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CONTAINING THE
INFORMAL FOOD SECTOR
IN WINDHOEK, NAMIBIA

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Abstract

Policy responses to the growth of the informal food sector in African cities vary from benign neglect to active destruction. The eradication of street food vending is the dominant mode of governance. Alternative approaches that recognize the inevitability of informality and the role of the sector in making food accessible to the urban poor have begun to emerge. One is an enclose-and-contain model, which creates spaces for trading and seeks to confine trading to these spaces through active policing outside them. This strategy has been pursued in Windhoek but has been compromised by consumer demand that is not satisfied by the city's approved markets and by the actions of street traders who cluster at key locations and force tacit official recognition. This paper examines the origins and development of this hybrid model of informalized containment, as well as the profile of consumers who patronize both types of market.

Keywords

informal food sector, street food, informal trading, governance

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Introduction

Rapid urbanization in Africa has been accompanied by the transformation of urban food systems and dramatic growth of the informal food sector (Crush and Battersby 2016, Tacoli 2017, Skinner 2019). As a result, street food vending has become a distinctive and ubiquitous feature of the contemporary African urban landscape. Policy responses to the growth of informal food vending vary from “benign neglect” to “active destruction” (Crush et al 2017, Young 2017). The latter has become a familiar response through high-profile military-style removal campaigns directed at eradicating informal street vending, such as Operation Murambatsvina/Restore Order in Zimbabwe, Operation Clean Sweep in South Africa, and Operation Dongosolo (Clean-Up) in Malawi (Bénit-Gbaffou 2016, Potts 2006, Riley 2014, Tonda and Kepe 2016). More commonplace are everyday eradication strategies involving low-level harassment of vendors by “predatory” city officials and police (Finn 2018, Kamete 2013, Morange 2015, Rogerson 2016). Mass forced removals and daily harassment can both have “a dramatic impact on informal sector livelihoods through arrests, fines, the destruction of property, the confiscation of goods, and reduced business opportunities” (Young and Crush, 2019). Such punitive approaches to informality are all too common, but they are also largely ineffectual as food vendors return with innovative evasion strategies in the daily struggle for survival on the streets (Brown et al 2015, Moyo 2018, Musoni 2010, Omogeun 2019, Steel et al 2014). They are also often undermined by forms of “relational governance” in which enforcement officials and vendors collude to the benefit of both (Dragsted-Mutengwa 2018).

The ultimate futility of attempts at informal sector eradication has prompted the search for alternative governance models. One of these, advocated by international organizations such as the World Bank and ILO, is informal sector formalization. Another strategy focuses more on containing the spatial extent of informal vending by designating legitimate and illegitimate trading zones (Resnick 2017). This is a form of spatial engineering that

tries to corral the informal food sector through the control of space, referred to by some as a strategy of “enclosure” (Lindell et al 2019). Enclosure or containment involves the creation of spatial “enclaves of informality” usually in the form of renovated or new urban food market structures (Kamete 2017). Neither urban food retail markets nor their advocacy as urban development planning tools are new in African cities (Dewar and Watson 1990). However, their integration into the governance and policing of informality is a more recent development. An essential component of the enclose-and-contain model is the provision of infrastructural incentives for street traders to locate or relocate. The corollary is often more intensive policing of forbidden spaces to eliminate choice for vendors who cannot or do not want to pay for the “privilege” of a fixed stand in a serviced marketplace. Pejoratively referred to as “pernicious assimilation” or “selective incorporation” by critics, governance by enclosure and containment thus rests upon a system of promised rewards for the included and punishment for the excluded (Kamete 2018, Pezzano 2016).

