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## Informal-formal linkages in market and street trading in Accra

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### Abstract

This paper investigates the ways in which linkages between the informal and formal segments of an economy may yield benefits to or impose costs upon informal workers, based on views of informal traders in Accra regarding their relationships with the formal economy and its institutions. The data are drawn from the *Informal Economy Monitoring Study* (IEMS), with a World Bank study of informal household enterprises providing context for the IEMS-Ghana study and a basis for interpretation of its findings. Data from 15 focus groups and a survey of 150 traders from both central and non-central locations of Accra, Ghana, are analysed in terms of traders' relationship to the value chain, non-government institutions, government and the macroeconomy. The last two are found to exert a strong, mostly negative influence on informal operators, offset to some extent by support from member-based organizations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Access to loans from microfinance institutions was an important influence on traders' work and was viewed both positively and negatively. Although there are few visible direct linkages between informal operators and formal firms, they are to some extent mutually interdependent as retailers and suppliers in the value chain. Taking advantage of the potential synergy in informal-formal linkages will require government and other actors to become more proactive in facilitating, rather than denying, infrastructure, support services and adequate space for informal traders. The probability of such an outcome depends on the ability of informal traders to organise themselves.

**Keywords:** Informal economy; Informal-formal linkages; Market traders; Street vendors; Ghana

## **1. Introduction**

Historically, informal activities have often been seen as disconnected from the formal economy, whether due to the nature of the structural relationship between the informal and formal sectors in a capitalist economy, a regulatory framework that disenfranchises informal activities, or the desire of informal workers to escape regulation. Currently, informal work is seen more as an integral part of successful economic growth in an economy such as Ghana's, in which up to 80 per cent of employment is informal (depending on definitions; see Twerefou, 2008; Obeng-Odoom, 2011; Baah-Boateng and Ewusi, 2012). While there are still forces that marginalise informal enterprises and workers, whether within value chains or through contestation for public space, research has established that linkages exist between the formal and informal segments of an economy that may yield benefits to, or impose costs upon, informal workers. The literature establishing the numerous ways in which the informal and formal economies are linked indicates that 'there are benefits and costs to both formality and informality' (Chen, 2005, p. 2) and that 'formal-informal linkages can improve but also worsen the distribution of costs and benefits' (Meagher, 2013, p. 1).

This paper adds to the understanding of the nature of informal-formal linkages as experienced by informal workers who are self-employed as market and street traders. Retailers selling in built markets are generally referred to as 'market traders' and those selling in public places other than a market (such as, in front of homes and by road sides) as 'street vendors' (Vanek, Chen and Raveendran, 2012). We use 'traders' to refer to both categories of retailers, while recognising that our analysis may gloss over differences in how these groups interact with authorities. (The study does not, however, cover itinerant hawkers with no fixed selling location.) We investigate how traders perceive the benefits and costs of their interaction with the formal economy, and the roles that intermediary actors and institutions play in mitigating the risks and enhancing the benefits of these linkages.

The paper draws on the findings for Ghana from two cross-country studies: the *Informal Economy Monitoring Study (IEMS)*, conducted in 11 cities worldwide by the Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) network (Anyidoho, 2013; Roeber, 2014); and the World Bank's study of *Raising Productivity and Reducing Risk of Household Enterprises*, conducted in nine Sub-Saharan African countries (World Bank, 2011a and 2011b). Through analysis of data from a survey and from focus groups, the WIEGO study investigates 'what drives working conditions in different segments of the street ven-

ding population - including the impact of macroeconomic conditions, specific urban policy drivers, and value chain dynamics' (Roever, 2014, p. 7). Based on employment statistics as well as survey data and interviews, the World Bank study assesses the status of household enterprises (operated by self-employed individuals and their family members) and the effects of 'relevant policies, programs and institutions' on their productivity and risks (World Bank, 2011b, p. 1).

Following this introduction, we discuss the theoretical basis of the relationship between the informal and formal economies, and provide context for understanding informal trading in Ghana. We then present the findings of the IEMS-Ghana study and conclude with recommendations for how informal-formal linkages can be strengthened and supported for the benefit of informal workers.

## **2. Conceptions of the informal-formal relationship**

The theoretical literature on informality includes very different perspectives on the relationship between the informal and formal sectors (Portes *et al.*, 1989). Keith Hart (1973) initially observed informal economic activities as 'what people really do for themselves beyond the reach of state regulation... - the negation of the central bureaucracy erected to manage national capitalism' (Hart, 2008, p. 6). *Dualists* (e.g., ILO, 1972) see the informal sector as a departure from the standard capitalist development model, resulting from the population having the wrong skill mix for the market or growing at a faster rate than formal structures can provide wage employment. The *legalist* school (e.g., de Soto, 1989) presents informality as a way 'to avoid the costs, time and effort of formal registration' (Chen 2012, p. 5). In these views, informal enterprises are the consequences of barriers to formal employment and legal status, and operate outside the formal economy and its regulations.

As an alternative to the viewpoint that the informal and formal operate in separate spheres, 'the *structuralist* school sees the informal economy as subordinated economic units (micro-enterprises) and workers that serve to reduce input and labour costs and, thereby, increase the competitiveness of large capitalist firms' (Chen 2012, p. 5, italics in original). From this standpoint, the 'informalisation' of jobs is inevitably driven by capitalist competitive pressures and globalisation, with businesses outsourcing activities to private contractors instead of employing workers in-house. Although this perspective suggests linkages between informal workers and formal businesses, the former are, in practice, entirely dependent on formal businesses without enjoying any of the normal security or benefits of formal employment.

