Protecting Informal Livelihoods? A Study of Street Vendors in Delhi

[1]Abhijeet Kumar, [2]Dr.G.Palanithurai, [3]Dr.G.George

[1]Research Scholar, [2]Professor (Rtd), [3]Independent Researcher

[1]Department of Political Science and Development Administration, Gandhigram Rural Institute, Gandhigram, Dindigul District, Tamil Nadu, India.
[2]Department of Political Science and Development Administration, Gandhigram Rural Institute, Gandhigram Dindigul District, Tamil Nadu, India.
[3]Gandhigram, Dindigul District, Tamil Nadu, India.

Abstract: Street vending is a crucial source of livelihood for millions of urban poor in India, but the social and economic disadvantages of hawkers have never been properly addressed, despite the adoption of the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014. We will discuss the socio-economic background, employment, and financial survival tactics, as well as the legal literacy, of 110 street vendors in Delhi. This leads to the fact that the data shows that vending is a kind of occupation of men mostly and provided by migrants and middle-aged individuals having low standards of education, and is often the only source of sustaining the family. Vendors have a very dangerous working situation and have to work long hours because they are not a part of the financial system and rely heavily on informal credit. Although the issue of its concern is the maintenance of livelihoods, the majority of vendors do not develop their rights, licensing processes, and at least two institutional forums, Town Vending Committees (TVC) and Grievance Redressal Committees (GRC). Harassment, seizure of property, and forced evictions are frequent occurrences, and this indicates the difference between the intent of the law and the practice in the field. The paper highlights the fact that in order to protect the livelihoods of vendors in the streets, it is not only necessary to acknowledge them legally but also to have good institutional frameworks that can support them socially, create social security, and dignity of work.

KeyWords: Street Vendor, Hawkers, Grievance Redressal, Social protection, Vending committees, Harassment.

INTRODUCTION

India Street vending is an urban informal sector that provides basic services and products to millions of urban middle and poor people at a low price. Simultaneously, it is developing the employment of the socially weaker and marginalized groups. In addition, street vending offers economic gains to both vendors and the consumers since it offers a productive means of earning income to the sellers as well as offering affordable products and commodities to the urban residents. Vending is not a novel activity, it is an old tradition of human society.
Vending is practiced in both rural and urban locations although it is more influential in serving urban population and urban economy, as it is more demanded and more populated. Although the urban economy has benefited more in terms of the contribution of the street vendors, these vendors are not given much consideration in terms of urban planning and policies. The urban authorities will prioritize more on the building of hospitals, parks, shopping complexes, and other formal infrastructure, and neglect street welfare, street safety, and even providing a legally approved space where the vendors can sell their products.

Street vendors in India have had numerous challenges that have affected their social security and source of livelihood. In Delhi, especially thousands of street vendors have gone through much and struggle in their daily lives. Street vendors are vulnerable to social stigma, marginalization, exclusion by the urban policies, harassment by local authorities, extortion, and lack of legitimacy due to the lack of social protection and security that threatens their lives. The conditions in which street vendors work are not constant, and they are working very long hours; thus, they require some basic facilities at the workplace, such as water, good lighting, and toilets, yet they have minimal access to those. Official recognition is not there, and, as such, street vendors are regularly evicted. It results in the loss of their day-to-day livelihood. Women vendors are also having a share of troubles due to gendered barriers. They are increased working hours, health hazards,

inability to move around, financial reliance, and reduced access to institutionalized support. Nevertheless, these challenges do not stop female street vendors, and they demonstrate tremendous resilience and the necessary invisible skills of negotiating, marketing, and networking (Sharma and Konwar, 2014).

The Government of India recognizes the importance of informal livelihoods and, therefore, introduced a law in 2014, the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act. The primary objective of the Street Vendors Act is to defend the rights of the street vendors, regulate the street vendors' vending business, and ensure the lives and livelihoods of the street vendors with dignity. The Street Vendors Act visualizes the legal recognition of the vendors. It commences with a systematic survey of the street vendors, identification of the street vendors, and once identified they receive vending certificates and formation of town vending committees (TVCs) to regulate the vending areas, and lastly, a grievance redressal committee is formed to provide legal aid. Nevertheless, the application is not uniform even though it is progressive in nature. The surveys conducted by the street vendors are usually incomplete and more vendors are omitted in the survey. Without a proper survey, the vending certificates are designated sporadically, and the lack of personnel in the street representatives of TVCs does not correspond to the standards. The TVC functionalities are not balanced without the representation of the street vendors.

