

# Resilience Through Indigenous Knowledge: Self-Determination Among Migrant Women Entrepreneurs in Cape Town

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# The Reach Alliance

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*Note:* Authors are listed alphabetically with the faculty mentors listed last.

*Cover photo:* Portrait of a smiling woman selling onions in a market (iStock image by Renate Wefers)



# Acknowledgements

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This research would not have been possible without the generosity, availability, and openness of the *Tusimame Wanawake* women. Their willingness to share personal stories, strategies, and lived expertise has been central to centring Indigenous knowledge and migrant women’s voices in our analysis. We recognize and honour the labour of care, testimony, and trust that women contributed throughout data collection.

Beyond direct fieldwork access, our collaboration with Africa Unite strengthens the project in three practical ways: (1) ethical community entry and facilitation through established peer-support networks; (2) co-design of dissemination and impact pathways so findings feed back to women and local advocates; and (3) strengthened advocacy channels via Africa Unite’s movement-building and policy engagement platforms. Together, we commit to producing research that is accountable to participating women and useful for community-led solutions.

We also acknowledge Landisiwe Binza for her contributions to the conceptualization and design of the study and data support with data transcription.



| Contribution                     | Contributor (Initials) |
|----------------------------------|------------------------|
| Conception or design of the work | KM, MM, ZD, IMSS       |
| Data collection                  | KM, MM, ZD             |
| Data transcription               | KM, MM, ZD             |
| Data analysis and interpretation | KM, MM, ZD             |
| Drafting of case study report    | KM, MM, ZD, NN, IMSS   |
| Visual documentation             | KM, MM, ZD             |

Woman showing the basket of her purchase at the market (iStock image by JordiRamisa)

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**Figure 1.** A self-employed street vendor working at her street stall selling fresh produce

## Executive Summary

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Across Southern Africa in recent years, the feminization of migration has increased as more women seek safety and opportunities for a better life. Migrant women in this region, especially those with mixed or irregular status, face numerous challenges including restricted access to formal labour markets and increased vulnerability due to legal barriers and persistent xenophobia. Despite these challenges, migrant women have found informal entrepreneurship as a way to subsist and thrive. In this context, Indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) play an essential though often overlooked role in how women create their networks and livelihoods and sustain their communities in pursuit of a dignified life for all.

We explore how migrant women use IKS to launch businesses in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, in response to the social and economic exclusion they experience

daily. In collaboration with Africa Unite's movement-building arm named *Tusimame Wanawake*, our study considers the lives, experiences, and knowledge of these women through ethnography and conversational storytelling. Five women entrepreneurs working in agricultural, food trading, textiles, and the arts sectors shared stories about how their businesses are based on Indigenous skills, practices, and values passed down through generations. We explore how collective and social networks provided them with essential resources, spaces, and support for their work.

While their IKS-based businesses allow them to generate income, autonomy, and cultural continuity, migrant women still face insecure environments, regulatory abuses, supply chain disruptions, hostility regarding their immigration status, and very limited access to permits and services. However, despite these barriers, they have demonstrated great resilience and collective awareness, which has helped them not only to overcome obstacles but also to create a cultural and intergenerational network that strengthens knowledge, traditions, and community cohesion. We highlight the need to address and develop migration policies to recognize this migrant population and strengthen partnerships with community-based organizations to support inclusive and dignified livelihoods.

# Background: Harnessing Women's Migration for Inclusive Development

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The Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) is a regional economic and inter-governmental organization comprising 16 countries in Southern Africa. Its migrant population — estimated to be 8 million people — makes up approximately 3 per cent of its total population. In South Africa, the SADC region contributes to 83.7 per cent of the total migration population and hosts 58.4 per cent of all SADC migrants.<sup>1</sup> Over the past 15 years South Africa has experienced the highest number of women migrating into the country, with 1.8 million women crossing its borders. Consequently, migration that supports human mobility for inclusive growth and development has increasingly become a challenge within the SADC and globally, to address heightened vulnerability to human rights violations, discrimination, criminal activities, exploitation and broader social unrest.

All SADC countries host and send migrants to other countries.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, the region has given attention to policies that build migration's capabilities for inclusive growth and development in the region as prescribed by the migration-focused SDG. Specifically, UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 10 — "Reduced Inequalities" — aims to reduce inequality both within and among countries. To address the challenges of unchecked migration, the United Nations developed the Global Compact

for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees. Furthermore, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) and International Organization for Migration (IOM) developed the SDG indicator 10.7.2 which ensures the facilitation of orderly, safe, regular, and responsible migration and mobility of people.

Achieving this SDG requires the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies that build the potential of migration for inclusive growth and development. The region faces a number of migration challenges, including migration undertaken with inadequate preparation, limited access to accurate information, insufficient resources, and weak legal or institutional support. Because migration is often viewed negatively as a threat to host countries' sovereignty as a result of an uncontrolled influx of migrants, there are often failures to translate migration policies and instruments into practice. Consequently, human mobility, refugee management, and the ability to harness migration's benefits have been a focal point of SADC's governance goals.

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Over the past 15 years South Africa has experienced the highest number of women migrating into the country, with 1.8 million women crossing its borders.

SADC has identified five key areas for development which include gender and migration, and migration and informal entrepreneurship, in response to the increase of mixed and irregular migrant women and youth and the decrease in formal contractually

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1 "Migration Profile Report for South Africa: A Country Profile 2023," Statistics South Africa Report no. 03-09-17, 2024 [🔗](#); "SADC Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) 2020–2030."

2 Jonathan Crush, Belinda Dodson, Vincent Williams, and Daniel Tevera, "Harnessing Migration for Inclusive Growth and Development in Southern Africa Special Report," Southern African Migration Programme (SAMP) (2017). [🔗](#)

employed migration, particularly in South African mines. “Irregular” migrants are asylum seekers, refugees, and economic migrants who enter South Africa through irregular or unauthorized channels, often without sufficient legal documentation and support. The decline in formal contract migration, the public’s perception of migration as a threat, and poor migration policy implementation has engendered migrants’ economic exclusion from the formal economy. Mixed and irregular migrant women are the most vulnerable to disadvantage and economic exploitation within South Africa’s formal economy. However, they have found a way to navigate these vulnerabilities by engaging in entrepreneurship within the informal economy, establishing business such as food street vending and hair and beauty salons.

Although historically overlooked in scholarship, the informal economy has been increasingly recognized as a key contributor to national and local economies. The SADC gender and migration strategy recommendations for harnessing migration for inclusive growth and development include enhancing female and youth migrant entrepreneurship, including informal entrepreneurship. Similarly, Indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) have been recognized as a critical resource for achieving sustainability. In 2003 the SADC Secretariat instituted biennial workshops that serve as a platform for policy exchange and expert discussions on IKS. These workshops convened multiple stakeholders from SADC member states, academia, independent researchers, research organizations, international agencies, Indigenous knowledge holders, small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), private sector entities, and media on the important role of IKS as a critical resource for achieving sustainability.<sup>3</sup>

The development of a regional strategy and action plan on IKS entails its formal integration into industrialization and development agendas as valuable across SADC member states. Migrant women’s entrepreneurship and IKS contribute to local economies, create local employment, and

foster community cohesion while contributing to dynamic informal urban economies. However, harnessing its potential requires access to accurate information for both gendered migration data and entrepreneurship, which has been a challenge for policymakers. This challenge is further exacerbated by the lack of studies focusing on gender and migration entrepreneurship in South Africa.

