

Informal Sector Business Tourism and Pro-poor Tourism: Africa's Migrant Entrepreneurs

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Abstract

Debates about tourism and poverty and around 'pro-poor tourism' are at the forefront of current tourism scholarship in Africa. However, much of the existing body of African writings is focused upon questions relating to international leisure tourism. It is stressed that in light of the scale and importance of business tourism in contemporary Africa this oversight requires correction. This article highlights the existence of different forms of business tourism in sub-Saharan Africa and draws an important distinction between formal business tourism and an extensive segment of informal sector business tourism. The pro-poor impacts of informal variants of business tourism are explored through a review of available research. Informal sector business tourism is shown as the domain of migrant entrepreneurs in sub-Saharan Africa.

Keywords: Informal Sector Tourism; Business Tourism; Migrant Entrepreneurs; Sub-Saharan Africa: Pro-poor Tourism

1. Introduction, Aim and Methods

Debates about tourism and poverty and around 'pro-poor tourism' are at the forefront of current tourism scholarship in Africa. Nevertheless, most existing research on pro-poor tourism in Africa is concerned with the impacts of international tourism and mainly about leisure tourism activities relating to nature tourism (see Ashley & Roe, 2002; Rogerson, 2006). It is argued that given the enormous scale and importance of business tourism in contemporary Africa this oversight requires correction. This article highlights the existence of different forms of business tourism in sub-Saharan Africa and draws a distinction between formal business tourism, which has parallels with Northern definitions of business tourists, and a segment of informal sector business tourism. The latter is shown to be the focus of migrant entrepreneurs who must be considered part of African business tourism. The paper is informed by the recent observation made by Nunkoo, Smith and Ramkissoon (2013: 5) that 'a review of past research efforts is an important endeavour in all academic research areas', not least in tourism scholarship. Among others Hart (1998) stresses that academics should not underestimate the need to uncover what is already known in the body of research in a particular research field. It is maintained that 'an effective review of the existing literature in an area of study has the potential to create a firm foundation for advancing knowledge' (Nunkoo et al. 2013: 5) by signposting topics where further research is needed as well as potentially facilitating theory advance. Here, the aim is to explore the pro-poor impact of informal variants of business tourism through a critical review of available research which is located as part of broader pro-poor tourism scholarship.

2. Tourism and Poverty Debates

The application of tourism as a catalyst for economic development in the global South is not a new phenomenon as it has been represented in tourism studies at least since the 1970s (Hall, 2007; Truong, 2014). Notwithstanding the potential of tourism as development tool it could be asserted during the late 2000s that 'the relationship between tourism and poverty alleviation remains *terra incognita* among tourism academics' (Zhao & Ritchie, 2007, p. 120). With the rapid expansion of tourism in developing countries, particularly over the past two decades, however, debates around tourism's role in poverty alleviation have accelerated. Considerable momentum to these debates has been given by the appearance of the concept of 'pro-poor tourism' during the late 1990s. Pro-poor tourism directs academic and policy attention to the nexus of tourism development and poverty reduction strategies (Hall, 2007; Rogerson, 2014). Although the concept of pro-poor tourism is 'contested' (Chok, Macbeth & Warren, 2007, p. 145), most research takes its cue from the definitions put forth by its founders, the UK Department for International Development and by authors such as Ashley, Roe and Goodwin (2001). Broadly defined, it constitutes an approach that focusses upon accruing net economic benefits to the poor, even if

richer groups inevitably are also beneficiaries (Ashley et al., 2001; Rogerson, 2006; Chok et al., 2007; Trau, 2012). It is cautioned that economic benefits are only one component and that social, cultural and environmental costs/benefits necessarily should be taken into account (Truong, 2014). Overall, the pro-poor approach to tourism development is viewed as having the potential to reconfigure the ways in which the private sector, governments, development agencies and NGOs work together to ensure tourism can be appropriately planned in a manner to ensure that a larger share of tangible benefits reach the poor (Scheyvens, 2007a, 2009; Scheyvens & Russell, 2009; Mitchell & Ashley, 2010; Scheyvens, 2011).