Chen (2005, p. 6) suggests a more integrated approach appropriate to the heterogeneity of informality: ‘some survival activities [have] very few links to the formal economy;...some microentrepreneurs choose to avoid taxes and regulations...some face excessive government regulation; other units...are subordinated to larger firms; [and] most informal enterprises...contribute to economic growth.’ The concept of the *informal economy* thus subsumes both the informal *enterprises* that are the focus of the dualistic and legalistic views and informal *employment*, which includes ‘all employment arrangements that do not provide individuals with legal or social protection through their work...whether or not the economic units they work for or operate in are formal enterprises, informal enterprises or households’ (ILO and WIEGO, 2013, p. 3). In the informal economy, ‘production, distribution and employment relations tend to fall at some point on a continuum between pure “formal” relations (i.e., regulated and protected) at one pole and pure “informal” relations (i.e., unregulated and unprotected) at the other...[with] the formal and informal ends of the economic continuum often dynamically linked’ (Chen, 2005, p. 8). Indeed, Fox and Sohneson (2012, p. ii) argue that ‘household enterprises should be seen as part of an integrated job and development strategy,’ and Ojong (2011, p. 11) recognises that formality is a continuum ‘with workers and units living along the continuum in varying degrees and often operating simultaneously at different points.’

In this integrated approach, not only the behaviours of informal actors but their outcomes are conditioned by the formal economic, policy and institutional environments and actors with which they are linked, whether directly or indirectly (see Meagher 2013 for a useful review of the literature on these linkages). Research on informality in Accra shows explicitly or implicitly that there is considerable interdependence (Adaawen and Jørgensen, 2012; Oteng-Ababio and Amankwaa, 2014), but there is little evidence on the implications of these linkages.

Our study analyses the implications of the situation summarised by Anyidoho (2013, p. 5): ‘informal workers are...linked to the formal economy...[as] part of modern chains of production, distribution and services’ (Anyidoho, 2013, p. 5). In addition to the focus of the structuralist and integrated viewpoints on direct employment and input-output linkages, we also consider less direct linkages through the distribution chain and the consumers that are served. This connection is important because recent literature on the ‘bottom of the pyramid’ suggests that ‘integration of the poor as producers and distributors...using multi-stakeholder partnerships to share the costs and risks’ can better enable them

to benefit from integration into local and global value chains (London and Hart, 2011, cited in Meagher, 2013, p. 16). Our study examines the validity of this claim by examining how traders in Accra perceive the benefits and costs arising from linkages to the formal economy. The linkages that are analysed include positive and negative driving forces in interactions with: national macroeconomic conditions; formal actors in the value chains within which they operate; local governments; and non-governmental agents, including associations and financial institutions.

### **3. Context of market and street trading in Accra**

Globally, informal employment accounts for over half of non-agricultural employment in half of 47 countries for which data are available, and over two-thirds of non-agricultural employment in a third of the countries. For Sub-Saharan African countries, the share of informal employment ranges from 33 to 82 per cent and accounts for 35 to 62 per cent of non-agricultural gross value added (ILO and WIEGO, 2013, pp. xi, 22). Household survey data for Ghana indicate that the overwhelming majority of micro and small enterprises consist of household enterprises; that is, a self-employed individual working alone (72 per cent) or with a family member or casual workers (21 per cent) (Ghana Living Standards Survey 5 [GLSS5], cited in World Bank 2011b, table 1).

Retail trade dominates informal employment, followed by manufacturing, although there has been some shift toward other services, especially in urban areas (World Bank 2011a). Traders (persons selling goods along streets or in public places, including markets) provide a major source of urban informal employment, ranging from 12 to 24 per cent in Sub-Saharan Africa, though somewhat less in other regions (ILO and WIEGO, 2013, p. 47).

Data from GLSS5 show that informal employment has risen slightly in Ghana from 84 per cent in 2000 to 86 per cent in 2010, with a higher share for women than for men (91 and 81 per cent, respectively; for all sectors including agriculture) (Baah-Boateng and Ewusi, 2013, pp. 198 and 202). Specifically, women make up 88 per cent of traders (Budlender, 2011).

The activities of informal traders are affected by macroeconomic factors, as well as by local conditions, policies and institutions. For nearly three decades, Ghana has experienced sustained growth in gross domestic product (GDP) and income, accompanied by steady reduction in poverty. Informal self-employment has made an important contribution, providing an estimated 1 million out of 2.8

million jobs created from 1991 to 2006 and earning income for nearly half of Ghana's households (World Bank, 2011b). Africa-wide data indicate that having a nonfarm enterprise leads to 'greater nonfarm income diversification [and] more rapid growth in earnings and consumption,' as well as household welfare (Barrett *et al.*, 2009).

Ghana's steady GDP and income growth has been associated with substantial financial deepening from 1997 to 2012 (Quartey and Afful-Mensah, 2013). With 41 per cent of the population having an account at a formal financial institution, Ghana has a relatively high rate of financial inclusion among Sub-Saharan African countries, and the number of clients of microfinance institutions (informal as well as formal) grew at 16 per cent per annum over 2001-2012, reaching 6.5 million (GHAMFIN, 2014). Despite growth in real GDP, inflation has fluctuated, exceeding 30 per cent per annum in 2000 and 2003 and falling below 10 per cent only in 2010-2012 before returning to double digits (Quartey and Afful-Mensah, 2013, p. 65; Felino, 2013). In part because of persistent high inflation relative to the rest of the world, the Ghanaian cedi has depreciated steadily over time, but particularly steeply in 2013-2014 (Trading Economics, 2014). This situation has had considerable impact on the retail sector, which depends heavily on the sale of imported goods.

Given the importance of the informal economy to employment and livelihoods, Keith Hart (2008, p. 4) argues that 'Ghana's economic future depends significantly on what [small] traders are up to.' Nevertheless, traders in African urban areas such as Accra face considerable obstacles to taking advantage of income-earning opportunities, due in large part to the continuation of the colonial 'conventional approach of creating Central Business Districts (CBDs) with concentrated work/business functions at a central point [which] often results in congestion problems' (Adanu, 2004, p. 1). With the centralised concentration of office workers and consumers, 'traders locate in strategic areas where there is heavy human and vehicular traffic and thus come into conflict with urban authorities, whose focus on formalizing the use of public spaces leads to recurrent evictions' (Steel *et al.*, 2014, p. 53). In its efforts to exert control over public space, the Accra Metropolitan Assembly's bylaws make it illegal to sell (or even buy) on the streets—making trading illegal not as an activity, but because of the location. The result is periodic, short-lived attempts at eviction—sometimes including destruction of 'illegal' kiosks, as well as confiscation of goods from itinerant hawkers—even though local officials may have been collecting fees from them the week before. Local authorities have

generally been slow to build sufficient market areas to keep pace with urban growth. But even when they attempt to provide designated markets, ‘traders remain reluctant to move...outside the CBD for fear of inadequate clientele and reduction in volume of sales, especially when allocation of sites is uncertain and non-transparent, or provisions are inadequate to ensure that all move at the same time’ (Steel *et al.* 2014, p. 57). An attempt by the AMA to move traders into a special ‘Hawkers Market’ floundered on poor design that made it invisible and inaccessible to passers-by, insecure, susceptible to flooding and poor sanitation, and allegedly subject to politics in allocation (Adaawen and Jørgensen, 2012).

