

A Phenomenological Analysis of Street Vending Regulations and their Impact on Informal Economies in Kitwe

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Abstract

Street vending is a critical livelihood strategy in urban and peri-urban Zambia, particularly in Kitwe, where informal trading sustains household consumption and supports local commerce. However, this participation occurs within a context of increasing governance interventions, including by-laws, licensing systems, enforcement practices, and spatial planning measures. Regulations, though framed as instruments of orderliness, public health, and economic development, often produce uneven effects on vendors' survival and inclusion. This study explores how vendors perceive, interpret, and respond to regulatory practices, situating regulation within their lived realities. A qualitative phenomenological approach was employed to foreground vendors' experiences. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and direct observation, enabling both individual and collective perspectives to be documented. Findings reveal constant tension between restrictive rules and the order they bring. Regulations influence trading locations, mobility, pricing, and investment decisions, while generating fear, anxiety, and exclusion. Vendors respond through adaptive strategies such as relocation, solidarity, and informal negotiation, highlighting both vulnerability and resilience. Regulation is not only imposed but also actively negotiated in daily practice. By situating regulation within vendors' life-worlds, the study contributes to debates on urban governance and informal economies, offering insights for context-sensitive policy that balances oversight with equitable participation.

Keywords: Street Vending, Regulation, Adaptive Strategies

Introduction

Street vending is one of the most visible livelihood strategies in urban and peri-urban Zambia, providing critical income and sustaining household consumption while contributing to local commerce. In Kitwe, informal economic activities such as trading in public spaces remain central to everyday survival for many households.¹ The involvement of People in the economy is happening at the same time that local authorities are putting more rules in place such as the by-laws, licenses, enforcement, and planning in order to control how public trading is done.” Although regulations are often framed as instruments of orderliness, public health, consumer protection, and formal economic development, their actual effects on vendors and the broader informal economy vary significantly, depending on how they are designed,

¹ Jongh (2021), p. 12

interpreted, and enforced.² For vendors, these regulations are not abstract policies but lived realities encountered through daily interactions with municipal authorities, enforcement officers, and market committees. Such encounters shape how vendors negotiate compliance, manage risks, and make decisions about trading locations, pricing, and investment.³ At the same time, regulatory interventions alter access to trading spaces, influence mobility and competition, and reshape opportunities for profit and accumulation.⁴ According to Dube et al.,⁵ these impacts are particularly pronounced for marginalized groups whose livelihoods depend on low-cost trading arrangements in public spaces. Understanding how regulations affect such groups requires more than an institutional or administrative lens; it demands attention to the lived experiences of those most affected. The study, ‘A Phenomenological Analysis of Street vending Regulations and their impact on informal economies in Kitwe,’ adopts phenomenology as its methodological pathway. This study examines how vendors perceive and respond to regulations, capturing meanings they attach to governance and strategies for survival. Rather than viewing regulation as external, it emphasizes the regulation-to-life-world process shaping everyday practices and adaptive responses. Studies by Jongh,⁶ it examines how vendors perceive legitimacy, fairness, and enforceability, and how these perceptions shape coping mechanisms, adaptations in trading practices, and informal negotiations. This shows that regulatory practices reshape informal economies, influencing market participation, livelihood stability, and enterprise sustainability in transformative ways. Through this phenomenological lens, the research seeks to understand how the vending regulations of Kitwe shape informal economic life, not only through compliance procedures but also as lived social and economic experiences.⁷ The findings are expected to inform policy and practice by grounding regulation in lived realities, supporting more context-sensitive governance, and strengthening dialogue between state regulation and informal economic participation.⁸

Statement of the Problem

Street vending is a critical livelihood strategy in urban and peri-urban Zambia, particularly in Kitwe, where informal trading sustains household consumption and contributes to local commerce. Yet this participation unfolds within a regulatory environment shaped by by-laws, licensing systems, enforcement practices, and spatial planning measures. Although regulations are often justified as instruments of orderliness, public health, and economic development, their effects are uneven, influencing vendors’ survival strategies, mobility, and economic inclusion.⁹ The central problem is that regulation of street vending in Kitwe is not a neutral framework but a contested process. While regulations are presented as mechanisms of order and modernization, their uneven application reshapes vendors’ strategies, mobility, and social identities. Existing scholarship acknowledges vending as both a survival mechanism and a social practice, but limited attention has been devoted to how regulatory structures specifically shape lived experiences in Kitwe.¹⁰ Importantly, vendors are not passive recipients of regulation; they actively interpret, negotiate, and adapt

² Dube et al. (2026), pp.12-16

³ Jongh (2021), p. 88

⁴ Dube et al, (2026), pp.12-16

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Jongh (2021), P.110

⁷ Mwinyi, et al, (2024), pp.7–22

⁸ Ibid, pp.18-22

⁹ Shula (2023), pp. 12-15

¹⁰ Jongh, (2021), pp. 134–138

to governance encounters. This gap underscores the need to situate regulation within the everyday realities of vendors, revealing how rules intersect with resilience, agency, and coping strategies. This study highlights the tension between restrictive rules and everyday survival practices. In doing so, it contributes to balanced debates on urban governance and informal economies, demonstrating that regulation should not only enforce order but also recognize the resilience and agency of those who depend on vending for survival.¹¹

Research Objectives

1. To explore street vendors' lived experiences and meaning making of street vending regulations in Kitwe.
2. To examine how interactions with local authorities and enforcement actors influence the survival strategies and adaptive practices of street vendors in Kitwe.

Research Questions

1. How do street vendors in Kitwe describe and interpret their everyday experiences with street vending regulations, and what meanings do they attach to these rules in their daily lives?
2. In what ways do interactions with local authorities and enforcement actors shape the survival strategies and adaptive practices of street vendors in Kitwe?

