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Socioeconomic characteristic of street food vending enterprises in the Vhembe district, Limpopo province

Mahopo TC[21], Nesamvuni CN[12], Nesamvuni AE[2]*, Melanie de Bruyn[2], and Van Niekerk J[2]

[1]Department of Nutrition, University of Venda, Private Bag X5050, Thohoyandou, S. Africa, [2]Centre for Sustainable Agriculture, Rural Development & Extension, University of the Free state, P.O. Box 339, Bloemfontein 9300 South Africa

nesamvunie@gmail.com

Abstract. The street food business is a crucial indirect driver of the economies of developing countries. It ought not to be ignored as most unemployed people turn to it as their primary means of earning a living to improve their lives. We studied the socioeconomic characteristics of the street food enterprises in the Vhembe district, South Africa. A cross-sectional survey of 511 street vendors (18-75 years old) was conducted. The socioeconomic characteristics of vendors in three towns of the Vhembe district were quantified. Data collected included age, gender, educational level, economic profile, factors influencing entry, foods sold, regulatory issues, and input suppliers. The results highlight the dominance (63.1%) of single middle-aged women (35-44 years old) with high school education and few young adults' participation (4.1%) in the street food enterprise. About 14% of participants migrated from Zimbabwe to seek employment. Many of them (11.4%) reside in Musina. Lack of opportunities (65%) and financial freedom (90.8%) was the primary motivation for entry into the enterprise. Street food enterprises contributed about 82% of the average household income R6 042.66 made from the enterprise per month. About 50% of the street vendors are affiliated with a local organization. The most commonly cooked foods sold were pap (97.1%) served with chicken (88.8%) or beef (68.3%), with others serving with different vegetables (75.3%). The study recommends the prioritization of the establishment of local representative organizations in collaboration with the authorities to serve as gatekeepers for the sector, such as health checks, enforcing enterprise certification, promoting association for lobbying power and internally settling disputes.

Keywords. socio-economic, street food enterprises, street vendors, South Africa

1. Introduction

Street food vending is an essential component of socioeconomic activities in low-and middle-income countries(Abrahale *et al.*, 2019; Hill *et al.*, 2016; Lekhanya, 2016; Mramba *et al.*, 2016). Food and Agricultural Organisation (2020) defined street food as ready-to-eat food and beverages prepared and sold by street vendors, especially in the streets and other similar places. In Sub-Saharan Africa, women are more exposed to informal employment than Latin American countries and most of the other lower-middle-income countries (Edeme & Nkalu, 2018; Resnick et al., 2019; Sambo, 2021). According to Dodson *et al.* (2012), the low opportunities of occupation in the skilled economy and the discriminatory laws and regulations exclude women from male-dominated occupations. Skinner, Caroline and Haysom (2016) also highlighted women's marginalization and economic hardship, poverty, weak government support, and demand for low-cost products and services attributes to the continuous rise of the

[illegible] (Roever, 2016). Studies highlighted that, despite all challenges, women are key personnel in food production for households and food-insecure households (Mkhize *et al.*, 2013; Roever and Skinner, 2016; Skinner, 2016).

In South Africa, street food vending and its significance can be measured by the volume of trade involved, including providing ready-made meals (Hill *et al.*, 2016) and employment (Chauke et al., 2015; Karsavuran & Özdemir, 2017; Mathaulula et al., 2015, 2016) along the business chain. The Informal economy statistics indicate that the sector employs about 13% of the labour force (about 2.4 million people), contributing to the livelihoods of about 4.4 million unemployed people and some 14.9 million adults categorised as economically inactive (Makwara, 2019). The street food vendors are in areas such as taxi rank, schools and terminal where it is easily accessible for various urban dwellers and the rural poor than the supermarkets (Hill et al., 2019; Bamhu, 2019; Hill *et al.*, 2016; Hill, McHiza, *et al.*, 2019; Lekhanya, 2016; Mchiza *et al.*, 2014; Mramba *et al.*, 2016; Njaya, 2014; Roever and Skinner, 2016, 2016; Sambo, 2021). Street food has been recognized as critical as food that can be accessed for the nutritional needs of the poor (Martins, 2006; Mathaulula *et al.*, 2015; Matjomane, 2013; Petersen *et al.*, 2018; Statistics South Africa and StatsSA, 2020; Tamako and Thamaga-Chitja, 2017). Although street food enterprises operations are regarded as unregistered for tax, lack regulation and do not offer employees any social benefits (Resnick et al., 2019; Petersen, Charman, and Kroll 2018; Karsavuran and Özdemir 2017; Milena and Ayure 2020).

While the informal industry has challenges, street vendors are not deterred by the challenges but focus on securing income for their livelihood (Williams and Gurtoo, 2012). However, Imathiu (2017) suggested that the challenges faced by street food vendors need attention to ensure the full potential of street food enterprises. Studies (Garg and Phaahla, 2018, 2018; Panwar and Garg, 2015) have highlighted that lack of financial support, the location of the enterprise, poor interactions with authorities and entrepreneurs characteristics as the main contributing factors to the success of the street food enterprise. Entrepreneurs' characteristics such as personality, competence, attitude and risk-taking capabilities are linked to the success of the informal enterprise, including street food vending (Garg and Phaahla, 2018).

