

INFORMAL TRADING AND THE SPATIAL ECONOMIES OF SPORTING EVENTS IN CAMEROON AND ZIMBABWE

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Abstract: This study critically analyses the relationship between informal entrepreneurship and sporting events in sub-Saharan Africa, with a specific focus on Cameroon and Zimbabwe. Through the use of semi-structured surveys, the research gathered data from informal traders and entrepreneurs associated with various sporting events. The findings indicate that, by and large, sporting events serve as popular, ideal, and conducive sites for informal trading, primarily due to the absence of requisite registration or taxation. Informal traders offer a diverse array of items and products, ranging from food items and snacks to unique handicrafts and beads, as well as commonly sold fruits, vegetables, and groundnuts. Furthermore, these informal traders travel across different cities to buy and sell their products, predominantly utilising public transport. Most importantly, the study demonstrates that informal entrepreneurship surrounding sporting events is not merely opportunistic; it signifies a strategic adaptation to systemic constraints, such as limited access to capital, regulatory hurdles, and unemployment, particularly in resource-scarce contexts. These challenges prevailing narratives that portray informality as a temporary or undesirable economic condition, instead underscoring its entrenchment in local livelihoods and its potential for fostering resilience. The study offers recommendations that bear implications for regional integration and policy development.

Key words: sports tourism, sporting events; informal business economy, Cameroon, Zimbabwe

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INTRODUCTION

There has been growing recognition for the potential of sport event tourism in the Global South in the last decade (Daniels & Tichaawa, 2021, 2025; Rogerson 2025). According to Daniels & Tichaawa (2025), this growth has largely been fuelled by the lessons from the Global North, where this kind of tourism has served as a catalyst for tourism growth, achieving developmental

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goals that would have taken long to attain in a relatively short period of time. Such goals include, but are not limited to the generation of profits, promotion of tourism development, attracting foreign investments into local markets and generally fast-tracking urban regeneration (Martin-Gonzalez et al., 2024; Nyikana & Tichaawa, 2024; Proos, 2025). According to Martin-Gonzalez et al. (2024), these and other benefits have enticed many destinations to aggressively pursue sport events as a socioeconomic development strategy particularly in their pursuits of destination competitiveness. In recent years, Nyikana & Tichaawa (2024) have observed how these events in sub-Saharan Africa trigger a plethora of economic activities, particularly for informal business trading and entrepreneurship.

Rogerson & Rogerson (2021) opine that there has been a growing presence of activities of informal business tourism in Global South destinations. This growth has resulted in informal business activity being important aspects of the economies of countries in sub-Saharan Africa (Makini & Tichaawa, 2021; Makoni et al., 2023; Rogerson, 2016; Tichaawa, 2021). Tichaawa (2017) contends that informal business activity, though central to Global South economies, especially in Africa, has been largely overlooked in academic discourse. This study investigates this complex relationship between informal entrepreneurship and sporting events in sub-Saharan Africa. The study draws focus on the informal business sector, which has been overlooked despite it being a vital component of regional commerce and business in the region. In this way, we present how informal traders operating around sporting events navigate the challenges and benefit from the opportunities presented by sporting events. The study is grounded on the theoretical basis of the resource-scarcity theory and the analysis of the informal business economy to unpack the opportunities, challenges and future pathways for informal entrepreneurship and sporting events in the region.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Resource-scarcity and sport event tourism in context

The theory of resource-scarcity, which originated in strategic management, has become increasingly important in tourism and entrepreneurship studies (Kimbu et al., 2023; Nyikana & Tichaawa, 2023). At its core, the resource-scarcity theory identifies the essential resources needed for performance and gaining a competitive advantage, describing resources as the assets, capabilities, processes, knowledge, and organisational attributes that affect the execution of strategies effectively (Nyikana & Tichaawa, 2023). In the tourism context, the theory highlights the capacity of destinations or enterprises to optimally organise their resources to achieve an advantage (Ogutuu et al., 2023). In developing regions such as sub-Saharan Africa, resource constraints often limit the ability of tourist destinations and enterprises, including informal traders, to realise their full potential (Kimbu et al., 2023; Dayour et al., 2020; Nyikana & Tichaawa, 2023). Dayour et al. (2020) suggest that countries of this region tend to be characterized by a high prevalence of semi-formal and informal small establishments who possess low savings and minimal insurance uptake culture. Ultimately, countries in this context are strained, and often the demand for economic and social resources far exceeds the supply, leading to a reliance on informal coping structures (Kimbu et al., 2023; Makoni et al., 2023). According to Augustyn (2013), the limited resources in these economies often compel these entrepreneurs to stretch their capabilities and optimise the existing assets.