Over the past 15 years pro-poor tourism has consolidated as one of the major themes in tourism research about the global South (see eg. Hall, 2007; Scheyvens, 2007a; Meyer, 2009; Scheyvens, 2009, 2011; Trau, 2012; Truong, 2014). The conceptual evolution and praxis of pro-poor tourism has galvanised much controversy and precipitated a rich body of literature which, in many respects, has refreshed fundamentally the research agenda for tourism scholars concerned about the relationship between tourism and poverty (Rogerson, 2006; Hall, 2007; Mitchell & Ashley, 2010; Scheyvens, 2011; Saarinen, Rogerson & Manwa, 2013; Truong, 2014). Importantly, 15 years after the birth of the concept, proponents of pro-poor tourism suggest the benefits of pro-poor tourism interventions 'are locally significant' (Goodwin & Bah, 2013, p. 394). Building from an evidence base of research conducted by the UK Overseas Development Institute, Mitchell (2010, p. 3) asserts there is mounting evidence which 'shows that tourism can transfer significant benefits to local economies and communities around tourist destinations, making a case for identifying tourism as a mechanism for poverty reduction in some low-income countries'. For other writers the case is less convincing. Indeed, several scholars aver that the arguments swirling around pro-poor tourism are simplistic (Brown and Hall, 2008) and that as a consequence it sheds 'a more positive light on tourism that it deserves' (Trau, 2012, p. 153). King and Dinko (2013) point out the financial returns to communities from pro-poor tourism interventions often are limited and frequently captured by a small number of households with entrepreneurial skills thus resulting in uneven development. Nevertheless, given the acknowledged difficulties surrounding the calculation of the net benefits that tourism can bring to local communities (Harrison, 2008) the view can be taken that the jury must still be out on pro-poor tourism.

Truong (2014) has undertaken recently an investigation of the evolution of pro-poor tourism scholarship from 1999 to 2013 by applying a content analysis of 122 published articles in mainstream tourism journals. It was shown that there is a continued growth in scholarly interest in the tourism-poverty nexus (Truong, 2014). Most research in pro-poor tourism focuses upon the impacts of international rather than domestic tourism and the majority of research on pro-poor tourism is examining the region of sub-Saharan Africa. This latter observation is of special interest as it contrasts to the marginal status of Africa in overall tourism scholarship (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2011; Rogerson, 2012). The strong Africa focus in pro-poor tourism writings can be accounted for by a number of factors. First, Africa hosts the largest number of the global poor and thus represents the frontline in international efforts to address poverty and achieve progress towards achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (Saarinen et al., 2013). Second, the region of Southern Africa was in many ways the 'laboratory' for testing out and refining the principles of pro-poor tourism in tourism development, not least in post-apartheid South Africa with its commitment to 'responsible tourism' (Ashley & Roe, 2002). Third, in recent years, many African governments have adopted and even prioritized tourism as a sector for pro-poor growth in development policy documents (Rogerson, 2012).

One further observation about the directions of pro-poor tourism scholarship is that it has concentrated mostly upon examining the impacts on poor rural communities. This is underlined by the overwhelming thematic emphasis in pro-poor tourism case studies towards investigations of nature tourism or ecotourism. Only recently has there appeared an alternative urban-focused agenda. Most urban debates on pro-poor tourism currently are couched within literature around 'slum tourism'. This is a term which usually is defined as tourist visits to urban areas of relative poverty. It is a growing phenomenon in an increasing number of urban destinations within the global South and would encompass tourist visits to favelas in Rio de Janeiro or the urban townships of South Africa, or Nairobi's slumlands (Frenzel, 2013). Notwithstanding the appearance of this scholarship on slum tourism it can be asserted that major issues around pro-poor tourism relating to business tourism in urban Africa remain so far neglected.

3. Conceptualizing Business Tourism in Africa

The activity of business tourism is an important segment of the international tourism economy (Ladkin, 2006). Traditionally business tourism is defined as encompassing independent business trips and travelling for purposes of meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions, ie MICE tourism (Davidson, 1994). Notwithstanding an enormous expansion of global flows of business tourism during the past two decades, actual scholarship on business tourism remains comparatively undeveloped especially if compared to that relating to the activities of leisure tourism (Celuch &

