is determined by and largely depends on having a good social life embedded in social networks. Traders who utilized networks were able to circumvent socio-economic and political challenges. Therefore, networks played a crucial role in mitigating challenges associated with the nature of street trading within the Pretoria CBD.

Street trading consists of heterogeneous activities and has consistently been regarded as a safety net for poor people. However, it is subjected to numerous challenges, including perverse regulatory frameworks, periodic confiscations, fines, and removals. Some of these perverse regulatory frameworks include high costs of obtaining licenses, limited access to trading spaces, inflexible regulations, and haphazard or harsh enforcement. Regardless of these challenges, many street traders visit the city daily to pursue livelihoods. In the Pretoria CBD, a mix of formal and informal enterprises, dilapidated and modern buildings, government offices and enforcers, and rich and poor individuals coexist. Simultaneously, at the community level, congested streets, hooting taxis, streams of pedestrians entering and exiting the city, shouting traders competing for customer's attention, constant negotiations, buying and selling, products being loaded and unloaded,

continuous cooking and relaxation occur side by side, on street pavements too crowded with multiple identities and hopes for livelihood. With all the complexity in this locale, street traders shared a similar primary goal - making money and sustaining their livelihoods.

In the Pretoria CBD, street trading is undertaken in the broader public space, although local government authorities designate specific areas for trading. These specific areas tend to be along Stanza Bopape Street and Helen Joseph Street, thus street traders are consequently found in the broader non-designated spaces. Consequently, street trading is considered a contravention of municipal bylaws. Since street trading takes place outside the purview of the law, it is regarded as an 'informal activity' by government authorities. Consequently, the state uses the illegal concept to legitimize draconian policies and punitive actions against street traders. In South Africa, governments frequently refer to most street trading activities as 'illegal' as they occur without the required licenses or permits to trade. This implies that the state considers street traders who operate without a valid permit or license as engaging in an 'illegal' activity.

The legal framework for street trading in South Africa is complex and varies depending on the location and type of trading activity. In some areas, street trading is regulated by municipal bylaws, while in others, it is governed by national legislation. Although bylaws govern street trading in the Pretoria CBD, many traders continue to operate without the necessary permits or licenses due to the high costs associated with obtaining them, bureaucratic barriers and limited access to formal markets. Many individuals engage in informal trading as a means of livelihood, particularly poor people with limited options. Street traders utilized social networks as innovative coping strategies and survival tactics to sustain their livelihoods.

The self-organizing capacity of individuals or groups has been and remains an essential feature of agency, especially within street trading, in maintaining socio-economic resilience. However, there is little qualitative information on the role of social networks. Therefore, it was the premise of this research to investigate the informal social networks of street traders. Specifically, their contribution, significance, and how external shocks may impact networks. This required understanding the actors involved, their composition, function, and how they operate to achieve their objectives, benefits, and limitations. To facilitate the understanding of network functions and its effects, sociological theories relevant to the study of social networks were applied to explain the various facets of networks found in the Pretoria CBD. As a result, it provides theoretical foundations for methodologies to explore social networks within street trading. The study argues that this information is critical for developing appropriate policy strategies. Additionally, the

multitude of network structures initiated by street traders to sustain their livelihoods offers new insights into informal urban politics for researchers.

7.2 Discussion

In addition to the overview above, street trading is ubiquitous in the Pretoria CBD, and worldwide, especially in low-middle-income countries. The research study showed that street traders used social networks to address the issues associated with street trading, particularly those related to the daily management of their activities. In addition, street traders could harness social, economic, and political benefits by engaging in social networks. Thus, networks represented the innovative coping strategies through which street traders received emotional support, sustained their income, and voiced their interests within local government. The rationale for attempting such an analysis is to provide a more accurate representation of the nature of the relations within street trading, as discussed in this section, based on the summary of findings in the Pretoria CBD.

The findings in this study expand our understanding of how informal social networks are structured, how they function within the daily lives of street traders and their benefits. The networks in the Pretoria CBD were founded on principles of interdependence instead of independence. Furthermore, they emphasized the sociality of street trading. Shared and collective dependence signified that traders do not operate in isolation outside of their social context. Therefore, street trading is predicated on a complex and heterogeneous web of interdependence. This interdependence focuses on mutual relationships, social connectedness, and reciprocity found in networks in the Pretoria CBD. As such, a discussion on the findings of the main objectives of the study are discussed below.

To clarify the topography of social networks by examining the situational factors that explain a street trader's decision to join networks.

