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RESEARCH ARTICLE

URBAN SQUANDERING: THE CASE OF THE INHABITANTS OF PO (BURKINA FASO)

***Rawelguy Ulysse Emmanuel OUEDRAOGO**

Assistant Professor, Department of Geography, Ouagadougou, (Burkina-Faso)

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***Corresponding Author:**

**Rawelguy Ulysse Emmanuel
OUEDRAOGO**

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ABSTRACT

The issues of economic integration and poverty are at the heart of concerns in the cities of Burkina Faso in particular and those of sub-Saharan Africa in general. For example, in 2019, the ILO unemployment rate in the cities of Burkina Faso was 10% compared to 7.1% nationally (1). Urban centers that were once an "El Dorado" for people looking for work have become places of growing poverty and misery. It is in this context that the informal sector has grown and constitutes a godsend for young people, educated or not. The objective of this article is to analyze the contribution of the informal sector to the socio-economic integration of the population in Po. The methodology adopted is based on documentary research, field observation, data collection through surveys and interviews with 245 people. The data collected was processed and analyzed. The results of these analyses showed that three categories of actors contribute to the distribution of products in Po. In addition, 100% of the respondents stated that the sale of various products is their main means of survival. The income obtained from the sale of products is used by 82% for current household expenses, 15% for projects and 3% for social events. In sum, the informal sector in Po has contributed to the creation of employment and the improvement of the socio-economic conditions of the population.

INTRODUCTION

In a context of continuous urbanization and demographic growth in the world, the problems of employment and socio-professional integration of young people are acute. These concerns arise successively from the economic situation of the periods of 2019-2020 with the COVID (2), of 2008 and finally of 1980 (3). To these we can add the effects of the implementation of the structural adjustment program (1990) in African countries. These different crises will impact the treasuries of African countries in particular. The demographic boom in Africa gives the continent the status of "continent of young population and continent of challenges". The fundamental challenge for the administrative authorities remains that of employment. It is for this reason that forecasts in the social, technological and infrastructural fields put the number of new jobs to be created by 2030 on the African continent at 122 million (4). Long derided and wrongly judged by Northern economists, the informal sector or popular sector could be a legitimate response to poverty and lack of employment in the South and particularly in Africa. In addition, it is a survival reflex for young people because of the diversity of production and services it offers (5). From a spatial point of view, the urban space of the continent remains the most dynamic and attractive. It receives many young people who leave poorly equipped rural areas where unemployment and/or poverty predominate and who are looking for better living conditions (6). The massive and constant influx of these young people influences the relationship with space as the city becomes the destination for

permanent residence, temporary settlement or short-term transit (7), (8). In 2022, the urban population of Sub-Saharan Africa represents 41.25%, with a growth rate of 4.5% per year. This strong growth has contributed to the socio-economic transformation of the sub-regional space (9), (10). However, in these urban centers, employment prospects are dwindling for millions of young people despite strategies and programs aimed at improving the lives of all urban residents. Therefore, faced with the situation of urban poverty or unemployment that tends to worsen, many graduates or without a professional qualification launch themselves into the field of the informal sector in the hope of promoting their business or even self-inserting in the active life (11), (12). This sector of activity contributed between 20 and 65% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of sub-Saharan African countries in 2017 (IMF, 2017) and participates in the distribution of products in the cities. It then constitutes a flourishing market, as it is estimated that two out of three city dwellers live off the streets in African cities (13). The informal activity is practiced along sidewalks and roadways, in places of leisure and rest, or in various forms of odd jobs (14). The present research is carried out in the border city of Po and is situated in several contexts:

- First, the various African countries have opted for decentralization as a way of governance and administration since the beginning of the 1990s (15), (16) Thus, the authorities of the various administrative districts, including Po, are responsible for providing the population with social

