

WOMEN STREET VENDORS IN URBAN UN-ORGANIZED SECTOR IN INDIAN ECONOMY - A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

According to International Labour Organisation (ILO) report women are 50 per cent of the world's population doing 70 per cent of the world's work but receive only 10 per cent of the income and own less than 1 per cent of the property. In most of the countries the average earnings of the women are lower than men. Their representation in gainful employment is comparatively lower. Women have confined their activities to selected professionals such as education, nursing, medicine and office work. Very few women enter into fields like industry, engineering, commerce and trade. According to 2001 census, there are 935 women for every 1000 men in the country making the female population about 48 per cent of total population. The working population constitutes around 36 per cent of total population and women constitute about 32 per cent of the working population. Majority of working women are crowded in the Unorganized Sector.

INTRODUCTION

According to International Labour Organisation (ILO) report women are 50 per cent of the world's population doing 70 per cent of the world's work but receive only 10 per cent of the income and own less than 1 per cent of the property. In most of the countries the average earnings of the women are lower than men. Their representation in gainful employment is comparatively lower. Women have confined their activities to selected professionals such as education, nursing, medicine and office work. Very few women enter into fields like industry, engineering, commerce and trade.

WOMEN WORKERS IN UNORGANIZED SECTOR

According to 2001 census, there are 935 women for every 1000 men in the country making the female population about 48 per cent of total population. The working population constitutes around 36 per cent of total population and women constitute about 32 per cent of the working population. Majority of working women are crowded in the Unorganized Sector. As per our country report presented at the fourth world conference on women in Beijing in 1995, only 4 per cent of all women working are employed in the organized sector. The majority of the workforce today is in what is generally known as the unorganized or the informal sector. In India this sector constitutes about 93 per cent. So that for the workforce as a whole, it is the major sector of work. However, as far as women workers are concerned the informal sector constitutes more than 97 per cent. It is true that the informal sector is dominated by workforce. The inter-state employment growth rate shows greater regional disparities in 1999-2000 as compared to 1993-94. In 1999-2000 the state with higher employment rates are Kerala with 20.97 per cent. West Bengal 15 per cent, Tamilnadu 11.7 per cent, Assam and Andhra Pradesh 8.3 per cent. The lowest unemployment rate states are Himachal Pradesh with 2.96 per cent, U.P. with 4.8 per cent, Punjab 4.3 per cent and Rajasthan 3.13 per cent. The gender difference in the public and private sectors and the female – male ratio (FMR) is situated. It shows the gender basis. For example the FMR's for Public and Private sectors were 0.136 and 0.025 in 1990, which increased to 0.176 and 0.319

respectively by 2001. By 2001 for every 1000 men, the number of working women was 176 in public sectors and 319 in private sectors. It is obvious that the private sector is perhaps more gender sensitive compared to public sector.

There has been a significant variation in the distribution across industry in private sector. 97.73 per cent women were engaged in agriculture in Assam and 100 per cent women in Mizoram were employed in service sector. Assam has registered high employment in agriculture (i.e., tea plantation) in the private sector. Thus the special topography of the region explains the economic opportunities for women. In Tamilnadu 82.47 per cent were employed in manufacturing. All the four southern states where women enjoy relatively more freedom and autonomy have reported high levels of employment in manufacturing in private sector in unskilled category. The private employer mostly would prefer women as they are more pliable, create fewer problems and can work for relatively low wages. The women of southern states perhaps are able to meet this requirement of the private sector. Apart from Assam and Tripura, the remaining four states of North Eastern Zone (NEZ), women are mostly concentrated in service sectors perhaps because they do not have enough opportunities in other sectors. Irrespective of significant variation in the distribution of women employment in different industries, in these states the percentage of women in total employment is quite high.

The number of street vendors in Indian cities has increased sharply during the past few years, especially after 1991 when the policies relating to structural adjustment and liberalization were introduced. It is now estimated that around 25 per cent of the urban population is engaged in this occupation. In most Indian cities the urban poor survive by working in the informal sector. Poverty and lack of gainful employment in the rural areas and in the smaller towns drive large numbers of people to the cities for work and livelihood. A large section of street vendors in urban areas are those with low skills and who have migrated to the larger cities from rural areas or small towns in search of employment. These people take to street vending when they do not find other means of livelihood.

Street vendors, on the other hand are self-employed and self-generation of income. They are sellers of produces of special kind, produced by small entrepreneurs, cheap products, daily necessity goods – selling to specific buyers - middle class and poor. They provide market channel to small products. They make their own economy without any official support. Vendors operate in the structure of local economy- local production, local resources, local supply and local demand. As a result of these an area of market operation is created for the communities marginalized by the globalization - women, poor, formally uneducated, disabled, uprooted from agriculture, migrants from villages, lower castes, retrenched workers etc. Street vendors are mainly those who are unsuccessful or unable to get regular jobs..