In the analysis of the topography of social network and their impact on street traders, an integral aspect of the study objectives was examining the situational factors that drive a street trader's decision to join such networks. The findings revealed that street traders draw from a range of factors that drive them to engage in networks from a local, national, and global level. At a local level, street trading is characterized by exclusionary and punitive government legislation that reveals a narrow-minded disregard for informal trading dynamics. At a national level, consistently rising poverty, unemployment, and inequality levels were the primary drivers influencing street trader's engagement in social networks. External shocks, such as the effects of the COVID-19 health pandemic and regulations on society, in general, and their subsequent impact on street traders, were the key global and national level factors. Different network structures – heterogeneous and

homogeneous – collaborated and cooperated to create social networks. Therefore, a trader's decision was influenced by a complex interplay of economic, social, political, and environmental factors, reflecting the intricate web of motivations that shape street traders' interactions and associations.

In analyzing the network structures, the evidence from the case study suggested that sociality is an essential aspect of a street trader's life to eke out a livelihood in the streets. The self-organizing capacity of street traders distinguishes the social life of street trading found in the Pretoria CBD. It argues that collective action aids the economic aspect of street trading. This support extends to the social aspect of street trading, where traders engage in informal savings schemes due to a lack of access to financial institutions and each other in cases of incapacitation due to illness or bereavement and skills-sharing. Finally, through social networks, street traders used their collective voice to express their opinions and address concerns with the local government on issues they face in their daily lives. The study also revealed that the decision-making processes of joining networks in the Pretoria CBD were (re)negotiated through relationships based on trust, interdependence, and common interest. The concepts of trust and interdependence were consistent findings in the study and supported the position of other scholars (Borgatti *et al.*, 2018; Granovetter, 2005; Woolcock, 2001). Therefore, trust played a significant role in the Pretoria CBD in shaping the patterns of relationships between street traders.

Members of a group were responsible for the initial formation and continuity, and the administrative and organizational tasks (for example, scheduling meetings, taking meeting notes, and being treasurer). The data revealed that the governance structure of social networks included members being initiated into a group through referrals. Therefore, a member's reputation was essential to ensure trust by meeting norm obligations and expectations agreed upon by the network. If a member failed to meet their obligations, the network had ensuing penalties, in the form of a fine, for example. If members proceeded to withhold their commitments within the network, they could be voted out. The chapter concluded that street traders in the Pretoria CBD faced constraints arising from their intrinsic deprivation of resources. They were also vulnerable to external shocks and pressures at a global and local level. Such conditions make street trading a precarious, uncertain and a contested space to operate within. Added to the challenge, street traders generally faced an ambiguous and haphazard regulatory environment. By engaging in social networks, street traders in the Pretoria CBD could minimize threats to their livelihood.

As we examine the topography of social networks, it becomes clear that these networks are dynamic spaces that play are essential in the survival, resilience, and empowerment

of street traders within urban landscape. Therefore, these findings raise implications about perceptions of vulnerability and how these lead street traders to engage in new forms of solidarity through social networks. The determination and discipline within which street traders partook in social networks were situated within a broader scope of ensuring oneself against risks, threats, precarity and uncertainty. Therefore, informal social networks in the Pretoria CBD had the potential to change the overall reality of street trader's lives. As discussed in the following section, social networks emphasized the importance of relationships and connections within street trading, how these relationships shaped individual and collective gains, and other social, economic, and political outcomes.

To analyze the importance and significance of social networks to street traders and examine the benefits that accrue from social networks.

The second objective and substantive data chapter examined the importance, significance, and benefits of social networks in street trader's lives. The findings revealed that networks offered traders pathways to access their markets, improve business and skills, and to cope and survive. It argued that the voluntary action by street traders, conducted under precarious and insecure conditions, had implications for their business activities and resulted in material and non-material outcomes. For example, support during times of hardships, access to markets, and access to the city. Therefore, the evidence from the Pretoria CBD highlighted that networks had an essential role in traders' lives as they provided resilience-enabling innovations and strategies. These were particularly significant to traders where value-laden social, economic, and political resources were limited or non-existent. In addition, networks were crucial for their potential to influence adaptability, mitigate challenges, sharing of good practices, and facilitate the diffusion of information and capacity-building. Therefore, based on the social networks case study in the Pretoria CBD, networks influenced not only their economic endeavours, but also street traders' emotional well-being, adaptability, and resilience through adversity.

The sub-themes that emerged from the data had social, economic, and political significance to street traders in the Pretoria CBD. In the context of the Pretoria CBD, social networks in the form of burial or other social functions were a crucial part and element of social life in South Africa. Therefore, the social life of street trading was a significant element in reinforcing coping strategies through traders' informal relationships and collective action with others. The sub-themes from the social role of networks to traders included mutual support during difficult times and assistance with personal advice (in the form of home improvement tips or coping with difficulties). In addition, for foreign traders, networks were crucial in providing a home away from home, thus recreating the illusion of home support in South Africa. The main economic benefits apparent from the data were

street traders collectively investing in their future through savings schemes or building societies. Some networks offered their members business acumen skills and other support measures to strengthen business activities. In the absence of access to banking institutions resulting from the nature and characteristics of street trading, networks also provided informal rotating credit schemes. From a political perspective, networks were an invaluable opportunity for street traders to advocate for their interests with local authorities by utilizing their collective voice through their political forums. To summarize the evidence from the Pretoria CBD, the findings imply that we should consider social networks as a durable and efficient means of sustaining trader's livelihoods.