We explored the journeys of five migrant entrepreneurs who had relocated from Zimbabwe, Congo, Rwanda, and Tanzania as a hard-to-reach population, given the systemic and structural barriers to inclusion they experience. The study explored the use of IKS among migrant women entrepreneurs operating within Cape Town’s informal sector.

We found that IKS informed both their entrepreneurial activities and their migration journeys. These insights, although not confirmed by the migrant entrepreneurs due to study limitations we highlight, contribute to knowledge that empowers policies intended to support safe and dignified cross-border mobility as a human right, particularly for vulnerable women and children.

## Migration’s Feminization in the SADC Region

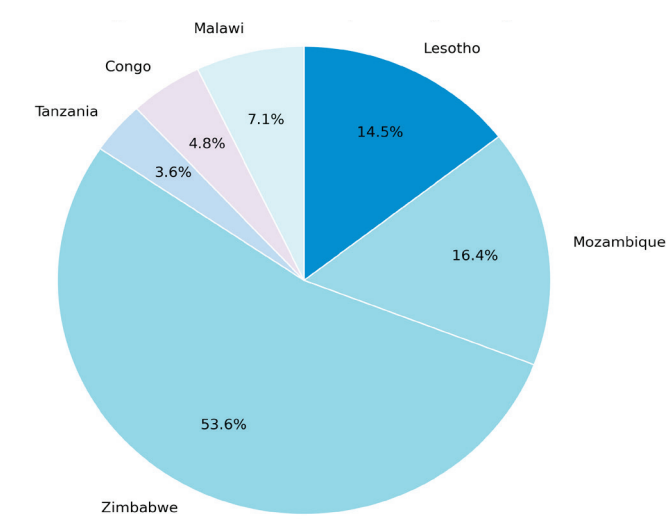
The increase in women migrants globally over the past two decades has resulted in a significant shift in the gender dynamics of the migrant populations in host countries, a phenomenon referred to as the *feminization of migration* to describe the growing number of women migrating globally. In Africa alone, women constitute 49 per cent of the migrant population, with South Africa experiencing the highest number of women migrating into the country — the number quadrupled to 1.8 million over the past 15 years.<sup>4</sup> South Africa contributes to 83.7 per cent of the total migrant population in the SADC region. A significant percentage of the women migrants were mixed and irregular migrants.<sup>5</sup>

3 “Sixth SADC Regional Policy Workshop on Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) to Be Held in Malawi from 29th November to 1st December 2023,” SADC press release, 28 November 2023. [↗](#)

4 Alex Farley, “South African Migration Policy: A Gendered Analysis,” Policy Insights no. 70 (June 2019). [↗](#)

5 “Migration Dynamics of Women, Children and the Elderly in South Africa,” Statistics South Africa, 2020.

According to the *South African Migration Policy* report conducted by the Southern African Institute of International Affairs, the number of women migrants in South Africa nearly doubled between 1990 and 2013, increasing from 519,315 to 1,007,320.<sup>6</sup> In total, the number of migrants living within the African region but not in their country of origin increased to 19.5 million in 2020.<sup>7</sup>



**Figure 2.** Female migrants in South Africa by country of origin (2022)

Figure 2 illustrates the female migration into South Africa by country of origin. This rise in migration encompasses a diverse group of women, including refugees and asylum seekers fleeing persecution and political conflict, as well as economic migrants pursuing improved livelihood opportunities. Women migrants occupy heterogeneous legal statuses, which interact with gendered power relations and economic positioning to shape their lived experiences and vulnerabilities in the host country. While legal status plays a critical role in determining access to documentation, protection, and formal employment, it does not operate in isolation. Gender mediates exposure to specific forms of exploitation, such as gender-based violence, care and domestic labour precarity, and reproductive burdens, while economic positioning further constrains women’s agency by limiting their access to stable income,

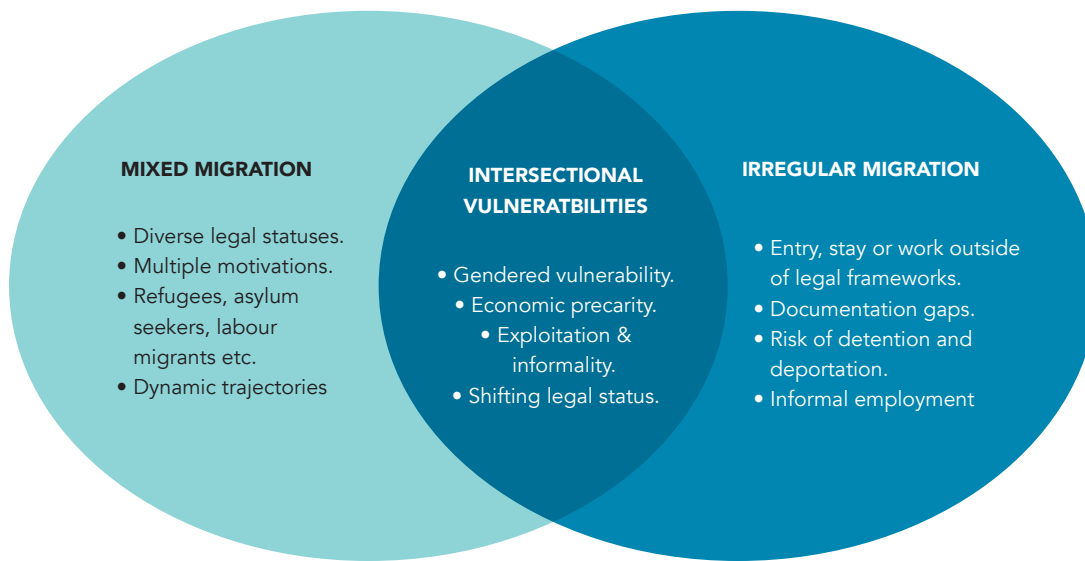
housing, and social networks. Collectively, these intersecting factors produce differentiated yet overlapping experiences of insecurity, exclusion, and resilience thus underscoring the complexity and nonlinearity of women’s migration motivations and journeys.

# Hardly Reached: Gendered Vulnerability

The women who partook in the study are hard to reach because of the triple disadvantage they experience. Their compounding intersectional experiences of vulnerabilities are illustrated in Figure 2: irregular migration status, gender inequality, and skills that are not recognized by the formal economy. Their precarious or varying legal statuses make them part of the broader category of mixed and irregular migrants. The South African Migration Policy gender analysis report conducted by the Southern African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA) found a significant percentage of women migrants were mixed and irregular migrants.

Because no legal visa pathways are available to them, they are largely unable to engage in the formal economy. Most find employment in informal, domestic, and agricultural sectors. Because South Africa’s current migration system does not consider gendered aspects of migration it fails to consider gender-specific migration drivers, trends, and vulnerabilities. A lack of gender-disaggregated data makes it difficult to identify their challenges and determine the specificities of migrant women’s engagement with the labour market. This is further exacerbated by migrant women’s reluctance to engage with government officials or researchers because they fear harassment, detention, or even deportation.

