

## THE PLACE OF MARKET ASSOCIATIONS AND INFORMAL ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES IN DEVELOPING ECONOMIES: A SOCIOLOGICAL REVIEW

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### Abstract

*The term 'informality' was conceptualised by the International Labour Organisation to describe labour force which operates outside the formal labour market. The idea of informality used in this paper covers a wide spectrum of unregulated economic activities such as vending and small-scale manufacturing which are carried out by operators outside the regulatory framework of the state. There is a consensus of opinion by scholars that connection exists between informality and vulnerable populations. Several authors have studied the nexus between informal sector and economic growth. So far, a perspective that highlights the implications of market associations and networks in the socio-economic development of the areas which the enterprises are located is still not being exhaustively addressed in existing literature. Leveraging on secondary elaboration technique, this paper presents a modest review of extant literature on norms of market associations and some of the challenges encountered by informal sector operators. The ultimate goal of this enterprise is to provoke intellectual discourse to achieve deeper understanding of the mediating role of market associations and other informal economic activities in developing economies.*

**Keywords:** Economic Growth, Unregulated Economic Activities, Developing Economies, Market

### 1 Introduction

A growing number of studies has shown that the world has been informalized (Hart, 2012). Informal economy has become the fastest growing economy all over the world (Neuwirth, 2011). The factors that encourage the growth of informal sectors have piqued the attention of many scholars. In the development literature, it is not clear whether the effect of informal economy on the poverty reduction yields positive result (Aryeetey, 2010). Some Scholars argue that people engaging in the sector are working poor because wages they earn are inadequate to them out of the cycle of poverty (Tokman, 2001; Reddy, 2007). The findings of Orlando (2001) are well

documented in the literature which confirms the above submission. Chen (2012) also affirms that the informal sector provides low incomes to its participants in most cases. The implication is that participants in the sector are prone to fall below the poverty line.

Other Scholars approach informal economy in terms of contributions to household livelihood. For example, Cichello and Rogan (2017) and Fourier *et. al* (2018) contend that the sector accommodates the poor and creates employment for unskilled and semi-skilled people who could have been without jobs. The argument is that an informal sector job has the potential of reducing poverty in a country as much as the formal sector job can. In his study in Fiji, Reddy (2007) demonstrates a positive association between engagement in informal economic activities and poverty alleviation. This finding was corroborated by Cichello and Rogan (2017) and Fourier *et al.* (2018) who observed that the informal sector exists to serve as a safety hub for the reserve army of individuals who are willing to work but are without formal jobs. The informal sector provides employment for about 61 percent of the labour force in developing countries of which majority are women (Akintoye, 2006). On the world stage more than half the global work force is accommodated in the informal sector (Benson, 2014). Andrei *et al.* (2011) demonstrate that there is a positive relationship between unemployment and the size of the informal economy. For example, just about 10% of the labour force in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is employed by the formal sector or formal economy, leaving the remaining 90% open to finding other means of making a livelihood, which most find in the informal sector (Benjamin, 2014; World Bank, 2018).

Most scholars have established a link between poverty and the informal sector. A report by the UN International Labour Organization (2018) emphasizes the relationship between these two variables – a strong correlation between poverty and informality. Kim (2005) opined that the motivation behind participation in the informal economy is to escape from poverty. In this way, the effectiveness of informal sector is one of the requirements for addressing economic challenges plaguing Nigeria as a nation. For instance, scholars aver that the informal sector has the potential to provide the needed push towards wealth creation, employment generation and development in general (Sakanko & Ewugi, 2017; Yelwa & Adam, 2014; Burgers & Fourie, 2018). For example, Andrei *et al.* (2011) demonstrate that there is a positive relationship between unemployment and the size of the informal economy. For example, just about 10% of the labour force in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is employed by the formal sector or formal economy, leaving the remaining 90% open to finding other means of making a livelihood, which most find in the informal sector (Benjamin, 2014; World Bank, 2018).

The role of the tax burden on the informal economy has been well researched and

documented in the literature (Giles and Johnson, 2000; Schneider and Enste, 2000; Schneider, 1994b, 2005; Sookram and Watson, 2008). The general consensus suggests that the tax burden is one of the main factors which influence people's decision to participate in the informal economy. For example, several studies have noted that an increase in the tax burden leads to an increase in the size of the informal economy (Giles and Johnson, 2000; Schneider, 2005; Sookram and Watson, 2008). Specifically, Schneider and Enste (2000) assert that individuals give considerable attention to the effect of taxes when making "labor-leisure choices". Similarly, the effect of taxes on income is given adequate consideration before individuals decide to work in either the formal or informal economies. Typically, a high marginal tax rate causes substitution effects and distorts labour-leisure decisions (Thomas, 1992). In fact, the substitution effect will be larger than the income effect if the individual is able to receive income from the informal economy. Potentially, this will make individuals take up fewer working hours in the formal economy, in order to increase their leisure time, as well as their participation in the informal economy (Schneider and Enste, 2000).

