STREET VENDING AND THE USE OF URBAN PUBLIC SPACE IN KUMASI, GHANA

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Abstract

In many cities all over the world, urban public space has become the place of work of the urban poor. This paper seeks to examine how street vendors use public space for their livelihood and the response by the Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly to control street vending. The research was carried out in the Kumasi metropolis, a nodal commercial centre, with proliferation of street vending activities. The study employed a variety of research methodologies in gathering the data, including personal observation, focus group discussions and a field survey with a sample of 517 street traders. The findings show that the modus operandi of street vendors induces impulse buying and that has been one main catalyst for the sustenance of the sector despite official efforts in relocating them. It was also revealed that the decision of street vendors regarding locations in which they operate was mainly influenced by the attraction of customers, and so regardless of the number of times the street vendors are evicted from their location by the city authorities, they would still remain on the streets and open spaces. This paper proposes that the spatial dynamics of the activity in the urban informal sector should be understood and the space needs of street traders must be considered in urban planning. It is recommended that the activity is accommodated adequately in the urban spatial environment and that the use of public space by street vendors is addressed in urban planning in order to minimize the negative and undesirable effects of street vending on the urban environment.

Keywords

Urban public space; street vending; locational decisions; livelihood strategy.

1.0 Introduction

Urban public space is the physical space and social relations that determine the use of space within the non-private realms of cities. It is the setting for panoply of human activity and a fundamental determinant of the character of towns. Urban public space is a key element in the livelihoods of the urban poor, but its importance in development policies for cities is largely ignored (Brown, 2006). In Ghana, urban public spaces, such as open spaces, nature reserves and right of ways, have become assets for livelihoods. Thus, urban public space is perceived as a physical asset which is used to sustain the livelihoods of the urban poor. Street vending is a visible and controversial component of the urban economy and vendors operate their businesses in areas that can be classified as public spaces and are originally unintended for trading purposes. Street vendors do not locate haphazardly in the places from which they ply their trades and certain areas offer greater locational advantage than others (Harrison and McVey, 1997; Yankson, 2000). With the advent of modern retailing – fixed retail operations, departmental stores and malls – many expected that street vending would go away, yet today, in most countries of the world, it persists even where local regulations seek to ban or restrict it (ILO, 2002). The street economy forms a component of many low-income cities and depends on the innovative use of space to survive and flourish.

In recent times, street trading has presented new challenges for urban administrations charged with the management of space in the country. In reality, there is no shortage of urban public space for trading, but the most profitable locations to trade are at the busiest locations where competition for space is acute (Brown, 2006). The Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly (KMA) has been preoccupied with the problem of street trading for many years. Street vendors operate on pedestrian walkways and on streets, thus impeding both pedestrian and vehicular traffic and causing congestion, especially in the city centre. Only a few vendors are lucky to secure stalls in the markets and some of those, who have market stalls, have either partly or fully moved their activi-
ties onto pavements and streets, especially in the central business district. However, the majority can neither secure stalls nor have the financial means to do so. Street vendors move from one site to another in the city as and when they are chased away by the city authorities (Yankson, 2007).

The major problems associated with street trading in Kumasi and other towns in Ghana include congestion as a result of the ever-increasing number of street vendors operating on sidewalks and on the streets. Consequently, there is intense struggle for space between the traders and the pedestrians on the pavements and most of the pedestrians are, therefore, forced onto the streets, resulting in conflict of vehicular and pedestrian traffic. Another major problem is poor environmental sanitation, largely arising from littering of the streets and sidewalks and dumping of garbage in open drains (Yankson, 2007). Also, the makeshift structures of the street traders mar the urban environment and degrade the aesthetic quality of urban settlements and this has been worsened by the fact that the Metropolitan authorities have not been able to provide secured sites within the city where trading could be controlled. The problem is that, over the years, various attempts have been made by KMA to address the problems associated with street trading without much success. Both persuasive and brute force measures were applied in the past without achieving the desired impact and, in spite of continuous harassment and decongestion exercises, street traders returned to the streets after a short time. Urban authorities, such as the KMA officials and town planners, have tried unsuccessfully to keep the traders off the streets. Directives have been issued to traders to relocate to the various satellite markets in Kumasi, but this has not been adhered to.

