

## HARARE AS A DESTINATION FOR INFORMAL BUSINESS TOURISM: PERSPECTIVES OF THE CROSS-BORDER TRADERS

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**Abstract:** Business tourism scholarship in the Global South is an undeveloped theme in international research. The phenomenon of business tourism in sub-Saharan Africa is urban-centred. This paper unpacks a critical dimension of business tourism in the African city, namely the activities of informal business tourists. Specifically, the focus is on Harare, Zimbabwe’s capital city, as a destination for international informal business travellers. Using qualitative interviews with cross-border traders, new insight is provided on the reasons why Harare is a preferred destination for cross-border traders. It is demonstrated that Harare is assuming a growing role in the network of cities in Southern Africa (and beyond) which are connected through the mobilities and activities of informal cross-border traders. Two distinct sub-groups are differentiated within Harare’s economy of international informal business tourism. These are cross-border traders from other countries in sub-Saharan Africa who travel to Harare and Zimbabwean cross-border traders who visit Harare either to buy goods for resale in other countries in the region of Southern Africa or to sell in Harare goods that are purchased in neighbouring countries, mainly from South Africa.

**Key words:** informal business tourism, cross-border trading, urban tourism, Southern Africa, Harare

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### INTRODUCTION

Business tourism is a critical facet of tourism development and in Africa focused mainly on large urban destinations. It is argued by Davidson (2019) that after many years of under-representation and neglect in tourism scholarship, there is an observed upturn in the volume of international literature devoted to business tourism. Unsurprisingly, the majority of academic writings on business tourism relate to urban tourism destinations in the Global North. In the Global South in recent years there is also an emerging scholarship on aspects of business tourism (Makoni and Rogerson, 2023). This literature includes works on issues relating to various aspects of formal business tourism as well as informal business tourism which is acknowledged as a distinctive aspect of business tourism in the urban Global South (Rogerson and Letsie, 2013; Rogerson, 2015, 2018; Rogerson and Rogerson, 2021). Building upon the mobilities approach to tourism from so-called ‘emerging world regions’ the concept of informal business tourism is another contribution to move beyond Eurocentric viewpoints in tourism studies (Cohen and Cohen, 2015a, 2015b). In urban sub-Saharan Africa the need to transcend Eurocentric perspectives on tourism is highlighted by the dominance of ‘informality’.

A decade ago Steck et al. (2013:145) could observe that informality had become “emblematic of the African city”. Likewise Crush et al. (2015:10) pinpointed that the informal economy could be styled as “the main game in town” across urban Africa. Arguably, the contemporary African city is characterized by high and ever-expanding levels of informality. For example, Grant (2015) highlights that across much of contemporary Africa informality is the permanent condition for the majority of its urbanites and more broadly a defining feature of the landscape, politics and economy of urban Africa. In the economy of business tourism informality is manifested in the activities of cross-border traders.

In business tourism scholarship among recent issues coming under scrutiny are the differentiated nature of cities as business tourism destinations (Davidson, 2020). The objective of this paper is to investigate Zimbabwe’s capital city – Harare – as a business tourism city and more specifically to analyse the city as a destination for international informal business travellers. The study therefore addresses a knowledge gap in business tourism literature about the Global South in general and the African business city in particular by investigating the reasons why cross-border traders decide to conduct their business operations in Harare. Overall, research conducted on informal business tourism in African cities contribute fresh insight to the

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little recognised ‘other half of urban tourism’, namely that of urban destinations in the Global South (Rogerson and Rogerson, 2021). The following sections give a discussion of literature context and research methods before turning to a profile of Harare’s informal business tourists and their reasons for choosing Zimbabwe’s capital city as a business destination.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The phenomenon of informal business tourism encompasses a segment of domestic informal business tourism as well as international informal business tourism - cross-border trading - which is observed as a widespread and critically important activity in much of sub-Saharan Africa (Rogerson, 2015; Dobler, 2016; Nshimbi and Moyo, 2017; Bouet et al., 2018; Ubba Koderu, 2020; Kahira and Kadirov, 2020; World Bank, 2020; Nakayama, 2022; Dzawanda and Matsa, 2023). Dzawanda et al. (2023: 522) define it as “an activity that entails the buying and selling of goods across national boundaries, usually conducted on a small-scale with traders that operate as unregistered sole traders”.