The geography literature suggests that markets are relocated from central urban spaces to the periphery as land becomes more commercialised and expensive, resulting in the exclusion of informal enterprises and workers (e.g., Öz and Eder, 2012). In Ghana, the increasing commercialisation of land in and outside of the capital city leads both to the impulse by officials to confine traders in the CBD into smaller and more controlled spaces, and also to the lack of allocated spaces for markets in newly-developing residential areas outside of the city centre. Traders in non-central locations are more likely to operate outside of built markets, which can have both positive and negative implications for their work. However, compared to the local government in the CBD, smaller local governments outside large metropolitan areas in Ghana have proven more amenable to working with informal operators, who represent an important source of revenue as well as employment (MEL Consulting, 2011). Thus, a variable of interest in this study is the question of location; the paper compares the perceptions and conditions of traders in the central market areas with those of traders in non-central locations.

#### **4. Data and methods**

The data for the World Bank study (2011a, 2011b) were based on the Ghana Living Standards Survey for 2005/06 (GLSS5) and on a nationwide sample of 45 focus groups and 220 structured interviews with operators of household enterprises in all sectors during 2010. (Trading was underrepresented relative to its large share in informal employment; manufacturing and services were overrepresented in part because the survey was carried out through associations and in part because they were more suited to investigating issues of apprenticeship, infrastructure and investment.) These were supplemented through interviews with trade associations, Business Advisory Centres, and officials (both local and national), and validated in two stakeholder workshops.

A detailed description of the objectives, research sites and sampling design of the Ghana country study of WIEGO's Informal Economy Monitoring Study (IEMS) can be found in Anyidoho (2013). From July to November 2012, the project conducted 15 focus groups with 75 traders and administered questionnaires to 150 traders who belonged to member-based traders' associations in six markets in the Greater Accra metropolitan area -- three in the CBD ('central' location) under the Accra Metropolitan Assembly and three in residential communities in the Ga East District Assembly, outside of downtown Accra ('non-central' location). All the traders were in fixed locations (whether selling in a market stall, or in a kiosk or off a table), but whereas all the 'central' traders were located within designated markets, the 'non-central' respondents traded both within and outside built markets. (Thus, in addition to the differences in central versus outlying locations, to an extent the differences in responses between the two groups reflect differences in market trading as against street vending. However, this variable of type of trading was not specifically elicited in the survey.) The traders mostly sold manufactured goods such as clothing and construction material, but some provided services such as carpentry and dress-making or added value through food preparation, for example.

Focus groups were used to elicit from participants their perceptions and experiences of the economic, political and other forces that help or hinder their work. Focus groups are distinct from focus group discussions; rather than a set of questions, focus groups are organised around tools, including mapping, listing, ranking, drawing of causal diagrams and matrices. A focus group is one of several urban participatory appraisal methods in which participants' voices are privileged and their ownership over the process is signified by the researcher (facilitator) 'handing over the stick [or pen]' to participants to produce visual accounts of their experiences (Moser & Stein, 2011). The focus groups for the IEMS-Ghana study were put together with the assistance of the leaders of the various market associations who helped identify participants who were diverse in regards to sex, types of goods sold, and size of businesses. Four to six traders took part in each focus group, which were conducted in or near their places of work. For the most part, the focus groups were composed of traders in a specific location (central and non-central), but two focus groups had a mix of participants from both types of location. They were also made up of all-male, all-female and mixed groups. The discussions in the focus groups were summarised into reports, which included reproductions of the maps, lists, and matrices created by the groups. These products were coded and then quantified in order to derive descriptive statistics such as frequencies and rankings.

The survey sampled 99 women and 51 men in the six markets: 74 respondents in the central locations and 76 in the non-central markets. The responses from the questionnaires were then entered, cleaned and analysed.

Data collection and analysis were organised around the forces that affect the outcomes of the traders' work. In this paper, these are presented in four categories:

- a) Macroeconomy (reflecting government monetary and fiscal policy framework);
- b) The value chain and the actors within it;
- c) Government institutions, both local and national; and
- d) Non-governmental institutions, including financial institutions and member-based traders associations.

## **5. Findings**

### *5.1. The macroeconomy*

Table 1 summarises a list of negative factors generated and then ranked by traders. The results displayed in this table (as well as in tables 2 and 6) are based on focus group data. In each focus group, participants were asked to generate a list of positive or negative factors affecting their work. They were then asked to select and rank the three most important factors. The tables thus show the top-ranked factors across all focus groups. (Note that the lower frequencies recorded in tables 2 and 6 reflect the fact that some focus groups did not complete all the tools, due primarily to lack of time.)

In table 1, we see that participants considered the depreciation of the Ghanaian cedi to be the number one negative macroeconomic force in five focus groups, and overall this was ranked in the top three in eight focus groups. Traders generally described the macroeconomy in negative terms (e.g., 'bad' or 'worsening') as it related to their work. They identified in particular the depreciation of the Ghanaian cedi against key currencies (the US dollar, the CFA and the Nigerian naira) as having a detrimental impact on their business through increase in the cost of inputs and supplies, leading to a reduction in the value of their working capital. The traders said they had difficulty passing on these costs fully to customers (because of the risk of contracting demand), resulting in declining profits.