Literature on the governance of informal food vending tends to focus on laws and regulations, on state actors and actions, and on the experiences of repression of informal food vendors. There is also a focus on informal vending as a form of entrepreneurship. Much less attention has been paid to the patrons of the informal food sector, who they are, where they come from, what foods they source and consume, and with what implications for food vending governance. In general, informal vending plays a critical role in urban food systems and in making food accessible to the poor. An AFSUN study of food sourcing by over 6,000 poor urban households in 11 African cities, for example, found that 70% regularly purchase food from informal street vendors and markets (Crush et al 2017). In principle, the ways in which the informal food sector is governed and policed can have major implications for the consumer who depends on the sector to put food on the table. As Resnick (2017) notes, repressive measures “hurt a vulnerable sector of society that is already food insecure but also reduces access for others who depend on the sector for many of their fresh and nutrient-dense foods”.

In this paper, we examine the development of an alternative model of informal food sector governance developed by the City of Windhoek in response to the demands of poor consumers and the actions of street vendors. None of the existing models of governance do full justice to this local adaptation of strategies developed in other cities. The model eschews the eradication impulse seen in many cities but nor is it completely captured by the enclose-and-contain model. We refer to this adaptation here as informalized containment and explain its background, development, and implementation. The first section of the paper examines the growth of the informal food sector and policy responses in Windhoek since independence from South African rule. The following sections examine the importance of the informal food sector to consumers in Windhoek, based on a representative 2016 household survey conducted in the city. The survey shows that the city's markets play an important role in the food sourcing strategies of lower-income, food-insecure households. The conclusion returns to the issue of governance to argue that consumer demand and vendor responses have led to informalized containment of the food sector.

Informality in Windhoek

Windhoek, the capital city of Namibia with a population approaching 400,000, has grown rapidly since independence in 1990 (Nickanor 2013). The city emerged from South Africa's repressive rule with an extremely small informal sector (Norval and Namoya 1992). Over the next three decades, the pace of urbanization led to a major increase in the size of informal settlements to the north of the city. In 2011, one-third (or 27,000) of all residential units in Windhoek were shacks in informal settlements. More than 3,500 new shacks are added to the city every year (Weber and Mendelsohn 2017). Along with the expansion of the city's population has come major growth in the informal food sector. A 2001 study observed that the sector was still relatively small (Frayne 2001). However, a 2007–2008 survey of low-income areas of the city found that two-thirds of households purchased food from the

informal food sector (Pendleton 2012). Although the city's food system is dominated by supermarket chains, the informal food sector has continued its rapid expansion (Crush et al 2019, Nickanor et al 2017).

The governance of the post-independence informal food sector in Windhoek was initially premised on the erasure model and embodied in the punitive 1994 Hawker and Pedlar Regulations. However, these were repealed in 1999 and replaced with new Street Trading Regulations which legitimized street trading under certain conditions (Government of Namibia 1999a). They made it illegal to trade without registering with the Town Clerk, designated various city spaces where it was illegal to trade, and contained various health and sanitation provisions. Penalties for transgressing a regulation included fines of NAD2,000 or up to six months in prison or both. The regulations remain in force and provide the legal basis for sporadic police raids, arrests, and confiscation of goods from unregistered vendors and those operating in areas of the city such as the CBD and outside shopping malls (Namibian 2019). Occasionally, confrontations between police and vendors have turned violent, as in 2014 when 18 women traders were arrested and charged with assault and contravening trading by-laws (New Era 2014).

The growth and spread of the informal food sector prompted the City to adopt a spatial enclosure strategy by constructing a series of fixed (or open) markets under the 1999 City of Windhoek development and upgrading strategy (City of Windhoek 1999). In 2014, the Mayor of Windhoek noted that “the open markets provide a suitable and safe trading area that can be utilized and enjoyed by the traders and the community. The City has made provision for a total of sixteen open markets and has also allocated unimproved trading sites on a temporary basis to regulate trading and maintain acceptable hygiene and safety standards” (Namibia Economist 2014). A publication by the City designed to promote their use describes 12 open markets across the city (Table 1) (City of Windhoek nd). We identified an additional four open markets, bringing the total to the Mayor's 16. The markets provide tenants

with infrastructure such as shelter, stalls, barbeque stands, potable water, sanitation facilities, and electricity, and are controlled by management boards. The board reports to the City and offers floor space to traders but without legal title. The municipality assumes responsibility for rent collection, security, cleaning, sanitation, and maintenance.