The economic reforms that have occurred under neoliberalism that have encouraged the flexibility of the labor market, have increased the informal jobs, including street vending, household work, and building work. They are the main means of sustenance of the rural migrants who are seeking jobs in the urban centers (Breman, 2013). In 2018, over 90 percent of the Indian labor force was working in informal jobs. It echoes systemic reliance in the low-paying, low-security jobs (NCEUS, 2007). Good practices, which in theory are safeguard measures, often prove ineffective in reality because of administrative loopholes, incompetence, and ingrained social and institutional prejudice (WIEGO, 2019). Street vending is not only an economic activity, it is a constant fight to secure their rights, dignity and recognition of their rights to be legal. The lives of the street vendors are in incessant danger of harassment, eviction, and marginalization by the city's inclusion policies and systems. In this regard, the current research, Protecting Informal Livelihoods? The article, A Study of Street Vendors in Delhi is essential because it explores the socio-economic status, vulnerability and institutional issues of the street vendors. This paper will discuss the socio-economic circumstances, weaknesses, and institutional factors of street vendors. This examines the loopholes between the legislative will and the realities on the ground concerning the policy implementation. In this way, the study will contribute to the making of policies and interventions that will advance the economic security, social protection, and more inclusive urban policy.

Provisions of the Street Vendors Act, 2014: The Act contains significant provisions, and they include: -
Survey and Census of Vendors: According to the Act, urban local authorities, through the assistance of the Town Vending Committee, must ensure that all street vendors are surveyed at least every five years. It assists in controlling the real quantity of vendors on the street, maps out the vending locations of the vendors through GPS positions, and the nature of the vending business they are doing. In the absence of conducting street vendor surveys, they will simply be invisible in the planning process of the city, and thus will be harassed, evicted, or denied their rights.

Certificate of Vending: When they are found in the vendor survey, the local authority gives a Certificate of Vending (CoV). It is a legal vending license that shields the vendors against eviction, extortion, or penalties of the local authorities. The certificate assists in availing the government grant and formal credit loan of the banks, accessing the health insurance, and other social security programs of the government. The vendors will be at the mercy of exploitation and eviction without the vending certificates; this is why the CoV is believed to be a supporting structure of the protective framework of the Street Vendors Act.
Town Vending Committees (TVCs): The establishment of Town Vending Committees (TVCs) is an obligatory provision of the Street Vendors Act of the urban local bodies. This committee is charged with the role of surveying all the street vendors, identifying natural markets and regulating vending. The representation of the vending committee should at least 40% of the street vendor representation to be in the participatory decision-making process, and to guarantee 33% of the women street vendors' representation in the committee. This participative representation means that street vendors have the say about the life and livelihood, and it can be used to make them part of the urban governance system.

Vending Zones: With the Street Vendor Act, there will be more stability and conflict between the vendors and the local authorities would be minimized. The Act demands that local governments must provide vending

areas on the urban master plans of the street vendors. The vendors would now be able to carry on business without the fear of being evicted or harassed after the location of the vending areas had been identified. Spotted Vending areas can be similar to weekly markets or night bazaars, or places of traditional vending in the streets. New or existing vending areas, which are well planned, can help ease traffic and make the area safe, and preserve the significance of city markets.

Grievance Redressal Committees: The committees consist of three members who are formed under the guidance of a civil judge or judicial magistrate and two other members. This committee Act does not permit the removal or eviction of the street vendors without due process. In case of any type of harassment, unethical eviction, or refusal of vending certificates to any Street Vendors, the committee will offer solutions and guard against the rights of the vendors.

Integration into Urban Planning: Street vending is an inevitable input into the urban economy; earlier, the inclusion of street vending in the urban planning was not considered. However, with the Street Vendors Act, all this has been turned upside down because the street vending business needs to be considered in city master plans, as well as urban development projects. The local government also makes sure that street vending is not a criminal and temporary practice but a normal urban livelihood that adds to the local economy.

OBJECTIVES

- To know the rudimentary characteristics of the Act Street Vendor, 2014.
- To examine the socio-economic and working status of street vendors.
- To investigate the problems and issues that street vendors encounter.
- To determine the level of awareness and implementation of the Street Vendor Act, 2014.