Tourism small and medium enterprises, especially the informal businesses often face capital and infrastructure limitations and challenges (Tichaawa, 2017; Trupp et al., 2024). Mathebula & Ngcobo (2024) suggest that such challenges can sometimes inspire adaptive new strategies and new ways of engaging with customers to sustain the small businesses. However, the realities of informal traders are that they are often in constant struggle, having lack of access to financial capital and resources, lack of relevant infrastructure to assist them in growing their

business operations and have limited institutional support (Ligthelm, 2013; Tichaawa, 2017; Trupp et al., 2024). In order to navigate these challenges, Kimbu et al. (2023) suggest that such informal traders make use of joint saving schemes like cooperative societies, accumulated and rotating savings as well as credit unions and credit associations. Such cooperative societies often offer financial advice and wealth management classes for members which allow them to navigate the resource scarcity better and ultimately cope with the uneven conditions prevalent in this context. Evidently, the experiences of informal entrepreneurs are influenced by broader socio-economic factors, such as regional recessions, unemployment, and limited access to formal financial services (Masuku & Nzewi, 2021; Nyikana & Tichaawa, 2024). Sporting events provide temporary relief from these challenges by offering high-demand marketplaces; however, they also intensify competition among traders, thereby exacerbating the cycle of scarcity (Nyikana & Tichaawa, 2023).

Nexus between sporting events and informal entrepreneurship

The link between sport and tourism is well established, with scholars recognising the growth of sporting events as a central element of event tourism and a key aspect of sports tourism (Bazzanella et al, 2023; Matongera, 2021; Daniels & Tichaawa, 2024; Herman et al., 2025; Raso & Cherubini, 2024). Sporting events are utilised to foster economic development and promote tourism growth in many destinations around the world (Tomino et al., 2020). These events attract considerable investments of resources and typically garner extensive media coverage, generating widespread attention and interest (Herman et al., 2025; Hemmonsbey & Tichaawa, 2019). Resultantly, there is a broad consensus that sporting events play a vital role in the development strategies of destinations, offering both tangible and intangible benefits to host regions (Nyikana & Tichaawa, 2024). In the same light, informal businesses play a crucial role in many developing countries, providing essential services and employment opportunities while significantly contributing to local and national economies (Makoni et al., 2023). These enterprises maintain a symbiotic relationship with sporting events, supplying vital services that enhance event experiences and financially benefiting from spectators (Mathebula & Ngcobo, 2024; Nyikana & Tichaawa, 2024). In any case, entrepreneurship is increasingly recognised as a vital pathway to address pressing socio-economic challenges, such as unemployment, poverty, and inequality, in Africa (Eniola et al., 2022; Tichaawa, 2017). However, as highlighted by Tichaawa (2017) as well as Makoni et al. (2023), the dominant form of entrepreneurship across much of the continent, particularly in the tourism and hospitality sectors, is characterised by informality.

Informal entrepreneurship refers to entrepreneurial activities that, while socially legitimate and widely accepted, do not comply with a country's legal or regulatory frameworks (Kimbu et al., 2023). Such activities often occur outside official registration processes, rely on off-the-book transactions, and avoid formal taxation (Salvi et al., 2023; Tichaawa, 2017). In comparison to the formal economy, the informal economy is viewed as a vast realm of economic activities and businesses that are not registered or protected by state laws. Initially, the informal economy was used synonymously with self-employment, but it is now noted as any form of paid work or business that is not government-recognised and protected (Eniola et al., 2022). According to Nyikana & Tichaawa (2024), traders in the informal economy are excited by the growth of sports tourism in Africa, as it creates more informal business opportunities. According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, informal entrepreneurship accounts for nearly 60% of entrepreneurial activity in developed and transition economies, and as much as 90% in developing economies (Salvi et al., 2023). While critics argue that informal entrepreneurship may cause adverse effects such as lower tax revenues and unfair competition with formal firms, its importance as a vital livelihood strategy cannot be overlooked. In many developing contexts, it provides employment opportunities, supports households, and serves as a platform for innovation and business experimentation (Mathias et al., 2015). Importantly, informal entrepreneurs complement the sport

