



Building a Supportive Entrepreneurial Ecosystem for Street Vending: Key Requirements for Growth and Sustainability in Dodoma, Tanzania

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Abstract

Street vending is one of the oldest forms of informal business and plays a critical role in poverty reduction by creating employment opportunities, particularly for women and youth who are excluded from the formal sector due to limited education, capital constraints, and socio-economic barriers. Despite its importance, the entrepreneurial ecosystem supporting street vendors is often overlooked by governments and formal business actors. This study aims to examine and understand the essential entrepreneurial ecosystem required to support street traders in Tanzania. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, collecting both qualitative and quantitative data from street vendors, municipal officers, and business experts to assess the current entrepreneurial environment and identify areas requiring improvement. The findings indicate that street vendors operating in the informal sector require significantly more support than has been highlighted in previous studies, which largely focus on formal businesses. Key needs identified include designated business locations, access to municipal services, formal recognition, business permits, protection from harassment, access to financial services such as loans, and entrepreneurial training. The study focuses on street vendors in Tanzania, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other countries with different regulatory and socio-economic contexts. Policymakers and municipal authorities should adopt a more positive and inclusive approach toward street vendors by fostering a supportive entrepreneurial ecosystem. Although developing such an ecosystem may require initial public investment, the long-term benefits—such as enhanced livelihoods and increased contributions to national development—are likely to outweigh the associated costs.

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Introduction

Appropriate entrepreneurship ecosystems are crucial for the growth and sustainability of small enterprises, especially in informal undertakings. Entrepreneurial Ecosystem (EE) refers to the set of complementary factors, institutions, policies, conditions, and foundations that collectively enable and sustain entrepreneurial activity within a specific area. EE is a set of elements that makes entrepreneurship possible (de Bruin & Swail, 2025). It encompasses a well-connected network of actors, including government institutions, academia, entrepreneurs, and the broader business environment, to create, support, foster, and enable entrepreneurial growth (Fischer et al., 2024). Although it started as a general term, researchers have begun to unpack the ecosystem to explain different categories of entrepreneurship, including gender, marginalised groups, minority and others



(de Bruin & Swail, 2025). Most of the entrepreneurial ecosystem research focuses on formal enterprises (Ajirowo, 2024; Birungi et al., 2024, 2024); however, little is known regarding informal enterprises, e.g., street vending business. The theory of the entrepreneurial ecosystem (EE) has gained significant attention in research, academia, professional discussions, and the broader movement toward entrepreneurship (Aggarwal & Kashiramka, 2025; Audretsch & Fiedler, 2024; Ossowska et al., 2023; Queissner et al., 2025). Street vending is a common feature of cities and towns worldwide, particularly in both developing and developed countries, although its ecosystem remains poorly researched.

Entrepreneurial ecosystem has been defined in different ways depending on context (Jorge et al., 2024), as various factors and interdependent actors, interacting within a geographical region, which evolves, to promote the creation of new businesses." The concept of entrepreneurial ecosystems remains largely unknown, despite extensive scholarly attention. It is a complete set of policy measures (Filippelli et al., 2025). The legal framework, institutions, private and public sectors, and resources promote entrepreneurship, value creation, and economic development (Aggarwal & Kashiramka, 2025). For this research, we define the entrepreneurial ecosystem as the set of institutions, actors, processes, and policies relevant to an entrepreneur's locality that support and sustain entrepreneurial activity. The entrepreneurial ecosystem is not a single factor. It is a network of interconnected instruments across various sectors that support one another in fostering new entrepreneurs and sustaining existing ones. Supportive ecosystems have the potential to attain legal status, secure access to credits and working capital, and acquire skills to improve efficiency, access markets, and enhance earnings (Ossowska et al., 2023).

Street vendors in third-world countries work in a challenging business environment (Abes, 2024). For example, they lack access to formal capital and rely on family and informal sources for credit (Yesmin & Calzada Olvera, 2025). Limited capital prevents street vendors from purchasing all the products they need, resulting in diseconomies of scale. Additionally, street vending is considered illegal, and traders face persistent harassment by authorities (George et al., 2023). Street vending is unlawful because it uses public space, makes the sidewalk dirty, blocks traffic, and conducts trade in unauthorised areas (Peimani & Kamalipour, 2024). Street vendors do not have a permanent structure for doing business; they move from one location to another, seeking customers and placing their products in open spaces designated for other purposes (George et al., 2023).

