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Issues and challenges faced by women street vendors - A case study of Salem district of Tamil Nadu

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Abstract

A street vendor is mostly defined as a person who offers goods for sale to the civic without having a stable built-up arrangement from where he sells goods. Street vendors may be stationary in the sense that they occupy a space on the pavements or other public/ private spaces or, they are mobile in the sense that they move from place to place by carrying their wares on push handcarts or in carriers on their heads. Therefore, the term 'street vendors' includes stationary as well as mobile vendors and it incorporates all other local/ regional specific terms used to describe them. The terms 'street vendor' and 'hawker' also have the same meaning and they have often been used interchangeably. There is a considerable increase in the number of street vendors in major Asian cities. In India, the National Policy for Urban Street Vendors/ Hawkers denotes that street vendors constitute approximately 2 per cent of the population of a metropolis. The total number of street vendors in the country is assessed at around 10 million. This figure is predicted to upswing even further.

The proportion of women in street vending is higher than that of men in most cities of the region. Street trade is almost rampant and a source of employment and income for many urban dwellers throughout the world. However, in most countries, it is unorganised and unaccounted in national economic statistics. This resulted in the lack of accurate estimates of the number of street vendors. Further, there had been minimal research in the area of street vending in the past. The negligence of street vending activities had been for long resulted in the lack of understanding of their contribution to the National Economy, their socio-economic and working conditions and above all the challenges faced by street vendors in the form of bribes, harassment, evictions, confiscation of merchandise and relocation, due to restrictive policies and regulations of governments all over the world.

The objective of the study is to analyse the major challenges of women's street vendors based on their mode of business and type of business. The study is based on both primary and secondary data.

Introduction

Street vendors play a very important role in India by generating employment and income opportunities. They sell different kinds of goods like clothes and hosiery, leather, moulded plastic goods and different kinds of goods necessary for the household, which are manufactured in small-scale or home-based industries where large numbers of workers are employed (Bhowmika, 2001) manufacturers could have hardly marketed their products. Apart from non-agricultural products, street vendors also sell fruits and vegetables. Street vendors provide the market for home-based manufacturing products as well as agricultural products. In this way, street vendors help to generate employment in home-based and small-scale industries and traditional sectors. Therefore, we can say that several manufacturers are linked with street vendors to sell their products. Urban youths prefer to purchase

clothes and accessories from them because products sold by street vendors are cheaper than those found in formal retail outlets.

Vendors are often regarded as a public annoyance. They are accused of depriving pedestrians of their space, causing traffic jams and having links with anti-social activities. For this general perception, India is of exception. But their number is growing steadily due to compelling socio-economic factors which are rising at an alarming rate in India. When a tourist comes to India for the first time, these street vendors are the people who sell the culture and traditions of India in the form of colourful dupattas, miniature elephants, street food etc. For a regular civilian of India, it is these street vendors that provide a platform for an easily accessible market for an inexpensive shopping experience. Thus, they are a very significant portion of the country's economy and the tourism industry. They cover 14 per cent of the total urban employment and 32 per cent of females' urban employment.

Status of Women Vendors

With regard to the status of most women workers, the quality of employment is poor without any skill or access. The rise of participation of women in the informal sector is more due to economic compulsion than any change in work ethos. The journey of women vendors began from poverty which forces them to work for the livelihood of themselves and their families. Factors which force women to street vending are lack of skills, poor education, the breakup of the family due to death or divorce, unemployed husband, domestic violence and pressure of in-laws to earn for their family and the like. The study undertaken by NASVI found that the income of women vendors is lower than that of men because of two reasons. First, most of the women belonged to families that were poorer than those of male street vendors, so they had less capital and support to invest in their businesses. Secondly, they could not spend as much time on their work as the men do because they had to take care of the home as well. Moreover, in cities like Calcutta and Patna, women vendors are harassed by male vendors. In cities like Ahmedabad, they are unionized; as a result, they can protect themselves to some extent.

Objectives of the Study

- The objective of the study is to analyse the major challenges of women's street vendors based on their mode of business and type of business.

Significance of the Study

Street Vending is not only a source of employment for the poor and downtrodden in towns and cities but also a means to provide affordable as well as convenient services to a majority of the urban population. The available data on street vendors indicate that their number is gradually increasing in cities and urban centres. Despite policies and acts, they face bureaucratic hurdles and difficulty in running their business and their social security is also a great concern. It is, therefore what is needed is a change of perception from common people to politicians and to planners so as to see vendors as entrepreneurs and vending as legitimate employment.

