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# **Informal Cross-Border Trading: Views of Zimbabwean and Mozambican Traders in Selected Areas**

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## **1 Introduction**

The informal sector in South Africa has grown remarkably in the 1990s after restrictions on the freedom of movement of African people and the freedom of trading in so-called white urban areas were lifted. By 1995 up to 17% of the economically active population of South Africa were estimated to be involved in the informal sector (StatsSA 1999). The rise in retrenchments in the formal and public sectors, increased global competition, low commodity prices and the privatisation of state-owned assets have probably increased this proportion substantially to date. The importance of the informal sector in providing jobs to an increasing proportion of the economically active population of South Africa can therefore not be underestimated.

Moreover, the informal sector has also become important to foreign traders from SADC and non-SADC countries. Foreigners gained entrance to South Africa's comparatively lucrative informal markets in 1987 as a result of deregulation and changes in legislation. Political changes in 1994 and the associated improved political ties with neighbouring countries further enhanced the viability of the informal sector in South Africa.

In 1998, up to 5% of the traders active in Pretoria were of foreign origin (interview, M. Vosloo, 1998-07-23). Johannesburg had an even higher percentage of foreigners involved in informal trading owing to its large population and its attraction to foreigners in general by virtue of its status as Egoli (the City of Gold). Due to heightened competition in the informal sector, South African informal traders came to perceive the foreigners as threats to their livelihoods. From the mid-1990s onwards this perception led to a rise in violent confrontation between South African and foreign informal traders, which reflected underlying tensions in the informal trade sector.

Reportedly, migrants from neighbouring countries were raised in societies where informal trading represented the largest economic activity. The view therefore exists that they are more informed about the rules guiding a successful hawking business and are in general better informal traders than South Africans (interview, M. Vosloo, 1998-07-23).

## **2 Deregulation of the informal industry**

Policies that restricted informal trade in urban centres were re-examined during the 1980s. According to Hart and Rogerson (1989: 161), changing urban and regional policies of the state showed evidence of a growing realisation of the development potential of South Africa's medium-sized centres. These centres could prove important instruments in the creation of employment opportunities and in accommodating some of the rural-urban migration flow. From 1987 onwards, new government policies gave directives for deregulation and the relaxation of legislative controls that blocked the expansion of all informal sector activity in cities.

The relaxation of controls on informal sector activities resulted in informal trade with few restrictions. Trading licences for hawking in Pretoria were abolished in 1994 (interview, M. Vosloo, 1998-07-23). Hence, people of all walks of life were therefore free to enter the informal sector. This arrangement also provided foreign migrants with the opportunity to get a foothold in the hawking industry. This foothold seems to have been strengthening as more foreigners became active in urban centres.

The increase in foreign traders in South Africa has led to widespread fear among local informal traders that the newcomers would take away the livelihoods of locals. This was clearly demonstrated by xenophobic acts of violence against foreign traders, such as occurred, for example, in Johannesburg in August 1997 and in April 1998 (SA shows illegal aliens the door, *The Star*, 1998.03.27; Angry hawkers smash foreigners stalls, *City Press*, 1998.04.26). These incidents of xenophobia underscored the need for research on foreign informal traders in South Africa beyond the small number of studies that had been conducted hitherto. The study described in this report arose from the realisation of this need.

### **3 Demarcation of the study**

For this study<sup>1</sup>, Zimbabwean and Mozambican informal traders (men and women) were interviewed in the area of Hartebeespoort Dam (Northwest), Phokwane (Northern Province) and Nelspruit (Mpumalanga).

These areas were chosen because of a relatively high concentration of informal traders from respectively Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Other areas with substantial numbers of foreign hawkers such as Johannesburg (Gauteng) and Cape Town (Western Cape) were excluded from this study because they had already been studied<sup>2</sup>. This study only focused on traders in the following sectors of street trading namely, handicraft and curios, fruit and vegetables and consumable goods.

### **4 Research methodology**

A qualitative research methodology was chosen for this study because it would enable the research team to gain a better understanding of the social realities of migrants involved in informal trading. Consequently, informal unstructured and semi-structured interviews were conducted.

