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September 2021

Urban governance and the politics of everyday survival for street traders in Harare, Zimbabwe

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Citation of this paper:

Bandauko, Elmond, "Urban governance and the politics of everyday survival for street traders in Harare, Zimbabwe" (2021). *Inspiring Minds – Showcasing Western’s Graduate Research, Scholarship and Creative Activity*. 192.

<https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/inspiringminds/192>

Project Summary

Street trading is the main source of livelihood for about 60 per cent of the urban poor in Global South cities. Street trading is a mobile, space-bound, predominantly urban practice that takes place on open spaces, sidewalks, and pavements. In Harare, street trading accounts for about 58 per cent of urban informal employment. Despite the contribution of street trading to livelihoods of the urban poor, traders are often subjected to all forms of control that deepen their marginalization. Yet, little is known about the interface between urban governance and the livelihoods of street traders in Harare. In this study, I will investigate how urban governance impacts street traders' lived experiences as well as their access to public space in Harare. Specifically, I will examine the extent to which Harare's modes of urban governance impact street traders' access to public spaces, analyse the strategies used by street traders to negotiate access to highly contested public spaces and claim their 'right to the city' and discuss the gendered implications of appropriation of urban space. My study builds on my lived experience as a former street trader in Harare, where I endured multiple harassments from municipal police for not having a trading licence. I will use participatory methodologies such as photovoice, participatory mapping, story maps and Q-interviews with street traders. He will complement this with key informant interviews with urban governance actors (e.g. urban planners), civil society leaders and street-level bureaucrats (e.g. municipal law enforcement officers). In addition to informing the design of pro-poor urban policies in African cities, the study findings will support Canada's international development priorities as articulated in the Feminist International Assistance Policy (2017), which seeks to improve the livelihoods of vulnerable groups, including women.