

MULTI-FACETED INTERVENTIONS TO EMPOWER STREET VENDORS IN BENGALURU

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ABSTRACT

The livelihoods of poor are determined by the setting in which they live and opportunities & constraints present in that setting. This is because the ecological, economic, social and political – conditions which largely determines the assets accessible to people, how they can use these (Sen, 1973a, 1998 & Meikle, 2002) and thus their ability to obtain secure livelihoods (Sen 1983d). Rural people see new opportunities in the urban areas in terms of employment, physical facilities and other opportunities; mostly because of not being able to generate decent living through incomes from agriculture or agricultural jobs. As a result, rural landless agricultural workers have little motivation to remain in agriculture. Instead, they choose to migrate to nearby towns or cities in search of more remunerative non- agricultural jobs. In the cities and towns that they migrate to, they end up in jobs that are more remunerative from their agricultural jobs but those that are at lowest spectrum of jobs in urban setting mostly in the informal sector. Street vending is a big part of the informal sector so much so that the term informal sector in Bogota was attributed exclusively to street vendors. Further, a large body of literature is found on the problems of street vendors in Bogota. In India too, a large part of the informal sector comprises street vending. An exploratory study conducted reveals that working life of both men and women street vendors outline the following characteristics of street vending; they work forexcessively long hours, under poor safety and security conditions at their workplaces, together with the illegal compensations/bribes they have to pay the local authorities, borrow at exorbitant rates of interest from money lenders etc. However, during the present study as part of the project on issues and concerns of street vendors found other problems plaguing street vendors. Among them was the problem of them being cheated by unscrupulous people who have been collecting money from the street vendors purportedly for an organisation's membership, which has come in to existence under the policy on street vending. Methodology: During a study on street vendors it was found that street vendors were being abused and cheated by some group of individuals in the pretext of getting them membership of organizations that help street vendors in various forms. In order to educate them and create awareness, social work students contacted a group of more than 50 vendors and a discussion was held with them to strategize an action plan. In association with Alternative Law Form – a NGO, interactions with street vendors were held. Sessions on their rights and awareness on available schemes generated confidence among the street vendors. A membership drive was conducted which resulted in more than 150 vendors applying for membership in the local municipality and other similar positive outcomes are also being observed. A questionnaire was designed and administered to assess Socio – Economic conditions of these vendors. Uddyam Foundation – a NGO, was on boarded for conducting sessions on Social and Financial management. Results of the intervention: Enhanced awareness about the rights and government schemes, More than 150 street vendors are about to get their Identity cards and legitimizing their vending, A platform created for brainstorming and solving issues similar to many, multi-dimensional approach to business. This has clearly indicated that, a social worker with support of right kind of organizations can play a significant role in creating awareness and educating street vendors.

Keywords: Street vendors; empowerment; unorganised; informal sector

1. Introduction

The livelihoods of poor are determined by the setting in which they live and opportunities & constraints present in that setting. This is because the ecological, economic, social and political – conditions which largely determines the assets accessible to people, how they can use these (Sen, 1973a, 1998 & Meikle, 2002) and thus their ability to obtain secure livelihoods (Sen 1983d). Rural people see new opportunities in the urban areas in terms of employment, physical facilities and other opportunities; mostly because of not being able to generate decent living through incomes from agriculture or agricultural jobs. As a result, rural landless agricultural workers have little motivation to remain in agriculture. Instead, they choose to migrate to nearby towns or cities in search of more remunerative non-agricultural jobs. In the cities and towns that they migrate to, they end up in jobs that are more remunerative from their agricultural jobs but those that are at lowest spectrum of jobs in urban setting mostly in the informal sector. Street vending is a big part of the informal sector so much so that the term informal sector in Bogota was attributed exclusively to street vendors. Further, a large body of literature is found on the problems of street vendors in Bogota. In India too, a large part of the informal sector comprises street vending. An exploratory study conducted reveals that working life of both men and women street vendors outline the following characteristics of street vending; they work for excessively long hours, under poor safety and security conditions at their workplaces, together with the illegal compensations/bribes they have to pay the local authorities, borrow at exorbitant rates of interest from money lenders etc.,

1.1 Definition of Street Vendors:

Street vendors are identified as self-employed workers in the informal sector who offer their labor to sell goods and services on the street without having any permanent built-up structure (National Policy on Urban Street Vendors [NPUSV], 2006, p. 11)¹. In India, street vending makes up 14% of total (non-agricultural) urban informal employment. Though street Vendors play a very dynamic role in the urban economy, providing necessary goods and services, which are largely both durable and cost-effective, to average income-earning households at cheap and affordable prices, various studies have confirmed the fact that street vendors comprise one of the most marginalized sections of the urban poor..