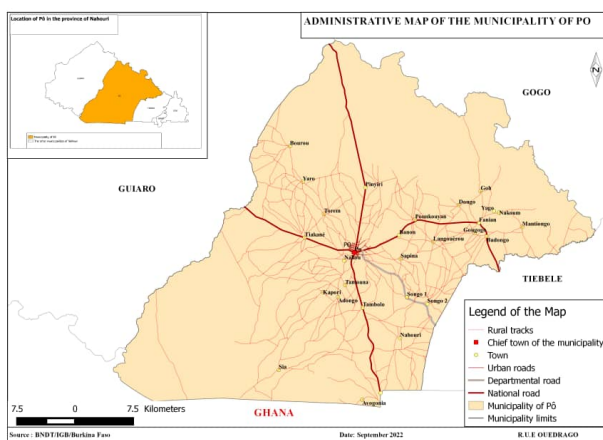
infrastructures likely to improve their living conditions and economic infrastructures to increase local production. They also have the responsibility to contribute to the urban centers as a socio-spatial system planned for the needs of an urban community. However, they face several obstacles in mobilizing financial resources for self-reliance.

- Second, the 2014 African Union Commission (AUC) Ouagadougou + 10 Declaration on Employment, Poverty Eradication and Inclusive Development in Africa called on African states to adopt strategies to reduce poverty. In Burkina Faso, for example, there was the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) in 2000, the Strategy for Accelerated Growth and Sustainable Development (SCADD) in 2010 and the National Economic and Social Development Plan (PNDES) in 2016. Despite the existence and testing of these plans and strategies, the living conditions of the population in urban centers are not brilliant.
- Third, Pô is classified as a small town in the urban framework of Burkina Faso. It therefore maintains relations with the surrounding environment and suffers the effects of economic and social crises (17). Thus, the city suffered the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic through the implementation of actions to stop the spread of the disease. In the application of barrier measures, there was the closure of markets, drinking establishments and borders. This has led to a slowdown in economic activities and has had a serious impact on economic life in the city of Po.

Thus, this research on the activities of the informal sector analyzes the problem of product distribution in a border town of Po. It is not only economic in scope, but also social in that it analyzes the contribution of the informal sector to the socio-economic integration of the urban population.

METHODOLOGY

Location of the study site: The urban commune (city) of Pô, a border town, is located in the southern part of Burkina Faso. Covering an area of 1,642 km², it is bordered to the north by the Kaboré Tambi National Park, to the east by the communes of Tiébélé and Gombougou, to the west by the commune of Guiaro, and to the south by the Republic of Ghana (Map 1). It is located between 11° and 11°30' north latitude and between 1°30' and 0°40' west longitude. It is distant respectively from Ouagadougou (political capital of the country) by 145km; from Manga (capital of the administrative region of Centre-Sud) by 90km and from Ghana by 19km.



Map 1.

In the 2019 General Census of Population and Housing (GCPH), the town of Pô had a population of 2,080 inhabitants grouped into 25 villages and 8 sectors. In terms of access roads, the commune has two paved roads: the Rn 5 (Ouagadougou-Ghana axis) and a section of the Rn 25 (Pô-Tiébélé).

In addition to these roads, the commune benefited from the 2018 national holiday festivities by asphaltting some streets in the center of the commune. This has contributed to the creation of several places of trade, drinking establishments that are concentrated along these roads. Apart from these roads, the city of Po has departmental roads, which are permanently practicable and rural tracks, most of which are practicable only in the dry season. The economy of the commune is essentially based on agriculture, trade and administration. Extensive agriculture is due to the good rainfall (on average 1000mm/year) and the diversity of crop production in relation to the variable potential of the soil. It remains the main production activity. The commercial sector is essentially dominated by street vendors and food sellers. The commercial functions of Po give it the status of a city of reception or transit for migrants. Four main ethnolinguistic groups, namely Kassena (52% of the population), Mossi (20.75%), Bissa (2.50%) and Peulh (1.75%) are found in the city. The structure by sex shows a slight predominance of the female population. As for the age structure, it shows a preponderance of young people.

Methodological approach: The methodological approach adopted is based on documentary research and field survey. The documentary research consisted of collecting data on secondary cities, cross-border cities and the sale of products outside of markets in African cities. Several works were then consulted in libraries and on the Internet.