Related Research Work

Street Vending as Urban Informality

Street vending has long been recognized as a defining feature of urban informality in African cities. Literature by Mensah¹² on informal economies in Ghana highlights informality as central to African urbanism, particularly where formal employment opportunities remain scarce. This insight remains relevant as many cities continue to grapple with unemployment and underemployment. In Zambia, and specifically Kitwe, Jongh¹³ argues that vending has become a visible livelihood strategy, emerging as households adapt to economic restructuring and the decline of formal sector jobs. The informal economy is not merely a survivalist response to poverty but also a creative and adaptive system. According to Zungu-Tamo¹⁴ informal economies demonstrate resilience, innovation, and flexibility, enabling participants to respond to shifting market conditions and regulatory pressures, including practices such as solid waste recycling in Johannesburg. Consequently, informal trade contributes significantly to urban commerce while connecting to broader struggles against precarious work in Africa. Comparative studies reinforce this perspective. Literature by Ewnetu & Seo¹⁵ notes that across African cities, informal trade is deeply embedded in urban life, shaping economic flows and social relations. Similarly, Chen¹⁶ argues that informality constitutes a global phenomenon, with African cities offering vivid examples of how informal trade sustains livelihoods and reshapes urban space.

¹¹ Peimani & Kamalipour (2022), pp. 829-832

¹² Mensah (2023), pp.25-43

¹³ Jongh (2021), p.45

¹⁴ Zungu-Tamo (2024), pp.15-20

¹⁵ Ewnetu & Seo (2025), pp.12-16

¹⁶ Chen (2012), p.7

Regulation as “Chaos and Order

Street vending regulation in Zambia is described as a balance between “chaos” and “order.” Chaos reflects spontaneous, congested vending, while order represents government efforts to maintain cleanliness. For example, Peimani and Kamalipour¹⁷ observe in South Africa that regulation alternates between tolerance and crackdowns, reflecting state ambivalence. Studies by Lata¹⁸ argues that regulation restricts vending yet simultaneously shapes spaces for urban citizenship, as vendors resist exclusionary governance and assert trading rights. Thus, the tension between chaos and order is deeply political, with regulation becoming contested terrain where vendors negotiate legitimacy, survival, and recognition in Kitwe and in cities in Zambia.

The Vendors’ Agency and Collective organizing

Street vendors are not just passive workers; they actively come together to protect their livelihoods and make sure they are seen in the city. Studies by Jongh¹⁹ suggest that vendors in Kitwe form groups and networks to speak with local authorities, resist removal from their trading spots, and secure places to sell. According to Masupa,²⁰ this kind of organizing is more than survival, it is a way of getting involved in politics, challenging unfair city rules, and claiming their right to belong. Literature by Brown, et al.²¹ argues that street traders help shape what it means to be citizens in the city by insisting on their right to trade and use public space. According to Jongh²² shows that these associations reveal how rules affect everyday life, shaping choices about movement, prices, and investments. This connects to wider struggles against insecure work across Africa, such as union organizing in Nigeria’s oil industry, where workers also resist being pushed aside.²³ Furthermore, Falola et al.²⁴ highlight that African women in informal economies are fighting for recognition and survival, showing how gender, informality, and governance are linked. Finally, studies by Apusigah & Bamora²⁵ contend that women’s struggles in informal economies reflect broader demands for socio-economic justice. Altogether, these examples show that vendors have real power: through organizing, they protect their work and influence city policies, becoming active players in shaping African urban life.

Phenomenological Perspectives on Regulation

Phenomenology offers a worthwhile lens for understanding regulation as lived experience. Dürrnagel et al.²⁶ argue that phenomenology captures the “lifeworld” of actors, enabling analysis of how abstract policies are interpreted in everyday contexts. Vendors encounter rules through daily interactions with municipal officers, committees, and security personnel, shaping perceptions of legitimacy, fairness, and clarity. Built on Schnegg & Sommerschuh,²⁷ such encounters reveal how regulation is socially

¹⁷ Peimani & Kamalipour (2022), pp. 829–832

¹⁸ Lata (2023), pp. 44–47

¹⁹ Jongh (2021), pp. 248–250

²⁰ Masupa (2020), pp. 34–36

²¹ Brown, et al. (2010), pp. 670–672

²² Jongh (2022), pp. 12–14

²³ Houeland (2022), pp. 865–867; Aye (2017), pp.4–6

²⁴ Falola et al. (2020), pp. 175–177

²⁵ Apusigah & Bamora (2021), pp. 1543–1563

²⁶ Dürrnagel et al. (2026), pp. 45–47

²⁷ Schnegg & Sommerschuh (2026), pp. 12–14),

constructed through compliance, resistance, or adaptation. Falola et al.²⁸ emphasize that women's lived experiences in African informal economies reveal how gendered power relations shape survival strategies. Similarly, Apusigah & Bamora²⁹ contend that phenomenological approaches highlight the intersection of informality, gender, and governance, showing how women negotiate both economic precarity and patriarchal structures. Advancing this perspective, phenomenology bridges policy and practice showing contested, and reshaped through everyday negotiations. It exposes gaps between governance and lived realities, underscoring experiential knowledge as essential for socially legitimate, technically sound regulatory analysis.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in *four key theoretical perspectives* that provide the foundation for analyzing the regulation of street vending in Kitwe. The analysis draws upon established theories of *Urban Informality*, *Neoliberal Urbanism*, *Agency and Collective Organizing*, and *Assemblage*. To frame the phenomenological experiences of street vendors in Kitwe, the study employs several theoretical lenses that illuminate both structural conditions and lived realities. The theoretical foundation of this research rests on the intersection of informality studies, neoliberal urbanism, collective agency, and assemblage thinking. Understanding the regulation of street vending requires engagement with multiple theoretical frameworks, including those outlined below. The first theory is 'Urban Informality Theory' (UIT) views informal economies as integral to urban life rather than peripheral. It challenges the rigid divide between formal and informal sectors by emphasizing the fluid boundaries that connect them. As Pulliat et al.,³⁰ argue, street vending and other informal practices are not marginal but embedded within the everyday functioning of cities, shaping livelihoods, identities, and community dynamics. In Kitwe, street vending is not simply an unlawful activity but part of a continuum in which state regulation is selectively enforced. Banks et al.³¹ emphasize that informality reveals underlying dynamics of power and inequality, showing how regulation reshapes livelihoods rather than eradicating them. In Kitwe, regulatory measures reflect neoliberal rationalities that prioritize order and modernization over the needs of informal workers. Peck et al.³² describe "actually existing neoliberalism" as the adaptation of global neoliberal policies to local contexts. Their analysis demonstrates how neoliberal urbanism is embedded in everyday governance practices, thereby, positioning the regulatory push of Kitwe within wider processes of urban restructuring. Secondly, the 'Neoliberal Urbanism theory' NUT explains that enforcement practices reflect a broader push for modernization.³³ This allows Vendors an opportunity to adapt by changing locations, diversifying what they sell, or finding creative ways to stay in business despite being pushed out. The third theory is the '*Agency and Collective Organizing theory*' perspective highlights the active role of vendors in shaping their livelihoods. Rather than being passive recipients of policy, they form associations, negotiate with authorities, and resist exclusion. Almulhim & Yigitcanlar³⁴ note that collective agency enables groups to achieve outcomes individuals cannot. In Kitwe, vendor associations mobilize to secure space and recognition, showing resilience against restrictive policies. Daily survival often involves collective