TABLE 1: Open Markets in Windhoek

	No. of stands
Soweto Market	199
Tukondjeni Market	140
Single Quarters Market	120
Wernhill Flea Market	96
Post Street Mall	82
Jonas Haiduwa Market	66
Eliazer Tuhadeleni Market	56
Hakahana Market	39
Semi Mall	30
Nangela Kaduuluma Market	26
Northern Industrial Area	25
Onghendambala Market	24
Green Well Market	n/a
Khomasdal Market	n/a
Okahandja Park	n/a
Wanaheda Bus Stop	n/a

Although the number of informal vendors in the city far outstrips the number of available spaces, the City has had difficulty filling all of the spots. There are various reasons for this including the high rent and the location of some of the markets. In parts of the city, there are customers but no markets. A recurrent challenge for market management is that some vendors prefer to locate in close proximity to the markets, where they can make use of the facilities (such as toilets and potable water) without the burden of rent. The enclose-and-contain model of informal sector governance demands that vendors operating outside the markets are vulnerable to official harassment, raids, fines, and confiscation of goods. In 2017, the City police launched a “clean-up campaign” aimed at removing vendors from the streets and into vacant stands in the open markets (New Era 2018a). In 2018, the Mayor publicly

criticized street vendors not in open markets and blamed them for the city’s health problems, noting that they were “the greatest contributors to poor hygiene as they carelessly dispose of their waste even in their trading environment” (New Era 2018b). These efforts to vilify traders as health risks and enforce greater use of open markets have not always had the desired effect. As one vendor commented in response to the 2017 clean-up campaign: “It’s not that we do not want to go to the available open market but it’s about doing business where potential customers are. Like here at Havana Four-Way Stop, our market is those people that live at the informal settlements since they are far from the shops. So, they always buy their tomatoes and meat here and in return we make profit” (New Era 2018).

One of the major self-protection strategies adopted by vendors outside the open markets is spatial clustering, gathering in larger groups on public land, along roadsides, at street corners, and at bus stops. This, in turn, has forced a major concession from the City and a departure from the enclosure model. The City has been forced to acknowledge the presence of these clusters and to give them tacit approval, labelling them “unimproved trading sites” or “informal markets.” These spaces are now officially recognized as legitimate sites of informality with names based on their geographical location. Further informal markets are springing up and the City has put in place a process of legitimation, declaring that “all hawkers operating at undeveloped trading sites are advised to group themselves and to approach the City of Windhoek in obtaining permission to utilize Council’s land” (Namibian Economist 2014). Windhoek has thus evolved a dual market structure for informal food vending comprising regulated open markets and unregulated informal markets. In other parts of the city, including in the informal settlements themselves, smaller numbers of street vendors sell fresh and cooked food along roadsides. The informal food sector also includes mobile vendors who sell door-to-door and fixed tuck shops mainly in the informal settlements. The next section of the paper turns to the patrons of informal food vendors using data from a 2016 household survey.

Methodology

The data for this study comes from a city-wide household survey of the City of Windhoek conducted in August 2016 as part of the research program of the African Food Security Urban Network (AFSUN) and the Hungry Cities Partnership (HCP). The survey instrument was developed by AFSUN and HCP and mounted on tablets through a modified computer-assisted personal interviewing open data toolkit. The survey interviewed a total of 863 households, drawn from all 10 constituencies of the city, using a two-stage cluster sampling design. First, a total of 35 primary sampling units (PSU) were randomly selected with probability proportional to size. The PSUs were selected from a master frame developed and demarcated for the 2011 Population and Housing Census. The second stage involved systematic sampling of 25 households in each of the selected PSUs. In each household, the head or their representative was interviewed after informed consent.

