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# An Investigation of Transnational Migration, Informality, And Livelihood Struggle Among African Migrant Farmers and Vendors in Mbombela

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## Abstract

African migrant livelihoods in Mbombela are increasingly shaped by the intersection of agriculture, informal trade, and precarious urban economies. The majority of these African migrants operate across blurred livelihood categories where a considerable number are small-scale farmers producing fresh fruits and vegetables, while others are street vendors selling agricultural produce in urban markets. This study examines how migration and population mobility shape these hybrid livelihood strategies, while foregrounding the structural challenges migrant farmers and vendors encounter in the informal economy. The paper highlights key constraints, including a lack of legal documentation, insecure immigration status, and limited access to trading permits, which often determine who can legally occupy and sustain trading spaces. Migrant traders frequently operate within a legal grey zone, where the absence of permits, passports, or business registration restricts their ability to formalise enterprises and access institutional support. These challenges are compounded by bureaucratic barriers, police harassment, and exclusion from designated trading sites, forcing many into precarious and sometimes illegal forms of survival. Beyond legal precarity, African migrant farmers and vendors also face economic competition and social exclusion, which reduces customer bases and heightens insecurity in public trading spaces. Their marginal position within both rural and urban economies limits access to credit, land, and agricultural inputs, while also excluding them from government support programmes that typically target formal or citizen-based farming sectors. By focusing on migrant farmers who are simultaneously producers and street vendors, this study challenges rigid distinctions between agriculture and informality. It argues that migrant livelihoods in Nelspruit are best understood as fluid, multi-sited survival strategies shaped by mobility, legal status, and everyday struggles for recognition and inclusion. The paper calls for more inclusive urban and agricultural policies that recognise migrant farmers and vendors as central actors in local economies rather than peripheral or illegal participants.

**Keywords:** African Migrants, Farmers, Migration, Precarious Lives, Vendors