6 Farley, “South African Migration Policy.”  
7 “Fundamentals of Migration,” International Organisation for Migration.



**Figure 3.** Venn diagram showcasing intersectional vulnerabilities

## About Our Research

Facing socioeconomic challenges, migrant women in Cape Town have adopted an entrepreneurial spirit to navigate their exclusion and exploitation from formal labour markets. We set out to explore their use of Indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) as a resource within Cape Town's informal economy. Having identified a gap in knowledge that focuses specifically on gender and migrant entrepreneurship in South Africa, we wanted to approach the fieldwork from a research process that considers the entrepreneurs' experiences.

We set out to highlight the importance of Indigenous contexts and advocate for research that honours and respects Indigenous communities and their systems of knowledge. Additionally, we aimed to contribute to the postcolonial conversations that emphasize the reclamation of Indigenous identities and the use of IKS as a resource.

Historically, Western knowledge denigrated Indigenous people as inferior and irrational. Their IKS was judged as superstition and ethnoscience. However, Indigenous entrepreneurs within the diaspora rely on IKS for solutions that are

environmentally friendly and that can be produced at low cost such as the use of black soap to treat Nigerian skin ailments, for example. Migrant women are informed by IKS across diverse sectors such as Indigenous fresh produce and beverages, textiles, arts and crafts, Indigenous agriculture, and cosmetics and personal care products. We highlight the usage of IKS as a resource for social impact for migrant women and Indigenous/traditional people and entrepreneurs.

### Indigenous-led Research Design

Research in Indigenous settings that does not consider Indigenous culture has received critiques. For instance, there has been research on informal cross-border trade (ICBT) goods which include *chitenges* and *capulanas*. Researchers describe these as clothes worn by Southern and Eastern African women with no mention of the fact they are traditional or Indigenous fabrics. Thus, neither the culture nor its impact on goods traded were explored. Our approach, by contrast, aimed to understand from the participants what influences their experiences. We used a qualitative ethnographic narrative research design that is aligned with Indigenous oral traditions of storytelling. This method created a research environment that is culturally resonant and affirming, allowing participants to speak freely and on their own terms.

This approach reflects what we considered to be the most familiar, accessible, and non-extractive way

of connecting with participants.<sup>8</sup> Because migrant women are vulnerable to experiences of xenophobia, exploitation, and gender-based violence,<sup>9</sup> creating a safe space for them to share their lived experiences from their perspectives and world views required relational trust and respect between us. To engender this trust, we established a partnership with Africa Unite (AU), a human rights and youth-empowerment organization that works with refugees and migrants. They are trusted advocates for refugee and migrant social justice.

AU assisted us in selecting the migrant women through purposive sampling. The selection criteria used for participation were migrant women from SADC countries who were engaged in entrepreneurship that uses IKS and who were operating within Cape Town's informal economy. We selected five migrant entrepreneurs from Zimbabwe, Congo, Rwanda, and Tanzania. They represented retail, creative industries, food and vegetable stalls, arts and crafts, and care and beauty clusters, respectively. We spent five days immersed with each migrant woman entrepreneur at their place of business to observe and learn about their culture and its impact on their entrepreneurial activities. Spending time in the business environment gave us the opportunity to observe the social and spatial dynamics of operating within informal spaces from the women's perspectives. The narrative method ensured that they could share their own migration stories and pathways to entrepreneurship. Additionally, the study was guided by the self-determination theory (SDT) framework.

## Indigenous Methodological Constraints

For our research, we sought to align its methodology with the principles and values of Indigenous-based and ethical research, particularly those emphasizing reciprocity, accountability, and the co-production of knowledge. However, we acknowledge that we were unable to fully realize these commitments in practice. Specifically, we were not able to return to

our research respondents in Cape Town to conduct an in-person validation workshop, which would have allowed participants to review, reflect on, and meaningfully engage with the findings and overall paper derived from their contributions.

This limitation arose from a combination of project timeline delays, changes in UCT team staffing, and financial constraints, which collectively restricted the research team's capacity to facilitate follow-up, in-person engagements with respondents within the remaining project period. Delays in the implementation timeline, together with transitions in the UCT project team during the study, contributed to overlaps into the following project year, which subsequently affected timely access to the remaining project budget required to support participant validation activities. Despite multiple meetings aimed at identifying a viable path forward, the limited remaining budget and compressed timelines ultimately made it unfeasible to conduct a full in-person validation workshop aligned with the principles of Indigenous knowledge systems (IKS)-based research. As a result, this report has been published without the benefit of a formal validation process conducted directly with participants. We recognize that this constitutes a departure from best practices in Indigenous and participatory research approaches, where iterative feedback and respondent validation are central.

Despite these constraints, we remain committed to principles of transparency and to minimizing extractive research practices. We shared the final draft of the survey instrument and key outputs with respondents in both French and Swahili (languages used during the consent process prior to fieldwork). These translations were disseminated via a WhatsApp group through which we have maintained ongoing communication with the participants, this being the only accessible and consistent platform for engagement available to both parties.

All challenges related to the inability to conduct a validation workshop were communicated to and are fully known by our collaborative partner, Africa

8 Catherine E. Burnette, Sara Sanders, Howard K. Butcher, and Jacki T. Rand, "A Toolkit for Ethical and Culturally Sensitive Research: An Application with Indigenous Communities," *Ethics and Social Welfare* 8, no. 4 (2014): 364–82.

9 Jonathan Crush, Abel Chikand, and Caroline Skinner, eds., *Mean Streets: Migration, Xenophobia and Informality in South Africa* (Southern African Migration Programme (SAMP), the African Centre for Cities (ACC), and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), 2015).

Unite. This partner organization has consistently upheld and advocated for strong ethical standards and Indigenous-based research principles and has been engaged in ongoing dialogue with the team regarding these constraints and their implications.

In addition, we adopted a precautionary approach to participant representation and confidentiality. While all respondents had initially provided consent for their names to be used, the team elected to anonymize all participants in the final case study given the inability to undertake a full respondent validation process regarding how individual narratives were represented. The five women who participated in this study are therefore referred to using anonymized identifiers, such as “Respondent 1,” “Respondent 2,” and so forth.

We present this work with a clear acknowledgment of the study’s limitations, while also recognizing the mitigating steps undertaken to support ethical engagement and minimize extractive research practices under the circumstances. The research team remains committed to strengthening participatory, accountable, and Indigenous-informed research approaches in future engagements.

## Self Determination in Informal Indigenous Entrepreneurship

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is a psychological and social theory concerned with the processes through which individuals initiate, sustain, and regulate behaviour.<sup>10</sup> At its core, the theory distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations and argues that human action is driven by the pursuit of three fundamental psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Rather than viewing individuals as passive responders to structural conditions, SDT sees people as active agents who continuously negotiate constraints and opportunities in ways that preserve their dignity, agency, and self-worth.

In the context of informal entrepreneurship, SDT is a valuable analytical framework because it enables us to examine how agency operates under conditions

of exclusion. For the migrant women informal entrepreneurship is rarely the result of free choice alone — it emerges through a complex interaction between internal motivations and external structural pressures. Throughout the investigation into the migrant women’s lived experiences, we were guided by SDT to explore their intrinsic and extrinsic motivations.

