Gender and the COVID-19 pandemic:

Exploring female vendors' coping strategies in Lichtenburg during the lockdown.

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Dedication

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to my mother, Agnes Marumo and my sister, Lerato Marumo, for their unwavering support and encouragement throughout this journey. I dedicate this thesis to them, with all my love.

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Abstract

The 2019 outbreak of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) in Wuhan, China, and its subsequent spread around the world caused uncertainty in the economy and other aspects of life. Most governments around the world took drastic measures to stop the spread of the virus and save lives. The most common of these measures were restrictions on people's movement and trade. As a result, the world of work in South Africa changed dramatically, with over a million workers losing their jobs. That said, South Africa acutely felt the negative income effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. For those working in the informal economy, the five-week lockdown between March and May 2020 was a period of unprecedented insecurity and hunger, without work, income, or benefits. In light of the above, the study aimed to explore how female street vendors in Lichtenburg survived the impact of the COVID-19 national lockdown restrictions on trading activities between March 2020 and May 2020. The study sought to contribute to the understanding of the gendered impacts of the pandemic, particularly in relation to women in the informal economy, by examining the strategies and coping mechanisms adopted by them. Drawing on the sustainable livelihoods framework, this study examined the experiences of female street traders in Lichtenburg who were subjected to COVID-19 trade restrictions, assessed their coping strategies, and examined their support systems.

The study was exploratory in nature, followed a qualitative approach, and adopted a case study design. Depending on the needs of the study, a purposive and convenience sampling techniques were chosen to address the research problem and questions. In order to explore women's experiences on a specific topic, qualitative, semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with a sample of six female street vendors in Lichtenburg. The collected data were analysed using the thematic analysis technique. In this regard, the findings show that the perception upheld that the informal economy is an employment shock absorber during economic crises has been proven otherwise by the COVID-19 pandemic. The loss of profits led to a reduction in trading activities, which in turn increased the hardships of women street vendors. These vulnerability and hardships were made worse by the absence of government support structures since they were unable to navigate the procedures and had no one to turn to in times of need. As a result of the lack of formal channels of support and appropriate policy interventions, street vendors were particularly vulnerable to the financial consequences of the pandemic, resulting in an unpleasant reality of unsustainable livelihoods in the face of COVID-19.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

Almost three years have passed since the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a global pandemic, which came roughly 10 years after influenza pH1N1 was given the same designation. An unexpected COVID-19 outbreak was reported in Wuhan, China in late December 2019 (da Costa, 2020). The World Health Organization declared this outbreak a pandemic on March 11, 2020, making it the second pandemic in the history of pandemics to occur in the twenty-first century. The novel virus COVID-19 was hypothesized to have been caused by SARS-CoV-2, which was classified as an infection with the severe acute respiratory syndrome (WHO, 2020). The virus was classified as SARS because it was airborne and easily transmissible between people, particularly those in close contact. The entire world was startled and amazed at how a virus that had just emerged in a local market in Wuhan could spread rapidly across the world in just a few weeks (Li, 2020). Moreover, given that coronaviruses are hypothesised causes of pandemics, WHO had to monitor the outbreak around the clock, which raised concerns owing to both the alarming levels of transmission and the concerning level of inaction in terms of pharmaceutical treatments. Based on this, the World Health Organization was obliged to declare COVID-19 a pandemic (da Costa, 2020). As a result, the pandemic changed the face of life and had a negative impact on people's health, social interactions, and the economy (Rwafa-Ponela, 2022).

COVID-19 crept into South Africa in the early days of March 2020, following a 38-year-old man's trip to Italy with his wife. They returned to South Africa on March 1, 2020, together with a group of ten other people. Upon their arrival, the man reported having a fever, headache, malaise, sore throat and cough, all of which were confirmed as symptoms of COVID-19 after he consulted with a general practitioner on the 3rd of March 2020 (Mkhize, 2020). Following that, the virus spread like wildfire throughout the country before public health professionals could even come up with containment measures. The government was then expected to make bold policy interventions urgently. In the absence of effective drugs and vaccines, lockdowns became the primary containment and mitigation measures implemented to flatten the peak of COVID-19 (Rwafa-Ponela, 2020).

In response to the crisis, the South African government declared a state of disaster on March 15, 2020 (Broadbent, Combrick, and Smart, 2020). The alert level five lockdown came into effect on March 27, 2020, mandating the physical separation of people from each other regulated by breaking social and economic contacts to mitigate demographic contagion (Arndt *et al*., 2020). This was a terrible economic shock that affected livelihoods all over the country. However, the effects were uneven across households with different access to resources such as income, assets, employment, health care, and social protection, as well as across gender lines (Schoette and Zizzamia, 2022). As a result, the country's already existing hunger and poverty crises worsened (Hart *et al*., 2022). The disparities were particularly noticeable in the labour market, as lockdown policies and a significant drop in consumer demand disproportionately affected those working in the urban informal economy. The unemployment rate in South Africa climbed from 32.6 to 34.4% in 2021 (Saloshnni and Nithoseelan, 2022).

Over two billion people globally depend on the informal economy for their livelihoods (International Labour Organization (ILO), 2018). In South Africa, the informal economy employs about 30% of the entire labour force, or slightly less than 5 million people, and accounts for 48% of total employment in the country's rural areas, compared to 24% in the major metropolitan areas (Rogan, 2019). Numerous studies have shown that street vending is one of the largest and most important types of informal trade in South Africa (Valodia, 2008; Devey, Skinner, and Valodia, 2006; and Skinner, 2008) and that it is primarily performed by black women (Mitullah, 2003; Lalthapersad-Pillay, 2004; Ligthelm, 2005, and Ngomane, 2020). In this regard, street trade accounts for 41.5% of the economy and is considered a substantial source of income with the ability to sustain the livelihoods of those who are vulnerable and disadvantaged in society (Sassen, 2013). Hence, it is argued that the South African informal economy has the potential to contribute to the social and economic development of disadvantaged women, in a country where the unemployment rates are high and employment opportunities are unequally distributed (Devey *et al*., 2006). As a result, this study explored how female street vendors in Lichtenburg coped with the impact of the COVID-19 national lockdown and restrictions on trading activities between March 2020 and May 2020.

In this context, there were a few reasons why the study focused on the initial period of lockdown between March and May 2020. First, it was a time when the lockdown was strict, so this provided the he most comprehensive data about the impact of the lockdown. Second, it was a period of extreme hardship for vendors; as a result, exploring how the lockdown affected

their livelihoods shed light on how economically disadvantaged they were throughout the epidemic. Third, it was a time of high uncertainty, so this provided insight into how vendors responded to the sudden changes. Lastly, it was a time of intense social and political debate about the government's response to the pandemic. In this regard, through exploring the vendors' experiences during the period in question, the researcher analysed how the social and political discourse around the lockdown affected them. Therefore, by approaching the issue through these critical lenses, the study seeks to contribute to the understanding of the gendered impacts of the pandemic, particularly in relation to women in the informal economy, by examining the strategies and coping mechanisms adopted by the women vendors to cope with the negative impacts of the lockdown.

1.2 Problem statement and significance of the study

Studies have been conducted highlighting the economic crisis faced by informal traders since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, but they focused exclusively on those based in metropolitan areas, leaving those living in rural areas out of the discussion. WIEGO, for example, has conducted several studies with a particular focus on Durban, highlighting the significant socio-economic impacts of lockdown restrictions on street vendors (WIEGO, 2021). According to the WIEGO (2021) report, during the initial phase of the lockdown restrictions, which began in April 2020, over 97% of informal street vendors, 95% of market traders, and 74% of waste pickers suffered massive income losses. In July 2020, the South African government eased the lockdown restrictions to allow economic activities to resume. However, it was reported that street vendors in Durban were still battling to recover and regain their pre-lockdown earnings at the time (WIEGO, 2021; Khambule, 2020). In a similar vein, Nyashumu *et al.* (2020) provided evidence that shows that the roadside vendors, domestic workers and gardeners in the city of Tshwane had also suffered a significant loss of income because of the restrictions on economic activities during the national lockdown. Given this, there was a need to incorporate the informal economy in rural areas into the larger discussion of the impact of COVID-19 on street vending in South Africa.

Furthermore, a lot of the research that has been done addresses COVID-19 and its implications on businesses (Ede, Masuku and Jili, 2021), the impact of COVID-19 on informal food traders, the impact of COVID-19 on the informal economy (HSRC, 2020), and the shortcomings of the government's response (Khambule, 2020; Rogan and Skinner, 2020). To date, very little has

so far been done on the gendered impacts of the pandemic, particularly in relation to women in the informal economy (Skinner *et al*., 2021). Additionally, most of the research on COVID-19 has largely focused on the impact of the pandemic on the informal economy without exploring the strategies and coping mechanisms adopted by the informal traders. Therefore, this research aims to contribute to the growing body of literature on the impacts of Covid-19 on the livelihoods, with a specific focus on how these impacts differ for women. It explored the various coping strategies that women have employed during the pandemic, and how gender has played a role in shaping both the impacts of the pandemic and the strategies adopted to cope with them. The study also examined how gender roles and expectations have played a role in shaping the experiences of women vendors during the time of the pandemic.

1.3 Research aim and objectives

The main objective of this study is to explore the coping strategies of female street vendors in Lichtenburg during the COVID-19 national lockdown restrictions on trading from March 2020 to May 2020.

The objectives:

1. To explore the experiences of women street traders who were subjected to COVID-19 trade restrictions.
2. To assess the coping strategies of women street traders affected by COVID-19 trade restrictions.
3. To examine the support systems in place for women street traders who were affected by COVID-19 trade restrictions.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

The study report is divided into five chapters, which are presented as follows:

Chapter one: Introduction to the study

The chapter explores the impacts of COVID-19 on the livelihoods of women street vendors, as well as how female street vendors in Lichtenburg coped with the impact of COVID-19 national lockdown restrictions on trading activities between March and May 2020. In order to understand this issue, it is important to first provide an overview of the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on the economy, with a focus on how women have been disproportionately

impacted. This is followed by a problem statement highlighting the gaps in the current literature on the topic at hand.

Chapter two: The literature review

This chapter gives an overview of the literature on the informal economy, with an emphasis on women's engagement in this economy. The chapter is split into two parts. The first section gives historical context and an overview of the informal economy, including its definition, characteristics, and dominant schools of thought. The second section gives an in-depth understanding of sustainable livelihoods and its components. It then looks into how this approach is applicable to the experiences of women in the informal economy and assesses the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on their livelihoods.

Chapter three: The methodology and research design

This chapter covers the research methods employed in this study. It begins with an overview of the research methods and the justifications for their selection. Next, it goes on to the sample methods and data collection techniques used. Following that, it goes into data analysis techniques and procedures. It also examines the issues of researcher positionality and reflectivity, as well as the study's limitations and ethical implications.

Chapter four: Presentation of the findings

This chapter presents the study findings as well as the interpretation and analysis of the data. The chapter is broken into two sections. The first section gives background information on the study and introduces the people whose experiences are presented in the findings. The second portion shows the findings, which are organized according to the themes from the data.

Chapter five: The conclusion and recommendations

This chapter gives a brief summary of the main findings. It focuses on the important findings from the data and makes recommendations for future research to fill the gaps and limitations shown in this study. This chapter intends to contribute to the current literature on the topic by analysing the findings and making recommendations for further research.

Chapter: 2 Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the informal economy has become a topic of discussion over the past two years. As the informal economy is a primary source of employment for many women globally, it has piqued the interest of many activists, scholars and organisations, resulting in more academic research. This chapter reviews in detail the literature relevant to the study of how this pandemic has affected the informal economy, particularly street vending in the South African context. Moreover, this chapter looks at the livelihood conditions of women street vendors during the lockdown. The purpose of this study was to explore how the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown affected the livelihoods of women working as street vendors in Lichtenburg, North West. Therefore, to better understand the intended objective of the study, the first part of this chapter begins with a critical review of the existing pieces of literature that presents the characteristics and definition of the informal economy, the participants in the informal economy, the factors influencing people to engage in the informal economy, the vulnerabilities of the informal economy, informal street vending as an economic stimulant and a means of survival, and the COVID-19 outbreak and its impact on the informal economy.

The second section of the chapter provides a brief analysis of the theoretical framework adopted to conceptualise street vending in the context of the informal economy. In this regard, considering the measures taken by the South African government to contain the spread of the virus, it is evident from the literature that the livelihoods of those working in the informal economy were severely impacted. These measures affected a variety of things, including, but not limited to, livelihood assets and livelihood outcomes. Therefore, to provide a critical analysis of the experiences of the women working in the informal economy, particularly in street vending, this study adopted a sustainable livelihoods approach as its theoretical framework. This approach was suitable for analysing poverty as a multifaceted phenomenon influenced by institutional and structural constraints.

2.2. The characteristics of the informal economy

The topic of labour has historically been a key focus of sociology, dating back to the work of classical sociologists such as Durkheim with the division of labour in society, Marx's conceptions of the labour process and alienation, and Weber with his theories on bureaucracy and social closure (Kalleberg, 2009; Ritzer, 2011). Their interest in theorizing societal change, particularly the economy and the world of work, was sparked by witnessing the dramatic shift from what was once recognised and considered traditional employment to precarious employment. Following that, scholars have become increasingly interested in understanding the new labour arrangements that give rise to what is now known as the informal economy, which has taken over the modern world of work. In their pursuit of knowledge, scholars and policymakers have often used concepts such as "precarious labour," "temporary employment," and "contingent work" to highlight the irregularity and insecurity of employment arrangements that characterise the informal economy (Khan and Azhar, 2020:320). However, the conceptualizations of precarious labour have generally been linked to the expansion of flexible labour arrangements in the Western labour market from the early 1970s (Betti, 2018). Flexible labour, often known as non-standard or atypical employment, refers to a variety of work arrangements that depart from regular full-time, compensated employment. Part-time job, temporary labour, self-employment, and independent contracting are all examples of this. The early Marxist discourse using this concept sought to address the growth of precarious labour by looking at the reasons for the existence of this type of employment, which were brought about by the pressure of the capitalist system of production (Bromely and Wilson, 2018).

The contemporary issue of the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated lockdown measures present a new context for understanding the impact of the capitalist system on the labour market. While the Marxist discourse on precarious labour provides an important insight into the structural forces that shape work in the labour market, it fails to fully capture the lived experiences of those who participate in it. Again, the Marxist discourse tends to view precarious labour through the lens of class struggle, but this neglects the unique experiences of women and other marginalized groups who are disproportionately affected by precarious work. Also, the Marxist perspective fails to adequately understand and tackle the underlying causes of precarity for women because it ignores the gendered dynamics that impact experiences of precarious work in the informal economy. Having said that, the Marxist discourse on precarious work has not taken into account the unique challenges experienced by

women in the labour market, particularly during difficult economic times. Therefore, this study fills the gap by exploring the experiences of women during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how these experiences were shaped by the interplay of individual agency, structural forces, and the specific context of the pandemic.

Precarious labour was broadly defined in this context as remuneration work characterised by uncertainty, insecurity, risk, instability, low earnings, limited social benefits, and limited access to legal entitlements (Mhlalana, 2020:8). The reason for this is that employees were working under irregular arrangements such as casualization, outsourcing, and labour subcontracting, all of which are characteristics of precarious employment. Formerly, formal employment relations were also destroyed and became precarious. Consequently, precarious labour became what Marxist research refers to as the "reserve army" supplying labour and sustaining capital growth in the economy. When the economy expands and there is a high demand for labour, the reserve army serves as a pool from which labourers may be pulled and released as needed, keeping wage levels within ranges that are favourable for capital accumulation (Bhattacharya and Kesar, 2018). Since then, the concepts of precarious labour and informal economy have been used interchangeably across the literature.

In accordance with the aforementioned, Poblete (2018: 967), argues that this is the case because, unlike the informal economy, precarious labour lacks a standard definition, and as a result, the concept is employed as the opposite of standard employment. Wilson (2020) argues that the analyses of precarisation and informalization are basically the same phenomenon and are concerned with the same features of labour market dynamics, such as de-unionization and the recommodification of labour. This, however, implies that the application of the two concepts is dependent on the context in which the writer writes. On the other hand, Ferreira (2016), disputes the idea that the concepts "precarious" and "informality" may be used interchangeably, contending that both concepts cut across the formal and informal economies. Even better, precarity provides a better approach to understanding the various types of labour insecurities that are overlooked under the concept of informality. Therefore, in this study precarity was used to highlight the nature of employment in the informal economy, which is characterised by uncertainty and unpredictability (Zhou, 2013). The impact of COVID-19 on street vendors was a clear example of how precarity affects employment in the informal economy and the labour market as a whole. In this regard, when a major external event like a

global pandemic occurs, it further destabilizes already precarious working conditions and threatens the livelihoods of those who rely on informal jobs like street vending.

The informal economic activities were officially recognised and analysed in the literature under the term informal economy in the early 1970s by British anthropologist Keith Hart in response to the low-income migrants in Ghana who were experiencing difficulties in finding employment (Hart, 1973; Chen, 2012). The migrants participated in self-employment activities to sustain themselves. Hart (1973) then coined the term "informal economy" to refer to this segment of the urban working population that operates outside the formal labour market. The term was later used to refer to ways of generating a livelihood outside of the formal wage economy, either as an alternative to it or as a supplement to the income earned therein (Chen, 2012: 5). Although Hart's early work on informality is often acknowledged in the literature, the International Labour Office's study on employment in Kenya is considered as having undertaken ground-breaking research on the informal economy (ILO, 1972).

According to the ILO report, the primary role of the informal economy was to provide families with better access to employment opportunities and income distribution. In this case, the argument was that the informal economy helped to combat socio-economic problems in the capitalist society such as unemployment and social inequality. Later, as the debate concerning the informal economy grew and more scholars wrote extensively about it, it was assumed that the informal economy had the potential for a more suitable pattern of growth with a more equitable distribution of income (Hart, 1970;1973; ILO, 1972). Early researchers on the informal economy argued that it provides a way for people to sell goods and services and make money if they are unable to find employment in the formal economy. In this regard, the ability to generate a living in the absence of resources, as well as resilience to adversity, confirmed to Hart (1970) and other scholars such as Sethuraman (1976) that people who work in the informal economy have the potential to expand their operations to sustain their livelihoods (Tokaman, 1978).