Hill et al. (2019) indicated that vendors acquire a practice license but are unaware of the procedures. In countries such as the Philippines (Perez and Khayat, 2020) and Cameroon (Cortese *et al.*, 2016), government authorities ensure that vendors work in a good environment and offer seminar training for licensing to the relevant authorities. However, it is not the case in South Africa amid the fast-growing street food sector (Garg and Phaahla, 2018; von Holy and Makhoane, 2006; Jain *et al.*, 2020; Mchiza *et al.*, 2014; Roever and Skinner, 2016; Skinner, 2019; Tawodzera, 2019). Given the importance of street food for a large proportion of the world population, research is needed to achieve a better understanding of street foods in different settings, especially food availability, consumption of food types and nutritional value (Abrahale et al., 2019; Birgen et al., 2020; Doibale et al., 2019). The value of micro-and informal entrepreneurs for their potential contribution to economic growth and their potential contribution to economic resilience and food security need to be considered (Knox *et al.*, 2019). Ali and Amir (2013) also indicated a need to include informal trading into the local legislative treatment and ensure policy alignment across private and government institutions.

This study attempts to compensate for the paucity of literature on the socioeconomic characteristics of street food enterprises. The study includes factors influencing entry to the establishment and the responsibilities and roles of the street vending organization in the Vhembe rural towns.

Technium Social Sciences Journal
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2. Methodology

2.1. *Study setting*

A cross-sectional survey was conducted from July to September 2019 in the rural towns of the Vhembe district, the northern-most district of Limpopo Province in South Africa. It covers an area of 21402 square kilometres of mostly rural land. About 32.65% of South Africans live in rural settlements (Statistics South Africa and StatsSA, 2020). The Vhembe district has an estimated population of 1.2 million. About 47.7% of the Vhembe district population resides in the Thulamela municipality, with women (55%) in most of the population compared to Musina and Makhado (Statistics South Africa and StatsSA, 2020). Due to unemployment and poverty, inhabitants of the district have ventured into informal trading, including the street food enterprise of major trading points within the local municipalities identified as Makhado, Thohoyandou and Musina, respectively. The informal sector in South Africa contributes 8% of the country's GDP and supports 27% of all working people (Greve, 2017).

2.2. *Sampling*

A convenience sample was taken, given that the study population was unknown (Veal, 2011). The municipalities had no records in place of street vendors. Five hundred and twenty-seven were approached across three towns. A total of 511 street vendors from Musina (168), Makhado (36), and Thohoyandou (307) towns participated in the study. Vendors were identified from taxi ranks, along the main roads, industrial areas, malls, schools, and lastly, between residences' streets, especially in the Musina town. Although Thohoyandou and Makhado are regarded as prominent, relatively developed and economically vibrant towns, Musina remains underdeveloped with a high incidence of shortage of employment and constant migration of some of its active labour force to the North Vhembe District serving at the border of Zimbabwe.

2.3. Data collection

The researchers surveyed street food enterprises, interviewing the business owner or the employee with complete information about the establishment. The business owner/employees were informed of the research objectives and interviews conducted to secure written consent. Information was obtained using a structured questionnaire of the socio-demographic characteristics, entrepreneurial motivation, enterprise characteristics, including the food sold, formality and regulations of the vendors.

Trained fieldworkers (nine) under the study leader's supervision conducted the interviews using a structured questionnaire. Structured questions allowed the researchers to inquire without unintended influence.

2.4. *Data analysis*

Two trained data capturers did data entry, and the primary investigator did quality checks Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 26) was used. To summarize the demographic, descriptive statistics were used.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. Socio-demographic characteristics

Table 1 summarises the socio-demographic characteristics, gender, age, marital status, country of origin and educational status of vendors in the three Vhembe district rural towns of study. Most participants were from Thohoyandou (60.1%), followed by Musina (32.9%) and Makhado (7.0%). A total of 511 street-food vendors were interviewed (July–October 2019),

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with more females (n= 461; 90.2%) than males (n= 50; 9.8%). The data highlight that more women participate in street vending than men in South Africa (Chauke et al., 2015; Hill et al., 2019; Roever, 2014; Roever & Skinner, 2016; Mathaulula *et al.*, 2015, 2016) and other low and middle-income countries such as Nigeria (Resnick et al. 2019) and Zimbabwe (Njaya, 2014), highlighting female-dominated informal traders.

About 43.6% of the street vendors were 35-44 years of age group. This highlights that the economically active age group participates in street food trading because of a lack of employment opportunities (Table 4). These findings are like those conducted nationally in South Africa (Roever, 2014; Roever & Skinner, 2016) and India (Doibale *et al.*, 2019), where street vendors are either active young adults or the working class due to poor employment opportunities (Imathiu, 2017). According to Tawodzera and Crush (2019) & Hill, McHiza, *et al.* (2019), the unstable economic environment forces individuals to enter street food businesses as a form of self-employment. Statistics South Africa and StatsSA (2020) reported youth unemployment (46.3%) (15-34 years) with unemployed in the first quarter of 2021 in South Africa (Statistics South Africa & StatsSA, 2021).