events ecosystems, primarily through food and craft vending, which enhances visitor experiences and provides traders with access to a concentrated customer base (Mathebula & Ngcobo, 2024; Nyikana & Tichaawa, 2024). The relationship between sporting events and informal entrepreneurship is thus symbiotic. Informal entrepreneurs, particularly small-scale food and craft vendors, rely on the dense crowds and festive atmosphere of sporting events to generate income while at the same time, organisers and participants benefit from the goods and services these vendors offer (Mathebula & Ngcobo, 2024). In doing so, informal traders reinforce the entrepreneurial ecosystem around events, often providing affordable, accessible, and culturally relevant products.

METHODS

This study was conducted using an exploratory qualitative research paradigm. A case study was adopted, where data was collected from Cameroon and Zimbabwe as the case studies for the research. Data was collected from informal business entrepreneurs in Cameroon (n=66) and Zimbabwe (n=150) (see Figures 1 and 2 below for maps of case study areas). This included administering an open-ended qualitative survey to informal businesspeople or traders who operate around different sporting precincts in Douala, the economic capital of Cameroon and in Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe using a purposive sampling approach.



Figure 1: Map of Zimbabwe
(Source: Chinhanga, 2025)

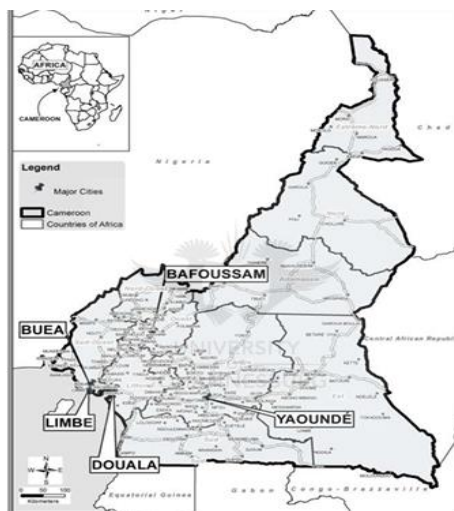


Figure 2: Map of Cameroon
(Source: Nyikana, 2019)

The survey, which was developed from the literature review focused on the nature of business activities; experiences with sporting events, as well as the challenges and opportunities associated with these events for informal traders. The idea was to effectively understand the nature, characteristics of, and link between informal entrepreneurship and sporting events in two different contexts of the African continent. The choice of an open-ended survey was driven by the goal of allowing the participants to express themselves in their own words, enabling us to capture the essence of their views and experiences. The qualitative survey data was captured, coded and analysed on ATLAS.ti. A summary of the methodological process is presented in Figure 3 below.



Figure 3: Flowchart of methodology

RESULTS

The study findings are presented in this section. There were three (3) main themes and ten (10) sub-themes that emanated from the data as illustrated in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Thematic analysis from ATLAS.ti	
Main theme	Sub-themes
Theme#1: Impacts of informal business activity on local economies	- Employment creation - Income generation - Regional and cross-border trading
Theme#2: Challenges faced by informal traders	- Lack of capita - Poor infrastructure - Unskilled labour - High demand and competition
Theme#3: Prospects for informal entrepreneurship and local development	- Business travel activity - Regional growth - Leveraging social capital and associations

Theme#1: Impacts of informal business on local economies

The first theme that emerged from the surveys was that informal businesses had positive impacts on local economies where sporting events are held. In turn, the sporting events draw crowds, which attract informal business activity, strengthening the impacts on the economy. In this regard, there were three aspects of the economic impacts identified in the responses, employment creation, income generation and regional and cross-border trading as explained below:

Employment creation

One of the main roles and impacts of informal businesses on the local economy is employment creation. In both Cameroon and Zimbabwe, informal business plays a significant role in employment creation. Thus, between 50 to 90 percent of the non-agricultural workforce works in the informal sector in the developing world (Gutiérrez-Romero, 2021). Moyo & Gumbo (2021) further explain that many people enter the informal business sector due the lack of opportunities in the formal sector, especially in developing nations. This is in line with the findings of this study that showed that the informal sector has become a retreat for individuals who are unable to secure jobs in the formal economy in Zimbabwe and Cameroon. Several respondents indicated that they started informal businesses because they could not obtain a job in the formal sector. It was interesting to note that even individuals who are also educated have resorted to starting informal businesses to get employment and survive.