The above findings are consistent with other scholars who note the existence of social networks within the informal economy (Meagher, 2018; Bromley and Wilson, 2018). Although these scholars note the existence of informal relationships, they assert that very little information exists on the nature and efficacy of networks in a South African context, which this study addresses. These findings raise implications on informal urban politics about how poor communities, specifically street traders, provide a sense of community and belonging through networks, promote social cohesion and reduce exclusion. In addition, the findings raise important questions on how street traders navigate perceptions of vulnerability and exclusion to access new markets and pool resources to invest in equipment and infrastructure that supports their livelihoods. Therefore, social networks can provide a range of social, economic, and political benefits to street traders, helping to improve their livelihoods and sustain their businesses. The importance and significance of these networks cannot be overstated, as they transcend economic transactions to encompass emotional bonds, collective strength, and mutual support. Street traders navigate urban challenges armed with the knowledge that their networks provide more than just livelihood opportunities – they provide a framework for thriving within the intricate tapestry of urban life. The profound impact of social networks on street traders illustrates the intricate ways in which human connections shape the urban landscape, offering hope, empowerment, and community to those who contribute to its vibrancy.

To explore the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the street trader's propensity to engage and reap benefits from social networks.

In examining the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on street traders' engagement with and benefits from social networks, a complex narrative emerges. The pandemic has disrupted the dynamics of these networks, presenting both challenges and opportunities that have redefined the role of social connections in the lives of street traders. Therefore, despite the capacity of social networks to mitigate societal imperfections, networks are not wholly adequate for responding to all challenges. The third objective and data chapter

highlighted that exogenous shocks, shifting and fluid times bring new challenges and realities, especially for vulnerable groups. Galvanized by the need to contain the spread of COVID-19, the South African government launched stringent government regulations on the national population. The chapter explored the specific and deleterious ways the regulations and policy measures affected and disrupted street trader's networks. Due to the unprecedented nature of the pandemic, the initial government response was not informed by local qualitative data. Therefore, the government regulations and social relief responses were insufficient to counter the added complex challenges reinforced within street trading. Therefore, manifestations of COVID-19 put Pretoria CBD street traders under increasing pressure to adapt and survive.

The findings illustrated that the regulations implemented to curb the spread of COVID-19 had an adverse impact on street traders. Instead of aiding, the social relief measures resulted in inequities. First, the government initially ignored street traders in the original COVID-19 policy regulations. Second, after much criticism, the government made amendments, but street traders who did not have permits before the COVID-19 regulations were gazetted could not return to the streets. Street traders highlighted difficulties and bottlenecks in accessing social relief measures. In addition, most social relief measures remained inaccessible to a large portion of foreign traders on account of being undocumented or not having the required documentation. Due to travel bans and cross-border restrictions, street traders with a strong rural identity lacked the financial and technological means (often absent in the rural areas) to reach family and other social ties in the rural areas. In addition, foreign traders who had found an illusion of home through social networks in South Africa found their tactics ineffective due to COVID-19 restrictions. The above emphasizes some salient and exclusionary themes that emerged from the data of street traders in the Pretoria CBD on the impacts of COVID-19 regulations on their livelihoods.

A thematic analysis of the data revealed that most street traders' networks were severely disrupted in some form between March 2020 and March 2021, resulting from the national lockdown and associated COVID-19 regulations in South Africa. The data illustrated the following themes: losses in income, physical isolation, market uncertainty and price increases, loss of customers and stock, early savings withdrawals, and food insecurity. For example, the analysis highlighted that lockdowns and social distancing measures imposed during the pandemic restricted physical interaction, disrupting the face-to-face connections that street traders heavily relied upon for information exchange, resource sharing, and moral support. Additionally, the volatility in market conditions and the closure of public spaces led to unpredictable shifts in demand and supply. Street traders found it

challenging to navigate these uncertainties without access to the streets or their clientele and the insights gained from their networks.

Simultaneously, foreign traders could not make significant, if any, remittances back home due to disruptions in the network process that allowed them to make provisions for sending money or parcels to and from home. Furthermore, the study found that the increasing impact of COVID-19, coupled with pre-existing socio-economic challenges were recurring concerns that amplified vulnerability and resulted in deprivations for street traders. Therefore, Chapter Six extends the analysis of how COVID-19 impacted street traders and manifested as a threat and multiplier of vulnerability with COVID-19 regulations affecting the adequate inclusion of street trading dynamics and disrupting traders' networks.