A similar definition is provided by Kahiya and Kadirov (2020: 89) that it is “market-based exchanges of legally produced/acquired goods across national borders which occurs outside the remit of formal commercial activity”. It is pointed out that the communities of informal cross-border traders “are called ‘informal’ because, generally, they travel with their goods, operate on a relatively small-scale, do not access preferential tariff agreements” and “often buy and/or sell in informal-sector markets (International Organization for Migration 2010: 7).

In tourism writings Timothy and Teye (2005) first drew attention to the mobilities of such traders and vendors in research on borderland spaces in West Africa. Their work sought to investigate these cross-border traders as a “form of business traveller that is unique to the developing world” (Timothy and Teye, 2005: 83) and thereby to extend from a developing world perspective “the traditional views of business travel in tourism”. Brenton and Soprano (2018: 4) view the phenomenon of informal cross-border trading as “a pervasive phenomenon in Africa” and “a major feature of African economic and social landscapes”. Further, Kahiya and Kadirov (2020: 88) suggest that informal cross border trading “is part of the fabric of sub-Saharan Africa which encompasses state fragility, poverty, rural to urban migration, food security, economic reform, inequality, economic empowerment, and formal and informal markets”. Arguably, the activities of these cross-border traders are the international manifestation of informal sector business tourism mobilities in sub-Saharan Africa (Masango and Haraldsson, 2010; Rogerson, 2015; Dobler, 2016; Tichaawa, 2021).

According to widely cited estimates by Afrika and Ajumbo (2012) informal trade is a vital source of income for at least 43 percent of the population of sub-Saharan Africa, a critical contributor to food security and to women’s economic empowerment as females dominate the business. Nakayama (2022: 66) points out that in sub-Saharan Africa informal cross-border trading became a highly visible phenomenon “between the late 1970s and the early 1980s when the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) was introduced by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund”. According to Nakayama (2022: 66) the SAP “resulted in an economic decline with the shrinking of formal sectors, specifically damaging women-headed households”. Among others Núñez (2009: 10) points out that in “Southern Africa the economic necessity to undertake this form of entrepreneurship is compounded by a lack of formal sector employment; many people get involved in informal cross-border trading activities as a response to unemployment”.

Brenton and Soprano (2018: 4) confirm that “the vast majority of Africa’s small-scale traders are female”. Salia et al. (2020: 1) point to the fact that the participation of women in informal cross-border trading “in the context of high mobility and circular migration has become an increasing phenomenon in sub-Saharan Africa, especially the Western, Eastern, and Southern Africa (SADC) sub-regions. Manjokoto and Ranga (2017: 27) consider that cross-border trading in Africa “provides specific opportunities for the empowerment of women” and that with “access to some capital, this creates an opportunity to alleviate poverty”. The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) projects that informal cross-border traders account for 30-40% of intra-regional trade within the Southern African Development Community and that women comprise at least 70 % of the informal cross border traders (Kudejira, 2020). Dzawanda et al. (2022: 1) aver that informal cross-border trade is “a significant part” of trade in sub-Saharan Africa and contributes towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in particular by providing employment opportunities for poor and vulnerable groups and thus helps in poverty reduction through providing a significant contribution of income into households. The extensive research studies prepared by the Southern African Migration Project demonstrate that informal cross-border trading plays a critical role in poverty alleviation, food security and household livelihoods in Southern Africa (Crush et al., 2015; Peberdy et al., 2015; Chikanda and Raimundo, 2017; Chikanda and Tawodzera, 2017; Tawodzera and Chikanda, 2017).