The study showed a number of respondents who indicated that they went to university but could not get employment, hence they started an informal business. This was in line with Mogomotsi's (2017) suggestions that many educated individuals who grew frustrated with unemployment sought opportunities in the informal business economy. Many survey participants indicated that sporting events are important arenas for their informal businesses to thrive, thereby combating unemployment. Many participants indicated that they were driven to start their informal business by the prevalence of unemployment in their economies. These participants were predominantly young people and suggested that the high unemployment rates had forced their hand to explore opportunities in the informal business economy. One participant from Zimbabwe

shared that “I have a degree from a prestigious university but I have not been able to find employment, so I joined my father’s business”. Another one suggested that he “needed money for me and my family to survive so that is how I started my business”. Interestingly, Cameroon’s educated individuals indicated that they are motivated by their education to be employed in the informal sector. This indicates that their academic background is a driver for them to start an informal business, as the knowledge equips them to identify the business opportunities in the informal sector and manage enterprises effectively. One informal trader in Cameroon suggested that “I studied agriculture at the University of Dschang, which motivated me to draw attention to Cameroonians about eating processed foods – so I started selling fresh produce”. Another one from Cameroon suggested that “I needed to find work but realised that I will wait forever applying. So I started a catering company, based on my hospitality education background and passion for cooking”. In a similar sentiment, another one suggested that “after studying, I saw a gap for healthy drinks and smoothies for athletes and smoothies for athletes and spectators. That I show I opened the business”.

Income generation

Another major impact of informal businesses on the local economy is the income generated by these businesses. Owing to the large numbers of attendees at sporting events, the informal businesses generate major cash receipts, especially those from the local area. Respondents in both Cameroon and Zimbabwe indicated that these informal businesses have become their main source of income, and they rely on these businesses mostly for everyday needs, such as food, family expenses, rent, and school fees. It is also interesting to note that even though these informal entrepreneurs indicated that these sporting events have a great impact on the income generation that these businesses have, these informal businesses have become prevalent and greatly relied on by the local economy, even without the sporting events. As one participant suggested, “I am always here whether there is a sporting event or not. This business is my everyday work, but I love events because I double or triple my profits on the day”.

With the increase in foot traffic that these events have, there is no denying the major income generation that they have for informal businesses, which is a benefit for the local economy. Another participant suggested that the “business generates money for my children. I am a mother of two and have no job experience so investing in this business helps me provide for my kids and on event days I come home with much more money for them”. The sporting events are a popular platform for the informal traders because of the profits as pointed out by one trader who said “the motivation to target sports events was the profits I saw from a friend. Now I am able to cater for most of my financial burdens and my family. I go to many sporting events to sell cold beverages”. Evidently, the informal traders benefit greatly from sporting events, with some specifically targeting them for their operations while others who operate every day appreciate the sporting events for their ability to double the profits on event days.

Regional and cross-border trade linkages

Another important impact that the informal businesses have on the local economies is the expansion that these businesses have for regional and cross-border linkages in both countries. In the context of Zimbabwe, the informal entrepreneurs travel to source their stock in neighbouring countries such as South Africa, Malawi and Zambia. Although the proportion of these types of entrepreneurs is small compared to those who source their goods locally, there is still an indication of how informal businesses facilitate regional trade integration whilst linking the local economies to a wider market. According to Mzimela (2021), informal cross-border trade contributes to regional integration, as informal traders frequently cross national borders to purchase goods and resell them in their home countries. This cross-border trend and the exchange of goods and capital contribute to the regional economic growth and diversification. Respondents from Zimbabwe echoed this by indicating that they travel frequently across borders to restock their goods. As one

trader suggested “Most of my goods are soccer merchandise and I get all of it in South Africa. So I travel monthly to buy”. Another one suggested that “I stock up my goods in Zambia, but when I go there I take some of the crafts from Zimbabwe because you can get some sales that side too”. This cross-border activity supports local economic development not only within Zimbabwe but also in other SADC countries like South Africa and Zambia.

