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**DECENT WORK FOR THE STREET VENDORS
IN MUMBAI, INDIA—A DISTANT VISION!**

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the working conditions of the street vendors in Mumbai in relation to the concept of “decent work.” The study highlights the vendors’ working conditions, their social security, and the collective bargaining by membership-based organisations aiming to provide them with a decent working life. The present research is based on mixed methods. The study is exploratory in nature, showing that the street vendors depend on moneylenders especially for social security purposes but also for their economic activity. The study shows that they are forced to borrow money at an exorbitant rate of interest (amounting to 5–10% per month), which in turn leads them to fall into a “debt-trap” situation. The current working hours of the vendors and the safety and security conditions in their workplace, together with the illegal activities of local authorities, are contributing to a deteriorating working environment and the deprivation of the workers.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of “decent work” was introduced by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 1999 in a report by its director-general to the 87th International Labour Conference. The main goal is to promote “opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work, in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity” (ILO, 1999: 3).

The four major pillars recommended by the ILO (1999) as essential to achieve the goal of decent work are opportunities for employment and income, respect for rights at work, social protection, and a strong social dialogue. Taking these four aims into consideration, ILO has defined decent work as

productive work in which rights are protected, which generates an adequate income, with adequate social protection. It also means sufficient work, in the sense that all should have full access to income-earning opportunities. It marks the high road to economic and social development, a road in which employment, income and social protection can be achieved without compromising workers' rights and social standards. Tripartism and social dialogue are both objectives in their own right, guaranteeing participation and democratic process, and a means of achieving all the other strategic objectives of the ILO. The evolving global economy offers opportunities from which all can gain, but these have to be grounded in participatory social institutions if they are to confer legitimacy and sustainability on economic and social policies. (ILO, 1999: 12)

From the definition given above, it can be seen, first, that decent work must ensure an adequate income. Second, workers have to have social protection coverage, which must be achieved without compromising workers' rights and social standards. Third, workers must have the right to work and rights at work. The fourth important dimension of decent work is a strong social dialogue, so that workers can raise their voices in collective bargaining. From the above definition, it could be extracted that tripartism and social dialogue can be examined at all levels with the social partners. ILO has suggested that it could be developed by strengthening representation between workers and employers, strengthening capacity and services to improve the quality of the services, and strengthening joint institutions of governance (ILO, 1999). Thus, decent work would ensure poverty reduction by increasing the work opportunities, the rights at work, the social protection, and the voice of the workers, which would result in an improvement in workers' capabilities and their overall well-being (Rodgers, 2001; Sen, 2000). The achievement of the goal of decent work is indeed an ambitious project. It is for all workers; not only for those who are in the formal sector, but also for the unregulated wage workers, the self-employed workers, and the home-based workers in the informal sector (ILO, 1999: 3–4).

The Indian labour market is dominated by the informal sector. In India, the terms 'formal sector' and 'informal sector' are used interchangeably as 'organised sector' and 'unorganised sector' respectively. A huge majority of members of the labour force, comprising around 92%, derives its livelihood from the informal sector. According to the most recent national sample survey, conducted in 2004–5, the informal sector workforce in India includes about 422 million workers, representing nearly 92% of the total workforce of about 457 million (National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector [NCEUS], 2007). The informal sector is heterogeneous in nature. Owing to this nature of the informal

sector, the workers are broadly categorised into three groups, namely, wage workers in the informal sector, self-employed in the informal sector, and unprotected wage workers in the formal sector (Chen et al., 2002; NCEUS, 2007). Street vendors are identified as self-employed workers in the informal sector who offer their labour to sell goods and services on the street without having any permanent physical structure (Bhowmik, 2001). According to the Government of India, around 10 million people in India as a whole, including about 250,000 vendors in Mumbai, are dependent for their livelihood on street vending (National policy on urban street vendors [NPUSV], 2006). Interestingly, Mumbai contains the largest number of street vendors among all the major cities in India. This study estimates, from the records of various trade unions, that the total number of street vendors in Mumbai is actually around 350,000.

Street vendors play a very important role in the urban economy of India by providing employment and income and other items. They sell different kinds of goods such as clothes and hosiery, leather items, moulded plastic goods, and various household necessities, which are manufactured in small-scale or home-based industries where large numbers of workers are employed (Bhowmik, 2001). It would hardly be possible for the manufacturers to market their own products. Apart from nonagricultural products, street vendors also sell vegetables and fruits. Thus, they provide a market for both home-based manufacturing products and agricultural products, supporting small-scale and home-based workers as well as agricultural workers. Therefore, several sectors and types of labour are linked with the street vendors.