During 1998, researchers gathered information relating to various issues stemming from the presence of Zimbabwean informal traders in South Africa during a survey at Phokwane and the Hartebeespoort Dam. The secondary aims of the survey were to establish a profile of Zimbabwean migrant traders in South Africa. This included collecting socio-demographic data such as

biographical information, information on places of residence, trading, living conditions, travel patterns and types of transport used between South Africa and the country of origin.

Similar semi-structured and unstructured interviews were conducted with Mozambican traders in the Nelspruit area during 1999. An interpreter was used during these interviews because only one of the Mozambican traders could converse in English. The other respondents could only speak Shangaan and Portuguese. An interview generally lasted about one hour.

## **5 Zimbabwean traders at the Hartebeespoort Dam**

### **5.1 The study area**

The Hartebeespoort Dam area is situated 30km to the east of Pretoria. The area is an important gateway between the Gauteng and the Northwest provinces. The area has also become a popular tourist attraction in recent years due to the scenic and recreational value of the dam and the adjoining Magaliesberg range. Large numbers of local and overseas tourists as well as day visitors from Gauteng travel through the area to the Sun City entertainment complex in Northwest.

The large flow of tourists and day visitors has created the opportunity for the development of a variety of informal businesses, especially those associated with arts and crafts. Consequently, numerous traders have been drawn to the area to exploit the available opportunities. Besides the South African traders, numerous foreign traders from other SADC and non-SADC countries have been drawn to the area.

### **5.2 Socio-demographic characteristics of the interviewees**

Six Zimbabwean traders were interviewed at the Hartebeespoort Dam during two fieldwork trips in 1998. Two of the six interviewees were women. All the respondents were relatively young (in their twenties and thirties), except for one man who was fifty years old. One of the female respondents reported to have been accompanied by her husband. He was selling carved stone sculptures on the opposite side of the road from where she was exhibiting her goods.

All the interviewees were interviewed in English. They spoke fluent English, which was the preferred language for trading.

One of the interviewees reported to have been from Harare and another from the Victoria Falls, where both had sold crafts and curios.

### **5.3 Trading in South Africa**

Foreigners that manufacture and sell hand-made arts, crafts and curios from various African countries view South Africa as a good market to sell their

goods. The reason for this view is the relative affluence of South Africa (compared to other African countries) and the presence of local and foreign tourists with an interest in African arts, crafts and curios. Our interviews with informal Zimbabwean traders confirmed this.

Most of the interviewees reported that they were selling curios and other articles in South Africa because they perceived the country to be a much better market than Zimbabwe and other African countries. One remarked the following: "I am selling my sculptures in South Africa because few Zimbabweans were interested in buying them. I used to sell at Vic Falls [Victoria Falls]. However, I decided to move to South Africa because of a greater demand for my sculptures at tourist attractions where less stiff competition prevails".

All the interviewees seemed to be well informed about South African tourist attractions. They also expressed their preference to trade at the Hartebeespoort Dam because of less stiff competition than in other areas. Some of them noted that they employed people in areas such as Rosebank and Bruma Lake to create a larger market for their goods. They would then travel from one market to the other in a supervisory capacity to ensure that everything was running smoothly.

Economic reasons seemed to have played an important role in the interviewees' decision to trade in South Africa. Unemployment in Zimbabwe forced many people into the informal sector to earn a living. Heightened competition in especially arts and crafts trading resulted in some traders looking to alternative markets such as tourist attractions in South Africa.

Some interviewees claimed to have tried selling their goods in other Southern African countries. One woman reported the following: "I tried to sell my goods in Botswana and Zambia but with no success. I then decided to move to South Africa because I thought that it would be better to sell here".

All the interviewees sold arts, crafts and curios, which they or other Zimbabweans made by hand. The men mostly sold human and animal figures hand-sculpted from either serpentine stone or mukwa wood. One interviewee remarked that there were many people that carved serpentine figures in Zimbabwe because these skills were transferred from one generation to another. Apparently a colonial missionary had found a school where indigenous people were taught carving skills. Furthermore, sheet metal articles such as containers, buckets and mugs, and wire articles such as ornamental motorbikes and chandeliers were also sold. Apparently these skills were taught at school in Zimbabwe.