Thus, street vendors cause traffic congestion, making it difficult for cars and pedestrians to pass through. All street vendors worldwide are characterised by low levels of education (Sandhika et al., 2024).

Typical street vendors lack sufficient human capital to remain competitive (Abes, 2024). They lack the foundations, strategies, and skills necessary to compete effectively, including with formal business owners (Peimani & Kamalipour, 2024). Despite their importance and employment of millions, street vendors are excluded from national policies and strategies (The Duy & Tien Thanh, 2024). Although no strategic approach to bringing inclusive development to them is articulated, their presence is mentioned in several federal development documents. Notably, street vendors in Africa and Tanzania are excluded from, or only partially involved in, street planning; yet they continue to conduct business on the street. Street vendors require a supportive social, legal, financial, and economic environment to sustain their businesses (Mramba, 2025; Munir & Watts, 2025). Providers of these factors must be connected to prevent duplication or confusion for street vendors.

In the Global South, local government authorities have been criticised for imposing prohibitive measures on street vendors (Grangxabe et al., 2024; Takyi et al., 2023). The widespread prohibitions



include evictions, relocations, fines, harassment, confiscation of products, and imprisonment (Gogoi, 2025). The use of excessive powers by municipal/city councils, rather than negotiation, led to loss of life, business, disability, incarceration, fines, chaos, and vendor resistance (George et al., 2023). Street vendors consider municipal/city councils a top threat, making their businesses uncertain and unpredictable (Guibrunet et al., 2024). It is ideal for unveiling what is needed to improve within the entrepreneurial ecosystem. The antagonism between the two benefits none; the municipal is losing revenue and costs evicting, while vendors lose business, hence the total loss (vicky, 2024).

This research focuses on identifying the requirements vendors need within a supportive entrepreneurial ecosystem. The purpose of this research is to examine the key factors that enable the growth and long-term sustainability of street vending businesses, analyse the strategies street vendors use to navigate and strengthen their entrepreneurial ecosystem to achieve business success and develop strategic policy recommendations and support mechanisms that foster a more inclusive and sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystem for street vending.

Method

We employed a cross-sectional survey design, which is well-suited to collecting data from diverse respondent groups within a limited timeframe. However, the cross-sectional research design is criticised for capturing data at a single point in time, which limits the ability to examine changes, trends, or causal relationships between variables over time (Denscombe, 2023). This design is cost-efficient and timesaving, and it enables the assessment of multiple outcomes. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected simultaneously, using a concurrent mixed-methods approach. This strategy was chosen to leverage the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods, providing a more comprehensive understanding than either approach could offer alone. Research was conducted in Dodoma, Tanzania's capital.

Given the dynamic nature of street vending – where vendors are constantly seeking customers – we employed convenience sampling, approaching respondents only if they were accessible and willing to participate. Convenience sampling is recommended for studying informal traders due to the absence of a comprehensive database; however, a major weakness of this sampling method is its tendency to introduce sampling bias (Denscombe, 2023). Because participants are selected based on ease of access rather than representativeness, the findings may have limited generalizability to the broader population. To gather insights from key stakeholders, we also used purposive sampling to identify and interview critical informants, including staff from city trade offices.

We conducted a desktop review of city plans, performance reports, and bylaws to assess what has been implemented and what is planned to improve the street-vending ecosystem. Our data collection methods included direct observation, which allowed us to determine the environment in which vendors operate. During site visits across the city, we examined the infrastructure for displaying goods, the availability of sanitation facilities, product quantities, and customer engagement. In addition, we conducted 16 in-depth interviews with key informants, including trade officers (3), community development officers (4), legal experts (2), business professionals (2), and urban planners (5) in Dodoma City. Ethical considerations are carefully addressed by ensuring voluntary participation, informed consent, and respondents' right to withdraw at any time without consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity of participants' personal and business information are maintained, and the data collected are used solely for academic research purposes.

The consultation aimed to gather data on the city's current and planned initiatives to improve the entrepreneurial ecosystem for street vendors. Interviews were conducted on the city premises, each lasting up to 25 minutes. In addition, closed-ended questionnaires were administered to a sample of



504 street vendors, selected based on accessibility, availability, and willingness to speak. 504 respondents were deemed relevant for small-scale research using probability sampling, based on recommendations provided by Denscombe (2023). Respondents were selected from densely populated areas of the city, including Nyerere Square, One Way, Saba-Saba, Majengo, and Chako ni Chako. Data collection took place between January and March 2024. The quantitative survey focused on identifying what street vendors expect from the city council to enhance their entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Additionally, the study explored what actions street vendors themselves are taking to improve the business environment in which they operate. The questionnaire covers vendors’ demographic and business characteristics, access to ecosystem support, and institutional conditions. It examines financial access, infrastructure, social networks, business support, coping strategies, and business performance, sustainability, and policy needs to inform inclusive, evidence-based recommendations.