Street vendors also support the urban rich as well as the urban poor. They support the urban rich by providing daily requirements right on their doorsteps (Tiwari, 2000). Urban youth prefer to purchase clothes and accessories from street vendors, because the products the vendors sell are typically cheaper than those found in formal retail outlets. People from lower income groups also benefit from the vendors, spending a large portion of their income on purchases from street vendors because their goods are cheap and affordable. It has been estimated that around 30% of the Mumbai workforce buy at least one meal a day from vendors (Bhowmik, 2001). Thus, it can be said that they are in fact a solution to some of the problems of the poverty-stricken urban dwellers.

Productive work, adequate wages, and other pillars of the decent work concept relate more to workers who are employed. Therefore, by definition, it seems that the concept is more appropriate to wage workers in the formal as well as the informal sector. Nevertheless, the ILO is concerned with all workers, including self-employed workers. Therefore, the main purpose of this article is to conceptualise the decent work approach with regard to the self-employed street vendors and to grasp the meaning of decent work for these vendors in Mumbai.

The present article is organised as follows. First, it discusses the theoretical understanding of the informal sector and street vending. The rationale for the study and the objectives of the study are explained in the following section. Next,

the article discusses methodology. This study is mainly based on a primary survey, and therefore the sociodemographic and economic profiles of 200 individual street vendors are then discussed. Their social security condition is then explored. The indebtedness of the street vendors is analysed, and the role of membership-based organisations in Mumbai is discussed.

THE INFORMAL SECTOR AND STREET VENDING: THEORETICAL UNDERSTANDING

We need to understand the theoretical debate on the informal sector before looking for a theoretical approach to street vending within that sector. Many researchers have tried to define the term “informal sector.” In the most recent discussion of the term, it is said to comprise employment without labour protection or social protection, both inside and outside informal enterprises, including both self-employment in small unregistered enterprises and wage employment in unprotected jobs (Chen, 2007). Over the years, there has been continuous debate among three schools of thought about the informal sector: the dualist view, the structuralist view, and the legalist view. The term “informal sector” was actually introduced by famous social anthropologist Keith Hart in his article “Informal income opportunities and urban employment in Ghana” (1973). Hart’s study was based on self-employed workers in Ghana, who were outside the formal labour market and unable to search for jobs in the formal sector. Hart explained that price inflation, inadequate wages, and an increasing number of workers who were surplus to the requirements of the urban labour market had led to a high degree of informality in the income-generating activities of workers, which varied in terms of legality, official registration, skills required, and other factors (Hart, 1973). But Hart’s concept of the informal sector was based on income opportunities rather than sectors, and he simply defined “informality” as being based on self-employment. The approach to the informal sector first used by Hart and the ILO and later supported by Tokman (1978) is known as the dualist view. According to this view, the persistence of informal activities is due to the fact that not enough modern job opportunities have been created to absorb surplus labour, due to a slow rate of economic growth and a faster rate of population growth (Hart, 1973; ILO, 1972; Tokman, 1978).

In contrast to the dualist view, the structuralist school of thought, which was propounded by Moser and by Castells and Portes in the late 1970s and 1980s, states that the formal sector and the informal sector are interrelated, connected, and interdependent in terms of labour. Workers have been pushed out of the formal sector, where they enjoyed job security, and into the informal sector, where they have no security, due to large capitalist firms’ desire to reduce input and labour costs and increase their competitiveness (Castells & Portes, 1989; Moser, 1978).

The legalist view, propounded by Peruvian economist Hernando De Soto (1989), argued that informality is a response to bureaucratic obstacles. The

informal sector includes micro-entrepreneurs who prefer to operate informally in order to avoid the high costs, time, and effort involved in the formal registration associated with meeting the demands of state regulations (De Soto, 1989). According to De Soto, recognition of the importance of small enterprises and informal economic activity has been advocated by development agencies as a strategy for generating economic growth in developing countries and providing income for the poor. Micro-entrepreneurs will continue to produce informally as long as government producers are costly.

After considering the definition of street vendors and all the schools of thought on the informal sector, this study considers that street vending fits best into the legalist approach, since state bureaucracy, tax evasion, and rules and regulations for registration are highlighted in that approach. We will revisit and put forward the theoretical approach to street vending after analysing our data.

RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Rationale for the Study

The important goals for the urban poor in the Eleventh Plan in India are to provide them with affordable shelter and “decent living and working conditions”; to make adequate provision of land for the poor; to help in developing “self-employment enterprises” and creating jobs for wage earners; and to protect the economic interests and safety of women and other vulnerable sections of our society (Planning Commission, 2008: 406). This study attempts to reveal the working conditions of street vendors within the framework of “decent work,” since there has been no previous study based on decent work as it applies to street vendors. Moreover, there has been no study attempting to look at the working conditions of street vendors since a study conducted by Bhowmik in 2001. In the nine years since that study, globalisation, liberalisation, and privatisation have led to an enormous change in street vending. Hence, it is necessary to look at street vendors’ current working conditions in terms of income level, access to finance, working hours, safety in the workplace, necessary bribes, and leisure time.