The large gathering that the sporting events generate, leads to high demand for food, drinks, sports-related merchandise and souvenirs and other merchandise that are sold by informal traders. In the context of Cameroon, many such products drive a very dynamic national travel pattern amongst informal traders. Many of them indicated that they travel to different provinces, following major sporting events, ensuring that they buy and sell as they travel. As one trader suggested “my biggest clients are the football fans for the Premier One league games. So I travel to games that I can to sell at the stadium”. This was a common sentiment with many of the informal traders, with many suggesting that they travelled around following sporting events in different cities and provinces. Many such traders constantly visited local markets where they went, in search of unique items that they can resell in different places. In this way, informal trading in that context drives domestic travel and trade. The travel that these traders due to other regions and even cities to source their goods, thereby contributes to tourism-related expenditures such as accommodation (although some primarily stay with friends and relatives during their travels), food services and transportation.

Theme#2: Challenges faced by informal entrepreneurs

The second theme centred around the challenges identified by the informal traders, which included challenges with capital for their businesses, lack of, and poor infrastructure, lack of skilled workers as well as high competition as discussed in the subsections that follow:

Lack of capital

One major challenge that informal businesses in Cameroon and Zimbabwe face is the lack of capital. The findings in the study indicated that most of the informal traders depend on their personal savings to start as well as maintain their business, and this hinders the expansion of these informal businesses. Respondents from both Cameroon and Zimbabwe when asked if they wanted to expand indicated that they struggled with “getting enough capital because I would expand my business”. Another one specifically suggested that with enough capital, they “would venture into different expansion ideas including fruit juices with natural flavours to suit the tastes of everyone”. This was particularly driven by the desire to have a presence at different places as one suggested that “I want a number of shops at different sporting events, but I don’t have money to make that happen”. In this regard, they primarily felt that they often had to decide on weekends for the best event to go to. In an ideal world, they indicated wishing to have stands in as many different events as possible, to maximise profits from the short-term nature of sporting events. The main issue for the informal traders was that there was lack of access to formal financial institutions because their business activity is not recognised as a formal business, which would enable them to access loans. One trader suggested that “you can forget about applying for loans because they [banks] don’t take our business as something serious”. This also linked to their sentiment that the government has failed to put proper financial support systems to enable them to grow their businesses. A trader from Cameroon pointed out that “the government can’t create employment opportunities for us, and they also fail to support our small businesses so you really can’t win anyway”.

Poor infrastructure

Poor infrastructure is also another challenge that informal businesses face. Informal businesses operate in open and temporary spaces that offer little protection from the weather and lack the adequate facilities such as storage, electricity and sanitation which affects these businesses. As stressed by one trader, “there are no facilities, they don’t even help us by building shelter for us”. Another one highlighted this as a problem “when there is unstable weather, we

unfortunately have no choice but to leave, despite people saying they want to continue buying from us. Some small shelters could help”. This was a problem, with another one suggesting that “my ice-cream machine needs electricity, but I can’t produce for the whole day without power”. Another one suggested that they needed “space to actually have a proper store, so I have this table and when it rains I have to run with my stuff”. However, although most respondents indicated their challenge of the poor infrastructure, there was a small proportion of respondents who prefer this situation. This was because a few informal businesses highlighted how easy it is to start businesses near these sporting venues without encountering major obstacles or official limitations.

Furthermore, several respondents also indicated how frequently these events occur near their homes, which leads to no travel for their businesses and decreases spending on transportation. In a way, they may simply get up and start their businesses in the area, which makes the process easy and reasonably priced. This accessibility in terms of both location and ease of entry was crucial in their decision to operate at sporting events. As one trader observed “I set up my stall with minimal fuss, and if I have to leave, it’s easy to pack away everything in five minutes”. This was echoed by another who indicated that “it’s not nice to set up in the open, they could have built structures for us so that we don’t disturb the place, but at least it means we can move to a different spot easily if business is slow on one side”. The portable set ups were also identified as an advantage in the face of harassment from officials, as one trader suggested that “sometimes the police come to harass us, and if we spot them, we can quickly pack everything away and move”. This, they argued is especially advantageous since they are not in fixed structures, which would be difficult to navigate when the police or local council officers came to “harass them”.

