

URBAN LIVELIHOODS AND THE USE OF PUBLIC SPACE: STREET TRADING IN KUMASI CITY, GHANA.

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Abstract

Urban public spaces are livelihood assets for the urban poor in developing countries like Ghana. Street trading is the means whereby the urban poor utilize urban public space to make a living and this results in conflicts between the street traders and the city authorities. This research investigates urban livelihoods of street traders in Kumasi and reveals that there are no planned places for them and they are located in spaces meant for other uses. Recommendations are that, the inter-relationships between street trading and the use of public space to sustain urban livelihoods be understood and the spatial implications addressed in urban planning in Ghana or else, street traders will continue to evade public space to the embarrassment of city authorities.

Key Words

- Urban public space
- Street trading
- Locational characteristics
- Urban Livelihoods

1.0 Introduction

Urban public space is the physical space and social relations that determine the use of space within the non-private realms of cities. It is the setting for a panoply of human activity and a fundamental determinant of the character of towns. Urban public space is a key element in the livelihoods of the urban poor, but its importance in development policies for cities is largely ignored.

In Ghana, urban public space such as open spaces, nature reserves and right of ways has become an asset for livelihoods. Thus, urban public space is perceived as a physical asset which is used to sustain the livelihoods of the urban poor. Street trading is a visible and controversial component of the urban economy and vendors operate their businesses in areas that can be classified as public spaces and are

originally unintended for trading purposes. Street traders do not locate haphazardly in the places from which they ply their trades and certain areas offer greater locational advantage than others (Harrison and McVey, 1997; Yankson, 2000). Pavements, walkways, parks, alleys, traffic intersections and road medians that are reserved for public use, have been encroached on by petty traders and street enterprises (Brown, 2006).

With the advance of modern retailing – fixed retail operations, department stores, and malls – many expected that street trading would go away, yet today, in most countries of the world, it persists even where local regulations seek to ban or restrict it (ILO, 2002). Street trading provides employment and income to a large percentage of the urban population. This is largely due to its flexibility and the comparative ease of entry compared to formal employment (King, 1999). Currently, selling on the street has presented new challenges for urban authorities charged with the management of space in the country. A cause of conflict is that trading often takes place on pavements or footpaths that are important pedestrian routes. This exacerbates environment problems such as traffic congestion and poor sanitation which causes health hazards. The makeshift structures of the traders also mar the urban environment and degrades the aesthetic quality of urban settlements. Urban authorities, such as Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly (KMA) officials and town planners have tried unsuccessfully to keep the traders off the streets and directives have been issued to them to relocate to the thirty-two satellite markets in Kumasi, but this has not been adhered to. In Accra, apart from the existing satellite markets, there is a Hawkers' market purposely built for street traders. Despite these efforts by government, street traders still prefer to sell on the streets because of the perception that potential buyers are found there.

Based on the above background, a survey was conducted to explore and understand the dynamics of street trading as an urban livelihood. It is hoped that with the survey findings, street trading would be better understood by policy-makers, planners and city administrators. This would enable them to come out with interventions for addressing the operation of the vendors which would be sustainable, resolve their spatial problems and curtail the negative effects of their operations on the urban environment.

2.0 Methodology

This paper presents a case study of vending in some of the streets in Kumasi. The Case Study Method was combined with the Field Study Method and Documentary Sources. Kumasi metropolis is a nodal commercial town where trading activities from the north and south of the country converge and this has led to a proliferation of informal street activities in the town. A field survey through the administration of questionnaires was carried out to understand the circumstances surrounding street trading activities and