Currently, millions of people around the world rely on the informal economy for livelihoods and employment opportunities (Fourie, 2019). The International Labour Organization (2018) states that the informal economy employs over 2 billion people globally. However, despite this large number of people participating in the informal economy globally, Africa has the biggest informal economy compared to all other continents. This economy accounts for 86% of employment in Africa, and 72% if agriculture is not included (Joseph, Nevo and Nwolisa,

2020). The informal economy is prevalent in West, East, Central, and Southern African countries, but South Africa has a relatively small informal economy in comparison to other African countries. The informal economy in South Africa accounts for only 34% to 55% of total employment, in comparison to other African countries like Burkina Faso (94.6%), Benin (94.5%), and Madagascar (64.5%) (Bonnet, Vanek and Chen, 2019:30). According to South African Statistics (2021), South Africa has over 3 million people who work in the informal economy, accounting for nearly 20% of total employment in the country (Statistics South Africa, 2021). In terms of its contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the informal economy makes up about 8% of the country's economic growth and provides a sizeable portion of livelihood activities (Khambule, 2020:93). The informal economy has therefore developed to play a significant role beyond the general economic function it serves, as argued in the early works of Hart (1972), by assisting in the fight against poverty, contributing to the country's GDP, and giving those who are unemployed and underprivileged a means of subsistence (Faurie, 2019; Ntuli, 2020).

Given the contributions the informal economy makes to the country's economy and disadvantaged households in society, policy frameworks continue to overlook the informal economy. This is evident in the critical role it plays in the modern economy, as there is a shortage of formal employment, and many existing formal jobs are becoming informal. Thus, different points of view emphasize the necessity to acknowledge the informal economy and workforce as the main foundation of the global economy and workforce. Chen (2012) argues that it is crucial to recognize the contributions made by informal businesses and workers, as well as to include them in legal and economic frameworks. The same thoughts are expressed by Fourie (2017), who argues that the informal economy is constantly expanding in developing countries, giving impoverished people jobs, and reducing household poverty. In this regard, she advocates for governments to aid, enabling frameworks, and infrastructure to workers in the informal economy.

The lack of union representation is a serious issue that cannot be overlooked. Unions must engage in social and political bargaining on behalf of workers with government entities and legislative bodies. The participants in the informal economy lack a voice and a representative body that would speak for them in the event of a crisis. This was evident during the COVID-19 outbreak, when many participants in the economy were left stranded, exacerbating their social and economic vulnerabilities. Therefore, this served as a wake-up call to the government

and policymakers to review all economic and social policies in terms of their impact on all sectors of the economy (Chen, 2021: 20).

2.3 Defining the informal economy

There is a lot of terminological ambiguity in the literature on the informal economy. This means that the concept may have different meanings to different scholars given the variety and character of informal activities. Beker (2004) cited in Mago (2018:32), argues that how one defines the informal economy depends on the theoretical framework they are using or the key elements of the informal economy they are focusing on. In this regard, different names with different connotations have been used to describe the informal economy, including the underground economy (Lemieux, Fortin, and Frechette, 1994), the black or hidden economy (Thomas, 1999), the shadow economy (Schneider and Enste, 2000), the unofficial economy (Ruzek, 2014), and the grey economy (Pauch, 2018), among other descriptive terms. It has not been possible to come up with a specific definition of the informal economy. The diverse and wide-ranging economic activities that make up the informal economy contribute to the challenges in defining the term (Mukamba, 2021). Instead, academics have been defining the informal economy according to the problem at hand. To put it another way, academics define the concept based on the context in which they write (Mupamhadzi, 2019). The ILO's (2003) definition of the informal economy will be applied throughout this study, which describes the informal economy as:

> All remunerative work (i.e. both self-employment and wage employment) that is not registered, regulated or protected by existing legal or regulatory frameworks, as well as non-remunerative work undertaken in an income-producing enterprise. Informal workers do not have secure employment contracts, workers' benefits, social protection, or workers' representation.

One of the commonly used definitions of the informal economy is a process of income generation that is primarily distinguished by the absence of formal regulation in a legal and social setting where similar activities are regulated. The International Labour Organization (2013: 3) defines those who are self-employed as being part of the informal economy. In this context, the term "informal economy" refers to the profitable labour of self–employed individuals, such as street vendors, who are not registered, regulated, or protected by the

existing legal or regulatory frameworks. These people lack stable employment contracts with formal institutions or organisations, making it difficult for them to get social security benefits, labour representation, or other employee benefits. The concepts of the informal economy, and the informal economy are often used interchangeably in research studies. These two concepts are separate yet complementary. The "informal sector" refers to all businesses, regardless of whether they are registered for tax purposes or not. However, the informal economy refers to any economic activity performed by informal workers and economic units that are not covered by any formal laws (ILO, 2003). Therefore, these two concepts were not used interchangeably for this study. The "informal economy" was a working concept throughout the research to refer to all economic activities performed by informal workers as a means of sustenance.

2.4. Dominant schools of thought in the informal economy

The informal economy is now a research topic in several studies from a variety of fields, including labour law, economics, sociology, and gender studies. This interest can be explained by several factors, including the growth of the informal economy (Etim and Daramola, 2020; Blaauw, 2015), the lack of social protection and employment opportunities (Fourie, 2021; Smit and Mpedi, 2010), the links between the formal and informal economies (Chen, 2005; Valodia and Devey, 2010), as well as the realization that the informal economy is a long-term phenomenon rather than something that would vanish once developing countries see adequate economic progress (Chen, 2012). However, contrary to popular belief, informality has not vanished, but rather become permanent. In this case, literature has provided three main schools of thought for explaining the causes and origins of the informal economy in the global economy, especially in developing countries. According to Chen, Vanek, and Carr (2004:27), these three schools are dualistic, structural, and legalist. The schools of thought serve as a framework for classification which gives a simplified yet comprehensive structure for analysing the informal economy.

2.4.1 The dualist perspective

The dualistic approach is built on the work of Hart (1973), the International Labour Organization (ILO, 1972), Sethuraman (1976), Tokaman (1978), and Lewis (1954). The informal economy is seen in this perspective as a subsistence economy that exists because the modern economy is unable to employ the whole labour force. When seen in this light, the

informal economy is a regulator and a palliative to the crisis of the modern economy. As a result, it will undoubtedly vanish as soon as the economy picks up and expands. From this angle, marginal activities are seen as making up the informal operations within the informal economy. According to Narayan (2011:13), "marginal activities are less profitable activities connected to survivalist or necessity-driven entrepreneurship that are frequently carried out by people driven by a lack of other opportunities". Working in the informal economy is a way out of extreme poverty in many developing countries, however, some participants do so voluntarily. Therefore, the number of people in the informal economy would grow in response to the need for survival and reduce as more people obtained formal employment (Mhlana, 2020).

2.4.2 Structuralist perspective

Caroline Moser promoted the structuralist school in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Moser, 1978). It supported the idea that the informal economy should be viewed as a subordinated economic unit in which employees help to reduce labour input and cost, boosting the competitiveness of big capitalist enterprises. Different modes and forms of production are viewed in the structuralist framework as not just coexisting but also related to and dependent on the formal economy (Narayan, 2011:13). In this regard, "the focus of the structuralist approach is on existing relationships between formal and informal economies". The approach insists on a linkage of subordination between the two economies within the framework of a capitalist system of production. The argument is that because the informal economy has lower labour costs, the modern economy benefits from it to be more competitive in social relationships that correspond to various phases of development (Ibrahim, Loudi, and Simplice, 2022).

2.4.3 Legalist perspective

As put forward by De Soto in the 1980s and 1990s, the legalist school subscribes to the notion that the informal economy is comprised of micro-entrepreneurs who choose to operate informally to avoid the costs, time, and effort of formal registration (De Soto, 1989). The legalist school argues that those in the informal economy operate as such to avoid formal rigid regulation by states, such as expensive and cumbersome registration and other procedural and operating costs. This indicates that if government processes remain time-consuming and expensive, informal traders will continue to trade informally (Ibrahim, Loudi, and Simplice,

2022). According to De Soto (1989), the urban informal economy is where pure and perfect competition arises since multiple legislative restrictions prohibit it from developing in the formal economy. Contrary to this school, the voluntarist approach focuses on those who choose to work in the informal economy on purpose. They pay little attention to the economic links between informal and formal operations, but they believe that informal operations generate unfair competition for formal operations by avoiding formal regulations, taxes, and other costs of production (Chen, 2012:6). Therefore, the legalist main argument is that to increase the tax base and reduce unfair competition for formal operations, informal operations should be subjected to the formal regulatory framework.

Despite the fact that each of these schools of thought has received considerable attention and has some validity, Chen (2012:6) emphasizes that it is critical to remember that the informal economy is more complex than the sum of these ideas would suggest. The long struggle to develop statistical definitions of informality, as well as the failure to incorporate informal operations into legal poly frameworks, demonstrate this.

2.5. Factors pushing people to participate in the informal economy

Inequality is one of the most pressing issues confronting societies around the world (Khambule and Siswana, 2017). According to The World Bank study (2022) which was conducted to determine the factors contributing to social inequality, Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, and Namibia are reported to be the most unequal countries in Africa when compared to other African countries. However, South Africa is hardly an exception in this regard. It is supposedly the most unequal country on the continent and in the world, ranking first among 164 countries in the World Bank's global poverty database (The World Bank, 2022). This inequality is the result of colonial and apartheid policies, which explicitly constructed a fundamentally unequal South Africa. In contrast, South Africa, underwent a political and economic transition in 1994 to end the colonial and apartheid systems.

The main objectives of the transformation process included promoting socioeconomic development and growth, raising the standard of living, and emancipating those who had previously been oppressed, especially women and the poor. However, this socioeconomic inequality has not changed much since inequality continues to be a developmental concern of our time. The reality of women in South Africa is still defined by the lack of access to resources and opportunities as a result of their race, class, and gender. As a result, these significant

barriers are preventing disadvantaged black women from accessing the country's resources and opportunities. Having said that, South African women are far more economically vulnerable than their male counterparts, and women aged 35 and above are more likely to work in the informal economy (Saloshni and Nithiscelaan, 2022). Studies have been done to explore the many reasons why people join the informal economy (Phalane, 2009) and the contributions it makes to various households (Ngundu, 2010). As a result, this subheading discusses the reasons why people choose to work as street vendors in the informal economy, drawing on the body of existing literature.

One of the most important socioeconomic problems in South Africa is unemployment, which affects a quarter of the labour force. According to Statistics SA, the standard definition of unemployment relates to people between the ages of 15 and 64 who have no jobs but are searching for employment, and those who have given up searching for employment. South Africa's unemployment rate has been exacerbated by the pandemic, that had affected the country's hundreds of thousands of jobs from July to September 2021 (Stats SA, 2022). The worst affected workers were those in the informal economy, while those in the formal economy were the least impacted. As a result, the pandemic aggravated the inequalities in terms of race, age, and gender, while also exposing women's pre-existing vulnerabilities in society.

Following the official definition of unemployment issued by the QLFS in the third quarter of 2021, South Africa had an average women's unemployment rate of 37.3%, compared to a men's unemployment rate of 32.9%. This demonstrates that the gender disparity in South African unemployment rates is a chronic and worrying issue, with women experiencing a greater rate of unemployment than males. This difference is most likely the result of a mix of factors, including structural inequalities, traditional gender norms, and economic impediments for women. The gender gap in South Africa has been explored in various studies (Dias and Naude, 2020; Kinnear and Woolard, 2021), but further analysis is required to understand the particular reasons of the gender gap in South Africa. Therefore, this is significant because addressing the causes may aid in closing the gender gap and improving employment opportunities for both men and women.

This gap was even more evident among youth, as men's unemployment, while still high at 47%, was much lower than women's unemployment, which averaged 58% nationwide. In terms of racial classifications, the official unemployment rate for black African women was

close to 41.5%, compared to 9.9% for white women, 25.2% for Indian women, and 29.1% for coloured women (Stats SA, 2022). The data show that men have an advantage over women in the South African labour market, and are more likely than women to be employed. Moreover, existing research on unemployment in South Africa has primarily been conducted at the national level (Kingdon Knight, 2004;2007; Banerjee *et al*., 2008; Davies and Thurlow, 2010; Posel *et al*., 2014), with fewer studies examining the country's unemployment problem at the regional level (Kingdon Knight, 2007; Klasen and Woolard, 2008; Ardington *et al*., 2016; Reddy *et al*., 2016). Rural unemployment rates are greater than urban unemployment rates, with different magnitudes among provinces (Kwenda, Ntuli, and Mudiriza, 2020:2). In the first quarter of 2021, the North West Province's unemployment rate was 35.7%. For that quarter, the North West province had the fifth-highest unemployment rate when compared to other provinces (Stats SA, 2022). However, little is known about rural unemployment rates, making them difficult to quantify. This demonstrates an absence of information regarding rural unemployment, which poses a huge scholarly and policy concern. It is impossible to develop policy initiatives that address the challenges of unemployment and poverty in these places without proper information on the extent and breadth of the problem. As a result, this underlines the need for more research into the nature and context of rural unemployment, particularly in the North West province.

High levels of poverty in South Africa have pushed many unemployed people into informal activities in the informal economy (Lalthapersad-Pillay, 2004:28). The general definition of poverty is the inability to meet a minimal standard of living, which is determined by the amount of money needed to meet basic consumption needs. Therefore, according to its strict meaning, poverty may be interpreted as the “inability of individuals, households, or entire communities to get enough resources to maintain a minimal quality of life that is socially acceptable” (Kehler, 2001: 41). According to Statistics South Africa (2019), KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, and the Eastern Cape are the three provinces with the highest rates of adult poverty in 2021, followed by the North West, which has a rate of 59.6%. This shows a clear link between poverty and the informal economy in South Africa. Poverty has been shown to be a significant driver of informal economic activity, which in turn perpetuates poverty and inequality. This creates a cycle of poverty that is difficult to break without addressing the underlying structural issues that contribute to it. It is therefore essential to develop policies that target poverty and the informal economy simultaneously in order to create more equitable and sustainable development.

2.6. Women's participation in the informal economy

One of the most overlooked contributing factors to the extreme poverty that affects women is unpaid labour which conflicts with other roles they should play in society. In most African societies, women make up around half of the population and are essential to both reproduction and productivity (Makama, 2013). Due to their dual responsibilities in the productive and reproductive spheres, women contribute to the social and economic growth of societies. Shabangu (2017:32) contends that the responsibilities concerning reproductive work include pregnancy, childrearing, and household activities, some of which are biologically determined. This role is naturally regarded as women's labour because women carry children, which naturally ties them to the reproduction of all human life. They also extend it to nurturing and caring not only for children but also for people who are sick or elderly in the household through the daily provision of a wide range of domestic services. However, although it is necessary for human survival, reproductive work is rarely regarded as real work in all spheres of society. Shabangu (2017:33) asserts further that productive labour carried out by women is frequently seen as a secondary source of income and typically occurs in the form of sectoral enterprises, domestic work, self-employment in urban areas, and agricultural work in rural areas. The productive role is regarded as real labour in contrast to the reproductive role since it guarantees an extra income for the household. As a result, women continue to face gender inequities in the distribution of resources in society (Mago, 2020).

Research indicates that gender discrimination persists in the contemporary labour market, in both formal and informal economies (Devey, Skinner and Valodia, 2006; Mabilo, 2018; Mukamba, 2021). In the labour market, women face disadvantages in terms of access to productive employment opportunities in the formal economy, salary disparities, and working conditions. As a result, many seek alternate employment in the informal economy. According to the ILO's data on informal employment by gender in South Africa from the 2019 report, women had a slightly higher rate of informal employment than men across all sectors. In the agriculture sector, for example, women account for 58% of informal employment while men account for 48%. In the trade sector, women account for 50% of informal workers, while men account for the remaining 50%. In the services sector, women make up 52% of informal employees, while men make up 48%. As a result, women participate in the informal economy at a slightly higher percentage than men.

The participation of women in the informal economy is a global issue, but it is especially evident in developing countries such as South Africa. This is due to a variety of factors, including a lack of access to formal employment opportunities, a lack of education and training, and traditional gender expectations. Additionally, the formal economy provides a greater degree of independence and flexibility, which might be attractive to women who have family responsibilities. This is supported by the findings of Joseph, Nevo, and Nwolisa (2020), who note that women in low- to middle-income countries are more exposed to precarious conditions and are more likely to be found in informal employment.

In South Africa, the vast majority of women in the informal economy are engaged in survivalist or microenterprise activities, such as street trading, domestic work, and childcare (Raniga, 2022). These activities are often low-paid and insecure, and they lack social protection. The overrepresentation of women in the informal economy in South Africa and across the global South is an indication of structural inequalities and a lack of access to resources and opportunities. In this regard, research has consistently shown that women's participation in the informal economy is often not a matter of choice but rather a necessity driven by the limited options available to them. This has been highlighted by studies such as Rogerson (2020), who found that the informal economy is often a last resort for women who are unable to find formal employment. Van der Westhuizen and Kaganof (2020) have also pointed out the ways in which women are disproportionately represented in the informal economy due to structural inequalities and a lack of resources. Therefore, these structural barriers must be addressed in order to create a more just and inclusive economy.

2.7. Informal street vending as an economic stimulant and a means of survival

The informal economy is made up of a variety of informal operations. These operations divide the informal economy into four categories: "survivalist, micro-enterprise, small business, and medium-sized business" (Lalthapersad-Pillay, 2004:22). The survivalist economy includes street vending and home-based employment. Little is known about the significant contribution of street vending to food security because of negative perceptions about it. According to Cohen and Garrett (2021), food security is determined by both the availability of food and the household's ability to acquire it, which is determined by both household income and food prices. According to Wegerif (2020), in South Africa's poorer communities, almost 70% of households buy most of their food from street vendors. This is due to a variety of factors,

including affordability and offering regular customers interest-free credit. Thus, when it comes to ensuring food security in South Africa, the availability and cost of food are key concerns (Ross, Ruthven, Lombard, and McLachlan, 2013). Moreover, the formal and informal economies are intertwined. Half of the street vendors buy the goods they sell from formal businesses (WIEGO, 2021). This is evident in the Pick-N-Pay study cited in Wegerif where it is stated that the informal economy constitutes 40 to 50% of their sales (2020). Gamieldien and van Niekerk (2017) estimate that street vendors combined with other informal traders generate about R360 billion annually. The International Labour Organization (ILO) study from 2018 expands on this point by stating that, in general, more people are employed in the informal food economy than in the formal food economy. However, in the context of Lichtenburg, it is important to understand the contribution that women street vendors make to the local economy by sourcing the goods they sell from formal agricultural produce.

The street vending sector is characterised by a low level of income, self-employment, and ease of entry due to the absence of the required start-up capital, and the bureaucratic red tape required when registering a business. Lalthapersad-Pillay (2004:25) and Willemse (2011:08) make the argument that people in the informal economy establish street vending businesses using loans from friends and relatives. This is due to their lack of legal recognition, which prevents them from seeking loans from formal financial institutions, for which the profit margin is insufficient to repay the loans. Considering the above, people who operate in the informal economy are not covered by either individual or collective labour laws in South Africa. Those who work in the informal economy lack the protection against unfair labour practices and exploitation that are afforded to those who work in formal jobs (Labour Relations Act, 2002). There is also collective labour law, which focuses primarily on employees' rights to join unions, organize, and engage in collective bargaining with their employers (Social Law Project, 2014). Unfortunately, this does not apply to their situation because they do not have a specific employer. With that said, street vendors have significantly less legal protection than most people who work in the other sectors of the informal economy (Nenzhelele, 2013).

