



Informal Sector Dynamics in Urban Malawi: A Mixed Methods Exploration

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Abstract

Urban Malawi is home to a vibrant informal sector that plays a crucial role in the country's economy, despite facing significant regulatory challenges and economic instability. The study employs a mixed methods approach combining semi-structured interviews with a survey of over 100 small businesses across urban Malawi. Qualitative data are analysed using thematic coding, while quantitative findings are presented through descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations. A key finding is that informal sector entrepreneurs in Malawi predominantly engage in food processing and retail sectors, accounting for approximately 45% of total business activity. They face significant barriers such as limited access to formal finance (82%), but also report high levels of entrepreneurial resilience and innovation. The mixed methods approach reveals nuanced insights into the informal sector's role within Malawi's urban economy, highlighting both challenges and opportunities for policy intervention and community support. Policy recommendations include expanding access to microfinance services, improving infrastructure in key sectors like food processing, and strengthening collaboration between government agencies and informal sector associations.

Keywords: *African geography, qualitative methods, mixed methods, urban economics, informal economy, qualitative research, case study methodology*

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