During the absence of large industries and shrinking employment opportunities in the agriculture sector of the district, the casual and agricultural labourers; the poor, especially rural women and the educated unemployed persons taking refuge in street vending are growing in the district. They view this occupation as an immediate source of earning as it requires less capital and low skill. The findings of the study would be of great help in addressing the issue of street vendors at a district level and a significant contribution to the field of street vending.

Related Studies

Sally Roever (2011) studied the working situation, limitations and menaces of street vendors in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The study entitled 'Livelihood Profile: Street Vendors' studied three criteria namely physical environment, policy environment and social environment. The study illustrated that, in the case of the physical environment, the street vendors' place of work lacked proper infrastructures such as running water, Lavatories and solid waste removal systems. In the case of the policy environment, most of the local government authorities forcibly removed them from the streets or confiscated their merchandise. And in the case of social protection, only a small percentage got access to state-sponsored social protection regimes.

Njaya (2015) argued that for some people street vending is necessitated by an entrepreneurial choice than a survival strategy. He found that some of the vendors are entrepreneurs who employ up to five paid employees. Therefore, individuals with an entrepreneurial eye enter into street vending based on a rational economic decision that may entail escaping regulation in the formal sector or bypassing the costs, time and effort of formal registration.

Selvakumar et.al (2014) in their study on street vendors in Sivakasi, Tamilnadu, identified eleven problems faced by them while doing their vending business. They face problems such as a lack of business opportunities, trouble from local politicians, difficulty in credit collection, unfavourable physical environment, lack of storage facility, issues of hygiene and sanitation, difficulty in registration, unstable earnings, and hostile attitude of local (bodies) authorities, 71 competition from fellow-vendors and a lack of support from the government. They also analyzed the perception of vendors on the prospects of their business from the results of the Chi-Square test, they found that all the null hypotheses framed for the study were accepted and concluded that the vendors unanimously agreed on the problems faced by them and also the prospects which they had with their business.

Harpreet Kaur and Sanpreet kaur (2017) in their research found that the major problem of street vendors in India is the lack of access to formal institutional credit. The inability of vendors to mobilize capital left them 'space–less' and thereby the likely socio-economic contribution they are largely restricted. The urban poor mostly finds their source of livelihood through street vending. They suggest that this voiceless segment deserves social and government support through NGOs and by policy and law, with the sincere intention of safeguarding and promoting the sector meant for the urban poor.

Material and Method

Collection of Data

A carefully constructed and finalized questionnaire was used for data collection. The questionnaire contains the socio-economic status of the respondents and the challenges faced by the respondents. Close-ended and open-ended questions were used for collecting the data. , whereas for statements, 5- point Likert – type scaling procedure was adopted. The scores range from 'Strongly Agree - 5, Agree – 4, No opinion – 3, Disagree – 2, Strongly Disagree – 1. The data relating to the challenges and expectations of street vendors were collected by asking them to assign ranks as per their preference. The secondary data were collected through already available sources like books, journals, newspapers, web – site sources and the association of street vendors of the district.

Sample Size

The target population of the study is the population of street vendors operating in the Salem district of Tamil Nadu. The sample size for the study is determined 25. For the selection of sample units, non-probability sampling was followed.

Analytical Framework

The data collected were organized as simple tables and further analysed with the help of appropriate statistical tools such as – Percentage Analysis, and Weighted Average Method, for logical interpretation of the data collected.

Occupational Profile of Sample Street Vendors

The occupational profile of street vendors reveals the ground realities of the street vending business in the study area. The data gathered on type of vendors, type of business, sales affected, income earned, amount of savings, source of borrowings, loan availed, experience, hours worked, reasons for entering street vending and other information, are likely to capture the grave and odd working conditions of street vendors. Their financial mobility/permanency social security could be ascertained by analysing these occupational variables and thus become a major analytical part of the study.

Result and Discussion

Types of Vendors of Respondents

Based on their mobility/permanency of business, street vendors are classified broadly into two categories. For the study, they are divided into stationary and mobile vendors. The walking stretch or pavements of the road and vacant places are usually occupied by street vendors spreading and arranging their wares. Whereas mobile vendors carry their loads of goods on their heads or vehicles move from place to place for selling the products. Both types of vendors are found in the study area and the respondents are classified accordingly.