Objectives of the Study

The overall objective of the study is to understand the working conditions of street vendors in Mumbai within the framework of decent work.

The specific objectives are as follows:

1. To understand the working conditions of the street vendors in terms of level of income, accessibility of finance, working hours, security of work, and safety in the workplace.

2. To understand issues relating to the social security of street vendors.
3. To understand the role of trade unions and other membership-based associations with regard to vendors' social security, access to credit for their economic activity, and other matters.

METHODOLOGY

The first pillar of decent work is employment and income opportunities. The indicators relating to employment and income opportunities are the ratification and observance of relevant conventions, the labour force participation rate, the employment-to-working-age-population ratio, the unemployment rate, the youth unemployment rate, the share of wage employment in the nonagricultural labour force, excessive working hours, the time-related underemployment rate, and job insecurity. Productive employment and decent living standards can improve social and economic development, which enhances the quality of life and leads to human development (Ahmed, 2003; Bescond, Chataignier, & Mehran, 2003; ILO, 1999).

The rights-at-work component of the decent work concept refers to freedom from child labour, forced labour, and discrimination in employment, and to freedom of association and collective bargaining, while discrimination at work is based on sex, language, political opinion, or social origin (Bescond et al., 2003; Ghai, 2003; ILO, 1999).

Indicators of social protection include the proportion of workers covered against major contingencies and receiving benefits in respect of sickness, unemployment, old age, maternity, disability, and so on; the adequacy of benefits received under these headings; public social security expenditure as a proportion of GDP; public expenditure on needs-based cash income support as a proportion of GDP; and levels of deprivation in specific areas such as nutrition, health, and education among vulnerable groups (Bescond et al., 2003; Ghai, 2003; ILO, 1999).

Indicators in terms of social dialogue include freedom of association and collective bargaining; the proportion of workers covered by collective bargaining agreements; participation in workplace decision making; and participation by workers, employers, and civil society in national policymaking bodies (Bescond et al., 2003; Ghai, 2003; ILO, 1999).

The present study considers that level of income corresponds to the decent work indicators of employment and income opportunities. In addition, working hours, safety in the workplace, and indebtedness with regard to business activity have also been considered. Access to social security and indebtedness correspond to the decent work indicators of social protection. Social security involves maternity benefits, access to medical facilities, children's education, and accidents. This study also highlights the role of membership-based organisations

with regard to social security, access to finance, and other issues in order to evaluate the potential of collective action for improving the decency of work. Collective action facilitates the decent work indicators of social dialogue.

The unit of analysis of the present study is street vendors in Mumbai. The static vendors, who have a specific space for their activity though the space is unregistered, are the participants in the present research. Mumbai was selected because of its diversity in terms of ethnicity and economic activities, and in addition because Mumbai has the largest number of vendors in India. A survey for the study was conducted from May 2008 to September 2009. Mixed methods (Creswell, 2009), with the quantitative method as the dominant method, were used to draw a sample from the population and to analyse the data. The sample was drawn with the help of the quantitative method while some of the individual cases were developed based on in-depth interviews and observations using a qualitative paradigm.

Data Collection Tools

Questionnaire

A semistructured questionnaire, based on the objectives of the study, was used (Bryman, 2009). Both closed and open-ended questions were included in the questionnaire. Since the study was exploratory in nature, open-ended questions were used to assist in exploring the current situation (Bryman, 2009).

Interview Methods

Personal interviews and group interviews were conducted (Bryman, 2009). Personal interviews with 200 individual street vendors were conducted. One group session was conducted with 10–15 vendors in each study area. These sessions helped in achieving an understanding of common issues. In-depth interviews were conducted with 10 individual street vendors in order to understand and explore the current situation. In-depth interviews were also organised with five key respondents. These five key respondents were involved in membership-based organisations, and they provided information on the role of these organisations with regard to collective action by street vendors in Mumbai. Such organisations are also in a position to make decisions for street vendors and represent them to higher authorities.

Process of Data Collection

Sampling Method

Three stages were used to draw the sample (Agresti & Finlay, 1997; Babbie, 2001; Murthy, 1967). The sample size was 200.

First Stage

When a population is scattered over a region and complete lists of the total population are not available, “clustering” is of assistance in sampling (Murthy, 1967). For the purposes of the present study, five places were identified in Mumbai in terms of volume of street vendors and commercial areas from the records of the various trade unions.

Second Stage

Since total population of the each of the clusters was unknown, a ‘quota’ was fixed in order to draw the sample. In the second stage, a quota of size 40 was fixed from each of the five clusters (areas).

