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## The aftermath of eviction in the Nigerian informal economy

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## The aftermath of eviction in the Nigerian informal economy

### **Abstract**

This paper examines the mechanisms through which street traders claim and maintain access to urban space in the aftermath of eviction – a phenomenon that affects poor urban workers across the Global South. Whilst much is known about the immediate impacts of evictions, there has been limited consideration of the post-eviction, longer term responses of traders. Drawing on primary research in Lagos, Nigeria, this paper analyses street trader responses to eviction, with a focus on their strategies for claiming access to space. The study highlights the importance of both individual and collective actions in re-establishing a foothold in public space. However, maintaining access to public space proved to be more problematic, with collective action severely diminished through the co-option of trader associations by urban authorities. This new knowledge has the potential to strengthen the resilience of traders to future evictions and their potentially devastating impacts.

**Keywords:** Street trading, displacement, eviction, urban governance, Oshodi, Lagos

### **Introduction**

This paper examines the mechanisms through which street traders, working in one of the most visible and contested domains of the informal economy (Bromley, 1998; Daniels, 2004; Bromley and Mackie 2009; Brown et al. 2009), claim and maintain access to urban space in the aftermath of eviction – a phenomenon that affects poor urban workers across the Global South. African cities are the emerging front-line of neoliberal urban policies, where cities are viewed ‘as a showcase for investment’, or ‘a manicured hub for finance and technology’, and it is in this developing context that street traders face hostility, repression, abuse and eviction in a constant battle over the use of public space (Watson, 2014; Economist, 2017). Whilst much is known about

the immediate social, economic and spatial impacts of evictions (for example see Swanson, 2007; Bromley and Mackie, 2009; Carrieri and Murta, 2011; Mackie et al, 2014), there has been limited consideration of the post-eviction, longer term responses of traders. Key immediate impacts of public space evictions on trader livelihoods include the damaging of previously existing networks and reductions in sales due to reduced footfall, particularly due to the displacement of traders from central locations to peripheral sites (Bromley and Mackie, 2009; Mackie et al, 2014; Omoegun, 2015a). The aim of this paper is to develop an understanding of street trader responses to eviction, with a focus on their strategies for claiming access to space. This new knowledge will provide the basis for a more informed approach to supporting marginalised urban informal economy workers and potentially serve to strengthen the resilience of traders to future evictions.

The paper draws on case study research in Lagos between 2013 and 2014 which examined trader responses to large-scale evictions at the major transport terminal and markets at Oshodi Junction. The paper has six sections. After the introduction, section two draws on a literature review to situate the spatial claim of traders, and section three briefly introduces the Lagos case study. Sections four and five discuss the empirical findings; first exploring how public space is found and secured post-eviction, and second examining how these spaces are retained. Section six presents the conclusions.

## **Framing Debates: drivers, impacts and responses to street trader evictions**

The informal economy is a major source of jobs for the urban poor in many cities of the Global South, often providing between 40-80% of urban jobs in countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America and contributing 15-60% of GVA<sup>1</sup> (ILO, 2013). Yet despite its prevalence and economic importance there is little political understanding of the extent, reach and poverty-reduction impacts of informal work. The urban informal economy employs millions of people in the Global South and is linked to global systems of trade (Brown and Roever, 2016).

Street trade is one of largest sectors within the informal economy, and also one of the most visible and contested domains (Bromley, 1998; Mitullah, 2004; Bromley and Mackie, 2009). Official policy towards street trading swings from benign neglect to forced evictions, with evictions often based on idealised neoliberal city images that overlook the importance of the urban informal economy and its contribution to urban livelihoods

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<sup>1</sup> GVA= Gross Added Value, a major component of GDP.

(Brown et al., 2014). Often clearances are politically instigated, for example city mayors may be elected on the basis of a commitment to rid the streets of traders (Transberg Hansen, 2004; King, 2006; Potts, 2007). Faced with hostility, evictions and their detrimental impacts; traders nevertheless create ways to negotiate and respond to their oppression and create ways to respatialise and claim urban space (Mackie et al. 2014), often through collective action and sometimes supported through legislation and constitutional rights, including the right to the city (UN-Habitat, 2011). This review of key literature therefore examines academic debates on the political and economic drivers that underlie street trader evictions, their poverty impacts, and the individual and collective trader responses which attempt to subvert eviction policies.

### **The political economy of street trader evictions**

Street trader evictions exist in the context of complex power struggles between the state and the urban poor for access to and control over public space. Street trade is often characterised by urban authorities and elites as chaotic, unorganised, or crime-ridden, and seen as an anathema to the broad political and economic ideals of 'well-planned, functioning and attractive cities' (Mackie et al. 2017: 63). While traders often face short-term evictions only to return in a few hours, large-scale clearances pursued with force and heavily policed are also commonplace (Skinner, 2008b; Brown et al., 2014). Displaced traders are sometimes offered alternative sites but these are often remote from customers and rarely constitute a viable alternative (for example see Bromley, 2000; Swanson, 2007; Donovan, 2008; Bromley and Mackie, 2009; Carrieri and Murta, 2011; Mackie et al. 2014). This section of the literature review considers the key drivers behind these evictions.