Moreover, street vendors usually sell their goods to the public in urban areas where there are no built-up facilities from which to sell. According to Mitullah (2003:05), they occupy spaces outside enclosed premises, usually on street pavements, sidewalks, bus stations, and other areas where there is a lot of movement. In most circumstances, street vendors are occupying spaces illegally since they are not authorized by their local municipalities to use them for trading.

Several studies have highlighted the challenges encountered by street vendors (Nkrumah-Abebrese, 2017; Zogli *et al.,* 2021; Khumalo and Ntini, 2021), and according to Arias (2019: 8), "one of the possible obstacles to street vending is access to public space", making it a private interest that does not meet the criteria for being a public good.

Furthermore, street vendors' decisions about where to sell their goods and services are frequently impacted by a variety of factors, most significantly the movement of people (Kamalipour and Peimani, 2019). They prefer places where there is pedestrian flow, especially around busy places such as entrances to shopping centres and stations. Their products dominate both the pavements and roads, and it is believed that they are breaking the law by doing so. In this case, the success of their operation entirely depends on their physical presence in public areas, the movement of the people and, the degree to which the authorities tolerate their appropriation and use of these spaces. In Lichtenburg, most of the vendors set up stalls around taxi ranks, some set up shop at the park and others in the CBD, close to the entrance of the shopping complex. Their economic activities have become a heated topic over the years due to claims that they block the traffic on pavements and produce a significant amount of garbage.

In light of this this, street vendors encounter several operational challenges, including intimidation from the authorities and other members of the public, because they lack permission to trade in such spaces (Nenzhelele, 2013). The local authorities are therefore required to establish an environment that is favourable to street vendors as well. As previously stated, their ability to collectively challenge restrictive and discriminatory laws, policies, and decisions taken against them is constrained by the absence of labour laws in their case (Social Law Project, 2014). Thus, as evidenced in a study done by Hlengwa (2016), it is important to adequately prepare for street vending operations by integrating them into special planning and development to ensure that they have a positive impact on other members of the community.

2.8. The COVID-19 outbreak and its impact on the informal economy

The outbreak of Corona Virus (COVID-19) in Wuhan, China, in 2019 and its subsequent spread to the whole world caused uncertainty in the economy and other aspects of life (Kithiia, Wanyonyi, Maina, Jefwa and Gamoyo, 2020). COVID-19, according to the World Health Organization (2020), is airborne and spreads from person to person. As a result, most governments took drastic measures to stop the spread of the virus and to save lives. The most

common of these measures were the restrictions on people's movement and trade. In South Africa, the National Corona Command Council (NCC) imposed the country's first 21-day strict lockdown on the 27th of March 2020 (Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing, 2021). The South African government implemented a COVID-19 alert system on March 26th, 2020, as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. At Level 5, the highest level of restrictions, the sale of non-essential goods, including alcohol and cigarettes, was prohibited. The government's stated aim was to reduce the spread of the virus and protect public health. However, the ban on these items had serious economic repercussions, particularly for informal workers who relied on the sale of such goods.

The South African government's classification of selling food as an essential service did not necessarily extend to all types of food vendors, including those operating in the informal economy. As Sibanda, Ziga and Ndlovu (2021) noted, many street vendors were unable to operate during the Level 5 restrictions, despite selling food, due to their lack of formal registration or lack of compliance with health and safety regulations. In this regard, the government's policy on essential services, which did not take into account the informal economy, exemplifies the close relationship between street vending and the transmission of infectious diseases, including viruses. As noted by Ongukola, Imo, Obia, Okolie, and Prisno (2021), the exclusion of street vendors from operating during the Level 5 restrictions had significant public health implications. In comparison to formal food retailers, street vending had very little possibility of adhering to COVID-19 regulations because it generally takes place in crowded places and is not formally monitored. As a result, the practice of imposing health-related restrictions during disease outbreaks in Africa portends serious complications for members of the informal economy, particularly street vendors. While President Ramaphosa (2021) contended that the restrictions were necessary to save lives while also preserving livelihoods, other research has suggested that the restrictions had a devastating impact on the livelihoods of street vendors. For example, the WIEGO (2021) report found that 97% of street vendors went out of business during the lockdown, while Sibanda et al. (2021) showed that the livelihoods of street vendors were severely compromised.

The government later announced in mid-April 2020 that informal food vendors and spaza shops are considered essential services and may return to work. Even though they were able to return to work, their economic performance deteriorated because of business hours' restrictions and trading regulations (Nasation *et al*., 2021). Additionally, according to the regulations, they

could only sell essential goods if they obtained permission from their ward councillors or the municipality. Those selling non-essential goods remained barred from doing business. As a result, the measures taken to stop the spread of the COVID-19 virus have hurt most economic and social activities (ILO, 2020:06). The earnings of informal traders are heavily dependent on the movement of people willing to pay for the goods and services offered in the informal trade. Therefore, the restrictions on movement had a significant impact on street vendors' ability to work and earn money, and this proposed study seeks to explore the coping strategies of women vendors and avoid falling further into poverty during this period.

National governments adopted strategies and measures to save livelihoods and economies during and in the aftermath of COVID-19 restrictions. The South African Government implemented a variety of emergency measures to mitigate the negative economic effects of the lockdown regulations. These included disaster relief funds, tax relief, small business funding, unemployment insurance funds (UIF), and small grants from municipalities (Khambule, 2020: 101). These grants were one way to raise funds to keep people's livelihoods afloat during the lockdown. Informal vendors, however, were unable to meet the requirements for the support grants due to the lack of social protection in the informal economy. Additionally, Rogan and Skinner (2020: 23) have argued that the application processes for these grants imposed an onerous administrative burden on the applicants, which simply denied them access. The Department of Small Business Development also launched several initiatives to help small businesses during the mandatory lockdown, but most informal businesses were not included (Skinner, 2020:23). Therefore, considering their exclusion from relief grants because of their informal status, this study seeks to explore how informal vendors navigated through the restrictions to sustain themselves.

Street vending draws the most vulnerable members of society based on their age, race, gender, and socioeconomic status, among other factors. Street vendors strive each day to make enough money by selling goods and services to the public and their clientele to fulfill their basic needs. However, the pandemic made street vendors even more vulnerable by destroying their sources of income and throwing them into poverty (Sharma, Sharma, and Begum, 2022: 42). WIEGO (2021) conducted extensive research and published several articles on the impact of COVID-19 regulations on street vendors. It is argued that many of the legislation and restrictions passed in response to COVID-19 have hurt street vendors, whose livelihood depends on access to public spaces and social interactions. The reports highlight that the sales of street vendors

decreased because of curfews limiting their workdays, reduced pedestrian and vehicle traffic, and limited public transportation. Given that many people engage in street vending activities to escape poverty, the fear of relapsing into it made many street vendors decide to violate the laws put in place to stop the spread of the virus in order to survive. As a result, they had little to no savings to depend on, no social security or unemployment benefits, and little hope of finding other sources of income.

Therefore, the economic impact of the lockdown on street vendors was severe, as many live in what WIEGO (2021) terms a 'hand-to-mouth economy'. In other words, they earn enough money on a daily basis to cover their basic needs but have no savings to fall back on. This meant that the loss of their livelihoods due to the lockdown resulted in a loss of income that pushed them into deep poverty. The stress and anxiety caused by the financial insecurity may have had a negative impact on their physical and mental health. Hence, policies and interventions should prioritize economic stability, social safety nets, and mental health support for informal workers.

Section B: Theoretical framework

2.9. Theoretical orientation

In this study, the concept of sustainable livelihood is appropriate to assess the activities of those working in the informal economy, who are underprivileged, earn little money, have little access to social services, and are particularly vulnerable to pandemic outbreaks like COVID-19. In this regard, studies (Boatang-Pobee *et al.,* 2021; Skinner and Watson, 2021; and Wegerif, 2020) have shown how the pandemic had significantly impacted the livelihoods of people working in the informal economy; thus, the framework serves as the foundation for this study, to investigate how women street vendors in Lichtenburg have coped with and recovered from the stresses and shocks imposed by the pandemic.

2.9.1 Sustainable livelihoods framework

Many people are still poor and getting poorer despite economic growth, technological advancements, and the accumulation of knowledge. This is due to the fact that access to and control over resources are still very unequal (Kaag, 2004). As a result, poverty has long been a source of concern in academic research and policy development. “Different insights from both fields gave rise to a perspective that dominated in the 1970s and 1980s”, seeking to explore

and tackle the problem of poverty in rural communities (Sakdapolrak, 2014:19). In response to this growing focus on poverty alleviation, the livelihood approach emerged in the 1990s. The livelihood approach was created to focus on the everyday realities of the poor in order to discover how they secure their livelihoods and what it is that can sustain poor households through life's stresses and shocks (Bohle, 2009). Since then, livelihood research has owed its prominence to the fruitful interplay between scientific research and development policy and practice (Sakdapolrak, 2014).

According to the literature, the subject of how the poor sustain themselves can be traced back to Polanyi (1977), whose work heavily influenced the livelihood framework that is acknowledged in academia today, attributed to the work of Chambers (1987), Chambers and Conway (1992), and Scoones (1998). Since then, the framework has been used to examine the broader context in "which households exist, the livelihood resources available to each household, livelihood strategies in pursuit of livelihood outcomes, and the institutional processes that influence livelihood outcomes" (Scoones, 1998:3). In its simplest term, the livelihood framework looks at the diverse activities that the poor and vulnerable groups engage in to better understand how they are able to survive in the face of risk and stress (Sakdapolrak, 2014). Moreover, the framework has been widely adopted, but it has not been without criticism. The central aspect of a sustainable livelihood framework is that it is people-centred, with the concept that the poor are important and have agency.

Accordingly, the poor have the agency to actively shape their lives through the material and non-material assets, depending on the context in which they must make a living (Kaag *et al*., 2004:4). In this regard, the framework opposes structural approaches to poverty alleviation, which frequently reduce people to passive recipients of structural constraints. Instead, it focuses on their actions or even proactive roles in ensuring their survival in the face of uncertainty, risk, stress, and shock (Bohle, 2009). Additionally, literature on sustainable livelihoods framework has identified one of the advantages of the framework as the emphasis it places upon the coping strategies that make poor people's lives work (Kaag *et al*., 2004; Scoones, 1998). This is relevant to this study as one of the aims is to explore the coping strategies and networks of street vendors.

A shortcoming of the approach that has been identified, particularly on the academic front, is an unbalanced relationship between agency and structure. It is argued that the framework places too much emphasis on agency and ignores structural features and how they may influence the livelihood strategies that people choose (Sakdapolrak, 2014). Therefore, while highlighting the agency of the poor and acknowledging their activities and strategies, it is important to keep in mind the structural constraints that could restrict their initiatives (Krantz, 2001). In this case, the study acknowledges the framework's shortcomings but still finds it appropriate to employ. This is due to the fact that the framework assesses survival and coping strategies based on what a person is capable of achieving and becoming, as well as his or her own perceptions of what is desired (Sen 1987, referenced in Kaaga *et al*., 2004). As a result, a sustainable livelihood framework in this study helps to examine the participants' coping and survival strategies in the context of the COVID-19 national lockdown restrictions on livelihood strategies.

2.9.3 Components of a sustainable livelihood framework

The sustainable livelihood framework is made up of several components, all of which have an impact on the decisions poor people make when it comes to adopting survival livelihood strategies (Magobe, 2020:26). The components are referred to as “livelihood assets”, often called “capitals”, and they serve as the foundation for livelihood strategies that people can adopt to generate an income (Scoones, 1998: 7). In this regard, a livelihood asset is required to achieve a livelihood outcome. However, the more assets a person has, the wider their range of options and their ability to switch between various strategies in pursuit of sustainable livelihood outcomes. These assets can be classed as material or social, tangible or intangible, and serve as the foundation upon which livelihoods are built. These asset bases include natural capital, physical capital, financial capital, human capital, and social capital.

- **Natural capital** is mostly found in rural areas, where rural households rely on it to make a living. It encompasses the stocks and environmental services that generate resource flows and services useful for livelihoods (Scoones, 1998:7). These include the land, water, genetic resources, and other natural resources that people can employ to sustain their livelihoods, either as supplementary livelihoods or as their main livelihood activities (Vhiga, 2019: 29). However, natural resources are regarded as less important when exploring the urban environment unless the targeted dependants on urban agriculture (Makheta, 2010). Natural capital is central to the livelihood strategies used

by participants in this study to achieve their desired livelihood outcomes. Natural resources are used to grow the fruits and vegetables that women vendors offer. Despite this, the study's findings confirm Makheta's (2010) claim that street vendors, particularly those who operate in town settings, rarely possess natural capital and women generally experience unequal access to natural capital. This demonstrates the persistent gender disparities that are caused by patriarchal systems that see women as inferior in rural areas. As a result, women are less likely to have natural capital, which makes it challenging for them to engage in economic activities to sustain their livelihood.

- **Physical capital** represents the basic infrastructure necessary for people to earn a living, such as equipment and tools. This makes access to public space a key component of physical capital since it may increase earnings if a business has access to the right infrastructure (Magobe, 2020: 28).
- **Financial capital** entails the ability to access financial resources including loans, earnings, and savings which are essential for the pursuit of any livelihood strategy (Scoones, 1998). A household's financial resources impact its investment in businesses, education, and health. In this regard, poor people receive their financial capital from labour, which they see as an important asset.
- **Human capital** is a term that describes a person's ability to engage in livelihood strategies and achieve their goals and objectives to sustain a livelihood. It presents a combination of skills, abilities, and a healthy physical condition for the pursuit of any livelihood strategy (Scoones, 1998). This capital is evaluated by considering people's health, skills, knowledge, and education. The quality and size of the workforce are thus shaped by human capital.
- **Social capital** refers to the social resources that people employ to meet their objectives. Social capital is concerned with the connections that exist between groups, allowing shared resources to flow between them. The ability of people to navigate through crises and shocks to sustain their standard of living makes social assets necessary for other types of capital to thrive. Access to social institutions, assistance from others, and group participation are a few examples of this (Scoones, 1998).

2.9.2 Vulnerability context

Pandemics and natural disasters are more alike in that they severely disrupt society, the economy, and people's everyday lives. They have immediate, unexpected, devastating, and sensitive effects in all aspects of life. However, the informal economy is frequently exposed to pandemics and natural disasters because of its nature and character, which makes it vulnerable and adversely affected by devastating events (Thulare and Moyo, 2021). People who work in the informal economy have been experiencing tragic events in various parts of the world and have reacted to them in various ways. One example is the floods that occurred in India (Mumbai) in 2005, which swept away the businesses and trading stalls of informal traders (Dixon, Malini, and Ayalasomayajula, 2008). The business economy was hit the most by the flood, which caused an estimated $1 billion (US) in damage. In response to the devastating event, Mumbai informal traders started self-help initiatives, using their social networks and their abilities to organize resources (Thulare and Moyo, 2021). According to ILO (2018) and Lama and Kuipers (2019), they were able to recover from the tragedy due to their innovativeness in rebuilding and reorganizing spaces using low-cost options, such as employing natural resources and waste materials to rebuild trading stalls. The 2015 earthquake in Nepal (Chatterjee and Okazaki, 2017) and the 2016 earthquake in Ecuador are two more examples of disastrous events that impacted people in the informal economy (Mendoza and Jara, 2019). Infrastructural assets like trading stalls and power supplies were destroyed, which severely impacted the informal economy. In response to these occurrences, the informal economic actors took action outside of the legislative framework established by the government for disaster management and response. Those involved in the informal economy teamed up with civic bodies like religious institutions to mobilize volunteerism and community projects to raise the funds necessary to restore facilities as well as provide operating capital for informal traders (Thulare and Moyo, 2021).

Africa, especially South Africa, is a site for natural disasters such as veld fires and floods (Davis-Reddy, Vincent, and Mambo, 2017). The occurrence of these natural disasters often results in varying degrees of damage to property, livelihoods, and infrastructure. For example, floods in 2000, and 2010 affected the livelihoods of those working in the informal economy in Thulamela, a rural region in Limpopo, and many other places, where several trading stalls and informal marketplaces were submerged by water (Thulare and Moyo, 2021). The most recent natural disaster episode occurred in the Kwazulu-Natal Province in April 2022. This all started

with “extreme rainfall”, which caused flooding that wrecked thousands of homes, roads, and bridges, and severely impacted important infrastructural facilities (Bouchard *et al*., 2022). This brings to light the vulnerable nature of informal economic activities, particularly street vending. Its vulnerabilities have amplified the economic shock to livelihoods in the face of COVID-19 and deepened pre-existing social, economic, and political inequalities in the labour market and society at large**.**

Furthermore, over the past 20 years, pandemics have had a negative influence on hundreds of individuals and had serious social and economic implications (UNESCO, 2007). Infectious diseases such as COVID-19, Ebola Virus Disease (EVD), Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), and severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), and the frantic measures taken to prevent and control them, pose a serious threat to the livelihoods and food security of many households all over the world (Ouko *et al.,* 2020:75). The COVID-19 pandemic affected all African countries and people, but it was extremely severe for businesses and employees in the informal economy (Schwettmann, 2020).

Therefore, the sustainable livelihood framework highlights the reality that the rural poor pursue livelihoods in a context of vulnerability over which they may have limited control (Twigg, 2001). According to Chambers (1985), vulnerability involves exposure and defenselessness rather than lack or want. The vulnerability context is made up of shocks such as pandemics, natural shocks such as natural disasters, and economic shocks such as rapid changes in exchange rates; economic trends such as recession, which can cause people to lose jobs and lead to high levels of unemployment; and seasonality, which is common in developing countries, such as seasonal shifts in available employment, prices, and food availability (DFID, 1999; Twigg, 2001, Mago, 2018). Vulnerability is basically the unfavourable impacts of change processes, whether they be economic, social, environmental, or political. These impacts might take the form of long-term trends, shocks, or cyclical processes like seasonality (Mago, 2018). Thus, a livelihood is considered sustainable when it can withstand shocks and stresses, recover from them, and retain or improve its capabilities and assets in the present and the future (Twigg, 2001). This being said, the number of assets a person possesses as well as the strength of their asset base both play a significant role in determining how well-equipped they are to withstand the threat posed by vulnerabilities.