The study on street vendors in seven cities shows that the average earnings range between Rs. 40 and Rs. 80 per day. Women vendors earn even less. These people work for over 10 hours a day under gruelling conditions on the street and are under constant threat of eviction. A study of street vendors in Mumbai conducted by SNTD Women's University and ILO showed that an overwhelming majority of them suffered from ailments related to stress- hyperacidity, migraine, hypertension, loss of sleep etc. Studies on street vendors/ hawkers are few and are focused mainly on some cities. In 2000, the National Alliance of Street Vendors in India (NASVI) organised a study on hawkers in seven cities which included Mumbai, Kolkata, Bangalore, Bhuvaneshwar, Patna, Ahmedabad and Imphal. This could be taken as one of the more comprehensive studies on street vending. Two more studies were conducted on street vendors in Mumbai, besides the one by NASVI.

The NASVI study found that the income of women vendors is lower than the men because mainly of two reasons. Most of the women belonged to families that were poorer than those of male street vendors so they had less capital to invest in their business. Secondly, they could not spend as much time on their work as the males because they had to take care of the home as well.

PROBLEMS OF WOMEN STREET VENDORS IN URBAN UNORGANIZED SECTOR

Women vendors were harassed by the male vendors and were not allowed to sit on the pavements. Most of the female street vendors in these cities harassment by the police and the municipal authorities. It is common practice for the police to charge Rs. 2/- per day from each vendor. The municipal authorities vendors face several problems in their work place. Women vendors earn about Rs. 35/- in less than males. They sold their goods during most of the day or in the morning and evenings. The minimum time spent on street vending was 9 to 10 hours every day. In some cases, they spent 12 hours or more. Hawkers employing helpers on paid basis is very rate but 10 per cent of the hawkers are assisted by their family members.

These people however have to leave their homes in their villages at around 5.00 am every day in order to reach the markets on time and start work on the pavements they occupy. They commute by bus from their villages and return home at around 10.00 pm after setting their accounts. The other vendors, who lived within 10 kilometers from their work place commute on foot. Some of them left their homes as early as 3.30 am to get their goods from the market. They face constant harassment and have to pay bribes almost every day. A fruit vendor at the income tax round about told us that he sells his wares at seven road crossings and he has to pay Rs. 2/- to the police at each crossing failing which he will be beaten by the constable. At the same time, payment of fines was not a protection against eviction by the Municipality. Even after paying fines, the hawkers could have their goods confiscated by the "Halla Gari" (local name for the truck used by the Municipality to conduct raids).

It seems that the only way, the vendors can escape harassment from the police and the Municipality is when their area of work is controlled by local musclemen. This is so in markets like antaghat. Only 1.5 per cent of these vendors live within 2 to 5 kilometers from their work place. Women street vendors in Mumbai conducted by SNTD Women's University and ILO (International Labour Organisation) showed that an overwhelming majority of them suffered from ailments related to stress- hyperacidity, mygraine, hypertension, loss of sleep etc. The middle income group bought clothes, vegetables and fruits from street vendors as these were cheap and fresh. There is therefore a need to make a proper assessment of women vendors. At a rough they should constitute 30 per cent of the total population.

Problems faced while carrying out vending

- Harassment by police officials
- Exposed to the environmental hazards
- Long hours of work without rest
- Rainfall damages goods and affects vending
- Customer's misbehaviour
- Extreme tiredness
- Absence of toilet facilities

- Absence of shade to protect from various weather conditions
- Wastage of unsold goods such as flowers, vegetable, fruits, food items etc. especially in summer
- Difficulty in procuring vending license and the fear of vending without vending license

STREET VENDORS AND THE URBAN ECONOMY

Mumbai has the largest number of street vendors numbering around 2,50,000, Kolkata has more than 1,50,000 street vendors, Ahmedabad and Patna has around 80,000 each and Indore, Bangalore and Bhuvaneshwar has around 30,000 street vendors. The total employment provided through street vending becomes larger if we consider the fact that they sustain certain industries by providing markets for their products. A study on street vendors, conducted in these cities, show that around 30% of the street vendors in Ahmedabad and Mumbai and 50% in Kolkata were once engaged in the formal sector.

A study conducted by Self Employment Women's Association (SEWA) in Ahmedabad shows that around half the retrenched textile workers are now street vendors. A lot of the goods sold by street vendors, such as clothes and hosiery, leather and moulded plastic goods and household goods, are manufactured in small scale or home based industries. These industries employ a large number of workers and they rely mainly on street vendors to market their products. In this way street vendors provide a valuable service by helping sustain employment in these industries.

STREET VENDORS AND PUBLIC SPACE

Street vendors have existed since time immemorial. In recent times however they have come to be regarded as public nuisance by certain sections of the urban population. At the same time, these associations too blatantly encroach on public space by employment private guards who regulate entry of people through public roads that access their residential areas and they cordon off public space such as roads and lanes by erection fences and gates. The constant tirade by these elite NGOs that street vendors deprive pedestrians of their space, inconvenience traffic and encourage anti social activities find favour with the media which highlights these issues. The municipal authorities too act promptly on their advice by evicting these street vendors and depriving them of their livelihood. The inconvenience caused to the majority of the population who find it convenient to purchase from street vendors is never a consideration.