Prominent political arguments used to justify evictions includes improving hygiene and enhancing aesthetics (Yeoh and Kong, 1994; Bromley, 1998), and improving public cleanliness through addressing environmental, health and safety, and traffic issues (Perera and Amin, 1996, Harrison and McVey, 1997; Oz and Eder, 2012). However, these views have been challenged, arguing that urban management problems are not inherent to informal activities but rather evidence of insensitive physical planning (Sethuraman, 1981; Omuta, 1986; Perera and Amin, 1996). For street traders, the lack of access to secure sites and basic infrastructure is a critical problem (Sethuraman, 1981), resulting in inadequate working conditions that cause environmental abuse (Omuta, 1986).

Economic arguments include tax avoidance and unfair competition with formal enterprises (de Soto, 1989; Kinyanjui, 2014), and notably the need to transform the 'image' of the city (Bromley, 1998; Donovan, 2008; Brown et al., 2014; Njaya, 2014) to attract foreign investment and promote economic growth, or protect prime property by removing competing or 'unruly' adjacent land uses that may undermine land values. In this vision, street trading has no space and is perceived as traditional or backward – associated with disorder or crime and an impediment to a clean and well-managed city. Street trading is thus a major hindrance to the concept of idealised neoliberal city images which is increasingly being pursued by government authorities and is a major underlying reason behind trader evictions.

Mackie et al. (2014) explain that policies aimed at managing the activities of street traders range between the extremes of tolerance and intolerance. Tolerant policies essentially permit street trade but do not promote it, including trader licensing and policies that seek to modify trading behaviours. Typically such policies exist where there is insufficient social or economic incentive to act more forcefully. Intolerant and more repressive policies frequently seek the relocation and removal of street traders, with the most repressive policies being street trader evictions, sometimes implemented along with relocation options. They further argue that 'whilst in any given city a range of approaches might be adopted to manage informal trading, urban policies appear to be increasingly intolerant, mainly as a result of neoliberal policies focusing on urban revitalization, city image or international tourism', as under the neoliberal paradigm, street trading is 'perceived as compromising city competitiveness by creating disorder, exacerbating congestion and intensifying petty theft and other criminal activity' (Mackie et al. 2014: 1886).

Some argue that street trader displacements typify the process of gentrification. Gentrification is seen as a class-oriented practice, often carried out by government authorities, involving 'exclusionary displacement, where low-income people are excluded from a place they might have lived in (or worked or shopped) had the place not become gentrified' (Shaw 2008: 193). Street trader displacements can thus be seen as a gentrification of public space, wherein lower-class traders are displaced from centrally located streets in favour of middle class residents and tourists (Bromley and Mackie, 2009), in order to bring about a re-orientation of the city towards a particular population of elites and investors (Cossa, 2009), and the tourist economy as a whole (Swanson, 2007).

It is clear that the state, usually at the level of the municipal authority, is driven by a range of social, economic and political factors to remove street traders, often through evictions. Yet, street trading provides important livelihood opportunities, and the removal of traders can have significant poverty implications.

### **Poverty implications of evictions**

Fieldwork consistently shows forced evictions of street traders have detrimental and sometimes devastating impacts on the lives of the urban poor. Indeed, Brown and Smith (2016) identify sudden and unpredictable evictions from work spaces as probably the single most significant cause of vulnerability amongst traders. Several authors have written powerfully about specific conflicts, for example Potts (2007) on Operation Murambatsvina, Skinner (2008a) on evictions in Durban in the run-up to international sporting events, and Middleton (2003) on exclusion of street trade from Quito's historic centre. Findings reveal very traumatic experiences and a complete loss of livelihoods suffered by poor traders. In this subsection we reflect on the impacts of two broad types of eviction: those that are accompanied by relocation, and the more draconian evictions which fail to offer alternative sites.

Sometimes the removal of traders is accompanied by relocation to a different site. Moving street traders can have some benefits but the disadvantages of displacements are often greater. For example, Carrieri and Murta (2011) in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, argue that although the displacement of street traders to purpose-built indoor markets led to an improvement in their physical working environment, it worsened the precarious political and social conditions under which traders had to operate and shifted focus from the underlying reasons for the continued existence of street traders, such as poverty, inequality, unemployment, and a lack of education. Yeoh and Kong (1994) explored the case of China Town in Singapore where, in a relatively large scale displacement, street traders were successfully relocated from the streets to purpose-built markets. Following the city authority's stringent enforcement of a licensing and relocation policy, the physical, environmental, and hygiene issues associated with street trade were effectively eradicated, resulting in the successful re-imagining of the formerly polluted China Town. They highlight that the relocations faced some resistance from traders, and damaged social ties within the community. De Soto (1989) also identifies that property rights that come with a fixed location provide security and the potential for economic growth for traders, nevertheless he argues

that excessive government involvement hinders these benefits. However, success is rare. Many researchers claim that the displacement of traders from central locations to elaborate new markets rarely succeeds in improving trading conditions, or in clearing the streets as the relocated traders cannot survive in the new markets and often slowly return to their original place of trade (Lyons and Msoka, 2010; Bromley and Mackie, 2009; Mackie et al. 2014; Omoegun, 2015a; Brown, 2017).

