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# Governing Urban Informality in an Era of Change: Street Trading in Dire Dawa, Ethiopia

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**ABSTRACT**

This article examines the governance of informality in Ethiopia using the data collected during 2016 and March 2019 in Dire Dawa. Using emergent methods and based on primary data gathered using survey, key informant and in-depth interviews, observation and secondary data collected by examination of regulatory documents and institutions, it investigates how the governance of informality operated and has changed in the wake of political and economic reforms sweeping the country. Survey participants (198) were selected using time-location sampling technique. The city has applied decentralized, a piece of the bundle, approach in governing street trading by deploying 'denb askebari', code enforcement, from the kebeles until the political change. But following the change, it has revised the regulation and started a centralized approach where denb askebari deployed directly by the city municipality. The city's approach has been driven by the neoliberal perspective of the ideal city vision. City authorities having little understanding of livelihood trajectories of traders; and innovative approaches of governing; have employed repressive and tolerant approaches. Moreover, traders were not seen as part of the economic reform. It is therefore strongly recommended that the city should apply innovative approaches in governing urban public spaces where street traders' livelihood depend.

**Keywords***:* Informality; Governance; Street trade

## 1. Introduction

Like many developing countries, informality is observed in almost all sectors of the Ethiopian urban economy. It is found in transport, trade, services, agriculture, public services and many more (CSA, 2018). Street trading is a key element of Ethiopia's informal economy, but is under researched. Nevertheless, street traders are widespread in the

major towns of the country. It is apparent that the traders tend to concentrate in areas dominated by transport and commercial functions. Some street trading activities are associated with other functions of the city where traders try to take advantage of the agglomeration and traffic to access a wide array of potential customers (Dube, 2017). As a result, more traders are usually found in larger cities and towns in Ethiopia. It is thus evident that the larger the size and the greater the diversity of the economy of urban centres tends to attract large number of street vendors in the context of Ethiopia.

In the wider African context, there have been extensive studies of street traders' associational characteristics, the legal context, and empowerment initiatives (Roever, 2016; Roever and Skinner, 2016). However, there is relatively little research into the contested relationship between street traders and local governments. In the context of Sub-Saharan Africa, the municipal responses to informality ranges between 'violent repression and sustained evictions to inclusive and support policies' (Rogerson, 2016). According to Lindell (2008), there has been 'fragmented and fluid urban governance in the context of widespread informalisation'. Morange (2015) discussed the role of private sector in the governance of street trade that, in the final analysis, helped frame and redefine the relationship between street traders and the local governments. Moreover, informal governance and management of street vendors have been observed in many cities in Asia and Africa (for example, in China, in Zimbabwe).

The history of Ethiopia tells us that it has long been a centralized unitary state. But, it is emerging from a centrally controlled economy by reducing the role of state in the economy. Thus, the country is in a period of intense political and economic change. With the coming to power of the new Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed in March 2018, Ethiopia has been going through major political and economic reforms. The political economy discourse dominantly based on *Revolutionary Democracy* and *Developmental State* is now highly disputed. As such, the state is compelled to gradually transform from more socialist political economy to a liberal one by reducing the role of state in the economy and economic open up programmes that would ultimately aim to privatization of state owned enterprises. Apart from this, Ethiopia envisages becoming a *lower middle income* country by 2025. Towards this grand goal, it has developed a series of five year plans, *Growth and Transformations Plans* (GTPs), since 2010. GTP I (2010/11-2014/15) has been implemented and the progress has been evaluated. At present, Ethiopia is in the final implementation phase of GTP II (2015/16-2019/20) (MoFED, 2010; 2016). Both GTPs were developed and implemented by formal sector in mind and a modernist view of the city where formalization was largely emphasized.

Ethiopia has also been facing ethnic unrest, some of the major conflicts have occurred between Oromia and Ethiopian Somali regions in the Eastern Ethiopia that that caused over one million internally displaced inhabitants (IDPs) in 2018 alone (The United Nations Office for Humanitarian Affairs [UNOCHA], 2018). The city of Dire Dawa has been known for being a center of transport and commerce (Baldet, 1970; Solomon, 2008). It has been also one of the major centers of contraband trade in the Eastern Ethiopia. With a population of over 465,592 (Estimate for 2017), Dire Dawa is the second largest city in Ethiopia. The population of Dire Dawa is projected to be 771, 618 in 2037. The urban population has accounted for about 63% (293,353) in 2017 and is expected to increase to about 69% (533,127) in 2037 (CSA, 2013). Dire Dawa is a multiethnic city where no single ethnic group constitutes over half of the urban population. It is the chartered city that lies between the two regions of Oromia and Ethiopian Somali re-

 

gion and nearby the city of Harar. The city also lies at the junction of key overland trade routes from Djibouti and Somaliland. These contextual factors make it a particularly interesting location to study.

