REGULATION OF INFORMAL TRADE IN JOHANNESBURG IN DISARRAY, BUT ALTERNATIVE VISION IS POSSIBLE

Today the Socio-Economic Rights Institute of South Africa (SERI) releases a new research report. The report, entitled ‘The End of the Street? Informal Traders’ Experiences of Rights and Regulations in Inner City Johannesburg, documents the realities of informal trade, and the ways in which it is regulated, in Johannesburg’s inner city.

The report responds to the now infamous Operation Clean Sweep, and what has unfolded in its aftermath. It draws conclusions and makes recommendations based on the experiences and lived realities of traders. These realities expose major gaps in informal trade policy in the city and in the way in which informality has been approached more broadly by the City.

The report presents two sets of findings. The first concerns the realities of informal trade regulation. The management of informal trade in the inner city is in disarray, and regulatory practices are restrictive, inconsistent and enforcement orientated rather than developmental or enabling. The management of informal trade by regulatory authorities is characterised by sporadic rent collection and site inspections which happen at the expense of meaningful consultation and the delivery of infrastructure and services.

The second set of findings presents some of the lived realities of traders making a living in the inner city. These experiences are crucial to understanding the mismatches between informal trading policy and the City’s attitude towards informal trade, as well as the realities of trade on the ground.

The report’s primary conclusions are that there is considerable scope for the City to improve the management of informal trade, and that any restriction or prohibition on trade is likely to negatively affect the way that traders make a living as it undermines the benefits that traders derive from permanence.

However the report concludes that a more inclusive approach is possible. Eradicating informality is not the way to regenerate the inner city. An authentically world class African city accommodates equal access to the economy, and respects the rights of informal traders.

According to Stuart Wilson, executive director of SERI, “‘The End of the Street’ is an important step forward in our understanding of informal trade. It draws attention to the City of Johannesburg’s regulatory failures in facilitating and managing informal trade in the inner city. Its recommendations, if adopted, will make a real contribution to creating a better run, more inclusive and more vibrant Johannesburg. We hope that City managers take on board the contents of the report.”

- The report, as well as a two page summary of its findings, are available for download [here](#).

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