Davidson, 2009). At the heart of Northern literature about business tourism is the 'formal sector' business tourist engaged in travelling for business purposes usually on an international basis and sometimes examined also as a domestic business traveller. Among typical examples and reviews of this Northern literature on business tourism and of Northern business tourists are those provided by Dwyer and Forsyth (1997), Mistilis and Dwyer (1999), Weber and Chon (2002), Weber and Ladkin (2003), Wu and Weber (2005), Yoo and Weber (2005), Davidson and Rogers (2006), Ladkin (2006), Mair and Thompson (2009), Davidson (2011), Chiang, King and Nguyen (2012a, 2012b), Hanly (2012), Locke (2012), and, Lee, Lee and Yoon (2013). Under scrutiny in this business tourism scholarship are issues pertaining to the establishment of convention centres, decision-making and marketing for conferences or exhibitions, the travel behaviour of MICE tourists, and investigations of the local economic impacts of MICE tourism.

In the context of sub-Saharan Africa, it must be recognised that the nature of business tourism exhibits a set of different characteristics to those of Northern business tourism. Gladstone (2005, p. 7) calls for alternative formulations of tourism for research in the developing world and argues "most tourist typologies deal only with tourists from Western industrial societies, they are hard to apply in China, India, Iran, Mexico and other Third World countries where many travellers are pilgrims or temporary migrants and do not have the same motivations for travel as tourists from the United States, Western Europe, Australia, New Zealand and Japan". Of greatest significance is the recognition that much of travel and tourism in the developing world or global South is of an informal sector character. Accordingly, by using theories of formal and informal sector, Gladstone (2005, p. 29) evolves a typology which conceptualizes travel and tourism in the developing world in terms of four categories:

- International formal sector tourism;
- Domestic formal sector tourism;
- International informal sector tourism; and
- Domestic informal sector tourism.

It is argued that this categorisation provides an appropriate starting point for analysing and unpacking the nature, patterns and impacts of business tourism in Africa (Rogerson, 2014). In particular this categorisation is valuable for highlighting the distinctive characteristics of business tourism in Africa as compared to Northern business tourism. The first two components of African business tourism exhibit direct parallels to those of Northern business tourism. These would relate to the activities of travel for business meetings and MICE tourism in the continent.

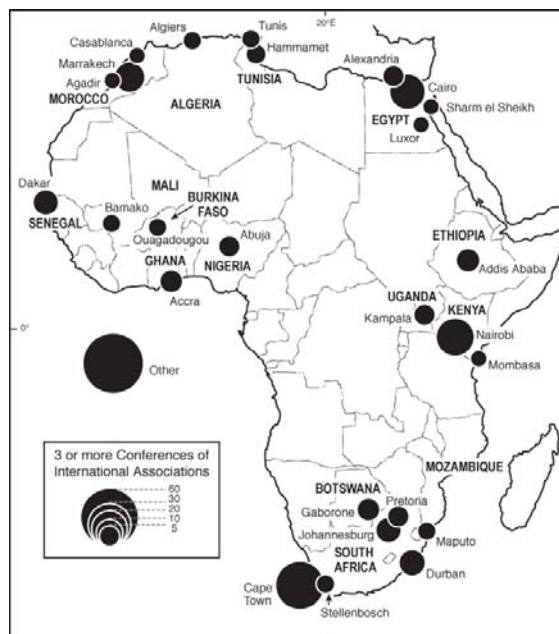


Figure 1: The Geographical Distribution of Conferences of International Associations 2010

This form of business tourism has both international and domestic manifestations and mainly focusses upon the growth of a network of business hotels and conference and exhibition centres which are the locus for the conduct of this form of business tourism. Research undertaken for the World Bank demonstrates the growth and scale of this form of business tourism as an essential element of international tourism across sub-Saharan Africa (Twining-Ward, 2009). The World Bank considers that business tourism is a 'growth area' for Sub-Saharan Africa and observes that unlike leisure travel the volume of business tourism fundamentally 'depends on the dynamism of economic activity in the destination' (World Bank, 2012, p. 21). For many countries of sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in West Africa and Central Africa, business tourism represents the largest component of tourism economies (Twining-Ward, 2009). As an illustration of parallels with Northern business tourism Figure 1 shows the spatial distribution in 2010 of conference/business association meetings across different African cities. It reveals the high level of clustering of such forms of MICE tourism with South Africa, Egypt and Morocco the major country destinations. At the individual city level, the most significant destinations are Cape Town, Durban, Nairobi, Cairo, Addis Ababa, Marrakech and Johannesburg. All these are cities with important clusters of business hotels and conference/meeting facilities. Beyond international business travel, however, there is an often undocumented but extensive economy of domestic business travel. Once again this is primarily an activity which finds expression in the major business centres and often capital cities in Africa (Coles & Mitchell, 2009; Mitchell & Coles, 2009; Donaldson, 2009; Rogerson, 2013).