Thus, most of the vendors (63.6%) were below 45 years, the findings reported in the country (Hill, McHiza, *et al.*, 2019; Maele *et al.*, 2015; Tawodzera and Crush, 2019). This age group is expected to be amongst the formal employed; however, due to the rising unemployment and economic stagnation in Tawodzera (2019), more people are likely to participate actively in the street food sector, as observed in the current study. These findings support studies in other African countries (Dodson *et al.*, 2012; Feeley *et al.*, 2011; Njaya, 2014; Roever, 2014) that though street food vending is regarded as illegal has helped reduce unemployment and enhance live hood of most households especially when denied access to formal employment. Hence, the means to properly coordinate the street food sector is needed to create employment opportunities to reduce unemployment and account for the informal trading in small towns.

Table 1 further highlights that individuals who engage in street food enterprises were never married (43.6%), with the proportion of 28.0% married while 22.9% were cohabiting. Various studies highlighted the dominance of never-married vendors (Mathaulula et al., 2016) to augment their financial lack and support other family members for their survival observed in this study. In other African countries, individuals, either married or married, opt for street vending to support their families financially due to poor employment opportunities (Eliku 2016; Knox et al., 2019). Although the number of migrants (14.7%) in the current study was small compared to Tawodzera and Crush (2019) and Hill, McHiza *et al.* (2019) in Cape Town observed patterns of foreign vendors suggesting that foreign nationals travel to South Africa searching for better living due to their unstable economy and political issues (Eliku, 2016; Imathiu, 2017; Resnick et al. 2019). Thus, migrants do not follow the South African regulation to register their businesses, increasing the number of vendors operating without licenses. Therefore, operating illegally in the street corners in town is a concern to the local authorities to manage the street vending operation, as highlighted in Johannesburg (Arias, 2019).

Very few (3.7%) street vendors never went to school, with many food vendors who attained high school education (79.3%) and tertiary (5.9%), due to lack of job opportunities, individuals enter the market to be in the informal food sector. Contrary to the other findings in other countries (Nyoni and Bonga, 2019a, 2019b; Okojie and Isah, 2014)), the findings highlight more years of schooling of the participants, reflecting opportunities to the literate individuals in the formal sector.

It was also supported found (Table 2) informal trading has highlighted that being a street vendor is independent of education level (Chauke, 2015; Garg & Phaahla, 2018; Hill et

Technium Social Sciences Journal
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al., 2016, 2019; Legodi et al., 2016; Mchiza et al., 2014; Roever, 2014; Tawodzera, 2019; Mathaulula *et al.*, 2016; Nkosi, 2020). The move to informal trading was not only for the low education level, but individuals with more educational level also participate in the street food vending sectors to increase their sources of household income—however, individuals without any financial resources.

As reported in a comparative study in both developed and developing countries, Recchi (2020) highlighted that immigrants move from their countries to the neighbouring countries, searching for a better life, as such the unskilled carry activities such as street vending. Contrary to the current study's findings, the un/skilled were engaged in the informal food sector, becoming an essential income source even for a well-educated individual. It is no longer the case in South Africa as Chauke et al. (2015) highlighted that attaining moderate achievement in the street vendors could inspire new innovative ideas such as using technology. Although previous studies (Doibal*e et al.*, 2019; Njaya, 2014; Recchi, 2020b; Sambo, 2021) highlights that street food enterprise is still considered for those with limited formal education and skills because only those with fewer years of education engage in the informal business in their cities. The current study reports that most South African participants had some high school (48,6%), compared to 3,9% who were not schooled. Most other citizens who participated had some high school (61,3%), compared to 2,7% who were not schooled. Thus, street food vending is independent of the educational level. Individuals with low educational attainment could be given the training to provide remedial education appropriate to the sector strengthening to avoid any health hazard caused by selling food in the street.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics, number (N) and associated percentages of street food vendors in the Vhembe district

Vhembe districts	Musina		Thohoyandou		Makhado		Total	
Gender	N (168)	Percentage (32.9)	N (307)	Percentage (60.1)	N (36)	Percentage (7.0)	N 511)	Percentage (100)
Male	9	1.8	40	7.8	1	0.2	50	9.8
Female	159	31.1	267	52.3	35	6.8	461	90.2
Age (Years)								
18-24	10	2	10	2	1	0.2	21	4.1%
25-34	33	6.5	46	9.0	2	0.4	81	15.9%
35-44	75	14.7	125	24.5	23	4.5	223	43.6%
45-54	33	6.5	90	17.6	9	1.8	132	25.8%
55-64	11	2.2	35	6.8	1	0.2	47	9.2%
65-74	3	0.6	1	0.2	0	0.0	4	0.8%
75 and more	3	0.6	0	0	0	0.0	3	0.6%
Marital status								
Never married	83	16.2	135	26.4	5	1.0	223	43.6
Married	50	9.8	84	16.4	9	1.8	143	28.0
Co-habiting	29	5.7	68	13.3	20	3.9	117	22.9
Single	1	0.2	10	2.0	0	0.0	11	2.2
Widowed	5	2	10	2.0	2	0.4	17	3.3
Citizenship								