These findings were consistent with the recent literature emerging that during the pandemic, major disruptions were noticed to street trader's operations and difficulties in accessing government social relief measures (Bassier *et al.*, 2021; Horwood *et al.*, 2021; Khambule, 2020; Skinner and Watson, 2020). These findings raise implications on the impacts of exogenous shocks in street traders' lives. Specifically, shocks and disruptions can have significant implications for street traders, who are already vulnerable to economic instability and social exclusion. For example, based on the findings in the Pretoria CBD, pandemics may cause marketplaces to close, resulting in consumer demand to decline, resulting in income loss. The loss of income can be devastating for street traders who depend on daily earnings to support themselves and their families.

Reflections on findings

Therefore, based on the above key findings, the study reflects as follows. The study contributes to global and local debates on social networks within street trading in five critical ways. First, it develops a gap in the literature on the diversified social network typologies within the Pretoria CBD, accounting for unique informal contexts. The in-depth analysis of street trading, covering individuals, groups, and economic units, broadens the existing knowledge and nuances about street trader's vulnerability and innovative coping strategies not captured in the existing literature. There are also distinct patterns of collective action and solidarity across and within street traders, with visible differences in tackling vulnerability and other daily pressures. These account for the community-level empirical and theoretical contributions. Second, the study presents new empirical evidence on the links between vulnerability and social networks. A complex, heterogeneous, and dynamic portrait emerges with fundamental instances of collective organizing through social networks. The analysis of social networks sheds light on street

traders' innovative coping strategies and socio-economic support within the precarious nature of informal trading, including a political voice against an ambiguous and punitive regulatory environment.

Third, the study assessed the external and internal risks and factors perpetuating vulnerability in street trading. Street traders face substantial threats and vulnerabilities resulting from an amalgamation of factors. Furthermore, the lack of access to socio-economic systems to help street traders cope with vulnerability pushes many into uncertainties and insecurity. In the absence of adequate and effective social protection assistance from the government, street traders remain vulnerable, deprived, and excluded while participating at the margins of society. Fourth, the study shows that the use of social networks by street traders is a complex and multiplex domain that touches on a wide range of benefits, including social, economic, and political. Trust and social connectedness were vital in promoting engagement in networks, creating innovative coping mechanisms, and enhancing survival strategies. Fifth, not all networks can survive in the short or medium term due to external shocks. For many, as highlighted by the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent regulations, any slight change in form or conditions may lead to adverse outcomes. In the Pretoria CBD, the data revealed that a collective set of norms and practices propels the development and structure of networks. Although these were differentiated in form, size, nature, and scope, they all encompassed shared organizing principles.

7.3 What Does this Analysis Tell us About Social Networking and Vulnerable Populations?

Analyzing informal social networking among vulnerable populations provides valuable insights into the dynamics of support, resilience, and community-building within street trading settings. It underscores the profound significance of informal networking as a critical lifeline for those facing social, economic, or political challenges. This concluding section reflects upon the study's key findings and interprets the significance of informal networking within informal settings for vulnerable populations. Several vital takeaways were derived from the study.

First, informal social networking is a crucial support system for vulnerable populations. For those struggling financially, living in marginalized communities, or dealing with inequalities, informal networks provide a sense of community and emotional support. Second, social networks facilitate the sharing of essential information, resources, and strategies for coping with challenges. This can range from practical advice on accessing storage facilities to guidance on navigating complex bureaucracies. Third, social networking frequently helps vulnerable populations find strength and resilience. These

networks enable people to stand up for their rights, confront structural injustices, and bring about constructive change.

Fourth, informal networks frequently have a strong connection to their local communities and cultures. They offer culturally appropriate assistance that considers various vulnerable groups' struggles and requirements. For example, through informal social networks, local traders were able to bury their loved ones according to their traditions and cultural norms. Concurrently, foreign traders stayed connected to their roots through networking. Fifth, social exclusion and isolation are prevalent challenges for both local and foreign street traders, many of whom come from outside urban settings. By cultivating connections and establishing settings where people may openly discuss their experiences without being judged, social networking works to alleviate this isolation. Finally, informal networks are instrumental in mobilizing resources within communities. Whether it's pooling funds for emergencies, organizing building materials, or saving capital to supplement entrepreneurship, these networks can channel resources where they are needed most.