Third Stage

In the third stage, 40 respondents were randomly drawn from each cluster. Thus, the present study covers 200 sample respondents. The study only dealt with five types of vendors (vegetable vendors, fruit vendors, garment vendors, vendors selling electronics, and vendors selling leather items) because these five types have the largest share in the total vending process.

Personal interviews with the help of the semistructured questionnaire were conducted with these 200 individual street vendors. One group interview was organised in each study area. In addition, 10 street vendors were identified based on their experiences. Then, in-depth interviews were carried out with these 10 street vendors in order to develop cases.

Methods of Data Analysis

Descriptive analysis was used to analyse the primary data from the 200 individual sample using quantitative data. Six individual cases based upon responses from individual vendors were developed in order to explore the situation. Three individual cases were developed from five key respondents from membership-based organisations in order to gain an understanding of the role of membership-based organisations with regard to the street vendors. These nine cases were developed based on in-depth interviews and field observations.

SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC PROFILE OF THE STREET VENDORS

The following sections show the possible outcomes of the present study and corresponding percentages for these outcomes, which are represented by values within parentheses. In the present section, the sociodemographic and economic profiles of the vendors based on primary data are explained.

Demographic and Social Profile

Street vending is a largely male occupation in Mumbai (Bhowmik, 2001), as confirmed by this study. The study demonstrates that around 77% of the vendors are men and about 23% are women (see Table 1). In terms of religion, about 59% of the total vendors are Hindu, around 33% are Muslims, 7% are Christian, and about 9% are Sikh (Table 1). The Constitution of India has recognised three broad communities among minority groups in the Indian population, namely, Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs). As per Census 2001, around 16% of the population were SCs and 8% were STs, and these percentages have been growing steadily since independence in 1947. In terms of caste composition, in this present study, about 60% of the total vendors belong to general castes, 25% belong to the SC category, and 6% and 9% belong to the ST and OBC categories respectively (Table 1).

Educational Profile

The educational level among street vendors is generally low, as has been shown in Table 1. Out of the total, around 17% of vendors are illiterate, about 8.5% can only sign their names, and about 8.5% have only primary-level education. Vendors who were college graduates, about 1.5% of the total vendors, had come from the rural areas in search of better-paid jobs in the formal sector in Mumbai, but street vending is one of the easiest means of earning a living as it requires only a small financial input. Hence, these graduates have become street vendors.

Level of Income

The income of street vendors depends on the products they sell, and it varies from product to product, from location to location, the volume and terms of trade. The monthly income of the street vendors is given in Table 2 in U.S. dollars. Table 2 shows that a few vendors earn quite a high income, reflecting the type of business, the age of the business, the location, and the product they sell. Interestingly, the data show that the incomes of vendors of garments, fruit, and electronics items differ from the incomes of vegetable vendors and owners of small enterprises. But the profit margin of the vendors who sell raw materials, namely, vegetable vendors, fruit vendors, and food vendors, is quite impressive compared with that of other types of vendors. Raw material vendors earn about 50% to 60% profit on their daily sales. At the same time, the working conditions of these vendors, especially vegetable vendors, are miserable. The study shows that most of the vegetable vendors are women, since this type of vending requires a very low level of investment in comparison with other types. Vegetable vendors work from 5 o'clock in the morning to around 12 o'clock at night, and they work

Table 1. Sociodemographic Profile

Indicators	Possible Outcomes	Total Number of Cases (Percentage in parentheses)
Sex	Male	154 (77)
	Female	46 (23)
	Total	200 (100)
Religion	Hindu	118 (59.0)
	Muslim	66 (33.0)
	Christian	7 (3.5)
	Sikh	9 (4.5)
	Total	200 (100)
Caste	General	121 (60.5)
	SCs	49 (24.5)
	STs	12 (6.0)
	OBCs	18 (9.0)
	Total	200 (100)
Educational level	Illiterate	34 (17.0)
	Can sign name only	17 (8.5)
	Primary education	17 (8.5)
	Upper primary education	65 (32.5)
	Secondary education	48 (24.0)
	Higher secondary education	16 (8.0)
	College graduate	3 (1.5)
	Total	200 (100)

Note: N=200

every day in the year. A woman vegetable vendor, who is the sole breadwinner for her family, described her day:

I wake up around 4 o'clock in the morning and then I go to the wholesale market to collect the vegetables. I clean the vegetables for two to three hours and I keep the vegetables in the market where I sit. I come back home and cook for my children and then I go again to the market and start the activity. When I come back home, it is already 12 midnight. I work for the whole year. If I don't work for one day, my children will sleep without meals, since I am the only breadwinner in my family.

Despite the hard and useful work the vendors do, street vending is an illegal activity, and vendors are seen as eyesores. As a result, they face constant harassment by local police and municipal authorities in their workplace. They are forced

to pay bribes. It is calculated that each street vendor pays 15% to 20% of his or her daily income in bribes to local police and the BMC.