Typically, across parts of Africa the business of informal cross-border trading represents ‘proximity trade’ that involves the short-distance movement of goods between markets close to a border (Timothy and Teye, 2005). In many countries of Southern Africa, however, cross-border traders go beyond the spaces of borderlands and travel longer distances to farther cities or towns in order either to sell their goods or purchase items that they might sell on their own side of the border or even in adjacent countries. Among others, Peberdy et al. (2015: 1) stress that in Southern Africa informal cross-border trade is “a significant feature of regional trade and international mobility”. In extant literature the most well-documented urban destinations for cross-border trading are the cities of Johannesburg and Maputo. Johannesburg is the pivot for a constellation of networks of informal cross-border traders that have expanded since South Africa’s reinsertion into global networks following democratic transition in 1994 (Rogerson, 2018; Zack and Landau, 2022). The city of Maputo has become a critical hub for mukerho traders who travel between Mozambique and South Africa to bring goods to supply the capital city’s retail markets (Piscitelli, 2015). As will be shown in our research the city of Harare is emerging as another significant destination for informal business travellers in the region of Southern Africa.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research findings are extracted from a larger investigation of Harare as an African business tourism city and here are from a semi-structured survey conducted between 2020 and 2022 of 300 cross-border traders (CBTs) visiting Harare for the purpose of either buying or selling goods in the city. In addition, interviews were conducted variously at the major bus terminals servicing the international travellers. A convenience sampling approach was used to target respondents. Furthermore, during the initial data collection period, it became evident that a snowballing technique could be employed which was then adopted to add to the final data that was collected. The choice of the sample was informed by the inability to draw a representative survey population of informal cross-border traders and their businesses in the city. Key issues examined were the socio-demographic profiles of the respondents with a view to determine who they are as well as their choice of Harare as a city to conduct informal business. The key findings are examined and discussed below.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Who are informal business tourists in Harare?

The research disclosed two distinct sub-groups within Harare's economy of international informal business tourism. First, are those Zimbabwean cross-border traders who travel to Harare either to buy goods for resale in other countries in the region of Southern Africa or to sell in Harare goods that are purchased in neighbouring countries, mainly from South Africa. The strong historical linkages that exist between Zimbabwean cross-border traders and South Africa are documented in studies by Bamu (2017), Tawodzera and Chikanda (2017) and by Dzawanda and Matsa (2021). Second, are a cohort of cross-border traders from other countries who travel to Harare as part of the activity of international informal business tourism. The study captured participants from 14 different countries in sub-Saharan Africa, including travelling as far as from Ghana, Nigeria or Gabon. The largest share (two-thirds) of the non-Zimbabwean cross-border traders were, however, drawn from surrounding countries, most importantly South Africa, Botswana, Namibia, Mozambique, and Zambia.

Arguably, the business activities of these non-Zimbabwean cross-border traders have not been well-documented in extant literature on cross-border trading in the region of Southern Africa. The finding from Harare that nearly 20 percent of the non-Zimbabwean cross-border traders were from South Africa is particularly noteworthy. The research studies conducted a decade earlier by the Southern African Migration Project stressed that "although South Africa is a major source of goods purchased by traders, the absence of South African informal traders was very noticeable" (Peberdy et al., 2015: 2). This suggests that the high levels of recorded unemployment over the past decade in South Africa are a catalyst to the emergence of a community of South African cross-border traders who are choosing to trade in Harare among other cities in Southern Africa.

Key characteristics of these two segments of Harare's informal business economy are given on Table 1. In a confirmation of the results of previous studies cross-border traders are a highly gendered group, comprised mainly of women. It is apparent women were the most important group in the cross-border traders, representing 78 % Zimbabwean traders and 69 % of non-Zimbabweans (Table 1). The cohort of women traders would be classed as relatively young with over 90 percent below the age of 40 years. Certain age differences were revealed across the two groups with the Zimbabwean group having 26 percent aged less than 30 as compared to 5 percent for the non-Zimbabweans. Education levels among the two groups were similar with both groups generally well-educated.