²⁸ Falola et al. (2020), pp. 175-177

²⁹ Apusigah & Bamora (2021), pp.1543-1563

³⁰ Pulliat et al. (2024), p.1155

³¹ Banks, et al. (2020), pp. 223-238

³² Peck, et al (2018), pp. 3-15

³³ Good fellow (2023), pp. 88-91

³⁴ Almulhim & Yigitcanlar (2025), pp. 113-116

strategies such as networks, resource sharing, and coordinated resistance. The fourth theory was ‘Assemblage theory’ was first introduced in France in 1980 by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their book: ‘*A Thousand Plateaus*.’ The term comes from the French word *agencement*, meaning, “*putting together*” or “*arrangement*.” Later, in the United States during the 1990s and 2000s, Manuel DeLanda expanded and formalized the theory, making it widely applied in philosophy, social sciences, and urban studies. Building on these foundations, scholars such as Durose et al.³⁵ explain that assemblage theory provides a way to step back and see governance as fluid and constantly changing. Stevens et al.³⁶ add that assemblage thinking highlights interaction and contingency, showing governance as the outcome of many entanglements rather than a single authority. In practice, this means rules are shaped by multiple players who attach meaning to them depending on how they are enforced and negotiated. For example, the Vendors, local authorities, politicians, and communities all contribute to this process, viewing regulations as both barriers and opportunities to claim space in the city. As McFarlane³⁷ points out, enforcement is part of a larger, flexible system where power is always shifting. Vendors’ strategies are therefore shaped by ongoing negotiations, and survival depends on flexibility and adaptation in contested urban environments the research questions are anchored in the *multi theoretical perspectives* providing the study depth and *multidimensional understanding of how regulations* and identity intersect in Kitwe’s street vending economy. Together, these theoretical linkages provide a multidimensional understanding of how regulation and identity intersect in Kitwe’s street vending economy, as illustrated in table1.

Table 1: Linking Theories to Research Questions

Research Questions	Linking Theories	Focus
RQ 1: Vendors’ Interpretations of Regulations	Urban informality theory, Assemblage Theory, Neoliberal Urbanism, Agency, & Collective Organizing.	Explains meanings vendors attach to rules, positioning informality within broader governance and power struggles.
RQ 2: Survival strategies shaped by enforcement.		Highlights adaptive practices, collective resistance and negotiation with authorities.

Source: The Researcher (2026)

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is a structured system of concepts, assumptions, and expectations that guides research by identifying variables and their relationships. Ravitch & Riggan³⁸ explain that such a framework clarifies the research problem, frames questions, and provides intellectual scaffolding. Ambrosj et al.³⁹ emphasize that it unites epistemological goals with practice based standards, embedding ethics and integrity planning in planning including informality, lived experiences, urban citizenship and exclusion. Literature by Eakin et al.⁴⁰ demonstrate that informality shapes resilience and equity outcomes

³⁵ Durose et al. (2022), pp. 2132-2135

³⁶ Stevens et al. (2024), pp.15-18)