Unskilled workforce and lack of training

Another significant challenge identified among informal traders for both Cameroon and Zimbabwe is lack of adequate business knowledge and technical skills. The study findings indicated that traders from both countries struggle with the day-to-day operations of their businesses and face issues such as stock management, customer handling, financial planning and the general business administration. For example, some respondents from Cameroon indicated that they make mistakes when restocking goods and estimating demand which affects the profitability of their business. They suggested that some trainings would help them with this. As suggested by one, “I sometimes struggle with miscalculations when restocking things, then I run short and have to make the long trip to the capital city to buy, costing me money, time and lost business hours”. Another one placed this on her employees suggesting that “they lack business knowledge, they will sit with stock finishing and only tell me when it is finished. I have trained them and spoken to them many times”. This frustration of employees was common as a trader from Zimbabwe opined that “finding someone passionate and skilled to run my business while I focus on my other one is almost impossible”. This was because “they just do it because they don’t have anything better to do. But they are not really serious about helping me grow my business”.

The informal traders find it hard to obtain skilled and reliable staff to manage their day-to-day operations. One blamed the education system for failing to prepare graduates with basic business skills saying that “you expect someone from university to have basic customer service and financial knowledge, but I am better than them and I didn’t go to school”. Another one noted how “it is hard to find someone who understands my business just like I do or even has the interest to understand it”. All these frustrations speak to difficulties around the training of workers, and the employment creation aspects of informal businesses. The latter was also noted to be difficult given the nature of the informal businesses and the unavailability of time for training or investing in employees. As one trader noted “I could train someone, but this takes time, and maybe by the time they have understood, I am already changing my products and processes because here there is no time to relax”.

High demand and competition

Another challenge that these businesses face is the market challenges that come from operating informally especially the uneven demands for their products and the increased competition. For example, some of the businesses experience high demand during sporting events, which causes fatigue and stress for the business owners since they are not fully skilled or equipped to handle many customers in a short time. As pointed out by one trader, “the sports games are very good for business, but then sometimes at halftime it is overwhelming because they are all buying and screaming at the same time”. Another one said, “many times you are attending to two or three customers at the same time and they are all in a hurry so it’s difficult to please all of them”. In contrast to this, other times they face extremely low demand, which is greatly caused by high competition from similar informal businesses and from established formal businesses. One trader remarked that “unfortunately with the little control, anyone can just copy your business and sell right next to you, and you can do nothing about it”. It’s important to note that a major key characteristic of the informal economy is that many traders tend to sell similar or related products, often targeting the same customer base. As one observed, “I have a lot of my friends that I sell with that also sell fruits near the same venue so sometimes I don’t have customers”. Another complained that “the informal sector has too much competition and we also compete with formal businesses and our customers mostly prefer to buy at the formal shops and say they don’t get a guarantee with our products”.

Theme#3: Prospects for the sustainable integration of informal business in local development

The final theme revolved around ways to integrating informal businesses in broader local development strategies. In this regard, this manifested itself into the three focus areas of domestic travel and tourism, regional development and growth as well as leveraging social capital and local associations as discussed in the following subsections.

Travelling to different sporting events for business

A key theme of the informal businesses is the travelling to many sporting events to carry out their trade. As alluded to in previous sections, there are many of these traders who frequently travel to different cities and sometimes neighbouring countries to buy and sell their goods. In this way, informal entrepreneurship triggers domestic and regional travel. In many instances, they travel to different cities for the purpose of attending and selling at sporting events. This forms a key part of sport event tourism in the countries. This kind of travel contributes to domestic tourism as many of these informal traders indicated using public transportation as a means of travel. As one trader put it, “I travel around the country, buying and selling my products. I prefer to travel with public transport because then I can buy in bulk and move my things around with ease”. Another one supported this, saying “public transport is cheap compared to hiring a vehicle or driving my own car. I don’t have to worry about anything except just paying my own fare then relaxing on the journey”. The general feeling was that travelling to different parts of the country allowed them to maximise the opportunities at sporting events, and exposed them to different products unique to the different places that they visited.