Table 1. Profile of Cross-border traders in Harare (Source: Authors Survey)

| <b>Gender</b>                      | <b>Zimbabwean CBT (n=102, in %)</b> | <b>Non-Zimbabwean CBT (n=198, in %)</b> |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| Female                             | 78                                  | 69                                      |
| Male                               | 22                                  | 28                                      |
| I prefer not to say                | 0                                   | 3                                       |
| <b>Age</b>                         | <b>Zimbabwean CBT (n=102, in %)</b> | <b>Non-Zimbabwean CBT (n=198, in %)</b> |
| 20-29 years old                    | 26                                  | 5                                       |
| 30-39 years old                    | 70                                  | 89                                      |
| 40-49 years old                    | 4                                   | 6                                       |
| <b>Level of education</b>          | <b>Zimbabwean CBT (n=102, in %)</b> | <b>Non-Zimbabwean CBT (n=198, in %)</b> |
| No formal education                | 2                                   | 7                                       |
| Some primary school education      | 1                                   | 3                                       |
| Primary school completed           | 0                                   | 2                                       |
| Some secondary school education    | 0                                   | 5                                       |
| Secondary school completed         | 12                                  | 24                                      |
| Some form of tertiary education    | 26                                  | 9                                       |
| Diploma or Certificate             | 30                                  | 30                                      |
| Undergraduate degree completed     | 23                                  | 20                                      |
| Postgraduate degree complete       | 6                                   | 2                                       |
| <b>Number of years in business</b> | <b>Zimbabwean CBT (n=102, in %)</b> | <b>Non-Zimbabwean CBT (n=198, in %)</b> |
| 1-3 years                          | 2                                   | 16                                      |
| 4-6 years                          | 26                                  | 71                                      |
| 7-10 years                         | 52                                  | 10                                      |
| Over 10 years                      | 20                                  | 4                                       |

The responses for years in business point to the fact that as a whole the Zimbabwean group are more well-established – 72 percent operating for more than 7 years – as compared to the non-Zimbabwean traders. With regards to frequency

of travel to Harare the results disclosed not surprisingly that the Zimbabweans were more regular business tourists in Harare (often three visits a month) than their foreign counterparts. The majority of the non-Zimbabwean participants indicated that they do not travel frequently to Harare and that their travel to the city is largely contingent on availability of funds (80%), and usually occurs once in a month (76%). In terms of products, food was found to be the most significant product brought into Harare by the Zimbabwean traders.

Also, cosmetics and accessories are the other important products brought by Zimbabwean traders, while the non-Zimbabwean traders were found to be bringing in mostly accessories. Taken together, cosmetics are the most common goods brought into Harare by Zimbabwean and non-Zimbabwean traders combined (66%).

### **Choosing Harare as a business tourism destination**

It is argued that cross-border trading between Zimbabwe and South Africa started on a small-scale in the 1980s and that the increased status of the informal economy in urban Zimbabwe “can be ascribed to direct consequences of the colonial legacy, the post-independence socialist bias in economic policy, and the secular recession that began in the mid-1980s” (Dzawanda et al., 2023: 522). Over the past three decades the economy of Zimbabwe has witnessed economic collapse, hyperinflation, escalating unemployment, and the progressive hollowing out of the formal economy since the adoption and implementation of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) between 1990 and 1995 (Chirisa, 2009). According to Kudejira (2020: 4) informal cross-border trading “emerged as an important alternative livelihood strategy” in the aftermath of ESAP of the mid-1990s and the post-2000 collapse which pushed Zimbabwe into a highly informalised economy”. Beyond ESAP some observers attribute the spiralling decline of the economy to “a series of counter-productive political decisions taken from late 1997” (Dzawanda et al., 2023: 522). These include actions relating land appropriation, large payments to war veterans that undermined fiscal discipline and the decision to send Zimbabwean troops into the DR Congo. By 2004 the national rate of inflation was running in excess of 600 percent. As Tawodzera (2023: 86) points out in the post-2000 period the national economy “further contracted due to the implementation of the fast-track land reform program”.