TABLE 1: NEGATIVE MACROECONOMIC DRIVING FORCES (FREQUENCY)

	Rank			Total Frequency
	#1	#2	#3	
Currency depreciation	5	3	0	<b>8</b>
High prices of inputs/supplies	3	3	1	<b>7</b>
Bad economy	0	0	2	<b>2</b>
High interest rates	1	0	0	<b>1</b>
Unemployment	1	0	0	<b>1</b>
Unavailable supplies	0	0	1	<b>1</b>

**Source:** Accra IEMS focus group data (2012)

When traders were prompted to identify positive driving forces related to the macroeconomy, they ranked credit as the most important, as seen in table 2 where ‘availability of loans’ was ranked as the number one force in two focus groups and number three in one focus group. However, it must be noted that credit was important primarily as a counter to the generally bad economic conditions described previously. That is, traders valued loans as a response to decreases in capital and revenue, which were in turn the result of the depreciation of the Ghanaian currency. In the focus groups, ‘money in the system’ was mentioned as the indicator of a stronger economy, which would result in greater purchasing power among customers, and consequently greater income for traders.

TABLE 2: POSITIVE MACROECONOMIC DRIVING FORCES(FREQUENCY)

	Rank			Total Frequency
	#1	#2	#3	
Availability of loans	2	0	1	<b>3</b>
Money in the system	1	1	0	<b>2</b>
Development projects	0	1	1	<b>2</b>
Fall in price of inputs	0	0	1	<b>1</b>

**Source:** Accra IEMS focus group data (2012)

## 5.2. Linkages in the value chain

Vendors reported links to the formal economy through their sources of supply on one end of the value chain, and the customers to whom they sell goods on the other.

TABLE 3: MAIN WAYS GOODS ARE ACQUIRED, BY LOCATION (%)

	Central	Non-Central	Total
Buy them from an informal enterprise	82.4	56.0	69.1
Make or grow them myself	16.2	37.3	26.9
Buy them from another street vendor	0.0	2.7	1.3
Buy them from a formal enterprise	0.0	0.0	0.0
Acquire them from a formal supplier to sell on commission	0.0	0.0	0.0
Acquire them for free	0.0	0.0	0.0
Other	1.4	4.0	2.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
<b>N</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>149</b>

**Source:** Accra IEMS survey data (2012)

The primary source of goods for 70 per cent of traders was other informal enterprises (table 3). Although none of the vendors surveyed reported that their main supplier was a formal enterprise, information collected from the focus groups suggests some indirect links. The types of goods purchased and sold by many of the traders—such as used clothing, cosmetics, linen, books, and non-perishable food products—indicate that these were originally imported by bigger enterprises or manufactured in-country. These are then sold to middlemen from whom the traders purchase their stock. This means that there are intermediaries between large formal importer/wholesalers and the informal retailers who market their goods. Besides de-bulking intermediate wholesalers, informal retailers buy some supplies directly from supermarkets and large retailers—cited by about 18 per cent of men and 4 per cent of women as ‘helpful’ to their businesses (see table 9). Similarly, the telecommunications sector in Ghana, as in many other African countries, depends heavily on vendors to make small purchases of airtime widely and conveniently available (Kottoh, 2008). This connection to formal import businesses and local manufacturers has real implications for the

traders' work, such as when import taxes and currency exchange rates change, as discussed in the section on the macroeconomy.

There was, however, a difference observed in how traders in different locations spoke about these macroeconomic conditions, which is related to the question of linkages to the formal businesses. When the non-central groups spoke of the falling value of the currency, they were describing the problem of inflation (that is, rising prices of goods in the economy as a whole). The central traders, on the other hand, specifically mentioned the increased cost of importing their products as a result of the cedi's depreciation against the dollar and other foreign currencies. This reflects the fact that central traders were more likely to sell imported goods and were therefore more attuned to changes in import duties as a result of changes in exchange rates. Non-central traders generally traded in Ghanaian goods and produce; even when they sold imported goods, these were often purchased from the central traders. Non-central traders were thus far enough down the retail chain that the effect of exchange rates on import taxes, and the knock-on effect on prices, was less obvious to them. Not surprisingly, therefore, while the focus groups in the central locations mentioned import duty rates as a driving force, this factor was not brought up in any of the focus groups with non-central traders.

Further, it appears that intermediaries between the importers and the informal retailers were able to pass most of the costs on to the retailers, but the latter were unable to pass on these costs completely to consumers because of market saturation and the failure of wages to keep pace with inflation. This came up in one focus group with male traders (quotations in the focus group reports use pseudonyms and are translated from local languages):

Ampene noted that the depreciation of the cedi 'leads to increases in the cost of inputs leading to increase in the cost of products.' Kobina added, 'Because the dollar is going up, people who import the movies (DVDs) have to increase their prices, but we cannot increase our prices too because then people won't buy from us... People are aware of what the prices of the movies should be, and if we increase the price we'll lose their sales.'

[Focus Group Report, FG 3, Non-central men, 5 July 2012]

The second way in which the traders were linked in the value chain to actors in formal businesses was through customers. In the surveys, traders referred to the 'the general public' and 'private individuals' as their main customer base (table 4), elaborating in the focus groups that these categories consisted primarily of 'workers in offices' as well as students in educational institutions. In addition, a

small proportion of the surveyed traders (about 5 per cent) identified formal businesses as their main customers, which is another way in which street traders' activities are linked to the formal economy. Thus, considering informal traders as part of the distribution chain brings balance to the structuralist approach to informal-formal interdependence with its focus on employment and production.

TABLE 4: MAIN CUSTOMERS BY LOCATION

(% of respondents; multiple responses permitted)

	<b>Central</b>	<b>Non-Central</b>	<b>Total</b>
General public	91.9	82.9	87.3
Private individuals	78.4	47.4	62.7
Personal family/Friends	47.3	35.5	41.3
Other informal workers	10.8	10.5	10.7
Informal businesses	8.1	9.2	8.7
Formal businesses	2.7	7.9	5.3
Other	0.0	9.2	4.7
<b>N</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>150</b>

Source: Accra IEMS survey data (2012)

### *5.3. Government institutions and services*

As previously noted, the literature on the bottom of the economic pyramid posits a role for intermediary institutions, both non-governmental and governmental agencies, in facilitating the ability of informal actors to benefit from connections to the formal economy. In the IEMS study, traders were asked to list and then rank institutions and actors whose actions had a significant impact on their work, whether positive or negative.