Technium Social Sciences Journal
Vol. 29, 419-437, March, 2022
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South Africa	110	21.5	304	59.5	22	4.3	436	85.3
Zimbabwe	58	11.4	3	0.6	14	2.7	75	14.7
Educational status								
No Schooling	10	2.0	8	1.6	1	0.2	19	3.7
Primary	26	5.1	136	27.0	1	0.2	30	5.9
Some high school	101	19.8	138	27.0	19	3.7	258	50.8
Matric	29	5.7	104	20.4	14	2.7	147	28.8
Diploma	2	0.4	23	4.5	1	0.2	26	5.1
Degree	0	0	4	0.8	0	0	4	0.8

3.2. Distribution of educational level by country of origin

Table 2 reports the distribution of educational level by country of origin. South African participants had some high school (48,6%), compared to 3,9% who were not schooled. Migrants in the current study also from Zimbabwe had some high school (61,3%), compared to 2,7% who have not schooled observations made by Njaya (2014) and Nyoni and Bonga (2019) amongst the vendors in Zimbabwe, highlighting that about 66% of the vendors are without formal (66) education and women-dominated.

Table 2. Frequency distribution and associated percentages of educational level by country of origin

Country of origin		Frequency	Per cent
South African	Primary Education	52	11.9
	Some high school	212	48.6
	Matric	126	28.9
	Diploma	25	5.7
	Degree	4	0.9
	No schooling	17	3.9
	Total	436	100.0
Other (Zimbabwe)	Primary Education	5	6.7
	Some high school	46	61.3
	Matric	21	28.0
	Diploma	1	1.3
	No schooling	2	2.7
	Total	75	100.0

3.3. The economic status of the street food vendors

Figure 1 and Table 3 summarises the economic profile of the street food vendor's households. The mean household income per month was R7 406.63 ± R6991.51, with a minimum of R1000 and a maximum of R80 000 (USD 511.49 ± 482.79). The mean household income made from the enterprise per month was R6 042.66 ± R10 375.41 with a minimum of R200 and a maximum of R200 000. Tawodzera (2019) also indicated that half of the household income of the vendors

Technium Social Sciences Journal
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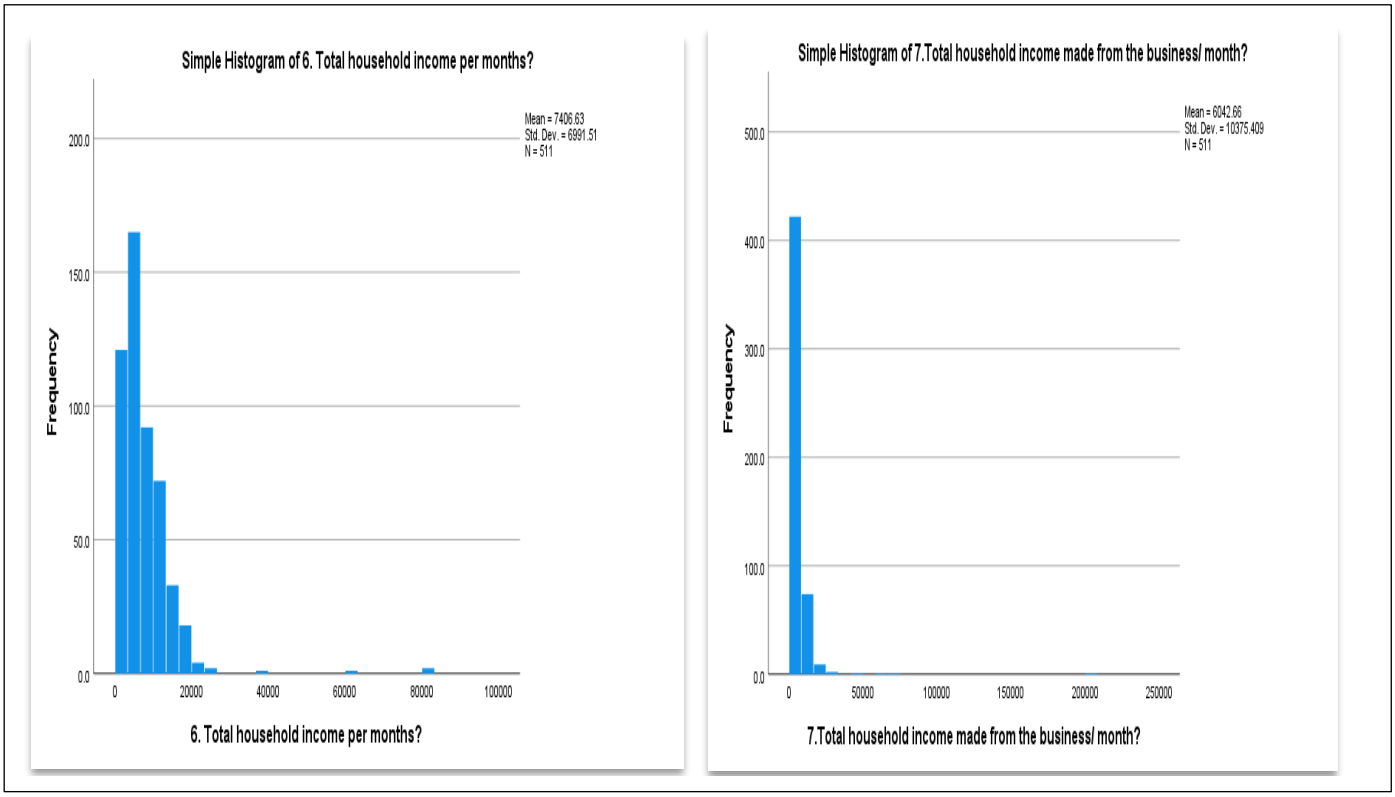
is derived from the enterprise profit, highlighting the vital contribution made by the street food enterprises in the livelihood of the households involved.
Similar to the current study's findings, Perez & Khayat resonates that street food enterprise contributes to half (31.6%) of the family monthly income to those involved in the business



without extra income or social relief. Wills (2009) also indicated that the informal trading contribution to total incomes is 11.1% of the informal sector's estimated contribution.