The implosion of the formal economy triggered a further surge in the informal economy, including of participation in informal cross-border trade. Rogerson (2016: 238) asserts that “the harsh economic downturn was particularly felt in the country’s cities”. Potts (2006: 288) stresses that for the majority of urban households that depend on the informal economy, including cross-border trading, “was not optional but utterly essential”. As the country’s major urban centre and capital, Harare has been the epicentre and borne the brunt of the shrinkage of Zimbabwe’s economy (Chadambuka, 2021). Given this situation it might be expected that Harare would not be a promising destination for the activities of cross-border traders. The study participants were asked to indicate their reasons for choosing Harare as their destination for cross-border trading. Certain differences in the responses and perspectives were evidenced from the Zimbabwean groups of cross-border traders as compared to the cohort of non-Zimbabweans. For Zimbabweans the emphasis in the interviews was upon Harare as the largest city in the country and critically of issues around economic downturn and the chronic shortages of basic goods that could be supplied by participating in the international circuits of cross-border trading. The infrastructure of flea markets established within Harare was also strongly profiled as a basis for the selection of Harare over other destinations in Zimbabwe. These markets are a connection with the local circuits of informal business tourists who come into Harare from the country’s secondary centres, small towns and rural areas.

*Our country has been living in poverty for over 20 years. Our poverty is not just about us not having money and poor living conditions, but also it stretches to lack of basic things we need to survive like toilet paper and cooking oil. Can you imagine! And many people want to come to Harare to buy these things that is why I am in Harare (Zimbabwean [Masvingo] female CBT 42yrs).*

*There are very good flea markets in Harare and many Zimbabweans who are trading get stands in those markets, but they have nothing to trade if we don’t supply them with things to sell. There is nothing in Zimbabwe besides just the fruits and the vegetables, so these guys need us to supply them with clothes and electrical things (Zimbabwean [Karoyi] male CBT 28yrs).*

For non-Zimbabwean CBTs, there exist a wide range of destinations in Southern Africa where they might conduct their business. In selecting Harare several key issues were highlighted by the non-Zimbabwean CBTs. Importantly, it was suggested that whilst South Africa (Johannesburg in particular) has long been the favoured destination and the pivot of international informal business tourism in Southern Africa the city was beginning to lose its dominant competitive position in the regional network of cross-border traders. Asked to explain their choice of Harare several respondents indicated comparisons with South Africa.

*If I were to answer this question about 12 years ago, I would say that there is not a better country to visit for my business than South Africa. It’s true that South Africa is still by far the best place to go to, but honestly they don’t want African foreigners anymore but they are not direct about it. There are so many bad things happening to people travelling to South Africa, and it’s worse for my kind of business because I can lose my goods anytime. That’s why I now chose to come to Zimbabwe, there is no pressure here especially in their flea markets (Mozambican [Pemba] male CBT 28yrs).*

*Crossing into South Africa you must always be on the lookout for anything from the border. You are asked for passports everywhere by the police, and many South Africans you meet are not friendly. You are made to feel like an intruder. And also the crime there, you can be robbed of your money or your stuff you go to sell. Even the police can search you of your money at Park Station in Johannesburg. In 2015 the police took 300 dollars in my purse when they were searching me when I arrived at Park Station. I was not able to buy the stuff I had travelled to buy there. The truth is that there are so many bad things that happen to people going to buy stuff in South Africa. Even if you ask them they will tell you that they are just taking big risks because South Africa has everything, but everyday you live in fear when you are doing this*

*business in South Africa. That's why I come to Harare, at least here I know everyone can buy my products and I am not scared of being robbed or harassed by anyone (Zambian [Ndola] female CBT 36yrs).*