A study of street trading in Ethiopia at this juncture is particularly interesting because such a political transition usually makes street traders more vulnerable than any other occupational groups in the informal economy (Kayuni & Tambulasi, 2009).This paper examines the governance of informality amid political and economic changes taking place in Ethiopia, focusing on street trading in Dire Dawa city. Governance is defined according to UNDP (2009:5) as"about the powers by which public policy decisions are made and implemented. It is a result of interactions, relationships and networks between different sectors and involves in decisions, negotiate and different power relations between stakeholders to determine who gets what, when and how."In light of this definition, governing is conceptualized as having control or rule over street trade in Dire Dawa. It is noted that cities are deeply embedded in a web of institutional, economic, and political constraints which creates a set of complex contingencies in the process of governing (Avis, 2016).

In this study, street traders were viewed as components of the urban economy and economic agents in the urban informal economy in particular. They depend on working in the right and a convenient location in the city to earn their livelihoods. Thus, we argue that they should receive respectful attention in any reform endevour in the country. Nonetheless, policies, programmes, and regulatory measures are often enforced with little understanding of the situation of street traders and without involving them. The study, therefore, argues for the innovative approaches of accommodating of traders to ensuring sustainable governance of of street trade in the city. The article contributes to the ongoing debate about the innovative mechanisms of accommodating street traders in the cities of global south. The paper employs a rights-based approach "right to the city" (Lefebvre, 1968) as an analytical framework. The major question it attempts to answer is how the prevailing political and economic reforms are affecting street traders through the governance approach applied on the ground. The study, therefore, investigates the governance of informality with specific focus on street trading by drawing data from Dire Dawa city.

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Description of the Study Area

The Dire Dawa city is found in eastern Ethiopia, located at 515kms to the east of Addis Ababa, 55kms to the north of Harar and 313kms to the west of Djibouti. The construction of 781kilometers of railway line connecting Addis Ababa to port Djibouti led to the emergence of Dire Dawa city. The city was founded in 1902 after the Addis Ababa- Djibouti Railway reached the area where the city was built. When the construction of the railway line was completed in 1908, the city's ascendancy in commerce had become apparent, replacing the role of Harar in Eastern Ethiopia (Dire Dawa Administration Bureau of Finance and Economic Development [DDA BoFED], 2014).

Dire Dawa is one of two chartered cities in Ethiopia; the other being the capital, Addis Ababa. It is administratively divided into two, the city proper and the surrounding rural part of the Administration. According to Proclamation No. 416/2004 (FDRE, 2004), the Administration has two tiers, i.e., the Administration and *kebeles*. The middle administrative tiers of sub-cities, which are common in other larger urban centres of Ethiopia, are missing in Dire Dawa. This makes the city unique in terms of administrative structure. The Administration is a governing body of both the urban and the rural *kebeles*. The Bureau of Construction and Municipal Services is responsible for

 

efficient and effective service delivery and construction activities of the city. The urban *kebeles* are responsible for administering local issues, including organizing and mobilizing the community in development activities, social and security issues within their jurisdiction. According to DDA BoFED (2013) the Dire Dawa Administration has 32 rural and 9 urban *kebeles*.

Since no single ethnic group constitutes about half of the total in the ethnic composition, the city has been largely considered as a multiethnic and cosmopolitan city (Shiferaw, 1989; Asnake, 2014). Due to this, the administrative apparatus of Dire Dawa is different from other cities in other regions of the country. It is a chartered city, like the capital Addis Ababa, and administered by two political parties representing the Somali, Somali Peoples Democratic Party (SPDP) and Oromo Ethnic groups, Oromo Peoples Democratic Organization (OPDO). Currently, the Dire Dawa Administration attempted to approve 40:40:20 administrative arrangements of local administration where 40% each to the Oromo and Somali Ethnic groups while the remaining 20% to other ethnic groups in the local administration and civil services. However, due to severe opposition from the city residents, widespread protests and social media activities, this rule has been corrected as 40:60 where 40% for SPDP and 60% for Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Front (EPRDF), a coalition of four parties (Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF); Amhara Democratic Party (ADP); Oromo Democratic Party (ODP) and South Ethiopia Peoples Democratic Movement (SEPDM) representing four major regions of the country, in civil service and local administration (Addis Standard, March 20, 2019).

### 2.2. Research Methods and Techniques

This article is based on data collected in Dire Dawa city in two phases; 2016 and 2019. While much of the data were collected during the 2016); an attempt was made to visit the city on March 2019 to collect relevant up-to-date data on the governance of informality and street trading in the city. A variant of multi-stage sampling, TLS (Time-Location Sampling) procedure was employed to select 198 street traders participated in the survey. Using initial observation, it appeared that street trading is location-sensitive business which is largely associated with the specific function of the area. Therefore, the major principles that dictated the selection of trading cluster sites included the following. Firstly, it was intended to include the major street trading cluster sites identified through mapping survey. Secondly, mobile street traders, locally known as *jeblo* should also be included. Thirdly, the selection procedure should ensure representatives which had to make statistical inference possible.