Evictions which are not accompanied by a relocation option are generally more detrimental to the lives of informal traders, with a wide range of social and economic impacts. Brown and Smith (2016) articulate four main impacts. First, Brown and Smith (2016) identify impacts on physical and financial assets, with equipment and goods often lost during evictions. Second, the constant threat of evictions, that result from a lack of property rights (de Soto, 1989), lead to traders living in constant fear and uncertainty (Brown and Smith, 2016) and this not only affects the wellbeing of the individual but also reduces the likelihood of investment. Third, there are impacts on business networks associated with both suppliers and customers. Impacts on business networks are particularly felt in instances where traders have operated in a specific location for a long time (Brown and Smith, 2016). The cumulative consequence is an exacerbation of poverty through a loss of income, families going without food, and children kept out of school, especially in single-headed households (Brown and Smith, 2016). Notably, the impacts of widespread clearances with no hope of return are often long-term.

### **Subversive responses: making a claim to public space**

Whatever the deadening weight of heightened repression and control over public space; spontaneous and organised political response always carries within it the capability of remaking and retaking public space and the public sphere. (Smith and Low, 2013: 16)

While street traders are subjected to evictions, they are also rational actors who are wily in negotiating access to space. As Smith and Low (2013) suggest in the quote above, street traders are capable of retaking public space, often through organised, collective action. Little is known about the agency and actions of traders in the



aftermath of evictions, hence this section examines the actions of street traders as they seek to secure public space more generally.

Unions and associations are a powerful tool in enabling traders to claim rights (Lindell, 2010). Trader associations, including unions, may be formally incorporated and recognised by authorities but there are also many forms of informal associations based on products, market localities, kinship, or religion. Associations' effectiveness in claiming rights depends on many factors, including the levels of literacy of leaders, their social networks, and capacity to organise members. Strong associations create a focus for negotiation, particularly for local governments which have a central role managing street trade but find it difficult to manage large numbers of micro-enterprises, as well as in the face of pressures from powerful private sector interests (Skinner, 2008a & b).

Dankoco and Brown (2017) document how in Dakar, Sénégal, traders first unionised in 1989 to lobby against the imposition of a sales tax. However, over the coming decades the union became far less supportive in advocating for trader rights. After the 2000 national elections, traders won political support from the President and street trade grew, but their political influence waned and in the face of municipal clearances in the city centre in 2007, traders resorted to force an uprising that closed the city centre for three days, leading to government directives to negotiate and the emergence of new street trader associations which helped in managing urban space.

Claim is also sometimes made by courting political powers. Traders can be an important voting bloc and reports that they are often left alone before elections are common. Crossa (2009) describes one case in Mexico, wherein traders circumvented government displacement policies by drawing on their ties with politicians and government officials. This was made possible through Mexico's clientelist governance system, wherein political parties maintained close ties with membership-based organisations, offering them privileges in return for their support. Mackie et al (2014) also detail how traders were able to gain some leverage by voting in a supportive mayor in Cusco, Peru. However in many cases street traders enjoy little benefits from clientelist political relationships as they are often mobilised prior to elections for voting support and thereafter neglected (Bhowmik, 2005; Njaya, 2014).

Legitimation through obtaining a license or payment of daily fees to the municipality may give marginal security, but this is rarely absolute. Licensed traders remain vulnerable, and traders rarely see any benefit for

paying fees. Although street trading contravenes local bylaws, fees are demanded from traders by various agents, including municipal authorities. These payments sometimes, but not always, confer tenuous legitimacy which does not protect against major politically motivated clearances, wherein even traders in allocated municipal markets are not immune (Brown et al., 2014).

In some countries organised traders have used court action to claim rights. Documenting ten years of struggle in Durban, Skinner (2017) documents the ebbs and flows of inclusion and how street traders eventually used legal action to claim rights, which resulted in the Warwick Junction project in which traders were accommodated in shared, adapted and new spaces at one of the busiest public transport interchanges in the city. Establishing rights (constitutional or otherwise) is important to securing spatial claim. For example, enshrining a 'right to work' in legislation can form an important bargaining platform in negotiations over evictions (Brown, 2006). In some countries, the 'right to the city' concept has been used to question competing claims to the city to create a safeguard against exclusionary development (UN-Habitat, 2011). Theoretical interest is growing in its application to livelihoods with ongoing debates about the potential for the right to the city to enable street traders to resist evictions and everyday harassment.