The traders indicated that in order to expand, sustain and grow their businesses, they need reliable and affordable transportation options and public transport was a big aspect of this. Without this, their ability to access more sporting events and, by extension, more customers remain limited, curbing their economic potential. While most of the informal business owners surveyed in this study expressed that travelling between different sporting events offers a strong opportunity for business expansion, it is worth noting that not all respondents shared this perspective. Interestingly, a smaller group of participants indicated a preference for operating at just one sporting event, typically one located close to where they live. These individuals expressed satisfaction with the consistency and convenience of working in a familiar environment, without the need for travel. One trader suggested that “I just prefer being here because I already have a

fixed stall here”. Another one said “I prefer selling my goods here at this sporting event, because its closer to home. And I can easily travel from home to here”. By choosing not to travel to multiple events, these traders may be missing out on valuable opportunities for growth, exposure to new markets, and increased income. The mobility of informal businesses not only enhances their own sustainability but also contributes to broader economic activity, particularly within the tourism and transport sectors.

Regional growth

The informal sector, particularly Informal Cross-Border Trade (ICBT), plays a critical role in regional development and economic integration (Makoni et al., 2023). This consistent movement of goods fosters economic ties and cooperation between neighbouring states. For instance, Zimbabwean informal traders have long served as suppliers to local businesses by sourcing goods, equipment, and supplies from other countries and reselling them in local areas. Studies by Chalfin (2001) and Peberdy (2002) also show that ICBT contributes to food security and provides access to goods not commonly available locally. These traders boost the economy through the purchase of goods, use of accommodation and transport services to and from their places of stay and business operation, and engagement with various local businesses. This highlights the significant role ICBT plays in supporting sectors such as retail, hospitality, and logistics. These findings are echoed by participants in the current study, who indicated that they frequently travel across borders to restock merchandise. This cross-border activity supports economic development not only within Zimbabwe and Cameroon but also in other surrounding countries in both regions. However, the benefits of ICBT can be undermined if these informal traders are not acknowledged or supported in regional policy frameworks, which remains the challenge for both contexts. Moyo & Gumbo (2021) argues that excluding informal businesses from formal regional trade protocols diminishes their role in the integration process. These traders should be seen as business tourists who contribute to regional tourism and economic activity.

Leveraging social capital and associations

The data collected has indicated that there is a lack of capital for informal entrepreneurs in Cameroon and Zimbabwe, which restricts expansion as the informal entrepreneurs mostly use their personal savings. This challenge is largely driven by limited access to formal financing options, high interest rates, and the inability of many informal business owners to provide the necessary collateral to secure loans. These financial constraints make it difficult for informal businesses to invest in better infrastructure, expand their operations, or even maintain daily business activities. As a result, many of these enterprises remain small, vulnerable, and unable to fully contribute to job creation or broader economic development. Several respondents then indicated that the lack of capital has therefore become a major disadvantage, preventing informal businesses from realizing their full potential and achieving long-term sustainability. As emphasised by one trader, “I struggled to get loans to start my business. I could have been far because I believe there is so much potential in the food provision business”. Another one suggested that “I think we need to find alternative ways because its clear the banks will not fund us”.

Interestingly, when participants were asked to specify the source of their business capital in the questionnaire, the majority indicated that their start-up funds came from personal savings either from previous employment or from earlier entrepreneurial activities. Many pointed to the importance of leveraging their social capital, including friends, family and local associations which fund members for their business ventures. As one trader noted, “I got my funding from my spouse because he believed in my idea that I wanted. Now we have opened two other businesses and recouped all the money from the initial investment”. Another one suggested that “I belong to an association and they sponsored my business. I was able to pay them back and I plan to ask them for another loan soon to expand my cotton-candy business”. This highlights the broader issue of limited access to formal financial support for informal business owners, many of whom are forced