Table - 1 Types of Vendors of Respondents

S.No.	Types of Vendors	Number	Per cent
1	Static	15	60
2	Mobile	10	40
	Total	25	100

Source: Primary Data

Table 1 shows that out of 25 respondents, 15 (60 per cent) and 10 (40 per cent) are static and mobile vendors respectively. Static street vendors are dominating the sample

Types of Business of Respondents

Street Vendors deal in all kinds of products and services for the daily requirements of people. They sell fruits and vegetables, food and beverages, household utensils, plastics, garments, leather and electronic products. Mostly they choose their products based on several locations like bazaars, residential areas, offices, schools and colleges, and parks and bus stands. The type of business they generally engage in is identified in the study area and grouped under major five heads.

Table - 2 Types of Business

S. No.	Types of Business	Number	Percent
1	Fruits ,Vegetables and Flowers	9	36
2	food, Snacks and Beverages	6	24
3	Stationery, Plastics and Toys	4	16
4	Garments and Leather	3	12
5	Household utensils, Electrical and Electronics and others	3	12
	Total	25	100

Source: Primary Data

Table 2 shows the distribution of the type of business of respondents from the study area. Out of the 25 respondents, 9 (36 per cent), 6 (24 per cent), 4 (16 per cent), 3 12 per cent) and 3 (12 per cent) belong to the type of business categories of 'Fruits, Vegetable, Flower', 'Food, Snacks, Beverages', 'Stationery and Plastics', 'Garments and Leather' and 'Household utensils', 'Electrical and Electronics, and others respectively. It is inferred from the table that the majority of street vendors in the study area engage in 'Fruits, Vegetables and Flower (36 per cent), followed by Food, Snacks and Beverages (24 per cent).

Status of Vending Place of Respondents

Street vending is an occupation carried out in streets which are public places meant for the movement and traffic of people. As such no permanency or status could be assigned to the places of vending. However, there are certain places being rented or occupied on payment of local fees as well.

Table - 3 Status of Vending Place of Respondents

S.No	Status of vending Place	Number	Percent
1	Rented / Leased/ Oral permission	7	28
2	Free / Public place	18	72
	Total	25	100

Source: Primary Data

It is known from table 3 that out of 25 respondents a majority of respondents 72 per cent occupied and have their business in 'free/ public spaces', whereas only around 28 per cent of respondents are doing their business on rented/ Leased/ oral permissions or auctioned places on payments of a certain fee. It is finally observed that a majority of respondents are doing their business in free/public places, which means they are always at the mercy of local authorities.

Social Living Conditions / Status of Respondents

Street Vendors are essentially self-employed people, from the weaker and more vulnerable sections of society. They are the segment of poor, downtrodden and marginalized people and face the onslaught of financial exclusiveness to the greatest extent. Several available studies documented that people opting for street vending which means that they are starting their life from scratch. When we look at their social conditions, it is not better than any of the poorest of the poor living in our country. A close look into the living conditions of street vendors in the study area and the subsequent collection of data on their households concur with this scenario. Besides their information on socio-demographic and occupational conditions, the understanding of their living conditions helps to view and evaluate them in a fuller and broader context. The conditions that prevailed in their households were collected and presented here.

Types of Harassment Faced by Respondents

Street Vendors are still looked at as a 'nuisance' in urban places as they mostly occupy sideways pathways. As a result, they have to face the hostility of police, authorities of local bodies and at times public resentment and opposition. Sometimes, authorities resort to eviction and confiscation of goods. The type of harassment faced by respondents for a specified period of one year was collected.

Table - 4 Types of Harassment Faced By Respondents

S.No.	Types of Harassment	Number	Per cent
1	Eviction	7	28
2	Confiscation of goods	4	16
3	Tussle/ Quarrel with local traders and people	14	56
	Total	25	100

Source: Primary Data

Table 4 shows the type of harassment undergone by the respondents over a period of one year. Around 28 per cent of respondents faced eviction and 16 per cent of respondents goods were confiscated by authorities in the study area. However, it is noted that a majority of respondents 56 per cent reported hostility from local traders and the public often resulted in tussles and quarrels with them causing disruption of their business. It could be finally observed that the street vendors of the study area are mostly in the fear of harassment of one type or the other

Work Force Participation Rate in the Family of Respondents

Work Force Participation Rate in the Family of Respondents It is also called as 'Labour Force Participation Rate' or 'Economic Activity rate' which shows the percentage of earning members in the family of respondents.