Because of the absence of statistics, this is used as sampling frame to draw sample street vendors. It was, again, assumed that the above vendors attend respective places during peak hours of vending. It was identified that street vendors work the whole week, but their concentration was higher in the morning from 10:00am to 1:00pm and in the afternoon from 4:00pm to 7:00pm for both weekdays and weekends. The sampling framework consists of Venue-Day-Time Units (VDT) or Primary Sampling Units (PSU) since these considered representing the potential universe (vendors) of venues, days and times. The primary data collection involved principally four approaches comprising of field observation, questionnaire survey with 198 street traders, key informal interview with Municipal Officers, Kebele Managers, Code Enforcement Officers, Trade and Revenue Officers and & in-depth interview with twelve vendors. During the second field work (March 2019), Code Enforcement Director at the Dire Dawa Municipality and seven vendors were interviewed on the political and economic changes and

 

the effects of these on the governance of street trade in the city. In collecting the primary data, ethical principles (confidentiality, anonymity, consent) adhered to by the researcher. Secondary data from various sources were also sought. As the study is not explanatory in its design, data gathered by way of survey, interviews, observation and from secondary sources analysed and presented in descriptive manner. The following briefly discusses the major findings of the study.

## 3. Result and Discussion

### 3.1. Socio-demographic and economic background of respondents

The purpose of this section is to discuss the governance of street trading in the Dire Dawa city. It primarily focuses on exploring the institutional and regulatory frameworks and practices that govern the informal economy and the street trading in the city. The entry point to examine the governance of informality with a focus on street trading in Dire Dawa is the erratic application of regulations. The city officials have erratically enforced regulations with little understanding of the trading. As such they mixed subtle control with some level of tolerance. The existing regulations and interviews conducted with officials and vendors revealed that street vendors were considered not as an integral component of the socioeconomic and socio-spatial fabric of the city.

In relation to locational functions, about 70 % of traders vend near formal markets, namely *Ashewa*,*Qefira*, *Sabean*, and *Taiwan* (Dire Dawa Market), and about 30 % work in different locations attached to social, administrative, recreational and cultural institutions indicating street traders' strong linkage with the existing markets both spatially, functionally and economically. Most traders sell clothes (new and second-hand), shoes and belts (39%), fruits, vegetable and chat (13%), foods and drinks (12%) and other items (24%). Gender distribution of respondents was overwhelmingly male (62.1%) versus female (37.9%). The age distribution shows that it is dominated by young below 30 years (60%). In terms of marital status, single (54%), married (33%), divorced, separated and widowed (13%) suggesting the high tendency for unmarried to engage in street trading in the city.

Looking at the ethnic composition, *Guragh*e (28.3%), *Oromos (*22.2%), were *Somalis (*13.6%), *Amhara (*11.6%), *Hadiya*, *Kembata*, *Wolayta*, *Tigraway (*20.9%), other constitute three percent. Educationally, the illiterate accounted for about 22 percent while 11 percent reported that they are able to read and write. Among the literates, those who have some primary education were slightly over one-third (36%), followed by those with secondary education which constituted slightly over one-fourth (27%) of the total. Another interesting feature about street traders in the city was that those who have some tertiary education (4%) found street trading as source of their livelihoods. Moreover, migrants account for 62% of all street traders included in the study during the time of survey in Dire Dawa. This study produced results on migration and informality which corroborate the findings of a great deal of the previous work in this field (for instance, Mesfin, 2009; Rogerson, 2016).

### 3.2. Conceptualizing Governance, formal and informal

Governance implicatively insinuates that the notions of sundry stakeholders, including the state involve in governance of the city and it signifies different to different contexts and people. But the governance of street trading refers to "the ways in which a variety of stakeholders beyond the state intervene through negotiation, contestations, coalitions and oppositions" (Bénit-Gbaffou, 2018a:398). Concretely street trade governance more centrally fixates on the multiple engagements between traders, the state and other actors. It could be formal and informal

 

as it may involve both actors in the process. Categorical to street trade, formal governance implicatively insinuates the licit and institutional frameworks and practices for managing street trading. On the other hand, informal governance refers to informal interactions, relationships and networks involved in decisions and practice that affect street trading. Governance is intricate, it is not just about the formal structures of city regime, but encompasses a host of economic and convivial forces, institutions and relationships (Avis, 2016).

The World Bank (2015) argues that urbanization needs proactive management if it is to work for people and the economy. This is concretely paramount for countries like Ethiopia to fixate on institutions that involve in urban governance in an aspiration to become a middle income by 2025. Benit-Gbaffou (2015) cautions that restrictive approaches were not only unsustainable but additionally constrains development. Moreover, the mobility of vendors and the fluidity of the sector have withal made its management arduous. Virtually, however, there has been ostensible national-local as well as policy-implementation gaps. Moreover, the predominance of economic focus; ignoring the spatial and gregarious implicative insinuations and imperatives were other bottlenecks. Amis (2010) argues that cities eradicate the livelihoods of those in the informal economy; neither enhances nor bulwark nor enhance their assets. Formal governance of public spaces has additionally witnessed many quandaries in the contexts of developing countries. For example, Racaud, et al.,(2018) has outlined the nebulous licit and institutional frameworks and belligerent working environment are identified as the drivers of conflictual utilization of public spaces in many African cities. Predicated on her study, Benit-Gbaffou (2018b) explored how the city of Johannesburg has manufactured the concept of 'ungovernability' of street trading. The study further illustrates the paramountcy of unpacking state practices cognate to in formalization in the cities of the ecumenical south. Besides the bourgeoning studies on formal governance, there is an emerging body of literature on informal governance of street trade in the developing countries.