³⁷ McFarlane (2011), pp. 653-656

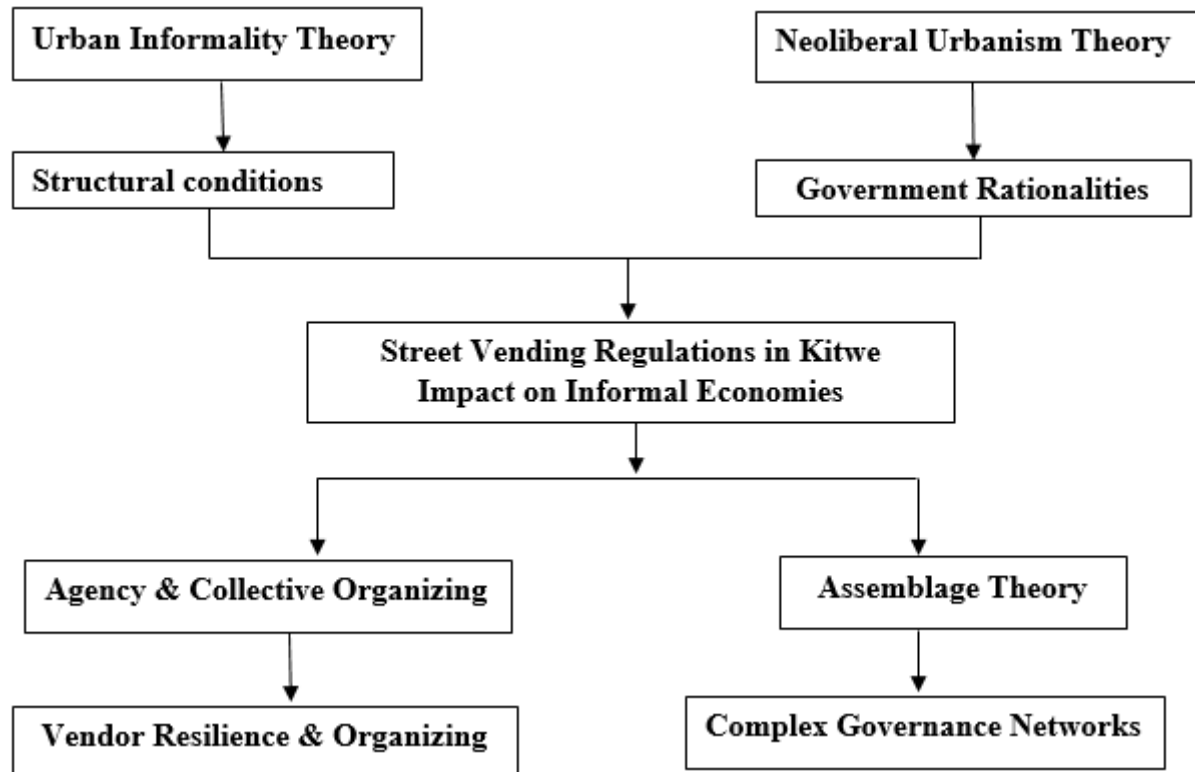
³⁸ Ravitch & Riggan (2023), pp.45-47

³⁹ Ambrosj et al.(2024), pp.22-25

⁴⁰ Eakin et al. (2025), p.4

in cities of the Global South, where power imbalances affect access to resources. Roy⁴¹ argues that urban informality is not merely a deviation from legality but a mode of governance, while Holston's notion of "insurgent citizenship" highlights how democratic disjunctions produce contested belonging. Chen & Li⁴² show that social networks function as infrastructure for survival, underscoring collective practices that sustain marginalized communities. This is illustrated in the figure one (1) below.

Figure 1: The Conceptual Framework



Source: The Researcher (2026)

Philosophical Underpinning

The study is based on phenomenology; a way of thinking that looks closely at people's lived experiences in social and regulatory settings. As Muzingili⁴³ argues that phenomenology does not see reality as fixed and measurable on its own, but as something shaped by how people perceive and understand create meaning. Building on this, Dahlberg, et al.⁴⁴ discuss the concept of the lifeworld, meaning that every day social interactions are found where people create meaning. In African contexts, Kaasila-Pakanen & Puhakka,⁴⁵ show how feminist phenomenology helps us understand how women deal with power and find ways to survive in informal economies. Extending this perspective, Doshi, et al.,⁴⁶ argues that informal work is part of wider struggles against insecure jobs, showing the political side of everyday experiences. In Kitwe, this view helps the study move beyond policy reports and instead look closely at how vendors

⁴¹ Roy (2005), p.148

⁴² Chen & Li (2026), p.3

⁴³ Muzingili (2026), p.12

⁴⁴ Dahlberg, et al. (2025), p.4

⁴⁵ Kaasila-Pakanen & Puhakka, (2026), p.8

⁴⁶ Doshi et al. (2026), p.220

respond to the rules they face. Building on these insights, Pulliat et al.⁴⁷ argue that street vending regulations are not merely legal instruments but lived realities that shape livelihoods, identities and community dynamics. Abdalla⁴⁸ further explains that qualitative research is based on interpretation, dialogue, and collaboration, where knowledge comes from interaction between researchers and participants. This approach to informal economies in Kitwe highlights survival, resilience and agency, showing how vendors actively negotiated authority and transformed regulation into adaptive practice.

Research Design

Street vending in Kitwe plays a vital role in sustaining livelihoods, yet it is constantly shaped by shifting regulatory frameworks.⁴⁹ At times, authorities tolerate vending, while at other times they enforce strict crackdowns, creating instability and uncertainty for vendors.⁵⁰ This instability influences the strategies vendors adopt to survive, making regulation a lived and negotiated experience rather than a fixed policy.⁵¹ Therefore, the present study is designed to explore how vendors experience these regulations in their everyday lives and how they adapt to changing enforcement practices.⁵² By employing a qualitative approach, the research emphasizes lived experiences and personal narratives rather than statistical measurement. The study is guided by two objectives: The first is to explore how vendors make sense of the rules that govern their work. The second is to examine how interactions with local authorities and enforcement officers shape their survival strategies and identity practices. These objectives are framed by the following research questions: First question: *'How do vendors experience and interpret regulatory practices'* and second question: *'In what ways do enforcement interactions influence adaptive strategies and identity work.'* Moreover, the research is informed by theories of urban governance and informality. Governance is understood as negotiated and relational rather than fixed. According to Dovey & Recio⁵³, informality is seen as a dynamic system where actors resist, adapt, and anticipate regulatory pressures. Similarly, Acosta et al,⁵⁴ emphasize that informal traders demonstrate agency and resilience by negotiating exclusionary urban governance. The Identification of work theory further explains how vendors challenge negative labels and assert legitimacy in contested urban spaces.⁵⁵ These theoretical perspectives are directly linked to the study's objectives, providing a lens through which to interpret vendors' lived experiences. Creswell & Clark⁵⁶ argued that a qualitative design was chosen to capture depth and detail. According to Acosta et al,⁵⁷ Semi-structured interviews and participant observations were the primary methods of data collection. Interviews allowed vendors to articulate their experiences in their own words, while observations provided insight into how enforcement practices unfold in everyday contexts. Purposive sampling was used to include vendors of different ages, genders, and types of goods, ensuring diversity of perspectives.⁵⁸ In total, twelve (12) vendors were interviewed, and three focus group