There appears to be a constant bi-directional relationship between the informal economy and the tax burden. On the one hand, a rising tax burden pushes individuals or firms into the informal economy, hence increases the size of the informal economy (Giles and Johnson, 2000; Sookram and Watson, 2008), as these economic agents are compelled to seek alternative sources of income from the informal economy. On the other hand, a growing informal economy places further pressure on the government to increase taxes, which in turn, encourages more economic agents to desire to move to the informal sector. Additionally, there is an incentive to participate in the informal economy if, in the official economy, the difference between the total cost of labour and after-tax earnings is high, as individuals would seek to avoid the difference and participate in the informal economy. The difference depends on the system of social security contributions and overall tax burden, hence, the bigger the difference, the higher the incentive to participate in the informal economy (Schneider and Enste, 2000). Arguably, reducing the tax rate, which by extension reduces the tax burden, will be accompanied by a reduction in the size of the informal economy.

## **2 Informal Economic Engagements and Household Livelihoods**

Scholars have suggested that the informal economy should be regarded as part of a solution to the high unemployment ravaging the continent rather than as a problem (Sahel, 2014). The role of the informal economy in creating jobs has never been in doubt, as early studies showed that the informal economy emerged to close the employment gaps in developing economies (see Hart, 1971). Particularly, these early writings assert that the unemployed in any economy will seek all available means of survival and the most popular, possibly the only, destination is the informal economy, where they operate as self-employed, hawkers, wage earners, scavengers,

shop-owners, shop-keepers and several other activities unregulated by the state. The informal sector is opened for people who intend to set up their own business with small capital. It has become the means of survival for poor people (Mahadea *et al.*, 2018). The importance of informal sector in the creation of employment opportunities for the jobless has been acknowledged by several scholars (ILO, 2018). For instance, ILO (2002A) reports that approximately 85% of all new employment opportunities around the world are created in the informal economy. The number of females participating in informal sector work across the globe is considerably larger than their male counterparts although, as stated by Chen (2014), women mostly deal in the sale of perishable goods.

Neuwirth (2011) argues that the informal economy is both the fastest growing economy globally, and the future of the world economy. As noted in Section 3.13, it does not come as a surprise that a larger part of the world's working population operates in, and earns their income from, the informal economy. Jutting and Laiglesia, (2009) and Williams and Nadin (2010) show that about 67% of the global working population works in the informal economy. This is similar to results reported by Bajada and Schneider (2005), Williams and Nadin (2010), Williams and Round (2010) and Andrei *et al.* (2011). Specifically, Andrei *et al.* (2011) report a positive linear relationship between unemployment and the size of the informal economy.

The informal economy arguably performs the important role of accommodating the poor, creating employment and reducing poverty as it provides jobs for both unskilled and semi-skilled individuals who could have been without jobs (Malik, 1996). For example, it has been reported that the informal economy provides alternatives for people laid-off from their formal jobs, and many that have never found a formal job, and/or may never get a formal job (Gali and Kucera, 2003). Similarly, Fiddler and Webster (1965) note that the informal economy provides employment for three categories of people: the survivalists, the self-employed, and owners of small businesses. Some results from the literature corroborate this claim. For example, Reddy (2007) reports a significant increase in the incomes and assets of participants in the informal Reddy (2007) reports a positive contribution of the informal economy in alleviating poverty and enhancing income generation. In addition, he finds that informal enterprises absorb mostly family members, who have relatively long working hours a day with an average of 60 hours a week. He concludes by noting that it is the family members' roles in informal business, their education level and experience that play vital roles in alleviating poverty.

As many people have difficulty in finding jobs in the formal economic sectors, informal sector provides earning opportunity and livelihoods for operators to support the dependent members of their family such as siblings, children and old

parents. Most people who are not accommodated in the formal sector of the economy are involved street vending as a source of employment and income (Muiruri, 2010). In most developing countries informal economic activities have become an employment and income earning option for a large segment of the population. (Mramba, 2015).