Based on the above-mentioned takeaways of the importance of social networking in informal settings for vulnerable populations, the significance can be summarized as follows. Social networks serve as vital coping mechanisms for individuals facing adversity. The significance here is that these networks provide a space for street traders to share their burdens, seek advice, and find emotional support. Social networking strengthens community resilience, empowering people to face challenges head-on and adjust to shifting conditions. The significance of these networks lies in their ability to strengthen communities from within. The power of informal social networking is most evident when it catalyzes collective advocacy efforts. These networks can amplify the voices of marginalized populations, draw attention to their needs, and drive social and policy change. Vulnerable populations also develop a sense of agency and empowerment through informal social networking. The significance lies in the newfound ability to navigate complex systems, access resources, and advocate for their rights.

In conclusion, the analysis of informal social networking within street trading for vulnerable populations illuminates the remarkable significance of these networks in providing support, resilience, and a sense of community. Informal social networking represents a powerful force for change and empowerment, allowing individuals and groups to navigate their challenges with greater strength and solidarity. As we consider the value of these informal relationships, it becomes evident that they are crucial to the lives of vulnerable populations, providing them with strength, hope, and a sense of community in a frequently uncertain and challenging world.

7.4 Policy Implications

Policymakers

The seriousness of South Africa remaining the most unequal country in the world on economic measurements, with persistent and systemic challenges of increasing poverty rates and chronic unemployment, remains a structural feature that demands a more detailed policy response. Based on the findings from the study, tackling vulnerability within street trading and facilitating safeguards to foster social cohesion in society requires actions from policymakers on five broad fronts:

- Expanding social protection to street traders

The data revealed that street traders contributed to informal economic activity and livelihood creation in the Pretoria CBD. However, street traders frequently work in precarious informal environments, lacking access to social protection mechanisms enjoyed by workers in the formal economy. For example, formal contracts or legal recognition, make them ineligible for social protection programmes, including unemployment benefits. Expanding social protection to street traders is a complex endeavour with important policy ramifications.

Expanding social protection to cover street traders necessitates inclusive policies that consider the heterogeneous nature of their work and activities. Policymakers must consider tailoring programmes catering to various categories of informal traders while considering their specific needs and vulnerabilities. This was evident in the data, which revealed that during COVID-19, street traders in the Pretoria CBD found themselves left behind and overlooked by the government. Thus, highlighting the need for governments and policymakers to consider street traders' context-specific needs and vulnerabilities. Therefore, policies must also adapt to shifting economic conditions and shocks.

Informal traders must be identified and registered to receive social protection benefits. However, this procedure can be complicated because of the fluidity and informality of their work. To reduce bureaucratic hurdles, policymakers must create registration processes that are easy to use and accessible. Limited access to education was another barrier for street traders in the Pretoria CBD, which aligns with what other scholars have articulated (Chen and Carre, 2020; WIEGO, 2019; ILO, 2019). Therefore, many street traders lack awareness about their rights and the benefits of social protection.

Policymakers should invest in education and awareness campaigns to ensure that street traders understand the value of social protection programmes and how to access them. As revealed in the data, street traders in the Pretoria CBD formed social networks to engage, advocate for their rights, and amplify their voices within politics. Since some

informal worker associations exist, policymakers can leverage them to identify street trader beneficiaries for social protection programmes. Additionally, policymakers are encouraged to leverage local street traders' associations to engage them in dialogue, educate traders on social protection programmes available to them, and collective policy formulation.

Expanding social protection reduces street traders' vulnerability to income shocks, ultimately improving their economic resilience. However, some challenges that exist include financial constraints and others related to the nature of street trading. First, expanding social protection to street traders requires significant financial resources, which may strain government budgets. Second, identifying beneficiaries could be problematic because street trading is amorphous and often unregulated. Therefore, one-size-fits-all policies may not address the specific needs and unique requirements of different types of traders.

Expanding social protection to street traders is a complex but necessary policy endeavour. While it presents challenges related to funding and the nature of street trading, the potential benefits in terms of reducing vulnerability and inequality make it a worthwhile endeavour. To effectively implement policies and serve the context-specific requirements of street traders, policymakers must take a nuanced approach, considering the diversity within street trading. Governments may improve a significant chunk of the informal workforce's livelihoods by doing this.

- Encouraging formalization of street trading through incentives, such as reduced regulatory barriers, access to credit, and support services

Many street traders choose not to formalize their businesses due to various challenges and constraints. The data from the Pretoria CBD articulated that in the context of street trading, a hurdle to formalizing traders' operations is a lack of documents required to comply with the regulatory environment. Another theme that emerged from the data was informal market dynamics. In informal markets, where adaptability and flexibility are crucial benefits, formalization can lead to rigid business structures, making competing in the highly competitive informal economy difficult.