⁴⁷ Pulliat et al. (2024),p.1155

⁴⁸ Abdalla (2026), p.100

⁴⁹ Jongh (2022), p. 390

⁵⁰ Huang & Ming (2024), p. 3002

⁵¹ Moyo & Gumbo (2021), p. 140

⁵² Jongh (2022), p. 392

⁵³ Dovey & Recio (2024), p. 2273

⁵⁴ Acosta et al. (2024), p. 56

⁵⁵ Jongh (2022), p. 395

⁵⁶ Creswell & Clark (2017), p. 173

⁵⁷ Acosta et al (2024), p.53

⁵⁸ Creswell & Clark (2017), p. 174

discussions were conducted, with data saturation reached when no new insights emerged. Studies by Moyo & Gumbo⁵⁹, data were collected through interviews, zero in on groups, and direct observation. Interviews provided detailed accounts, zero in on groups encouraged collective discussion, and observation revealed practices in natural settings. Collectively, these ways offered a fuller picture of participants' realities. For analysis, the study employed the phenomenological method, which involved identifying significant statements, grouping them into themes, and developing descriptions that effectively captured the essence of vendors' lived experiences, thereby ensuring rigor and credibility in the findings. Alongside this, *thematic analysis* was used to highlight common coping strategies and survival practices.⁶⁰ According to Goode,⁶¹ *NVivo software* supported the coding process by organizing transcripts and field notes into categories and themes. Open coding identified recurring expressions such as "uncertainty," "crackdowns," and "identity work." Axial coding grouped these into broader categories while selective coding refined them into central themes.⁶² The analysis revealed four key themes: governance fluidity, strategic identity work, moral judgments, and resilience of informality. Significantly, these themes highlight how vendors experience regulation as unstable, resist stigma by reframing their contributions, contest moral judgments from authorities, and persist through adaptive strategies despite restrictive laws.

Methodology

In this study, a qualitative phenomenological approach was used to observe into the everyday experiences of street vendors in Kitwe, Zambia, and to comprehend how they made sense of street vending regulations. This approach was chosen because phenomenology focuses on how users interpret and give meaning to their daily lives. By listening to vendors' stories, the study revealed how rules and enforcement shaped their survival strategies and coping practices. Meaning, phenomenology allowed the research to capture the essence of lived face. Built on Cunningham et al.⁶³ informal, work has long been recognized as central to urban survival in Africa. Additionally, Uwamahoro & Khoo,⁶⁴ street trade plays a needed role in shaping urban economies and citizenship. In this study, the researcher used three main (methods) to gather data and these were, interviews, focus groups, and direct observation. Additionally, these ways worked together to give a fuller picture of how vendors experienced and responded to regulations. Firstly, Interviews were conducted along with individual vendors using semi-structured questions. This allowed them to share personal stories about how rules affected their work and what those rules meant to them. Interviews are central to phenomenological research because they capture lived experiences in point. Which means interviews provided insight into both emotional and real-space dimensions of vending. Secondly, Focus Groups were organized to see into collective interpretations and shared survival strategies. In these sessions, vendors built on each other's ideas, which revealed how they collectively interpreted regulations and discussed coping strategies. Moreover, this highlighted the community aspect of vending, by showing how survival strategies mostly depend on team assist. Studies by Kamaara,⁶⁵ recommended that women's collective agency in informal economies has also been emphasized in African scholarship. Finally, Direct Observation was carried out in vending areas to see how vendors interacted along with customers, each

⁵⁹ Moyo & Gumbo (2021), p. 142

⁶⁰ Moyo & Gumbo (2021), p. 144

⁶¹ Goode (2022).

⁶² Moyo & Gumbo (2021), p. 146

⁶³ Cunningham et al. (2024), p. 7

⁶⁴ Uwamahoro & Khoo (2025), p. 8

⁶⁵ Kamaara (2025), p.215

other, and local authorities. Built on Skinner,⁶⁶ observations allowed connections to be made between what vendors said and what was happening in real-life situations. This helped identify practices that might not come up in interviews, such as minor adjustments vendors made to avoid conflict or informal routines they followed.

Integration and Justification of Research Methods

The researcher shows how different methods such as interviews, focus groups, and direct observation were combined to give a fuller picture of the topic. Integration means connecting these methods so they complement each other rather than standing alone. For example, interviews captured personal stories, focus groups revealed collective strategies, and observation showed everyday practices in action. Together, they provided a more complete understanding of how vendors in Kitwe experienced and responded to regulations. The researcher explains why these methods were chosen. The reasons are as follows: Firstly, They were suitable for the research questions, practical in the Kitwe setting, and ethically sound. For example, the interviews were justified because they allowed vendors to share personal experiences in their own words. The Focus groups were also justified because they highlighted collective interpretations and group survival strategies. Lastly, the Observation was justified because it revealed practices that might not be mentioned in interviews, such as small adjustments vendors made to avoid conflict. The researcher connects the methods to the theoretical framework. For instance, phenomenological interviews were justified because the study is grounded in phenomenology, which values lived experience. The theoretical foundation rests on Urban Informality Theory (UIT), Neoliberal Urbanism Theory (NUT), Agency and Collective Organizing (ACO), and Assemblage Theory (A.T). Each method was chosen to illuminate both structural conditions and lived realities, showing how regulation is experienced and negotiated by vendors. The researcher demonstrated that the selected methods were realistic considering the available time, resources, and access. Since surveys were not suitable for informal vendors, interviews, focus groups, and observations were found to be more effective, providing rich data from the study location (Kitwe). Ethical principles, including beneficence, ensured the respect, confidentiality, and protection of participants. This approach fostered trust and encouraged vendors to share their experiences openly.

Population

According to Singh & Malik,⁶⁷ population is the set of individuals along with alike characteristics from which the sample is drawn and to which the results of the study are intended to be applied. This means that it is the whole team the researcher wants to pick up about; while the sample is the smaller team, the researcher actually to represent the population.

Sampling Methods and a Sample

Sampling Methods

Sampling is the process of selecting participants from a study population.⁶⁸ Sampling methods are techni-