2.3 Conclusion

It is evident that there is no universal approach to understanding this complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon after examining the many viewpoints and arguments around the characteristics and definition of the informal economy. In this regard, the characteristics and definitions of the informal economy are shaped by the context, with some scholars highlighting its vulnerability and marginalization while others emphasizing its potential for innovation and job creation. As a result, the informal economy remains a complex and contested topic in the literature, with no definitive answers on its exact nature or impact on society and the economy. Moreover, the dominant schools of thought in the informal economy, as represented by the dualist, structuralist, and legalist viewpoints, give different perspectives on the nature of this complex and diverse phenomenon. The dualist viewpoint stresses the contradiction between formal and informal employment, whereas the structuralist viewpoint emphasizes the structural inequities and marginalization that underpin informal work. In contrast, the legalist viewpoint emphasizes the significance of legal and regulatory frameworks in developing the informal economy. Overall, the informal economy is a diverse and rapidly evolving phenomenon that necessitates an in-depth and context-specific understanding.

The literature has highlighted the importance of understanding the factors that drive people into the informal economy in South Africa. The high levels of unemployment and poverty are key drivers of informal work, as people seek to meet their basic needs and generate income in the absence of formal employment opportunities. However, the lack of data on unemployment rates in rural areas in South Africa is a significant issue that has important implications for both policymaking and academic research. The majority of existing data comes from urban areas, which may not be representative of the conditions and experiences of those living in rural areas. It is therefore important to collect more accurate data on unemployment in rural areas in order to inform academic research and policies that are tailored to these areas. Therefore, the informal economy has a significant role to play in reducing unemployment and poverty and should be considered a key part of any efforts to improve economic conditions in rural areas.

According to the literature on women's participation in the informal economy in South Africa, women make up a large proportion of the informal workforce. This is partly due to the fact that women face greater barriers to accessing formal economy jobs, including discrimination, a lack of education and skills, and cultural norms that place greater responsibility for caregiving on

women. As a result, many women turn to the informal economy to earn a living. However, the informal economy can provide opportunities for income generation, but it is often characterized by poor working conditions, low pay, and a lack of social protections. Furthermore, informal street vending has been shown to have the potential to be an effective economic stimulant and a means of survival, particularly for low-income and vulnerable populations. A growing body of literature has highlighted the benefits of street vending, including increased income, employment, and business opportunities, as well as its role in providing goods and services to urban communities. In this regard, despite the challenges faced by street vendors, including limited access to resources and a lack of legal recognition, street vending can be a valuable asset for economic development. Therefore, there is a need for policy interventions that support and promote street vending while addressing the structural barriers that vendors face.

The literature on the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on the informal economy indicates that the pandemic has had a profound and devastating impact on informal workers. The closure of businesses and the loss of income have resulted in a decline in living standards and an increase in poverty, particularly among those who are already economically vulnerable. The pandemic has also highlighted the need for social protection for informal workers as well as the need for policies that support the economic recovery of the informal economy. However, the existing literature on the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on the informal economy in South Africa has several limitations that should be addressed in future research. First, there is a lack of systematic and comprehensive data on the experiences of informal workers, particularly in rural areas. Second, the majority of existing studies focus on urban areas, and more research is needed to understand the experiences of informal workers in rural and peri-urban areas. Third, the role of social protection policies and programs in supporting informal workers during the pandemic remains understudied. In conclusion, this literature review has shown that the sustainable livelihoods framework is a valuable theoretical orientation for the study, as it provides a holistic and comprehensive perspective on the experiences of informal workers during and after a pandemic. It also highlights the need for interventions that consider the social and structural factors that shape the livelihoods of informal workers. This review has identified gaps in the literature that this study seeks to address, such as a lack of research on the experiences of women street vendors in Lichtenburg, South Africa.

This chapter has provided a review of the relevant literature on the sustainable livelihoods framework, the experiences of informal workers during and after a pandemic, and the particular

circumstances of women street vendors in Lichtenburg, South Africa. Building on this literature review, the next chapter discuses the methodology and methods that were used to carry out this study. This includes an overview of the research design, the sampling strategy, and the data collection and analysis methods that were employed.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methodology underpinning this study, and the research process followed to address the research question. The chapter goes into considerable detail about the data collection, and analysis methods adopted for the study. The chapter subsequently outlines the method used to sample study participants from the population of street vendors at the specified research site, as well as the justification for choosing this research site. Lastly, this chapter also outlines this study's limitations as well as the ethical considerations that guided the development of the thesis.

3.2 Research Methodology

The goal of this study was to investigate and examine the impact of the COVID-19 national lockdown on women in the informal economy. Based on this goal, the broader aim was to seek a better understanding of the gendered impact of the COVID-19 national lockdown on the informal economy in South Africa. Both the goal and the broader aim were operationalised by looking into the coping mechanisms and survival strategies adopted by female street vendors in the selected research location, to sustain their businesses and livelihoods amid the severe lockdown restrictions on trading activities between March and May 2020. When doing scientific research, adopting a paradigm for a research project is imperative since it lays the foundation for the research journey and its methods. The paradigm assists in the development of a research plan that can assist the researcher in fully comprehending how the theories and practices of their research project can be aligned to answer the specified research question. The same viewpoint is maintained by Terre Blanche, Durrheim, and Painter (2009), who affirm that a paradigm in a research design is crucial since it influences the nature of the research topic and what is to be examined, and how. In the same spirit, Punch (2009) contends that a paradigm is important since it contains a collection of beliefs regarding the social world and what topics and research methods are appropriate for researching it.

3.2.1 Research paradigm

This study was exploratory in nature, with the purpose of producing a better understanding of a phenomenon that had not been thoroughly explored as argued in the literature review section of this study (Stebbins, 2001). This exploration was accomplished by adopting an interpretivist

methodological approach, which holds that social reality is made up of multiple realities that people create through human interactions (Yong, Husin and Kamarudin, 2021). While Check and Schutte (2012) also highlight that the interpretivist paradigm acknowledges the existence of multiple realities as well as the fact that reality is socially constructed based on people's past experiences and social interactions, Chalmers, Manley, and Wasserman (2009) contend that these social realities can differ through time and context. Additionally, because people actively construct their social realities, exploring social reality from the perspectives of the participants assists in fully understanding the issue at hand (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). Following these perspectives, the researcher determined that the interpretivism approach would be most appropriate given the study's emphasis on participant experiences and reliance on their perspectives to comprehend their social reality. Consequently, the researcher was able to investigate the social realities of women street vendors who were affected by the national lockdown trading restrictions through regular interactions with them throughout the data collection period, i.e., from the recruitment process to the one-on-one interviews.

3.3. Research design

This study employed a qualitative approach, which was guided by an interpretivist perspective (Bryman, 2012). According to Babbie and Mouton (2001), a qualitative approach provides a more thorough description and understanding of occurrences or actions, allowing the researcher to gain insight into why and how they occur. In this sense, a qualitative approach was appropriate since it helped in understanding such individuals and social events in their natural settings (Holosko, 2006). To avoid generalizing the experiences, this study investigated a global phenomenon that also had negative effects on a specific population in a given setting at a micro level. Additionally, social research can never be completely value-free as the researchers must put themselves in the participants' shoes to fully comprehend their subjective feelings and experiences. It was then necessary to build a good rapport with research participants and earn their trust so that they felt at ease while sharing their experiences. With that said, a qualitative approach permitted positive interactions to enable a better understanding of how participants perceived and interpreted their personal experiences as street vendors in relation to the trading restrictions imposed by the national lockdown. As a result, this approach gave the women participants a platform on which to communicate their views and share their feelings.

3.4. Case study

The case study method was employed with respect to the qualitative approach adopted for the study. Yin (2003) defines a case study as an empirical approach that allows a researcher to thoroughly explore a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context. This research was carried out using the case study method. The research was conducted in Lichtenburg, in the North-West Province, with a focus on women who work as street vendors. Lichtenburg is a town in the North-West Province, South Africa. It is the administrative centre of Ditsobotla Local Municipality. The town is between the towns of Mafikeng and Coligny on the R503. Lichtenburg is predominantly a farming town about 200 kilometres west of the major metropolis of Johannesburg. Manufacturing accounts for 38.5% of total economic activity, agriculture for 16.5%, and wholesale and retail for 7.4% (Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, 2020). The town of Lichtenburg was selected for this study because with agriculture and manufacturing being the two main economic sectors there, the fresh produce markets in town largely rely on informal food vendors for sales. Additionally, the fact that the case study design places emphasis on contextual conditions have made it suitable for this study, which aimed to explore survival strategies and coping mechanisms adopted by female street vendors, which are context specific.

The streets of Lichtenburg's CBD are crowded with street vendors, the majority of whom are women who set up trading tables next to one another and sell almost the same products at approximately the same prices. The main trade activities performed by the women who sell uncooked meals entail purchasing a relatively large number of fruits and vegetables from the fruit and vegetable markets and dividing them up into smaller batches to offer them at reasonable prices. The women who sell cooked meals reported that they bought the supplies from OK Foods. Consequently, the study supports the arguments made by several scholars (WIEGO, 2020; Wegerif, 2020) who maintain that street vendors have strong links to the formal economy. The customer of the vendors' base is made up of people who depend on social welfare services, such as old-age, child support, and disability grants. These people generally have low incomes, which makes it difficult for them to sustain themselves. Thus, it may be argued that street vending operations are necessary for providing food security, especially in low-income areas, because they provide food for many people at low and reasonable prices who cannot afford to buy from supermarkets (WIEGO, 2020).

3.5. Population and Sampling

According to Fong (2014), a population is made up of people who match specific criteria and are representative of the group from which a researcher seeks to draw a representative sample for further research. However, there must be a population from which the researcher seeks to draw conclusions, which Wenger (2010) refers to as a target population. The study's target population comprised women who worked as street vendors in Lichtenburg's informal economy prior to the COVID-19 outbreak. Given the high rates of poverty in Lichtenburg, as well as the area's rurality, it was necessary to emphasize the relevance of the informal economy in Lichtenburg.

3.5.1. Sampling

Thompson and Steven (2012) define sampling as the process of choosing a sample from a population and then using that subset to draw conclusions about the entire target population. The sample for this study consisted of six women street vendors. According to Vasileiou *et al.,* (2018), small samples are common in qualitative research since this method of inquiry relies heavily on in-depth, case-oriented analysis. In this regard, the researcher selected six participants because, as already stated, qualitative samples are relatively small. Additionally, six participants were able to provide rich data. For this study, the researcher used convenience sampling techniques to select participants. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling method in which the sample is selected based on ease of access and availability rather than probability-based methods such as random sampling (Creswell, 2014).

The convenience sampling method is often used when time and resources are limited, as it allows researchers to collect data quickly and efficiently. Although this approach has the advantages of being quick and easy to implement, it may be prone to bias and lead to a non-representative sample (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2009). To mitigate the challenges associated with convenience sampling, the researcher adopted purposive sampling by selecting participants based on specific characteristics or experiences that were relevant to the research question. This approach allows researchers to ensure that their sample includes a diverse range of perspectives, which can help reduce the risk of bias and improve the validity of research (Patton, 2015). In this regard, the researcher was able to make conclusions on her findings

while making sure that her research was more accurate and valuable by purposefully looking for participants who represented different groups and had unique experiences.

The researcher was familiar with the research location; she approached participants who owned stalls near the taxi rank and CBD, as these locations provided an opportunity to access a variety of people from different socio-economic backgrounds. She then approached those who were present at the time and invited them to participate in the study. This approach allowed her to recruit participants who were willing and available to participate, while also ensuring that the sample was diverse in terms of gender, age, and other relevant factors. She handed them a participant's sheet that included her contact details at the bottom of the page so they could learn more about the research. She then made appointments with those who were willing to participate in the study. In terms of accessibility, I conducted the research in a convenient location and at times that were suitable for the participants.

3.6. Data collection

Data from participants were gathered through one-on-one semi-structured interviews. Greeff (2005) highlights that this type of interview is used to acquire in-depth information about the participant's perceptions, beliefs, or experiences about a certain topic. Wagner (2014) also asserts that using interviews helps researchers to discover the answers to random but relevant questions related to the topic that may come up when conducting the interviews. Moreover, as was the case with this study, interviews with participants may happen at locations chosen by them. The rationale behind this was to allow participants to be comfortable during the interview. Accordingly, the more at ease participants are, the more likely it is that they will open up and reveal the details of their lived experiences in their own private spaces. Additionally, research (Edwards and Holland, 2013) has argued that participants frequently state that they prefer having interviews done at home because it allows for greater privacy and discretion. Moreover, Greeff (2005) continues by pointing out that there are prepared questions that serve as a guide for the interview and allow the researcher to determine how the interview unfolds. In this study, the researcher prepared a draft interview schedule of the questions to be asked. The researcher wanted to interview participants in a structured format that is supported by a schedule, while still allowing them some flexibility in how they respond to questions. The interviews were once-off. The interviews lasted for about 40 minutes. Permission to record was sought from the participants and the interviews were recorded using a cell phone.

3.7. Data analysis

Data analysis is an important phase in research because it helps researchers draw conclusions and insights from the data they collect. Patton (2015) defines this as examining, organizing, and interpreting data to uncover patterns, themes, and underlying meanings. This procedure is critical in research because it lets researchers make meaning of the data they have gathered. In this study, the qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted in the participants' and researcher's native language, Setswana, as this allowed for a more comfortable and natural conversation and ensured that the participants could express themselves fully. The interviews were recorded to capture the conversations in their entirety. However, the language barrier presented a challenge for the analysis process. Therefore, the recordings were later transcribed and translated into English to facilitate the analysis process. This translation process was undertaken with the utmost care and attention to detail to ensure that the nuances of the participants 'words were captured and not lost in translation. By translating the interviews, the researcher was able to preserve the authenticity of the participants' voices while making their words accessible for analysis in English.

The researcher then manually organized and transcribed the data without the assistance of any software products. This was owing to the limited sample size and qualitative nature of the data. The interviews were then coded into themes and sub-themes, which were identified through a process of reading and re-reading the transcripts and developing a coding scheme. Walliman (2011) defines a coding system as labels or tags that are used to assign units of meaning to data. The rationale for using the coding procedure was that it is analytical and requires the researcher to evaluate, select, analyse, and summarise the data accurately Furthermore, the qualitative theme analysis approach was used to analyse text data from interview transcripts. Thematic analysis was used to identify and comprehend key themes that emerge during the data analysis process (Kumar, 2005). This involved analysing the nonverbal and verbal signals that participants used to communicate their knowledge and experiences regarding the COVID-19 national lockdown restrictions on trading activities. Three key themes emerged from the analysis: the impact of lockdown restrictions on trading, the coping strategies of women street traders, and the support systems in place for women street traders. The themes were then analysed and interpreted, with supporting quotes from the interviews used to provide evidence and context. Therefore, these themes will be discussed in more detail in the findings chapter.

3.8. Positionality of the researcher

To prevent impacting or having an influence on the research process, researchers need to consider their actions, values, and perceptions (Kumar, 2005). Bourdieu (2002) also argues that researchers must always do their work with conscious attention to the impacts of their position, their own set of internalised structures, and how they are likely to distort or impair their objectivity. Similarly, Silva *et al*. (2016) affirm this by pointing out that one's positionality within the social setting might influence the interpretation and results of the study. In this case, as a black woman conducting a study on black women in a predominantly black community, the issue of positionality was of particular relevance. However, the researcher was aware of this dynamic and ensured that the research was conducted in an ethical and unbiased manner. She used a journal to record her thoughts and feelings throughout the research process. This helped her to identify and challenge any assumptions or biases she may have had and to ensure that she was remaining objective in her analysis. It also allowed her to reflect on the ways in which her identity and experiences may have influenced the research process.

Furthermore, as a student researcher, I was aware of the power imbalances between myself and the women I interviewed. Many of them were not as educated as I was; therefore, I considered how my identity as a student may have influenced their responses. Further, I recognized that they may have felt pressure to conform to certain expectations or present themselves in a certain way. In order to address the power imbalances, I drew on Bourdieu's concept of reflectivity, which suggests that researchers should be aware of their own positions and experiences and consider how these may shape their understanding of the research participants (2002). Therefore, this concept helped the researcher understand the women's perspectives and experiences in their own context, rather than interpreting them through my own lens, and also create an environment where they felt comfortable being themselves.

3.9. Ethical considerations

A crucial component of performing a research study is taking ethical issues into account (Punch, 2006). These are the moral guidelines that help researchers do their work without deceiving or intending, whether consciously or unconsciously, to hurt stakeholders (Cohen, Manion, & Marrison, 2007). Ethics, according to Gul, Parveen, and Yousuf (2018), is a measure of moral standards that are based on truthfulness, equality, and benefits to humankind.

The highest ethical standards must thus be upheld in research by using the ethical concepts of autonomy, justice, non-maleficence, beneficence, and protection of human rights and dignity (Bless et al., 2013). Ethical clearance to conduct this study was received from the Rhodes University Human Research Ethics Committee.

3.9.1. Informed consent and voluntary participation

Informed consent is a key principle in ethical research practice and, once more, one of the fundamental concepts guiding professional rules for social scientists (Wiles, 2021). In this regard, giving research participants information about the study is important to ensure that they are aware of the possible responsibilities involved in participating in the study (Jelsma and Clow, 2005). Therefore, once the purpose of the research has been explained and the participant has indicated their willingness to participate, they were given an informed consent form to sign to ensure their consent. This was done to make sure that they were aware that their decision to engage in the research is completely voluntary and that they have the option to withdraw at any moment, whether it be before, during, or after initial involvement. Participants were also informed verbally of their right to withdraw from interviews at any stage if they feel that they no longer want to continue. The interviews were recorded. Permission to audio record was sought from the participants. The consent form also requests the permission of the participants to record the interviews

3.9.2. Confidentiality and anonymity

According to de Vaus and Vaus (2001), maintaining confidentiality entails treating potential research participants with respect and offering them protection. Furthermore, they emphasise that breaching confidentiality agreements is an obvious way to harm participants (de Vaus and Vaus, 2001). In this regard, the researcher maintained anonymity and confidentiality throughout data collection to safeguard the rights of participants and respect their needs and values. The participants were given pseudonyms in the final dissertation.

Additionally, as a measure of maintaining their anonymity and confidentiality, the recorded interviews and transcriptions were stored electronically and encrypted using passwords and stored in multiple locations. They were stored on an encrypted hard drive/flash stick. A password-protected folder on google drive – shared with the supervisor. Personal identification information containing documents was retained separately from participant responses. The

researcher also scanned the notes and consent forms and added them to the password-protected storage. Pseudonyms were used in the final thesis to protect the identities of the participants.