The data also revealed that street traders often lack access to formal financial services, including credit, loans, and insurance. Their ability to access banking institutions also makes it difficult for street traders to meet the financial requirements of formalization, such as renting a store or complying with complex tax obligations. Policymakers should work to reduce bureaucratic barriers and facilitate compliance through incentives. Given the above challenges for street traders, simplifying and streamlining the registration process and

regulatory requirements can encourage formalization. Formalized street traders can integrate into the broader economy, expanding their market reach and contributing to local economic development.

Another incentive for policymakers to consider is establishing mechanisms that give street traders access to credit and banking services. In the Pretoria CBD, some informal social networks that street traders engage in include access to credit. To reduce lending risks associated with the informal nature of this borrowing, policymakers could consider collaborations with microfinance institutions, customized loan products, or credit guarantee programmes for traders who have formalized. In addition, the formalization process can be facilitated by having access to support services, including legal counsel, assistance with business registration, and training on market intelligence.

Policymakers should understand the dynamics of informal markets, including the role of social networks when designing formalization incentives. Access to credit and training can improve the productivity of street traders, leading to higher income levels. Incentives for formalization can also promote financial inclusion, helping street traders access banking services and savings products. Policymakers can better assess and understand street traders' environment to facilitate locally appropriate initiatives and policies. A mutually beneficial understanding between street traders and policymakers would help advance local economic development through employment. It requires combining street traders' informal resources and resilience capabilities with the policymaker's mandate to promote livelihood creation and burden sharing. The synergy between street traders and policymakers would equip the government to create inclusive policies that empower vulnerable communities to survive.

Government

National and local governments have a meaningful role in mitigating societal imperfections for vulnerable populations. To address street trading challenges, government should: protect workers and their activities; design targeted and inclusive policies and regulatory frameworks; facilitate and provide accessible and inclusive socio-economic relief packages; augment and prioritize social services in poor communities; provide support to local social organizations; adapt and reduce administrative barriers and complexities to the needs of street traders; and facilitate and implement better-informed policy planning initiatives. Thereby stimulating the growth of small businesses, creating and sustaining employment opportunities, reducing inequalities and poverty, and the effects of COVID-19. The study showed that during COVID-19, policy measures used to regulate street trading did not align with the context and prevailing dynamics. Therefore, the approaches

and strategies instituted by the government need to explicitly consider the nature, scope, and idiosyncrasies that define street trading. As highlighted in data and literature, street trading exists in a complex context, including registered and unregistered traders, local and foreign traders, and typically in insecure geographical locations. Beyond the bustling urban streets and selling on sidewalks, street trading exists within a complex web of interactions, influences, and challenges. Street trading is a dynamic and multifaceted phenomenon deeply intertwined with urban dynamics, economic forces, social structures, and regulatory frameworks. Traders grapple with licensing issues, evictions, and clashes with authorities. The inherent informality of street trading raises questions about urban governance, informal economies, and the need to balance regulation with the livelihoods of traders. Therefore, for future pandemics or other external shocks, government planning should consider street traders' immense vulnerability and limited access to social relief when designing and implementing policies that remove traders from their only source of livelihood. The points mentioned above further affirm governments need to provide inclusive and complementary policies for durable and sustainable solutions for street traders.

Community level engagement

To understand how and why street traders' social networks emerge, evolve, and change over time. Improved understanding of social network dynamics at the local community level is important for several reasons. Chapter Four focused on the factors that propel street traders to engage in networks. Their genesis and evolution in terms of structure were the focus of the analysis. Chapter Five highlighted the potential role of street trader agency in creating innovative coping strategies that benefit them. In Chapter Six, the study noted that significant disruptions due to COVID-19 regulations adversely impacted the ability of networks to function, rendering them ineffective as a coping strategy. For example, at the local level, to respond to and soften the impact of COVID-19 and the subsequent government regulations. Therefore, such operational contexts are contingent on the efficacy of the specific network structures. Based on the above, the study recommends that network structures should: aggregate insights from members on network issues for the effective functioning of the network; engage and advocate for the needs of their members at all times; mobilize social, economic, and political resources to support and mitigate members livelihoods; coordinate activities to provide emotional and psychosocial support to members. Networking can enable street traders to engage with their customers and communities more effectively, building trust and creating opportunities for dialogue and collaboration. Governments may need to encourage and support community-led initiatives that promote community engagement, dialogue and cooperation between street traders, customers, and local authorities.