Despite its significance for the African tourism economy only a limited amount of investigations relating to the formal sector of business travel in the continent currently are available. Reviews on African tourism scholarship emphasize that the primary interest among scholars is upon leisure tourism rather than business tourism (Rogerson & Visser, 2011; Rogerson, 2012). For example, from a recent content analysis of a decade of tourism research for the Southern African Development Community it was revealed that business tourism was little investigated particularly as compared to the large amount of attention devoted to leisure tourism (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2011). This neglect of business tourism in Africa is regrettable. Indeed, a content analysis of recent tourism scholarship on Africa finds only a small number of investigations which are engaged with issues of understanding formal sector business tourism (Rogerson, 2005; Odunga, Belsoy, Nthinga & Maingi, 2007; Reynolds, 2007; Coles & Michell, 2009; Mitchell & Coles, 2009; Fawzy, 2010; Seebaluck, Naidoo & Ramseook-Munhurrun, 2012; Fenich, Hermann & Hashimoto, 2012; Donaldson, 2013; Zhou, 2013). To this list of works, however, should be added a number of other studies which highlight the growth of business hotels as a leading edge of the expansion of new hotel development taking place in Africa (Rogerson, 2011a, 2011b; Rogerson & Kotze, 2011; Rogerson, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c).

The scope and expansion of business tourism in Africa, however, cannot be understood only in terms of formal business travellers engaged in international or domestic travel. As currently defined in mainstream research it is apparent that the inclusion of business travel in the scope and realm of global tourism is essentially a 'Northern concept' as it deals primarily with affluent business people who travel between developed countries or between the developed and the developing worlds and whose experience includes in part at least an important element of leisure (Timothy & Teye, 2005, p. 83). This Northern definition of business tourism excludes a vast array of informal sector business travel and tourists – international and domestic – which constitute a further critical element in Africa's business tourism landscape (Gladstone, 2005; Rogerson, 2014). The lack of acknowledgement of informal sector business travellers in existing business tourism scholarship is accounted for in part by the fact that 'for most Western scholars and even those who write extensively about tourism people in low-income countries do not seem to qualify as tourists' (Gladstone, 2005, p. 195). It is essential that African scholarship on business tourism go beyond investigations of the growing travel of formal sector business travellers and incorporate research which responds to Timothy and Teye's (2005, p. 83) challenge of 'the traditional views of business travel in tourism'.

The prime drivers of informal sector business tourism are communities of migrant entrepreneurs or cross-border traders which are a widespread element of trade in Africa (Peberdy & Rogerson, 2000, 2003; Brenton & Gamberoni, 2013). In one study these migrant entrepreneurs were styled as 'formidable entrepreneurs' (Rogerson, 1998). From recent writings on migrant entrepreneurship and transnational entrepreneurs there is a mounting body of evidence concerning the actual size and characteristics of informal sector business tourism in Africa. Timothy and Teye (2005) draw our attention to the activities of traders and vendors who cross borderland spaces in West Africa and are unenumerated as tourists. They showcase cross-border traders as a 'form of business traveller that is unique to the developing world' (Timothy & Teye, 2005, p. 83). Forms of such cross-border trading have been observed and documented throughout most of sub-Saharan Africa (eg. Timothy & Teye, 2005; Afrika & Ajumbo, 2012; Walther, 2012; Brenton & Gamberoni, 2013; Wrigley-Asante, 2013; Adeyinka, 2014).