Roever (2016) presents the intricate relationships between informal street traders and informal governance of public space predicated on her comparative analysis of the licit reforms in India, South Africa and Peru. Her study further suggests studies into informal governance of public space wherein balance should be made between the right to livelihood and governance of public space. Informal governance emerges where formal mechanisms fail to work amply to address street trading in cities. In informal governance, street traders negotiate to access space and work. Meagher (2011; 2014) studied informal economies and governance in Nigeria predicated on informal sodalities and actors. Her study pointed out informal enterprises sodalities was unable to break through the barriers of gregarious and licit marginalization; and have multiple constraints on their political engagement. As such, besides marginalisation from above, the informal actors face process of disempowerment from below. Predicated on the study street vending police in Taipei Night Market, Chiu (2013) analyzed the political, gregarious and spatial paramountcy of this informal management in order to elucidate one of the ways in which modern cities can benefit from urban policies and orchestrating strategies that support urban informality.

Rights based approach to management and governance of informality is also an emerging issue in the informality literature. Since Lefebvre (1968), the right to the city has become increasingly dominant in the modern urban development debates. Lefebvre's view of the right to the city is essential in a way that it puts forward the rights of the urban inhabitants. He argued that the right to the

city is the right to urban life which would enable its inhabitants full and complete use spaces. Moreover, Harvey pointed out that the right to the city is not only the right to access to space, but also the right to change (Harvey, 2008). These are the right to participation and appropriation. The right to participation concerns with participation of urban dwellers in the decisions that mainly produce space. The right of appropriation, on the other hand, deals with the right to access, habitation and use of space and the creation of new spaces that meet the needs of the inhabitants. Thus, the right to the city involves not only the right to access, but also remaking the city space. According to Brown and Kristiansen (2009) the right to the city is a vehicle for the urban change in which all urban dwellers are urban citizens. It helps empower urban dwellers and ensuring their capacity to have access to urban resources, services, goods and opportunities of the city life and enabling effective citizens' participation in local policies that would affect their livelihoods (UN-Habitat, 2015). The basic guiding principle of the right of the city is that 'cities must develop a vision that integrates everyone'. As such, the right to the city is a dynamic and pragmatic combination of the multiple human rights to which urban dwellers are entitled. In light of the above, it is believed to provide municipal authorities with the platform they need for a wide-range of policies and initiatives that promote inclusive cities (UN-Habitat, 2008).

The right to the city has been used in various countries and cities as conceptual, theoretical and political frameworks (UN-Habitat, 2008). Some scholars have advanced the right to the city concept to more specific economic rights of workers in the informal economy. For example, according to Chen, *et al*. (2013) the legal struggle of street vendors around the world demanded a mix of negative and positive economic rights. Negative economic rights primarily concern with the removal of barriers and constraints and may include the right not to be subjected to harassment, confiscation of goods, evictions and arbitrary warrants and convictions. Positive economic rights concern with the provision of legal and social protections or productivity-enhancing measures and may include the right to vend in public spaces under fair and reasonable restrictions (balancing competing rights of different users of public spaces), to maintain natural markets, to infrastructure services as vending sites.

### 3.3. Informality and street trade in Ethiopia

Informality is a key facet of the urban economy in Ethiopia. The informal sector; without including informal employment in the formal sector, employs sizable portion of the labour force in the major towns of country. In terms of sheer size, *Urban Employment and Unemployment 2018 Report* (CSA, 2018) has showed that 1,343,194 persons were employed in the informal economy in major towns of Ethiopia. The above figure is about one-fifth of the total employment (6,184,590) in all cities and towns covered by the 2018 survey, excluding those in substance agriculture; working in private households or informal employment in the formal sector. Informality varies across cities and regions with a tendency to increase with city size and vice versa.

The informal sector is diversified in Ethiopian towns when considering working spaces. Some work in business houses; at home; in office; on streets; in open market; in farm area and much more. Based on CSA report, street trading accounts for 13% of all informal works nationally; whereas, it accounts for far more than twofold (33%; 6,099 out of 18,369) in Dire Dawa. In the city, most of those engaged in the informal sector have formal education (76%). Those who never attended any formal or non-formal education accounts for about 24%; primary education (46%); secondary education (23%); and only

 

about five percent have tertiary education (CSA, 2018). This is against the commonly held view that most persons in the informal economy in the developing countries are less educated.