Sometimes traders who have been shifted take with them a critical mass of customers enabling them to survive, but this is rare. For example Bromley and Mackie (2009) describe the case of street traders in Cusco, Peru who after government led displacements from central streets maintained a presence in central locations by relocating to courtyard markets which were close to their former locations. The courtyard markets were created from the courtyard spaces of traditional city-centre houses typical in Latin American cities. Through collective agency, clusters of traders were able to resist displacement to off-centre sites which would have led to the loss of previous customers. Traders from particular streets moved together into the nearest courtyard location they could find, thus continuing to operate in the same area of the city centre and managing to keep many of their previous clients.

From the discussion above it is clear that street trader displacements are a widespread policy adopted by city authorities in developing countries. This review of selected literature highlights the importance of collective action in claiming public space (eg. associations, political lobbying) and to a lesser extent the role of licensing, law and rights, however few studies have explored the responses and practices of traders in the

aftermath of displacements. This study aims to begin to fill this knowledge gap in order to inform support for marginalised urban informal economy workers and to strengthen the resilience of traders to future evictions.

## **Spatial claim in vulnerable contexts: an introduction to the Oshodi case study**

Oshodi market in Lagos, Nigeria, was the site of a zero tolerance policy towards street trading, resulting in large-scale trader displacements in 2009. The site therefore provides an excellent case study of evictions and sufficient time has passed to allow for an examination of street trader responses.

Lagos state is the economic hub of Nigeria, with a population of about 17 million (LSG, 2013). Lagos possesses a deeply entrenched informal economy (Skinner, 2008b; Meagher, 2010; Omoegun, 2015a; 2015b), with estimates suggesting that about 50-75% of the workforce of Lagos is employed informally (LSG, 2004; 2013). The informal economy in Lagos therefore provides livelihoods for millions of people, notably in street trading. Although street trading is often a municipal responsibility, local authorities in Lagos are weak and many urban management functions are undertaken by Lagos State Government (LSG). In 2008, LSG through the state's Ministry of the Environment, adopted a zero tolerance policy to street trading. The implementation was led by a militant police force called KAI (Kick Against Indiscipline) and it was designed to clean up the city. The adoption of this policy led to massive displacement of street traders located around Oshodi Market, affecting several thousand traders (Koolhaas, et al. 2000), with the site playing host to over five million commuters and traders daily.

Oshodi was a hub of trade and commerce mainly due to its central location and transport links, which include a railway station along the main line in Lagos, two major highways, several smaller feeder roads and a major bus terminal (Omoegun, 2015b). The market evolved from a traditional farm market to a massive trading site with several adjacent formal markets built by local government and private entrepreneurs, generating a pedestrian flow that attracted large numbers of traders to streets adjacent to the markets. Street traders occupied the footpaths along Agege Motor Road, smaller nearby streets, and the adjoining rail line, creating an enormous fluid informal market, claimed to be the largest market in Lagos and probably the second largest continuous market in West Africa (Aradeon, 1997).

The displacement of street traders located around the Oshodi Market was prompted by the ambition by LSG to attain 'megacity status'. Plans to achieve 'megacity' status included an ambitious infrastructure development and re-branding programme wherein street trading was deemed inappropriate. The overall aspiration of political elites was to redefine the image of Lagos and make it more conducive for foreign investments (Basinski, 2009; Fourchard, 2010). Due to its strategic location and scale, the revitalization of Oshodi Market was key to this agenda. Oshodi was 'the unwanted symbol and signature of Lagos' and a shameful representation of the city which was desperately in need of a transformation (LSG, 2010: 16). The diverse combination of human and vehicular traffic surrounding Oshodi created immense traffic, safety and health concerns.

The evictions in 2009 were widespread. Executed by security forces, the scale and impact of the operation was massive with most of the market decimated and several thousand street traders displaced (Omoegun, 2015b). The case study research in Oshodi was carried out between 2013 and 2014, some four years after the clearance, to examine its effect on spatial claim. A mixed-methods approach was adopted including: semi-structured interviews, documentary analysis and observation. The data for this paper draws on semi-structured interviews with 100 street traders to explore their experiences and perceptions of the displacements in 2009 as well as a key informant interview with a government official. In order to capture a wide range of informal trader perspectives, and to account for possible variations in experiences according to key characteristics, trader Interviewees were selected based on a stratified sampling strategy. Sampling was based upon; gender, the type of goods sold, and the trading location. The interview sample included approximately equal numbers of men and women. The traders interviewed were mostly located along the side streets (60%) where many had moved following their displacement from the highway and the remainder (40%) were in four formal markets (Arena, Kairo, Olorunshogo, and Idera). Traders sold a variety of goods in five different product groups: i] fruits and vegetables; ii] poultry, livestock, fish and meat; iii] uncooked food, grain, and other perishables; iv] clothing, footwear and textiles; and v] household goods, electrical hardware, newspaper, books, and other non-perishable goods. Figure 1 illustrates the locations of the interview sites in Oshodi.

**Figure 1.** Street trader interview locations (Oshodi, 2009)

INSERT FIGURE 1 AROUND HERE

The KAI-led action in 2009 reconfigured the space around Oshodi, shifting the extensive and fluid confluence of street trading from around the four formal markets to the side streets nearby, creating a significant change in the dynamic of the urban landscape. Although the vulnerabilities of traders were acute during the period of the evictions, and some displaced traders moved away, others used different mechanisms to secure space and legitimacy in the remodelled urban landscape.