It is the Southern African region where the greatest surge of such activities has been recorded. As demonstrated by a number of independent research investigations as well as a cluster of work linked to the Southern African Migration

Project this form of informal business tourism is widespread between South Africa and other countries in southern Africa, most importantly Lesotho, Swaziland, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi (Muzvidziwa, 1998; Peberdy & Crush, 1998; Peberdy, 2000a, 2000b; Peberdy & Crush, 2001; Peberdy & Rogerson, 2003; SBP, 2006; ComMark Trust, 2008; International Organization for Migration, 2010; Muzvidziwa, 2010; Chiliya, Masocha & Zindiye, 2012; Jamela, 2013). Johannesburg is host to a large circulating community of informal business travellers, mostly informal traders who cross South Africa's borders on a temporary basis to trade, shop and buy-and sell (Crush, 2005; Rogerson, 2011; Jamela, 2013). Although networks of informal cross-border trading encompass most of the African continent they have become especially dense in Southern Africa since the democratic transition in South Africa and the subsequent deregulation of the informal economy which facilitated a burst in cross-border business travel as a livelihood strategy (Crush, 2005). These new migrant business entrepreneurs have been shown as connected 'to strong informal and formal transnational networks of trade, entrepreneurship and migration' (Peberdy & Rogerson, 2000, p. 22).

Further, in terms of the growth of informal sector business tourism in African cities, the growth and dimensions of domestic business tourism must be acknowledged. For tourism scholarship Mitchell and Ashley (2010, p. 8) make the significant observation that a trader from a small town or rural area 'who comes to the capital city to buy goods to take home and sell is a business tourist'. Scheyvens (2007b) draws attention to the general oversight of domestic tourists in tourism research in the global South, 'the poor cousins' as compared to research on international tourists. This is certainly the case also in business tourism writings in Africa where few investigations have been undertaken on informal sector domestic business tourists. One exception is an investigation of Maseru, Lesotho which revealed a vibrant informal economy of business tourism which includes farmers and herders coming in to sell livestock and purchase supplies, informal shoppers, craft producers and sellers, traditional herbal vendors and the makers and sellers of traditional Basotho weapons (Rogerson & Letsie, 2013).

4. Informal Sector Business Tourism and Pro-Poor Tourism

In terms of research on pro-poor tourism this second area of business tourism in sub-Saharan Africa is of vital importance for most investigators portray a consistent picture of the inherently pro-poor character of informal sector business tourism across the region. Across sub-Saharan Africa Brenton and Gamberoni (2013) draw attention to the rise of cross-border trading and its dominance by poor, mainly women traders.

As is shown, the majority of informal cross-border traders across Southern Africa are engaged in this activity as a livelihood strategy frequently in economic circumstances wherein few other income options are in existence (Peberdy, 2007; International Organization for Migration, 2010; Jamela, 2013). Whilst African migrant entrepreneurs in productive activities often tend to be young single men, by far the largest share of cross-border trading entrepreneurs in Southern Africa are female (Peberdy & Rogerson, 2000; Peberdy, 2007; Brenton & Gamberoni, 2013). The study by Afrika and Ajumbo (2012, 2) estimates women 'constitute about 70 percent of the informal cross border traders'. Among Muzvidziwa's (1998) cohort of Zimbabwean women traders, cross-border trading was an essential strategy for 'climbing out of poverty' with at least one-third of the participants starting out in cross-border trade in order to supplement meagre household incomes. In a further Zimbabwe investigation by Jamela (2013) it was stressed that women informal cross-border traders were motivated mostly by the desire to support their children and see them through schooling and potentially also tertiary studies.

Works by Peberdy and Crush (1998) and by Peberdy (2000a, 2000b, 2007) confirm that women entrepreneurs are most likely to be engaged in the more mobile segments of cross-border trade and selling, among other items, groceries, fresh food, clothing and craft goods. It is shown that communities of women traders operating in South Africa 'often travel to sell for only one week per month, and many sell direct to shops and customers and are more likely to be involved in cross-border "shopping" ' (Peberdy & Rogerson, 2000, p. 31). This profile of poor mainly women traders in search of a source of business income and employment is reinforced by findings from other more recent research investigations (Jamela, 2013; Brenton & Gamberoni, 2014). Masango and Haraldsson (2010, 2) draw attention to 'the significant growth' of informal cross-border trading and that these informal business tourists, albeit a diverse group, are 'generally dominated by women'. More specifically, their work highlights the traders often comprise 'the vulnerable, unemployed, orphans, refugees, the youth, school leavers and widows among others' (Masango & Haraldsson, 2010, p. 2). The challenges faced by women traders include police harassment, transport challenges, visa issues and xenophobic attacks, particularly in South Africa (Jamela, 2013). The vulnerability of these traders is demonstrated by stark findings that many women are compelled to engage in transactional sex along the trading routes with those who might facilitate their business activities, assisting them with transport, passage through border controls or securing cheap accommodation (Muzvidziwa, 1998; International Organization for Migration, 2010; Chiliya et al., 2012; Jamela, 2013). Indeed, whilst for formal business