to rely solely on personal savings to start and sustain their businesses. Notably, only a small number of participants in the study mentioned receiving loans as a source of capital. Given that access to capital has been identified as a major challenge for the majority of informal businesses, this lack of borrowing points to deeper systemic issues. According to existing literature, one of the key reasons for this gap is that central and local governments tend to prioritize the formal sector. As Magidi (2024) explains, policy efforts are often focused on supporting formal or large-scale businesses, while the informal sector receives inadequate attention and support. Furthermore, as noted by Ngundu (2010) and Tamukamoyo (2009), most banks and lending institutions impose borrowing conditions such as collateral, credit history, and financial documentation that informal entrepreneurs simply cannot meet. This lack of institutional support significantly hinders the growth and sustainability of informal businesses. Without access to affordable credit or targeted financial programs, many are unable to invest in business improvements, expand their operations, or weather economic challenges.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study confirm the dynamic and symbiotic relationship between informal entrepreneurship and sporting events within sub-Saharan African context, specifically in Cameroon and Zimbabwe. It illuminates how sporting events offers entry opportunities for informal entrepreneurs, who are excluded from formal economies for various reasons. This aligns with the broader literature on event tourism and informal economies, which portray such gatherings as opportunity for economic participation among marginalised groups (see Mathebula & Ngcobo, 2024; Chappelet & Lee, 2016). Most importantly, the study shows that informal entrepreneurship around sporting events is not just opportunistic, but it reveals a strategic adaptation to systematic constraints, such as limited access to capital, regulatory red tape and unemployment, especially in resource-scarce contexts. This challenges dominant narratives that frame informality as a temporary or undesirable economic condition, instead highlighting its embeddedness in local livelihoods and its potential for resilience-building. The comparative dimension of this study reveals contrary motivations and structural conditions between the two countries that were studied. In Zimbabwe, informality is largely driven by survival imperatives, with educated individuals entering the sector due to formal sector exclusion and broader unemployment challenges. In contrast, Cameroonian entrepreneurs appear to leverage their education as a resource for informal business development although they also do so because of broader economic challenges. Moreover, Zimbabwean traders exhibit stronger regional and cross-border linkages, sourcing goods from neighbouring countries and contributing to regional integration, trade and development. Cameroon, by contrast, shows limited engagement in cross-border trade with many of them being focused on national domestic travel and business.

These differences have implications for regional development strategies and the role of informal entrepreneurship in fostering economic integration. Ultimately, the nexus between informal entrepreneurship and sporting events presents a unique opportunity to foster inclusive and sustainable development in sub-Saharan Africa. By recognising the entrepreneurial agency of informal traders and addressing structural constraints, stakeholders can build more resilient tourism economies. This requires a shift from viewing informality as a problem to be solved, toward understanding it as a dynamic system with its own logic, strengths, and vulnerabilities.

While research on sport event tourism literature has grown tremendously over the years, the neglected focus on the nexus with informal entrepreneurship activities necessitated this research, cognisant of the informal economy dominating in the Global South context. Having established through the findings, that such sporting events promote economic development, this paper argues that informal businesses play a strategic role in sustaining local livelihoods and, from a tourism perspective, promote travel and inclusive development for economies in sub-Saharan Africa. From

a literature perspective, the study contributes by extending the application of resource scarcity to the context of informal entrepreneurship and sport tourism events. It reveals how informal entrepreneurs mobilise limited resources in a creative manner to ensure participation in the mainstream economy through their social networks. This shows that such informal entrepreneurs have developed adaptive responses to the structural challenges and constraints they face in resource-scarce economies.

In terms of policy implications, this study has highlighted the need for the integration of informal businesses in sport tourism events management frameworks, as access to such events, training and improved infrastructure that considers such forms of businesses in the event vicinity will enhance the sustainability of the event. Moreover, these informal actors are mainly local citizens which ensures that sport event hosting and the associated economic impacts remain local and support the community.

CONCLUSION

This study's approach to compare two countries in the context of sport event tourism and informal entrepreneurship has provided insights that add to the existing literature. The connection of informal entrepreneurship and sporting events in sub-Saharan Africa reveals a dynamic yet complex ecosystem where resource-scarcity, mobility, and innovation connect and present opportunities for local and regional development. While informal traders face structural challenges such as limited capital and regulatory barriers, they also demonstrate resilience and adaptability by leveraging the opportunities presented by sporting gatherings. Recognising and integrating these informal economic activities into broader development and tourism strategies is essential for fostering inclusive growth and long-term sustainability in the region. This is especially important in the context of sub-Saharan Africa, where innovative developmental trajectories are much needed to improve socioeconomic conditions. This study makes a modest contribution to literature on sport events and informal entrepreneurship, which has remained neglected in the academic discourse.

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