### **3 Market Association and Norms of Market Operations**

Several studies have affirmed the importance of institutions in predicting the level of development in a particular country (Hall and Jones, 1999). As research on the role of institutions in economic development has gained remarkable attention, interest of scholars has remained focused on the activities of trade associations. For example, Mawazo *et al.* (2015) focused on how market associations provide functional support to the marketing activities of informal operators. Also Baumol (1990) maintains that entrepreneurial activities are significantly influenced by institutions. Hodgson (2006) argues that institutions are systems of established and prevalent social rules that structure social interactions. While formal institutions are created, communicated and enforced through official channels, Helmke *et al.* (2004) maintains that informal institutions are socially shared rules, usually unwritten, that are created, communicated and enforced outside of officially sanctioned channels. Adding credence to this view, Baughn *et al.* (2006) affirm that informal institutions may promote women's participation in entrepreneurial activities. Therefore, correct understanding of informal governance mechanism is necessary for carrying out economic activities (Williams and McGure, 2010).

Markets in Nigeria are largely managed by women traders who are organized into groups according to their line of business. The commodity leaders are responsible for the smooth-running of market transactions. In order to secure a well-run commodity value chain, traders' associations are constituted to represent business interests in a specific context (Rajwani *et al.*, 2015). Once these associations are formed, they serve as platform through which members identify and resolve challenges confronting them (Barnett, 2013). They also carry out a range of market-oriented activities such as information on procurement, potential buyers price and prevailing market conditions (Minto, 2016; Kahl, 2017).

In the absence of formal legal institution, Lyon (2000) reports the role of moral norms in the organisation of market activities. Strongly enforced norms within a commodity-specific association engender cooperation among traders which in turn prevent the market from plunging into chaos (Spellman, 2012). This ensures united action on issues affecting or likely to affect their interest. Market associations also play useful organisational roles by settling disputes without the intervention of formal authorities (Fafehamps & Minten, 2001).



By constructing shared meaning, scholars report that market associations remarkably shape the understanding of their members about on-going market conditions, marketing strategies and the nature of market competition (Lawton *et al.*, 2018). Involvement in the activities of market associations enables members to gain access to knowledge and entrepreneurial competence (Lawton *et al.*, 2013). Sequel to this, market associations facilitate the marketing mix in order to achieve greater efficiency in the marketing chain (Mawazo *et al.*, 2015).

Market associations influence a great deal of the trade activities which take place. ILO (1997) asserts that workers in the informal economy usually organize themselves to achieve specific objectives. This includes the regulation of the operators and the promotion of interests of informal workers. Britwum (2013) alludes to this view and asserts that trade associations embody support and regulatory systems that guide economic activities in the informal sector. Shepherd *et al* (2009) maintain that informal trade association play pivotal roles in product development, pricing and distribution. By creating norms and standards bothering on their operations, informal traders' association has become resilient and autonomous economic actor (Vorley *et al.*, 2012).

Market associations in the rural communities are informal and women dominated much of the trading activities take place under the influence of members of these associations (Shepherd, 2004). Most of these associations are commodity-specific. They facilitate the work of their member and seek to achieve greater efficiency in the marketing chain. In Nigeria, studies indicate that market associations restrict supply to non-members by preventing them from making purchases and from selling (Smith and Luttrell, 1994).

Traders associations usually adopt strategy to ensure the availability of products to consumers (Muchiri, 2016). For example, associations establish schedule and members can only procure products based on that schedule. By so doing, they effectively control quantity supplied thereby preventing price collapse. These associations provide functional support to the marketing activities of the rural markets and assist with marketing of products (Mawazo *et al*, 2015). For example, they help to expand access to transport and credit. By encouraging members to work together, trading associations help in the reduction of marketing transaction costs. Mkenda and Campenhout (2011) assert that cost of marketing transaction is reduced as traders' association act as liaison between the producers of products and the market. Several associations work to provide marketing information.

Smith and Lutterll (1994) view associations as social structures within which cooperative arrangements between traders are developed and maintained. These

cooperative arrangements foster loyalty, friendship and trust which invariably enable members to appropriate economic benefits that would otherwise be unobtainable.

Eluagu and Okereke (1985) assert that associations perform the task of collective bargaining for stall fees, ensure the security of market stalls, and enforce correct measures for sale. Baden (1998) demonstrates that associations of women traders are important in forming a regulatory framework, gathering and disseminating market information. Dispute resolution is an important function of most market associations.

#### **4 Challenges Encountered by Informal Sector Operators**

Operators of the informal sector face numerous challenges in their bid to generate income. Most scholars identify lack of working space as a leading problem that operators in the sector encounter (Suharto, 2004). This arises as a result of the fact that in most cases, there is no authorized space for their activities. Other scholars are apt to point out harassment and eviction as a constraint they face in their everyday activities. Except in regions where historic street markets have been preserved, there is a general problem of gaining a secure and stable workplace among operators in the informal sector (Roever, 2013).