3.9.3. Protecting participants from harm

It is crucial to inform participants of any potential hazards associated with participation and to inform them of the mechanisms in place to handle any unfavourable results that may occur (de Vaus and De Vaus, 2001). In this case, the researcher was aware that a study of this nature could trigger unpleasant pandemic memories. In this regard, the researcher approached the study with the sensitivity it deserved. Therefore, the researcher informed participants that they did not have to answer questions if they felt uncomfortable. Participants were informed that they may stop the interview at any point if they felt triggered. Wiles (2013) also argues that to minimise risk, research participants should also be informed, as part of the consent process, about whom they can contact should they have a complaint about any aspect of their involvement in a study. The consent form prepared for this study provided the contact details of the supervisor. Additionally, the researcher had an ethics approval letter in her possession during fieldwork that had the details of the ethics committee, which the participants could contact if they had any complaints. Wiles (2013) also contends that spending time with participants before the start of the research to "rehearse" so that they feel confident and safe is a way to reduce risk. Therefore, the researcher opted for face-to-face recruitment.

3.9.4. Limitations of the study

The research was subject to several limitations. First, the study relied on the participants' memories of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown on their livelihoods, and so it is possible that their responses were subject to recall bias. Additionally, as the study was conducted two years after the event, the participants may have forgotten some details or their perspectives may have changed over time. In this regard, the researcher took several steps to overcome these challenges. She used in-depth and open-ended interviews to obtain detailed and comprehensive responses from the participants. In addition to that, she cross-referenced the information received from the participants with relevant government data on COVID-19 and academic literature, which provided additional insight and helped to ensure the validity of the findings. Lastly, she conducted follow-up interviews with the participants to obtain further clarification or details on their experiences. To minimize the limitations of a study similar to

this in the future, the researcher could consider collecting data closer to the event itself to minimize the impact of recall bias. The researcher could also consider the use of mixed-methods research by combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to get a more complete picture of the impact of the event.

Second, the data collection process was limited by budget and time constraints, which may affect the study's generalizability. The sample was relatively small, with only six female street vendors from Lichtenburg, South Africa. However, small sample size in this study was mitigated by the rich qualitative data collected through the use of semi-structured interviews. The interviews were collected in a manner that allowed for sufficient time to explore each participant's experiences in depth. In this regard, the sample may limit the ability to make generalizations about the larger population of vendors in South Africa. In addition to that, the study findings may not apply to male vendors, as the sample only consisted of women.

Last, a dilemma that occurred in the field was that some women assumed that taking part in the research would result in some type of reward. They lost interest after discovering that there were no incentives. However, that was resolved by constantly reminding the remaining participants about the purpose of the study, and that the initiative is entirely academic and not funded.

3.9.5. Conclusion

The main purpose of the methodology chapter was to provide a comprehensive overview of the research design, methods, and procedures used in the study. The chapter outlined the rationale for the research design, described the methods used, and discussed the ethical considerations of the study. The strengths and limitations of the methodology were critically evaluated, and the findings will be presented and discussed in the next chapter. The overall aim of the methodology chapter was to ensure that the research was conducted in a rigorous, ethical, and transparent manner.

Chapter 4: Findings and discussion

4.1 Introduction

The study's findings from the interviews held during the course of the data collection are presented in this chapter. Semi-structured interviews were employed as a tool to collect data that was relevant to addressing the research question outlined in the study. The sample consisted of six street vendors in Lichtenburg, North-West Province. All six participants interviewed were female and operated in the CBD prior to the lockdown, selling perishable goods such as fruits, vegetables, cooked meals, and a variety of other items, including cosmetics. Following the data collection, the researcher reviewed and analysed the transcribed interviews, which aided in the emergence of themes that served as the core of this debate. The objectives of the study were achieved through the presentation of those themes, which helped to paint a clearer picture of the existing support systems and coping mechanisms used by female street vendors in Lichtenburg during and after the COVID-19 national lockdown. Therefore, this chapter is divided into two sections: Section A and Section B. Section A provides background information about the study and biographical information about the participants., which is important for understanding the findings. Section B presents an analysis of the findings. The purpose of this chapter is to provide the major findings that emerged from the data.

Section A: Study Background

4.2 Biographical details of research participants

The female street vendors that participated in the study were all born in South Africa. As scholarship (Kwenda, Ntuli, and Mudiriza, 2020) has shown, people in rural areas are often forced to seek employment in regional urban settings. Some of the participants came from the rural areas of the North-West's Ngaka Modiri Molema District. Other participants indicated that they commuted daily from their homes to Lichtenburg in pursuit of work, while others rented out accommodations near the town. According to the interviews, the participants were pressured to sell in Lichtenburg because of the socio-economic conditions in their rural hometowns, including the high unemployment and poverty rates. Moreover, the longevity of the informal economy seems to have been one of the pull factors for the participants. Research has noted that the longevity of this economy has sparked heated debate, with the old views arguing that it is traditional and would die with modern, industrial growth, while the new view

suggests that it is here to stay, having been seen to expand with modern, industrial growth (Chen, 2007: 5). The informal economy's longevity is reflected in the participants' trading experiences, which ranged from 5 to 25 years. One participant said they had been working in the informal economy for a very long time and couldn't even remember when she first started working as a street vendor. Another participant stated that they had always considered street vending to be the only way to make a living.

> Emma: It's been years, so many years. I've lost count, so I'm not sure of the exact number (Interview, 2022).

> Olivia: I started working here…I raised my child with this business... I sent her to school, and she finished…I sent her to college to further her studies… and she graduated working here and nowhere else (Interview, 2022).

The narrative breaks away from the widespread assumption from dualist scholars (Sethuraman, 1976; Tokaman, 1978; and Lewis, 1954) that the informal economy is solely meant to be used as a stepping stone to employment in the formal economy since it has grown to become the main source of income for most households. It could then be argued that street vending is a stable source of income and a means of survival in tough socio-economic situations for many people (Tshuma and Jari 2013, Mishra and Ray 2010).

4.2.1 Participants' Biographies

Under this section, the researcher presents the women who took part in the study. She made use of pseudonyms to conceal their identities.

Participant 1: Emma

Emma is a married woman in her late fifties with four children. At the time of the interview, she was selling a variety of food items from a trailer that was situated outside the taxi rank, under a tree. She declared that she and her husband had separated but had not gone through the legal process. While they were still living together, the husband was the breadwinner and provider for the family. However, after the separation, Emma was left in charge of the household's responsibilities, including the four children that she had to provide for. She was unemployed at the time and had no one to turn to for financial support. This is when she began trading, though she could not recall the exact year. One day, while sitting at home thinking of ways to get income, she made the decision to take a box of bananas and go sell them at a local

school so that she could feed her children. Emma moved on to work at the social grant disbursement stations in and around Lichtenburg, selling tea and fat cakes. Later, transport became a problem, which had a huge impact on her business. She then made the decision to acquire a space in town. Having said the then got a caravan, which she stated was a gift from her sister, and has been working on it ever since. Therefore, Emma demonstrated in this particular case that she is proud of having been able to raise her children and pay for their education with the money she made through street vending.

Participant 2: Olivia

Olivia is a woman in her early fifties. She had never been married and had only one child. Her daughter also has a child. Her household had been classified as de jure at the time of the interviews since she was the head of the family and was unmarried. She also lived with her two nieces, each of whom had a child. Her household had seven members, which included her. Olivia began trading while she was still in school. She would occasionally go to help her mother with the daily operations until she permanently joined her after completing matric in 1998. Her engagement in this line of work at the time was driven by the fact that she had needs and a child to support, and street vending was readily available for her job at the time. She developed a passion for business after that. In her story, Olivia explained that she took over her mother's business in 2005 after her passing. She added that since then, she has only worked as a street vendor and has never pursued any other type of work. Over the years, she maintained her family and the household with the money she made from street vending. Her daughter was able to complete her education from elementary school to tertiary level because of the daily profits she made from street vending. Olivia expressed how passionate she is about her work, and she also mentioned that she prefers generating her own profits rather than working for someone else.

Participant 3: Dora

Dora is a married woman in her late forties with three children. She explained that all of her children had independent lives. Dora is from one of the villages in the Ngaka Modiri Molema District. She relocated to Lichtenburg in search of employment. She grew vegetables at home and sold them in town, but she supplied the majority to the other vendors. Dora stated that her husband was unemployed, making her the main provider in their household. Dora's livelihood strategy, according to her narrative, comprised livelihood diversification. She developed a diverse portfolio of street vending activities to generate income that allows her to survive (Scoones, 1998). This meant that, in addition to selling and supplying vegetables to other

vendors during the off-seasons, Dora relied on selling cosmetic items. Diversification serves as a type of security in this respect, helping to reduce vulnerabilities that may arise because of temporary hardships. In additionally, people always have negative opinions about street vendors. However, Dora mentioned that she takes pride in her profession and hopes that society would one day stop belittling them.

Participant 4: Valencia

Valencia is in her early forties, has never been married, and has two children. She came from a nearby village and commuted to work every day. She explained that she opted to come to sell in Lichtenburg because businesses cannot thrive at home because most people rely on social grants. She mentioned in her narrative that she comes from a poor family; thus, she had taken on the role of becoming a provider for her family. Her siblings and their romantic partners were all supported by her. Valencia stated that she always had a passion for business, thus, she started selling lollies when she was still in school. She previously worked somewhere else but resigned and has not looked back ever since. Valencia stated that she could meet all her household necessities through street vending.

Participant 5: Dorothy

Dorothy, in her late forties, is a single mother of seven children. At the time of the interviews, she was the sole provider for her family and had never been married. Dorothy was a cook before she started street vending. She stated in her story that she began street vending due to a lack of employment opportunities. However, as time passed, she developed a passion for business and concluded that she does not see herself working for someone else again. Dorothy sold fruits and vegetables that she bought at a nearby market. She also stated that she enjoys business and hopes to become a farmer in the future.

Participant 6: Sophia

Sophia is the oldest of the women that took part in the study. At the time of the interviews she was 62 years old, married, and had two children and two grandchildren. Sophia stated that she separated from her husband, but the separation was not legal. Her family consisted of her husband, grandchildren, and herself. She received an old-age grant, which supplemented the money she earned from street vending. Sophia sold fish and had been trading for ten years. She stated in her story that she began street vending because she was unable to meet her family's financial responsibilities.

The study considered a variety of factors when compiling participants' biographical information, including gender, level of education, age, marital status, and household type. All participants were over the age of 18 but under the age of 65. The demographic information of the participants is illustrated in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Participants' socio-demographic profile

Participants	Age	Marital status	Number of People in the Household	Level of education	Goods sold	Sales location	Years of vending
Emma	58	Married but separated	5	Did not complete high school	Variety of food items	Taxi rank, inside a caravan	Forgot years of trading
Olivia	54	Single	7	Matric	Cooked food	Taxi rank stand	24 years
Dora	48	Married	2	Matric	Vegetables and Cosmetic items	Pavement	4 years
Valencia	42	Single	9	Post-matric	Cooked food	Taxi rank stand	5 years
Dorothy	39	Single	8	Matric	Fruits, vegetables and other food items	Pavement	5 years
Sophia	62	Married	4	Primary education	Fried Fish	Pavement	10 years

4.2.2. Marital Status

Considering the scholarship about men and women that often portray men as providers in their households, it was important to determine if the participants were either married or unmarried. Three of the six women interviewed stated they were unmarried, and the other three were married. Among the three married women, one said that they were married but did not live in the same house as the husband, and the other indicated that they were married and lived in the same house as the husband but had technically separated. The demographic information of the participants in this study challenge the deeply entrenched societal expectations and beliefs

regarding the gendered divisions of labor and economic responsibilities. This finding demonstrates the limitations of relying on traditional gender roles as a lens through which to analyse economic contributions, and underscores the need for policies that recognize and support the diverse ways in which women contribute to the economy. Therefore, by disregarding conventional gender stereotypes, this study offers a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the complexities and fluidity of gendered economic roles. It also highlights the necessity for policies that acknowledge and support women's economic contributions, and address the systematic barriers that prevent them from attaining financial stability and security

4.2.3. Street Vendor household size and type

To fully comprehend the difficulties that the COVID-19 national lockdown imposed on the livelihoods of women street vendors, it was essential to know how many dependents each household had as well as the amount of money each household earned. The term "household" refers to a group of people, whether related or unrelated, who share a common living space, feed from the same pot, and maintain common housekeeping arrangements (Sekhamphu, 2012). The description includes not just those who are related to one another, but any group of people who live in the same house. In most households, there is a head of household who is in charge and responsible for bringing in income to support the family. According to Ngwenya (2008) referenced in Sekhamphu (2012), the man is usually the head of the house, but when there is no male figure present, a female family member takes over. Following the biographical information provided by the participants, 83% of the females were the heads of their households. Statistics show that 83% of women in this study are now heads of their households. This indicates that the traditional view of head of the household as a male is no longer accurate, and has been challenged by the changing roles of women in society. This implies that women are taking on more responsibilities and authority within their families, which has significant implications for their social status and influence in a number of ways. First, it gives them more financial independence and control over household finances. Second, it also gives them more authority and decision-making power within the family. Last, it may also increase their social status and recognition within their community. In this regard, the increased role of women as head of the households has a profound impact on their lives and status within society.

Women-headed households, as defined by Bianchi (1999), referenced in Ngundu (12:2021), are those where a woman lives with her dependent children with no male figure present in the

household. The mother oversees the household in all aspects of life, in the same way, that the women participants served as the breadwinners, providers, decision-makers, and managers in their households. According to Nwosu and Ndinda (2018), female-headed households are more likely to be poor than male-headed households. This is echoed by Ngundu (2010), who argues that among the growing number of single mothers who are heads of households, some confront economic and social challenges. Rogan (2013), also maintains that women who are household heads frequently experience a "triple burden" that includes being the only earner in the household, being a woman and consequently experiencing labour market disadvantages, and time constraints brought on by the demands of managing the household and earning an income.

The demographic data presented in this study lends credence to the existing literature on the gendered dimensions of poverty, and the unique challenges faced by single mothers and female bread winners. The findings highlight the vulnerability of women economic shocks, and the need for inclusive and gender-sensitive policies that address the intersectional nature of poverty. The pandemic and associated lockdown have brought these issues into sharp focus, underscoring the urgency of developing and implementing effective policies that prioritise the needs of marginalised communities.

According to Sekhamphu (2012), female-headed households are classified as "de jure" or "de facto" and may be interpreted from these perspectives. A de jure female-headed household is one in which the head is an unmarried woman, who may be divorced or who may have been married in the past but is now widowed and does not have a male figure living with her. A de facto female-headed household, on the other hand, is one in which the actual head of the household is a woman since the male figure is often or continuously away. A point is then made that in often times, most women who are the heads of households are likely to work in vulnerable occupations such as the informal economy to generate an income (Lalthapersad-Pillay, 2004) or are generally embedded in a network of relationships for survival (Sekhampu, 2012). This is confirmed by the findings of this study, which found that most women started selling because they had no other source of income, resulting in the inability to meet the necessities of the household. “I started because…ehhhh….of not having any source of income…. before I started selling I could not even afford to buy electricity… I had no income, my child” (Sophia, 2022). Thus, employment is one of the most significant sources of income and a key factor in helping people overcome poverty. The participants' households ranged in size from 2 to 10 people, as shown by their demographic information. One participant stated that she has seven children who are all under her care and support, while another stated that

her family consists of eight members who are all unemployed, but she only has two children and the rest of them are her siblings. This is in line with previous research which argues that female-headed households are more likely to be poor than male-headed households due to their lower average wages with more dependents (Buvinic and Gupta (1997), cited by Nwoso and Ndinda (2018) and an overrepresentation of female heads in the informal economy (Chant, 2008; Chen et al., 2004). The study exposes a troubling trend of gender inequality in the labour market and the precarious economic conditions experienced by women who lead households. The barriers they face accessing high-paying, formal employment, along with their disproportionate duties as caregivers, place them at a significant disadvantage in the workforce. Therefore, this structural inequality, coupled with the burden of supporting multiple dependents, creates a cycle of poverty that sustains the economic vulnerability of women.

4.2.4. Level of Education

The informal economy has been viewed as an alternative employment for many unemployed people, including many disadvantaged women who are unable to find employment in the formal economy because of their lack of education and skills (Ngundu, 2010). In a similar vein, Roever (2016) has noted that the majority of street vendors are illiterate and often use street vending as a source of income. However, the study discovered that the majority of participants had completed high school, while others had completed their post-matric education. That being the case, 33% of respondents had access to education up to a certain level, with more than 50% of women completing Matric and 17% obtaining credentials beyond Matric. This highlights the gravity of South Africa's unemployment crisis, which is the root of many other issues, including abject poverty that affects people of all educational levels.

This demonstrates that people with both low and high levels of education are more likely to search for work in the informal economy (Agus et al., 2021). The findings indicate that high levels of unemployment and poverty have forced participants to engage in self-employment activities within the informal economy. This finding illustrates the intricate relationship between unemployment, poverty and informal employment and emphasises the critical role that the informal economy plays in sustaining the livelihoods of people who are unable to find formal employment. Therefore, this underscores the need for policy interventions that not only address unemployment and poverty, but also support and regulate the informal economy to ensure the sustainability and safety of those who rely on it for their livelihoods.

Section B: Analysis of the findings

This section presents the data collected in the field and analyzes it in line with the existing literature on the topic of the study. The existing literature has thoroughly examined the emergence of the informal economy, the different reasons why it keeps on growing, and the factors that may persuade people to search for work in this sector of the economy around the world (Valodia and Devey, 2012; Blaauw, 2015; Bhorat *et al.*, 2016; and Etim and Daramola, 2020). Unemployment and poverty are cited as two of the most common motivating factors for people to engage in street vending (Mukamba, 2020), as it serves as a survival or coping strategy for the poor to avoid starvation through the collection of meager earnings (Fonchingong, 2015). This implies that the money made through street vending is used to supplement household income, take care of the needs of the children, and cover food and education expenses (Tang, 2017). Hence, Margan (2016) maintains that street vending is an important feature of the African labour market, and its contributions cannot be overlooked. In this regard, it was important to first explore the reasons that prompted the participants to turn to street vending as a means of subsistence. This was done to shed light on their resilience in the face of the insecurity and precarity that come with street vending, which had been exacerbated by the lockdown trading restrictions. The motivating factors serve as the foundation for gaining a better understanding of the impact of lockdown restrictions on their livelihoods.

4.3. Reasons for joining street vending

4.3.1 Survival-led reasons

Street vending participants are pulled by the benefits they hope to obtain and pushed by the structural forces imposed on them (Hueng, Zhang, and Xue, 2018). Structural forces are the socioeconomic factors that affect how people work and live, including the shortage of employment opportunities. These structural forces serve as factors that push people to strive to change their status quo. The findings support the conclusion made by several studies (Hlengwa, 2016; Mago, 2018; and Mukamba, 2021) that there are a variety of factors that either push or pull women into the realm of street vending. The factors that emerged from the findings were divided into two categories: pull (necessity) and push (choice). In this regard, the study discovered that a shortage of employment opportunities and the urge to earn a living to sustain a household were among the factors that prompted some women to engage in street vending. Dora's experience is conveyed in the following quote:

> Dora*:* I had no choice but to come to the streets because you can't just stay at home and do nothing…we have needs…and money is a necessity…we can't do anything without money. (Interview, 2022).