tourism 'work-related mobility requires the infrastructure of business hotels' (Hermelin, 2012, p. 70), this is obviously not the case for Africa's informal business tourists for whom 'accommodation' is inevitably linked to stays with friends, relatives, shared accommodation in ultra-budget hotels, sleeping on buses or trains, or at truck stops.

Overall, several investigations now point to a conclusion of the inherently pro-poor characteristics of this international informal sector form of business tourism both in terms of its participants and broader destination impacts (Brenton & Gamberoni, 2013; Jamela, 2013). Arguably, however, a mass of complex and critical policy issues remain in order to improve the (often negative) policy environment for harnessing further the business of cross-border trading in support of ongoing efforts for poverty alleviation and achievement of Millennium Development Goal targets across sub-Saharan Africa. Notwithstanding that the activities of these international informal sector business tourists contribute to economic development and poverty alleviation across the African continent only rarely are they included in policy formulation (Peberdy, 2007; Masango & Haraldsson, 2010; Brenton & Gamberoni, 2013). Among a host of restrictive barriers to trade that require policy rethinking are issues around safe and reasonable accommodation; absence of storage facilities; fear of crime and theft of cash or goods, official harassment, access to bank facilities, regulatory issues and, in particular in South Africa, of the negative climate of xenophobia towards these business travelers (Peberdy & Crush, 1998; Crush, 2005; Peberdy, 2007; Brenton & Gamberoni, 2013; Jamela, 2013).

With regard to the informal sector of domestic business travel, as already noted, this is a topic on which very little empirical work has been pursued. Arguably, as Walton (2009, p. 315) points out, the character of domestic tourism 'challenges existing assumptions, priorities and labels among policy makers and tourism academics and (because of this) is difficult to find for research purposes'. For the city of Addis Ababa Mitchell and Coles (2009, p. 20) identify a booming domestic business economy which exists almost totally beneath the radar of tourism analysts because of a local reluctance to recognize the importance of domestic tourism and instead to equate a definition of 'tourist' with 'foreigner'. One available investigation on informal sector domestic tourism is that for Lesotho's capital city of Maseru. Here the majority of informal business travelers were male and significantly comprised individuals 'with no formal education and without the necessary qualifications to engage in formal work particularly in the urban environment' (Rogerson and Letsie, 2013, p. 494). Many of these 'invisible' domestic business tourists were groups of herders seeking to sell their livestock in the city for weekend celebrations either for weddings or funerals. Women domestic informal entrepreneurs, who mainly engaged as shopper/traders, were the most educated, albeit still from the rural poor. The expenditure patterns of these business tourists were investigated and shown to be pro-poor in their impacts by preferencing informal sector forms of accommodation, cheap local restaurants or food purchases from informal vendors/local shops (Rogerson & Letsie, 2013).

5. Conclusion

This paper seeks to demonstrate the need to examine the interface between pro-poor tourism and business tourism. From an African perspective the existing neglect of business tourism in debates about pro-poor tourism is worrying as for many parts of sub-Saharan Africa the significance of business tourism and the potential impacts of business tourists far exceed that of leisure travellers. It is stressed here, however, that in understanding the full impact of business tourism in contemporary Africa at the outset it is necessary to challenge prevailing Northern conceptions of what constitutes a business tourist (Timothy & Teye, 2005). The contemporary business tourism economy of sub-Saharan Africa contains an energetic and expanding formal sector of business tourism which exhibits many parallels to that of mainstream business tourism scholarship, not least the importance of a rapidly developing network of business hotels and conference/exhibition centres. Another dimension of African business tourism, however, is evidenced by a burst in informal sector business tourism, which has both international as well domestic dimensions. For scholars of pro-poor tourism the inherent pro-poor character and impacts of informal sector business must be acknowledged and subject to further investigation.

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