Based on the above background, a survey was conducted to examine how street vendors use public space to support their livelihoods. It is hoped that with the survey findings, street vending would be better understood by policy-makers, planners and city administrators since actions of urban governments are a key factor in reducing, perpetuating or increasing the vulnerability of street vendors. This would enable policymakers to come out with interventions for addressing the operation of the vendors which would be sustainable, resolve their spatial problems and curtail the negative effects of their operations on the urban environment.

1.1 Theoretical Background

There is significant literature on urban public space of cities to examine to know how these can be better designed to enhance urban vitality. Brown (2006) explores the concept of urban public space and its importance to the poor. She concludes that, although urban public space is a common property resource, it is not static, but a shifting resource whose boundaries may change quickly over time as a result of social negotiation. Another issue is that, government intervention towards the informal sector is particularly related to its business operation (Suharto, 2004). Street vendors operate their businesses in areas that can be classified as public spaces and are originally unintended for trading purposes. As most street vending occupies busy streets, pavements or other public spaces, these activities are often considered to be illegal. This status makes traders victims of harassment and threats from police and other government authorities.

Harvey (1973) argued that, to understand cities, it is important to understand how human practices create distinctive conceptualizations of space, and that only by exploring the concept of social justice and its relationship to urban spatial systems, the role of land as a commodity and the spatial implications of economic production, can people achieve an urbanization that is not built on the exploitation of the poor. He states that, in the city context, the question is not, “what is space?”, but rather “how is it that different human practices create and make use of distinctive conceptualization of space?” It is also apparent from the literature that studies have been carried out which have expounded on the rights to public space. For example, according to Mitchell (2003), unlike other spaces of the city, which are increasingly being created for people rather than by people, public spaces are important in that they are sites for the articulation and demand of rights and citizenship.

Lynch (1981) states that, even though much of the literature assumes that urban public space is a common property resource to which everyone has equal and free rights of access, in many instances,
this is not the case, because it has competing uses. Urban researchers like Roy (2005) have specifically focussed on the way street vendors in New York, although a public nuisance in the eyes of city authorities, in fact, produce safe public spaces and enhance the quality of life in the neighbourhoods in which they work. In Indian cities, such as Mumbai, there is ample evidence too that street traders’ vigilance over public spaces enhances the safety of all city residents (Anjaria, 2006). A case study of public space planning in a peripheral neighbourhood of Barcelona (Garcia-Ramon, et al., 2004) demonstrates that the public nature of such spaces holds city planners and urban authorities accountable because they have to answer to the community since the citizens are able to exert a voice in the design and planning process.

1.1.1 Locational Decisions of Street Traders
Street vendors choose their locations for a variety of reasons and, from the point of view of urban planning, it is important to understand why they choose the sites or locations where they operate their enterprises. The failure of urban planning and management systems to address this has resulted in a haphazard and scattered locational pattern of informal economic units within the urban built environment. In Ghana, the location and site selection of the street vendors is at the core of the accommodation issue. According to Yankson (2000), it is customary to understand this through the application of normative models of industrial location. In the light of this, Yankson’s study of Accra (2000), found that a number of factors were identified as influencing the choice of sites by the operators. The attraction of customers was considered the factor that most influenced site selection. This was followed by the availability of access road and the lack of suitable alternative sites. The least important was plot allocated by municipal authority.

The results of Suharto’s study (2004) in Bandung Metropolitan Region in Indonesia revealed that, although street vendors were widespread in many different places, their locations always reflected their reliance on economic activities either located on, or affected by the street. Dewar and Watson (1990) highlighted the sensitivity of market locations to concentrations of pedestrian traffic and they promote a policy of intervention which recognises that markets operate best around commercial centres, public transport termini, or other areas with high pedestrian flows.