Despite the widespread informality, there are relatively few studies conducted on the governance of street vending in the context of Ethiopia. Most of the existing studies have paid substantial attention to its role as a livelihood strategy. Moreover, these studies in Ethiopia view the informal sector as an employer of the last resort and tend to suggest formalization as a solution to informality (Fransen and Van Djik, 2008; Fransen et al.,2010). For example, studies by Awol (2000), Yared (2009) and Jonga (2012) in Addis Ababa and Yenealem (2012) in Jimma and Habtamu (2013) in Hawassa, have focused on the role of street vending as a livelihood strategy, source of income and employment.

The current political changes sweeping Ethiopia provide an interesting context for assessing street trade. As street traders are the most vulnerable sections of society, but they have capabilities and assets with which they use to access space and work on the streets to earn a living. The political changes happening nationally could have a negative or positive impact on traders in different city contexts. For example, the political change has brought about disputed and unstable city and municipal authorities; policy changes and changes on the governance of trading in urban centres. Mayor, policies, regulations, and institutional structures changes now and then that makes traders more vulnerable. For example, the mayor Dire Dawa has been replaced by another mayor in January 2019 (Addis Standard, 2019).

Empirical studies on street trading in urban centres of Ethiopia date back to the late 1990s. Perhaps, the first work of Tsgai Berhane focused on the informal activities, the law and practices in regulating street trading in Addis Ababa (Tsegai, 1998). Moreover, most studies on street vending in Ethiopia have focused on the capital (for example, Awol, 2000; Yared, 2009; Jonga, 2012) for its primacy effect; few focused on regional urban centres like Hawassa (Habtamu, 2013); and Mekele (Filimon, 2011) and medium-sized towns like Jimma (Yeneneh, 2012; Tamirat & Nega, 2015), Dessie (Sebsib, 2015), Hossana (Yemata, 2007) and Gondar (Asfaw, 2008) representing the four leading regions of the country. Most of these studies highly appreciate the survivalist role of street trading while paying little attention to how it should be addressed.

Street trading served as a safety-net for the disadvantaged group in Jimma town (Tamirat and Nega, 2015). As to Sebsib (2015), street trading, *parallel trading*, is the first choice for widowed and divorced women, among alternative businesses, in Dessie town. However, some street traders tend to make the most out of it as a vital occupation in the same town. In Mekele, people join street trading to fight poverty from the streets due to lack of formal jobs, a sense of independency[e] and lack of other options to generate income (Fillmon, 2011). Thus, it is evident that street trading is used as a survival strategy for the urban poor.

Despite the above reasons for engaging in street trading, they traders are vulnerability due to their illegality status. A study by Awol (2000) identified that lack of working place, police harassment and shortage of capital as major constraints facing street traders. The main problems of street traders during startup and operation periods were lack of working place, harassment and eviction from selling places by police and private shop guardians, lack of credit, lack of freedom and social security (Yared, 2009). In Mekele, lack of working premises, financial difficulties in terms of lack of access to credit and capital were identified as major challenges of street vendors (Fillmon, 2011). Jonga (2012) discovered that vending was a

 

risky activity because traders were illegal and have always been harassed by police and established businessmen in Addis Ababa. As evidenced from a study in Jimma, there were confrontations between authorities and traders over licensing, taxation and encroachment of public spaces and pavements (Yeneneh, 2012).

Therefore, since street traders are considered illegal, the response of urban authorities has been harassment and eviction which causes conflicts between authorities and traders. However, traders and local politicians were not sure of the bylaws and regulations that govern street trading as revealed in a study conducted in *Megnangna Square* (junction) of Addis Ababa (Jonga, 2012). Therefore, recent development in the study of street trading have led to a renewed interest in innovative ways of governing and managing street traders in cities of global south.

### 3.4. Policies for Governing Informal Sector in Ethiopia

As discussed above, the informal economy absorbs a significant portion of urban labour force. But, it has received little attention in the National and/or local development plans and strategies. The existing institutions pay much attention to the formal sector. The constitution of Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) clearly states the right to work in Article 41 (1 &2) (FDRE, 1995). Employments in the informal sector and self-employment have received minimal attention despite the economic and social contributions. For instance, the labour proclamation lacked a provision to support the informal sector and the self-employed. This is also true n other policy documents where the sector did not receive a respectful attention. Nonetheless, self-employment has been highly encouraged by the state as the formal sector is unable to absorb the teeming youth, women and migration to cities.

Recognizing the weaknesses of the labour market system and the need to integrate it with economic growth and poverty reduction strategies, the government of FDRE has prepared the National Employment Policy and Strategy (NEPS) in 2009. The NEPS provides a framework for guiding intervention aimed at improving employment. Moreover, five years development plans have been the major roadmaps in Ethiopia. These outline the overall strategic priorities and policies. When critically investigated, neither Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP) (2005/6-2009/10) nor Growth and Transformation Plan I (GTP-I) (2010/11-2014/15) has directly and explicitly addresses the informal sector and street trading. Contrarily, these plans try to address the sector through emphasis given to job creation in Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs). As a continuation of GTP-I, Ethiopia set GTP-II (2015/2016-2019/2020). This plan also sought to foster the governance and management of rapid urbanization with the aim to accelerate economic growth, promote women and youth empowerment, participation and equity. Even though it envisages promoting self-employment; it seems to have to paid little attention to the informal sector and street vending.