⁶⁶ Skinner (2008), p.12

⁶⁷ Singh & Malik (2022), p. 33

⁶⁸ Creswell & Clark (2012), p.155

ques or “methods of arriving at a sample size.”⁶⁹ According to Creswell & Clark,⁷⁰ Purposive Sampling is a method whereby one identifies the purposively selected sites or individuals for the proposed study, and this is common in qualitative research. A Purposive Sampling Approach (PSA) was used to select vendors who could provide rich insights into the topic. Purposive Sampling is used in qualitative designs to allow the researcher select those participants who will provide the richest information those who are most interesting and those who manifest the characteristics of most interested to the study.⁷¹ The participants selected based on purposive sampling were mainly the leaders chosen in accordance with their roles. This method ensured that there was broad based representation of respondents among the stakeholders of interest. In addition, this method ensured that data was gathered from people who had information readily available. Diversity in age, gender, type of goods sold, and vending location was considered. In total, about 12 vendors were interviewed, and three (3) focus groups were held. This number was sufficient to reach a point where new interviews were no longer adding new information, which is known as ‘data saturation’, sometimes also called ‘Theoretical Saturation’.⁷² Despite this, care was taken to ensure that diverse voices were represented. The information collected was analyzed using a phenomenological method. Literature by Bailey-Collins⁷³ suggests that phenomenology provides a lens for understanding the “lifeworld” of actors, showing how abstract policies or structures are interpreted in everyday contexts. Consequently, according to Bailey-Collins⁷⁴ the ‘phenomenological method’ is a way of doing research that tries to understand people’s real-life experiences. It does this by setting aside the researcher’s assumptions and focusing on how experiences appear to participants themselves. Consequently, important statements were identified, grouped into themes, and transformed into descriptions capturing the essence of vendors’ realities. Furthermore, thematic analysis highlighted common survival strategies and coping practices. Therefore, studies by Aye⁷⁵ suggested that these approaches enhanced both detail and reliability, ensuring that findings were rigorous, trustworthy, and reflective of participants’ lived experiences in Kitwe.

Study Sample

A sample is defined as ‘a subset of individuals or units drawn from a larger population to study, since examining every member of a population is rarely practical.’⁷⁶ Kombo & Tromp,⁷⁷ add that a sample involves a set of respondents (users) selected from a larger population for the purpose of a survey, and it helps to create conclusions and generalizations. In research, the sample provides the basis for making inferences about the wider population, and its size and composition influence the validity of conscious and the extent to which findings can be generalized. To create good conclusions and generalizations, the study should have a sizeable number of respondents that form the sample size. This study, being qualitative research, the researcher used a sample size of 12 respondents.

⁶⁹ Mugenda (2003), p.50

⁷⁰ Creswell & Clark (2012), p.155

⁷¹ Best & Kahn (2009), p.12

⁷² Hossain et al, (2024), p.160

⁷³ Bailey-Collins (2023), p. 27

⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 14

⁷⁵ Aye (2017), p.12

⁷⁶ Sarun (2026), p.316

⁷⁷ Kombo & Tromp (2014), p.78

Ethical consideration

Studies by Ambrosj et al,⁷⁸ recommend that ethical considerations in research involve respecting participants' rights, avoiding harm, and ensuring integrity in the research steps. Likewise, Roehrig et al,⁷⁹ emphasize that ethical practices safeguard participant rights and uphold integrity, thereby preventing misconduct and promoting responsible conduct. According to Wimmer & Dominick⁸⁰, ethical considerations were carefully observed throughout the research process. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from relevant authorities and participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Moyo & Gumbo⁸¹ suggested that Consent forms safeguarded their rights⁸² and personal identifiers were excluded from the final report.⁸³ The researcher maintained decorum by dressing formally, showing respect, and fostering a friendly atmosphere, while practicing reflexivity to minimize bias and ensure fair interpretation. Accordingly, the main considerations applied during this study-included permission for the research, confidentiality, mien and decorum, and safe info storage. Before getting to the field to collect data, the researcher ensured that the required permissions (verbal and written) were obtained from relevant authorities. Firstly, the research proposal was presented to the supervisor for review. Then, a letter of introduction and authorization to conduct the research was obtained from the Head of the University of Lusaka (UNILUS) Post Graduate Studies. Finally, the researcher prepared a personal letter of introduction, assuring participants that their involvement was voluntary and that strict confidentiality would be maintained. All information collected was treated with discretion, and identities were protected to ensure privacy throughout the study. Studies by Kang,⁸⁴ 'confidentiality' is the ethical obligation of researchers to protect participants' identities and personal information from unauthorized disclosure, ensuring sensitive information remain safe and accessible only to authorized individuals.

Mien & Decorum

The researcher maintained professionalism by observing a formal dress code during data collection, showing respect and aligning with local norms. A friendly atmosphere was cultivated, and good conduct upheld in interactions with respondents. Respect was extended to all participants, while harm was prevented through kindness, emphasizing protection and well-being. Participants felt their voices were heard, fostering trust and openness. Finally, reflexive practice ensured biases did not compromise credibility or ethical integrity, reinforcing the study's ethical foundation

Data Storage

Researchers Naikwade, et al,⁸⁵ have demonstrated that sound info security practices must include encryption and limits to access in maintaining privacy. On top of that, Vimalapriya, et al,⁸⁶ discuss the role of password-protection and privacy-preserving technologies in protecting sensitive information, noting that the importance is more than just info security; also at stake is human privacy. In line with

⁷⁸ Ambrosj, et al.(2024), pp. 22–25

⁷⁹ Roehrig et al.(2026), pp.14–17

⁸⁰ Wimmer & Dominick (2011), p. 94

⁸¹ Moyo & Gumbo (2021), p. 148

⁸² Wimmer & Dominick (2011), p. 95

⁸³ Moyo & Gumbo (2021), p. 148

⁸⁴ Kang (2023), pp.12-15

⁸⁵ Naikwade et al (2026), p. 112-118

⁸⁶ Vimalapriya et al (2026), p.77-83

recommendations, study data remained confidential: instruments secured in lockbox, digital files stored on encrypted drives, password-protected programs accessible only to the researcher.