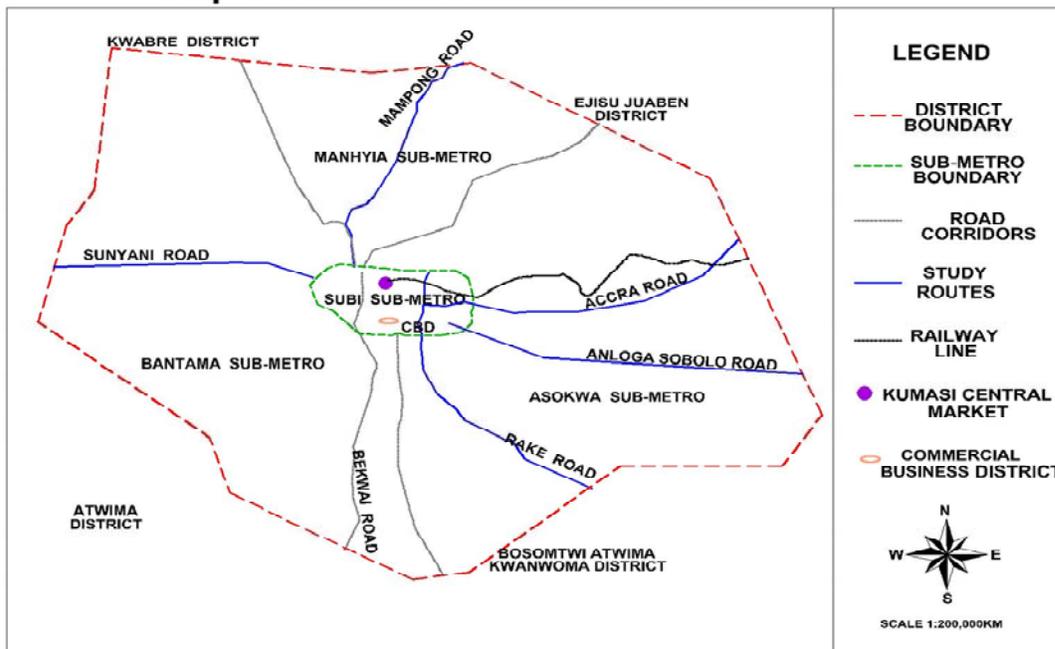
also to explore the mode of operation, spatial dynamics and factors influencing the selection of worksites of the vendors.

A number of research methodologies were used in gathering the data and these include observation, key informant interviews, focus group discussions and a field survey. Key informant interviews were conducted with 9 (nine) urban institutions and executives of 2 (two) street traders' associations and a sample of 517 street traders were interviewed. Archival research for information and official documents on the approach of the Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly (KMA) towards street trading was sought. The Documentary sources were the review of available documents for information on Ghana's informal sector and street activities. This was from both published and unpublished sources such as KMA official documents and reports.

2.1 Field Survey Locations

The study areas were the Central Business District (CBD), Kejetia Railway line Area at the Kumasi Central Market and sections of the main arterial roads namely the Kumasi-Accra Road, Kumasi-Lake Bosomtwi Road, Kumasi-Sunyani Road, Kumasi-Mampong Road, Anloga- Sobolo Road (Map 1).

Map 1 : Selected Road Corridors



Source: Town and Country Planning Department, Kumasi, 2007

3.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Background Characteristics of Street traders

3.2 Categories of Street Traders

Kumasi street traders can be classified into two main groups: sedentary vendors and footloose vendors. The sedentary ones work in fixed locations, and the footloose or mobile vendors have no fixed locations. In the survey, 54.2% were sedentary vendors and 45.8% were footloose vendors. Goods are sold from fixed stalls, from the pavement, in front of people’s houses, in small shops and in most cases, from people’s heads as they walk along the streets.

3.3 Age, Sex and Gender Profiles

The economically active age group of 18 to 45 years formed the greater proportion of the vendors, representing about 82%. Out of this, the 25-29 age group constituted 30% of the street traders, followed by the 30-34 years age group comprising about 18%. This suggests that since selling on the street is a tedious and energy consuming activity, it is mainly the active and youthful population who get involved in it. The gender split in most age categories as shown in Figure 1 favoured the female gender. Street trading is a key livelihood strategy for families in Kumasi, particularly for women because of the social structure of the Akan people, where a matrilineal tradition encourages economic independence (King, 1999).



Source: Author’s Field survey, 2007

Women vendors are not restricted in any means in the type of goods they want to trade in. Thus, women could undertake the same livelihood activities as men to earn a living to meet their daily needs. The men were mostly engaged in the sale of electronic goods while women mainly sold perishable goods such as foodstuff and cooked foods.