The NEPS acknowledges that the informal sector is dominated by the unskilled youth and women, the most vulnerable groups being necessity-driven livelihood. It also asserts that supporting the sector is critical for creating decent jobs as it absorbs a sizable portion of the labour force. The support should be maintaining businesses and eventually transforming them into formal business ventures in the medium- and long-term. In this respect, the major responsible stakeholders to support informal sector and/or small and microenterprises were identified as Technical and Vocational Education Training Institutions (TVET), Micro and Small Scale Enterprise Development Programmes and Micro Finance Institutions (MFIs).

In this article, it was argued that the above approaches may not necessarily address the sector and may not adequately help those who are engaged in it. This is mainly because the sector is very dynamic, possesses autonomous adaptive capacity but elusive. On account of this, it can be argued that the sector deserves special attention in the policies and programs if it has to continue playing appreciable roles by employing sizable portion of youth, migrants and women in major urban centers of the country who would otherwise remain jobless.

Street trading is one of the most visible but hard-to-reach components of the informal economy in many cities of the country. Nevertheless, on its own right, it lacks regulations that demands official recognition and policies to govern in Dire Dawa. The paradox is municipal authorities were struggling to regulate the activities by considering and treating them as *illegals*.

### 3.5. Policies & Institutions in governing Street Vending in Dire Dawa

Conflict between policy objectives and practice has been the most common problem in Ethiopia. This is also evident in the informal sector and street trading in major urban centers of the country. The FDRE constitution clearly states in Article 41 (1 and 2) "everyone has the right to choose and freely engage in an economic activity to pursue a livelihood of his/her choice anywhere within the national territory" (FDRE, 1995). Moreover, the NEPS envisages supporting the informal sector by recognizing its importance in employment creation but aims to formalize. Contrary to this, the local practices in Dire Dawa were aimed at regulating the sector by subtle control mixed with some level of tolerance. There is lack clarity among municipal authorities in understanding street trading-sometimes they refer to the sector as 'illegal activities' and at other times as 'informal activities'. It is with this understanding that they enforce regulations to control street trade in the city.

In most urban centres of Ethiopia, working on the street is prohibited by regulations. These regulations prohibit carrying out some informal works on the streets or public spaces. For example, in the capital Addis Ababa, *The Addis Ababa City Government Executive and Municipal Service Organs Re-Establishment Amendment Proclamation* (Proclamation No. 37/2013) established the Office of Code Enforcement Service. One of the powers and functions of the Office is to "prevent, control and take measures or cause measure to be taken pursuant to the law on non-hygienic, illicit street vendoring [vending], unauthorized construction, illegal land invasion, illegal outdoor advertisement…." It appears from this provision that street vending is among unwanted activities. Similar situations widely prevail in many larger urban centers of the country.

Dire Dawa city has been using the following regulations in governing street trading. These are *Commercial Registration and Business Licensing Proclamation* (Proclamation No. 686/2010) and *Dire Dawa Provision Administration Road Safety Regulation* (Regulation No. 21/1997 E.C [2005 G.C]) and *Dire Dawa city Illegal Activities Prevention and Control Regulation* (Regulation No. 23/2016). According to these, working on the streets, sidewalks and other public spaces, is illegal. In addition, according to Proclamation No.686/2010 (FDRE, 2010), Article 6 (1), "no person shall be allowed to engage in any commercial activities which requires a business license and without having registered in the commercial register with the relevant authority." Moreover, it is stated in Article 31 (1) as "no person shall be allowed to carry on a commercial activity without obtaining a valid business license." The last regulation has been put into effect after September 2018, five months after the political change in the country. The major departure from the previous regulations is

 

that this one uses a centralized approach where code enforcers are directly deployed by the municipality. Nevertheless, street vendors usually respond by employing various spatial and temporal strategies in order to continue earning by vending.

Recognizing the challenges of street trading in the city, the city gave attention to it. Regulating street trading had become part of the city annual plans. For example, the 2013/14 (2005 Ethiopian Fiscal Year [EFY]) and 2014/15 (2006EFY), the plan of the city had stated some goals about the informal sector and street vending. It was intended to identify about 150 enterprises engaged in the informal trade and assist them so that they could be formalized, be registered, receive licenses and would start paying revenue. Particularly, the plan paid attention to identifying individuals who were engaged in the informal sector in the city; creating awareness on the benefits/ advantages of engagement in formal businesses; and facilitating the process of formalization of informal operators as per their preferences.