The conceptual framework used in this study is an adaptation of the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework developed by Department for International Development (DFID) in 1998. The framework adopts a perspective on the understanding of poverty and how to intervene to improve the conditions of the poor. Broadly, a Sustainable Livelihood (SL) is a means of living which is resilient to shocks and stress and which does not adversely affect the environment. The 'livelihoods framework' aims at understanding and addressing the causes of poverty, the vulnerability of poor people and their multiple and resourceful efforts to survive, based on a mix of strategies (Rakodi, 2002). In the framework, it is essential to consider public space as a physical livelihood asset and identify how conflicts with other uses can be resolved. The livelihood analysis emphasises the importance of political institutions and processes in framing the vulnerability context of the poor, official structures and organisations in the government and private sector, and processes defined in laws, policies, culture and institutions (Rakodi, 2002). Anecdotal evidence indicates that the street economy is no longer small-scale or marginal, but is in some cities, a major employment sector catering for diverse and mobile city populations (Brown, 2005).

2.0 Methodology
This paper presents a study of vending in some of the streets in Kumasi. The unique location of Kumasi as a traversing point from all parts of the country makes it a special place in terms of the social, economic, cultural and political life of the country. As a result of its central location, vibrant market, and rich culture and history, the metropolis serves as an urban destination accommodating a high migrant population comprising people from almost all the ethnic groups and regions in the country (KMA, 2004). Kumasi is also endowed with social services which include education, health and tourism services. It has important educational and health institutions which are run by government, private and religious bodies (Solomon-Ayeh, 2009).
The commercial activities of the city cannot be underestimated. It has the largest single market in Ghana, the Kumasi Central Market, which serves both the inhabitants of the city as well as people from other parts of the country and those from the neighbouring countries, such as Mali, Burkina Faso and Togo.

This paper used both primary and secondary data gathered through observation, focus group discussions, key informant interviews and a field survey. The secondary sources included books, journals and available and directly relevant research reports on the informal sector of Kumasi (e.g., King, 1999; Brown, 2006). The primary data was collected from street vendors operating in Kumasi.

The interviews with the street traders were first preceded by a reconnaissance survey to have an overview of the nature of street vending in Kumasi and all the major streets were covered. It was observed that street vending activities occurred in three spatial patterns: in a cluster around the large shops in the Central Business District, in linear arrangement along pedestrian circulation paths, such as alleys and streets, and thirdly, in pocket areas where relatively larger spaces are available, such as open spaces. In all these areas, basic characteristics of street vending were recorded. These included the location, type of goods sold, type of structure used in vending and whether the vendors operated in a particular locations or moved from one location to the other. A questionnaire was then prepared and tested along the major roads and in the Central Business District. Based on the responses, a final questionnaire was produced for the survey.

A sample of five hundred and seventeen (517) street vendors was drawn. The interviews with the street vendors were conducted on the streets in October 2007, while they were working, and included both men and women. A sampling frame was developed by going to the areas chosen for the study and counting the number of street traders found there on a particular day. Systematic random sampling was used to select the sedentary street traders since this method of sampling gave all the street traders in the city an equal chance to be chosen for the interview. In the study, two hundred and eighty (280) sedentary vendors and two hundred and thirty seven (237) footloose vendors were sampled. The footloose vendors (hawkers) were selected by purposive sampling, because they were not stationary and were always on the move.

Focus group discussions and key informant interviews were conducted on two (2) street vendor associations, and in each association, the executives were interviewed. The associations that were identified as the most active were the United Petty Traders’ Association and The Kumasi Royal Traders’ Association. Also, a list was obtained from the KMA on relevant urban institutions whose work had a bearing on street trading activities or urban management. Using this list, another list was drawn using purposive sampling method, and officials were then selected from nine (9) urban institutions. The officials selected were the heads of the various institutions and their deputies in Town and Country Planning Department, the City Engineer’s department of the KMA, Waste Management department of the KMA, Ghana Police Service, Department of Parks and Gardens, Ghana Highway Authority, Department of Urban Roads, Kumasi Regional Administration and the office of the Kumasi Metropolitan Chief Executive.