In table 5, local government received the highest mentions, indicating that these institutions loomed large in the everyday lives of traders. The Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA) was singled out as having a great deal of influence. The AMA is the district-level government under whose jurisdiction the markets in central Accra fall. However, so great was its perceived influence that some traders in the non-central locations (who were in the contiguous and smaller Ga District East Assembly) mistakenly assumed that they were under the AMA's

authority. Others mentioned that, indirectly, they were affected by the AMA because they bought goods wholesale from traders in the AMA-controlled CBD. By contrast, the central government and other governmental bodies (such as the Food and Drugs Board and the Internal Revenue Service), the police and public utility companies did not have much perceived impact on traders' everyday work.

When respondents were asked specifically to explain the negative driving forces related to state institutions (table 6), their responses suggested that the negative perception of government authorities was related to non-fulfilment of their obligation to provide market infrastructure for traders, the imposition of perceived high levies, taxes and fees, 'harassment' of traders, demolition of kiosks, and the city's unwillingness to provide enough publicity about newly-built markets to attract the public to them. This dissatisfaction with the derived benefits from taxes and fees corresponds to findings in other studies of informality in Accra (Adaawen and Jørgensen, 2012; Bob-Milliar and Obeng-Odoom, 2011; Steel *et al.*, 2014). Moreover, a study by Atuguba (2006, p. 29) on Ghana's tax culture, which surveyed Ghanaian tax payers generally, found that 45 per cent of respondents considered their tax burden to be too high because they 'doubted the real benefits of paying taxes', but 60 per cent expressed willingness to pay taxes if authorities would improve their services.

TABLE 5: INSTITUTIONS HAVING SIGNIFICANT IMPACT  
(frequency of mention across focus groups, by negative or positive perception)

<b>Institutions</b>	<b>Freq (+)</b>	<b>Freq (-)</b>	<b>Freq (±)</b>	<b>Total Frequency</b>
Financial institutions	2	2	10	<b>14</b>
AMA		11	1	<b>12</b>
Suppliers	3	2	1	<b>6</b>
Ghana Trades Union Congress	2	1	2	<b>5</b>
Local government (besides AMA)		5		<b>5</b>
Utilities (water & electricity)	1		2	<b>3</b>
Central government		3		<b>3</b>
Market associations	2			<b>2</b>

*Table 5 continued*

Regulatory bodies (e.g., Food and Drugs Board)		1	1	<b>2</b>
Internal Revenue Service		1	1	<b>2</b>
Police		1	1	<b>2</b>
Foreign businesses (competition)		1	1	<b>2</b>
Schools	1			<b>1</b>
Hospitals	1			<b>1</b>
StreetNet <sup>1</sup>	1			<b>1</b>
WIEGO	1			<b>1</b>
Accra Chiefs	1			<b>1</b>
Church	1			<b>1</b>
Market queens			1	<b>1</b>
TV & radio		1		<b>1</b>
Middlemen		1		<b>1</b>
	<b>16</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>67</b>

**Source:** Accra IEMS focus group data (2012)

Likewise, the World Bank study found that local authorities play a critical role in determining the environment for informal traders, since they are ‘responsible for zoning and other regulations which determine whether they have access to workplaces, as well as infrastructure and support structures. This includes the provision of roads, water, electricity, and markets, among others’ (World Bank, 2011b, p. v). Furthermore, ‘urban bylaws tend to restrict the location and operations of household enterprises, often leading to conflict when local authorities attempt to evict informal enterprises from central business districts, especially hawkers’ (ibid.).

The question of the taxes and fees that traders pay to the government is an important issue because of the conventional assumption discussed in the introduction (which pervades public and policy discourse in Ghana) that workers in informal enterprises are prone to illegality by omission or commission, and in particular that they choose to remain informal in order to avoid taxes. Local authorities also tend to have a negative perception of informal traders and household enterprises, whom they see ‘as reluctant to pay taxes and fees or obey planning regulations’ (World Bank, 2011b, p. v).

TABLE 6: NEGATIVE GOVERNMENT DRIVING FORCES  
(RANKING AND FREQUENCY)

	Rank			Total Frequency
	#1	#2	#3	
Infrastructure/work environment (city)	1	1	1	<b>3</b>
Taxes and duties (national) and city levies	1	1	1	<b>3</b>
Harassment from government authorities (city and national)	0	0	2	<b>2</b>
Lack of publicity (city)	0	0	1	<b>1</b>

**Source:** Accra IEMS focus group data (2012)

The findings from both the IEMS and World Bank studies undermine this stereotype. The World Bank study found that household enterprises actually tend to be registered, but often with the local Assembly rather than the national Registrar-General, and that the local authorities generate important revenues from these and other fees: ‘many...HEs [household enterprises] also pay regular market fees, presumptive income tax, and other fees for specialized licenses, as well as Value Added Tax on their inputs’ (World Bank, 2011b, p. 8).

Analysis of both survey and focus group data from the IEMS indicates that local authorities do levy various forms of fees on street traders, particularly in the markets in the CBD. Survey respondents reported paying an average of nearly 4 per cent of gross turnover in fees and taxes, with a much higher burden relative to income in non-central locations. Those in the CBD paid less in fees (though more in national taxes), but also received little support from these government actors and perceived the AMA as a significant negative force in their operations. This situation fuels the negative perception street traders hold of these institutions that make financial demands on them and yet neglect them:

Aba said, ‘They [AMA] don’t help us in any way...They don’t come to take the refuse from the market. We don’t even know whether they are supposed to clean the market or not. I’m a bit elderly and remember the Kwame Nkrumah era; the AMA people were very efficient in cleaning the markets. All they do now is to come and take their levies and ticket money from us.’

[Focus group report, FG 12, Central women, 13 August 2012]

On the AMA, Kaseem said, ‘The AMA takes income tax and licenses. They take too much money from us and what we expect them to do, they don’t do.’ Alvin also commented on the

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monies AMA takes from the traders, ‘Previously, they took a license [fee] of 0.70 cedis [per year] but now it’s gone up to 10 cedis.’ Kaseem came in again to say, ‘The drainage system is bad - they are all choked and the AMA is doing nothing about it.’ Paul however had something positive to say about the AMA: ‘We sometimes work late into the evening and the AMA provides us with security.’