However, street traders' prefer formalization given the city could provide them working space in a place where they could have exposure to potential customers. Provision of space in the convenient location is one of the most viable options if formalization to succeed. But, these spaces are in the most contested domain in the city. Some interviewed traders reiterated that the *kebele* authorities and code enforcement personnel had urged them to get registered and organized. Traders further reported that sometimes city agents themselves register them in sweeping street operation. The registration is to organize them and give them business training. However, they take no further steps afterwards and this happen many times in a year (Engida and Solomon, 2020; Engida, 2021).

### 3.6. Street Vendor Organizing and Participation in Dire Dawa

Street traders need to have a say in policies, regulations and programmes that would directly or indirectly affect their livelihoods. The FDRE Constitution provides in *Article 31* the right to association as "everyone has the right to association for any cause or purpose" (FDRE, 1995). In the context of Dire Dawa, traders do not participate in any way in all issues that would affect their livelihoods. However, interviews with some fixed traders who vend in the streets near established formal markets indicated that they collaborate with the police in crime prevention as part of the community policing endeavor. For example, they collaborate in fighting theft and robbery near the market. Nevertheless, they were not participating in any of the activities directly related to trading in the streets of the city.

It has been widely known that organizing street traders is one of the ways with which street trading could benefit. This is for the reason that it could provide them the opportunity to have a say through their representatives. It may also help them to negotiate for access and use of public spaces such as streets with city agents mandated to control trading or manage on day-to-day basis. In Dire Dawa, it is unclear as to who should take the initiative or be mandated to organize traders in the city. An interview with a Code Enforcement Officer at points out as:

So far we do not have collected and systematically organized data about street traders in our *kebele*. Sometimes we make sweeping survey of vendors only for reporting purpose. We do not keep such data for further use. The major challenge is that traders invade streets collectively and retreat to other *kebeles* collectively when they sighted us. So far, we haven't organized traders in our *kebele*. This is so because it is unclear as to which body has the mandate to register them and which has to control.

The above situation is quite common in almost all *kebeles* of the Administration. Moreover, an Expert at Trade and Revenue Department shares the above as he said:

There is no systematically collected and stored data about street traders in our *Kebele*. Once we attempted to organize them. In an effort to organize them, when asked some told us that they came from *Melka Jebdu* and some others said they were from *Kezira* and others from *Qefira.* Some even said they were from the rural areas. None of these are in our jurisdiction. This situation has been posing huge challenge on us with respect to managing vending in our *kebele.*

None of the *kebeles* consulted were able to provide any documented data on street trading in their respective jurisdictions and the city-level data either. So, lack of data about street traders has been one of the most serious challenges in the city. In addition, the traders' hard-to-reach nature is also another bottleneck as many of them reside and work in different parts of the city. When asked about what type of membership-based association traders belong to, most of them reported that they do not belong to the formal associations. Interviews with traders also indicated that the formal street traders associations do not exist in the city. However, many of them belong to informal associations among themselves and *idir*. The reasons they mention for joining such informal associations was primarily aimed for mutual help in the time of risks and insecurities. Beyond that, it did not help them to negotiate for access to space for trading in the most convenient streets and locations in the city as they are informal.

In light of the above, Head of Trade and Revenue Department points out the situation as:

We do not have organized data yet. But, vendors in our *kebele* can be estimated to be between 2,000 and 3,000.

To alleviate the problem, we have to move them to the sheds when the construction of these is completed. However, our serious challenge is their address. They come from all *kebeles* and rural areas. For Example, we were in duty today morning. It has become difficult to differentiate the legal vendors from illegal ones in our *kebele*. We are grappling with the illegals who occupy streets near *Qefira* market. It is very challenging. If we simply chase them, that may cause chaos. Since we do not have data about their number and address, we opt to tolerate them.

During our field work in March 2019, the researchers have observed that the city authorities have relocated some street traders who used to work on the sidewalk of the main street in *Sabean* area in Dire Dawa city. Those interviewed explained their grievance about the new location as they could hardly sell as customers do not want to come to the new locations (See Plate 1& 2).

Moreover, an Expert at Trade and Revenue Department shares the same with above as he puts the challenges forward as:

Plate 1 Street vendors selling goods on the sidewalk of the main street in Dire Dawa in 2015

Plate 2 Street vendors relocated temporarily to inconvenient locations away from the main streets in Dire Dawa in 2019

Street vendors create problems in our *kebeles* as they occupy roads, vend unhealthy foods and drinks, compete with legal traders and VAT payers complain as a result. We use consumer protection and trade registration regulations in managing street vending. But, frankly speaking, I cannot tell you that we have managed street vending well. Rather we preferred to tolerate them. This is because if we prohibit them working on the streets, we are aware that many people, their families, shall be affected. Thus, it is challenging. We have made gradual improvements. For example, there is improvement when comparing last year (2005E.C) with this year (2006 E.C). It is possible to clear vendors off streets. But, where should they work? We do not have enough sheds constructed for them. This is the reason we tolerate them in our *kebele*.