2.1 Field Survey Locations

The locations for the field survey were the Central Business District (CBD), Kejetia Railway line area at the Kumasi Central Market and sections of the main arterial roads, namely, the Kumasi-Accra Road, Kumasi-Lake Bosomtwi Road, Kumasi-Sunya Road, Kumasi-Mampong Road, Anloga-Sobolo Road (Map 1). These areas are considered as sampling blocks, and they include three blocks, namely, the commercial/business area, market area and street. These areas were taken into consideration, because it was observed that they had a high intensity of street trading activities within the city.

At the Central Business District (CBD) area, where a lot of street traders can be found, various roads were selected as sampling areas and street traders were interviewed. At the Kumasi Central Market (KCM) area, the Kejetia Railway line area was selected as the sampling location, because it was near the main market in Kumasi, that is, the Central
market, and there was an overspill of traders from the Central market onto the open space around the railway line. Sections of the main arterial roads, where traders could be found plying their trade on the streets during and after the activity count, were the other sampling locations used. Areas on the four most important road corridors, in terms of average daily traffic volumes, were selected. The Anloga-Sobolo road was also chosen in this study as a sampling area, although it was not a main arterial road. This was based on the need to assess what the situation was on a neighbourhood road and the dynamics of street trading on such roads. The selected roads used in the study are shown in Map 1.

3.0 Results and Discussions

3.1 Types of Street Vendors

Kumasi street vendors can be classified into two main groups: sedentary vendors and footloose vendors. The sedentary ones work in fixed locations using pavements, verandahs, stalls, tables, and sometimes the bare floor. They are often concentrated in large areas or their activities may be home-based. The footloose or mobile vendors have no fixed locations and move throughout the city or in the city centre in search of customers. In the survey, 54.2% were sedentary vendors and 45.8% were footloose vendors. The sedentary vendors, who work in fixed locations, include vendors of foodstuffs, fruits and vegetables, cooked food and various manufactured goods, such as stationery, watches, mobile phones and electronic goods. The footloose or mobile traders mainly sell newspapers, iced water, ice cream, biscuits, second-hand clothing and different kinds of manufactured goods, such as handkerchiefs, toilet roll and shaving sticks. They carry their goods on their head, in their hands or in push-carts. There is an upward mobility in the conduct of the street vending business (Asiedu and Agyei-Mensah, 2008), and usually, there is a gradual ascent over time from the sale of simple, rudimentary goods to the more sophisticated and costly ones.

3.2 Age, Sex and Gender Profiles

The economically-active age-group of 18 to 45 years formed the greater proportion of the vendors, representing about 82%. Out of this, the 25-29 years age-group constituted 30% of the street vendors, followed by the 30-34 years age-group comprising about 18%. This suggests that, since selling on the street is a tedious and energy-consuming activity, it is mainly the active and youthful population who get involved in it. The gender split in most age categories, as shown in Figure 1, favoured the female gender. Street vending is a key livelihood strategy for families in Kumasi, particularly for women, because of the social structure of the Akan people, where a matrilineal tradition encourages economic independence (King, 1999).

Women vendors are not restricted in any means in the type of goods they want to trade in. Thus, women could undertake the same livelihood activities as men to earn a living to meet their daily needs. The men were mostly engaged in the sale of electronic goods, while women mainly sold perishable goods, such as foodstuff and cooked foods.
3.3 Educational Level of Vendors

From the survey, 53% of the street vendors had obtained education only up to basic school level. Even more interesting was the finding that 20.7% of the respondents had never been to school. Thus, for close to 75% of the vendors, jobs in the formal sector was out of reach to them, hence their only means of survival was in the informal sector. Regarding 23.2% of the respondents, who had obtained secondary school education, their employment options were limited to the lower echelons of the formal sector. It is apparent that only 2.7% of the respondents, who have had vocational level education, had a skill they could survive on.