Supreme Court judgement notes the positive role of street vendors in providing essential commodities to common people at affordable price and at convenient places. Moreover, the judgement notes that street vending if regulated, cannot be denied merely on the ground that pavements are meant exclusively for pedestrians. Street vendors conduct their business amidst insecurity. The act that no committee of slum dwellers has ever complained against street vendors is of course irrelevant to the municipal authorities as well as these self - proclaimed defenders of public space. Supreme court judgement is significant because it emphasizes on several important aspect of street vending and use of public space.

NASVI ACTIVITIES

National Association of Street Vendors of India (NASVI) was initiated by SEWA in September 1998 to bring together the street vendors organizations of India so as to collectively struggle for macro- level changes become imminent to support the livelihood of around 10 million vendors which stood severely threatened due to outdated laws and

changing policies, practice and attitudes of the powers that be. NASVI is a location of trade unions and voluntary organisation working for street vendors spread all over India. NASVI's study of street vendors found that they pay between 10 per cent to 20 per cent of their earnings as rent. NASVI also used every possible forum to advocate the rights of street vendors. NASVI organizes interface with policy makers, administrators, planners, police officials and street vendors it creates awareness about the usefulness of the vendors and hawkers, brings to light their plight and facilitate short and long term interventions for the benefit of street vendors. NASVI also advises them on the strategy they would need to follow in such situation. NASVI also helps the member organisation in organisation strengthening. NASVI organizes workshops, seminars, meetings etc at national, state and city levels to highlight the plight of street vendors. NASVI publishes a quarterly newsletter in Hindi and English called Footpath Ki Aawaz that provides information about its activities

NASVI would focus on the following five issues.

- (1) Implementation of the National Policy
- (2) Strengthening NASVI its affiliates
- (3) Developing social security for street vendors
- (4) Access to legal space mainstream struggle of woman vendors
- (5) Mainstream struggle of woman vendors

NATIONAL POLICY OF STREET VENDORS

The Ministry of Urban Development and Poverty Alleviation has recently finalized the draft national policy on street vendors. This policy is a land mark for the urban informal sector because for the first time the government has taken steps to regularize a major section of the self-employment. If implemented, one can hope that this important sector of the urban economy will get legal recognition.

The policy was prepared by the national task force for street vendors appointed by the Ministry of Urban Development and Poverty Alleviation headed by the Minister of State for Urban Development and Poverty Alleviation. Other members comprised senior officials of the Ministry, Mayors, Municipal Commissioners, Senior Police Officials and representatives of the Trade Unions.

POLICY GUIDELINES

The draft national policy tries to follow the guidelines of the Supreme Court Judgement. It is an important document as it tries to restore some dignity to street vendors. Its introduction states: "The role played by the street vendors in the economy as also in the society needs to be given due credit but they are considered a unlawful entities and are subjected to continuous harassment by civic authorities". The policy stresses that "designation of vendors markets/ no- vending zones should not be left to the sole discretion of any civic or police authority but must be accomplished by a participatory process". These committees will have representatives of the municipal authority, traffic and local police, associations of shop keepers, traders and residents associations including association of slum dwellers and representatives of street vendors. The representation of street vendors will be from membership based organizations.

CONCLUSION

Street vendors have been a part of the urban scenario for long. They have become a part of the life of all cities in the country. However this is not the only reason for their continuance.

The increasing proportion of the urban informal sector coupled by the shrinking of the organized sector have added to the number of street vendors in mainly two ways.

Firstly, as noted in the introduction, for the low skilled migrants seeking employment in the cities, hawking is a means of earning for their livelihood. In this way a section of the urban poor are absorbed into gainful employment. Many of these retrenched workers are able to provide minimum needs for their families by taking up street vending activities. The second reason for the increase in hawkers is due to the increase in the urban poor. These people are able to produce their basic necessities mainly through hawking, as the goods sold are cheap. The plight of the urban poor street vendors in cities would be worse than what it is at present. This would have in turn lead to greater social problems and unrest among the poor. In this way one section of the urban poor, namely, hawkers, helps another section to survive. Almost all cities have police and municipal laws that help to protect public spaces and allow free flow of traffic on the roads. Hawkers become the main victims of these law because they are viewed as the main obstructers and encroachers. The rapid increase of vehicles on the roads creates problems not only of traffic congestion but also of parking space. Several shops encroach on the pavements by illegally extending their construction and it is not uncommon to find residents in buildings cordoning off public space in order to create their private gardens. Such encroachments are often tolerated and in most cases regularized by the municipal authorities. Municipalities rarely pull down illegal extension by the shops. They issue them notices and at time fine them. In order to prevent illegal parking, municipalities create parking lots in public spaces.

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