*The immigration laws of South Africa are not friendly like in Zimbabwe. In South Africa they can stamp your passport with only a 7 day or 2 weeks, so your time is very limited to do business. If you want to stay longer you must buy 90 days at the border. So to me it's just unnecessary. Zimbabwe does not have those things, so I can come in Harare and there are a lot of South African things in Harare. I don't know how Zimbabweans do it; they have everything you need in Harare but the country is poor (Nigerian [Lagos] female CBT 36yrs).*

*Harare is the best for me, even during the political situations in 2008 it was still better to come to Zimbabwe than to go to South Africa. There are people who bring stuff from South Africa to Harare. I prefer getting it in Harare than going South myself. South Africa is just overrated. All the Africans in South Africa are made to feel like criminals, even those who have papers are still not treated well. South Africa is the only country in Africa where an African is made to feel like a foreigner. I travel to many countries and wherever I go I am welcomed and treated like a visitor. The laws in many African countries protect foreign nationals, but in South Africa the word foreigner is just the same as a criminal and I honestly don't feel safe anymore to go there with my business (Congolese [Kinshasa] female CBT 43yrs).*

As a whole it is evident that for this group of non-Zimbabwean CBTs issues of widespread xenophobia in South Africa, visa and border challenges (including corruption and harassment), inherent safety and crime issues combine to make Harare and Zimbabwe a preferred destination for these informal business tourists as compared to the potential attractions of Johannesburg or South Africa more generally. Beyond the direct comparisons made between Zimbabwe and the negatives of South Africa several other reasons were forwarded for cross-border traders to opt for Harare as a business tourism destination. One overarching theme related to the collapse of the country's formal economy, the accompanying shortages of goods in formal retail outlets and of the opportunities thereby offered to these cross-border traders by the size of the market in Harare albeit a city where the majority of the population live in circumstances of poverty and necessarily seek out the cheapest prices for basic commodities. These are issues which parallel those discussed by the Zimbabwean CBTs.

*There is no competition with the formal industry in Zimbabwe. This is making it easy for me to push my business in the capital of this country (Ghanaian female CBT 26yrs).*

*Because Harare is the capital city and it has big market places with a great opportunity to trade my goods, Zimbabwean people have need for the cleaning equipment I sell because it is scarce in the country's formal shops shelves (Mostwana [Gaborone] female CBT 37yrs).*

*Zimbabwe is a poor country with a very small formal industry. The products I bring to this country are needed every day so it's better for me to travel here (Mozambican [Pemba] male CBT 28yrs).*

A similar response was given by a Zambian participant whose family background was Zimbabwe.

*My parents are from Zimbabwe. They left in the 1980s during the Gukurahundi<sup>1</sup> killings and settled in Zambia, when I began this business, It was because I saw many Zimbabweans crossing into Zambia to buy toilet papers and baby diapers and other things that are surprisingly not found in Zimbabwe. The poverty in the country keeps getting worse and cross-borders like us are helping the country and its people to survive the poverty. Harare is a central business city for my goods because I have many Zimbabweans coming to the city to get these products (Zambian [Lusaka] female CBT 36yrs).*

Other CBTs stressed that their choice of Harare was tilted by factors around the availability of the markets in the city and opportunities not only to sell goods brought into Harare but also to purchase at local flea markets certain products for sale in the home country. In this regard Harare is becoming attractive as a geographical locus within the broader circulation of products and wider circuits or networks of cross-border trading as observed in Southern Africa. Further, in addition to the international networks of trading and shopping there is the linkage within Harare to domestic circuits of informal business tourists in terms of the activities of domestic shopper/traders.