The survey collected data on household demography and economics, levels of food security, the type and location of food sources, and the purchasing strategies of households. To assess the prevalence and levels of household food insecurity, the survey used three indicators developed by the Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance (FANTA) project (Coates 2013): (a) the Household Food Insecurity Access Score (HFIAS), which is a continuous measure of the degree of food insecurity in the household. An HFIAS score is calculated based

on answers to nine frequency-of-occurrence questions and ranges from 0 (completely food secure) to 27 (completely food insecure) (Coates et al 2007); (b) the Household Food Insecurity Access Prevalence (HFIAP) measure, which uses a scoring algorithm to categorize households into one of four categories: food secure, mildly food insecure, moderately food insecure, and severely food insecure; and (c) the Household Dietary Diversity Score (HDDS), which captures how many food groups were consumed within the household in the previous 24 hours from 0 to 12 (Swindale and Bilinsky 2006). Household food purchasing patterns were identified using the Hungry Cities Food Purchases Matrix (HCFPM), which identifies where households normally purchase a range of up to 30 common food items, the frequency of purchase, and the geographical location of the source (Crush and McCordic 2017).

Informal Food Sector Sourcing

Table 2 shows the sources from which households in Windhoek obtain food. The domination of supermarkets is readily apparent with 97% of households patronizing these outlets. Just under half of the households in the city source food from open markets while just under one-third (29%) patronize street vendors (which includes those clustered in informal markets). In other words, while both open markets and street vendors appear to play an important role in the city's food system, open markets have higher levels of patronage overall.

TABLE 2: Household Frequency of Sourcing Food from Different Outlets

	% of households	Frequency of purchase from source (%)				
		At least five days per week	At least once per week	At least once per month	At least once in six months	At least once per year
Supermarket	96.5	4.5	16.5	65.7	12.4	0.8
Open market	49.8	17.6	46.2	19.5	16.2	0.5
Street vendors (including informal markets)	29.2	49.8	33.7	6.8	9.6	0.0
Tuck shop	19.4	50.9	41.2	7.3	0.6	0.0
Small formal shop	18.6	11.9	60.0	22.5	5.6	0.0
Fast food/take away	15.5	5.1	39.4	48.5	4.8	2.3
Restaurant	5.8	8.2	49.0	36.7	4.1	2.0

What is striking are the variations in patronage frequencies. Two-thirds of supermarket patrons only shop there on a monthly basis, compared to 20% of open market patrons and 7% of street vendor patrons. Another major difference is between open markets and street vendors: the open markets tend to be patronized more on a weekly basis (46% weekly, 18% daily) while street vendors are patronized more frequently (34% weekly, 50% daily).

Tables 3 and 4 show the patronage levels of the various open and informal markets. There is considerable variation in consumer preference across the different markets and the largest markets are not necessarily the most favoured. For example, Soweto Market has the most stands but is only preferred by 10% of open-market-goers, compared to over 40% for Tukondjeni Market (which is located much closer to the informal settlements). However, not all of the stalls at Soweto Market are devoted to food sales, as it includes stalls for hair braiding, hair products, clothing, and sewing. Single Quarters Market (favoured by 25%) is primarily a site for purchasing fresh and cooked meat. Preference for designated informal markets tends to be more even, with the majority preferred by less than 10% of patrons.

TABLE 3: Preferred Open Markets

	No.	%
Tukondjeni Market	145	42.1
Single Quarters Market	85	24.6
Soweto Market	34	9.9
Okahandja Park	29	8.4
Hakahana Market	25	7.2
Wanaheda Bus Stop	13	3.8
Khomasdalen Market	8	2.3
Green Well Market	5	1.4
Eliazer Tuhadeleni Market	1	0.3
Semi Mall	0	0.0
Nangela Kaduuluma Market	0	0.0
Northern Industrial Area	0	0.0
Onghendambala Market	0	0.0
Wernhill Flea Market	0	0.0
Post Street Mall	0	0.0
Jonas Haiduwa Market	0	0.0
Total	345	100.0