Both the female interviewees sold crochet articles such as tablecloths and various garments, as well as stone carvings. One Zimbabwean interviewee mentioned that she regularly sold crochet clothes to a South African who exported them to the United States of America. Some foreign tourists also

bought in bulk from her with the intention to sell the goods in their home countries.

#### **5.4 Competition with locals**

More often than not, foreigners involved in the informal sector are in cut-throat competition with local people. However, this was not the situation at the Hartebeespoort Dam. From the interviews and personal observation it seemed that few local people were involved in the manufacturing and selling of hand-made crafts and curios similar to those of the Zimbabwean traders. Indeed, the South Africans involved in these activities were mostly employed by the foreign traders.

Nevertheless, some competition did exist between Zimbabwean traders and traders of other nationalities. Kenyan, Malawian and Swazi traders were also involved in the selling of hand-made crafts and curios at the Hartebeespoort Dam. Zimbabwean traders preferred to trade as groups of Zimbabwean compatriots.

#### **5.5 Housing in South Africa**

Most of the interviewees were renting rooms near their place of work. Reportedly, some traders also lived in pickups and other motor vehicles parked nearby.

At Hartebeespoort Dam, a local shop owner rented rooms to foreigners at R100 per month. An interviewee remarked the following with regard to this type of accommodation: "The accommodation that we are having is good. It is better than what we are used to in Zimbabwe".

The accommodation consisted of a single room built from bricks, and it had a corrugated iron roof. It was not clear whether this accommodation included electricity and water. The occupants nevertheless had easy access to water due to the close proximity of shops, a filling station and restaurants.

#### **5.6 Patterns of movement**

The Zimbabwean traders showed a fixed pattern of movement. They stayed in South Africa for three weeks to a month and then returned to Zimbabwe for at least one month. The time in Zimbabwe provided them with the opportunity to manufacture or acquire new goods to sell in South Africa. This pattern was reportedly also influenced by the length of time their tourist visas were valid in South Africa.

One female interviewee reported to have traveled to South Africa with her husband. Every month, she and her husband returned to Harare for a short period of time. They owned a motor car, which made them independent of public transport and helped them to visit Zimbabwe frequently.

One of the male interviewees, Oliver, returned to Zimbabwe every three weeks to replenish his stock of sculptures. He manufactured most of the sculptures himself during his stay in Zimbabwe. Once he had made enough sculptures, he used a private motor car and trailer to transport the sculptures back to South Africa. He also complained that, although a trading licence was issued free of charge in Zimbabwe, it was very difficult to come by. When transporting his carved sculptures to South Africa, he had to pay import tax at Beitbridge.

## **6 Zimbabwean traders at Phokwane**

### **6.1 The study area**

To supplement the information gained from the interviews conducted at the Hartebeespoort Dam, three interviews were conducted with Zimbabwean informal traders in a rural village, Phokwane, in the former Lebowa homeland. Phokwane is situated 70km to the east of Pietersburg, the capital of the Northern Province.

The interviews conducted at Phokwane provided an interesting perspective on Zimbabwean informal traders in deep-rural areas as opposed to those at the Hartebeespoort Dam. The interviews were conducted in 1998.

### **6.2 Socio-demographic characteristics**

Three young male respondents, Lazarus (21), Stephen (22) and Jabulani (25), were interviewed at Phokwane. Jabulani's highest educational qualification was the equivalent of South Africa's Grade 10 while Stephen had completed the equivalent of Grade 7. Lazarus's highest qualification could not be determined.

### **6.3 Reasons for leaving Zimbabwe**

All three respondents came from Zimbabwe to South Africa. However, Lazarus was born in Mozambique. In 1988 he left his home village Masurizwi in Mozambique as a result of the ongoing civil war. During his stay in Zimbabwe he lived in a refugee camp until 1997 when he decided to leave for South Africa. In the refugee camp he attended the Inyanga Boarding School where he learned to speak English. He also acquired skills such as building and carpentry.