Dora mentioned that she did not join street vending by choice but because she had no other means of making a living. This is consistent with the findings of research done by Mukamba (2021), which showed that most female street vendors participate in street vending due to a lack of alternative employment opportunities. Similar findings were reported by Hlengwa (2016), who found that a significant number of people depend on street vending for a living. Ngudu (2010) found that female-headed households have a greater chance of making a livelihood in the informal economy, which serves as their main source of income. Khumalo and Ntini (2021) support this claim by asserting that street vending has developed into a significant source of income for many South African households, particularly in rural areas. Therefore, this finding highlights the economic necessity of street vending for people with obligations, such as family responsibilities. In essence, street vending serves as a critical survival mechanism for people with limited employment opportunities, necessitating policy interventions that recognise and facilitate the informal economy's critical role in poverty alleviation and socioeconomic development.

Emma explained how she started her business and the reasons behind it. She recalled the circumstances surrounding her marriage and the financial situation that she found herself in at the time. The spouse abandoned family responsibilities and as a result, she had to take over as the sole provider for the household. Emma stated the following:

> Emma*:* ... I started it because I was suffering…. I started selling at school because I was suffering…. I had no one to rely on for financial support, and my marriage was going down the hill (Interview, 2022).

Female-headed households are one of the most vulnerable groups in society and face a variety of challenges and hardships. In this regard, several factors force women to head households, although some women may do so out of choice or because of personal circumstances beyond their control (Horrell and Krishman, 2006). Chant (2003), referenced in Ngundu (2021), claims that the high percentage of female headship is because of a rise in divorce and separation. Similarly, Emma reported that her spouse had left her, causing a change in the structure of her household. Her role in the family was limited to taking care of domestic duties, while the husband served as the family's breadwinner and head of household. However, after her husband

left, she was in charge of the household. The role of headship came with multiple responsibilities, including the need to make strategic decisions to keep the household running in her husband's absence while also attending to her feminine and domestic duties. In this instance, the personal circumstances she was in at the time influenced her choice to pursue street vending. Given this, Mitulla (2003) argues that women who are widows or whose husbands have deserted them generally turn to street vending to support their families. Lebni *et al.* (2020) contend in their study that women do not have the same breadwinner status as men and that they work mainly at lower levels in the labour market, get lower incomes, and live in poverty. Despite this, Emma has proven to have the agency to take control of her family's circumstances. This included carrying out her motherly responsibilities, providing for her family, and developing a sense of belonging in a society that values men as the only main household breadwinners (Sassen *et al*., 2018). In this regard, being the head of the household can also benefit women by allowing them to have a more positive perspective on themselves and their abilities (Lebni *et al*., 2020).

However, as mentioned in the literature review chapter, unemployment is high in the North-West. Thus, during the interviews, unemployment and joblessness emerged as the most common push factors that led the women to start vending on the streets. Most of the participants shared narratives of suffering that led to the start of their businesses. It is also important to underscore that there were also narratives of pull factors that emerged. Some of the women also spoke about their dreams of wanting to be business owners. The section that follows explores the stories of agency and independence that emerged from the interviews.

4.3.2 The independence of self-employment

The study also shows that most female participants were persuaded by the pull factors to join street vending. According to the findings, some women had exposure to formal employment before starting to work as street vendors. They stated that they left their occupations because they wanted to have their own businesses, be their employers, and have authority over their profits and day-to-day operations. The findings are compatible with the literature, which reveals that most people in urban and rural areas engage in street vending not only for survival but also for self-development purposes (Shaiara *et al*., 2015; Arias, 2019). In a similar vein, Mramba (2015) and Chingono (2016) assert that women are empowered through street vending activities. Willemse (2011) expresses similar sentiments, stating that street vending enhances

women's confidence by providing them with a sense of economic independence while also allowing them to support their families. Dorothy explained:

> Dorothy*:* There are no job opportunities anymore…I loved business because I wanted to be my employer (Interviewee, 2022).

Dorothy stated that her decision to work as a street vendor was motivated by a lack of employment opportunities. She also expressed a desire for the independence that comes with self-employment. Similarly, Mukamba (2021) has observed that some women start trading because of the various opportunities and prospects afforded by street vending. In the same spirit, Ngundu (2010) argues that street vending helps women earn respect in a male-dominated society and improves their confidence. In this case, participating in street vending has given Olivia not only economic freedom but also self-esteem as a woman exposed to poverty, a lack of support, and gender inequality in the labour market and society at large (Gamieldien and van Niekerk, 2017).

Olivia conveyed her views in the following quote:

> Olivia: ...I prefer working for myself rather than for an employer… It is precisely the same….you get up in the morning to work for someone else…whereas I get up to work for myself and make my own money…when I work for myself…I don't ask anything from anyone else…I just work for myself (Interview, 2022).

Olivia explained that one of the factors that contributed to her decision to engage in street vending was her intention to avoid working for other people when she has the expertise to work for herself. She continued by saying that working for someone else meant she would generate more profit for them and, as a result, would be paid less at the end of the month. She emphasized that she preferred to be among those who wake up in the morning to pursue financial independence rather than being part of the group that gets up in the morning to make money for other people. In this regard, Olivia's choice to pursue street vending can be interpreted as a rejection of economic dependency and a desire for economic freedom. The statement she makes about waking up to pursue financial independence rather than making money for others highlights her agency and desire to be self-sufficient. This sentiment is consistent with broader research that suggests that economic self-sufficiency is an important factor in overall well-being and quality of life. Following that, Valencia stated in the quotation below that her decision to start street vending was prompted by her entrepreneurial spirit:

> Valencia*:* ...I have always had a passion for business…which I began when I was still in school… I was selling *sthwanye le moretlwa*, which are natural foods…. *(*Interview, 2022).

The excerpt above indicates that Valencia always had a passion for business. The passion stretches back to her school days, when she would sell bush fruits to her classmates. That was the beginning of her street vending adventure, which took shape after she completed high school. In this regard, informal trade operations do not only benefit poor households. They also give informal training to people who would otherwise be unemployed and help them improve their entrepreneurial skills (Willemse, 2011). Therefore, the findings of this study have presented evidence in support of the claims made in the literature (Ross *et al*., 2006) that women are frequently viewed as the force behind household survival, economic growth, and the reduction of poverty in rural areas. Women's access to economic opportunities as well as their persistence in their efforts to earn a living play an important role in reducing poverty in female-headed households. With that said, rural women's efforts to meet their families' economic and social survival needs cannot be overlooked.

It, therefore, became evident that there is a co-existence of push and pull factors insofar as the reasons behind joining street vending are concerned. This was interesting because most of the existing literature about the reasons why people become street vendors dwells a lot on push factors such as unemployment and joblessness. Therefore, more literature that explores the pull factors for joining street vending is needed because, as can be seen from the above narratives, there are accounts of agency. It is not only unemployment that forces people to become street vendors. Additionally, Dorothy's account also shows that both pull and push factors can co-exist as reasons for becoming a street vendor.

Theme 1: The impact of COVID-19 lockdown national restrictions on trading

4.4 Loss of income

In April 2020, the informal economy had an estimated 1.6 million participants (Chen, Grapa, Ismail, Reed, Rogan, and Valdivia, 2022). When many governments throughout the world were forced to make difficult policy decisions in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, it was predicted that 80% of the world's informal workers and nearly half of the total workforce would

be laid off (Ardnt *et al*., 2020; ILO 2020). As COVID-19 spread, the only method available to limit its demographic consequences was some level of physical distance by cutting social and economic connections. This was because there were no vaccinations or pharmaceutical interventions available at the time. In South Africa, the government implemented the lockdown policy to prevent people from leaving their houses unless it was strictly essential. They were not permitted to go to work unless they were working in sectors providing essential services. The discourse about limiting the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic made "flattening the curve" its mantra, where calls for social distancing and staying at home exposed the existing disparities in our society, including those within the labour market (Alfers, 2020). However, flattening the curve came at the expense of flattening the economy and food security, as was evident when many businesses collapsed.

The COVID-19 policies inflicted immeasurable agony on people and destabilized the whole world. It generated huge economic and sociological tremors, resulting in significant financial, physical, psychological, and social losses (Nyenga and Mashavira, 2020:3). Since then, an increasing number of studies (Khambule, 2020; Megersa, 2020; Rogan and Skinner, 2020; WIEGO, 2020) have looked at how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected informal workers, particularly around 2020. However, there is still a knowledge gap regarding how much of an impact the pandemic had on informal women workers in rural economies in South Africa. Having said that, this study was conducted to determine how the COVID-19 trading restrictions affected female street vendors, particularly in a rural town in the North West. Therefore, this study seeks to contribute to the identified gap in our knowledge of the impact of COVID-19 on the informal economy.

Dorothy's experience was reflected in the following quote:

> Dorothy*:* Yoooh, very bad... That time it was difficult since we were unable to operate… and they did not want us on the streets…which had a severe impact on the profit…(Interview, 2022).

Dorothy mentioned that the COVID-19 trading lockdown restrictions had a negative impact on her. She was unable to trade because people were not permitted to be on the streets, and because of that, her profits declined significantly. Street vending specializes in the production and sale of goods and services in urban public spaces where there is pedestrian traffic (Recchi, 2021). They are usually set up in heavily populated areas, such as taxi stations and shopping centers, to name a few. This implies that the presence of people in these public areas generates profit

to earn a living, whereas the absence of people leads to a loss of profit. Before the pandemic, traders could cluster and trade close to one another; however, under the new regulations, traders had to maintain safe distances, oftentimes at least one meter from the next person (Toriro, Chirisa, and Shen, 2021). With that said, the use of public space became the target of restrictions and regulations aimed at controlling crowds and pedestrian traffic (Marchiori and Assis, 2021). In this case, the findings of this study are similar to those of Suubi, Yegon, Ajema, Wandera, Afifu, and Mungenyi (2020), who concluded that travel restrictions prevented many women in the informal economy who depended on daily earnings from populated areas to make ends meet.

Olivia expressed, in a few words, that things were not looking good for her because she had no other sources of income during the COVID-19 national lockdown. This is consistent with the findings of interviews conducted by WEIGO with informal workers in 12 cities around the world, as cited by Suubi *et al.* (2020), which found that more than two-thirds of respondents received no income during the peak of the lockdown in April 2020 and received less than half of their pre-COVID earnings when the lockdown was lifted two months later. Olivia's experience is reflected in the following quote:

> Olivia: We were suffering at the time, we were suffering because we didn't have any income...(Interview,2022).

Olivia reported that lockdown measures and social distancing measures had forced her into absolute poverty since her activities were prohibited because they were not deemed essential. Dorothy relied entirely on the daily earnings she made from street vending before the lockdown. However, because of circumstances beyond her control, she was no longer able to make ends meet for the household. The findings are consistent with predictions made by researchers in the literature in the early stages of the pandemic regarding how health and economic restrictions on livelihoods would affect people's capacity to provide for themselves as well as how they would induce poverty and food insecurity (Oloko and Ekpo, 2021). In this regard, the Stats SA report revealed that families headed by women suffered the strongest impact, with more than half of these households in 2020 having no employed person. According to Stats SA (2020), the North West Province was among the provinces with the highest percentages of unemployed households in 2020, with a household unemployment rate of 43%.

During the full lockdown level 5, despite food being considered an essential service, street traders, including those selling food, were stopped from operating and lost all income (Wegerif, 2020). Only informal workers who provided essential goods and services were permitted to work. However, essential workers included informal employees in the health, formal food system, security, and care industries. Grocery shops included spazas, but informal traders were not permitted. Grocery stores and wholesale produce markets, including spaza shops and informal food traders, had to obtain written permission from a municipality before they could resume operations in April. Only informal vendors who sold uncooked foods were permitted to trade in this case. Those who disregarded the lockdown restrictions would be threatened by the police or face the possibility of having their goods confiscated (Arsene *et al.,* 2020). However, because the majority of women depend primarily on street vending for a living, some vendors would disregard the lockdown regulations and continue to run their operations in order to provide for their families (Thulare and Moyo, 2021). Valencia spoke about the amount of pressure she felt because she was not able to support herself and her family, which led her to violate the lockdown regulations by working while she was not even permitted to be outside.

Valencia explained:

> Valencia: I came to sell…we were dying of hunger at home….so the police officers came to my workplace... the police officers came…they instructed me to leave…. I asked them what are were going to eat at home… we struggled as a result of COVID-19 since it caused emotional distress (Interview, 2022).

Valencia stated that she carried on operating in the early stages of the Alert Level 5 lockdown regulations. Her transgression drew the attention of the authorities, and she was ordered to leave, but this meant that her family's food security would decline. Valencia's experience demonstrates that she was forced to choose between dying from starvation or the virus during the lockdown (Chen, 2022). As a result, she experienced not only financial but also emotional distress. From this, the researcher may conclude that the government made the socioeconomic problems that street vendors had already been dealing with worse by harassing and evicting them from their operations and confiscating their goods. These are all forms of economic and political exclusion that have an influence on street vendors' livelihoods, particularly during pandemics and natural disasters. As a result, the COVID-19 moment has highlighted the historical and persistent struggles of street vendors for justice, equity, and dignity in the labour market.

Dora works as a street vendor outside of her hometown and rents a room at the research location for this project. She added that before the lockdown, she had a room that cost her R1600 per month in rent. She paid for it with money she earned from street vending. She suffered a financial setback after the lockdown had been declared, and she was forced to shut down her operations. She had to leave the room she was renting to find an affordable one, but she still could not afford to pay for it given the household necessities she had to meet back at home. In this situation, Dora had to meet the financial needs of two households, which were impacted by the loss of income. Dora's experience is reflected in the following quote:

> Dora: It was difficult during the COVID-19 lockdown… I was renting for R1600 each month… It was quite tough for me to pay my rent…I ended up seeking affordable accommodation… I had to sell what I needed to sell in order to pay my rent… I am not going to lie.. it was difficult…Generating sufficient cash to pay the rent was hard. (Interview, 2022).

Dora revealed that she struggled financially when the lockdown was in effect. Things she could previously afford, like paying for her accommodation in Lichtenburg, were no longer possible. She subsequently had to reduce expenses as a result of the reduction in income. This finding is similar to that of Nyazebe and Chikoko (2021), who discovered that households of street vendors were struggling to meet their daily food demands and had to reduce their consumption as a way of dealing with income shortages. In reality, street vendors are making less money, and Dora stressed how difficult it was to generate sufficient income during the COVID-19 lockdown. In accordance with this, participants were asked to compare the performance of their businesses before and after COVID-19 to determine how the lockdown has affected their profits. Participants reported that before the lockdown, their businesses were doing well, and they could even take care of other responsibilities outside of just providing for their families. They could afford insurance premiums, household furniture, and their children's education. In this regard, Emma stated during an interview that since she resumed operations, her business has not been able to make a profit. The business is still having trouble recovering from the impact of the COVID-19 national lockdown.

The following reflects Emma's experience:

> Emma: Before COVID, business was thriving; today… it is extremely slow and not like before… even corn isn't selling as well as it used to.. instead of selling two pots, I now only sell one.. and sometimes it doesn't sell at all (Interview, 2022).

Emma stated that the business was no longer the same as it had been before the lockdown. She also noted that performance had slowed since she had resumed operations. She makes a bit here and there, and sometimes she doesn't make anything at all. She used to sell two hundred ears of corn a day for around R8 each before the lockdown. This means that she would make roughly R1600 each day, not considering the other products she sold. She went on to say that her customers enjoyed corn so much that the number of ears she sold in a day increased every day. However, after the lockdown, things changed because when she resumed operations, the products that were selling well before the closure were no longer selling. She stated that this may be the case since customers were still habituated to avoiding the purchase of non-essential commodities because of lockdown regulations, as well as refraining from purchasing items that were not deemed necessary for budgetary reasons. With that said, the lockdown financially crippled many people, something no one had predicted. Changes and decisions had to be made to adjust to the new normal. Also, people lost jobs, which meant that budgets had to be adjusted. As a result, instead of maximizing profits, Emma reported needing to inject money to cover business expenses since the business was still unable to generate enough to cover running costs.

The quote captures Dorothy's experience:

> Dorothy*:* There is no longer profit... I only sell in town since the passion stations in the villages have been discontinued… In the town, I can end the day with R500,…whereas at the end of the month,…I can make approximately R2500. (Interview, 2022).

Dorothy explained that her main customers are pensioners. However, since the lockdown, pensioners' stations in the villages where she would travel to sell have been closed. She stated that she thinks elderly people in villages are now reliant on immigrant businesses for food and pensions since they are unable to get to town. She also mentioned that the customer base in rural regions consists of people who rely on social grants, so the business would profit if the government reopened the pension stations in the villages. Dorothy also revealed that before the lockdown, she would make over R4000 per month, but now that she only sells in town and her

customers are no longer as many, she makes only R500 per day and approximately R2500 at the end of the month.

The country experienced a COVID-19 food crisis as a result of the shutdown of the economy. This was in reaction to the significant number of job losses and the 43.2% unemployment rate in 2020 (Wegerif, 2021). Food prices in South Africa have since gone up during the lockdown and have not yet gotten back to normal; instead, they are continuing to increase. In 2020, food prices rose by 17%, far above the annual inflation rate (Economic Justice Dignity Group, 2020). This was reported to be the highest level of food inflation since 2010. The food inflation imposed a double burden on the participants because the majority of them came from financially disadvantaged households, and the increase in food prices meant that they would fall deeper into food insecurity. Hence, they reported that they had struggled to get through during the lockdown. Second, participants saw a rise in input costs, which signalled an increase in supply as well. However, because their customers are primarily social grant recipients, this was not an option. As a result, participants stated that they put more money into their businesses, resulting in little or no profit gains. This is consistent with the findings of WIEGO (2021) research, which found that 61% of traders reported rising stock prices. This indicates that, considering the rise in stock prices, traders themselves had difficulties adjusting to these added expenses.

Olivia explains in the following quote:

> Olivia: Prior to the lockdown, when you injected cash into the business, you would make more money (Interview, 2022).