METHODOLOGY

The present study is essentially an exploratory research in a bid to find out the ground reality. It was carried out in the National Capital Territory of Delhi, which has a high number of street vendors and is quite near to the power house of the country, including the parliament and the Ministry of making political and administrative decisions. In this research, the sample consisted of 110 randomly selected street vendors in the main vending centers, such as markets, roadsides, and transport centers in Delhi. Data collection was done using a structured questionnaire that contained both closed and open-ended questions.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Socio-economic status of street vendors: The socio-economic profile of street vendors demonstrates that vending is not a marginal activity, but it is a key livelihood approach which is influenced by age, gender, migration, education and household processes. Over 53 percent of the vendors (more than half) are 41 years and older, which means that vending is maintained largely by middle-aged and older people who in most cases do not have mobility options to formal jobs. The occupation is still very male dominated as 82 percent of the vendors are men and 18 percent only women depicting the hindrances formed by harassment in the open areas, insecurity, and the insufficient gender sensitive infrastructure that make women unwilling to engage in the occupation. Regarding social background 85 percent of vendors are Hindu with 12.2 percent Muslim and 2.8 percent Christian which are general sizes of urban migration. It is worth noting that 89 percent of the vendors are migrants with Uttar Pradesh and Bihar being the states where agrarian distress and unemployment in rural areas have forced people to the vending trade as a survival mechanism. This transition is usually enabled by kinship and community networks strengthening vending as a traditional and intergenerational vocation. Although the majority of the vendors still practice family-based occupations, 27 percent of the total are first-generation entrants, indicating the industry is growing as an occupation of necessity to people who have been locked out of the formal labor market.

The level of education is poor with 40 percent just possessing basic schooling, 27 percent being illiterate and only 6.7 percent having graduated, restricting the formal sources of employment and welfare programs. The highest number of household members causes economic strains; 43 percent of the families of the street vendors have five to six members, and that the household breadwinner is already working in the street vending business, and thus, the family entirely relies on street vending as the main source of livelihood. In addition, 67.5 percent of the respondents said that there is only one street vendor in the family. It shows that it is to a great extent, a personal venture and not a group project. The fact that the socio-economic status of street vendors in Delhi is not stable is demonstrated by the living and working conditions.

Most (63.4 percent) of the street vendors stay in rented houses, with 12 percent of the street vendors inhabiting urban slums, and it is as such that the street vendors have limited access to stable housing.
Coping strategies of Street vendors in the financial context. In this paper, the major lenders to Street vendors are members of their families, friends, and, in most instances, street vendors borrow funds at high interest rates from the private moneylenders. It demonstrates the fact that the street vendors are more reliant on this form of exploitative credit systems, and the statistics highlight the fact that the vendors do not have access to formal financial institutions. Absence of paperwork, poor financial literacy, and fear of having to adopt strict terms of repayment are arguments explaining why the vendors cannot avail themselves of formal credit. The financial strain gets the vendors caught in debt cycles, and this limits their ability to grow their business or even stabilize it.

Income of Street vendors: 22 percent of the street vendors did not provide their income information because of conflict of interest. The rest 78 percent of them reported their income. Of 78 percent, 40 percent of the vendors cited daily earnings of between 500 and 1000 rupees and 56 percent of the vendors made monthly earnings amounting between 20,000 and 30,000 rupees. Still, the income does not always fall. Nevertheless, the lack of means of earning money, as well as hours of work and bullying, imposes a lot of limitations on their lifestyle. Most of the street traders use [?]10,000 to [?]15,000 of the money monthly to pay bills like rent, food, working capital and other family expenditures. In addition to these costs, monthly street vendors are required to give frequent bribes to local authorities and police. This also makes them financially burdened.
Working conditions of street vendors: The social protection of street vendors is very poor as only 6 percent of street vendors have health insurance. The other 94 percent of the street sellers lack any health insurance. This information indicates a huge disparity in the welfare provision to informal workers, especially street vendors. The lack of health cover does not just render them vulnerable. But also taking them to the edge towards unexpected medical costs should something happen. According to the statistics, the street vendor will demand specific social security policies such as health insurance and accidental insurance by the government to live safely. Occupational stability of the street vending is demonstrated by the work experience whereby 53 percent of the street vendors have been in the Street vending activity over 20 years. This experience is long term which shows that vending is a long-term way of life and not a short-term way of life. The experience also assists the vendors to build resilience in the face of harassment, eviction, and competition. It assists in developing effective community networks that assist them to bargain the public space.

The information demonstrates that Working hours reflect the level of the intensity of vendors which they are engaging in business with. In 51 percent of the vendors work more than 11 hours in a day. It gives a pointer to the physical condition of the street vendors indirectly. Increased hours of work have an impact on their physical and psychological health. There is the sale of food-related products by 32 percent of the street vendors, a petty shop by 28 percent of the street vendors that sell cigarettes and pan masala, and a stationary form of vending is the activity of 69 percent of the street vendors. Of 110 street vendors, only 34 percent of the vendors were holding a valid vending license and the rest 66 percent of the vendors were operating without any formal license and authorization mostly out of the formal systems. Most vendors are also extremely sensitive to harassment, as most of the street vendors noted that they are being constantly harassed by local bodies and municipal officials during their working hours, due to lack of legal recognition. This means that local municipal authorities abused their power in a systemic manner, and it will be a challenge on the way to social protective policies. The eviction does not just leave the street vendors without a source of income but it also leaves them with no security in the long run regarding their livelihoods. The vendors were hit psychologically besides losing their money. This constant eviction resulted in stress, anxiety, and always having a fear of losing their place of work, which was apparent, particularly among those who were working without a license.