TABLE 4: Preferred Informal Markets

	No.	%
Havana Road End	63	17.0
Oshitenda Roadside	36	9.7
Olyeeta Roadside	35	9.5
Monte Christo Roadside	30	8.1
Goreangab	29	7.8
Otjomuise Road Bus Stop	24	6.5
Havana Bus Stop	23	6.2
Ombili Woerman Roadside	21	5.7
Greenwell Roadside	15	4.1
Havana 3-Way	12	3.2
Gemeente Bus Stop	10	2.7
Herero Mall	10	2.7
Okahandja Park Roadside Bus Stop	9	2.4
Single Quarters Roadside	7	1.9
Goreangab Sport Field	7	1.9
Havana Council office	1	0.3
Wernhill	1	0.3
Black Chain	1	0.3
Total		100.0

The HCFPM provides item-by-item food sourcing information (Table 5). The first column shows the proportion of surveyed households that had purchased each food item in the previous month. The other columns show where they normally buy the given item. Once again, the dominance of supermarkets is obvious, with more households purchasing every single item on the list from this source. Many of the staples on the list are purchased by over 90% of households at supermarkets which, in turn, explains the monthly patronage pattern since most lower-income households purchase these foods in bulk. More relevant to this paper is what items are normally purchased in open markets and from street vendors and whether there are any differences between the two. The shaded cells in the table show those food items that are normally bought by more than 5% of households from one or the other or both. Open markets tend to be patronized by more households for produce such as meat, vegetables, fruit, offal, chicken, frozen fish, and cooked meat, and street vendors for fish, snacks, sweets/chocolates, and pies/*vetkoek*. In general, open markets seem to enjoy a competitive advantage for most healthy food products.

Table 6 shows the food security status and socio-economic characteristics of households that source food from open and informal markets at least once per month. In general, these households experience high levels of food insecurity, with 94% being food insecure and only 6% being food secure (on the HFIAP). The mean HFIAS of 15.7 is extremely high for any urban population group and the HDDS of 2.5 extremely low (meaning that food was consumed from less than three food groups out of 12 in the previous 24 hours). If consumers live in formal housing, are small, are male-centred and earn more than NAD3,500 per month, they are less likely to be food insecure. However, in every category in

Table 6, over 80% of households are food insecure and no category has an HDDS of greater than 3.1.

Figure 1 confirms that the frequency of food access varies with the type of informal vendor with street vendors patronized more frequently than open markets, irrespective of household income. However, household income does impact on frequency of patronage in both. For example, 60% of the lowest income households purchasing food from street vendors at least five days per week, compared with 52% in the middle tercile, and 42% in the upper tercile. Similarly, households in the lowest income tercile tend to patronize open markets more frequently than those in the upper two terciles.

TABLE 5: HCFPM Matrix of Food Item Sources

	% of households purchasing item	Open market	Street vendor	Supermarket	Other*
Maize meal	76	0.6	0.1	96.0	1.3
Cooking oil	76	0.7	0.0	94.6	4.7
Sugar	65	0.5	0.2	94.7	4.6
Rice	53	0.4	0.0	99.4	0.2
Pasta	50	0.2	0.0	99.6	0.2
Bread	57	1.2	0.6	53.5	46.5
Tea/coffee	46	0.5	0.0	96.8	2.7
Meat	42	20.0	5.1	51.1	23.8
Fish	33	16.6	26.6	46.0	0.8
Vegetables	31	11.6	8.0	77.5	2.9
Frozen chicken	29	0.0	2.3	95.7	2.0
Butter/margarine	26	0.0	0.0	99.6	0.4
Milk	25	0.4	0.9	96.9	1.8
Cooldrinks	23	0.5	0.0	81.2	18.3
Eggs	21	0.0	2.1	93.1	4.8
Fruit	17	5.7	2.5	91.1	0.7
Fruit juice	15	0.0	0.0	97.7	2.3
Sour milk/omaere	12	2.8	0.0	95.4	1.8
Offal	11	29.9	18.6	38.1	13.4
Snacks (crisps)	11	2.0	14.9	66.3	16.8
Sweets/chocolate	11	4.3	15.1	57.0	23.6
Canned vegetables	10	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0
Frozen meat	10	3.4	0.0	51.1	55.5
Cooked chicken	3	0.0	0.0	62.5	37.5
Pies/vetkoek	9	9.6	10.8	53.0	26.6
Chicken	9	9.5	2.4	62.5	25.6
Frozen fish	7	15.4	1.5	80.0	3.1
Canned meat	5	2.3	0.0	95.3	2.4
Canned fruit	5	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0