The other two respondents, Jabulani and Stephen, were from the Buher and Chimanemane districts in Zimbabwe. Jabulani and Stephen came to South Africa because of unemployment in Zimbabwe. Jabulani was skilled at doing sheet metal work and decided to act upon information received from Zimbabwean women that a large unexplored market for sheet metal articles existed in rural areas in South Africa. Stephen, on the other hand, came to South Africa because of a disabled father who was not capable of providing for his family. In order to help his family survive, Stephen decided to come to

South Africa to seek employment. He used to work as a farm labourer in Zimbabwe but was of the opinion that he could earn more money in South Africa.

Lazarus came to South Africa to inquire about the whereabouts of his deceased father and his sister. His father used to work as a contract worker at a mine in South Africa. Lazarus wanted to inquire where his father was buried, the circumstances surrounding his death and whether he left an estate behind. The whereabouts of his father and his sister were still unknown to him at the time of the interview.

#### **6.4 Migration career**

Jabulani came to South Africa in April 1995 using his passport to gain entry at the Beitbridge border post. He traveled by taxi to Phokwane where a family member (cousin/brother) of him lived. Both Stephen and Lazarus entered South Africa by illegally crossing the border fence near Beitbridge. Stephen paid 200 Zimbabwean dollars to a group of Zimbabwean people who helped him to cross the border safely. Afterwards he stayed with them for six months at Malegale in Sekhukhuneland. During his stay at Malegale he was taught some South African customs and how to speak Sotho. He was also taught how to manufacture sheet metal articles. During these six months he helped his mentors to manufacture and sell sheet metal articles for a living. When his mentors decided to leave for Bushbuckridge in Mpumalanga, he decided to go to Phokwane.

Lazarus knew people at Phokwane who were manufacturing sheet metal articles. He therefore decided to travel to Phokwane as soon as he crossed the border fence.

None of the respondents were formally employed in South Africa before they came to Phokwane. They all decided to go to Phokwane because they did not have any legal documents that enabled them to obtain formal employment in urban areas. They also felt that their chances of getting caught and harassed by Phokwane police were very slim. Stephen was also of the opinion that rural people were more friendly and helpful towards migrants than people in urban areas.

Once or twice a year Jabulani visited his relatives in Zimbabwe, that is, during the December festive season and sometimes during the Easter holidays, depending on whether he had saved enough money. He traveled via the Beitbridge border post when going home and used the same route back.

The other two respondents did not have passports that enabled them to enter South Africa legally via the Beitbridge border post like Jabulani. It can therefore be assumed that they did not travel to Zimbabwe as often as Jabulani because of the dangers associated with crossing the border fence illegally.



## **6.5 The current situation**

### **6.5.1 Employment**

All the respondents were self-employed at the time of the interviews. They were manufacturing sheet metal articles such as bath-tubs, kettles and food containers that they sold to local people. According to one respondent, this provided an income of between R600 and R800 per month.

### **6.5.2 Residence**

Because of the relative abundance of accommodation at Phokwane, all the respondents were either renting houses or receiving free accommodation. The respondent who received free accommodation was only required to take care of the house while the owner was working in Johannesburg. The other two respondents each paid R20 rent per month.

### **6.5.3 Social contacts and ties**

Two of the respondents kept regular contact with their family members in Zimbabwe by means of postal and telecommunication services. Female merchants traveling between South Africa and Zimbabwe were used as couriers to deliver letters to family members in Zimbabwe. However, our respondents reported that they preferred to send money home by postal order. They also visited their family in Zimbabwe once every six months.

Two of the three respondents were either married to, or living with, South African women. Therefore, their relations with local people at Phokwane seemed to be good. A South African neighbour of the respondents pointed out that they were handy and hard-working people, did not bother their neighbours and were friendly and respected by the community.

## **6.6 Impact**

### **6.6.1 Utilisation of services and infrastructure**

All the respondents were dependent on the Phokwane taxis for conducting their business locally and in surrounding communities. Taxis were also used to travel between South Africa and Zimbabwe, because bus and train services were unavailable at Phokwane.

Telephone and postal services were frequently used to communicate with family members in Zimbabwe. However, they occasionally also used couriers to deliver their mail to family in Zimbabwe. Cash remittances were sent by postal order.

One of the respondents reported that he acquired medical assistance for a minor illness at a nearby clinic. According to him, he received treatment without any questions after introducing himself as a Zimbabwean. The other respondents did not use any medical services since coming to South Africa.