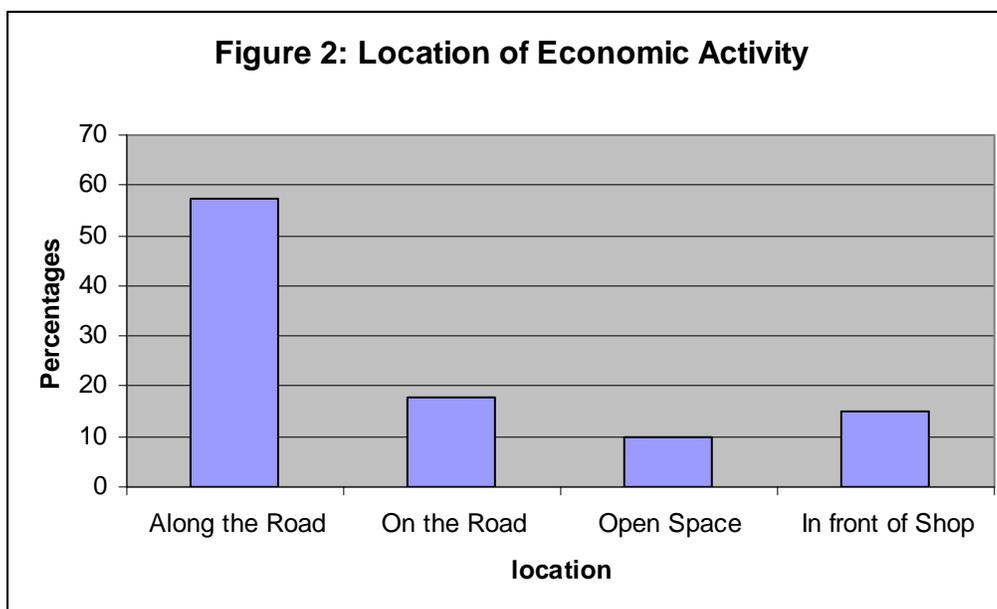
3.4 Educational Level of Street Traders

From the survey, 53% of the street traders had obtained education only up to basic school level. Even more interesting is that 20.7% of the respondents had never been to school. Thus, for close to 75% of the vendors, jobs in the formal sector was out of reach to them, hence their only means of survival was in the informal sector. Regarding 23.2% of the respondents who had obtained secondary school education, their employment options were limited to the lower echelons of the formal sector. It is apparent that only 2.7% of the respondents who have had vocational level education had a skill they could survive on.

4.0 Locational Characteristics

4.1 Location of Street traders

The trading location has implications for urban planning. Figure 2 shows that, about 58% of the street traders were located along the road, 17.6% were on the road weaving in and out of cars and 15.1% were found in front of shops. About 10% of the street traders were situated in open spaces and this was mainly near the Central market area and the Railway area. It was also found from the survey that, although many of them did not have permanent locations in which to conduct their businesses, they tended to use the same place every day.



Source: Author's Field Survey, 2007

The reasons given for the choice of location are found in Table 1. The availability of customers at the various locations was the main reason which was given by about 64% of the respondents. About 17% of respondents also said they were located where they were because they did not have to pay any rent while 13.2% had no choice but to operate in that location since it was the only one available. About 6% who were mainly food vendors had chosen the location because of its nearness to their place of abode and also to cut down on transportation. Replacing a family member and no eviction from urban authorities were other reasons given by the rest of the respondents (Table 1). The street traders said it was imperative that they work in the same place every day and also avoid paying rent whenever possible so as to build up their business.