3.4 Location of Vendors

The trading location has implications for urban planning. Figure 2 shows that, about 58% of the vendors were located along the road on pavements and other pedestrian walkways, 17.6% were on the road weaving in and out of cars and 15.1% were found in front of shops. About 10% of the vendors were situated in open spaces, mainly near the Central market area and around the Railway area. It was also found from the survey that, although many of the vendors did not have permanent locations in which to conduct their businesses, they tended to use the same place every day.

The reasons given for the choice of location are found in Table 1. The availability of customers at the various locations was the main reason which was given by about 64% of the respondents. About 17% of respondents also said they were located where they were, because they did not have to pay any rent and, therefore, it was cost effective, while 13.2% had limited options, but to operate in that location since it was the only one available. About 6%, who were mainly food vendors, had chosen the location because of its proximity to their place of abode and also to cut down on transportation. Replacing or assisting a family member and no eviction from urban authorities and, therefore, peace of mind, were other reasons given by the rest of the respondents (Table 1). The vendors said it was imperative that they work in the same place every day so as to maintain their regular customers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Availability of customers</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>63.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited Options</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proximity</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost Effectiveness</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to replace/assist family member</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace of mind</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>517</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors’ Field Survey, 2007.

A good location is very important for the sedentary vendors since they are not mobile like the footloose vendors. Proximity to their homes did not play a major role in the choice of location for both types of
street vendors. Only 2% of the footloose and 4% of sedentary vendors found it important. This finding is similar to that of Sagoe-Addy (2006), who found that only 1.2% of people in the informal sector were operating at locations close to their homes. This suggests that both categories of vendors are likely to relocate and operate at any properly situated and functional market, irrespective of the distance of the location from their place of abode.

3.5 Fees Paid for Location
According to the bye-laws of the district assemblies, anybody engaged in business by using the urban space has to pay a fee to the assembly. Vendors were, therefore, interviewed on fee payment. It was revealed that 75% (387) of the vendors interviewed paid some fees daily or monthly, while the remaining 25% (130) did not pay fees. Among those who pay some fee, the majority, about 79%, pay less than one Ghana Cedi daily to the KMA as daily tolls. The amount paid is in relation to the type of goods sold and whether the vendor is footloose or sedentary. Fees paid by the vendors are received by different authorities. A large proportion (93%) paid fees to a KMA revenue officer.

In a few cases, 1% of the fees were paid to the shop owners from whose frontage the street vendor was operating. Income tax to the Internal Revenue Service constituted 3.6%, while 2.3% of the respondents paid fees to the chairpersons of the various street vendors’ associations. Thus, it is clear that, fees are not being paid to one source. The pertinent issue was that, from the survey, all the street vendors assumed that they were paying fees for gaining permanent status to their sites. However, the KMA bye-law on Control of Hawkers states that, they are to obtain a license for the use of the space and they are also to pay tolls to the KMA.

3.6 Effects of Vendors’ Activities on the Urban Landscape
In investigating street vending and the use of public space, it is necessary to find out what effects activities of street vendors have on the urban environment and the implication for urban planning. In recent times, street vending has presented new challenges for urban administrations charged with the management of space in the country. In reality, there is no shortage of urban public space for trading, but the most profitable locations to trade are at the busiest locations where competition for space is acute. One cause of conflict is that, trading often takes place on pavements or footpaths that are important pedestrian routes. This exacerbates environmental problems, such as traffic congestion, air and noise pollution and poor sanitation, which cause health hazards. Pick-pocketing is rife and stress is caused to pedestrians. The makeshift structures of the street vendors also mar the urban environment and degrade the aesthetic quality of urban settlements. The insanitary conditions that are created from the filth and garbage generated by vendors could lead to an increase in mosquito-breeding areas and malaria. Also, in Kumasi, the pavements as well as road islands were falling into disrepair and misuse because of the activities of the vendors. In view of this, vendors were made to identify the effect they perceived their businesses had on the urban environment. About 78% claimed their businesses had no negative effect on the environment, while 15% said their businesses created waste management problems. It is possible that the majority, who did not see any impact of their activities on the urban landscape, were either not telling the truth or did not really know the negative effects of their activities.