### **6.6.2 Education and training**

None of the respondents received any formal education or training in South Africa. They all acquired their skills in metal work at schools in Zimbabwe or from Zimbabwean mentors. Hence, no additional pressure was placed on any educational institutions at Phokwane.

### **6.7 Zimbabwean migrants: Conclusion**

Zimbabwean traders interviewed at the Hartebeespoort Dam were not modest about their foreign status because most of them entered South Africa legally. They were also observed to trade in close proximity of their own countrymen. Other traders, who included South Africans, Swazis, Kenyans and Malawis, were also clustered together in their respective groups. In contrast to the Hartebeespoort Dam interviewees, the Phokwane interviewees were modest about their foreign status because they mostly dealt with local people and not foreign tourists. They preferred to keep a low profile because they feared being caught and repatriated.

Oral reports suggested the existence of an informally organised network of Zimbabwean stone carvers. This network contributed to the spread of information on the best sites to sell sculptures and curios. However, the same cannot be said about traders dealing in sheet metal articles; they claimed not to know the whereabouts of other Zimbabweans involved in the same trade.

Information collected at the Hartebeespoort Dam resulted in the conclusion that Zimbabwean traders were not lowly educated people fleeing from their country in a bid to survive poverty, as is widely believed. Rather, they were entrepreneurs seeking better business opportunities in a globalising world. In addition, the Zimbabwean economic down-turn made South Africa an attractive option for better trade conditions and a larger market for hand-made articles. The Phokwane interviewees also came to South Africa because of their perception of better economic prospects in this country. The unexplored rural markets in South Africa for durable sheet metal household goods played a major role in their decision to trade at Phokwane.

The impact of foreign informal traders on South Africa can be described as fairly positive. The traders did in the first place not compete directly with South African traders because hardly any South Africans were manufacturing or selling hand-made sculptures, curios and sheet metal articles similar to those produced by the Zimbabweans. Second, some of the foreign traders provided employment to local people. Third, it would seem that a substantial percentage of their earnings was spent in South Africa on food, clothing, accommodation and trading space, which benefited the South African economy. In some cases, even raw materials were bought in South Africa. This was the result of import duties payable on goods imported from Zimbabwe.

## **7 Mozambican interviewees at Nelspruit**

### **7.1 The study area**

Nelspruit, the capital of Mpumalanga, is situated 120km from the Mozambican border. A fast-growing urban centre, it increasingly attracts large numbers of foreigners from all over. Reportedly, the Maputo Corridor development initiative contributed to this growth.

Development activities also spurred growth in Nelspruit's informal sector. An estimated 400 to 500 people were engaged in hawking activities in the central business district. Foreign hawkers accounted for up to 25% of the hawkers, which was a much higher percentage than in Pretoria (interview, L. Winterbach, 1998-11-06). These hawkers included Mozambicans, Senegalese, Zimbabweans, Pakistanis, Chinese and Somalis. However, Mozambican migrants accounted for most of the foreigners in Nelspruit due to its location near the Mozambican border.

### **7.2 Socio-demographic data**

Interviews were conducted with seven Mozambican men and three Mozambican women in the Nelspruit area on 8 and 9 November 1999. The interviewees originated from the southern Mozambican provinces of Maputo and Inhambane. This was probably due to their shorter distance to South Africa compared to the distance from the Mozambican central and northern provinces. The fact that the past recruitment of mine workers was restricted to these southern provinces may also have contributed to this phenomenon.

The interviewees were between 20 and 48 years old. Seven of them were in their early twenties. Only two of the male interviewees were married, one of whom had left his wife and children behind in Mozambique. The wife and children of the other married male interviewee were with him in South Africa. Only one female interviewee was married. Her husband was working on a South African mine.

All the interviewees had received some form of basic education in Mozambique. Tito had the highest qualification; he had passed the equivalent of the South African Grade 8. Financial constraints had forced many of the interviewees to leave school before completing their education.

All but one of the interviewees supported family members in Mozambique with their earnings by sending either money or consumer goods to them. Furthermore, the interviewees kept close contact with their families by visiting them once or twice a year.