Street traders

The use of social networks by street traders can have several policy implications. Chapter Five highlighted the economic, social, and political benefits of social networks for street traders. First, the benefit of financial inclusion is to access new markets and customers, increasing street traders' income and helping them become financially included. Second, street traders used social networks to access financial services as a safety net during financial shocks. Additionally, social networks helped street traders and their households maintain financial stability and improve their quality of life. Beyond the benefits mentioned above, the study also recommends that street traders use social networks to share knowledge and resources to sustain their livelihoods and grow their businesses, a positive survival strategy to consider. Therefore, social networks among street traders can have significant implications for their livelihoods and socio-economic well-being. The study suggests that social networks can facilitate economic integration among street traders, enabling them to participate in formal markets. Policies that support the formation and functioning of these associations can help street traders move from informal to formal economies, increasing their economic security and reducing their vulnerability. In addition, social networks can provide street traders with access to resources, such as capital, market information, and training. Policies that support the formation and functioning of these networks can enable street traders to improve their productivity and competitiveness, enabling greater bargaining power.

7.5 Future of Research

Future research on the networking of street traders can explore several areas, including the factors influencing the adoption, impact on income and livelihoods, impact on urban governance, dangerous or virtual networks, comparative analysis, and coping with external shocks. First, research can explore the factors influencing street traders' adoption of social networks, including their age, gender, level of education, and technological literacy. It can also investigate the role of social networks, culture, and social norms in shaping the adoption of social networks among street traders. Second, there is a need to study the impact of networking on the income and livelihoods of street traders. This can involve examining the types of networking tools used, the extent to which they are used, and the outcomes for street traders, such as increased sales, access to new markets, and improved customer relationships. Third, research can investigate the impact of networking on urban governance, including the relationship between street traders and local authorities, the role of networking in promoting dialogue and cooperation between street traders, customers, and local authorities, and the implications of networking for the regulation of street trading activities.

A few participants illustrated in Chapter Five that using social networks can pose several dangers to street traders, including exposure to criminal activities and exploitation. Street traders may be exposed to criminal activities through their use of social networks. Alternatively, social networks may be used, either by members or third parties, to exploit street traders by offering them false promises in exchange for money or defaulting on their obligations. Research can explore the dangers associated with social networks by street traders, including the potential for exploitation and abuse of membership. Another avenue for potential future research can be to compare the networking practices of street traders in different cities, countries, or regions, examining the similarities and differences in the types of networks used, the extent to which they are used, and the outcomes for street traders. This can shed light on the role of context in shaping the social network practices of street traders.

In the context of external shocks, specifically the impacts of COVID-19 on marginalized communities, this study and other studies in the future on how vulnerable groups adapt could help identify how and what support is needed. Researchers working on street trading can use their expertise and resources to inform and re-orient future planning to alleviate the short-term impacts of crises and build long-term resilience to future shocks. The study recommends that this research and future research communicate the findings and put forward recommendations (for example, through policy briefs, academic articles, and podcasts). In addition, future research will need to identify, analyze and interpret ongoing and changing factors that propel street traders to engage in networks and how resilient these networks are to disruptions. This is especially pertinent in the context of constantly evolving urban environments, coupled with the dilemma of possible future pandemics and how these impact the development of vulnerable groups. The research could also supplement government monitoring and evaluation to ensure that policies implemented reach the vulnerable groups that need it most.

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Appendix 1: Research permission – City of Tshwane



City Strategy and Organizational Performance

Room CSP22 | Ground Floor, West Wing, Block D | Tshwane House | 320 Madiba Street | Pretoria | 0002
PO Box 440 | Pretoria | 0001
Tel: 012 358 7423
Email: NosiphoH@tshwane.gov.za | www.tshwane.gov.za | www.facebook.com/CityOfTshwane

My ref: **Research Permission/F.Khuzwayo**
Contact person: **Pearl Maponya**
Section/Unit: **Knowledge Management**

Tel: 012 358 4559
Email: PearlMap3@tshwane.gov.za
Date: 13 August 2020

Ms Fanelesbonge Khuzwayo

512 Dawn Road
Lynnwood
0081

Dear Ms Khuzwayo,

RE: THE SOLIDARITY NETWORKS OF INFORMAL STREET TRADERS: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF STREET TRADING IN THE TSHWANE METROPOLITAN CITY, SOUTH AFRICA.

Permission is hereby granted to Ms Fanelesbonge Khuzwayo, Doctoral Degree Candidate in Development Studies at the University of Pretoria (UP), to conduct research in the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality.

It is noted that the primary aim of the study is to investigate the contribution, role and significance of informal social networks for street traders in the Pretoria Central Business and to understand street trading dynamics in the developing world. The City of Tshwane further notes that all ethical aspects of the research will be covered within the provisions of UP Research Ethics Policy. You will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement with the City of Tshwane prior to conducting research.

Relevant information required for the purpose of the research project will be made available as per applicable laws and regulations. The City of Tshwane is not liable to cover the costs of the research. Upon completion of the research study, it would be appreciated that the findings in the form of a report and or presentation be shared with the City of Tshwane.