*I cross the border into Zimbabwe at Machipanda [Zimbabwe-Mozambican border in the Manicaland Province] with my clothes which I sell in bulk in Harare flea markets. In Mozambique many people survive on fishing, and fishing rods are on high demand. I use my money to buy the advanced fishing rods that they bring from South Africa (Mozambican [Chimoio] male CBT 26yrs).*

*I chose Harare because it is a big city and also has a large number of people and has the majority of my target market (Mozambican [Pemba] male CBT 28yrs).*

*Because most of the people come to this city in large numbers and it is good for business (Kenyan [Kikuyu] female CBT 38yrs).*

*I make traditional herbs and come to sell them here in Harare because Zimbabwean people are struggling in the health system. The medicine in their clinics and hospitals is not enough. My medicine is in demand here and it sells fast. I use my profit to buy empty paint buckets that are coming from South Africa. We have water problems in Malawi and these buckets are in demand for storing water (Malawian [Lilongwe] female traditional healer 48yrs).*

One Tanzanian trader pointed to market opportunities for CBTs to service also the small community of higher-income Harare residents with specialized products.

*I bring dried bush meat [venison] to Harare. It is not in demand in the city centre because Zimbabweans want important things like food. But people in rich suburbs need it and I also bring them art. Even important politicians in Harare call me to bring it to their homes. The hotels in Harare also call me for supply. When they pay me I go to the Harare*

<sup>1</sup> This was a period of ethnic violence between 1982 and 1987 in Zimbabwe, carried out by the Zimbabwean government under Robert Mugabe, directed against the Ndebele people

markets to buy the sports jerseys and sneakers from Mozambicans and South African business people [referring to the CBTs] because the people in Tanzania love them, especially basketball jerseys (Tanzanian [Dodoma] male hunter/CBT 41yrs).

For a large segment of the non-Zimbabwean CBTs the scarcity of local goods in Harare was the key factor driving their decision to do business in Harare. The participants indicated that they were travelling to sell different goods in Harare that were mostly in short supply or absent commodities in the city. Such participants considered themselves crucial for supplying these goods to Harare residents.

*In Zimbabwe there was a time where you cannot find even a toilet paper in the big shops (referring to formal shops) shelves. And everyday people need those important items, we have to be there to make sure there is a good supply of those things* (Motswana [Gaborone] female CBT 37yrs).

*Clothes, shoes, baby clothes, socks, school shoes, uniforms. I am not sure if there is anything in the shops in Zimbabwe. I sell these ones to people who sell things in Harare, they always call me after a week to bring more stuff. They are always telling me that there is nothing in Zimbabwe and they need me* (Mozambican [Maputo] female CBT 28).

*Clothes because I have clothes of many sizes. They say clothes are expensive in Zimbabwe, and when they find them cheap is in China shops but the shops are always having few sizes. To me it's important to come here with these clothes because I am always having demand* (Mozambican [Maputo] male CBT 32).

*Empty buckets, green bar soaps, candles and candle wax, paraffin, turpentine because there is a growing business now in Harare. There are people who are making detergents and some cleaning material like floor polish. There is a shortage of detergents in Zimbabwe and people are doing it themselves. So I saw a business from them and they are always happy to see me come especially with the buckets, because they make the detergents and display them in Harare flea markets in the buckets and containers I sell to them. They also tell me that they can even sell the candles I bring to areas where there is no electricity. I also bring red candles, many of them because I was told that the healers and the prophets always ask the people they help to bring a red candle* (Namibian [Omaruru] female CBT 36yrs).

The group of South African cross-border traders in Harare provided similar responses to those of traders from other African countries concerning the market opportunities for their informal businesses.

*Harare is good because other Zimbabweans selling their things are coming here so it makes it easier for me to get Zimbabwean products like their tobacco and chibuku [traditional alcohol beverage] which I buy and go to sell in my country* (South African [Johannesburg] male CBT 28yrs).

*The big shops like TM and Spar are just a name now in Zimbabwe. If things are not very expensive in those shops, they are not there. If you ask anyone in the street now, they tell you that they prefer to buy Maq (referring to a washing powder), cooking oil and green bar soaps from us because it is very expensive in TM. Last year there was a trending joke about cooking oil- People were saying that a man can pay lobola with cooking oil, and videos were trending on social media where a man would be woken up by his wife in the morning just to pour cooking oil measurements into the cooking pot. Because of the shortage. It is so funny and pitiful that a whole country fails to afford cooking oil in its shops* (South African [Johannesburg] male CBT 26yrs).