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, and medians) to summarise vendor characteristics, business conditions, and access to ecosystem support. Qualitative data were analysed through content analysis following Denscombe (2023), involving familiarisation, coding, categorisation, and theme development to identify key patterns and insights into vendors’ experiences and strategies.

Results and Discussions

The Wishes of Street Vendors to Improve Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

We sought to understand what street vendors expect from their city council to enhance their entrepreneurial activities. The survey findings are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: *Wishes of Street Vendors to Improve Entrepreneurial Ecosystem*

Street Vendors’ Requirements	Mean Score
Facilitation to stimulate business growth and Profit	4.7
Financial inclusion	4.46
Access to permanent and decent business locations	4.3
Representation in decision-making processes	4.2
Affordable waste disposal services	4.0
Access to lavatories	4.0

Support to Gain More Profit and Growth

Street vendors aspire to increase their profits, expand their businesses, attract more customers, and achieve long-term sustainability. Many shared stories of fellow vendors who had transitioned into successful business owners, often asking, “How can we grow like them?” In pursuit of growth, they have tried various strategies—such as cutting living and business expenses, seeking advice from formal traders, following entrepreneurial training via radio and social media, consulting witchdoctors, and making sacrifices—but with little success.

Some vendors reported surviving on a single meal per day, eaten at 3:00 PM, to balance breakfast and dinner and to save money for reinvestment—yet they still saw no progress. As one vendor asked, “Brother, what should be done to make more profit?” They expressed a strong desire for their businesses to grow and cover their living expenses but admitted they didn’t know how to make that happen. Although vendors have received various business tips from family and friends, many of these suggestions have proven ineffective. The interviews revealed that some advice has even harmed their businesses, for example, being encouraged to borrow from informal lenders, despite the heavy burden of high-interest rates.



These findings indicate that, although street vendors are eager to grow, increase profitability, and enhance sustainability, they often lack the knowledge and skills necessary to achieve these goals. For most, street vending is not a permanent career choice but a stepping stone toward establishing larger, more formal businesses. However, many have remained in a “survivalist” state for years, struggling to transition into sustainable enterprises. The key challenge they face is figuring out how to achieve business growth and long-term success. Previous research indicates that most street vendors employ survival strategies rather than growth strategies (George et al., 2023).

Financial Access

Street vendors need greater access to affordable financing. Currently, they operate with minimal capital, which limits their ability to achieve economies of scale. Many believe that with improved access to funding, they could borrow money to expand and enhance their businesses. In Tanzania, municipal councils are required to allocate 10% of their annual revenue to economically empower citizens by providing interest-free loans to groups of women, youth, and people with disabilities, including street vendors. Of this allocation, 4% is earmarked explicitly for children. However, many vendors interviewed were either unaware of these funds or found them difficult to access. Various studies have documented the financial exclusion of street vendors in Tanzania (Mramba, 2025).

In Dodoma, as in many parts of Tanzania, street vendors are unable to borrow from formal financial institutions, unlike registered businesses, due to their informal status, lack of registration, and absence of collateral. As a result, they are largely excluded from formal financial services. Furthermore, municipal loans often require vendors to form groups of three to five members and to provide guarantees in the event of default. Given the mobile nature of street vending, meeting these conditions can be difficult, further hindering access to these government funds (George et al., 2023).

Formal and Decent Business Location

Street vendors often operate in unauthorised locations, occupying spaces intended for other uses. This not only poses safety risks for both the vendors and the public but also contributes to disorder and tension in urban environments. By operating in unapproved areas, street vendors are frequently blamed for traffic congestion, overcrowding, and obstruction of pedestrian pathways—disruptions that undermine effective city planning.

Observations across various streets reveal that vendors have taken over numerous public spaces, including minor roads, sidewalks, parking lots, open areas, and public gardens. This widespread occupation has led to growing public dissatisfaction and resistance. Municipal officers interviewed expressed frustration over the unsanitary conditions associated with street vending. One officer remarked, “They dispose of their rubbish everywhere. They don’t pay for cleaning or sanitation services—they simply don’t care. We cannot continue like this—something must be done.” Some officials even warned of a potential cholera outbreak in Dodoma if the situation is not addressed urgently.