Table 2 shows that 46 street vendors (about 23% of the total respondents) are earning from \$63.82 to \$95.76 per month. It seems that this amount is adequate for the survival of an individual vendor, but considering the number of family members dependent on each vendor, the amount is abysmally low in terms of supporting the vendor's family. It is estimated from the primary data, taking into account the number of dependents each vendor has, that the per day, per capita income of those households is less than 20 rupees (less than 50 cents (U.S.) per day). The poverty line as given by the World Bank for developing countries, including India, is one U.S. dollar per day per person. Hence, 23% of the total sample population in this study are classified as "extremely poor," which is a matter of serious concern.

CONDITIONS OF SOCIAL SECURITY FOR STREET VENDORS IN MUMBAI

Social security covers medical care, sickness and maternity benefits, compensation for injury at work or inability to work, survivors' benefits, old age pensions, and so forth (ILO, 2000; Jhabvala, 2000). Social protection policies in developing countries like India are almost always concerned with reducing vulnerability and unacceptable levels of deprivation. Ahmad et al. (1991) have discussed two

Table 2. Monthly Earnings

Income Range (in U.S. Dollars)	Range Midpoint of Income (in U.S. Dollars)	Total Number of Vendors (Percentage in parentheses)
63.82–95.76	79.79	46 (23.0)
95.76–127.67	111.72	27 (13.5)
127.67–159.58	143.62	20 (10.0)
159.58–191.50	175.54	31 (15.5)
191.50–234.05	212.78	22 (11.0)
234.05–265.97	250.01	19 (9.5)
265.97–297.88	281.92	9 (4.5)
297.88–329.80	313.84	12 (6.0)
329.80–361.71	354.76	6 (3.0)
361.71–393.63	377.67	8 (4.0)

Note: N=200. The income of the street vendors is given in terms of the U.S. dollar. At the time of data collection, the exchange rate was 47 rupees to the U.S. dollar.

aspects of social security. They have described the use of social means to prevent deprivation and vulnerability to deprivation. The main aim in terms of social security is to enhance and protect people's ability to feed themselves adequately, and to avoid escapable morbidity and preventable mortality. The role of social security policies in developing countries must be extended to include the prevention of increases in deprivation and the promotion of better chances of individual development (Guhan, 1994). The social security programme in India can be divided into two parts. One consists of protective social security measures, largely applying to formal sector workers and covering medical care and benefits relating to sickness, maternity, old age, and so on. The other part of the programme, promotional social security, consists of security relating to self-employment and wage employment, and provision for basic needs such as food, health, and education, especially for workers in the unorganised sector. Thus, the social security programme should aim at the protection and promotion of both human and physical capital. The ILO estimates that half of the world's population has no social security coverage and only one-quarter of the world's population has adequate social security coverage (Ginneken, 2003). In India, however, only around 8% of the total number of workers are covered. This is because about 92% of the total workforce are employed informally. The Unorganised Sector Workers' Social Security Bill was passed in 2008. The bill covers the entire country and all workers in the unorganised sector. It covers self-employed workers, wage workers, home-based workers and informal workers in the organised sectors who have no social security coverage. It provides old age pension for workers, health insurance for self and family, maternity benefits for women workers or spouses of men workers, and insurance to cover accidental death and disability ("The Unorganised Workers' Social Security Bill," 2008).

Vending is full of insecurity and uncertainty, since vendors work at the roadside and accidents may occur at any time (see Anjaria, 2006; Bhowmik, 2006). Since as members of the informal sector they do not have access to any government-assisted social security, they have to manage their social security arrangements themselves. Therefore, this study attempts to try to detain the conditions of the social security of this group of workers in Mumbai. It is interestingly noticed from this study shows that around 88% of street vendors do not know even the term "social security."

Around 62.5% of vendors manage their social protection by saving in banks or cooperatives, whereas 36% of vendors manage their social protection by borrowing from various sources at an exorbitant rate of interest, around 3–10% per month (see Table 3). Some do both. Interestingly, 27 vendors (about 13.5% of the total) have life insurance policies for social protection purposes in terms of health care, medications, maternity expenses, accidents, children's education, and so on. Therefore, impressively, it can be admitted that some of the vendors (about 13.5 %) are aware of the importance of and need for social security.

Table 3. Access to Social Security

Access to Social Security	Total Number of Vendors (Percentage in parentheses)
Saving in banks and cooperatives	125 (62.5)
Insurance	27 (13.5)
Borrowing	72 (36.0)

Note: N=200.