### **7.3 Reasons for trading in South Africa**

The poor economic conditions in Mozambique and the consequent unemployment, low wages and expensive commodities (as a result of the low

value of the metical, the Mozambican currency) were stated by most of the interviewees as the main reasons for leaving their country to secure a future in South Africa. Moses, a 35 year old informal trader from Inhambane, commented in this regard: "Life is difficult in Mozambique. Food and consumer articles are very expensive. Many people are unemployed". This comment was shared by Bila, 23 years old, from Inhambane: "Low wages and poverty forced me to leave Mozambique".

Relatives and friends who were already working in South Africa (as mineworkers, construction workers, informal traders, etc.) played an important role in promoting migration among the interviewees. According to the interviewees, they had been well-informed about South African job opportunities before setting out for South Africa. Furthermore, the supposed well-being of migrants working in South Africa had acted as an incentive for the interviewees to migrate to South Africa. The perception existed that money was readily available in South Africa and that they would therefore be able to sell their merchandise. Some of the interviewees reported that family members already in South Africa helped them to secure jobs.

Two of the interviewees fled during the civil war between FRELIMO and RENAMO to South Africa and have been living in the country ever since. They visited their families in Mozambique once a year.

Interestingly, Carlos, a 20 year old interviewee from Massinga in the Inhambane province, was offered a job as informal trader in South Africa by a Mozambican businessman while still in his home town. Because he was unemployed at the time, he immediately took the opportunity and traveled with his employer to the Nelspruit area.

#### **7.4 Daily life of an informal trader**

Four categories of informal traders were identified in the study: traders buying and selling vegetables; traders working for businessmen selling clothes, shoes, cheap electric goods, umbrellas, watches, wallets and toys; traders working for businessmen selling fruit, vegetables and nuts; and traders selling their own art.

Three of the interviewees bought potatoes on the market and sold them directly to the public at their respective stalls along a busy street in the central business district of Nelspruit. According to them, business was reasonably good, especially towards the end of every month.

Moses (35), Tito (22) and Lizzy (25) sold consumer goods at their respective stalls in a shopping mall in the central business district of Nelspruit. They were employed respectively by Senegalese and Chinese businessmen. At the time of the interviews business was bad for the interviewees, especially after another shopping mall had opened in Nelspruit. The Chinese businessman paid Tito R500 per month which he considered too little to make a living and to support his family in Mozambique.

Carlos (20) was selling fruit and nuts at the stall of a Mozambican businessman along the N4 road near Nelspruit. According to him, he could not survive on his earnings because he was only paid R300 per month: "I do not earn enough. I am barefoot".

Both Ana (32) and Paula (28) from Maputo were selling fruit and vegetables at their respective stalls in the central business district of Nelspruit. Both were employed by foreign businessmen. At the time of the interviews both Ana and Paula mentioned that business was reasonably good.

Mario (27) from Manhica in the Maputo province was an artist selling wooden objects carved from roots and trunks of various trees along the N4 between Nelspruit and Malelane. He carved the objects at his stall while waiting for customers. According to him, the business was reasonably good, but he would have preferred to sell his art in Johannesburg where the market was much bigger. However, he could not afford the travelling costs to Johannesburg.

Informal trading involved long hours, usually starting between 07:00 and 08:00 in the morning and ending at 18:00 in the afternoon. Eight of the interviewees worked six days a week while the other two worked every day.

Most of the male interviewees reported that informal trading was their last resort when they could not get jobs in the formal sector. Furthermore, they were not skilled at any trade. Alfredo (45) commented in this regard: "Selling potatoes was my last resort since all the decent jobs were already taken by South Africans. I could not complete my education and were not skilled for any trade".

Two of the interviewees had previously been employed in the construction industry but lost their jobs. They could not find similar employment. The female interviewees, on the other hand, came explicitly to South Africa to engage in informal trade. They reported that they had been well-informed about the opportunities in informal trade in South Africa.

Moses (35) from Inhambane reported that he considered engaging in informal trade because he wanted to improve his English as well as to become conversant with other South African languages.

The interviewees who had their own informal businesses reported that they preferred to employ fellow Mozambicans rather than South Africans as casual labourers. Alfonso (21) commented in this regard: "South Africans are lazy to work. South Africans prefer to wear a tie. Sometimes they run off with the business's money".