Street Vendors Legal Awareness: Legal awareness is a dimension of the extent to which the street vendors are aware of their rights and policies of social protection, as well as the extent to which this dimension influences their lives and livelihoods. Especially, the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014, is significant to protect the livelihoods of the vendors. The data in the field indicates that there is a tremendous lack of awareness among the street vendors. 63 percent of the street vendors are not aware of the Street Vendor Act 2014. The ignorance is a significant drawback to the possibility of vendors claiming their fundamental rights or demanding social protection in accordance with the Street Vendor Act 2014. 72 percent of the vendors are aware that one needs a vending license in order to be able to vendor, yet an extremely small proportion of the vendors have such as a vending license. It demonstrates an absence of knowledge-action disparity.

Mechanisms of the institution, as envisaged in the Act, are also not very visible to vendors. More than 79 percent of the respondents never heard the name of the Town Vending Committee (TVC), which is the very organization that represents and regulates them. On the same note, despite the fact that 81% indicated that they had been informed that a survey on the street vendors would take place, they claimed that it was not well communicated and was not often carried out by the authorities themselves. These types of lapses do not only lower the inclusiveness of the survey but also threaten to lock out vendors in future regulatory frameworks, licensing opportunities, or support mechanisms. There was even lower awareness of grievance redressal mechanisms. The unbelievable result was that 92% of the vendors said that they had never heard of the Grievance Redressal Committee (GRC). In Delhi, even though the GRC was officially formed in 2020 and the four municipal areas shared contact information of the chairman and two members, it is evident that the GRC is just on paper. The fact that it still has not gained awareness among the majority of vendors and even among the ones who have heard about it hardly ever approach it. As a result, even though they are regularly harassed and have their goods confiscated or are forcibly evicted by police and municipal authorities, the vendors have no good avenue of seeking justice.

DISCUSSION

The main conclusion, since it is based on the primary finding, is that the Street Vendors (Livelihood Security and Regulation of Street Trading) Act, 2014, is not implemented on the ground level. The Street Vendor Act was suggested to ensure that street hawking is a legitimate profession that can be used to support millions of urban poor. Street vendors are threatened by harassment, product dispossession, and eviction because of the low enforcement/implementation by the local government. These not only deprive them of their income, but also incessantly demean their dignity as vendors, but also put at risk the very base of their lives and security of livelihood.

Another thing that the research has found is the reality in the field, where most of the vendors are not aware of their rights and provisions concerning the Street Vendors Act. Most of the vendors are unaware of the procedures of street vending licensing, the role of Town Vending committees, and the redressal of grievances. Unless they know their representation in the decision-making process, they stand a high chance of being locked out of the decision-making process. Even with these mechanisms that include grievance redressal committees, these have only been on paper, further creating the distance between the policy and the practice. Thus, livelihood security as a notion should not be viewed as a saving income, but also as social security, stability, and dignity of work of street vendors. This takes more than the law; there must be Positive awareness campaigns, understandable and inclusive practices, and effective and easily accessible organizations that vendors can trust. These changes will make the difference between a law that is merely symbolic and does not bring social justice and livelihood security as it claims.

CONCLUSION

This paper underscores the fact that street vending in Delhi is an informal means of earning a living and is predominantly practiced by the middle-aged who are predominantly migrant workers in different states and lowly educated individuals. Though street vending is economically significant, it is not a sustainable business because of poor living conditions, hours of work, financial marginalization, and extensive police harassment of street vendors are in place. Street Vendors (Livelihood Protection and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014, though progressive in its purpose, has not been effective on the ground since most of the vendors are unaware of their rights and licensing procedures and institutional regulation structures, including town vending committees and grievance redressal committees. The fact that the law promises to defend livelihoods is compromised by ineffective enforcement and legal loopholes, and exposes the vendors to all sorts of income shocks, displacement, and exploitation. Thus, not only does the law guarantee the livelihood of street vendors, but also effective awareness, institutional support, and social protection should be implemented to provide sustainability, dignity, and economic security.

The government is in dire need to remedy these problems by offering and enhancing legal awareness in the form of training and community outreach, streamlining the process of vending licensing, and ensuring a proper formation and operation of town vending committees and grievance redress mechanisms. Assuring social security, e.g., health insurance and formal credit access. This ought to be extended, and safe and gender-sensitive sales zones developed. Consistent surveillance and participatory urban planning will also improve the economic security, dignity, and stability of the street vendors, as well as ensure the law does what it promises in protecting livelihoods.

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