Field observations confirmed these concerns, with waste scattered throughout vending areas and bottles filled with urine left behind. In several locations, strong odours of urine and alcohol were evident. Despite these challenges, many street vendors in Dodoma argue that the municipal government should officially recognise their activities and provide designated trading spaces, similar to those in formal markets. Vendors reported experiencing harassment from government officials, members of the public, and formal business owners due to the locations in which they operate.



Representations in the Decision-Making

Street vendors are an essential part of the global informal workforce. However, they are often excluded from city planning and decision-making processes. In Tanzania, for example, street vendors lack formal representation in city councils. Rather than fostering an inclusive business environment, municipal bylaws primarily serve to discourage and prohibit street vending. Key decisions concerning urban spaces – such as vendor relocation – are typically made unilaterally by authorities without prior consultation with vendors. These decisions are merely communicated to them for enforcement, rather than being discussed or negotiated in advance. Interviews revealed that, when vendors are involved in decision-making, their participation is often symbolic and carries little actual influence.

Waste Disposal and Lavatory Services

Street vendors have expressed an urgent need for improved waste disposal services in the city. Observations indicate that waste is often left unattended in areas where vendors operate, primarily due to the lack of adequate waste disposal facilities. This situation poses health risks to both traders and customers. Sales revenue of street vendors is also negatively affected by the dirtiness of business locations, as customers are reluctant to purchase in hazardous environments. Interviews with respondents revealed that some customers avoid purchasing goods from street vendors due to concerns about hygiene. One respondent remarked, “The place is dirty and smells bad. I can’t risk my stomach by buying these fruits.” Therefore, a call for a joint initiative between the municipal authorities and traders, as everyone has a role to play.

Municipal officers interviewed acknowledged the issue but attributed the city's waste problems to the informal operations of street vendors. All respondents reported frequently observing rotting fruits, vegetables, and fish that emit a persistent foul odour, contributing to an unhealthy and unpleasant environment. These findings highlight the urgent need for a systematic approach to enforce existing municipal bylaws related to waste management and hygiene. Although the interviews confirmed the existence of such bylaws, there is currently no precise mechanism or system for their implementation and effective enforcement.

Interviews and field observations revealed a significant shortage of public toilets in Dodoma. The few facilities that exist – managed either privately or by city authorities – charge users between 200 and 300 Tanzanian shillings per visit. In key markets such as Saba-Saba and Majengo, public toilets are particularly scarce, and in the city centre, those available are often located far from where vendors operate. In the absence of nearby facilities, vendors resort to using bars, restaurants, private homes, or even open spaces – sometimes urinating in bottles. In some areas, warning signs have been posted stating that unauthorised urination carries a fine of 50,000 shillings. The situation is especially difficult for vendors with disabilities. As one respondent noted:

“Disabled vendors cannot access most toilets. Those using walking sticks may manage, but those who require assistance cannot enter. The infrastructure is not disability-friendly – not just in toilets, but throughout the city.” Street vendors are calling on the city to provide more accessible and affordable public sanitation facilities that meet their daily needs.

In addition, there is currently no dedicated policy or legal framework regulating street vending in Dodoma. Although the municipal government holds the authority to develop such regulations, it currently relies on general business bylaws that are not tailored to the unique circumstances of street vendors. The primary legal reference, *Sheria Ndogo Halmashauri ya Jiji la Dodoma*, does not adequately address the challenges faced by this sector. Legal exclusion is a problem for informal traders across the developing world (Peimani & Kamalipour, 2024).



Strategies Employed by Street Vendors to Improve their Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

Despite facing numerous challenges, street vendors remain a vital source of livelihood for millions of low-income individuals, including youth, women, and those with limited formal education. To navigate this uncertain environment, they have developed various resilience strategies. These include accessing informal sources of finance, engaging in informal learning, obtaining vending identity cards, operating on weekends and at night, forming informal associations, and lobbying municipal officials.

Access to financial capital and other resources is critical to business performance. However, street vendors often lack access to formal financing and must instead rely on family and informal credit sources (Grangxabe et al., 2024). Due to limited capital, they frequently struggle to purchase sufficient stock, resulting in diseconomies of scale. These financial constraints also hinder business expansion and the transition to formal, sustainable enterprises. Significant barriers to formal financing include a lack of collateral, legal business status, and proper financial documentation (Takyi et al., 2023).