The field survey, conducted from June 2021 to June 2022, involved all eight sectors of the city of Po, and required tools such as a questionnaire, an interview guide and a camera. It was carried out in two complementary phases: field observation and the collection of information from the actors concerned by this research. With the help of an interview guide, the collection of field data first mobilized information on the contribution of the informal sector and the typology of informal activities from representatives of administrative and communal structures. These data were then supplemented by a questionnaire survey of informal sector actors. The absence of a reliable database on informal activities in the urban commune made it impossible to determine a representative sample of the target population to be surveyed. Thus, based on information obtained from communal authorities, three categories of actors were identified: (i) street vendors, (ii) stall vendors, and (iii) fixed vendors (with a regular place of business). For each category of actor, a questionnaire was administered and collected information on the practice of the activity and its contribution to the improvement of their living conditions. The reasoned choice method was finally retained and the size of the target population (245 people) is as follows (Table n°1).

Table 1. Distribution of respondents

Sectors	Fixed vendors	Itinerant vendors	Stallholders	Customers	Authorities
1	10	10	5	5	05
2	10	10	5	5	
3	10	10	5	5	
4	10	10	5	5	
5	10	10	5	5	
6	10	10	5	5	
7	10	10	5	5	
8	10	10	5	5	
Total	80	80	40	40	05

Sphinx V5 and Excel 2016 software were used for the statistical processing of the collected data. The treatment was materialized by the realization of the graphic illustrations (diagrams and curves). For the cartographic realizations we used the software Arcgis 10.5. The data obtained from the field allows us to identify the actors who drive the informal sector, to determine the impacts of this activity on the socio-economic development of the city of Po human environment.

RESULTS

Overall, the typology of respondents distinguishes 77% men and 23% women, for all the neighborhoods covered by the fieldwork.

The majority of respondents were aged 20-30. The vast majority of respondents (97%) were Burkinabè. As for the level of education, 48.2% had primary education and 30.3% had secondary education. As for the place of origin, 53% came from the commune of Pô, 34.7% from the surrounding communes and 12.3% from Ouagadougou or other countries bordering Burkina Faso (Ghana, Benin, Togo and Ivory Coast).

The street, an alternative for survival: Informal trade in the city of Po brings together a diversity of actors whose complementary roles enable city dwellers to have access to different types of products. Overall, three categories of actors can be distinguished: itinerant vendors, stall vendors and those with a fixed site.

Informal trade actors in Po: In urban centers where individualism and the accumulation of wealth predominate, the respondents (100% of those surveyed) affirm that this activity is their main means of remuneration and survival.

Itinerant vendors: From our fieldwork, it appears that street vendors fall into two categories: those who sell on their own account and those who work with a "boss" who may be a relative or a third party trader. They approach and propose to the customers, without complex, different products: fruits, telephone units, clothing articles, food products, cigarettes, etc. This activity was once considered to be a man's job because of the daily walking involved, but it is still practiced by girls (35% of this sample). Overall, it is noted that among street vendors, mopeds are not widely used for transporting products (15%). On the other hand, vendors using bicycles (37%) and those walking (48%) are the actors who animate the market. As an illustration, photo 1 shows an avocado vendor. She met in sector 1 of the city and offers her products to customers in the drinking establishments along the Rn n°5 or in the transport company stations.



Source: (19)

Plate 1. An avocado seller in sector 1 of Po

She obtains the merchandise from a wholesale trader in the Pô market, which is poorly equipped. The sale of a product can bring her a profit ranging from 100 to 500 CFA francs. The products sold vary according to the time of year. She says that she does not sell a fixed product but adapts to the laws of the market.

Stallholders: Two categories of stallholders were also identified. First, there are vendors who have not obtained a place in the existing formal market and who have created an informal site for selling products not far from the points of intersection of the public highway. These actors are mostly semi-wholesalers, as they establish contact with wholesalers, gardeners, or even producers who come to offer

their products themselves. They mainly market vegetables, tubers and market garden products. Apart from these actors, we were able to identify those who offer a variety of products by stall not far from their place of residence. Women (60% of those surveyed) constitute the majority of actors in this category, in contrast to street vendors, where they are in the minority. Photo 2, taken in Sector 5, shows the lack of a market layout. Established under mango trees, the vendors offer edible leaves, cucumbers and tomatoes. The products are in basins because of the unsanitary state of the site and are displayed on jute bags once the customer arrives.