## **7.5 Permanent residence in South Africa**

Three of the interviewees reported that they would like to return to Mozambique as soon as the economic situation in their country improved, mainly because their families were still in Mozambique. Other interviewees indicated that they

would prefer to remain in South Africa and also bring their families to South Africa.

### **7.6 Medical services**

All the interviewees reported that they used medical services in South Africa. For minor ailments they visited the clinics and paid R10 per consultation. Two interviewees, however, reported that they did not pay at all for the services at the clinics. Some of the interviewees also received medical treatment at the local provincial hospital and paid between R13 and R26 for these services. One of the interviewees reported that she once visited a private practitioner which charged her R80 for the consultation and medication.

### **7.7 Accommodation**

Accommodation of the interviewees ranged from housing in informal settlements to rented rooms and a rented house. Two of the interviewees lived in rented rooms in the Ka Nyamazane township, while one lived in a rented house in White River with his wife and children. The other interviewees lived in informal settlements in the Nelspruit area. They complained about the lack of clean water and decent sanitation.

### **7.8 Relations with South Africans**

Most of the Nelspruit interviewees reported that they maintained good relations with South Africans, not only with the South African public at large, but also with the informal traders. However, Carlos (20) reported that he was stabbed by a South African who wanted to scare him away from his stall. Furthermore, South Africans sometimes called him by derogatory terms such as 'Shangaan'.

### **7.9 Conclusion**

In the Nelspruit area, four groups of informal Mozambican traders were identified: traders buying and selling vegetables; traders working for businessmen selling consumer articles such as clothing, cheap electric goods, watches, wallets and toys; traders working for businessmen selling fruit, vegetables and nuts; and traders selling their own art.

It seemed that many of the male informal traders preferred to be employed in the formal sector. However, because they were unable to obtain jobs there and were not skilled at any trade, they turned to informal trading. Some were able to make a living while others found it difficult to make a living and support their families with their earnings. The female interviewees, in contrast to the male interviewees, came to South Africa with the intention to engage in the informal sector.

The foreign informal traders at Nelspruit did not provide employment to South Africans because they preferred to employ their fellow countrymen. Furthermore, they were in competition with the South African traders as they were selling the same consumer goods and were competing for the same jobs.

Good relations existed between the Mozambican traders and both the South African public and South African informal traders. Only one interviewee complained about harassment by South Africans.

## **8 Findings**

The Zimbabwean and Mozambican interviewees were mainly in the younger working-age categories. All of them had received some basic education in their respective home countries. However, the Zimbabweans generally had higher levels of education than the Mozambicans. The Zimbabwean with the highest qualification passed the equivalent of South Africa's Grade 12.

Economic reasons seemed to have played an important role in the decision by the Zimbabwean interviewees to trade in South Africa. Heightened competition in especially arts and crafts trading in Zimbabwe resulted in many people seeking alternative markets for their goods in South Africa.

The poor economic conditions in Mozambique and the consequent unemployment, low wages and expensive commodities (as a result of the low value of the metical, the Mozambican currency) were stated by most of the Mozambican interviewees as the main reason for leaving their country to secure a future in South Africa.

The Zimbabwean interviewees came to South Africa with the explicit aim of selling their arts and crafts. They stayed in South Africa for relatively short periods of time (generally about a month) before returning to Zimbabwe to acquire new stock.

Mozambican male interviewees, on the other hand, indicated that they came to South Africa to seek employment in the formal sector. As they were unable to obtain jobs there and were not skilled at any trade, they turned to informal trading.

Mozambican female interviewees migrated to South Africa with the intention to become involved in the informal sector. Generally the Mozambican interviewees entered South Africa for prolonged periods and did not intend to return to their home country in the near future.

Most of the Zimbabwean and Mozambican informal traders interviewed perceived South Africa as a wealthy country with suitable markets for their merchandise. Consequently they preferred to trade in South Africa and not in other Southern African countries. The perceived well-being of other Mozambicans in South Africa acted as an incentive for the Mozambican interviewees to travel to South Africa in search of a "better" life.

An important factor facilitating migration to South Africa was the existence of networks in both the sending and the receiving country. The contact of potential informal traders with family members, friends and business

associates in South Africa and in their respective home countries was important for the creation of social support, information and business networks.