Figure 1: The economic profile of the street food vendor's households.

On average, there were two female dependents compared to one for males reported in the current study (Table 3). The role of street food vending has been shown in several studies, including Tawodzera (2019), where 4.9% of dependence (4.9%) on business profit was observed. It was revealed that street food vending is used to augment incomes earned to contribute to the monthly income of most vendors' households. Besides the enterprise, more than 50% of the street vendors depended mainly on social grants (51.3%%), and very few (22.7%) reported spouses (Table 3), indicating that income is an essential motivation (Table 4) for the establishment and endeavour the hardships of the enterprise.

Table 3. Frequency of dependents, sources of income and associated percentages

Variable	Statistic	Measure
Dependent on business	**Mean**	**Standard Deviation**
Male	1.96	1.09
Female	2.33	1.27

Technium Social Sciences Journal
Vol. 29, 419-437, March, 2022
ISSN: 2668-7798
www.techniumscience.com

Sources of income	N	%
Social grants		
Yes	262	51.3
No	249	48.7
Spouse		
Yes	116	22.7
No	395	77.7
Other businesses		
Yes	24	4.7
No	487	95.3
Other (Not specified)		
Yes	27	5.3
No	484	94.7

3.4. Uses of money made from the business.

The perceived role of street food vending in the area is reported in Table 4. The results highlight that providing for the family (92.6%), meeting the daily basic needs of families (food, school fees, clothes, shelter), buying business inputs paying for merry go round-Stockvel (19.4%), and savings are the most roles acknowledged by the street food vendors in the Vhembe District. Our findings agree with several studies conducted in other developing countries concluding that street food vending allows most of the marginalised people from urban and rural areas to support their families and improve their social and economic situation (Arias, 2019; Balasha Arsene *et al.*, 2020; Karondo and Tumaini, 2021). de Groot *et al.* (2017) also indicated that street food vendors' income contributes to food, shelter, and children's education and plays a key role as food-energy support instruments (Knox *et al.*, 2019) landscapes like the current study findings. However, street food vending is criticised for its illegality and no clear regulations governing the street business (Roever and Skinner, 2016).

Table 4. Frequency of praticipants and associated percentages (%) on the uses of money made from the Business (N = 511)

Variable	Frequency	Participants (%)
Support my family	473	92.6
Food	179	35.0
School fees/ uniform	98	19.2
Clothes	22	4.3
Build a house/ shelter	16	3.1
Business inputs	120	23.5
Stokvel	99	19.4
Savings	67	13.1
Electricity	55	10.8
Transport	46	9.0
Pay labour	13	2.5

Technium Social Sciences Journal
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www.techniumscience.com

3.5. Motivations into an entry to the establishment of the enterprise

The motivations to entry to establish the street food enterprises in the Vhembe district are outlined in Table 5. The current study reports the lack of income (90.8%) as the primary motivation for establishing the street food enterprise. In addition, lack of income was mainly due to unemployment/ lack of jobs (60.5%) and poverty (20.7%) in the Vhembe District. As highlighted by Tawodzera and Crush (2019), the current study also indicates that entry into the enterprise is based on survival and opportunism and the inability to fulfil the formal sector's requirement (Doibale *et al.*, 2019). At the same time, the Government of the Republic of South Africa (2015) highlights that the dominance of women in the street food sectors is due to the low opportunities of occupation in the skilled economy and the discriminatory laws and regulations, exclusion from male-dominated occupations (Dodson *et al.*, 2012).

In 2020 only, about 20% of the 40% of active unemployment in South Africa increased intensively, leaving people with no other income sources but relying on the government for social relief (Statistics South Africa and StatsSA, 2020; WIEGO, 2020). Roever & Skinner (2016) highlighted that street food vending reduces poverty by generating income for households, and less capital is required for their establishment.

Although street vending is still encountering challenges such as poor governmental support, research (Kinlocke & Thomas-Hope, 2019) suggests that street food vending requires ways to support the retailers' resilience to provide greater access to financial support through the opportunities for obtaining start-up capital. About 7.6% of the vendors indicated that entry to the enterprise was because of passion for business and cooking.

Table 5. Frequency and associated percentages on the motivations to establish the street food enterprise (N=511)

Motivation	Frequency	(%)
Lack of income	464	90.8
Unemployment/ lack of jobs	309	60.5
Poverty	106	20.7
Passion for business/ cooking	39	7.6
Keep busy	5	1.0
Inheritance	2	0.4
Getting out of crime	1	0.2
Self-empowerment	1	0.2

3.6. Roles and responsibilities of the organisations

As reported in Table 6, vendors report three prominent associations known by the vendors. The current study highlighted that at least 10.5% of the participants were part of a local or national association. Most participants whose business was represented by an association were represented by the Vendor Association (34%), followed by the Beitbridge taxi rank association (23%). Although 11.3%% of the vendors had affiliated with an organisation, they could not tell the association's name. Roever & Skinner (2016) and Tavonga (2014) highlighted the importance of vendors to be part of street vendors local organisations to help overcome any possible challenges in the informal enterprise. The current study highlighted that at least a few were part of a local business association.