3.7 Eviction by the City Authorities
Vendors face evictions in their operations by city authorities, where their goods are seized, huge sums of monies allegedly collected from them and, in some cases, beaten. As many as 59% (307) of the vendors responded in the affirmative on the question as to whether they had experienced eviction from city authorities. Forty-one percent (210), however, had been free from the city authorities’ evictions since they started trading. Traders are required to make cash payments of up to 300 Ghana cedis when their goods are seized and, according to the vendors, the most worrisome is the fact that one is never sure of when the KMA city guards would come and drive them away. Brown (2004), in her study of vendors in Zimbabwe, stated that the fear of eviction makes vendors fearful and insecure.
3.8 Relocation

One of the major problems identified by the leaders of the vendors’ associations in Kumasi during the focus group discussions conducted in this study is frequent eviction and relocation, a problem that is experienced by street vendors all over the world (Mittula, 2004; Brown, 2006; King, 2006). Street vendors work with short-term loans which have to be paid back within a matter of two to three months. Those, who sell perishable food items, collect the items on credit on daily basis and repay the owners with interest at the end of the day. The survey revealed that frequent relocation, however, affects their repayment rates and their chances of earning an income, since relocation disorganises their activities and it takes a long time for them to get back to their normal work. Relocation implies dismantling vending structures, negotiating a new form of tenureship and rent and having to put up new structures before settling in the new location. The vendors also lose their regular customers who are unable to locate them at the recognised vending spaces. According to the United Petty Traders’ Association, where the street traders are given limited time to move, many of them get their goods stolen since the confusion surrounding relocation easily creates avenues for people to steal. It is also the occasion when, sometimes, the law enforcement agents make additional income from the misfortunes of the traders. Bhatt (2006), in a study in India, states that, the law enforcement agents enjoy this state of confusion so that they would continue to enjoy their “tea money” from the vendors. Thus, relocating street vendors in urban public space in Kumasi has several implications that go beyond the members who are immediately affected. Economically, it has a multiplier effect which trickles down to affect several households, large shop owners (who use the street vendors as retailers) and their customers.

3.9 Representing the Voices of Association Members

The United Petty Traders’ Association and the Kumasi Royal Traders’ Association represent the street vendors and speak for their members. For example, with the plan to decongest the street of major cities in Ghana towards the celebration of the 50th anniversary of independence, the urban authorities in Ghana declared their intention to rid the street of street vendors. Past decongestion exercises were hard on the vendors in many respects and there was still the fear that the proposed decongestion exercise may have a negative effect on their enterprises. This put a lot of pressure on the leadership to ensure that their members were not affected negatively.

As the leaders of the association attempted to play their role to intervene on the part of their members, they were frustrated by city authorities when their letters did not receive any attention. According to the leadership of the United Petty Traders’ Association, they petitioned the government on a number of occasions, but did not receive any reply to their letters. For example, regarding the 2007 decongestion exercise, the leadership said they sent six (6) petitions to the Ministries of Local Government and Rural Development and Ministry of Trade, petitioning them to relocate the street vendors to an old and under-utilised market known as the Suame Market. The leadership cited only one occasion when the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development responded to their letter and copied it to the city authorities in Kumasi. A follow-up to the KMA on several occasions revealed that the letter could not be traced. The leaders of the association spent six months following up on their plea until they finally had to give up. According to the leaders of the association, the fact that the letter to KMA got missing was an indication to them that the city authority was not interested in assisting them to relocate. In all this, the leaders of the association used their own resources to pay for the transportation to KMA which again frustrated them.