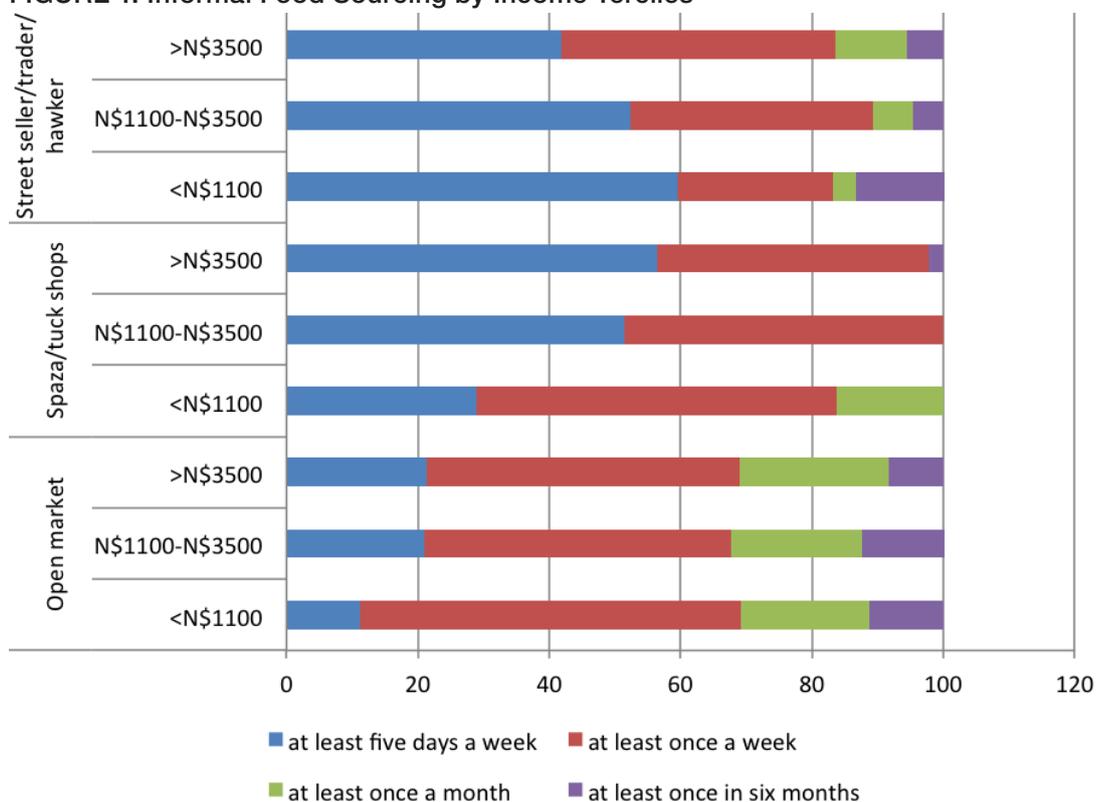
Cooked meat	4	27.3	3.0	51.1	18.6
Cooked fish	1	24.0	0.0	64.0	12.0
*Includes small shops, tuck shops, butcheries, bakeries					