[Focus Group Report, FG 6, Central men, 20 July 2012]

Regarding the Ga East District Assembly (GEDA), the participants agreed with Godfred’s statement: ‘They come and demand high payments of fees and when you can’t pay it, they come and close your shop. And they don’t provide us with some of the facilities that they should, such as running water.’

[Focus Group Report, FG 8, Non-central men, 29 July 2012]

Aggregating responses from all the 15 focus groups to the question ‘What do you consider to be your contributions to your city?’, ‘taxes’ were by far the most frequently mentioned contribution (table 7).

TABLE 7: CONTRIBUTION OF SECTOR TO CITY/NATION (FREQUENCY)

Item Category	Location			Total
	Central	Non-Central	Mixed Central & Non-Central	
Tax revenue	21	9	27	57
Provide for people’s needs	1	7	1	9
Make goods accessible	1	5	1	7
Provide income and employment	6	0	0	6
Promote development/help economy	0	4	0	4
Clean the market/city	1	0	1	2

**Source:** Accra IEMS focus groups (2012)

Vendors used the term ‘taxes’ in the focus groups loosely to refer to various monies paid out to the local governments (or their agents). In one focus group, the word was applied to fees paid to a non-governmental institution, with the rationale that the government would indirectly benefit:

Juliet said she paid about 50 cedis a year to the school as a type of rent. ‘And there are a lot of us selling in this school, so that is a lot of “tax” (revenue) to the school.’ There was some discussion about whether the ‘tax’ to the school should be separated from the fees to the city authorities, but they decided that the school would eventually pay some taxes to the city, so it all amounted to the same thing.

[Focus Group Report, FG 2, Non-central women, 1 July 2012]

The survey data provide a useful breakdown of these various payments, which include license fees and permits for space and operations, as well as income taxes (table 8).

TABLE 8: MEAN MONTHLY EXPENDITURE ON LICENSES AND PERMITS,  
BY LOCATION (GHANACEDIS)

	<b>Central</b>	<b>Non-Central</b>	<b>Average</b>
Income tax	19.6	4.8	12.2
Fee to secure the space used for your activities	18.7	41.8	25.7
Formal permit to operate	14.4	7.4	11.9
License fees	3.2	9.4	4.4
Other tax	2.5	4.2	3.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>58.4</b>	<b>67.6</b>	<b>57.2</b>
As percentage of gross monthly turnover*	2.0%	5.6%	3.8%
N = 144			

**Source:** Accra IEMS survey data (2012)

On average and across locations, traders reported spending 12 cedis for the national income tax and 45 cedis<sup>1</sup> on all other payments, which are made the local government (table 8).<sup>2</sup> Non-central respondents paid much more for their space

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1 The cedi-dollar exchange rate at the time of fieldwork in August 2013 was approximately US\$1 = GH¢1.86.

2 If these traders had an average profit margin of 20 per cent, then the overall tax burden on value added would be 19 per cent, similar to the Value Added Tax and National Health Insurance levy paid by formal sector firms. In addition, they pay Value Added Tax on their inputs (including goods purchased to sell), whereas formal firms can credit such levies against taxes owed on their sales.

than those in the CBD, resulting in a higher total. They also paid a much higher percentage of their gross monthly turnover in such fees and taxes (5.6 per cent as against 2.0 per cent for those in the CBD, whose turnover was 2.4 times as high). These differences may reflect the more repressive stance taken by the AMA, leading many traders to evade dealing with the authorities, whereas the more cooperative stance of the non-central authorities may yield greater willingness to comply. This is consistent with the results of an experiment in Entebbe, Uganda, in which simplifying registration procedures and lowering fees yielded a 40 per cent increase in compliance and revenues, with a fourfold increase in the number of businesses registering (Sander, 2003). For those in the central location, the highest expenditure was for the national income tax, which the non-central respondents were more likely to evade.

#### *5.4. Non-government institutions: financial*

Of the non-government entities that the traders perceived had influence (whether positive or negative) over their work, financial institutions received the most mentions in the focus groups (see table 5). The traders mentioned that non-bank lending institutions were their preferred source of capital, needed especially to make up the shortfall when trading capital was diverted into consumption needs or when capital depreciated in value as a result of the falling currency. This is consistent with the literature on financial inclusion, which suggests that greater access to microfinance can help the poor to cope with ‘irregular and uncertain incomes’ and other vulnerabilities (Rosenberg, 2010, p. 2; CGAP, 2006).

In Ghana, as worldwide, informal entrepreneurs cite capital as their primary constraint on establishing or expanding business. But it is not clear to what extent the problem is access or low profitability or cash flow. According to the World Bank’s analysis of GLSS5 data, ‘only 11 per cent of HEs [household enterprises] had applied for formal credit in 2006, of whom half were successful,’ even though a third of them had savings accounts; ‘rather, the problem is rooted in the lack of business skills and/or financial literacy among operators of household enterprises, as well as their lack of confidence in their ability to pay back a loan’ (World Bank, 2011a, p. 6).

Even though access to finance is appreciated as a coping mechanism, the issue of inability to repay costly loans, in particular, is consistent with emerging literature about the risks to business success of over-indebtedness through high-interest loans pushed by proliferating lenders in peri-urban areas of Ghana,

as elsewhere (Owusu-Nuamah, 2013; Bateman, 2010). The advent of for-profit 'Microfinance Companies' with little concern for poverty reduction has made it easier for consumers and traders to obtain high-cost loans, whose weekly repayments and lack of grace periods may not conform to the cash flows of small businesses (Steel, 2015). Combined with the stress on cash flow resulting from inflation and exchange rate depreciation, as well as factors such as loss of stock due to confiscations, or loss of revenue due to the seasonality of demand, being able to access high-cost microcredit may actually have worked to the detriment of some.

As table 5 (above) shows, traders had deep ambivalence about the benefits of non-banking financial institutions, citing them equally as positive and negative forces. On the one hand, they had access to capital that was not as easily available to them through other sources, including commercial banks. On the other hand, they complained about the terms of these loans; in particular, the collateral required and the payment schedules were perceived as unfavourable.