Applying SDT to the study foregrounds the intersection between structure and agency. It highlights how entrepreneurial behaviour is shaped not only by economic necessity but also by the pursuit of autonomy, competence, and social belonging in contexts of displacement and exclusion. Using IKS reinforces this dynamic, allowing migrant women to draw on culturally embedded competencies that are accessible, transferable, and resistant to formal gatekeeping mechanisms. Through this lens, we understand informal entrepreneurship as a form of self-determined economic participation where migrant women actively navigate exclusion from the formal market while constructing livelihoods that embed their culture, consequently, affirming their skills and Indigenous identities.

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10 Marylène Gagné and Edward L. Deci, “Self Determination Theory and Work Motivation,” *Journal of Organisational Behaviour* 26 (2005): 331–62.



**Figure 4.** Woman in the camp for displaced persons (iStock image by Joel Carillet)

# Migration Journeys

It was very traumatic. It was very, very traumatic.

—Respondent 1

In South Africa's current socio-political climate, migrant women live under a cloud of suspicion, misinformation, and hostility. To many in South Africa, distinctions between people who are "undocumented," "asylum seekers," "refugees," and "economic migrants" are blurred or collapsed into a single negative stereotype. But for the women in our study, these categories were not labels they adopted lightly — they were often the result of traumatic, unpredictable, and winding journeys.

We heard how migrants left their countries of origin not because of a single moment of crisis, but gradually as insecurity, forced recruitment in unethical labour practices, or the collapse of basic services made normal life untenable. Contrary to popular imagery of direct flights or border crossings, most women experienced nonlinear, dangerous, and traumatic migration paths. The following examples

illustrate the complex and nonlinear reality of migration, thus challenging the common narrative that migration is a straightforward and opportunity-driven process.

## Conflict-Induced Migration and the Violence of Political Upheaval

A proportion of the women we interviewed traced their departure from home countries to war, conflict, or acute insecurity. For two migrant women from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), civil unrest and armed conflict forced them to flee. The protracted conflict in the DRC forced countless civilians to flee under conditions of extreme violence and uncertainty. As rebel groups and military forces advanced through towns and villages, ordinary people were compelled to abandon their homes with little to no warning, embarking on long journeys by foot through dense bush terrain. These journeys were marked by constant fear as displaced families moved silently through forests, hiding from armed personnel and avoiding main roads where encounters with rebels or soldiers could prove fatal.

Their survival depended on an intimate reliance on the natural environment for edible plants, trapped or scavenged small animals, and listening intently for the sound of water to sustain themselves along the way. The bush became both refuge and threat, offering concealment and sustenance while also exposing migrants to exhaustion, hunger, and violence.

Respondent 1 endured similar experiences. She left her home in DRC with only the clothing she was wearing and a bag carrying her Bible and a few family portraits. With a baby on her back, she walked miles across different countries seeking refuge. She saw the bodies of those who had perished along the route due to violence or succumbing to hunger, dehydration, and exhaustion. Reflecting on the trauma of leaving the DRC, she told us:

You know, leaving home wasn't like, you know, you prepared. You don't prepare anything. Because I remember I was preparing some supper, and all I had to leave was the clothes [on my back] and

the bag that was there, that was the only bag I had and myself and my baby... so that is all. There was no money. There was no documentation — nothing — no food, no money.

## Migration as Process: Nonlinearity, Re-displacement, and Uncertainty

Migration is not a single, direct, and one-time trajectory from a country of origin to a clearly defined destination. The narratives shared by the research respondents reveal a far more complex and nonlinear reality. For some of the women we interviewed, migration unfolded as a fragmented and prolonged journey marked by multiple stops across different countries, cities, refugee camps, and informal settlements. In some instances, respondents reported moving through territories without clear knowledge of which country or region they were in at a given moment, underscoring the extent to which movement was shaped by uncertainty, survival, and rapidly shifting conditions rather than deliberate or linear planning.

This form of nonlinear migration stands in stark contrast to conventional representations of migration as orderly, intentional, and temporally bounded. Rather than progressing steadily toward a predetermined final destination, respondents described shifting destinations where their initial intentions were repeatedly reconfigured in response to violence, border closures, lack of resources, changing security conditions, or emerging opportunities for safety. As a result, what may have once been imagined as a temporary or transitional route often extended into years of movement, waiting, and enforced immobility. For some, being “on the road” was not a brief phase but an extended period of displacement that stretched across several years, blurring distinctions between transit, settlement, and displacement. Respondent 1’s account of a nonlinear migration trajectory, for example, is marked by multiple displacements and prolonged uncertainty.

You know, I was forced to leave the place because I was attacked by the rebel groups. They invaded our small house,

and later on I had to find refuge at a police station. That’s where I spent, like, days, weeks, and so on. And there were people — a number of people — the crowd was growing and increasing. And because of the conditions, you know, the living condition was just not healthy at all. And during the time, I was still breastfeeding, and there was no water, no food, nothing. You don’t bathe — you know — all of that.

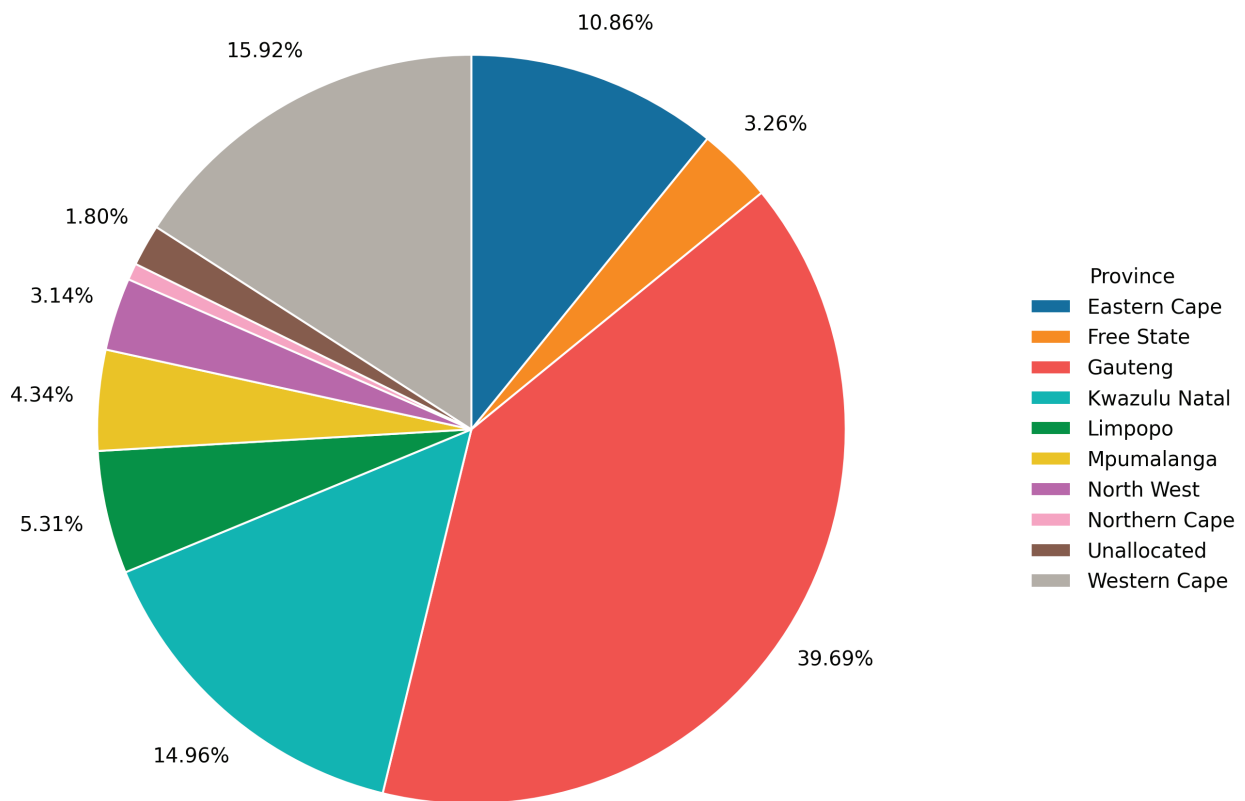
Her migration experience was an ongoing process shaped by repeated decision making under constraint. Other respondents also recounted experiences of re-displacement, where places they initially perceived as safe or final points of settlement became untenable due to renewed violence, political instability, or exclusionary conditions forcing them to flee once again.