Table 1: Reasons for Choosing Location

Reasons	Frequency	Percent
Availability of customers	328	63.4
I had no other place	68	13.2
It is near where I live	32	6.2
No payment of rent	86	16.6
Replace family member	2	.4
No sacking by KMA	1	.2
Total	517	100.0

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2007

A good location is very important for the sedentary vendors since they are not mobile like the footloose vendors. Proximity to their homes did not play a major role in the choice of location for both types of street vendors. Only 2% of the footloose and 4% of sedentary vendors found it important. This finding is similar to that of Sagoe-Addy (2006), who found that only 1.2% of people in the informal sector were operating at locations close to their homes. This suggests that both categories of vendors are likely to relocate and operate at any properly situated and functional market irrespective of the distance of the location from their place of abode.

4.2 Fees Paid for Location

According to the bye-laws of the various district assemblies, anybody engaged in business by using the urban space has to pay a fee to the assembly. Street traders were therefore interviewed on fee payment to estimate how much KMA generates from their trading activities. It was revealed that, 75% (387) of the street traders interviewed paid some fees daily or monthly, while the remaining 25% (130) did not pay fees. Among those who pay some fee, the majority, about 79%, pay less than one Ghana Cedi daily to the KMA as daily tolls. The amount paid is in relation to the type of goods sold and whether the vendor is foot-loose or sedentary. Fees paid by the street traders are received by different authorities. A large proportion of about 93% paid fees to a KMA revenue officer designated by the metropolis. In some cases the fees were paid to the shop owners and these constituted about 1%. Income tax to the Internal Revenue Service constituted 3.6% while 2.3% of the respondents paid fees to the chairpersons of the various street traders associations. Thus, it is clear that, fees are not being paid to one source. The pertinent issue was that all the street traders assumed that they were paying fees for gaining permanent status to their sites.

4.3 Effects of Street Traders Activities on the Urban Landscape

In investigating the spatial dynamics of street traders, it is necessary to find out what effects their activities have on the urban environment and by implication for urban planning. The insanitary conditions that are created from the filth and garbage generated by street traders could lead to an increase in mosquito-breeding areas and malaria. Also, in Kumasi, the pavements on the streets as well as road islands were falling into disrepair and misuse because of the activities of the street traders. In view of this, traders were made to identify the effect they perceived their businesses had on the urban environment. About 78% claimed their businesses had no negative effect on the environment, while 15% said their businesses created waste management problems. It is possible that the majority who did not see any

impact of their activities on the urban landscape were either not telling the truth or did not really know the negative effects of their activities.

4.4 Eviction by the City Authorities

Street traders face many constraints in their operations. A case in point is eviction by city authorities, where their goods are seized, huge sums of monies collected from them and in some cases beaten. As many as 59% (307) of the street traders responded in the affirmative on the question as to whether they had experienced eviction from city authorities. Forty-one percent (210) however had been free from the city authorities' evictions since they started trading. Eviction of street traders take various forms which includes seizing of items sold by them, cash payments of up to 300 Ghana cedis and according to them, the most worrisome is the fact that one is never sure of when the KMA city guards would come and drive them away. Brown (2004) in her study of street vendors in Zimbabwe stated that the fear of eviction makes vendors fearful and insecure.

4.5 Relocation and Access to Urban Public Space

One of the major problems identified by the leadership of the street traders association in Kumasi is frequent eviction and relocation, a problem that is experienced by street traders all over the world (King, 1999; Mittula, 2004; Bhatt, 2006; Brown, 2006). Street traders work with short term loans which have to be paid back within a matter of two to three months. Those who sell perishable food items collect the items on credit on daily basis and repay the owner with interest at the end of the day. The survey revealed that frequent relocation however affects their repayment rates and their chances of earning an income since relocation disorganizes their activities and it takes a long time for them to get back to their normal work. Relocation implies dismantling vending structures, negotiating a new form of tenureship and rent and having to put up new structures before settling in the new location. The street traders also lose their regular customers who are unable to locate them at the recognized vending spaces.

During the process of dislocation, relocation, and readjusting, street traders are harassed by the city authorities for not meeting the deadline given to them and also by their creditors for not being able to pay back loans they have contracted. According to the United Petty Traders Association, where the street traders are given limited time to move, many of them get their goods stolen since the confusion surrounding relocation easily creates avenues for people to steal. It is also the occasion when sometimes, the law enforcement agents make additional income from the misfortunes of the traders. Bhatt (2006), in a study in India, states that, the law enforcement agents enjoy this state of confusion so that they would

continue to enjoy their “tea money” from the vendors. Thus, relocating street traders in urban public space in Kumasi has several implications that go beyond the members who are immediately affected. Economically, it has a multiplier effect which trickles down to affect several households, large shop owners (who use the street traders as retailers) and their customers.