The facilitator [asked], '... Are there any [institutions] that are hindering your business?' Joyce answered, 'The banks charge high interest rates so that by the time you finish paying off your loan, your business has gone under.' Another woman added, 'They know that we are in a village, so they cheat us by charging us high interests and then they make you fill this paper, and that paper'... The facilitator asked, 'So do the banks help at all?' 'No, just with the loan,' Joyce answered. 'But that is help, isn't it?' the facilitator said. The women virtually chorused, 'But they charge us high interest rates! So they are not helping us!'

[Focus Group Report, FG 1, Non-Central women, 26 June 2012]

'I know a woman who took a loan of 2000 cedis and she's being asked to pay 2900 cedis,' Samuel said. 'Taking a loan doesn't really help us. I used to save with a bank for many years. About three years ago, I needed 1000 cedis and when I went to the bank, they said they would need to have one of the bank officials go to my home to inspect it before they could give me the loan. Can you imagine? And this is a bank that I have an account with. In the end I just gave it up. Plus, the banks seize the goods of people who default on their loans'.

[Focus Group Report, FG 9, Central men, 2 August 2012]

In one focus group, participants gave anecdotes of traders who had lost their businesses when they were unable to pay back the loans, which served as cautionary tales for others about the dangers of loans from financial institutions.

David said, 'There are so many people who have had to run away because they have defaulted on their loans.' 'They just leave their businesses?' the facilitator asked. 'Yes, they run away.'

[Focus Group Report, FG 11, Central and Non-Central men, 5 August 2012]

### 5.5. Non-government institutions: associations and NGOs

Given the generally negative perception of the role of government institutions, the question arises as to whether the associations of informal operators are perceived to be helpful to street traders. The focus groups viewed positively the roles of their market associations and the Trades Union Congress, the umbrella organization for unions which has also embraced informal workers' associations (see table 5).

In the survey, member-based organizations ranked as the most helpful institutions, cited by at least two-thirds of respondents in each category, especially in the non-central locations (table 9). (Note: As discussed, financial institutions were cited in the focus groups as being particularly important, in both helpful and negative ways, to the vendors' work. However, they were not included in the survey.)

TABLE 9: TYPES OF ORGANIZATIONS THAT ARE IDENTIFIED AS BEING 'HELPFUL', BY SEX AND LOCATION

(% of respondents; multiple responses permitted)

	Central		Non-Central	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Member-based organizations [including market associations]	70.4	66.0	83.3	84.3
NGOs	33.3	29.8	50.0	43.1
Other workers	59.3	38.3	20.8	25.5
Trade union	14.8	27.7	33.3	27.5
Local government	3.7	8.5	25.0	17.7
Supermarkets or large retailers	18.5	2.1	16.7	5.9
Worker's co-op	7.4	2.1	12.5	13.7
Police	7.4	14.9	8.3	3.9
National government	7.4	6.4	8.3	5.9
<b>N</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>51</b>

Source: Accra IEMS survey data (2012)

Given these results from the survey, it is surprising that market associations were only mentioned in two focus groups (see table 5), in one instance possibly because the Chair of the association was sitting in on the focus group:

The Madina Traders Association was mentioned by one of the female traders as an institution that helped traders. Kwaku was skeptical. ‘They don’t help. In what way do they help?’

‘If you need some help, they can give it to you,’ another participant replied. ‘If you need a loan, they can give you a loan from your dues. And then if you have some misfortune befall you – like the death of a parent or close relative – they’ll give a donation and help you in other ways through that.’ Augustina added that they also gave business advice.

[Focus Group Report, FG 4, Non-central men and women, 8 July 2012]

Other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were perceived to be helpful by 30 to 50 per cent of survey respondents—again, higher in non-central than central locations (table 9).

After ‘other workers,’ the Ghana Trades Union Congress (TUC) came out as the next most helpful type of organisation, although it featured in only 5 of 15 focus groups (see table 5). TUC has been an international leader in also accepting membership of associations of informal workers, particularly market traders. Nonetheless, it is far less active with the informal segment of the labour force than with the formal, and its advocacy is generally at the national rather than local level. This might explain why respondents did not rank it especially high as a helpful institution and why there was some ambivalence about its role:

Christina said, ‘I feel the TUC should do something to influence the government, because they have voice.’

‘That’s what you would like them to do. But right now, are they helping your work?’ the facilitator asked.

‘They are not helping,’ Christina answered, ‘because to my mind we are all under TUC – they are like our parent, all of us traders. For example, with the increase of the dollars and rents, the TUC should rise up to say, “No!” so that the traders can run their businesses, but they are not doing that.’

[Focus Group Report, FG 10, Central men and women, 3 August 2012]

The TUC, according to participants, was unable to help them in times of trouble; the traders specifically mentioned times when the police confiscate goods. Cecilia said, ‘TUC does not really help us. We have made a lot of complaints to them and they promised to help but nothing has come out of that... We don’t feel the importance of TUC.’

[Focus Group Report, FG 5, Central women, 13 July 2012]

## **6. Conclusions and recommendations**

Market and street traders are strongly affected by trends in the macroeconomy. Respondents were adversely affected by the rising rate of currency depreciation and inflation in cost of inputs and supplies, which squeezed their profits because customers resisted corresponding increases in retail prices. Worsening economic trends, and in particular the depreciation of the cedi against major trading currencies, are also likely to increase competition among street traders on the supply side, as more people undertake informal retailing to replace or supplement income.

There was little evidence of direct input-output linkages between informal street traders and formal firms, either as suppliers or buyers. This lack of visible direct contact may explain the common perception of dualism, which suggests that informal activities operate independently of formal businesses. On deeper analysis, however, there appears to be greater interdependence, in that the goods that street traders sell mostly originate from formal importers or manufacturers, who in turn often rely on decentralised, informal retailers to market their products. Moreover, the traders' customers include workers in formal employment. Thus, the findings of this study indicate a broader interdependence of the informal and formal economies than is allowed for in the structuralist perspective, and are consistent with the findings of Adaawen and Jørgensen (2012) and Oteng-Ababio and Amankwaa (2014). But there is no indication that the intermediaries between the large importers/manufacturers and the informal retailers provide any buffer from negative macroeconomic trends. On the contrary, the informal traders appear to bear the brunt of the costs and risks of inflation, currency depreciation and stagnating real wages-which often impairs their ability to repay loans.