## Postarrival Precarity: Navigating Life in South Africa

Xenophobic attitudes from South African nationals hindered migrant women’s efforts to be socially and economically integrated. These experiences heightened throughout the 2010s, culminating in 2018 when Respondent 2 felt compelled to return home because she feared violence and attacks from South African citizens.

The rise of xenophobia in the country can be attributed to many factors. Most notably, South Africa’s declining formal economy and high unemployment rates have intensified competition over limited resources and opportunities. As economic precarity grows, migrants are increasingly scapegoats for both new and pre-existing social ills, allowing political and social actors to redirect public frustration away from systemic governance failures. This environment fosters resentment and fuels exclusionary narratives that frame migrants as threats to citizens’ livelihoods and thereby normalize xenophobic attitudes and violence.

Respondent 1’s personal reflection mirrored the confrontational hostility found within xenophobic media reports of 2008. She described distressing



**Figure 5.** Incidents of xenophobic violence by province (2008 — 2021)

encounters, such as being restricted from entering public clinics with her child who required medical care at the time and witnessing foreign commuters (identified based on their perceived darker skin tones) being thrown off trains. Despite her feelings of fear and her vulnerable position as a migrant herself, Respondent 1 recalled assisting a Zimbabwean woman who was being harassed on the train. She confronted the perpetrators by firmly expressing her disapproval and boldly reminding them of their humanity: “You cannot do this to your own fellow human being.”

Responding to such violence with a spirit of *ubuntu* has proved effective for some women.<sup>11</sup> Respondent 3 did not experience the confrontational violence that Respondent 1 saw. She described building trust through courteous deeds as a crucial strategy to foster xenophilic sentiments (positive attitudes toward migrants). We witnessed an example of these acts during Respondent 3’s working

hours at a horticultural plot. She offered a group of young boys an errand to feed her rabbits some vegetables, for which they receive pocket money and supplementary meals such as sandwiches whenever Respondent 3 can offer them that opportunity. Similarly, Respondent 1 greets her neighbours in their language, attends funerals, and contributes toward the creation of a local village network of mothers who raise and protect all children in the neighbourhood regardless of nationality. As she put it, “We are all Africans at the end of the day.”

These migrant women are not passive witnesses and victims of marginalization. Their individual efforts toward community building, aided by their entrepreneurial activities, cultivated compassion to remind Africans of their shared humanity. Respondent 3 and Respondent 1 can inspire other migrant women entrepreneurs to overcome exclusions that stem from misguided xenophobic attitudes.

<sup>11</sup> *Ubuntu* refers to an African philosophy of “humanity to others.” “It comes from the Zulu proverb ‘*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*,’ meaning ‘a person is a person through other people’.” Vicky Marshall, “What’s in a Word? The Meaning of *Ubuntu*,” Dandelion Philosophy. [↗](#)



**Figure 6.** Women in Respondent 4’s community in Zimbabwe have used baobab fruit and powders for millennia to support their reproductive health and address iron deficiency

## Exclusion from the Formal Economy: Entrepreneurship As a Strategy

Self-determination Theory’s extrinsic motivation refers to behaviour shaped by external demands, constraints, or rewards. The migrant women’s extrinsic motivations surfaced in their responses to deeply embedded structural realities, including restrictive immigration regimes, lack of legal documentation, nonrecognition of foreign qualifications, language barriers, xenophobia, and exclusion from formal labour markets. These constraints significantly limit their access to formal employment, financial services, and social protection, effectively channelling migrant women into the informal economy. Informal entrepreneurship thus becomes a pragmatic response to systemic

marginalization, enabling income generation in the absence of viable formal alternatives.

While the informal economy offers a vital entry point for migrant women excluded from the formal market, it remains a space of contradiction — it offers both opportunity and constraint. For the women we interviewed, their engagement in informal trading is a necessity born of structural exclusion. They did not immediately enter informal entrepreneurship. Some initially worked in formal places of employment such as restaurants and domestic homes. However, this formal income was insufficient, especially for participants like Respondent 3 who was the sole parent, shouldering livelihood responsibilities for her four children after her husband’s death. Similarly, Respondent 4 had been formally employed in several jobs as a domestic worker and waitress, but because of low wages and the inability to sustain her livelihood, she began trading part time and gradually disengaged from formal employment to manage her enterprise full time.

Their entry into informal entrepreneurship was to enhance their respective livelihoods, generate income, and support their families. Furthermore, their varying legal statuses, lack of business registration, and lack of access to financial services effectively bar them from the formal economy, leaving the informal sector as the only viable means of survival given its low barriers of entry in relation to costs and skills required.

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Table 1. Entrepreneurship and IKS dimensions

| Name         | Nationality | Business                                                     |
|--------------|-------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| Respondent 1 | Congolese   | Indigenous textiles, arts and crafts                         |
| Respondent 2 | Tanzanian   | Indigenous organic products and crafts                       |
| Respondent 3 | Rwandan     | Indigenous agriculture                                       |
| Respondent 4 | Zimbabwean  | Indigenous organic fresh produce, beverages, and foods stall |
| Respondent 5 | Congolese   | Indigenous textiles, arts and crafts                         |

SDT recognizes such extrinsic motivations for autonomy. In highly constrained contexts, individuals may internalize extrinsic pressures, transforming them into self-directed strategies for survival and mobility. For migrant women, engaging in informal business can represent an act of reclaiming agency: choosing *how* to survive, *what* skills to mobilize, and *which* networks to rely on, even when the broader structure restricts choice to establish their enterprises. The migrant women embedded their Indigenous knowledge within entrepreneurial activities when making these choices.

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Entrepreneurship and IKS Embeddedness

By contrast, SDT’s *intrinsic motivation* refers to engagement in an activity for its inherent satisfaction, meaning, or personal value. For the migrant women, intrinsic motivations include a desire for autonomy over one’s livelihood, the fulfilment derived from applying IKS, and a sense of pride and identity attached to culturally rooted forms of production that embed Indigenous knowledge and their culture such as craftwork or herbal practices. These activities often draw on skills transmitted across generations, allowing women to assert competence and continuity with their cultural heritage despite precarious conditions. In this way, informal entrepreneurship becomes a site of self-expression, cultural preservation, and psychological resilience.