The Zimbabwean informal traders all traded in hand-made articles such as stone and wood sculptures, crochet work, wire and sheet metal articles. Whereas the Zimbabwean informal traders were mostly self-employed, businessmen employed some of the Mozambican informal traders. Those employed by businessmen sold consumer articles such as clothing, cheap electric goods, watches, wallets, toys, fruit, vegetables and nuts. The self-employed Mozambican interviewees mostly bought and sold vegetables, with the exception of one who sold wooden artwork. Generally, the Mozambicans did not participate in the handicraft and curio sector.

Regarding the creation of jobs in South Africa, some of the Zimbabwean interviewees noted that they employed South African workers to sell their curios. However, the Mozambican interviewees did not provide employment to South Africans as they preferred to employ their fellow countrymen. Furthermore, foreign businessmen employed some of the Mozambican interviewees as salesmen. Consequently they competed with South Africans for available jobs in the informal trade sector. They also competed with their South African counterparts by selling similar consumer goods. The Zimbabwean interviewees, on the other hand, did not compete directly with South African informal traders because they mostly specialised in selling Zimbabwean art and handicraft articles.

The majority of the Zimbabwean and Mozambican interviewees mentioned that they financially supported their families in their home countries. However, some of the Mozambican interviewees found it difficult to make a living in South Africa as well as support their families in Mozambique on their small income. The Zimbabweans, on the other hand, did not complain about a low income.

Some of the Zimbabwean interviewees mentioned that they took consumer articles such as clothes, shoes and electrical appliances with them to Zimbabwe because the market for these articles was good in their country. This was generally viewed as beneficial to the South African economy.

A Zimbabwean interviewee mentioned that she regularly sold crochet clothes to a South African who exported them to the United States of America. She sometimes also sold crochet work in bulk to overseas tourists who intended to sell it in their home countries.

The current South African immigration policy as codified in the Aliens Control Act of 1991 (as amended in 1996) makes no provision for trading permits. Consequently, most of the Zimbabwean informal traders interviewed entered South Africa with visitor visas. Only a few of the Mozambican interviewees indicated that they entered South Africa with visitor visas. Visitor visas are free to Zimbabweans, but Mozambicans are required to pay for the visas.



Although visitor visas allow traders to enter South Africa, they are not officially permitted to trade.<sup>3</sup> Since 1996, only single entry visas have been issued to Zimbabweans; multiple entry visas are only issued under special circumstances (Peberdy and Crush, 1998: 31). Some of the Zimbabwean interviewees indeed complained about the difficulty of getting these visas. Furthermore, informal traders had to pay duties on personal goods in excess of R500. Some of the Zimbabwean interviewees complained about the high custom duties payable at the border post. According to them this eroded their profit margins.

None of the Zimbabwean informal traders were interested in living permanently in South Africa. The Mozambican interviewees were more inclined to live permanently with their families in South Africa.

The information obtained through the interviews led to the conclusion that the Zimbabwean traders are not lowly educated people fleeing their country in a bid to survive poverty, as is widely believed. Rather, they are entrepreneurs seeking better business opportunities in a globalising world. On the other hand, most of the Mozambican male interviewees came to South Africa to seek employment. Male Mozambican traders viewed their involvement in the informal sector as temporary until they acquire formal employment.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> This study was part of an HSRC study on the causes and impact of cross-border migration between South Africa and its neighbours, Zimbabwe and Mozambique.
- <sup>2</sup> See amongst others: Peberdy, S. & Crush, J. 1998. Trading places: Cross-border traders and the South African informal sector. *South African Migration Project. Migration Policy Series*, 6. Cape Town: Idasa; Rogerson, C.M. 1997. African immigrant entrepreneurs and Johannesburg's changing inner city, *Africa Insight*, 27(4): 265-273; Rogerson, C.M. 1997. International migration, immigrant entrepreneurs and South Africa's small enterprise economy. *South African Migration Project. Migration Policy Series*, 3. Cape Town: Idasa.
- <sup>3</sup> The *White Paper on International Migration* of 1999 recognised informal traders who regularly visit South Africa for short periods of time. Measures were recommended to accommodate them.

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## **Interviews**

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