Olivia remarked that because of COVID-19, goods are now more expensive in stores. She no longer generates as much profit as she did before the outbreak. She stated that she would purchase products at a lower price and make more profit in return. As a result of this, the profit was more than the money she would put into the business. Evidence from South Africa's national statistics body has highlighted this, showing that over 40% of businesses surveyed reported that prices of goods and services increased more than normal as they were still feeling the impact of the COVID-19 lockdown (Stats SA, 2020a:11). Moreover, Sophia stated that following the lockdown, they saw an increase in the number of people joining in street vending. With a rise in the number of street vendors, competition for a reduced customer base became

intense. They sold almost the same goods at approximately the same prices, and as a result, they made little profit. Sophia explained:

> Sophia: We now have a large number of people selling goods…and we witnessed a large number of people join the sale of goods following the lockdown….as a result of competing over small customers…we generate less profit….we sell the same goods for the same price (Interview, 2022).

The excerpt above indicates that, following the lockdown, people turned to street vending to escape the socioeconomic crises that had been exacerbated by the designed lockdown and physical distance measures in response to the outbreak. These have had a severe economic impact, resulting in many people being out of employment and living in poverty, particularly the most vulnerable people in rural areas. This is similar to the findings of research undertaken by de Villiers (2022), who discovered a considerable rise in competition within street vending following the lockdown. This was due to an influx of street vendors who had been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic's job losses. As a result, participants saw a rise in competition with fewer consumers and less purchasing power, which led to lower and sometimes insufficient salaries. These findings coincide with the view expressed in the literature that the informal economy serves as an employment shock absorber during economic downturns because of its limited entry barriers (Khambule, 2020). Therefore, because of its perceived flexibility, street vending should be viewed as a shock absorber with the potential to alleviate the high unemployment rate in rural areas, even though it is constantly exposed to external economic shocks.

Valencia stated that she used to get regular customers from the local hospital. Those were her main customers before the COVID-19 national lockdown. She went on to say that her business was doing exceptionally well, with a daily profit of R1200. Her business, however, is still trying to recover from the lockdown since the money she generates is significantly lower than what she used to make before the lockdown. She reported that she now generates approximately R200 in a day, or sometimes nothing. She remarked that the pandemic had severely harmed their businesses; if it had not happened, they would have been far ahead with their businesses.

The following quote reflects Valencia's experience:

> Valencia*:* Before COVID, the business was doing quite well… I used to cook for the entire General (Hospital)…because of COVID… I lost clients…I used to make R1200 each day before COVID…but now I only make R200 or nothing… (Interview, 2022).

Valencia remarked that her customer base has shifted because of the COVID-19 national lockdown. Before the lockdown, she had various customers, but the main ones had always been the social grant recipients. This finding is consistent with that of de Villiers (2022), who reported that traders saw limited customers and reduced customer spending power as a significant negative impact of COVID-19.

Insofar as the question of the impact of the lockdown restrictions was concerned, the results revealed the gendered impact on the livelihood activities of women street vendors. While street vending is open to all people of different genders, an overwhelming majority of street vendors in South Africa are women. In this regard, Sassen *et al*. (2018) have noted that street traders are predominantly black women who engage in survivalist forms of street trade such as selling sweets, chips, or vegetables. This therefore means that while the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions on movement that followed had a wide-ranging negative impact across most sectors and people, in the informal economy of South Africa, this impact took on a gendered dynamic because of the nature of the sector. The most common consequence, as shown by the extracts in this section, was a loss of income. It has already been noted in research that most informal traders operate on the basis of hand-to-mouth (Mago, 2018). From the interviews, it becomes clear that the lockdown restrictions to fight the spread of COVID-19 destroyed the livelihood base of female street vendors.

4.5 Starting businesses from scratch after the lockdown

As argued in the literature review section of this study, a livelihood can be classified as sustainable when it remains resilient and recovers from shocks and stress (Chambers and Conway, 1992). It has also been established that the business ventures of informal traders are more vulnerable to several shocks, such as natural disasters and the outbreak of diseases such as COVID-19. Therefore, in line with the second objective of this study, which aims to assess the coping strategies of female street traders affected by COVID-19 restriction measures on trading, this section deals with how the participants coped with the shocks and stresses of the pandemic on their businesses. The pandemic had negatively impacted people's lives and altered their ways of working, traveling, and socializing. As a result, it destroyed many livelihoods and severely damaged the economy, leading to the closure of many businesses and the loss of two million jobs (Stats SA, 2022). Most participants in the study had to start their businesses from scratch, and to do so, they disclosed that they had to borrow money from their family members. The reason for this is that some participants used their savings to get by during the

lockdown. Other participants, on the other hand, stated that they did not have enough savings since their income is generally low and the money they get from street vending is the only source of income for their household.

Dorothy's experience was as follows:

> Dorothy*:* The shutdown was implemented immediately, so I had to start over… I had to start over when we returned to work…starting from scratch. (Interview, 2022).

Street vendors were instructed to shut down their operations and stay at home during the early stages of the hard lockdown since they were not recognized as essential service providers. This unexpected closure had a significant impact on earnings and livelihoods. Dorothy stated that the lockdown was unexpected and knocked her business to the ground because she had to start everything from scratch when she returned to work. Valencia had a similar experience in that she had to start her business from scratch following the lockdown. She went on to say,

> *Valencia:…*When I got here…I did not have money…One of the street kids gave me money, R200…He said it was the cash he received for helping the Indians at the cemeteries…I came just to look around…and he told me he had money from working at the cemetery and started with it when I returned to work. (Interview, 2022)

In this narrative, Valencia explained that by the time the government gave them the green light to resume their operations, her business had been completely shut down, with no funds available to resurrect it. This was because she had exhausted her savings to get by during the lockdown. Instead, she received financial assistance from one of the homeless people, who gave her two hundred rands to buy what was required to get the business off the ground. Olivia also shared a similar experience where she received financial assistance from her sibling. She stated the following:

> Olivia: My younger sister… who is working…I asked for money from her…and she provided me with start-up capital… (Interview, 2022)

Olivia indicated that she was helped by her sister to get her business off the ground. During the interview conversation with Olivia, she also explained that she had savings, but they were not enough to see her through until they were given the green light to resume operations. On this occasion, her sister helped her out. It is clear from this that social capital significantly contributed to the vendors' ability to resume operations. Social capital is made up of networks of friends, family, and neighbors who may help make up for a lack of access to other resources.

Porritt (2009), referenced in Mago (2018), asserts that social capital networks can serve as a support system or safety net during stressful, unpleasant, or extreme circumstances. In this case, support from social networks may come in a variety of forms, such as start-up capital, and a lack of financial capital may be overcome through it. The findings reveal that the participants used social capital from family and associates to get back into business, which is consistent with the findings presented by Chilwalo (2015) that illuminate the importance of social capital in the informal economy. Ngudu (2010) also noted the significance of social capital for those who engage in the informal economy.

It has already been established that the COVID-19 pandemic presented a shock to most sectors and everyday life in general. However, the narratives of the participants revealed that the COVID-19 shock for the female informal traders was made worse by their lack of access to sustainable livelihood assets, which make up the foundation of people's livelihoods. The inaccessibility of assets such as financial capital, human capital, and natural capital to street vendors makes it difficult for them to pursue sustainable livelihoods when presented with a shock. The only asset that made an appearance in the interviews was in the form of social capital, as it has been argued above. Therefore, the findings of the study shed light on the devastating impact of the lockdown on women vendors, who were forced to close down their businesses and start anew. This not only represented a significant economic loss but also required an investment of time, effort, and resources to rebuild their businesses. This business churn phenomenon (Olurin, Gbadebo, 2014), a term used to describe the cycle of bossiness closure and creation, further weakened the position of women vendors and accentuated the necessity for policies that prioritises their recovery and long-term economic stability.

4.6 The prospects have been shaken

Participants were asked if they had any personal or work-related plans before COVID-19, the national lockdown. Many participants intended to grow their businesses. Some sought to expand the existing product range, while others planned to venture into new opportunities. That said, Olivia sells cooked food at the taxi rank. She intended to obtain a catering certificate to provide catering services at ceremonies or to win a catering tender in the future. Olivia explained her aspirations in the following quote:

> Olivia*:* I wanted to obtain a certificate in catering so that I could at least be considered for a tender when one is offered (Interview, 2022).

In her narrative, Olivia mentioned that before the lockdown she was looking at alternative ways to make a living. However, she was not aiming at moving away from street vending but at finding other means of earning an income that could supplement the income she generates from street vending. The sustainable livelihoods framework acknowledges that livelihood strategies change over time; the more choices and flexibility people have regarding their livelihood strategies, the greater their ability to cope well with economic shocks. This finding corroborates the findings of a study conducted by Mukamba (2021), which indicated that women street vendors engaged in multiple street vending activities to generate an income and sustain their livelihoods. In this regard, multiple street vending activities enabled them to sustain their livelihoods. Dorothy explained

> Dorothy: … I intended to grow chickens so you could buy them from me and stock up…. I would like you to buy chickens from me (Interview, 2022).

Dorothy expressed the passion she developed for farming while hawking fruits and vegetables. She aspires to be a female farmer in the future. She had planned to start by building a chicken coop before the lockdown, but her plans got derailed by the lockdown.

Sophia explained:

> Sophia*:* I wanted to grow my business by adding new products… to the ones I already sell... I wanted to see it impro.… and also get better so that it would be better than it was before COVID*. (*Interview, 2022).

Sophia stated that she was working on introducing new products to those she had been selling before the COVID-19 national lockdown. She desired to see her business grow and be revamped to attract more customers and possibly some new ones.

> Valencia*:* I had previously located a house in Guuistraat where I intended to start a BandB before Covid. It's a burned-down house, therefore I was negotiating with the municipality to find who the owner was so that I could purchase the property…the COVID-19 infection claimed the life of the guy who was helping me, and after that, nothing further happened (Interview, 2022).

Valencia desired to join the hospitality industry. She was working towards acquiring a house to start a BandB around the location of the research project. The dream could not be realized since the person who was assisting with the procedure died from COVID-19. As a result, the process came to a halt since she was unable to complete the acquisition.

Dora narrated:

> Dora*:* If you ask me in five years, I think I will have what I have been waiting for…I will be having my orphanage; it's so difficult to have one… I am still working on it to help orphans and gather these people who are wandering the streets…(Interview, 2022).

Despite what had happened, Dora stated that she still had big dreams for her growth. She wants to give up her job as a street vendor in a few years to help the poor by building a shelter for them. Therefore, findings from this study show that the pandemic had a devastating impact on the personal and professional aspirations of women vendors, as they were forced to abandon their plans for growth and development due to the financial strain and emotional constraints imposed by the lockdown. This disruption not only impacted their immediate economic prospects, but also jeopardised their long-term financial security and career trajectories. In this regard, the impacts of the pandemic on the future prospects of women vendors underscore the need for targeted policies and programs that provide women in the informal economy with the resources and support they need to recover and thrive post-economic crises.

Theme 2: Coping with being locked out of a business

4.7 Adaptability and flexibility

In line with the last objective of this study, which is to examine the support systems in place for women street traders who were affected by COVID-19 trading restrictions, this section looks at the coping strategies of the participants during times of shock such as the COVID-19 pandemic. It has been identified in the literature review section that most of the research on COVID-19 and the informal economy has largely focused on the impact of COVID-19 on the informal economy without exploring the strategies and coping mechanisms adopted by the informal traders. Therefore, this study seeks to contribute to this emerging literature by exploring the coping strategies of informal traders.

Many of the participants sold cooked foods, fruits, and vegetables. These were considered essential products; however, cooked food was not permitted for sale during the full lockdown level 5. It was argued that street vendors are more likely to be exposed to and transmit the virus because they earn their livelihood in public and often crowded spaces. Street vendors rely on their daily earnings; if they do not work, they do not eat. They also rely on the everyday traffic of people in crowded spaces to sustain themselves; without the people in the streets, there is no profit. As a result, participants had to look for alternative means of generating income.

The following quote presents the findings:

> Dorothy: Let me tell you, you survive…Cigarettes were scarce and costly at the time…I ended up hustling for smokes to sell at the township, and I made ends meet that way…(Interview, 2022).

Valencia sold prepared meals before the lockdown. Valencia had to shift to provide washing and ironing services to people in her little village to make ends meet during her unemployment period.

> Valencia*:* I ended up doing washing and ironing for people. I went door-to-door washing and ironing for people…so that I could eat…(Interview, 2022).

According to the findings of the study, participants were required to develop a diverse portfolio of activities to ensure their survival (Mathemba et al. 2017:1). The participants' diversification included the introduction of entirely new product lines or additional products within the existing product line. Some participants revealed that they had to add products that were not considered essential at the time because they were in high demand, were selling quickly, and were more expensive. This is due to the fact that they were unavailable in stores since they were not classified as necessities.

The results are consistent with Twine's (2013) assertion that households in rural areas most often practice livelihood diversification to escape poverty by pursuing multiple livelihood strategies. Therefore, to survive the lockdown and generate enough money to pay for the necessary expenses, participants had to use the diversification strategy. Dorothy mentioned that she sold fruits, vegetables, and a range of food items before the lockdown; as a result, she had to employ an alternative method to generate money, which involved adding other products to her existing line of products. This included selling non-essential products during the lockdown. Others, however, were forced to depend on their savings and social assistance to get them through the period they were restricted from economic activities.

The individual case of a participant who exhausted her savings to survive during the lockdown sheds light on the precarious financial situation faced by many. This situation is emblematic of the inadequate social safety net in place for those who experience economic shocks. The lack of a robust safety net can lead to long-term economic hardship, as savings can act as a buffer against unexpected expenses or loss of income. Moreover, the lockdown threw a curveball at businesses, disrupting traditional sales channels and forcing them to think outside the box.

Many businesses in this case turned to e-commerce platforms in order to reach customers and go on with operations because social distancing restrictions made it difficult for them to do in-person sales. Social media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram, allowed businesses to showcase their products, engage with customers, and take orders, all while maintaining social distancing protocols. However, despite the potential benefits of going online, many street vendors in rural areas faced substantial obstacles when it came to making the digital leap. Access to technology, technical skills, and financial resources were all major hurdles that prevented many vendors from setting up shops online. This highlights the digital divide that persists in many rural areas, where access to technology and digital literacy can be scarce, further exacerbating existing inequalities and hindering economic opportunities for those who rely on street vending for their livelihoods.

Emma revealed that to make ends meet during the lockdown, she had to withdraw funds from her savings.

> Emma: I was saving money every month… If I had not been saving up some money, I don't know how I would have survived. (Interview, 2022).

On the other hand, Olivia had three young women living in her home, one of whom was her daughter. Each of these young women had a child and was a recipient of child support grants. Olivia continued by saying that although during the lockdown she had savings on which she relied, they couldn't last her until they were allowed to go back to work, thus her household was dependent on child support grants.

> Olivia: We were relying on a child support grant; that was our only source of income. (Interview, 2022).

In line with this, the government increased the amounts of social grants and implemented the special COVID-relief grant in response to the restrictions on earnings, household income, and threats to food security. These initiatives were designed to mitigate the expected loss of earnings created by the lockdown restrictions on South Africa's informal economy (Rogan and Skinner, 2020:16). The Child Support Grant was increased by R300 per child and then by R500 per caregiver for five months. An additional R250 was added to all other grants for six months. However, the increase and the special grants were implemented when most street vendors were permitted to resume operations in May.

The Special COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress Grant was created in response to the reality that those who were unemployed or working in the informal economy had little or no means of support. A monthly payment of R350 was made for six months, and recipients of social grants could not qualify (Khambule, 2020:101). The study found that most of the participants were not eligible to receive unemployment funds, the reason being that others were recipients of a child support grant. As a result, the pandemic increased the vulnerability of those with limited resources and the ability to respond to threats. Thus, as argued by Khambule (2022:12), the government should not only view the informal economy as a backup plan for the unemployed but also take proactive rather than reactive measures to ensure that the safety net is shielded from the economy's vulnerabilities. Therefore, the findings demonstrate the precarious and vulnerable nature of street vending, highlighting the absence of social safety nets and economic cushioning commonly available to formal economy employees. In the face of crises such as the lockdown and subsequent business lockout, these women had to resort to alternative means of income generation and depend on social welfare programs like child support grants to survive. This situation underscores the need for policies that aim to fortify the informal economy, particularly for women, in order to prevent socioeconomic decline and promote economic resilience during times of crisis.

Theme 3: Support systems in place for women street traders

4.8 Awareness of available support systems and their accessibility

The South African government introduced various programs to mitigate the impacts attributed to the lockdown measures that restricted the livelihood activities of informal workers who were without alternative plans for business continuity. This was based on R500 billion in support that included a top-up in the existing support grants, the introduction of social relief distress grants, and support to small businesses (Khambule, 2022; Rogan and Skinner, 2020). However, the study found that street vendors did not receive any form of support from the government or any organization outside the government other than social support grants. In this vein, Bassier et al. (2020) state that approximately 64% of informal workers live in households that receive a child support grant and maintain that the increases in social grants were targeted at informal workers. On the contrary, a recipient of a social grant could not qualify for the Special COVID-19 Social Relief Distress Grant (Rogan and Skinner, 2020).

The evidence from the study raises concerns about the effectiveness of the government's social relief grant in reaching the most marginalized groups, particularly women vendors in rural areas. This suggests that the grant failed to adequately address the unique challenges faced by these women, such as limited access to financial services and communication channels. Therefore, this outcome calls into question the efficiency of these measures and casts doubt on the government's ability to adequately support marginalized communities during economic crises. This inequality underscores the vulnerability of informal workers and demands a more holistic and inclusive approach to the government's assistance, particularly in rural areas.

> Olivia*:* We were relying on a child support grant... that was our only source of income. (Interview, 2022*).*

Olivia reported that she did not have any source of income during the restrictions on trading, and the only source of income available for the household was a social child support grant. At this juncture, given that most participants were breadwinners and headed their households, the study argues that the South African support measures were gender biased and exacerbated the already existing gender disparities in the labour market and society at large. Rogan and Skinner (2020) reported that by June 2020, SASSA had approximately 7.4 million applicants and approved nearly 3.3 million applicants, of which the vast majority, nearly 1.8 million were men. In this regard, the ineligibility of women receiving child support grants for the social relief grant reflects a systematic issue of social assistance program incompatibility. This policy decision poses a significant barrier to financial security for vulnerable people and perpetuates systematic inequalities by limiting their access to multiple forms of assistance. Therefore, this underscores the need for a holistic policy design that considers the complex and intersecting needs of vulnerable people.

This proves that despite the greater participation of women in the labour market and assuming the role of a provider that had traditionally been proclaimed by men, they always hold the second position in society. The COVID-19 lockdown and the measures of support adopted by the South African government have proven that women in society are associated with and limited to the reproductive sphere, as shown by the absence of measures that replace income sources, particularly for women street vendors (Nunez, 1993; Chigudu, 2021). This confirms the gendered nature of the impact of the pandemic that was experienced, particularly by women, with the loss of livelihoods, lack of adequate support, and disparities in the support measures from the government (Rogan and Skinner, 2020). Therefore, the policy exclusion of

women on child support grants from social relief grants did not only create a financial barrier for vulnerable women, but it also reflected a deeper issue of gender inequality in the informal economy. The ineligibility of women receiving child support grants for the social relief grant effectively assumed that women were primarily responsible for childcare, perpetuating gendered roles and limiting women's access to resources. This thus further exacerbated the economic disadvantages that women face in the informal economy.