### **Finding and securing public space: individual and collective action**

Two main approaches proved to be effective at enabling street traders to reclaim public space in the aftermath of eviction in Oshodi. First, and most frequently, traders acted individually, albeit often using their social networks. Second, traders worked collectively with their peers to identify and claim possible trading spaces. While previous studies of informal trading have highlighted the predominance of collective action in securing access to public space (Lindell, 2010; Steel, 2012), it appears individual action, albeit with support from networks, was an important mechanism in this post-eviction case study. Both individual and collective actions are explored in this section.

#### **Individual claim through networks, payments and self-help**

Street traders pursue various processes of individual claim to find and secure trading space. These processes lie fundamentally beyond legal or formal regulation, involving social networks and the payment of gatekeepers. Moreover, different combinations of approaches achieved varied outcomes in terms of occupancy rights and profitability of locations. Our analysis of interview data identifies a four-fold typology of individual street trader actions to claim space following the Oshodi evictions of 2009 (Table 1). Each approach is briefly discussed.,

INSERT TABLE 1 AROUND HERE

The first approach (*Networks and payments*) was through social networks combined with payments. These traders drew upon social connections to locate trading spaces – they then had to make payments in order to

make use of the site. Social connections were typically beyond the immediate family, particularly for traders who had moved to formal markets. These traders had typically been working in Oshodi for a long time and had managed to build stronger networks. They were able to gain access to more central and profitable locations because of their connections, who often provided prompt and valuable information on where to go and the procedures to follow. Traders continued to make payments for these sites which were more accessible, had greater footfall and were therefore more profitable and desirable. Generally, traders in this category moved into available spaces in older and centrally located markets that had been in existence before the evictions (such as Kairo and Olorunshogo formal markets). Whilst these sites were not as desirable as their previous sites, they were comparatively better than other relocation sites. A poultry seller described her experience of using networks and payments to secure a trading space;

[I have been trading in Oshodi for a long time]. I used to trade along the rail line [before the displacement] ... I came here through a friend. I only made a payment to the managers of this market. (Female trader, Olorunshogo Formal Market, selling poultry)

The second approach (*Payments only*) was to identify and occupy a public space and then pay local 'area boys'<sup>2</sup>. The sites occupied by these traders were mostly located along less profitable side roads, albeit some were on the main public pathways and public spaces. It seems that this strategy was adopted by those who lacked social networks that might otherwise have assisted in securing public space, as illustrated in the quotation from a fish trader;

[I have no one to help me] ... everyone has their problems ... I gained access by occupying the trading space. I displayed my goods and started selling ... [then I paid] the 'area boys'.  
(Female trader, Ariyibi Oke Street, selling fish)

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<sup>2</sup> 'Area boys' are notorious in Lagos State. They are vigilante groups of young men who are often violent and harass and exploit other citizens. Many of the 'area boys' are unemployed and drug-dependent, and they intimidate pedestrians, motorists, and street traders and extort money from them (Filani, 2012).

A third approach (*Networks only*) of securing space was for street traders to occupy public space where they were familiar with some neighbourhood residents without making a payment and sometimes with support of social networks they had built over time. All trading spaces secured in this way were located close to structures or buildings, and occupation rights were granted to the traders by the owner or occupant of the adjoining property. Most of these trading spaces were located on side streets and not on the main streets or public spaces, so were not in the most desirable trading locations, which also partly explains the lack of payments. One street trader explained;

[I didn't make payments to be here] My mother used to own a shop so the space in front of my late mother's former shop ... is just what I am using (Female trader, Agege Motor Road, selling raw food items)

The fourth approach (*Self-help*) used to secure trading space was to occupy unfamiliar public spaces without any support from social networks nor any form of payment. This process involved strong observation techniques combined with boldness, confidence and defiance. The sites occupied by this group of traders include both side roads and the main public pathways and public spaces, although most of this group were located along the main public pathways and spaces in Oshodi due to the openness of such sites, which means that informal local control by area boys is less than in neighbourhood locations, making it relatively easier to occupy such spaces without social ties or payments. However, these sites were often the most conflict-prone as traders had limited occupation rights. A clothing and footwear trader described his experience;

No I didn't pay to come here. I saw people trading here and since it does not belong to anybody I just came early in the morning and claimed this place and started selling. (Male trader, Oshodi Road, selling clothing and footwear)

This analysis shows that only those who had access to and used strong social networks alongside some form of gatekeeper payment were able to access the most desirable spaces – defined as those in more profitable locations and accompanied by some form of occupancy rights. Where individuals acted in absence of social

networks and/or some form of gatekeeper payment the spatial outcomes were ultimately worse either in terms of profitability or occupancy rights. These findings help to conceptualise our understanding of how individuals secure public space and the outcomes of different approaches, building on work in other populous African cities such as Dar es Salaam where traders similarly drew upon family ties, non-financial and financial agreements with owners of adjoining properties, and dogged encroachment in order to secure public space (Nnkya, 2006).