In Ghana, Roever (2014) highlighted that it is crucial for street vendors to have a sense of belonging to host meetings of local associations regarding vendors' training needs and

Technium Social Sciences Journal
Vol. 29, 419-437, March, 2022
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www.techniumscience.com

requirements. One of the Women's roles in Informal Employment (WIEGO) is to assist the informal trading in training, formalizing the sector and policies (WIEGO, 2014). However, in the Vhembe District, there is no formal institution like WIEGO to assist the informal street food vendor's competitiveness.

Moreover, WIEGO (2020) indicated that vendors should form their organisations in their locality because the availability of the membership-based organisation help vendors to navigate their relationship with authorities, build commonality and solve problems amongst each vendor. The role played by most associations were problem-solving (35.2%) and helping in coordinating (24.1%) street vending activities. Street vendors also reported that the associations assist in the provision of advice (14.8%) and maintaining the environmental hygiene (14.8%) of the area to avoid outbreaks (Table 5). Amongst vendors, this calls for better coordination to constitute themselves into well-organized associations to develop a code of practice for their businesses or constitute a forum for interaction with the authorities. All vendors were to abide by regulations within their local affiliates to ensure the cleanliness of the environment to avoid any health problems from foods cooked from the street. Njaya (2014) reported that local authorities do not recognise vendors because of their unorganized structures. Mathaulula *et al.* (2016) and Garg and Phaahla (2018) also highlighted the lack of coordination amongst authorities' vendors as observed in the current study. Well-structured guidelines and regulations specifically for this vendor's sector are needed. This will help street vendors operate and build relationships with relevant stakeholders for better service, such as local municipalities (Arias, 2019).

The ill-treatment of vendors was common in other parts of the country (Arias, 2019; Mkhize *et al.*, 2013; Roever, 2014) and other developing countries by Roever and Skinner (2016) and Resnick *et al.* (2019), where police confiscate street vendor goods and equipment if found without license or permission to sell on the street. However, it was not the case in the current study because vendors continued to work without certification like the Zimbabweans without police abuse. The study observed the weakness of the interaction within the organizations and vendors.

Table 6. Frequency and associated percentages on the role and responsibilities of the organisation affiliated

Organisations and Their roles	Frequency	Per cent (%)
Organisational representation	**511**	**100**
Yes	53	10.5
No	451	89.5
Names of organisations	**53**	**(100)**
Not specified Organisations	7	13.0
Vendor association	18	34.0
Beitbridge taxi rank	12	23.0
Musina street vendors	3	5.7
Do not know	6	11.3
Other	7	13.0
Roles of the business associations	**54**	**100**
Provide advice	8	14.8
Problem-solving	19	35.2
Build a restaurant	1	1.8

Technium Social Sciences Journal
Vol. 29, 419-437, March, 2022
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Co-ordination of vendors	13	24.1
Hygiene	8	14.8
Provide title deeds	4	7.4
Water and electricity	1	1.8

3.7. Formality and regulation of street food vending

It was observed that 39.7% of vendors surveyed had their business unregistered (Table 7) and 56.5% had permit, lease (2.2%) and concession (1.6%). The lack of government control that put the quality of food produced in the street because of the unregistered business that lack recognition has been shown in various towns in South Africa (Roever, 2014; Roever and Skinner, 2016) and other countries s(Nyoni and Bonga, 2019a; Okojie and Isah, 2014). Furthermore, Skinner (2005) indicated that the Health Act 61 of 2003 requires that the Health Department of a city issues a certificate of acceptability to a person trading foodstuff. However, informal traders have considered this process complex and costly (Nkrumah-Abebrese and Schachtebeck, 2017; Hills et al., 2019). This observation resonates well with the current study that only 47.6% of the vendors could secure the certificate of acceptability from the Department of Health per Health Act 61 of 2003.

According to Nkosi (2020), the local government's lack of resources has been a problem that influences poor interaction with street food vending enterprises. Hence, vendors operate freely without any fear of authorities confiscating the resources. Furthermore, in Thohoyandou, Selepe (2017) noted that vendors find it challenging to obtain the necessary documentation to operate their businesses, indicating a lack of rigour and enforcement of regulations from their local authorities. Most local government decisions regarding development in the local authorities in South Africa are not shared with the relevant groups (Garg and Phaahla, 2018; Mathaulula *et al.*, 2016), such as the vendors. Similar findings were also reported in Nigeria (Resnick *et al.*, 2019) and other countries (Roever, 2014; Roever and Skinner, 2016) vendors where minimal or no interactions with the authorities was highlighting officials claimed to ensure compliance of the vendors while no effort is put in place to support the vendors. Moreover, street vendors also reported being in the sector but were unaware (39%), an observation made by van Nieuwenhuyzen *et al.* (2011).