Government is an overwhelming presence in the operations of informal street traders- predominantly in a negative way, especially in the CBD. Contrary to the view that informal enterprises operate underground or outside the purview of officials, they perceive themselves as regularly paying fees and taxes but receiving little in return other than harassment (see Adaawen and Jørgensen, 2012; Obeng-Odoom, 2011). Respondents in non-central locations were more likely to regard local government positively, whereas those in the CBD were more subject to inadequate infrastructure and demolition or relocation exercises.

The greatest impact of formal institutions on street traders was the availability of loans from microfinance and other non-bank financial institutions-especially

as a means of coping with the squeeze on working capital and profits. However, the high cost and difficult terms of such loans were often burdensome, resulting in mixed opinions about the utility of these financial institutions. As in the case of the macroeconomy, the costs and risks of finance appear to be passed on to the microfinance institutions and, in turn, to their clients.

Member-based organisations, including trade associations, were the most uniformly helpful type of institutions for street traders, especially those in non-central locations. Not only are these associations registered, some are members of the Trades Union Congress, which plays a positive role by giving voice to concerns of workers at the national level, but does much less in terms of organising and advocacy for informal workers than for those in formal employment. NGOs were also viewed as helpful, especially in non-central locations. Those in non-central locations had a greater tendency to rely on market associations, NGOs and local government for support. This is consistent with the conclusions of Bob-Milliar and Obeng-Odoom (2011) that when market traders are able to organise and mobilise support from the national government and civil society, they are better able to negotiate with and resist the actions of local authorities.

In sum, informal street traders are significantly integrated into the formal economy. They are especially, and mostly adversely, affected by the policies of local governments and by national economic trends, especially in the exchange rate and prices. They rely on support from formal financial institutions, member-based organisations and NGOs. Those in non-central locations tend to pay a higher proportion of income as fees and taxes, and are relatively more likely to receive support from their associations, NGOs and even local government. Although directly visible links between informal and formal businesses are few, a broader look (using focus group data) at the nature of the goods sold and the supply chains indicate interdependence: formal importers and manufacturers supply the goods that informal operators sell to consumers in both informal and formal employment.

The data discussed in this paper support the conclusions of the two larger studies on which this paper is based; namely, that 'economic and urban policies are not supportive of urban informal livelihoods...Informal workers are critically dependent on urban infrastructure, but deficits in the quality and appropriateness of infrastructure often undermine their livelihoods' (Anyidoho, 2013, p. 5) and that 'In general it's a mixed track record with inadequate service provision and examples of new markets located at poor locations, leaving them unused' (World Bank, 2011b, p. 9). One cannot assume that the potential benefits of

integration of the informal with the formal economy will be realised without explicit policies, institutions and measures to help mitigate risks and ensure more equitable distribution of returns.

An important implication of the findings of this study is that stabilising the national economy- especially inflation and the exchange rate-has important benefits for informal as well as formal operators. In turn, the growth of informal self-employment to absorb workers and generate incomes has contributed to Ghana's long period of stability, economic growth and decreasing poverty. Yet tensions remain as a result of the generally negative mutual perceptions of the authorities and informal actors (Obeng-Odoom, 2011). Much of the literature on the informal economy notes that authorities at the local level tend to view informal workers negatively and to adopt bylaws and practices to evict them from urban business districts (Adaawen and Jørgensen, 2012; Obeng-Odoom, 2011; Oteng-Ababio and Amankwaa, 2014; Steel *et al.*, 2014) even while national level strategies often recognise the importance of informal self-employment for employment generation and poverty reduction (MESW, 2012). The study confirms that traders perceive urban authorities as generally hostile to informal economic activities and recommends building more constructive engagements between traders and their districts and municipalities.

Improving the approach to the use of public space appears to be the most important avenue to building better relationships between informal traders and local authorities, as it addresses the main source of contention between the two parties, especially in the CBD of large cities. On the part of local (as well as national) governments, this would first involve greater recognition of the contributions of informal operators to government income as well as to the livelihoods of the bulk of the population, and of the government's obligation to enable them to operate their businesses. The Local Government Act, 1993 (Act 462) gives local governments responsibility 'for the development of their areas, and this includes the promotion and supporting of productive activities and social development in the district while removing any obstacles to initiatives and development...[as well as] creating the enabling environment for informal enterprises...to thrive so as to boost local economic development' (MESW 2012, p. 2). Indeed, some of the smaller district assemblies in Ghana have adopted a more collaborative approach, engaging small businesses through Micro and Small Enterprise Subcommittees, consulting their associations in setting fees and taxes each year, and sometimes providing mini industrial sites (World Bank 2011b).

Taking a more constructive approach to dialogue with informal operators is

consistent with the recommendation of the draft National Strategy and Action Plan for Informal Enterprises to ‘develop better methods of supporting and engaging local associations in planning, taxing and carrying out relocation exercises’ (MESW 2012, pp. 2-3). The Strategy goes on to recommend ‘setting up more industrial zones and markets with infrastructure and facilities suitable for informal enterprises...[and] developing a manual of guidelines for planning and implementation of industrial zones and markets.’ This approach would have to be complemented by capacity-building to strengthen the ability of associations to consult and negotiate more effectively.

With respect to financial institutions, Ghana has made substantial progress in improving the access of informal businesses to microfinance institutions. To help avoid the adverse effects of over-borrowing at high cost, the appropriate action would be to expand financial literacy training and consumer protection, especially aimed at informal traders, micro and small enterprises and their associations. At the same time, the microfinance institutions, especially the for-profit companies, should be sensitised on the mutual benefits of adapting their lending terms and conditions to the needs and variable cash flows of their low-income and small business clients.

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(Footnotes)

1 StreetNet Ghana Alliance is an alliance of membership-based organizations of traders.