They engaged in entrepreneurship aligned with Indigenous knowledge and skills that are rooted within IKS. Table 1 illustrates the diversity of IKS-based knowledge and skills the migrant women draw on to offer a myriad of Indigenous products and services.

The women revealed in-depth knowledge of their products and services that were rooted in nature-based Indigenous knowledge. For instance, Respondent 4 shared extensive knowledge about her products such as baobab and okra (see Figure 6). She explained that both have been used in her community in Zimbabwe for millennia. She explained that baobab fruit and powders were used by women

to support their reproductive health and address iron deficiency. She illustrated how it is consumed and warned us not to bite into the seeds which have a painful effect on one's teeth. Similarly, she explained the uses of okra and the preparation of okra water which supports skin and hair health when applied as topical medicine. (Okra water can also be used as a hair conditioner and ingested to improve gut health.)

Similarly, Respondent 2 produced soaps, teas, and oils infused with seamoss, hibiscus, and black seed and castor seeds, respectively, that carry medicinal and health benefits. We also saw how the migrant women valued producing products that were environmentally friendly, nature based, and organic. Respondent 3's agricultural enterprise produces a variety of African leafy greens such as kale, covo, and rapeseed (canola). She also produces mainstream vegetables such as eggplants and carrots. During our fieldwork Respondent 4 was snacking on a packet of chips that her neighbouring vendor had given her. Reflecting on what she was consuming, she said "Because you know what you eat when you use your food from home. You see the food I'm eating here? Too much chemical ... I prefer food that grows organically."

## Indigenous Communalism

Indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) include people's insights, skills, and experiences, which have been useful in maintaining and improving their livelihoods. In our interviews, communalism emerged as an important dimension of IKS. With communalism as an inherent value, migrant women were motivated to create social value beyond the individual. Communalism surfaced not only as a pragmatic survival strategy in conditions of socioeconomic disadvantage and exclusion, but in their migration journey experiences as well. Social networks, relationships, and community ties are crucial for the migrant women.

## Diaspora-Supported Migration Journeys

While migrants constitute a minority within South Africa's broader population, the respondents described migration journeys that were facilitated by diaspora-supported networks upon arrival. These networks operated as informal but critical mechanisms of support, providing access to accommodation and pathways to social integration. Such support did not uniformly stem from pre-existing personal relationships but encompassed a spectrum ranging from extended family members to previously unknown individuals who nonetheless provided assistance in times of acute vulnerability.

For some respondents, diaspora networks were rooted in familial ties. Respondent 3, for instance, arrived in Cape Town after her husband who had already established himself in South Africa. His presence provided an initial point of social anchoring that helped her to navigate settlement processes with a degree of stability. For others, integration was facilitated through gendered and community-based diaspora formations. Respondent 4's primary support network emerged through the women affiliated with *Tusimame Wanawake*. Through this collective, she was able to access social belonging, mutual support, and a sense of community that eased her post-arrival transition.

While diaspora networks are often understood through the lens of shared nationality, country of origin, or already-established relationships, our findings suggest a more expansive and nuanced formation of belonging among migrant women. For example, Respondent 2 described arriving in South Africa with limited connections, yet she quickly became embedded within supportive social structures through *Tusimame Wanawake*. These networks were not exclusively constituted through national identity but shaped through shared experiences of migration, precarity, and womanhood.

In this sense, Respondent 2's experience can be understood as distinctly feminized. Migrant women actively cultivate relational spaces that transcend geopolitical boundaries, forming solidarities with others who may not share their linguistic, cultural, or national backgrounds. What emerges is a gendered

infrastructure of care that is rooted in mutual support, knowledge exchange, and collective resilience.

*Tusimame Wanawake* exemplifies this phenomenon as a community in which women convene not merely as co-nationals, but as social actors navigating similar structural constraints and opportunities.

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**Migrant women actively cultivate relational spaces that transcend geopolitical boundaries, forming solidarities with others who may not share their linguistic, cultural, or national backgrounds. What emerges is a gendered infrastructure of care that is rooted in mutual support, knowledge exchange, and collective resilience.**

This feminized diaspora challenges conventional interpretations that position diaspora as primarily ethnic or nationally bounded. Instead, it points toward an alternative social architecture grounded in affective ties, shared vulnerability, and collaborative survival strategies. Belonging, therefore, is produced not only through origin but through practice.

This pattern also resonates strongly with IKS and the culture across many African contexts, where collective forms of support — especially among women — have long functioned as mechanisms of social protection and continuity. Historically, women have organized around cooperative labour,

caregiving, informal economies, and community governance, generating durable networks that sustain households and communities alike. The solidarities we observed among migrant women reflect these enduring epistemologies, suggesting that such practices are not newly formed adaptations to migration but are instead extensions of deeply embedded cultural logics.

Notably, diaspora networks also extended beyond kinship and organizational affiliation to include acts of solidarity from strangers. Upon arrival in South Africa, many reconnected with distant relatives or friends who had preceded them. Other than the respondent whose husband preceded her, respondents arriving in South Africa were greeted by the diaspora network consisting of in-laws, friends, and extended family. Respondent 4's experience underscores this reality. She was stranded at Park Station (Johannesburg, CBD) and unable to reach the individual she had initially been in communication with upon arrival. The bus driver offered her food and shelter and subsequently to return her to Zimbabwe but she refused to return. She told us: "I tried to call my friend... her phone just died. He (the bus driver) took me to the garage ... gave me food and afterwards coffee. Then he said 'Okay, take a shower.' After that he said he will take me back to Zim. I say 'no' ... Now we go back to Park Station." She eventually connected with her receiving contact person the following day. This encounter highlights how diasporic support can be situational, contingent, and grounded in shared identity and collective empathy rather than prior familiarity.

Taken together, these narratives demonstrate that while diaspora-supported networks do not represent all migration experiences, they play a significant role for some migrants in mitigating the precarity of arrival. But access to such networks remains uneven thus reinforcing the differentiated nature of migrant integration and survival in South Africa. Social capital played a vital role not only in the migrant women's integration and settlement into the South African society but in their entrepreneurial trajectory.

**Table 2. Entry into business and social networks**

| Name         | Nationality | Business                                                     | Network                                              |
|--------------|-------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| Respondent 1 | Congolese   | Textiles, arts and crafts                                    | Received cut-offs from formal clothing manufacturers |
| Respondent 2 | Tanzanian   | Organic products and crafts                                  | Organization: <i>Tusimame Wanawake</i>               |
| Respondent 3 | Rwandan     | Agriculture                                                  | Malawian neighbour familiar with horticultural plot  |
| Respondent 4 | Zimbabwean  | Indigenous organic fresh produce, beverages, and foods stall | Student permitted her to share trading space         |
| Respondent 5 | Congolese   | Textiles, arts and crafts                                    | Mother-in-law                                        |

### Social Capital as an Entrepreneurship Resource

Some of the migrant women identified how their social networks offered them spaces to trade through informal agreements. For Respondent 4 it was a migrant student operating within the Cape Town Taxi Rank who permitted her to share his trading space with him. Initially she said that the space was small, but when he completed his studies and disengaged from informal trading, he let her take over his trading space. Respondent 1 established an enterprise that produces Indigenous mats crafted from off-cuts donated to her by traditional clothing manufacturers. Table 2 illustrates some insights that surfaced about social networks and businesses.