It was found from the focus group discussions that members also suspect that some of their leaders use them for political favours from politicians and officials of the city authorities. For example, the presidents of both associations knew a number of people in government and were able to go to them directly. This was, sometimes, used against them by their own members, although they may have good intentions for their members. Members also do not appreciate the bureaucracies associated with having audience with government and city officials. Some of these frustrations could, therefore, discourage membership where their demands are not met. Thus,
maintaining the membership of such associations could in itself be a very challenging task for the leaders.

In the case of the United Petty Traders’ Association, in order to assist the KMA in their search for a suitable place for the relocation of the street traders, the leaders had identified a location and were prepared to ensure the construction of a new market, provided they were invited to participate in the process. The leaders of the United Petty Traders’ Association had also taken it upon themselves to provide their members with information concerning the rules and regulations of the city. They were prepared to educate their members on government policies that have implications on their activities and to mobilise daily tolls from members.

The leaders of the United Petty Traders’ Association have tried to reduce the incidence of confrontations between their members and the police by serving as mediators for members who have problems. For example, where a member misbehaves by disobeying city rules and regulations, the leaders suspend the individual from operating on the street for a certain number of days. Occasionally, the leaders seize the goods of members who are found guilty. This may not be any different from what the city authorities and the police do and, therefore, suggests that the leaders of the associations could stamp their on members, as also observed by Clark among the Kumasi Market Traders’ Organisations (Clark, 2010).

One of the key factors that brings street vendors together for collective action is the struggle for space to work, which suggests that their economic aspiration in urban areas is a key factor for organising. The leaders of the United Petty Traders’ Association spend the better part of their time chasing city officials and politicians to negotiate for space for their members to avoid being evicted. This suggests that street vendors can only secure trading spaces when adequate space is allocated for them in the zoning of the city. The issues of concern to street vendors’ organisations are not one of conflict between street vendors and vehicles and pedestrians or street vendors and city authorities; rather, it is how the city authorities address the needs of this traditional, small-scale informal economy.

4.0 Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly’s (KMA) Response to Street Trading

The bulldozer approach has been the main instrument of the Kumasi city authorities as they attempt to destroy structures of street vendors. There is evidence to suggest that this is common in many countries and the daily newspapers in Jakarta, New Delhi, Lesotho, and other large cities still carry stories about the destruction, removal and forced relocation of vendors and other informal operators almost daily (Harper, 1996; Setsabi, 2006). Another approach in Kumasi is the attempt by city authorities to relocate street vendors to the twenty-six (26) satellite markets in the metropolis. This has not proved successful, because these markets have been built outside the CBD and are outlying and not commercially viable (King, 2006). This policy has generally not been successful globally (Cross, 1998; Skinner, 2000), and these markets are often empty and, in most cases, the stalls are used for storage or are overgrown by weeds.

In Ghana, the urban authorities have tried several times to get street vendors off the streets. As the trading location is extremely important for the street vendors, their strategy revolved around refusing to leave the spaces from which they have been evicted and re-occupying the streets. According to Setsabi (2006), this strategy often carries considerable risk that includes physical and psychological harm by authorities as well as the loss of wares and property. It is, nonetheless, a risk that the street vendors seem to weigh against the prospect of destitution, if they leave their current trading spaces. Again, street vendors, who are willing to risk re-occupying the streets, increase their mobility by picking a few items in their hands and selling to customers so that when the city guards appear, they can get away quickly, and if they are caught, not much is confiscated. The major disadvantage of this approach is that, all businesses grow on their volume of sales, but for the street trader, the larger the business, the greater its visibility and the greater the risk of eviction, thus keeping the business small helps secure its survival, but constrains its growth.