### **Collective claim and the respatialisation of Oshodi**

Whilst many street traders acted individually in response to Oshodi evictions, some street traders made collective claims for public space. Where social connections are particularly strong amongst street traders, for example where a particular site or area is controlled by a community or kinship group, there appears to have been a greater likelihood of collective claim following eviction, although it is important to recognise that the boundaries between individual and collective claim are blurred. Several street traders, particularly women, commented on the strength of ties amongst traders before the evictions. The gender difference appears to result from existing stronger networks of support between women, prior to the eviction. For example, women would assist with sales when one of them went away to get her children from school; 'my relationship with other traders following the displacements has not changed, because we are like family' (Female trader, Idera Formal Market, selling livestock).

In instances where ties between traders were very strong, it seems a response to the eviction was to relocate away from the principal roads to side streets. Traders reported how they were shocked by the eviction and their livelihoods were disrupted, forcing them to initially remain at home, but they remained in contact by mobile phone and eventually started looking together for an alternative location around the side streets of Oshodi. Notably, 84% of the 100 traders interviewed had a mobile phone or access to one. A woman selling household goods described her experience of acting collectively to reclaim a trading space;

My relationship with my neighbouring traders it is still the same, since it is those of us who were in the previous location that are still here now, because after the displacements we



reunited, found this place, and then moved here together. (Female trader, Ariyibi Oke Street, selling household goods)

While, as discussed below, there are strong product-based associations to which many street traders belong, these are relatively ineffective in advocating for street traders' rights and rarely support spatial claims. Thus, collective actions amongst traders affected by the displacement in Oshodi relied upon finding alternative locations that could accommodate relatively large numbers of traders (in comparison to those making individual spatial claims) out of the gaze of the authorities. Given the lack of power and voice of these collective groups, and their greater visibility due to sheer numbers, their trading locations were generally less prominent and profitable than many traders who acted individually. The collective actions in Oshodi are similar to the experiences documented by Bromley and Mackie (2009) in their account of street trader displacements in Cusco, Peru, where street traders relocated as a group from the streets into nearby courtyard markets. Significantly, Mackie et al (2014) later returned to Cusco to find the courtyard markets were an accepted part of the retail landscape. Unlike in Cusco, the resilient traders of Oshodi remained highly visible on side streets, hence it is perhaps more likely that traders will face ongoing challenges of maintaining access to public space.

### **Maintaining access to public space: towards spatial legitimacy**

After gaining initial access to space following an eviction, the next challenge for traders is to lay regular claim to trading space. Given their generally illegal status and their long history of marginalisation and harassment, traders are vulnerable to further displacement. Previous studies of street traders showed that space is frequently maintained through collective action (eg. associations, political lobbying) (Skinner, 2009) and through licensing, laws and constitutional rights (Brown and Mackie, 2017). By contrast, in Oshodi there seems to have been limited collective action and laws and rights appear to have played almost no role. The main mechanism used by traders to secure temporary occupation rights was the payment of levies either to government authorities or to other parties such as adjacent property owners and 'area boys'. In this section the payment of levies is explored, before a discussion of the co-option of trader associations by government, subsequently hindering any collective action.

## **Undocumented taxation: maintaining space through fees, bribes and extortion**

Street traders make significant but generally undocumented payments to access public space. However these contributions are rarely recognised by urban authorities in economic assessments of the local economic contribution of the informal economy (Brown and Smith, 2016). These methods of maintaining access were very common in Lagos, with extortion particularly prominent in comparison to many other studies of street trading.

Whilst local government officials did not help traders gain access to public space, government involvement is prominent in the process of maintaining regular use of public space. Traders have to make official payments of at least 50 Naira a day (US\$ 0.30) to local officials who collect the fees directly. Amongst the 60 traders surveyed on the streets, most (80%) said that they made daily payments to the local authority in order to be able to trade in public spaces. Significantly, the 'rent' paid to local authorities does not provide a legal right to occupy public space, hence many traders also reported having to pay bribes to local government officials and KAI officers;

Yes, I make payments to local government council officers. I don't know what for and if we ask they will ask us to pack our goods. (Female trader, Ariyibi Oke Street, selling fish)

I have been harassed by KAI officials before because of what they want to collect. Once in a while they confiscate our goods and demand bribes which [after paying] may or may not guarantee the return of our goods. (Female trader, Ariyibi Oke Street, selling provisions)

Traders are generally vulnerable to exploitation because they are perceived by city authority officials as being inseparable from nuisance, chaos and illegality. Any contribution they make to the city is generally overlooked. Informal trading is perceived to be incompatible with an orderly urban environment and is associated with; environmental, health, safety and traffic issues. This is evident in the following narrative by a Lagos State Government official;

Things have changed considerably [since the transformation of Oshodi, in particular the clearance of public spaces and the movement of traders from the major pathways], but I am going to approach it multi-dimensionally. Number one; traffic, there has been a huge improvement in traffic management and flow ... because of the restructuring of Oshodi we now have trading activities [that are] much more organised, so much so that it even gives prospective clients the safety consciousness to go there. That now takes us to security, hitherto because of the disorganised nature of Oshodi people were scared to even go and buy things there, to even patronise them but now it is much more organised, you can enter anywhere and buy whatever you want to buy safely, the crime rate too has reduced tremendously. Incidents of thuggery and street trading have actually reduced, so this has actually ... put Oshodi in a very good pedestal that we can even begin to say that in time it can be likened to any international market around ... this sub-region, and the continent, let me not say the globe. (LSG Official, Ministry of Commerce and Industry).