Social networks can provide access to diverse resources such as customers, labour, knowledge sharing, and business information assisting the migrant women to overcome institutional barriers to daily operations. For example, Respondent 4 rents an “illegal” storage place in a shop in the Cape Town taxi precinct. Respondent 3 shares agricultural knowledge and resources with her Malawian friend. The migrant women prioritized reciprocal value creation among their social networks. For instance,

Respondents 3, 4, and 5 described being motivated to create employment opportunities for vulnerable migrant communities, employing a Malawian youth to contribute to his academic tuition, a Malawian assistant, and two to five seasonable harvesters while providing employment opportunities to migrant women from the AU social network, respectively.

They described relationships they created and maintained as crucial in supporting the launch of their ventures. The migrant women became entrepreneurs not only by their individual skills but through the African humanistic compassion of those around them. Reflecting on Indigenous relational values, for example, Respondent 3 shared the Zulu proverb that teaches about *Ubuntu* or interdependence among Indigenous people: “I am because you are.”



**Figure 7.** Assorted nuts for sale in a market stall

## Intergenerational IKS Production Skills and Knowledge

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The Indigenous knowledge and skills used for entrepreneurial activities were acquired from the migrant women's families and communities, passed down intergenerationally through practical observation and learning from elders. Respondent 1 acquired the knowledge and skills to produce Indigenous mats from her mother and grandmother who also made them. She informed us that both her parents were creatives and so her creativity emerged from observing their artistic pursuits. Respondent 4's knowledge of the benefits of the fresh produce she sells was acquired from her family

and communities. This knowledge was embedded in daily lived experiences and transmitted by the elders to the young generations. She described the importance of Indigenous practices of passing down knowledge generationally. To these migrant women, entrepreneurship is not centred exclusively on money and enhancing livelihoods. By involving their children, they found that ordinary business transactions at the taxi rank become opportunities where the generational transfer of Indigenous knowledge and skills occurs, thus ensuring its preservation and use in a Western-centric world. Reflecting on this issue, Respondent 4 stated "I told them [her children]. They know they can put this order on their own. I mustn't put my culture aside because of the Western culture."

Skills such as sewing (Respondent 1) and farming (Respondent 3) that they acquired in childhood were beneficial in providing an entrepreneurial foundation. However, these women simultaneously experience complex challenges associated with life in a foreign city. They described how relationships they created and maintained were crucial in supporting the launch of their ventures. Migrant women became

entrepreneurs not only by their individual skills but also through the compassion of those around them.

Although collectivism was a theme that emerged across the migrant women's lived experiences as entrepreneurs, the certainty of goodwill is not always guaranteed, even among communities where reciprocal sharing is common. Respondent 4 shared how goodwill and the desire to create communal social value is an individual choice and everyone differs in their relations with others. Commenting on this issue she shared: "You know this life we're living in — this life is different. I even told my kids — I always tell them — be very careful. People are not who you think they are."

## Entrepreneurial Barriers, Migration, and Indigenous Knowledge

Considering that research focusing on gender and migration entrepreneurship, particularly IKS-based entrepreneurship in South Africa, is lacking, we wanted to explore the factors that hinder IKS-based migrant women's entrepreneurship.

### Navigating Informal Market Constraints

In urban centres like the City of Cape Town (CoCT), where the informal economy is both vibrant and tightly controlled, foreign migrant women traders face distinct disadvantages. They must first compete with South African nationals for limited trading spaces in markets and along busy streets. This competition can often become tense because many sell similar goods to the same consumer base. Such market saturation reduces profits and fuels resentment, occasionally even escalating into conflict or xenophobic hostility.

Beyond competition, the supply chain dynamics of informal trade present additional challenges for the women we spoke with. Unlike formal enterprises that can order stock through streamlined supply networks, the respondents rely on informal and irregular sourcing channels. Obtaining trading stock is often a complex, costly, and time-consuming process, involving cross-border travel, reliance on middlemen, and navigating unpredictable transport systems. Respondent 4 highlighted inherent risks and challenges with sourcing fresh produce from Zimbabwe. Because of the long travelling time, she sometimes receives produce that is spoiled and unsuitable for sale.



**Figure 8.** Grandmother sharing wisdom and stories with granddaughter (iStock image by poco\_bw)

### Operating within Regulatory Constraints

The City of Cape Town's regulatory environment further compounds the women's precarity. Despite operating in the informal economy, traders remain subject to rigorous municipal bylaws that govern street trading, zoning, and business permits. These policies disproportionately affect foreign nationals, who often lack the required legal documentation to obtain permits. Consequently, many operate without authorization and face frequent raids, confiscation of goods, or forced relocation by city officials. These disruptions not only destabilize their businesses but also reinforce their sense of insecurity and marginalization. As Respondent 4 described, "Mostly

they [police] come, they give a warning: Pack! I ask myself, if I pack, where am I going? How am I going to survive? I need food at home for the kids. I have bills to pay, the rentals to pay.”

Informal markets are deeply embedded in the urban contests of power and control. Migrant women entrepreneurs often find themselves caught between conflicting interests such as disputes between local trader associations, community leaders, and even the taxi industry, which frequently influences who can trade where. These tensions make their operating environment unpredictable and sometimes dangerous, forcing them to navigate a fragile balance between survival and compliance.

Thus, while the informal economy provides the women entrepreneurs with a means of economic participation and social belonging, it also reproduces multiple layers of exclusion. Their inability to access the formal economy keeps them in precarious and often exploitative conditions, while their informal livelihoods remain vulnerable to policy shifts, market pressures, and social hostility. Yet, within these constraints, the women continue to demonstrate remarkable resilience by adapting, innovating, and drawing upon Indigenous knowledge systems as a form of economic agency and self-determination in a city that simultaneously depends on but displaces their labour.

### Financial Precarity and Enterprise Sustainability

Despite being labelled informal, the women’s entrepreneurial activities can have a high-cost risk. For example, some of Respondent 3’s most costly monthly expenses include ZAR 3,500 (just under CAD 300) to rent her agricultural plot and ZAR 800 (approx. CAD 66) for cow dung. These figures are crucial in highlighting assumptions of informality which conflate its unregulated, flexible space with low-cost advantages. While these expenses can be mitigated by sharing financial resources with fellow farmers, such sharing requires strong mutual trust. In the absence of institutional support such as subsidies, these connections reflect the importance of relationality which is rooted within their Indigenous knowledge systems.

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Within these constraints, the women continue to demonstrate remarkable resilience by adapting, innovating, and drawing upon Indigenous knowledge systems as a form of economic agency and self-determination in a city that simultaneously depends on but displaces their labour.

High operational costs may also lead to challenges of authenticity and quality control, especially where informal transactions occur transnationally. In Respondent 5’s case, high costs and complex logistics form barriers that prevent her from creating items from genuine Congolese fabric. Without access to registered supply chains, she relies on Chinese wholesalers who can replicate the patterns and fabric found in Congo. This alternative highlights the compromises that migrant entrepreneurs might have to make to produce items that sustain their livelihoods while trading off their cultural authenticity for affordable production.