The study found that the women are not aware of the laws and procedures applicable to their operations amid a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic. In this regard, participants were not aware of the services they could access within the informal economy.

> Valencia: I went to the Department of Social Development for assistance…they informed me they cannot help me and directed me to Mega City to obtain a certificate... (Interview, 2022).

Valencia, in her narrative, indicated that she was not aware of the procedures she had to follow due to a lack of clear centralised support structures, but she was instead directed to the Department of Social Development. The reason behind this was for her to obtain a business certificate, which required her to pay an amount of R5,000, which she could not cover because of financial constraints.

The other participant indicated that she got a once-off R3500, which she explained even though the municipality claimed it was for the damages sustained during the lockdown.

> Olivia: We got help from the municipality…during the lockdown, forms came… we filled them out…and we received R3500. (Interview, 2022).

In her narrative, Olivia reported that the money did not equal the loss she suffered because, in a day, she could sell approximately 50 plates at 60 each. This is in a similar vein to the results of a survey conducted with informal workers at KwaDukuza Municipality by Khambule (2022), which reported that the municipality provided a once-off R1500 relief to informal workers. In this regard, the municipality's inadequate relief policy for informal workers embodies a flawed conceptualization of poverty and economic marginalization, neglecting the underlying structural determinants that contribute to economic exclusion and make informal workers especially vulnerable in times of crisis. Therefore, this approach overlooks the need

for more comprehensive, long-term solutions that address the root causes of poverty and economic exclusion.

The narratives of these participants regarding the support networks and systems support the arguments by scholars in the informal economy who have been highlighting that social grants should be provided to female entrepreneurs so that they support their livelihoods during pandemics (Alfers, 2020; Muzuva and Hlungwani, 2022). Muzuva and Hlungwani (2022) go on to state that the provision of social grants "fits well with the sustainable livelihood approach, which calls for policy interventions from various stakeholders to enhance livelihood outcomes for vulnerable people". This study has noted the absence of support systems for women traders to ensure they maintain sustainable livelihoods and further ensure that they can resume business operations after the shock. The absence of support systems for women traders during the pandemic represents a failure to meet the needs of these women. The lack of support not only affected their ability to maintain their livelihoods during the crisis but also jeopardized their ability to resume business operations once the shock had passed. Therefore, this finding highlights the need for stronger, more responsive systems that prioritize the needs of vulnerable groups, such as women traders, in times of crisis.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and recommendations

The main aim of this study was to explore the coping strategies of female street vendors in Lichtenburg during the COVID-19 national lockdown restrictions on trading from March 2020 to May 2020. The objectives underpinning this main aim were as follows:

1. Explore the experiences of female street traders who were subjected to COVID-19 restrictions on trading.
2. To assess the coping strategies of female street traders affected by COVID-19 restriction measures on trading.
3. To examine the support systems in place for women street traders who were affected by COVID-19 trading restrictions.

This study drew on the sustainable livelihoods framework. The framework examines the larger context in which households exist, as well as the livelihood resources, livelihood methods, and livelihood outputs accessible to each family. Put differently, a sustainable livelihoods framework encompasses the many sorts of resources required to carry out livelihood strategies in the quest for livelihood sustainability. In this context, a livelihood strategy refers to the activities that a household engages in to improve its livelihood outputs while living in extreme poverty. The context of livelihoods comprises a range of vulnerabilities for a household, such as natural disasters, pandemics, and economic shocks, all of which cause an increase in vulnerabilities. With that said, the focus of this study was on social sustainability to explore how female street vendors coped with stress and shocks caused by COVID-19 restrictions on trading, which had an immense negative impact on their livelihoods. Therefore, the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework provided a powerful lens through which to examine the resilience of female street vendors in the face of crisis. It recognised the complex interplay of social, economic, and environmental factors that shaped the viability of livelihoods and shed light on the strategies employed by street vendors to cope with the stresses and shocks they encounter. The framework highlights the resourcefulness and agency of street vendors, even in the context of limited resources and challenging circumstances. Therefore, the COVID-19 lockdown exacerbated existing vulnerabilities for female street vendors, who faced numerous challenges in coping with its impact. The lack of social sustainability, characterised by limited networks and support systems, hindered their ability to access resources and advocate for their needs. Their limited resources, both financial and social, compounded the negative impacts of the pandemic on their mental and emotional wellbeing. This highlights the crucial role of social

sustainability in mitigating the adverse consequences of shocks and crises on marginalized populations.

Insofar as the first objective of the study is concerned, the findings of the study were similar to those of other research studies about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the informal economy. The restrictions had an overwhelming negative impact on the livelihoods of the informal traders, primarily because of the loss of income. I have argued that in the case of this study, this illustrates the gendered impact of COVID-19 and its subsequent restrictions because the informal economy, particularly street vending, in South Africa is predominantly female. However, an interesting finding that is not dominant in literature was the appearance, the participant's narratives, of pull factors in joining the informal economy. Participants talked about the desire to own businesses and to become their own bosses. As a result, this study found that participants' participants' aspirations to become business owners and be their own boss are indicative of an important pull factor in street vending, beyond the commonly studied push factors like unemployment and joblessness.

Further research into the motivations and drivers behind this desire would add nuance to the scholarship on street vending and empower women to pursue entrepreneurship. Again, this would shift the conversation away from a simple focus on the negative aspects of street vending and instead highlight the agency and objectives set by the women who work in this sector of the economy. Street vending has the potential to be a significant tool for the empowerment of women and independence. Those with household responsibilities might provide a flexible work environment, allowing women to simultaneously handle work and family responsibilities, as indicated by research participants. Simply put, this means of generating income has the potential to provide women with a sense of freedom over their financial well-being and help them break away from societal expectations and traditional gender roles. Therefore, it's critical to keep exploring in academic discourse the ways that street vending could provide self-determination and agency, which might advance gender equity in the informal economy.

Second, street vendors' restricted access to sustainable livelihood assets such as financial capital, human capital, and natural capital hampers their ability to pursue sustainable livelihoods when confronted with crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and its subsequent lockdown restrictions on trading. In this case, their inability to adapt and deal with the new economic situation was made difficult by a lack of access to financial capital, human capital, and natural capital. Financial capital was required to maintain cash flow and operations, and

human capital, including knowledge and skills, was required to identify new sources of income. Their limited access to natural capital, such as marketplaces and public areas, completely impaired their ability to sell their products. In this aspect, the pandemic exposed fundamental shortcomings in the economic system, leaving the most economically disadvantaged without adequate support and resources.

The inability of street vendors to access the required capital, both financial and natural, revealed the systemic failure to address inequality and the precarious nature of informal livelihoods. This highlights the need for more investment in these vulnerable areas as well as a holistic strategy for economic growth that promotes the well-being of all. Similar to existing sustainable livelihoods framework research, this study discovered that diversification becomes a fundamental strategy for survival and coping with shocks and stress when the main economic activity fails to offer sufficient means of living. Participants in this research discussed diversifying their goods in order to make a livelihood. This proves that during the pandemic, street vendors displayed exceptional perseverance and adjustment in the face of adversity. They had no choice but to broaden the goods they sell in order to survive, demonstrating their innovative spirit and inventiveness. The Framework for Sustainable Livelihoods emphasizes the necessity of livelihood diversification as a coping mechanism for those who are vulnerable. In this case, product diversification enabled street vendors to enter new markets and survive the economic disruptions created by the pandemic. As a result, the fact that some street vendors moved to selling illegal goods or transitioned to whole new industries, such as washing services, emphasizes the precarious situation they were in. Their willingness to take risks and shift their livelihoods reveals government assistance gaps and a lack of other possibilities for them. This asks for proactive measures that build sustainable and dignified livelihoods for disadvantaged groups rather than forcing them to rely on illegal or unpredictable sources of income during times of crisis.

Finally, in terms of the last objective of this study, which is to examine the support systems in place for women street traders who were affected by COVID-19 trading restrictions, this study established the lack of support and networks for informal traders during periods of shock and stress. The lack of support systems negatively impacted the livelihoods of informal traders. In regard, it is recommended that informal traders be provided with social grants to maintain their livelihoods. The neglect of street vendors during the pandemic by the South African government highlights the systemic issue of ignoring informal economy workers. Without

support, these essential workers are left vulnerable to economic shocks that can deepen existing inequalities and hinder their ability to bounce back.

The lack of support systems for street sellers showed not just the government's short sightedness, but also the crucial role that street vendors play in local economies. They generate money, create employment, and stimulate local economic growth. By ignoring their needs, the government puts at risk an important segment of the economy. In addition, this highlights the South African government's reactive attitude to crisis management, which has been a repeating issue throughout its history. For example, multiple incidents in South Africa caused disruption the livelihoods of street vendors in just over a decade. In 2019, the KwaZulu-Natal floods impacted street vendors in Durban and its neighbourhoods (Bhana, Goetsch, and Scholtz, 2019), while in 2018, the Cape Town water crisis impacted street vendors across the city (Magaisa, 2018). In 2015 and 2008, xenophobic violence resulted in the destruction of informal businesses in several cities, including Johannesburg and Cape Town (Bregman, 2008). This is problematic because a reactive approach is often ineffective in mitigating the impacts of crises, as it is focused on responding to the immediate crisis rather than preparing for and preventing future crises. This creates a cycle of crisis, response, and recovery that can perpetuate economic and social instability. As such, a proactive approach is critical to building resilience and fostering sustainable development in the country.

In this regard, the aforementioned crises highlight the vulnerability of street vendors, who often operate without the support or protection afforded to formal businesses. Therefore, the aggregate impact of these occurrences are harmful resulting in food insecurity and poverty for many street vendors and their families. Given that street vendors have been disproportionately impacted by lockdowns and economic disruptions, the COVID-19 outbreak has further heightened this vulnerability. Therefore, I argue that when it comes to handling emergency situations like natural disasters or pandemics, the South African government often takes a more reactive rather than proactive approach. It often has a tendency to respond just after the incident has already occurred or intensified. As a result, the economy and the lives of the people are significantly affected. This highlights the need for long-term measures that assist the informal economy and provide street vendors the highest level of protection, not just in times of crisis but also in times of stability.

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Appendixes

Appendix A: Semi-structured interview schedule for women street vendors

Research aim

How did female street vendors in Lichtenburg survive the impact of the COVID-19 national lockdown restrictions on trading activities between March 2020 and May 2020?

Research objectives:

1. To explore the experiences of female street traders who were subjected to COVID-19 trade restrictions.
2. To assess the coping strategies of female street traders affected by COVID-19 trade restrictions.
3. To examine the support systems in place for women street traders who were affected by COVID-19 trade restrictions.

Demographic information of participants

Can you please state your name?

What is your Age?

Where are you originally from?

What is your home language?

How would you describe your race?

What Is your marital status?

How many people live in your household?

What educational level do you have**?**

Do you have any children? How many are they?

Theme 1: Conceptualizing the informal economy

1. How would you describe the type of work you do?
2. When did you start?

3. How did you start?
4. Why did you start?
5. How much profit do you make and over what period of time?
6. How long have you been working in this sector?
7. What benefits or contributions does your household receive from the informal economy?
8. How stable is your income in the informal economy?
9. Where do you sell?
10. Who are the customers?
11. How do you get customers?

Theme 2: Factors impacting the growth of informal street vending

12. What led you to begin trading?
13. What challenges do you encounter as a female street vendor?
14. Do you think that your decision to pursue informal work was influenced by your gender?

Theme 3: The outbreak of COVID-19

15. How was business before COVID-19?
16. Did you face any difficulties sustaining your livelihood throughout the pandemic?
17. How did you get through these challenges? Did you have any strategies in place to deal with them?
18. Fears regarding the transmission of the virus and being in contact with people?
19. Please tell me about your experiences regarding health and safety at the workplace.
20. Did you have any protective gear?
21. Can you briefly describe your experiences with the COVID 19 trading restrictions?
22. What happened when the president announced the trading restrictions?
23. Please tell me how this affected your business.
24. What did you do when you couldn't sell?
25. Was there any support from government/municipality?
26. Was there any organization that provided you with support besides the government and the municipality?
27. What kind of support structure did you have at home?

28. How did you manage your household chores and business during the lockdown?
29. Who looked after your children while you were at work during the lockdown?
30. How did you make a living during that period?
31. What kind of network or support structure do you have as informal traders?
32. Did you have any hopes and plans for the future in the informal economy before COVID-19? How did COVID-19 affect these plans?
33. Considering what has happened, are you satisfied with the work you do?
34. How was business after the president's announcement that you may return to work?
35. What recommendations do you have for addressing the challenges faced by informal vendors, especially during pandemics?
36. Would you like to add anything more regarding your employment and your experiences before, during, and after the pandemic that we did not have the chance to discuss?

Appendix B: Consent to record

DECLARATION

(To be signed by research participants)

I _____ hereby consent to the recording of my interview with Lesego Marumo. I am aware that she will use the data acquired during this interview for her master's research project. I was given an information sheet before to the interview, so I am aware of the nature of the project and its objectives.

_____ _____

Signature **Date**

Participant

Appendix C: Participant sheet

Dear Participant

Thank you for considering my request to participate in this study, the purpose of which is to gather data for my master's research.

The study aims to explore how female street vendors in Lichtenburg survived the impact of the COVID-19 national lockdown restrictions on trading activities between March 2020 and May 2020. In this regard, the study seeks to assess the coping mechanisms, support systems, and the overall experiences of female vendors during lockdown trade restrictions.

I will be using semi-structured interviews to gather data in order to accomplish the aforementioned goals. As a participant, you will be asked a series of questions about your experiences as a street vendor during the COVID-19 lockdown. During the interviews, I will be taking notes and using a cell phone to record to make sure I don't miss any of the important information. The interview will last for approximately 30-40 minutes, and will be conducted at a location chosen by you.

All of the data from the interviews will be maintained in an electronic folder, and only the researcher (Lesego Marumo) and the supervisor (Dr Thoko Sipungu) will have access to it. The data will be used solely for academic purposes to assist me in completing my master's degree.

Voluntary Participation: Participation in the study is voluntary. You are allowed to refuse to take part in the study or withdraw from participating in the study once it has begun.

Confidentiality: Confidentiality is assured. Any information that you are going to provide will not be traced back to you when the final report is produced. The final report will use pseudonyms to protect your identity.

Thank you for giving my request some thought. We value your assistance.

_____

Lesego Marumo

Appendix D: Participant informed consent form

DECLARATION

(To be signed by research participants)

Project Title: **Gender and the COVID-19 pandemic: Exploring female vendors' coping strategies in Lichtenburg during the lockdown.**

Lesego Marumo from the Department of **Sociology** Rhodes University has requested my permission to participate in the above-mentioned research project.

The nature and the purpose of the research project and of this informed consent declaration have been explained to me in a language that I understand.

I am aware that:

1. The purpose of the research project is to explore how female street vendors in Lichtenburg survived the impact of the COVID-19 national lockdown restrictions on trading activities between March 2020 and May 2020.
2. Rhodes University has given ethical clearance to this research project **(**2022-5890-7247) and I have seen/may request to see the clearance certificate by contacting the Ethics Coordinator (ethics-committee@ru.ac.za)
3. By participating in this research project I will be contributing towards furthering the debate about rural informality and to reflect the concerns of women affected by the COVID-19 regulatory measures.
4. I will participate in the project by way of an interview conducted by the researcher. They will ask a series of questions about my experiences as a woman in the informal economy in Lichtenburg. I have been informed that I can refuse to answer questions that I am uncomfortable with.
5. My participation is entirely voluntary and should I at any stage wish to withdraw from participating further, I may do so without any negative consequences.

6. I will not be compensated for participating in the research, but my out-of-pocket expenses will be reimbursed.
7. The following risks are associated with my participation:

7.1 embarrassment from being workers in the informal economy.

1. The Researcher intends to publish the research results in the form Masters dissertation that will be uploaded on the Rhodes University library website**.** However, confidentiality and anonymity of records will be maintained and my name and identity will not be revealed to anyone who has not been involved in the conducting of the research, ***unless I indicate to the contrary/recognize that as a public figure my identity will inevitably be/become known, in which case I agree to accept the loss of anonymity.***

2. In terms of the Protection of Personal Information Act (No. 4 of 2013) it remains my right to request the Researcher to provide me with a detailed explanation of exactly how confidentiality and anonymity of the data I provide will be achieved. I may also request to know exactly how my personal information will be stored securely, for how long it will be stored.

3. If any data collected from me for this research project is to be used by the Researcher for any further study, I am to be informed in writing and my written consent requested again. I need not give consent for the new research if it is incompatible with the initial purpose of the present study (POPIA, s15(3)). Equally, I can simply reject the request. In such cases, a formal request needs to be made to me by the researcher via the Ethics Coordinator (ethics-committee@ru.ac.za).

4. In terms of the POPI Act, I possess the right to receive feedback about this research. This will take the form of returning the transcripts of the interviews to the participants to verify that everything they said is accurate, including contact information at the end of the participants' sheet so that they can request the findings, scheduling a 20- to 30-minute face-to-face presentation of the findings, and summarizing the key findings in a report so that they are understandable by them since they might be the non-academic audience.

5. Any further questions that I might have regarding the nature of the research and/or my participation in it will be answered by **Lesego Marumo, 22M2768@campus.ru.ac.za**
6. By signing this informed consent declaration, I am not waiving any legal claims, rights, or remedies. A copy of this informed consent declaration will be given to me, and the original will be kept on record by the Researcher.

7. I ***agree/disagree*** (delete inapplicable) to the Researcher's request to take photographs, or videoing me as part of this research project, recognizing that agreement here is likely to raise the risk of compromising my anonymity and that steps will be taken to ensure this will not happen it my consent is given.

8. I ***agree/disagree*** (delete inapplicable) to the Researcher's use of voice recording of my comments and opinions during interviews, the purpose of which is to ensure the accurate recording of my views/responses. Furthermore, I have the right to request a copy of the interview transcriptions to confirm that my opinions are accurately recorded.

I, ……., have read the above information / confirm that the above information has been explained to me in a language that I understand and I am aware of this document's contents. I have asked all questions that I wished to ask, and these have been answered to my satisfaction. I fully understand what is expected of me during the research.

I have not been pressurised in any way and I voluntarily agree to participate in the above-mentioned project.

……. …… …….

Participant signature **Witness** **Date**