In addition, they help many small-scale industries to flourish by marketing the products that they manufacture (Bhowmik, 2001; Tiwari, 2000). Thus, they help to sustain the urban economy, to a great extent, in terms of generation of employment and income, and provision of goods and services.

The policy document on street vendors defines ‘Street vendor’ as ‘a person who offers goods and services for sale to the public in a street without having a permanent built-up structure.’ There are three basic categories of street vendors: a. Stationary; b. Peripatetic and c. Mobile.

Stationary vendors are those who carry out vending on a regular basis at a specific location, e.g. those occupying space on the pavements or other public places and/or private areas either open/covered [with implicit or explicit consent] of the authorities. Peripatetic vendors’ are those who use who carry out vending on foot and sell their goods and services and includes those who sell their goods on pushcarts. Mobile street vendors are those who move from place to place vending their goods or services on bicycle or mobile units on wheels, whether motorized or not, they also include vendors’ selling their wares in moving buses, local trains etc.

¹National Policy For Urban Street Vendors, <http://muepa.nic.in/policies/index2.htm>
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1.2 Street Vendors Rights in India:

Women also, for reasons such as lack of education, financial need, family pressure or a combination of all these, take to vending on streets. Being in an unorganized sector, lack of policies, law and regulations, extortion and displacement, lack of civic facilities lead to certain difficulties while vending. Supreme Court of India, in the year 2010, recognized street vending as a legitimate source of livelihood, in the context of issues concerning this section of the society. There are studies that say that this recognition has not yielded commensurate benefits to the street vendors. Many are not even aware of this fact and get harassed. There are also cases where vendors are cheated in the pretext of legitimizing their business.

Associations like National Association of Street Vendors of India [NASVI] and other local NGOs work towards the protection of street vendor's livelihood. In 2010, the Supreme Court of India, recognized street vending as a source of livelihood, and directed the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation to work out on a central legislation [policy], and a draft of the same was unveiled to the public on November 11, 2011. The key points of the draft bill were, protection of legitimate street vendors from harassment by police and civic authorities, and demarcation of 'vending zones' on the basis of 'traditional natural markets', proper representation of vendors and women in decision making bodies, and establishment of effective grievance redressal and dispute resolution mechanism.

The salient features of the act the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014, include - registration and identity cards, Town Vending Committee (TVC) and a database of registered vendors, entitlement to a new vending site in case of Eviction and Relocation and Civic Facilities. Though, in essence the policy on 'Street Vendors', was drafted to address several issues and concerns of vendors, they continue to face challenges and have not been effectively addressed. Also it is found that there are organizations which are attempting to misuse the provisions of the policy.

Street vendors in India until 2009 were working in a highly informal environment until the government of India under judicial direction made a policy for the functioning of this vulnerable group. Since then informality of this group's functioning has been reduced to some extent and further the policy on street vendors has evolved in to street vendors act. However, during the present study as part of the project on issues and concerns of street vendors found other problems plaguing street vendors. Among them was the problem of them being cheated by unscrupulous people who have been collecting money from the street vendors purportedly for an organisation's membership, which has come in to existence under the policy on street vending.

2. Methodology: The present study is a part of another study on street vendors in various parts of India and some other developing nations. During a study on street vendors in Bengaluru, the capital city of the state of Karnataka in India, it was found that street vendors were being abused and cheated by some group of individuals in the pretext of getting them membership of organizations that help street vendors in various forms. In order to educate them and create awareness, social work students contacted a group of more than 50 vendors and a discussion was held with them to strategize an action plan. In association with Alternative Law Forum – a NGO, interactions with street vendors were held. Sessions on their rights and awareness on available schemes generated confidence among the street vendors. A membership drive was conducted which resulted in more than 150 vendors applying for membership in the local municipality and other similar positive outcomes are also being observed. A questionnaire was designed and administered to assess Socio – Economic conditions of these vendors. Uddyam Foundation – a NGO, was on boarded for conducting sessions on Social and Financial management.