Yours faithfully,

PEARL MAPONYA (Ms.)
DIRECTOR, KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Appendix 2: Ethical Clearance – University of Pretoria



Faculty of Humanities

Fakulteit Geesteswetenskappe
Lefapha la Bomotheo



2 September 2020

Dear Miss FMB Khuzwayo

Project Title: The Social Life of Street Trading: A Qualitative Analysis of Social and Economic Significance of Informal Street Traders' Solidarity Networks in the Tshwane Metropolitan City, South Africa
Researcher: Miss FMB Khuzwayo
Supervisor(s): Prof V Thebe
Department: Anthropology and Archaeology
Reference number: 22324985 (HUM048/0620)
Degree: Doctoral

I have pleasure in informing you that the above application was **approved** by the Research Ethics Committee on 27 August 2020. Data collection may therefore commence.

Please note that this approval is based on the assumption that the research will be carried out along the lines laid out in the proposal. Should the actual research depart significantly from the proposed research, it will be necessary to apply for a new research approval and ethical clearance.

We wish you success with the project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'KHarris'.

Prof Karen Harris
Acting Chair: Research Ethics Committee
Faculty of Humanities
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
e-mail: PGHumanities@up.ac.za

Appendix 3: Letter of introduction and Informed consent



Faculty of Humanities
Fakulteit Geesteswetenskappe
Lefapha la Bomotho



Letter of Introduction and Informed Consent

Dept. of Anthropology and Archaeology (Development Studies)

The Solidarity Networks of Informal Street Traders: A Qualitative Analysis of the Dynamics of Social Networks among Informal Street Trading in the Tshwane Metropolitan City, South Africa

Research conducted by:

Ms, FMB Khuzwayo, (u22324985)
Cell: 082 298 9341

Dear Participant

You are invited to participate in an academic research study conducted by Ms. Fanelesbonge Khuzwayo, a Ph.D. student from the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology (Development Studies) at the University of Pretoria.

The purpose of the study is to understand the social networks associated with street trading in the Pretoria Central Business District (CBD). I confirm that this study will be purely for academic purposes.

Please note the following:

- This is an anonymous study as your name will not appear on any of the documentation. The answers you give will be treated as strictly confidential as you cannot be identified in person based on the answers you give.
- Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may, however, choose not to participate and you may also stop participating at any time without any negative consequences. Furthermore, the study will not lead to harm (emotionally or physically) to the participant.
- You may ask any questions related to the study before signing the consent form. Furthermore, you have the opportunity to request access to your data.
- Please be aware that this will be a participant observation study with some discussions via interviews that will be grouped into thematic areas. The discussion should not take more than 45 minutes of your time.
- The results of the study will be used for academic purposes only. The results will be published as a Ph.D. thesis and may be published in an academic journal. I will provide you with a summary of my findings upon request.
- You are participating with the full knowledge that there are no direct benefits to you for the participation.
- This information will be stored in the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology for a period of 15 years.
- When writing up the research results, the student will comply with the University of Pretoria's policies regarding plagiarism.

Please sign the form to indicate that:

- You have read and understood the information provided above.
- You give your consent to participate in the study on a voluntary basis.

Participant's signature

Date

Appendix 4: Interview Schedule



Faculty of Humanities

Fakulteit Geesteswetenskappe
Lefapha la Bomotheo



Interview Schedule

Section A: Demographic Background

1. What is your gender?

Female

Male

2. How old are you?

23 to 30 years

31 to 40 years

41 to 55 years

3. What is the highest qualification you have completed?

Primary

Secondary

Tertiary

4. How long have you been a street trader?

2 to 4 years

5 to 9 years

+ 10 years

5. Are you living in:

Township

Suburb

6. How many people do you support in your household through street trading?

1 to 3 years

4 to 7 years

8 or more

7. On average, how much would you estimate you earn per month?

R3000 or less

R5000 or less

R5001 or more

8. Is there any other source of income in your home besides street trading?

Yes

No

Section B: Research focus

1. What prompted you to join an organization?
2. How did you find one and what were the conditions for joining the organization?
3. How active are you as a member in the organization?
4. Do you only have one organization you are a member with, or are there more? If others, what kind of organizations are they?
5. Would you leave the organization, if so, why?
6. In the past year, how has this organization helped you?
7. Have you, as an individual, received any economic support from the organization?
8. Have you, as an individual, received any other support besides economic support from the organization. If so, please explain what kind of support.
9. What kind of support do you, as a group of street traders, receive from the organization?
10. What happens to the continuity of the organization if a member does not do their part?
11. How do you, as an organization, ensure that relations of reciprocity remain fair for all group members?
12. Was the organization affected by the COVID-19 government regulations? If so, how?
13. Is there anything else, related to your organizations, that you would like to share with me, that is not covered in the questions above?