*Because of the poverty in this country, people cannot afford goods in the supermarket and big shops, I love coming here because the demand is high from many Zimbabweans.* (South African [Cape Town] male CBT 29yrs).

*Rice, sugar, powder milk, floor, cooking oil, honey, eggs and many food stuff. Food is a big problems in Zimbabwe, the people in Harare are always complaining of how expensive food is, especially meat. I wish I can be able to cross-border with fresh meat, I will make a lot of money. You can never go wrong if you bring foodstuff to Zimbabwe, there is always a market for it* (South African [Musina] female CBT 33yrs).

*I sell cell phones, phone covers, cell phone batteries and battery charges, and all the small things. Because in Zimbabwe these things I sell are very expensive in shops or they will find fong kong ones in China shops there. I sell original things and people like that because I still sell them cheap* (South African [Johannesburg] male CBT 31yrs).

Overall, the different groups of non-Zimbabwean cross-border traders emphasized the business relationships and linkages they establish with local Zimbabwean traders operating in the city markets of Harare. In addition, they pinpointed also the various types of local Zimbabwean products that they purchase for resale in their home destinations. For South African traders an important set of products were specialized Zimbabwean food items for supply to the market provided by the large community of Zimbabweans who are residents of South Africa's major cities.

*Us we cross-borders and come here, and we are already connected to the Zimbabwe people who buy and sell the things we bring. We find them waiting for us at bus stations or sometimes we even go to them at the markets* (South African [Johannesburg] female CBT 29yrs).

*Our business is like a give and take situation. We are bringing important things to Zimbabweans, and when we leave, we also have important things, like the traditional herbs that Zimbabweans make are very strong and effective, and also their art can sell well in South Africa. So in my business, the Zimbabwean traders need my products and I want their herbs and art, it's like that* (South African [Johannesburg] female CBT 38yrs).

*When we travel here with stuff, like now I am coming in with a lot of stuff I am coming with orders for these people who are selling in Harare. They ask me for orders and I ask them also for orders. If they don't have, they ask their friends to get me the stuff I want. So sometimes I have to wait for someone coming from Kariba with matemba [kapenta fish] then I end up staying for more days until they get with my order to Harare. For my business I always bring things like solar, torches and batteries because they say to me that these are wanted in Zimbabwe. Sometimes I even come with cooking oil. And, in South Africa there are many Zimbabweans there who want Zimbabwean food like matemba and madora,*

*mazoe and cerevita, and even masese [Zimbabwean locally brewed traditional beer]. So I have to wait for a few days in Harare for my people there to bring them (South African [Johannesburg] male CBT 42yrs).*

*Our kind of business has provided options for people in Zimbabwe to make a choice to either go to buy what they want from the formalized trading companies or from us in the streets. So there is a balance now, and the poor can be able to make a choice, and in many cases we are the ones they choose because our prices are competitive and we can be able to get to where they are or even deliver stuff at their homes, so they save money to travel (South African [Brits] female CBT 35yrs).*

## CONCLUSION

Scholarship on business tourism in African cities constitutes only a small focus within the literature of urban tourism (Makoni and Rogerson, 2023). This study provides new insight on one dimension of Harare as a business city. It has centred on the city's important role as an international destination for informal business tourism. Arguably, Harare is assuming a growing role in the network of cities in Southern Africa (and beyond) which are connected through the activities of cross-border traders. Although there has emerged an extensive literature around cross-border traders in Africa much of this work centres on issues around the drivers and policy challenges of the traders.

Qualitative responses provide a valuable perspective on the reasons for cross-border traders to select Harare as a destination for their business. The results point to the fact that Harare is increasingly a preferred destination for many cross-border traders as compared to South Africa's major cities and in particular Johannesburg. Further research is merited to unpack the changing character of informal business tourism mobilities in urban Africa.

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