Data Analysis

According to Naikwade et al,⁸⁷ data analysis are the step of applying systematic and replicable ways for organizing and interpreting information, thereby identifying patterns, themes, and relationships that assist valid inferences and contribute to knowledge claims. That way, findings are ensured to be evidence-based. The analysis of this study was guided by a qualitative phenomenological orientation, which was particularly suited to illuminating the lived realities of street vendors in Kitwe. According to Jongh,⁸⁸ regulation, through phenomenology, was understood not as abstract policy but as a daily encounter that vendors negotiate, resist and adapt to. This approach highlighted participants' voices, letting their own views on governance come through. To preserve the richness of participants' accounts, interviews and focus groups were transcribed verbatim, transcripts anonymized and field notes added contextual points. Importantly, Nvivo software was employed to organize the information, yet the emphasis remained on capturing meaning rather than reducing data to numbers. In addition, a systematic break down of analysis revealed the recurring patterns. The initial findings, such as 'exclusion, negotiation and threat', rose through open coding, with words like 'fear of crack downs' repeatedly surfacing. Subsequently, axial coding connected these terms to broader ideas, linking regulation along with mutual assistance. In the wrap up, selective coding synthesized these strands into a coherent picture, showing that vendors making space in the city was not random survival but rather shaped by power structures and belonging.⁸⁹ Literature by Howell et al,⁹⁰ suggests that this process builds on the principle of structured coding in qualitative research, which enhances trustworthiness by transforming raw statements into organizing themes. Accordingly, fragments of data were clustered into categories such as governance fluidity, adaptive strategies and identity work.⁹¹ Selective coding refined these into central themes that captured the lived realities of vendors. In addition, triangulation across interviews, centered on groups, and observations strengthened credibility, ensuring that themes reflected shared experiences rather than isolated accounts, ensuring that themes reflected shared experiences rather than isolated accounts. From these steps, four themes emerged. First, governance fluidity was evident as regulation shifted back and forth between tolerance and repression.⁹² From this process, four main themes came out. Second, strategic identity work, where vendors resisted stigma by reframing their contributions as legitimate.⁹³ Third, moral judgments, along with authorities portraying vending as disorderly while vendors' emphasized necessity.⁹⁴ Taken together, the interpretation of these findings directly addressed the objectives of the study. The revealed experiences of vendors revealed regulation as both restrictive and enabling, shaping meaning making around survival. The theoretical lens provided further insight: urban informality blurred boundaries between formal and informal economies; neoliberal urbanism explained how modernization agendas marginalised traders; agency and collective organizing highlighted resilience through

⁸⁷ Naikwade et al. (2026), pp.112-118

⁸⁸ Jongh (2021), pp.134-138

⁸⁹ Acosta et al. (2024), p.52

⁹⁰ Howell et al. (2022), pp.102-105

⁹¹ Wei (2026), p. 417

⁹² Lata (2023), pp.44-47

⁹³ Van et al. (2020), pp.335-338

⁹⁴ Dovey & Stephens (2023), p.118

associations; and assemblage theory emphasized governance as fluid, contested and co-produced.⁹⁵ The findings revealed regulation reshapes profit, mobility and livelihood stability, while also producing exclusion and vulnerability, highlighting its dual role in vendors' everyday urban lives.⁹⁶ Despite restrictive laws, vendors demonstrated resilience and agency, underscoring the ongoing struggle for recognition and inclusion within contested urban governance.

Findings.

Street Vending in Kitwe: Regulation, Vulnerability and Collective Agency in Urban Citizenship struggles

The study shows that street vendors in Kitwe live with constant tension between restrictive rules and the order those rules provide. Many felt regulations tied their hands, limiting where they could sell and forcing movement when authorities appeared, yet some admitted that without regulation the streets might collapse into disorder. According to Jongh,⁹⁷ many vendors felt that rules made their work harder, since they could not choose freely where to sell and mostly had to pack up and move whenever officials showed up. At the same time, some admitted that without any rules the streets could become messy and disorganized, so they saw regulations as a way to keep things under control. This shows how informal work in African cities is both a way to survive and a source of conflict. One vendor explained it clearly: *'The council tells us to move, but if we don't, they chase us. It feels unfair, but without rules the streets would be chaotic.'* Fear and worry came up often in the interviews. Vendors spoke about the stress of not knowing if their goods would be taken or if they would be forced to move from their spot. Scholars such as Peimani & Kamalipour⁹⁸ argue that vulnerability reflects how everyday structures shape the way people interpret space, and that lived experience is deeply tied to emotions. One vendor captured this clearly: *'Every day I worry, will they confiscate my goods? It makes me feel powerless.'* Emotions were only part of the story. Vendors also felt that regulations defined their place in the city. Many saw themselves as outsiders, excluded from the formal economy. According to Jongh,⁹⁹ governing systems in Kitwe place traders in uncertain zones, caught between legality and illegality. These conditions make informal work a central site of urban citizenship struggles. Building on this, Van et al.¹⁰⁰ show that forms of "street citizenship" emerge from everyday informal practices, where marginalized groups contest belonging and rights in African cities. Vendors' stories in Kitwe reinforce Jongh's findings: traders constantly navigate shifting rationalities and agency under regulation. Methodologically, Englander & Morley¹⁰¹ emphasize that phenomenological interviews are essential for capturing lived strategies, while Skinner points out that observation often reveals practices interviews miss. This combination of approaches helps uncover the full picture of how vendors manage uncertainty. Finally, Azunre & Cobbinah¹⁰² highlight solidarity as another strong theme. Vendors often relied on each other for support, showing that collective bonds are central to surviving and resisting exclusion in the urban informal economy. Regarding focus groups, the vendors described how they warned each other when patrols came and pooled resources to cope. One vendor

⁹⁵ Dovey & Recio (2024), p.2271

⁹⁶ Naikwade et al. (2026), pp.112-118

⁹⁷ Jongh (2021), p.85

⁹⁸ Peimani & Kamalipour (2022), pp.829-832

⁹⁹ Jongh (2021), pp. 134-138

¹⁰⁰ Van et al (2022, pp. 77–80

¹⁰¹ Englander & Morley (2023), p.30

¹⁰² Azunre & Cobbinah (2025), pp.68-73

explained, ‘*when they come, we shout to each other. Alone, cannot survive.*’ This reflects those findings on collective survival strategies and the emphasis on the women’s collective agency in informal economies. In the end, negotiation along with authorities was part of everyday life. Additionally, some vendors admitted making tiny payments or informal deals to keep working. Finally, studies by Hossain et al,¹⁰³ argue that phenomenological approaches highlight how rules are lived and negotiated not just imposed and this was evident in the vending spaces in Kitwe.

Linking the purpose of the study to the research questions

The study examined how street vendors in Kitwe interpret their everyday experiences along with street vending regulations and how interactions along with authorities shape survival strategies. Using a phenomenological approach, the research lived meanings rather than viewing regulations entirely formal rules. The findings reveal that regulations are experienced as everyday forces influencing mobility, safety, identity, emotion and community. Regulation is therefore, understood as a negotiated process, where enforcement is not one-directional but along with the vendors adoption, negotiation and collective coping highlighting their agency in sustaining livelihoods under restrictive urban governance.