Peterson et al. (2018) highlighted that enterprises' daily challenges, such as the illegal nature of the operation and the power imbalance faced by their formal sector suppliers, make it difficult for any intervention by stakeholders. Resnick et al. (2019) reported that while street vendors find it difficult to obtain documents to operate legally, most vendors in the study could operate for 4-6 years without governmental support and interactions using permits and leases. In addition, Nkosi (2020) indicated infrequent to find authorities conducting monitoring amongst the vendors in South Africa. This requires an investment in a mechanism of outreach and engagement by several stakeholders to better the street food vending operation (Resnick et al., 2019).

Table 7. Frequency and associated percetanges on the formality and regulation of street food vending

Variables	**Number**	**Percentages**
Have permits/concessions or lease to sell	**511**	**100**
Permits	289	56.5
Concessions	8	1.6

Technium Social Sciences Journal
Vol. 29, 419-437, March, 2022
ISSN: 2668-7798
www.techniumscience.com

Lease	11	2.2
None	115	22.5
No response	88	17.2
Certification to sell street food by DOH	**494**	**100**
Yes	235	47.6
No	259	52.4
Year of Certification by DOH	**235**	**100**
Less than a year	3	1.3
A year	21	8.9
2-3 years	46	19.6
4-6 years	50	21.3
7-9 years	11	4.7
10-15 years	36	15.3
More than 15 years	23	9.8
Not specified	45	19.1
% Reason for No certificate	**259**	**100**
Lack of information	101	39
No organization	2	0.8
Did not register	10	3.9
Insufficient funds	6	2.3
No time to register	2	0.8
Pay rent	4	1.5
Sell at school	2	0.8
Sell at home	5	1.9
I am a foreigner	1	0.4
No reason	4	1.5

3.8. Foods cooked and sold by the street vendors in the Vhembe district.

Table 8 present the number and main food items categories sold in the Vhembe District. Food sold by the vendors in the Vhembe district includes home-cooked foods such as meat (98.8%), starch-maize meal porridge (97.5%), vegetables (75.3%), gravy (34.8%) and chakalaka (8.2%). The food items sold are mostly grouped into a few categories (pap, meat gravy, vegetable or chakalaka). Foods sold in the current study are no different from other developing countries nutritionally (Alimi, 2016; Okojie and Isah, 2014). While the current study focused on cooked food, ImathIu, (2017) highlighted that food sold in Burkina Faso consists of foods such as cereals (48.5%) and meat (33.9%) less than in the current study. Differences could include the diversity of foods sold depending on the location, and most of the foods are based on the combination of starch staples. In South Africa, Steyn et al. (2016) reported that cereal and meat sold in the street contribute 13-50% of the daily energy intake in adults and contribute around half of the daily protein intake.

The increasing consumption of ready-to-eat foods is attributed to their significant role in food security and nutrition for millions of practitioners along the food chain (Imathiu, 2017; Steyn *et al.*, 2011). Like the findings by Petersen et al. (2018), street foods sold in South African towns are cheap and play a vital role in meeting daily food demands for township residents. While other studies on foods sold in the street, especially Durban (Mkhize et al., 2013), Johannesburg (Martins, 2006) and Cape Town (Hill, Mchiza, *et al.*, 2019; Mchiza *et al.*, 2014), found that food sold in these cities are high in calories value, and their content is unfavourable

Technium Social Sciences Journal
Vol. 29, 419-437, March, 2022
ISSN: 2668-7798
www.techniumscience.com

and has low benefits of general health. Sambo (2021) attests that customers find street food less inconvenient to access. The working class in town does not find time to prepare meals to take to work, and street vending in their vicinities such as public transport spaces is convenient (Hill, Mchiza, *et al.*, 2019; Mkhize *et al.*, 2013).

Table 8 also highlights that the main protein-rich foods sold in the study were chicken (88.8%) and beef (68.3%), most commonly served with pap (97.1%) as the main starchy staple. Although vendors did not sell much fish in this study because of the challenges, as also observed in Hill et al. (2019), indicating commonly sold food types were chicken or beef (38.5%), rice with beef or chicken (28.1%). While rice (1,4%), pork (2.2%) and fish (1.4%) were not typical, vendors do not have refrigerators to store fresh fish and pork to keep them safe from spoilage (Tawodzera, 2019; Perterson et al., 2018; Hill et al., 2019) as reported in the current study.

The street food offer varies across countries and cultures, with different ingredients and preparation and cooking methods, thus differing in nutritional value (Abrahale *et al.*, 2019; Hill, Mchiza, *et al.*, 2019; Hill, McHiza, *et al.*, 2019). In the current study, the vendors sold plates as a meal with a combination of foods served as pap/rice with meat, gravy/chakalaka sometimes with leafy green vegetables (60.1%) or with few selling beans in the Musina town (1.8%) together with gravy sauce (34.8%) or chakalaka (8.21%). Gravy sauce is a simple sauce made to serve as a topping for pap/rice made of onion and tomatoes as the main ingredients. At the same time, chakalaka sauce is a spicy dish of onions, tomatoes, and beans. Chakalaka has been the main side sauce for generations of black South Africans and is the most used condiment at South African braais or barbecues.