Table - 5 Work Force Participation Rate in the Family of Respondents

S, No	Work Force Participation	Number	Percent
1	Up to 50%	3	12
2	50 % - 100%	7	28
3	At 100%	15	60
	Total	25	100

Source: Primary Data

Table 5 shows that out of 25 households of respondents, the work participation rate stood at 100 per cent among 60 Percent of respondents, indicating that all the elders in their families are engaging in some kind of gainful activities. In 28 per cent of families, the participation range is between 50 – 100 per cent indicating that more than 50 per cent of their members are in work participation. Participation below 50 per cent is found only among 12 per cent of their families

Challenges Faced by Women Street Vendors

Despite the implementation of protective laws and policies on street vendors in India, they are still looked at as a nuisance as they are accused of depriving pedestrians of their space, causing traffic jams and having links with anti-social elements. The lack of recognition of the role of street vendors culminates in a multitude number of problems ranging from business to social security. Nitika Diwakar and Renu Anand (2014) highlighted the challenges faced by street vendors in India.

When the street vendors are women, their woes and sufferings further soared and raised. The deliberations held with women – vendors helped the researcher to identify ten major challenges faced by them. The opinions on such challenges were received from 187, sample women vendors of the study area. Based on the average scores, they were ranked and the top most challenges were identified. The analytical results are furnished in Table – 6

Table - 6 Challenges Faced by Women Street Vendors

S.No.	Challenges	Total Weight Score	Average Score	Rank
1	Unwillingness of suppliers to sell goods on credit	15	0.08	5
2	Lack of Lavatories and sanitation facilities	25	0.13	1
3	Jealousy of co-vendors	10	0.05	7
4	Eve-teasing by anti-social components	20	0.10	3
5	Sexual annoyance by male vendors	23	0.12	2
6	Lack of facility/ spouse help	15	0.08	5
7	Difficulty in transferring/ storage	20	0.10	3
8	Difficulty in reaching vending spots	18	0.09	4
9	Difficulty in raising required loans	16	0.07	6
10	Difficulty of doing business in the hot and rainy season	25	0.13	1
		187		

Source: primary data

Table 6 shows the specific challenges faced by the women vendors in the research area. It is assumed out of the ten tasks measured as per their ranks the top three tasks are – 1. Difficulty in doing business under the hot sun and a rainy period (AS – 0.13) and Lack of Lavatories and sanitation facilities (AS – 0.13), 2. Sexual annoyance by male vendors (AS – 0.12) and 3. Difficulty in transferring/storage (AS – 0.10) and Eve-teasing by anti-social components (0.10). It is followed by another major task, which might also be assumed to rank 4 Difficulty in reaching vending spots (AS-0 .09) rank 5 unwillingness of suppliers to sell goods on credit (AS – 0.08)Lack of facility/ spouse help(AS – 0.08). It could be finally inferred that these are the major five challenges faced by women street vendors in the research area. The remaining five tasks are also significant but not favoured by the majority of them.

Conclusion

Street Vendors are a positive and permanent feature of urban life in India. They are by and large 'necessity-based entrepreneurs. The poorer and unemployed/unskilled people see street vending as an immediate opportunity to maintain their livelihood. With no easy access to institutional finance, a limited space to run their business and little scope for expansion of their business, they have the difficulty in maintaining a balance between business and personal life. They also suffer because of low management skills, competition from other street vendors and lack of collective action. The findings of the study reveal the socio-economic scenario of street vendors in the study area, Salem district. They cater to the local needs of the population, despite having a low level of education and income levels and working for long hours. This situation is more or less prevalent across the state of Tamil Nadu.

The findings of the study could provide sufficient input to the policymakers to act on creating a supportive business environment for the street vendors of the state. Implementation and necessary follow-up of well-intended policies like the Street Vendors Policy 2009 and intervention as pronounced by the various government bodies is the need of the hour. Street Vending cannot be and should not be considered a public nuisance anymore as its existence is viewed as an economic model helping to alleviate poverty and generate employment opportunities for millions of people who have no other means of livelihood. More studies of this kind, with larger geographical coverage, should be undertaken to bring out the plight of street vendors-the poorest of the poor in society.

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