Interviews conducted with other individuals of Code enforcement or Trade and Revenue department in other selected *kebeles* reveal more or less the same challenge. Nonetheless, the magnitude of the challenge is severe in *kebele* 02, 06, 07 and 09 for these are where *Sabean*, *Ashewa* and *Qefira* markets are located respectively. In addition, to the views of the officials and experts, some traders also wish to see any lasting solution to be implemented instead of harassing and evicting them simply considering them as *illegals*. Thus, it is evident that street trading been tolerated in the city. The city officials seem to understand the delicate nature of street vending livelihoods. Even though sometimes they conduct operations to clear up; but they also choose to tolerate them. As a solution, most of those who have been interviewed indicated moving vendors into sheds, formal ones. However, they are unaware whether vendors want sheds or not. Vendors prefer space in or near the existing markets where they will be able to get customers. This clearly points out the difference in what is viewed to bring lasting solution to traders between city authorities and vendors. But, city authorities reiterate that street trading remained the most challenging component of informal sector activities in the city. Although, these results substantially differ from some studies in Ethiopia (Mesfin, 2009; Jonga, 2012), they are somehow consistent with those of Brown (2006); Asiedu and Ageyei-Mensah (2008); Njaya (2014); Benit-Gbaffou (2015; 2018a); Racaud**,**et al. **(**2018); and Adama (2020).

## 4. Conclusion

The overarching purpose of this article was to examine the governance of informality in an era of political and economic changes currently sweeping Ethiopia with a focus on street trading in Dire Dawa city. The result of the study showed that most traders are young, single and migrants from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Their socioeconomic and spatial position and the institutional and regulatory environment have been making

their livelihoods precarious as work on the streets is prohibited by the regulations governing public spaces and business. The municipal authorities have enforced these restrictive and punitive regulations erratically. The enforcement is usually without having a proper understanding of the dynamics and trajectories of street trading livelihood.

The study of street trading in the city provides an interesting case of employing decentralized governance followed by a centralized approach. In decentralized approach, law enforcers were deployed by the lowest administrative hierarchy, the *kebeles;* but in decentralized approach, the city municipality directly deploys code enforcers into different parts of the city. Another interesting aspect of this study is that the change to a centralized approach has been coincided with the national change stirring up the country. Since 2006 until 2018, a decentralized approach has been employed; but following the change, the city started to revise the old regulation and restructure the municipal code enforcement services. The major departure in the latter regulation is that it increased the fines levied on those who break the laws by selling on streets. Nevertheless, in both traders are not considered as part of the change and the socioeconomic development process of the city. That is why the city combines use of restrictive regulations to take punitive measures, for example, operation sweeping vendors once or twice a month and some level of tolerance at other times.

They study also pointed out that city officials still believe formalization as a solution to street trading. In this respect, most officials and experts consider street traders as 'illegals'. Moreover, without having a proper instructional setup and mandates, they wanted traders to register. The reports from *kebles* Trade and Revenue Departments indicate the increase in newly registered and licensed traders but does not clearly show whether these are street traders. Nevertheless, the registration appears to provide little protection for street traders as traders are not organized. The city officials opted to relocate traders from main streets to inconvenient locations that reduced customers and caused conflict with private house owners. The relocated traders expressed their unhappiness with the new location.

Therefore, it is evident from the above summary that the local government's i.e. municipal and *kebeles* were poorly informed about innovative ways of accommodating street trading in Dire Dawa as it is the case in most cities of the global south. Moreover, street trading is not seen as part of the economic reforms as most reforms either focus on the formal sector or formalization of the informal sector in the city. But, for street traders the streets near markets are physical assets and therefore preferred locations. To this end, they use spatial and temporal strategies to continue earning by selling on streets of the city. Therefore, if traders are to continue earning from working on streets and public spaces, access and use of these spaces need to be properly understood and addressed by the city authorities.

The institutional and regulatory framework has revealed that there is lack of enabling environment for street traders in the city. The existing regulations that govern the roads safety and business environment criminalize them for working on the streets and without having valid business permit. The institutions mandated to manage street trading largely focus on subtle control such as attempting to sweep traders from streets of the city though usually unsuccessful. The city and the *kebele* Administrations lack data on the basic demographic, socioeconomic and business characteristics of street traders. This made the governance of street trade a more difficult task for the city authorities. Against this, we argued that the activities of institutions aimed at subtle control of vending found to jeopardize the livelihoods of traders.

Given the rapid urbanization due to migration into the city coupled with the absence of other viable options for the migrants, youth and women (the most vulnerable), street trading shall remain the persistent feature of the city. Therefore, municipal authorities should consider street traders as integral element of and positive force in the socioeconomic landscape of the city at large. They should be capacitated with innovative approaches of accommodating street trading where inclusive and participatory approaches could be put in place and practice. When this is so, it is anticipated that street trading livelihood will be enhanced and the city will benefit from street trading in various ways.

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We have no potential conflict of interest to disclose.

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