Source: (20)

Plate 2. An informal "green product" market in Po

Fixed vendors: The third component in the distribution of products in Po is made up of men (47%) and women (53%) who are established in a fixed location. While some have modified the front of their houses to build stores, others have rented a kiosk¹ or negotiated to set up shop. Of the survey sample, 80% of the installations are along the roads in the city in order to be able to reach the customers. The vendors offer a variety of products: food, clothing, fuel, electronics.



Source: (21)

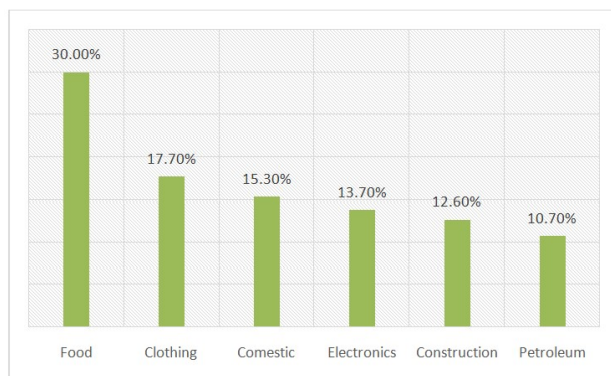
Plate 3. Stables for selling products in Po

Photo 3a, taken in Sector 1, along the Rn5, shows fixed places where fried food (fish or yams), detergents, soap and bread from Ghana are sold. The products are offered to travelers and the site is considered a temporary stop for several transport companies. Photo 3b, taken in sector 3, shows a store selling food products. It allows local residents or neighbors to buy food products. The demographic growth and the diversification of the needs of the population associated with the factors of poverty and unemployment have contributed to the growth of the informal sector in the city of Po. This sector, in spite of everything, ensures the distribution of products, creates wealth and employment in the city.

¹House made from the recovery of used or metal containers

Nevertheless, the installations along the urban arteries have transformed the urban landscape and could constitute a health risk.

A range of products sold: The city of Po is growing, both spatially and demographically. Long before 2003, the city's area of influence extended beyond its administrative boundaries because of the position of the customs control post. The area became more important in 2003, when the central administration decided to move the customs post to Dakola, a locality located about 20 km from Po. This relocation will have an impact on the urban space, since the city is now spreading out to the south in order to make a connection with this new locality. The arrival of migrants, combined with the swallowing up of peripheral villages, is an asset for economic activities. Thus, the average demand for food products, household appliances and construction materials will increase. The various traders will develop strategies to ensure the distribution of products. They thus animate the economic life of the city through the sales outlets. For example, telephone stores (selling telephones or accessories), petroleum products, clothing and cosmetics are found along public roads where traders have set up an informal site, taking up a few meters of the sidewalk (photo 3a). We note that 97% of the clients surveyed stated that they paid for certain products in the fixed sales areas. This choice is linked to the quality of the products and the trust that is established with the vendor. The points of sale for agricultural products are also found in informal settings occupied spontaneously. Since they do not have space to build a shelter, they exploit small orchards (photo 2) and market their products through stalls. Graph 1 below shows the types of products sold in the city of Po, the most dominant of which are food products.



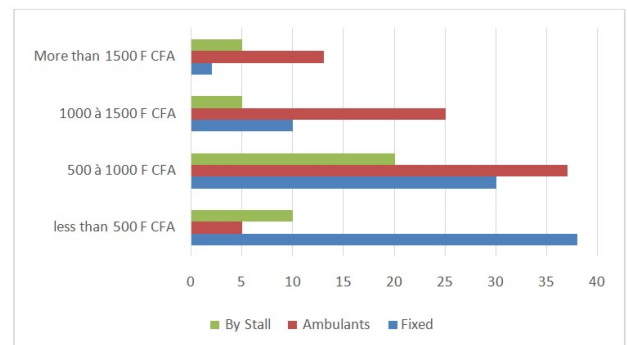
Source : (22)

Graph n°1. Typology of products sold in Po

The informal sector, a means of fighting unemployment: The informal sector remains the one that employs the most people in many African countries. It is dynamic because of its inventiveness, networking and the fluidity of its financial resources. In the city of Po, it generates financial resources and offers many employment opportunities.