Traders also made payments to two types of non-government actors in order to retain and defend their trading space. First, they paid the owners and occupants of nearby shops, who collect payments monthly or weekly and in return street traders are afforded a greater degree of legitimacy in the street as they are then perceived by authorities and others to be an extension of formal enterprises and thus less vulnerable to eviction and exploitation. Second, and far more frequently, they made payments to local 'area boys'. 'Area boys' have been described as freelance thugs who extort money from street traders in many parts of Lagos (Basinski, 2009). 'Area boys' have long existed in Lagos and Nigeria with their origins traceable to the colonial period when, denied access to the wealth of the state, people organised into local collectives to gain influence but over time they have degenerated into criminalised gangs due predominantly to political and economic factors (Gore and Pratten, 2003). A food seller described her experience of making payments to 'area boys';

I make payments to the 'area boys'. They come to collect money [from us] daily, whether you make sales or not you must pay them and if you don't, they can beat you up. (Female trader, Oshodi Road, selling readily edible food items)

Maintaining access to space is easier for traders who use their networks to relocate to existing formal markets as they are officially recognised and only pay fees to the market officials. When these traders have problems they go to the managers and as long as they have paid their fees their spaces are secure and they have limited problems regarding the protection of their trading space. A seller of household goods in Arena Formal Market explained; 'in case of problems we meet the officers [in charge of the formal market] to settle any problems whatsoever, because they have the authority' (Male trader, Arena Formal Market, selling household goods).

This contrast between the experience of street traders operating in public space, who are often subject to bribes and extortion, and traders who relocated to existing formal markets and who only pay fees, has been highlighted in other studies (see for example Donovan, 2008 on Bogota; Carrieri and Murta, 2011 on Belo Horizonte). However, the extent of extortion faced by street traders in post-eviction Oshodi appears to be very pronounced.

### **Political co-option: compromising ongoing access to public space?**

Studies of street trading have provided numerous examples of vulnerable street traders raising a collective voice against municipal authorities in order to retain access to public space (Cross, 1998; King, 2006; Skinner, 2009; Steel, 2012). Typically, collective action of traders is pursued through either the daily lobbying of trader associations or bloc voting during elections. In Oshodi, collective actions proved to be limited in relation to both these mechanisms.

Although there are no associations specifically for street traders in Oshodi, there are well-established market-trader associations (formal market-trader associations and product-based trader associations) to which street traders sometimes belong. These associations unite traders, including some street traders, and are intended to protect their general interests. Street traders are typically more active in product-based trader

associations, particularly meat, textile, chicken and vegetable-sellers' associations. However, these associations appear to focus on issues of social welfare and economic profitability, rather than securing access to public space. In relation to social welfare, street traders explained that group savings with associations covered medical and funeral expenses, while economic benefits included support for bulk buying goods and the control of prices;

I belong to the meat-sellers association. There is nowhere we meat sellers will be that we will not have an association ... because we buy our goods together and resolve our trade related issues together. (Male trader, Ariyibi Oke Street, selling meat)

Whilst associations clearly have important economic and welfare functions they do not engage in effective advocacy. One female market trader stated; 'even when we communicate with them [government] through the union they don't act on it'. There are clear signs of co-optation of these associations by local and state government authorities. For example, many street traders indicate they have no part in choosing the leaders of market-trader associations, and even where traders had been involved in the choice of leaders, the selection is still subject to the approval of the state government. Political influence over the choice of market-trader association leaders was most evident in the controversial appointment of the daughter of the previous governor of Lagos and chieftain of the ruling party in Lagos (Bola Ahmed Tinubu) as the overall head of all market-trader associations in Lagos State (the Iyaloja-General), succeeding her grandmother. The Iyaloja-General is a highly respected position that derives from pre-colonial social structures, commanding a widespread level of response and power, although in recent years the role has been politicised. Such clientelist political relationships are common between trader associations and ruling political parties, typically with little benefits for street traders (Bhowmik, 2005; Lindell, 2010; Njaya, 2014). The controversial appointment of the Iyaloja-General was widely reported in the press, for example;

There had been reports that Mr. Tinubu [former Lagos Governor] foisted his daughter as the Lagos market leader on the traders after the death of his mother, a claim the ex-governor's party, the Action Congress of Nigeria, ACN, denied.... The party dismissed the reports as

'rantings' of the opposition Peoples' Democratic Party, PDP. (Vanguard Newspaper, Tuesday, November 05, 2013)