5.0 Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly’s (KMA) Approach to Street Trading

The bulldozer approach has been the main instrument of the Kumasi city authorities as they attempt to destroy structures of street traders. There is evidence to suggest that this is common in many countries. The daily newspapers in Jarkarta, New Delhi, Lesotho, and other large cities still carry stories about the destruction, removal and forced relocation of vendors and other informal operators almost daily (Harper, 1996; Setsabi, 2006). This creates tension between street traders and urban authorities. Attempts by city authorities to relocate street traders to satellite markets and purpose-built markets have also not proved successful. This policy has generally not been successful globally (Cross, 1998; Skinner, 2000), and these markets are often empty and in most cases, the stalls are used for storage or are overgrown by weeds.

In Ghana, the urban authorities have tried several times to get street traders off the streets. One finds numerous examples over the years when the city authorities implemented decongestion exercises by using the bulldozer approach and have tried to sustain the decongestion exercises but have failed. As the trading location is extremely important for the street traders, their strategy revolved around refusing to leave the spaces from which they have been evicted and re-occupying the streets. According to Setsabi (2006), this strategy often carries considerable risk that includes physical and psychological harm by authorities as well as the loss of wares and property. It is nonetheless a risk that the street traders seem to weigh against the prospect of destitution if they leave their current trading spaces.

5.1 Strengths and Weaknesses of Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly’s Approach

5.1.1 Strengths

1. Influence of Traditional Leaders

The traditional system of government still exists alongside the western/modern one, and traditional rulers work with the KMA in a co-operative manner in settling disputes, administering lands jointly with the government and promoting the culture of the people. Market institutions are strongly rooted in traditional norms and so traders are guided by the traditional style of leadership and authority, and tend to relate more to traditional leaders than the local government (King, 1999). Before the adoption of the western ways of government and administration, the traditional rulers were the custodians of the local markets.

Traders therefore owe allegiance to the traditional rulers than to the KMA and have a more flexible and cordial relationship with the traditional rulers.

In the last decongestion exercise in Kumasi in 2009, the Metropolitan Chief Executive sought the assistance of the traditional ruler of the Ashanti Kingdom. He in turn, met with a section of the street traders and their executives and told them that he supported the KMA decongestion exercise and so they were to comply with the KMA. This approach gave more legitimacy to the exercise and made it successful for a while.

2. Provision of Market Infrastructure

The KMA recognizes that if the markets in the city are to stay competitive and attract both traders and customers, they must be redeveloped and upgraded to meet the needs of the users. In an interview with the market manager of KMA, he reported that some of the satellite markets had been developed by the city authorities but still suffered from low patronage. It is clear that the KMA was committed to providing street traders with a favourable work environment in the satellite markets. However, the problem is that these outlying markets are not as popular as the Central market and the Asafo market in Kumasi.

5.1.2 Weaknesses

1. Lack of Good Channels for Communication between Vendors and Officials

The street traders are not recognized by the KMA and so have no representation in the Market Committee of the KMA. The market committee is the only body within the KMA that works with markets in the metropolis, and therefore, the mouthpiece of all traders in the metropolis. It however had no street traders on the committee. Petitions sent by executives of street traders' associations to KMA are not responded to. The organizational structure and procedures of the KMA do not give street traders easy access to communication channels within the KMA. Traders can only get to the market committee through the market manager, who is a member of the committee. The committee cannot take any decision without the consultation of the Metropolitan Chief Executive (MCE), who gives final approval on any decision. The MCE may also pass on certain decisions to the metropolitan assembly, thereby delaying actions to be taken on important issues. The above channels are long and cumbersome and discourages the street traders from making use of the official channels.