Income from informal activity: The field data reveal that the majority of informal sector actors are married and those with a low level of education. As regards marital status, married people predominate (75.3%), followed respectively by single people without children (22%) and single people with children (2%). This is explained by the obligation to be able to provide for oneself and one's family. As for the level of study, we distinguish first those of primary level (47%), then those who have not been to school (37%), in addition, those of secondary level (12%). Finally, there is a small proportion of those with a higher education level (4%). In sum, we note that informal activity remains the means of socio-professional integration for people who have not attended school or who have a primary level of education, as long as they are able to take charge of their own lives and that no qualification is required to exercise the trade. The marketing of the various products generates income and constitutes, without a doubt, a means of self-support for the actors. At

the end of the day, vendors earn an average of between 200 and 3,000 CFA francs. Graph 2 illustrates the net income earned daily from the informal activity.

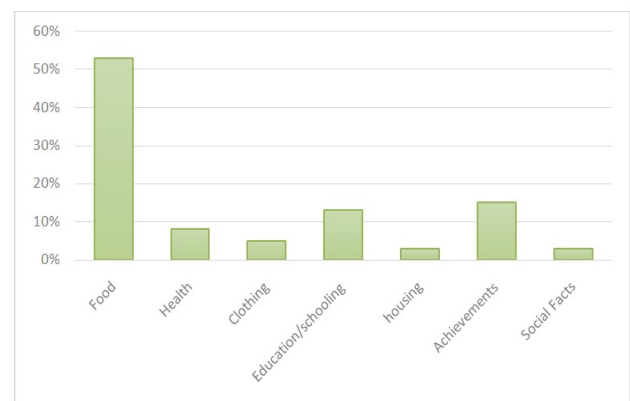


Source : (23)

Graph 2, Daily income by category of vendor

By comparing the amount of money earned by category (Figure 2) with the guaranteed minimum wage (GMNW) in force in Burkina Faso, which is 30,684 CFA francs, or 1,022.8 CFA francs per day, it can be said that 30% of our respondents live above the threshold but are not immune to financial poverty. In fact, the revenue contributes to the sustainability of the activity (supply of products, repayment of loans taken out, site rental costs or electricity for those concerned). A part of the respondents (47%) affirm that they depend on their activities and manage to meet their needs. On the other hand, another group (53% of respondents) said that the activity was not very lucrative. However, they have no other alternatives.

And yet, we benefit from it: The economy derived from informal activity is the primary source of income for many households in the study area. Indeed, the results of the fieldwork show that 82% of the respondents devote their income to current household expenses. This income allows them to meet their families' food needs and to invest in schooling and family health (Graph 3).



Source : (24)

Graph 3. Destination of sellers' income

In this graph 3, we notice that the share reserved for achievements (15%) follows that of food. Sellers invest in the purchase of land or means of transport, the construction of a small house in the family yard or in informal areas. They periodically invest in improving their trading activities. One could also notice a 3% share reserved for social events (baptism, illness, death, funerals). These contributions, which are almost compulsory, are justified by the predominance of the chain of solidarity and the "weight" of the large African family. It is undeniable that the informal sector contributes to the improvement of the living conditions of the actors. Nevertheless, several actions must be carried out in order for this activity to contribute significantly to the economic vitality of the city.

Informal Activities and the Local Economy in Po: The existence of a free and competitive market attracts young people who are able to earn an income. However, the management of informal activities escapes the municipal authority, which derives little benefit from them.