Most vendors struggle to get access to spaces for trading their goods through invasion. As a result, eviction by local authority has become part of their everyday experience. They lack freedom to operate due to harassment and confiscation of their wares by local authority.

Furthermore, operators of informal sector lack access to credit facilities. For example, Aryeetey (2009) reports that most of the participants informal economic activities do not have collateral to access credit. This however poses serious challenge to the expansion of their investment and profits.

Workers in the informal sector are often trapped in poverty because according to ILO "they lack protection, rights, and representation". Chen (2012) also argues that the informal sector provides low incomes to its participants most of the time. This implies that participants in the informal sector are likely to fall below the poverty line. Other studies also confirm this finding. For instance, an empirical study of the informal sector by Orlando (2001) showed that the informal sector in Venezuela has high poverty levels than the formal sector because of low earnings in the former.

Some studies have found a positive relationship between corruption and the informal economy. For example, Johnson *et al.* (1997) demonstrated in his study that the size of informal economy rises with the level of corruption. Hindriks *et al.* (1999) added

credence to the findings and assert that corruption within the polity pushes individuals operating in the formal economy to the informal economy. Corruption arises when a profiteer or public servant abuses the office s/he occupies for personal profit. It is arguably a main obstacle to the progress of an economy, as the latter's rule of law and institutional foundation are distorted and weakened by the former. Corruption is also believed to be very detrimental to a country's poor and disadvantaged citizens (World Bank, 2009). In particular, corruption creates illegitimacy to democratic institutions, distortions to markets and competition, misappropriation and inadequate use of scarce resources, and citizens' distrust for a country's political leaders and institutions (Transparency International, 2009; Buehn and Schneider, 2009).

Corruption appears to be one of the key determinants of the informal economy, as argued in the early debates and evidenced by the number of studies conducted on the subject in the 47 literature (examples are Dobson and Ramlogan-Dobson, 2012, 2010; Andres and Ramlogan-Dobson, 2011; Schneider and Enste, 2000; Johnson *et al.*, 1998a; Schneider *et al.*, 2010; Hart 2012; Ferraira-Tiryaki, 2008; Choi and Thum, 2005; Dreher *et al.*, 2005). However, corruption's link with the informal economy is far from straightforward. Arguably, corruption can be good for the economy, as it reduces inequality in an economy with large informal sector. Conversely, high levels of corruption increase the size of the informal economy. Schneider and Enste (2000) for example have observed that the size of a country's informal economy will be small if it is able to operate with limited corruption. The study then noted that the relatively large informal economy in transition countries is due to the fact that they have got high levels of regulation, which in itself, causes a high and significant incidence of bribery and corruption. For example, Johnson *et al.* (1998a) observe that wealthy countries have a relatively small informal economy because they have a relatively low burden of regulation, low taxes for formal economy participants, good and effective rule of law, large revenue, and corruption control mechanisms. Similarly, Hart (2012) argues that the global economy has been informalised due to the corruption of politicians, bankers, and corporations. Also, Ferraira-Tiryaki (2008) argues that the size of the informal economy increases with corruption, as entrepreneurs deliberately informalised in order to avoid the high costs associated with bureaucracy and corruption.

## **5 Conclusion**

A lot of studies have been done on informal sector in Nigeria. In recent times, attention of scholars has shifted to effective organisation of the informal sector enterprises for economic development. These studies show that various factors drive the growth of the informal economic activities. However, research studies reviewed (Cichello and Rogan, 2017; Fourier *et al.*, 2018; Reddy, 2007; Andrei *et al.*, 2011) indicate that there is a positive relationship between unemployment and the size of



the informal economy. These elaborate studies also show that the sector serves as a safety hub for population, especially those who are not accommodated or laid off the formal sector.

However, research studies reviewed in accordance to the contributions of informal sector (for example Sahel, 2014; Hart, 1971; ILO, 2018; Malik, 1996) show that the informal economy accommodate the poor, creating employment and reducing poverty.

Studies that focus on effectiveness of market associations in regulating norms of trading operation among individuals involved in informal sector (for example, Mawazo *et al.*, 2015; Raywani *et al.*, 2015; Barnett, 2013; Fafehamps & Minten, 2001) report that market associations provide functional support to the marketing activities of informal operators.

Literature reviewed in line with factors that constrain the growth of informal economic activities (Roever, 2013) shows that there is a problem of gaining a secure and stable workplace among the operators in informal sector.

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