INDEBTEDNESS OF STREET VENDORS

Street vendors' access to finance depends on their volume of trade and the types of product they sell. Vendors borrow money both for their economic activities and for social security purposes. Thus, they fall into a debt trap due to high indebtedness. They need to obtain credit for their economic activities, but, as part of the informal sector, they have no access to credit from formal financial institutions (Bhowmik, 2001, 2007; Jhabvala, 2000). In order to survive, they borrow money from various other sources. In the present study, out of the total sample (N=200), we see that 161 vendors borrow money from different sources for different purposes, namely, for their economic activity, for housing, for house rent, and especially for social security purposes. Around 44.72% of the vendors (72 out of 161) borrow money for social protection purposes in terms of health care, medications, maternity expenses, accidents, children's education, and so on, whereas 34.16% of the vendors borrow money for their economic activities. About 9% of the vendors borrow money to pay a deposit on house rent (see Table 4).

The present study found that the social security purposes served by borrowing are family health care and medications, maternity expenses, children's education, daughter's marriage, accidents, and purchase of insurance. Around 31% of vendors borrow money for family health care and medication purposes, while 25% vendors borrow money for their children's education (see Table 5). They encourage their children to continue their education. One of the vendors stated that

I don't want my children to become street vendors. This job has no dignity, no respect, and is full of uncertainty. I started because I had no option, to survive. If my children want to continue with higher education, I would support them; I would even borrow money for them.

Table 4. Purposes Served by Borrowing

Purposes Served by Borrowing	Total Number of Vendors (Percentage in parentheses)
Business	55 (34.16)
Housing	8 (4.97)
House rent (deposit)	15 (9.32)
Send money to village	11 (6.83)
Social security	72 (44.72)

Note: N=161.

Table 5. Social Security Purposes Served by Borrowing

Purposes	Total Number of Vendors (Percentage in parentheses)
Family health care and medications	22 (30.56)
Maternity expenses	5 (6.94)
Children's education	18 (25.00)
Daughter's marriage	7 (9.72)
Accidents	16 (22.22)
Insurance	4 (5.56)

Note: N=72.

Most of the vendors borrow money for school fees and to purchase computers for their children, because they prefer to send their children to English-medium schools. More than 50% of the total vendors borrow up to \$212.77 for their economic activities in a month, while around 50% of the total vendors borrow up to \$425.00 in a month for their medications, for health care, and for insurance purposes. They borrow either from moneylenders or from wholesalers. Some of the street vendors are very happy to borrow from the wholesalers since they don't charge monthly regular interest rate. But it is calculated in the present study that the vendors unknowingly pay around 25-35% more than the cost of their products to the wholesalers.

Table 6 shows that around 36% of the vendors have already paid in interest as much as they borrowed. Others have paid in interest two, three, or more times the amount they borrowed. One of the vendors in the study borrowed 10,000 rupees (\$212.77) for buying medicine 10 years ago, and he has been paying interest at a 5% rate ever since. Thus, it is estimated that he has paid in interest around 14 times the total amount that he borrowed. One of the vendors stated that “my father had taken money for this activity. After his death, I am still paying the rate of interest.”

ROLE OF MEMBERSHIP-BASED ORGANISATIONS

Membership-based organisations can be defined as “those in which the members elect their leaders and which operate on democratic principles that hold the elected officers accountable to the general membership” (Chen et al., 2007: 4). Trade unions, cooperatives, workers committees, savings and credit groups such as Self Help Groups (SHGs), producer groups and so on are categorised as membership-based organisations (Chen et al., 2007). This section of the article is based on in-depth interviews with five individuals who are actively involved in membership-based organisations and in a position to make decisions for the vendors. They are doing administrative work in their organisations, and they were also vendors. Key respondents, who were working as small vendors initially, have become small enterprise owner over the period of time and have appointed a number of wage workers for administrative work and other responsibilities in their respective organisations. According to them, it is very easy to work for the vendors as insiders. One of the key respondents stated that “our friends [the vendors] rely on and trust us because they think that we can understand the situation and represent their voice properly.”

Table 6. Total Interest Paid as a Multiple of the Principal

Multiple of the Principal	Total Number of Vendors (Percentage in parentheses)
1-Time	26 (36.11)
2-Times	28 (38.89)
3-Times	11 (15.28)
4-Times	4 (5.56)
6-Times	2 (2.78)
14-Times	1 (1.39)

Note: N=72.

Street vendors in Mumbai are continuously harassed by local police and the Bombay Municipal Corporation (BMC), since street vending is illegal and it is also the most visible component in the urban informal sector. Thus, some street vendors have organised themselves into unions or local associations that enable them to pursue their economic activities. These unions are mainly localized bodies and they are membership based. However, there are as yet very few such organisations in existence, whether in Mumbai or elsewhere in India. The organisations act as intermediaries between individual street traders and local authorities. Since the street vendors have no legal basis for their existence, the main role of the organisations is to negotiate with local authorities such as municipal corporations and local police forces for the right to occupy public space so that the vendors can carry on their trade. The organisations face many problems when they start to negotiate with the authorities about public space. One of the key respondents noted that

we are struggling for the rights for them [the vendors] and for their space on the road. We protest [against the authorities'] continuous harassment. Many times, we went to jail with the vendors to protest.