A difficult contribution to the economic development of the city: Local decision-makers in Po have opted to improve the living environment and conditions of the population. It is in this sense that they mobilize resources from the population and from businesses established in the municipality. As regards the contribution of the informal sector, the survey revealed a diversified perception of the population surveyed. Thus, the majority of the actors interviewed (64%) did not have any information about the tax, while another part (21%) equated it with the tax for occupying the public domain. Nevertheless, 15% affirm to have knowledge of it. Regarding the annual fee, the data show that a relatively large proportion of respondents (77%) say that the amount is affordable. On the other hand, 20% find it insignificant and 3% consider it high if compared to all the actors. In terms of revenue, the contribution of microenterprises for the year 2020 amounted to 11,430,000 CFA francs and that of informal sector actors amounted to 6,000,000 CFA francs for the year 2021 (Direction provinciale des impôts, 2022). However, these amounts are still insufficient to stimulate community development, as the collection rate is very low (less than 10%) according to the administrative authorities. This low mobilization of resources is attributable to several factors: lack of knowledge of this tax (46%), lack of trust with the communal authority (30%), low resources (15%) and a deliberate choice not to pay because they do not know the final destination of the amounts collected (3%). The respondents who reported paying their taxes regularly (6%) were those with a fixed sales site. It can be noted that there is a potential for resources that can be mobilized in the commune but that are not exploited due to insufficient communication.

An area of activity that faces difficulties: Informal trade in the commune of Pô is a proven source of income for actors in this product distribution sector. However, it presents a serious health risk. The actors are exposed to risks of accidents or inhalation of fumes for those who are installed along the RN 5. In addition to this, we notice the use of certain stimulants by the street vendors. According to them, this intake of prohibited products (tramazol for example or a mixture of liquor with nescafé) constitutes a stimulant to travel daily distances increasingly long (10-15 km). Faced with this situation, confirmed by the health agents, it is urgent to find palliative solutions so that this does not become a public health problem in the commune. It should also be noted that the health and economic crisis (COVID-19) has affected economic activities through the increase in the cost of foodstuffs or basic necessities and the slowdown of commercial activities. Séni, a dealer in imported products, said: "The COVID-19 disease has ruined me. I consumed the capital of my business during the time the barriers were in place. Now I am looking for a mentor to help me get back on my feet, but unfortunately, everyone is crying about the high cost of living. Following her, Florence, a soap and bread seller, notes an increase in the price of the products: "I raised the prices because in general the prices have increased at the source. But since I raised the prices, I don't have any more customers and I can often go a day without selling anything. Based on the statements of the respondents, we can see that a situation of poor sales is taking hold and affecting the socio-economic life of all the respondents.

DISCUSSION

The geographical position of Po is favorable not only to commercial exchanges but also to the development of informal sector activities. The city is a space that attracts young or unemployed populations in search of better living conditions. The results of this research work have made it possible to characterize part of the informal sector in the city of Po. The categories identified (itinerant vendors, fixed vendors and stall vendors) offer a diversity of products to city dwellers, the most dominant of which are agricultural products.

In addition, they have relatively acceptable revenues that allow them to improve their living conditions. These results corroborate those of (25), (26), (27), (28), (29). In addition to the income earned by the actors in this field, informal activity in Africa remains an activity that is difficult to control by municipal and administrative authorities. Revenue flows are not systematically recorded, making it difficult to measure the real contribution of this sector to the economy of cities. In addition, the low level of tax collection in this sector affects the development of cities (30), (31), (32) in their previous work have also shown that it is difficult and complex to analyze the activities of the informal sector. However, far from being an insurmountable obstacle, urban managers should develop new strategies to manage and organize the informal sector in order to stimulate prosperity and local development.

CONCLUSION

The city of Po, due to its geographical position, continuously welcomes populations in search of better living conditions. This has contributed to an increase in the population of the city. Faced with the lack of employment and growing poverty, informal trade has become an opportunity for the population. The socio-economic effects induced by this type of trade are sufficiently important for the households because it contributes to the improvement of their living conditions. If the informal sector constitutes a lever for growth in Africa, the fact remains that it poses enormous difficulties for the economies of communities. With the intensification of the globalization process, there is an urgent need to control the expansion of informal trade practices and to fight against the non-formalization of the sector through a progressive framework. This would help mobilize more financial resources and make Po's local economy more sustainable.

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