Studies of street traders elsewhere have found that they often mobilise as a group prior to elections (Crossa 2009; Mackie et al. 2014) and are courted for their votes with promises of pro-poor policies. However, in Oshodi even this form of collective action seems to have been beyond the reach of street traders. Interviewees explained that co-opted trader association leaders coerced traders to vote for the ruling party;

It is our leaders that relate with government authorities ... [and they] asked us to vote ... [We were told that] the voter's card could be required when our children want to get into school ... A lot of us voted during the last elections but we will not vote anymore. Government officials see us as fools. They used us and dumped us ... They promised to help us before the elections but they have done otherwise. (Female trader, Ariyibi Oke Street, selling raw food items)

The politicisation of unions, and co-option of trader associations, representing both large-scale and smaller informal operators has been noted in other African cities and this has curtailed their advocacy for low-income vulnerable traders (Brown and Mackie, 2017). Clearly the market trader associations in Lagos are seen as politically influential, and their affiliation to the Iyaloja-General means that there has been effective co-option of market associations across the whole state. Priorities are thus unlikely to focus on low-income traders affected by high profile state-led projects.

## **Conclusions**

The eviction of street traders is a common occurrence throughout cities in Africa and elsewhere in the developing world, driven by a clash of culture and vision of the future of cities – whereby urban governments and elites seek to maximise land values and disguise the visible expression of poverty that street traders are sometimes seen to represent. While the psychological and poverty impacts of evictions have been explored in

the literature, there is little analysis of the coping strategies that traders adopt after a major eviction. Through a case study of the 2009 Oshodi evictions in Lagos, this paper begins to fill this important research gap, examining street trader responses to eviction, with a focus on their strategies for claiming access to space.

The findings of this research are unusual. In other cities the social networks of traders and associations have provided collective support which has been critical in enabling them to establish livelihoods. In Lagos this appears to have been particularly difficult to achieve. While the study highlights the importance of both individual and collective actions in re-establishing a foothold in public space, maintaining access to public space was problematic, with collective action severely diminished through the co-option of trader associations by urban authorities.

It appears individual action, albeit with support from networks, has been essential to enable street traders to return to the area in the immediate aftermath of eviction, and has been the dominant mechanism in this post-eviction case study. Our analysis identifies a four-fold typology of individual street trader actions to claim space. First, only those who had access to and used strong social networks alongside some form of gatekeeper payment (*networks and payments*) were able to access the more desirable spaces in existing formal markets. Second, traders who could pay for access to space, but without social network support (*payments only*), could claim occupancy rights and gain some security, but often not in profitable locations. Third, traders occupied public space without making a payment and sometimes with support of social networks (*Networks only*), enabling them to gain some form of property rights but limited profitability due to the side-street location. Fourth, where individuals acted in absence of social networks and any form of gatekeeper payment (self-help) the locations tended to be profitable but they had to remain fairly mobile with no occupancy rights. In addition to the four types of individual action, street traders report one form of collective response. This fifth approach involved traders working collectively with their peers to identify and claim alternative trading spaces on nearby side streets. These findings help us to conceptualise the spatial response of street traders to evictions.

Previous studies of street traders show that space is frequently maintained through collective action – either through associations or bloc voting during elections. However, in Oshodi trader associations were not effective advocates as they had been co-opted by political authorities – to such a degree that street trader voting habits were influenced – quite the reverse of experiences elsewhere. Instead, the main mechanism used

by traders to maintain access to public space was the payment of levies. Usually street traders saw payment of daily tolls or fees to local government officials or neighbouring property owners as a mark of legitimation, but the success of payments in defending territory was mixed, and many found they received no benefit and could still be moved on. In cases of state failure, the local thugs, or 'area boys', moved in and exploited the more vulnerable by demanding payment for protection.

Why collective claim should be so difficult to establish in Lagos we have not yet been able to evidence but our proposition is that the politicisation and co-option of trader associations across the whole of Lagos State was a key factor. In addition, the widespread prevalence of demands for kickbacks and unofficial payments in state and local governance in Nigeria, to which traders in this study were also subject, is almost certainly a factor which disadvantages collective voice of the poor. In the longer-term, as in so many African cities, the outlook and security of street traders is bleak – perhaps more so in Lagos than many other places – largely due to the lack of collective action in maintaining access to public space. This new knowledge has the potential to strengthen the resilience of traders to future evictions and their potentially devastating impacts. However, achieving a respatialisation of African cities that includes street traders and other street workers is still distant.

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**Table 1.** A typology of individual street trader's spatial claims following the post-2009 evictions in Oshodi

| Typology                 | Process of securing space |                    | Spatial outcome |                  |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|------------------|
|                          | Social networks           | Gatekeeper payment | Profitable      | Occupancy rights |
| 1. Networks and payments | yes                       | yes                | yes             | yes              |
| 2. Payments only         | no                        | yes                | somewhat        | yes              |
| 3. Networks only         | somewhat                  | no                 | no              | yes              |
| 4. Self-help             | no                        | no                 | yes             | no               |