Vendors’ everyday interpretations of Regulation

Due to the regulatory restrictions, many vendors described a persistent tension between being governed and being controlled. They often felt the rules ‘tied their hands,’ limiting where they could sell and forcing frequent movement when enforcement officers appeared. The presence of authorities was seen as an immediate risk that turned vending spaces unstable. Even so, some vendors acknowledged regulation’s stabilizing role in public space. Thus, rules viewed as both oppressive and connected to maintaining public order.

Emotional Meanings: Fear, Anxiety, and Vulnerability

Moreover, fear and anxiety were regular in interviews, linked to worries about confiscation or relocation. Vendors showed that regulation works both psychologically and materially, along with unpredictable enforcement creating constant vigilance. One vendor felt powerless, saying confiscation could occur ‘every day.’ These experiences highlight how rules shape emotions, meaning and everyday life beyond simple compliance.

Regulation as a Boundary for Belonging

The vendor’s perspectives show that regulations shaped how they understood their place in the city. Through their lived experiences, rules were not seen as neutral instructions but as boundaries that defined inclusion and exclusion. Regulations influenced identity and citizenship struggles, while vendor’s interpretations revealed how these rules communicated belonging within the urban economy.

How Authorities shape survival strategies and adaptive practices.

Authorities in Kitwe played a central role in shaping how vendors survived and adapted within the informal economy. Because enforcement was frequent and unpredictable, vendors were compelled to develop flexible routines that allowed them to respond quickly to sudden patrols or regulatory pressures.

¹⁰³ Hossain et al, (2024), pp.160-163

They shifted stalls rapidly, sold smaller quantities to reduce losses, and hid goods to avoid confiscation, showing how regulation directly influenced everyday practices. At the same time, negotiation and informal coping mechanisms emerged, with vendors making discreet payments or arrangements to gain temporary tolerance, turning regulation into something actively navigated rather than passively endured. Solidarity also became a vital survival tool, as vendors warned each other of patrols, pooled resources, and relied on collective resilience to withstand enforcement pressures. Taken together, these strategies highlight that survival was not random but structured by the constant presence of authority, underscoring how regulation shaped mobility, routines, and community bonds in the vending economy of Kitwe.

Enforcement triggers adaptation and tactical mobility

In Kitwe, enforcement encounters were frequent and unpredictable, compelling vendors to adopt survival strategies. They shifted stalls quickly when patrols appeared, sold smaller quantities to minimize losses, and hid goods to avoid confiscation. These encounters reorganized routines and reflected practical intelligence shaped by repeated exposure to enforcement. Because enforcement was urgent and sudden, adaptation was essential. The strategies of vendors underscored how regulation influenced informal practices while highlighting resilience. Survival in Kitwe's vending economy depended on flexibility, negotiation, and the ability to respond effectively to shifting authority pressures.

Negotiation and informal coping mechanisms

Furthermore, vendors engaged in informal negotiation with authorities, gaining temporary tolerance through small payments or discreet arrangements that lowered immediate risk. Observations confirmed these exchanges were subtle yet normalized in vending life. Regulation thus became something vendors actively navigated. Consequently, relationships with enforcement actors were shaped by negotiation, improvisation, and strategic compliance, highlighting how informal practices adapt to regulatory pressures in everyday urban contexts.

Solidarity as protection and collective resilience

Moreover, solidarity emerged as a central theme in focus groups. Vendors warned each other of patrols, pooled resources to withstand enforcement, and emphasized that survival was harder alone. Solidarity functioned as an informal safety system, enabling anticipation and rapid response to enforcement. It also strengthened community bonds, transforming vulnerability into resilience and shaping everyday practices within Kitwe's informal vending economy.

Bringing it together: What the findings mean overall

The study shows that street vending regulations in Kitwe are lived as complex, emotionally charged realities. Regulations act not only as external constraints but are internalized through fear, adaption and identity. Interactions with authorities directly shape the work, locations and strategies of vendors. This phenomenological perspective frames regulation as lived process rather than a written policy, revealing human consequences of the enforcement in informal economies.

Philosophical alignment: Why phenomenology fits these findings

Considering the philosophical underpinning, phenomenology is appropriate because it treats meaning as something constructed through lived interaction. Since vendors interpret regulation through daily

experiences, knowledge in this study is created through dialogue and narrative. Therefore, the findings are top understood as insights into the life world of vendors how they create sense of rules, authority, and survival under everyday pressure. Ultimately, this philosophical foundation supports the attempt of qualitative ways for capturing the richness of lived face. It also positions the researcher as a facilitator of understanding rather than a detached observer, requiring reflexivity and sensitivity to power dynamics within the research steps. Therefore, the study contributes not just to policy debates, but also additionally to a deeper appreciation of the human dimension of informal economies.

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Conclusion

This study explored how street vendors in Kitwe navigate street vending regulations and how daily interactions with local authorities shape survival strategies. The findings reveal that regulations are not merely written rules but lived realities embedded in everyday life. The vendors often felt restricted, forced to move, or hide goods and lived with fear of confiscation. Yet some acknowledged that rules prevent disorder. Importantly, the vendors demonstrated resilience by adapting creatively by shifting stalls quickly, selling smaller amounts, negotiating discreetly with officials and supporting one another through collective networks. These actions show that vendors are not passive victims but active participants who continually negotiate their livelihoods. These actions show that vendors are not passive victims but active participants who continually negotiate their livelihoods. As a result, regulation emerges as a two-sided reality. As a result, regulation emerges as a two sided reality, providing order while at the same time imposing hardship. Policy makers should therefore design rules that balance urban management with livelihood protection, recognizing informal trade as crucial to the economy of the city. While limited to Kitwe and a small sample, the study calls for further research across cities in Zambia, with attention to gender, technology, and urban planning. Ultimately, listening to vendors highlights regulation both as a challenge and as an opportunity, demanding fair and inclusive governance.

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