The organisations also are helping to set up a welfare board with the help of labour commission to enhance vendors' social security and cooperatives to provide them with access to credit for their economic activities and access to personal and educational loans.

Organising Social Security

Active membership-based organisations press for social security schemes that provide multiple benefits for those who are unionised. For instance, the social security scheme called 'Janshree Bima Yojana,' provided by the Life Insurance Corporation of India (LICI), is very successful scheme. But this scheme has implemented in a few places, one of which has been considered for the present study. The scheme includes insurance coverage for health issues, house and property, accidental and natural death, and permanent and partial disability. It is a group insurance scheme, for a minimum of 25 members. Members pay an annual premium. The annual premium for an individual vendor is 50 rupees (\$1.06), which is very affordable, even for the poorest. Under this scheme, each vendor can receive 15,000 to 75,000 rupees (\$319.15 to \$1595.74) in the case of an accident, and the vendor's family will receive 75,000 rupees (\$1595.74) after his/her death. Moreover, this scheme covers scholarships for the education of the vendor's children. A maximum of two children of the vendor can benefit, and each child can receive 1200 rupees (\$25.53) per year as a scholarship. One organisation has helped to arrange money for one vendor's son to pursue higher studies.

Toward Credit Accessibility for Street Vendors

A cooperative credit society has been registered under the state government to provide loans such as personal loans, educational loans, and loans for economic activity and the cooperative receives the money from the state government. The cooperative gives loans to the membership-based organisations. A cooperative cannot provide a direct loan for an individual vendor. Hence, membership-based organisations act as intermediaries between street vendors and a cooperative. Vendors must be members of an organisation to benefit from the cooperative. According to the rules and norms, a vendor can acquire a maximum of 30,000 rupees (\$638.30). Each vendor in the organisation gives money to the organisation according to the vendor's volume of trade (at a minimum of 10 rupees [\$0.02] per day) and the organisation thus accumulates money that is used as "working capital" Then, the vendor can take a loan from the "working capital" in the organisation at the nominal rate of interest. According to the five key respondents from membership-based organisations, this cooperative is very successful.

However, the problem is that overall very few street vendors are unionised in Mumbai. The study has shown that only around 2,500 vendors are involved in this cooperative and social security scheme in Mumbai, while Mumbai has 350,000 street vendors according to the records of most of the unions. According to all the key respondents, all the street vendors try to evade the necessary rules and regulations. They do not want to pay even the nominal minimum membership fees. Therefore, very few of the street vendors are registered members of the unions. One of the key respondents stated that "most of the vendors try to avoid all the rules and norms and hence they prefer private money lenders at a high rate of interest."

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In summary, a good deal of work has been done to analyse and define the informal sector. However, we are still a long way from really understanding this phenomenon, which is of such major economic, political, and social importance in all countries, developed as well as underdeveloped. Thus, it is also very difficult to theorise the street vendor workers within the informal sector context. However, from the present study, we can see that most of the street vendors are either inter-state or within-state migrants. Given this fact, we can perhaps support the dualist view of the informal sector, since adequate jobs are not available in the countryside and modern jobs are not in sufficient supply in the cities. Hence, the numbers of street vendors have been growing significantly over the decades. However, migration cannot be the only factor responsible for the growth in numbers.

The basic problem of street vendors is that of their right to exist in the urban informal sector, because their occupation is illegal. Hence, they do not have

dignity or rights at work. These are the first requirements in providing them with a decent working environment. Hence, government should provide the vendors with legal space for their activities. If government provides the vendors' basic need for space, the rules and regulations should not be complicated. The key respondents clearly stated that most of the vendors try to avoid formal rules and regulations. These can be very difficult for those with little education, and it has been noted that most of the vendors have only a low literacy level. From this point of view, the present study supports the legalist view, which relates to the problems of formal rules, regulations, and registration. If the rules and regulations are simple and the vendors are provided with space, this would provide the vendors with some dignity, which is an integral part of decent work.

From the present study it can be seen that street vendors play a very important role in the urban informal economy by generating employment (which is the first and the most important pillar of decent work; ILO, 1999) and by supporting the urban poor as well as the rich. Nonetheless, the study found that 23% of street vendors survive on 20 rupees (\$0.43) a day in Mumbai. The NCEUS report (2007) categorised people with this daily income as "poor and vulnerable." Bhowmik's 2001 study showed that the daily income of male vendors was 70 rupees and that of women was 40 rupees. In the present study, we find that over 40% of the population have an income of 20 to 35 rupees (\$0.43 to \$0.74). Therefore, the income level has not improved in the last eight years. One of the factors responsible for vendors' low income is the regular payment of bribes. Their income could be more decent if they did not have to pay these bribes. A vendor stated that "harassment, eviction, and the collection of bribes have been increasing in the last three to four years."