TABLE 6: Household Characteristics of Market Patrons

Household characteristics		HFIAS	HFIAP		HDDS
		Mean	Food secure (%)	Food insecure (%)	Mean
Housing type	Formal	13.5	11.6	88.4	3.1
	Informal	15.3	4.8	95.2	2.6
Household size	1 member	12.4	16.0	84.0	2.5
	2-3 members	14.9	7.8	92.2	2.6
	4-5 members	15.1	3.2	96.8	2.6
	6 or more members	15.0	6.8	93.2	2.9
Household structure	Female-centred	15.5	2.7	97.3	2.6
	Male-centred	13.9	9.9	90.1	2.5
	Nuclear	15.8	6.7	93.3	2.5
	Extended	13.9	6.7	93.3	3.1
Income poverty*	Poor	19.0	0.0	100.0	1.8
	Otherwise	14.7	7.0	93.0	2.7
Income terciles	<NAD1,100	18.4	0.0	100.0	2.0
	NAD1,100-3,500	15.0	5.1	94.9	2.7
	>NAD3,500	11.6	16.1	83.9	3.0
Total		15.7	6.5	93.5	2.5

* Those who could not spend NAD520.80 on basic needs were considered to be poor (NSA, 2016)

FIGURE 1: Informal Food Sourcing by Income Terciles



Conclusion

Rapid urbanization, the growth of informal settlements, and high rates of unemployment have led to a massive increase in the size and importance of the informal food sector in Windhoek in the last 20 years. Although the city has undergone a supermarket revolution and the foodscape is dominated by South African supermarkets, the informal food sector plays an important role in making food continuously available and affordable to the urban poor. As a result, the City has not pursued the kind of large-scale eradication “operations” seen in other Southern African cities in the recent past. Eradication would also have been politically untenable in a country recently emerged from decades of oppressive South African rule. Instead, the City sought to respond to the spread of informal food vending through an alternative policy of containment and enclosure. This involved the construction of new market infrastructure at various strategic locations across the city where, in the words of the Mayor quoted earlier, “suitable and safe trading” could be “enjoyed by the traders and the community.” The corollary to the projected enclosure of informal traders in open markets was containment of the spread of street vending to other parts of the city.

The city’s open markets have come to play an important role in the urban food system, particularly for the marketing of fresher offerings to low-income households in the informal settlements. Their role tends to be one of mitigating food insecurity rather than eliminating it entirely since many households that buy from the markets remain food insecure in terms both of the small amounts of food they consume and their low dietary diversity. At the same time, as this paper has suggested, the construction of open markets has not led to a notable decline in street vending outside the markets. On the contrary, the number of street vendors and the places in the city where they sell has continued to climb. The initial response of the City was to enforce its 1999 trading regulations to try to contain the spread of street vending to try and ensure maximum usage of the open markets. Sporadic raids and arrests continue to the present, causing disruption to the

traders and prompting open defiance. The threat of enforcement has prompted street traders to adopt the strategy of clustering documented in this paper. Clustering is an effective defensive strategy that makes it much more difficult for the authorities to remove them. However, it has led to a pragmatic policy shift in which clusters of street vendors have been recognized and given legitimacy by the City.

These “informal markets” or “unimproved trading sites” (in official parlance) lack the services and management structures of the open markets, but they clearly respond to a consumer need and are strategically located in relation to both the informal settlements and transportation hubs. As this paper shows, street vendors (including the informal markets) are also an accessible source of daily food for low-income households in the city’s informal settlements. In terms of the literature on the governance of the informal food sector, the Windhoek case clearly illustrates that combination by informal vendors, in this case taking the form of clustering in informal markets, has the potential to disrupt the enclose-and-contain model of governance. These vendors have therefore helped give effect to an alternative model of governance, what we would call informalized containment, by forcing an acknowledgment of their right to operate in city spaces that lie outside those formally designated as legitimate areas for trade.

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