Street vendors in Dodoma reported obtaining capital from informal networks, including family, friends, and informal savings and credit associations. When asked about their initial source of capital, 54% reported accumulating funds through various means, 19% received support from parents or relatives, 14% raised funds by selling agricultural products, and 10% relied on other sources. Notably, women were significantly more likely (73%) than men (27%) to receive financial support from parents or relatives, while men were twice as likely to raise capital through agriculture.

Common sources of informal financing include individual moneylenders, family and friends, rotating savings and credit associations (ROSCAs), and informal credit arrangements such as Mali Kauli (Lyons, 2013). However, informal moneylenders often charge significantly higher interest rates than banks, enforce strict repayment terms, offer limited loan amounts, and impose hidden costs such as service charges and unlimited liabilities (Grangxabe et al., 2024). Consequently, some vendors experience financial exploitation rather than genuine support.

The study also revealed that 60% of street vendors had only completed primary school. Women were twice as likely (67%) as men (33%) to have no formal education. Among all respondents, 30% had completed secondary school, 4% had postsecondary education, and 6% had no formal education. When asked whether they had received any business-related training, only 10% reported having such opportunities. As a result, most vendors lack the skills necessary to remain competitive. To bridge this gap, 65% of vendors reported learning by copying or imitating others, 20% through trial and error, and the remainder from sources such as radio, television, and other technological tools.

Street vendors aspire to operate in a safe and stable environment, yet they live in constant fear of eviction because they lack formal business premises. Municipal councils frequently order them to vacate their regular vending locations, often relocating them to remote areas without compensation. To minimise this risk, many vendors choose to operate on weekends, evenings, and at night in unauthorised locations to avoid fines. They also rely on informal leaders, community development officers, trade officers, and political representatives to voice their concerns to municipal authorities.

To strengthen their bargaining power, street vendors in Dodoma have formed numerous unregistered and semi-registered associations. The research found that new associations are regularly established, often with goals similar to those of existing ones. These groups are typically registered as informal organisations rather than as trade unions. In collaboration with municipal authorities, some associations have successfully negotiated for designated vending areas. The core mission of these associations is to empower their members by providing platforms for freedom of expression, access to finance, personal and business security, and collective negotiation. Nevertheless, vendors continue



to call for stronger legal frameworks and policies to protect their businesses and ensure long-term sustainability, regardless of future changes in government.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. Data were collected only in Dodoma, which may limit generalizability to other cities. Most respondents were government employees, which may introduce bias in favour of municipal policies. In addition, some street vendors may have withheld information out of fear of legal or security consequences, thereby affecting data completeness. Despite these limitations, the study offers valuable insights into street vendors' needs, strategies, and challenges within the ecosystem.

Conclusion

This study examined the essential entrepreneurial ecosystem required to support street traders in Tanzania. The findings show that most street vendors operate with minimal capital, limiting their ability to achieve economies of scale and sustain business growth. In addition, many conduct their activities in unauthorised locations that are excluded from formal urban planning and decision-making processes, increasing their vulnerability. To survive under these conditions, street vendors adopt various resilience strategies, including reliance on informal sources of finance, informal learning, obtaining vending identity cards, operating on weekends and at night, forming informal associations, and lobbying municipal officials.

The findings further imply that street vendors aspire to grow and transition into larger, more formal businesses; however, existing entrepreneurial ecosystems are largely unsupportive and effectively exclude informal traders. Although the government has introduced initiatives to support small and informal businesses, these efforts remain insufficient relative to vendors' needs. While the coping strategies employed by vendors help them survive in the short term, they are neither sustainable nor competitive enough to ensure long-term growth. This study, therefore, concludes that local authorities should prioritise the establishment of a more inclusive and supportive entrepreneurial ecosystem for street vendors—one that facilitates access to finance, secure business locations, skills development, and institutional recognition—so that street vending can contribute more effectively to inclusive urban development and economic growth.

Building a supportive entrepreneurial ecosystem for street vendors is crucial for poverty reduction and economic growth, given that millions of Tanzanians—especially women and low-income groups—depend on street vending for their livelihoods. Supporting street vendors should not be viewed as a cost to the government, but rather as a long-term investment in inclusive development and future economic resilience. Importantly, such an entrepreneurial ecosystem must be carefully contextualised to the realities of the street vending environment, reflecting vendors' operating conditions, capabilities, and constraints to be effective and sustainable.

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