2.1 About Alternative Law Forum (ALF)

A collective of lawyers with the belief that there was a need for an alternative practice of law created ALF in March, 2000, The team recognizes that a practice of law is inherently political, however, are committed to a practice of law which will respond to issues of social and economic injustice. Over the past few years ALF has grown from being a legal service provider to becoming a space that integrates alternative lawyering with critical research, alternative dispute resolution, pedagogic interventions and more generally maintaining sustained legal interventions in various social issues. ALF is committed to an inter disciplinary interrogation of the law using creative forms. ALF perceives itself simultaneously as a space that provides qualitative legal services to marginalized groups, as an autonomous research institution with a strong interdisciplinary approach working with practitioners from other fields, as a public legal resource using conventional and unconventional forms of creating access to information, as a centre for generating quality resources that will make interventions in legal education and training, and as finally a platform to enable collaborative and creative models of knowledge production.

2.2 About Udhyam Foundation:

Udhyam foundation, an Not for Profit non-government organization (NGO) works with low income small/micro entrepreneurs (Vyapaaris) - typically whose revenue falls below Rs.40000 per month. It is estimated that over 80% of the audience would fall within the 30 to 45 year age range. The program caters to both Urban and Rural Vyapaaris, men and women. The participant signs up for the program by choice and stays in the program by choice. Showing respect, compassion, love and trust is at the core of engagement with the each and every individual. The information about participants forms the basis to design and customize curriculum to their needs. The curriculum is a combination of Content, Method and Assessment.

Udhyam, believes that each individual has immense potential within. While some people are aware of this potential and others are not. The curriculum at Udhyam is designed keeping in mind this core belief. The foundation's role here is not to teach or give them new or unknown concepts to learn, but to understand the existing knowledge and experiences of the target group, and build our curriculum to enable them to accomplish the goals. Therefore, the curriculum and the facilitator play the role enablers and not teachers.

3. Training Intervention:

Volunteers from Alternative Law Forum interacted with street vendors. It was assessed that the vendors need awareness sessions on the legal provisions. Sessions on street vendors' Rights was conducted and participants were encouraged to apply for the identity cards. They were helped with the documentation procedure which resulted in more than 150 vendors applying for the identity cards.

It is important for the vendors to have an identity card to avail benefits from many of the government schemes.

Further, trainers from Udhyam Foundation interacted with street vendors. Based on the assessment of street vendors' requirements, training program was designed delivered. The training modules included -

- 2 days pitching and context gathering
 - Design Thinking interviews with 8 participants to identify relevant interventions (content and format)
 - 3 sessions over 5 weeks with different groups of participants
- Topics covered : self-worth of Vyapaaris, overcoming barriers, perseverance, trying new things, goal setting, creative problem solving, importance of self-starting and being entrepreneurial, demonstration of overcoming barriers

4. Results of the intervention:

- Training sessions were successful in creating enhanced awareness about the street vendors' rights and government schemes which can benefit them. This led to improved confidence among them and motivated to avail benefits to do better in their business.
- Post their understanding about the importance of an Identity card, more than 150 street vendors applied for an identity card issued by the authorities and are about to get their Identity cards legitimising their vending.
- The training sessions gave a platform for many vendors to come together and discuss challenges that they face. They were able to find some easy to apply solutions through brainstorming and solving issues which could be similar to many. These sessions were also used as an opportunity to play some games and relaxation.
- Some of the participants could use these sessions to express their hidden leadership abilities. They could arrive at consensus on options / solutions while solving group activities, assess strength and weakness of the situation, etc.,
- Most of the vendors were able to understand that there are multiple factors that affect their business. Vendors were made to consciously analyse Impact of place of vending, money, quantity and variety of items, time of vending on the revenue. The vendors could develop and apply multi dimensional approach to business.

5. Conclusion:

People in unorganized sectors like street vending are the vulnerable sections in a society. Lack of awareness and education makes them prone to exploitation. However, social workers and organizations involved in social work can play an important role in improving their condition. Developing trust among street vendors and motivating them to participate in training sessions, though not easy, has resulted in positive outcomes. This has clearly indicated that, a social worker with support of right kind of organizations can play a significant role in creating awareness and educating street vendors.

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