Another important finding of the study is that street vendors depend on moneylenders and wholesalers for access to credit as well as for social security purposes. The study also shows that vendors are often forced to pay exorbitant rates of interest. The main purposes of the borrowing are for their social security and for their business activity, as a result of which they often fall into a debt trap, which is a matter for grave concern. This study also reveals that 100% of the vendors need a means of achieving social security. They are surviving by means of their savings or borrowing at high interest rates. Thus, a basic need for the vendors is social security, which is supposed to be provided by the government. Group insurance could be a better solution to this problem. During this study, respondents said they were interested in this. Therefore, the government or any other stakeholders, especially trade unions, should come forward.

The study further reveals poor working conditions in terms of excessive working hours in a day, in addition to unhealthy and unsafe conditions in the workplace. Street vending is spreading dramatically. As a result, to compete with others and continue to exist in the local market, vendors increase their hours of work. This study reveals that working hours have increased by four to five hours a day since the study was carried out in 2001. Long-time street vendors

have also admitted that their working hours have increased. A 72-year-old vendor stated that

I have been doing this activity since I was a 12-year-old boy. I have spent 60 years in this area. We were only 10 on this road and now we are more than 1,000. Our total space is the same. Only our personal space has been reduced. I have noticed that the profit margin has decreased compared with before. Competition has increased over the period. I used to spend 5 hours in a day but now I spend 9–10 hrs to survive.

The ministry of urban development and poverty alleviation set up national policy goals and made many recommendations in 2006 (NPUSV, 2006). The national policy on urban street vendors was revised again by the ministry of housing and urban poverty alleviation, Government of India, in 2009 (NPUSV, 2009), though the new policy is much the same as the old. . Thus, government has already highlighted the important problems and provided very specific recommendations. The problem is that these recommendations still remain on paper only and have not been implemented in Mumbai so far. Mr. Arbind Singh, coordinator of National Associations for the Street Vendors in India (NASVI), commented on the revised policy as follows:

We want the government to stay with the earlier policy and work for its quick implementation rather than come up with another one. It is eventually the States and local bodies which have to implement the policy. Even five years after the first policy was adopted, only five States and about 15 cities have made attempts to implement it. The new policy would only provide further excuse for the States to delay the implementation and the vendors would suffer in the meanwhile. (Srivasthan, 2009)

Therefore, the state governments should take the initiative to fully implement the national policy, especially in Maharashtra, since the numbers of street vendors have been growing significantly in Mumbai.

According to the local authorities, the street vendors occupy public space illegally. The national policy (NPUSV, 2006) suggested that town vending committees (TVCs) should be made responsible for the allocation of space to street vendors. The functions of the TVCs recommended by the national policy are as follows: registering the street vendor and ensuring the issuance of an identity card to the vendor after it has been prepared by the municipal authority; monitoring the facilities to be provided to the street vendors by the municipal authority; identifying areas for vending with no restriction, areas with restrictions with regard to dates, days, and times, and areas that would be marked as no-vending zones; setting the terms and conditions for hawking; taking corrective action against defaulters; and collecting revenue. But the fees should be nominal or at least affordable for all street vendors. The committees may decide the amount the street vendors will be charged, considering the local conditions. Considering the functions of the TVCs recommended by national policy, it could be said that

TVCs would be the better solution to organise the vendors in the local level. Street vendors would prefer to pay fees legally to the government instead of paying bribes to the local police and the municipal corporation. One of the vendors stated that “we would like to pay the amount as taxes instead of bribes for our . . . space. We would even love to pay double the amount that we are paying now.”

Given the importance of street vendors in the urban informal sector, some nongovernmental organisations, cooperatives, and other groups are coming forward with initiatives for providing social security and many other basic requirements for street vendors, but these initiatives are few and far between. In view of the present economic situation, especially given the recent financial crisis and the large number of formal-sector jobs that have been lost, the informal sector will expand further in the years to come. Since street vending is one of the easiest ways to get into the urban informal sector, the number of street vendors is very likely to increase drastically in the near future. One of the major findings of this study is that in places where trade unions are performing efficiently and effectively, street vendors are found to be in a somewhat better position. Thus, trade unions or other membership-based organisations could be the best way to organise them. Vendors can achieve a reasonably decent working life or at least a better working environment with the help of trade unions. However, looking at the findings of the present study as a whole, it can be said that the empowerment of the lives of street vendors by transforming their work life into one of “decent work” is a distant vision.

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