2. Unapproachable Officials

The threatening language used on the street traders by the urban authorities often makes them unapproachable. The KMA finds the traders recalcitrant and stubborn on issues of decongestion and are therefore forced to use threatening language on them. It was apparent from the way the KMA officials

treat the street traders, and also from discussions with the street traders that power relations between both of them has led to confrontations and mistrust.

3. Notice for Eviction

Prior to evictions and decongestion exercises, a deadline is usually given by the KMA to the traders. In the focus group discussions with the street traders, it came out clearly that most of them considered the time given them to meet the deadline as too short. This normally ranges between two weeks and two months. The street traders complained that the KMA should be more considerate and give them enough time to find appropriate places to relocate to. They did not find relocating to satellite markets as an option since they do not find them viable. Since the traders find it difficult to move to appropriate locations, they invariably came back to their old sites after a short time.

4. Lack of Logistics

One reason why the decongestion exercises cannot be sustained is the lack of logistics. The amount of money spent on security personnel and other members of the demolition team was untenable and so could not be maintained. Usually, there was the need to deploy personnel all over the metropolis to ensure that the street traders are evicted and do not come back to the streets. The number of personnel and other logistics such as transportation could not be maintained and so as soon as the decongestion momentum went down, the traders came back on the streets.

5. Vote Bank

Traders are viewed as a large pool of voters in any elections in Ghana. It is for this reason that directives may be given to urban authorities to halt the decongestion exercises for the exercise to be given a 'human face'. Developments in Accra is indicative of this example, where when the city authorities ordered the eviction of street traders from the Central Business District of Accra, the politicians revised the decision and asked them to go back to the streets. This brings the decongestion exercises to a halt and renders the city authorities powerless. To the politician, the vendors are a "vote bank" and so anything which would incur their wrath may inevitably affect the way they would vote. Thus, for fear of losing votes, especially preceding an election year or in an election year, the urban authorities who are working through the politicians treat street trading with 'benign tolerance'.

6.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

This paper has demonstrated that urban public space is an important resource to livelihoods in cities and towns. Street trading particularly offers a wide range of employment opportunities and participation is

irrespective of age, educational background and gender and the street offers a stable and constant agglomeration of both traders and buyers. The study suggests that trading location is very important to the vendors and their operations require such a location that must induce impulse buying and convenience to buyers. It is recommended that, the inter-relationships between street trading and the use of urban public space be understood and the spatial implications addressed in urban planning. Such an approach does not seek to perpetuate the activity, but rather attempts to limit its negative and undesirable effects on the urban environment.

Certain issues can be deduced from the approach of the urban authorities in Ghana over the years towards street traders. First, law enforcement is poor and street trading is on the ascendancy because there is a lack of mandate and structures to deal with the issue. In Ghana, there is also no street trading policy and this makes law enforcement almost impossible. This has led to the powerlessness of the urban authorities to tackle the issue on a sustainable basis and it is therefore recommended that a policy is formulated to control the activity. The absence of dialogue is also an important issue. The threatening language used on the street traders by the city authorities shows the power relations between the city authorities and the street traders. Decisions are made by government for them and they are only contacted when the compliance of their members is sought. It is expedient that city authorities should involve the street traders in dialogue to curtail the problems arising from their activities.

The overall approach proposed to remedy the problems caused or suffered by street traders depends on the view that the city authorities hold. Some may hold the view that street trading is a largely temporary phenomenon whose importance would diminish as formal employment expanded. However, a more realistic view is that more and more people will have to depend on the informal economy and urban space for their livelihood and that there is little evidence to suggest how and when this situation might ever change on a global scale. According to King (2006), the non-recognition of the informal sector makes it difficult for local governments to appreciate the extent of activities carried out in urban public space. However, as long as the majority of Ghanaians are poor, street trading will continue to fill a key economic sector, and it would be prudent for the urban authorities to recognize its vital role in wealth creation for the poor. Land use planning and land allocation through formal channels has limited impact on the urban poor in cities in many developing countries, but there should be some scope for the recognition of the space needs of the street economy in urban planning processes.

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