4.1 Influence of Traditional Leaders

The traditional system of government still exists alongside the modern one, and traditional rulers work with the KMA in a co-operative manner in
settling disputes, administering lands jointly with the government and promoting the culture of the people (Solomon-Ayeh, 2009). Before the adoption of the western ways of government and administration, the traditional rulers were the custodians of the local markets. Traders, therefore, owe more allegiance to the traditional rulers than to the KMA and have a more flexible and cordial relationship with the traditional rulers. This relationship could be harnessed and developed for traditional leaders to be involved in sustaining decongestion exercises. In the last decongestion exercise in Kumasi in 2007, the Metropolitan Chief Executive (MCE) sought the assistance of the traditional ruler of the Ashanti Kingdom. This approach gave more legitimacy to the exercise and made it successful for a while.

4.2 Notice for Eviction
Prior to decongestion exercises, a deadline is usually given by the KMA to the traders. In the focus group discussions with the street vendors’ associations, it came out that most of them considered the time given as too short. This normally ranges between two weeks and two months. The street vendors’ executives complained that the KMA should be more considerate and give them time to find appropriate places to relocate to. This is because space is highly differentiated in its trading potential, in that, moving vendors even by a few metres, can cause them to lose their competitive edge. It also accounts for the reason why most street vendors come back to the same location after they have been evicted from the site.

4.3 Lack of Logistics
According to the MCE, one reason why decongestion exercises cannot be sustained is the lack of logistics. The amount of money spent on security personnel and other members of the demolition team is high and so could not be maintained. Usually, there is the need to deploy personnel all over the metropolis to ensure that the street vendors are evicted and do not come back to the streets. In Kumasi, the personnel and other logistics, such as transportation, cannot be maintained, and so, as soon as the decongestion momentum go down, the vendors return to the streets.

5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations
Street traders are mainly in the active and youthful population group, and majority of them have either no schooling or only up to basic level education. This implies that jobs in the formal sector are out of reach for them, and they, invariably, find themselves jobs in the informal sector, such as street trading. Thus, it is necessary for governments to perceive and pursue informal sector jobs as opportunities rather than problems. Programmes should be formulated to provide these youth with employable skills.

There are no planned places for street traders and they are, therefore, located in spaces which are meant for other uses. This results in contestations and conflicts with urban authorities. The challenge for urban managers is how to accommodate competing demands on urban public space, in particular, the need to accommodate essential pedestrian and vehicular movements in areas that have become de facto places of work. The implication of this is that, unless there is a conscious effort to adequately allocate some urban public space to take care of street trading in a very decent manner, street vendors will continue to invade public spaces to the embarrassment of city authorities. This study suggests that trading location is very important to the vendors and their operations require such a location that must induce impulse buying and convenience to buyers. It is recommended that, street trading areas must be integrated in urban planning schemes to ensure that the activity is accommodated adequately in the urban spatial environment. Such an approach does not seek to perpetuate the activity, but rather attempts to limit its negative and undesirable effects on the urban environment. This has been the case in Latin America, Asia and Africa. Some of these countries are Singapore, Malaysia, Mexico, Kenya, Burkina Faso and South Africa, where an integrated approach to street trading is practised in some of their cities (Mittullah, 2004; Yankson, 2007; Solomon-Ayeh, 2009). In cities, such as Durban and Ouagadougou, conscious attempts have been made to integrate informal economic activities with other urban formal activities by planning for those engaged in it and providing structures that blend into the city development plan (Brown, 2006).

Certain issues can be deduced from the approach of the urban authorities in Kumasi towards street vendors. Executives of street traders’ associations
are not given the needed recognition by both urban authorities and street traders themselves. This implies that the street traders’ associations are not recognised, hence, they are not encouraged to strengthen their associations.

There is also hardly any dialogue between street traders and urban authorities. The absence of dialogue is an important issue and decisions are made by government for street vendors. It is expedient that city authorities involve the street vendors in dialogue to curtail the problems arising from their activities.

There is also the need to take into consideration ways of enhancing livelihood strategies already adopted by the urban poor. For street vendors, access to urban public space in the right location is critical to the viability of traders’ operations.

References


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