Table 8. Frequency and associated percentages of participants on the list of cooked items sold by the street food vendors in the Vhembe district (N=511)

Foods cooked/sold	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Std.deviation
Meat				
Beef/ ox	349	68.3		
Wors	28	5.5		
Pork	11	2.2		
Offal (Magulu)	73	14.3		
Poultry				
Chicken	454	88.8		
Fish	7	1,4		
Starch	**498**	**97,5**		
Pap	496	97,1		
Rice	7	1,4		
Vegetables	**385**	**75.3**		
Beans	9	1.8		
Green leafy vegetables	307	60.1		
Carrots	1	0.2		
Gravy	178	34.8		
Chakalaka	42	8.2		
Plate pricing				
Beef (Full plate)	346	68.0	44.22	7.70
Beef (Half plate)	264	52.0	32.44	5.45
Chicken (Full plate)	422	83.0	43.03	16.88
Chicken (Half plate)	317	62.0	30.91	8.71

Technium Social Sciences Journal
Vol. 29, 419-437, March, 2022
ISSN: 2668-7798
www.techniumscience.com

3.9. *Street food vendors and their inputs suppliers*

Vendors' inputs were sourced mainly from supermarkets, grocery stores, butchery, local farmers, and the informal street market (Table 9). The top four suppliers included commercial stores, Spar (62%), Boxer (41.1%), Shoprite (30.1%) and unspecified local supermarkets (30.1%). Butcheries used by the vendors for their meat purchase were OBC (34.6%), CY Frozen (22.3%) and lastly Roots (15.1%). Vendors did not have access to a wholesaler due to the location and hence, dependence on the supermarket. Similar observations were made by Hill, Mchiza, *et al.* (2019) that supermarkets primarily used and could reduce the profit from vendors than bulk purchases from the wholesalers.

Table 9. Frequency and associated percentages of participants on the inputs supplier used by the street food vendors in the rural towns (N=511)

Places	Classification	Frequency	%
Spar	Supermarket and grocery store	322	63.0
Boxer		210	41.1
Supermarkets (Unspecified)		201	39.3
Shoprite		154	30.1
Limpopo		7	1.4
U-Save		7	1.4
Fruit & Veg		6	1.2
Minaz		5	1.0
OBC	Butchery	177	35.0
CY frozen food		114	22.3
Roots		77	15.1
Newco		6	1.2
Makhoma		14	2.7
Butcher		11	2.2
Meat & Chicken		9	1.8
Farmer	Local famers	68	13.3
Market		59	11.5
Street Vendors/ Bakkie	Local street vendors market	36	7.0

In the Vhembe district, street vendors had more access to butchery wholesalers selling meat (beef, chicken, pork) and meat products (chicken feet) in bulk to save money. Nkrumah-Abebrese and Schachtebeck (2017) also highlighted that informal traders are not used, and vendors rely only on formal business purchase inputs. Vendors use other producers such as local farmers (13%) and informal local markets (11.5%), including the bakkie sellers (7%), as reliance on the supermarkets and butchery. The wholesalers were not used because street vendors in the current study are primarily from rural villages and have no access to bulk purchases to maximize profit.

Technium Social Sciences Journal
Vol. 29, 419-437, March, 2022
ISSN: 2668-7798
www.techniumscience.com

4. Conclusions

The paper used an original survey of vendors to understand their characteristics. The purpose was to characterise the street food enterprises in the Vhembe rural town on a large scale. The current study confirms that street food vending contributes more to total employment among single women. Although available studies showed that street vending was of the poor uneducated, the study has revealed a completely different picture. The study highlights that never-married women participate in informal street vending Vhembe district, especially in Thohoyandou town. The study revealed that street food vending contributes significantly to household income (82%). Unavailabilities of opportunities in the formal sector and lack of income were reasons for the vendors to establish the street food enterprise to augment their financial lack and support family members for their survival. Street food enterprise is not only for the low educated individual but also for individuals with more years also engage in informal trading.

The study also highlights that foreign nationals migrate to South Africa to seek better living from their home countries, despite all people having legal documentation following the South African regulation to register their businesses. Authorities should implement guidelines and regulations for all people anticipating to engage in street food vending. The establishment of local representative zations should prioritize the vendors in collaboration with the authorities to serve as gatekeepers for the sector, such as health checks, enforcing enterprise certification, promoting association for lobbying power, and internally and internally settling disputes.

The vendors' food was home-cooked meat, starch-maize meal porridge, vegetables, gravy, and chakalaka. Although the current study could not determine nutritional intake, a study on the nutritional contribution of street food is recommended to understand the nutrient quality of foods sold in the Vhembe district. Vendors' inputs were sourced mainly from four chain stores (supermarkets), grocery stores, butchery, local farmers, and the informal street market. Vendors should be aware of the benefits of bulk buying inputs from nearby wholesalers to make more profit. Although, accessibility to the wholesalers will be a challenge because of the locality of the street food enterprise in disadvantaged towns. Other suppliers used by the vendors included local farmers, the informal local market and bakkie sellers available in the vicinity to maximize profit. To advance vendors' position, we need to strengthen their capacities and skills through training, credit, information, and infrastructure to enhance their competitiveness and productivity. There is a need for further research to describe the nature of street vending. The local government should provide greater access to financial support through the opportunities for obtaining start-up capital.

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