Entrepreneurs like Respondent 5 actively navigate structural and economic constraints, sourcing materials from nontraditional markets while maintaining their business operations. The ability to pivot — whether that’s driven by cost, availability, or logistics — illustrates strategic resilience. It underscores how migrant women actively exercise self-determination, making calculated decisions that preserve their economic agency despite limitations in accessibility or affordability. In this sense, adaptation becomes both a survival strategy and an expression of entrepreneurial creativity, ensuring that cultural

knowledge and craft continue to circulate, even if mediated through alternative supply chains.

Disruptions such as crop diseases and floods complicate these operational challenges, including climate change, which affects crop yields and decreases profits. Respondent 3 draws from her accumulated experience as a knowledgeable farmer. Moving seedlings away from flood-prone plots and investing in organic manure ensures sufficient yields are available to balance her costly operational expenditures and sales required to sustain her livelihood. These methods illustrate the embodied and experiential nature of IKS which is vital in navigating environmental risks where institutional agricultural developmental support and assistance are inaccessible for migrant women entrepreneurs.

The absence of formal security systems such as guards or electric fencing further underscores the vulnerabilities embedded within the informal sector. For example, this lack of security exposed Respondent 3 to crop theft but she addressed these incidents with forgiveness and community- and trust-building initiatives such as feeding the neighbouring children and tasking them with delivering feed to her chickens. Thus, social integration grounded in IKS value systems is reflected in problem-solving about security methods.

Emotional harassment represents a more hidden form of structural vulnerability that migrant women experience. They are vulnerable not only to xenophobic harassment but also to the structural racism that persists in South Africa as a consequence of the legacies of oppressive systems of colonialism and Apartheid. We were direct witnesses to this challenge during Respondent 4's brief interview. The manager, a white woman, verbally abused her in our presence. Respondent 4 remained composed and explained that her manager's behaviour was known at the market. Without a human resources representative, Respondent 4's calm demeanour emerges out of necessity to placate those who wield greater institutional, racial, and economic power.

Although most participants are multilingual and have attained adequate proficiencies in South African languages, English remains a barrier for Respondent 2 who has resided in Cape Town since

2010. She assessed her lack of proficiency as a limiting factor to her business growth and accessing opportunities in English-dominated settings. Her observation reveals that linguistic hierarchies still persist, even within informal business settings. These operational challenges, whether economic, climatic, or linguistic, are all interconnected and complex issues that migrant women entrepreneurs experience. Their use of IKS-based knowledge to persistently navigate these challenges shows this knowledge to be a crucial resource and an embodied way of life.

## Lessons Learned and Recommendations

### Bureaucratic Protection

Drawing from Respondent 4's experience of being threatened by city officials to vacate from the taxi rank, we suggest that migrant women should have more efficient access to operational permits that are required by the City of Cape Town. City officials can liaise with civil society organizations such as Africa Unite to assist in dissolving such bureaucratic barriers to enhance the operational security of their businesses.

Informality is not always synonymous with low operational costs as we saw. The lack of institutional support during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbates these financial risks and shocks. The temporary cessation of economic trade because of social distancing policies had adverse effects for Respondent 2, whose livelihood relied on in-person market trade. Without alternative or supportive forms of capital, migrant women within the informal sector faced significant financial hardship.

From a legislative basis, entrepreneurial policy should be reviewed to enhance inclusiveness and support for informal-sector operations. The informal sector should be recognized as a valuable sphere to stimulate economic and social development. Migrant women's businesses could flourish within an institutionally supported environment. Possible challenges such as exclusivity arising from how the municipality chooses to categorize favourable and undesirable informality should be noted.

## **Policy Intervention**

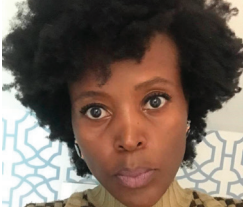
Migrant women represent one of the most economically productive yet structurally marginalized populations in host societies. Although they contribute substantially to care economies, agriculture, domestic work, food systems, and informal trade, migrant women remain disproportionately excluded from the protections, recognition, and opportunities afforded by formal economic participation. Policy interventions could set out a comprehensive framework to address formal economic inclusion, safeguarding those outside the formal economy, improvements to migration governance, and measures to strengthen social cohesion and belonging.

**Safeguarding migrant women outside the formal economy.** Migrant women working in informal or unregulated contexts must have access to rights and protection regardless of their documentation status. Key measures include decoupling protection from immigration status; bringing domestic workers fully within labour law and ratifying ILO Convention 1998; establishing gender-sensitive, multi-agency outreach units in informal work settings; creating firewall or whistle-blower protections for women who report exploitation; and providing free, multilingual legal aid for claims of wage theft, trafficking, harassment, and unsafe conditions.

**Improving migration governance.** Migration governance in its entirety must be reformed to be coherent, rights based, and gender responsive. This means auditing existing legislation and bilateral agreements for discriminatory provisions; introducing regularization pathways for long-term irregular migrants, with specific provisions for women in exploitative or dangerous situations; disaggregating migration data by sex, sector, and status to inform evidence-based policy; and establishing whole-of-government coordination across Labour, Home Affairs, Health, Social Development, and Women's ministries so that migrant women's inclusion is a shared governmental responsibility.

# Research Team

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**Zandile Dumas** is a social innovation strategist with nearly two decades of experience in the social impact sector, working across township SMME development, food security, and creative and cultural entrepreneurship projects. A Chevening Scholar, she holds a master's degree in social entrepreneurship from Goldsmiths, University of London's Institute for Creative and Cultural Entrepreneurship, and has just completed an MPhil in inclusive innovation at UCT Graduate School of Business. Her research explored the intersection of IKS, township entrepreneurship, context, identity, and postcolonial critique. Through her work at Creative Dogma social enterprise, she continues to champion IKS-based development and innovation.



**Michelle Maneya** is a humanities student (working on her bachelor of social sciences in environmental and geographical sciences and industrial sociology) and emerging researcher with a growing interest in migration studies within the SADC region. Through her work on this case study, Michelle is strengthening her analytical grounding in the humanities while contributing to broader discussions on inclusion, sustainability, and regional migration dynamics.



**Kamogelo Modisane** holds a bachelor's degree in political studies and governance, social development, and sociology. She is now pursuing her honours degree in migration and displacement at the African Centre for Migration and Society (ACMS) at the University of Witswatersrand (Wits). She works closely with Africa Unite, a human rights organization with a strong focus on migration justice, and the Southern African Migration Network (SAMIN), where she serves as a rapporteur. In addition to her research work, she is an emerging writer and experienced rapporteur, contributing to policy- and justice-oriented conversations on migration, rights, and regional mobility.



**Iza Maria Sánchez Siller** is a professor in the School of Humanities and Education at Tecnológico de Monterrey. She graduated in law from the Tecnológico de Monterrey and holds a PhD in social sciences, with a specialization in migration and public health, having completed research stays at Mississippi State University and University of Trento in Italy. Her current work on social development focuses on gender and violence from a sociological and legal perspective, especially with domestic migrants, through projects with Indigenous communities within the Monterrey Metropolitan Area. Sánchez Siller is co-founder of the program "Promoting Gender Equity in Adolescents and Young Women in rural areas" in Mitunguu, Kenya, a program that works with local high schools to reinforce the importance of higher education and decision making.



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