Seeds
No. 20 2000
ISSN 073-6833

SEEDS is a pamphlet series developed to meet requests from all over the world for information about innovative and practical program ideas developed to address the economic roles and needs of low-income women. The pamphlets are designed as a means to share information and spark new initiatives based on the positive experiences of projects that are working to help women generate livelihoods and to improve their economic status. The projects described in this and other issues of SEEDS have been selected because they have served not only to strengthen women's productive roles, but also to integrate women into various sectors of development, both social and economic. All projects documented in the SEEDS series involve women in decisionmaking, organize women locally, and address broader policy issues that affect the economic roles of women.

These reports are not meant to be prescriptive, since every development effort will face somewhat different problems and possibilities. Rather, they have been written to describe the history of an idea and its implementation in the hope that the lessons learned can be useful in a variety of settings. They are also being written to bring to the attention of those in decisionmaking positions the vital roles that women play not only in the economies of their individual households but also in the economic life of every nation.

The Population Council provides project direction and administrative support for SEEDS. Editorial policy is set by the SEEDS Steering Committee: Sajeda Amin (Population Council), Judith Bruce (Population Council), Marilyn Carr (International Development Research Centre), Marty Chen (Harvard Institute for International Development), Margaret Clark (The Aspen Institute), Monique Cohen (USAID), Nicole Haberland (Population Council), Ann Leonard (Population Council), Cecilia Lotse (UNICEF), Katharine McKee (USAID), Aruna Rao (consultant), Sandy Schilen (SEEDS editor), Jennefer Sebstad (consultant), Mildred Warner (Cornell University), and Corinne Whitaker (International Women's Health Coalition).

This edition of SEEDS is made possible by support of the Ford Foundation and the Population Council.

Copyright © 2000 The Population Council, Inc.

Population Council

The Population Council is an international, nonprofit, nongovernmental institution that seeks to improve the wellbeing and reproductive health of current and future generations around the world and to help achieve a humane, equitable, and sustainable balance between people and resources. The Council conducts biomedical, social science, and public health research and helps build research capacities in developing countries. Established in 1952, the Council is governed by an international board of trustees. Its New York headquarters supports a global network of regional and country offices.

Population Council, One Dag Hammarskjold Plaza, New York, New York 10017 USA; telephone: (212) 339-0500; facsimile: (212) 755-6052; e-mail: pubinfo@popcouncil.org; www.popcouncil.org

Statements made and views expressed in this publication are solely the responsibility of the authors and not of any organization providing support for SEEDS. Any part of this document may be reproduced without permission of the authors so long as it is not sold for profit.

Cover Photo: International Women's Tribune Center
Typography: Susan Rowe
Printing: Graphic Impressions

Other Editions of SEEDS Currently Available

No. 2 *Hanover Street: An Experiment to Train Women in Welding and Carpentry—Jamaica* (English, Spanish)
No. 3 *Market Women's Cooperatives: Giving Women Credit—Nicaragua* (Spanish, French)
No. 4 *Women and Handicrafts: Myth and Reality—International* (English, Spanish, French)
No. 5 *The Markala Cooperative: A New Approach to Traditional Economic Roles—Mali* (French)
No. 6 *The Working Women's Forum: Organizing for Credit and Change—India* (French)
No. 7 *Developing Non-Craft Employment for Women in Bangladesh* (English, French, Spanish)
No. 8 *Community Management of Waste Recycling: The SIRDO—Mexico* (English, Spanish)
No. 9 *The Women's Construction Collective: Building for the Future—Jamaica* (English, Spanish)
No. 10 *Forest Conservation in Nepal: Encouraging Women's Participation* (English, Spanish, French, Nepali)
No. 11 *Port Sudan Small Scale Enterprise Program—Sudan* (English)
No. 12 *The Muek-Lek Women's Dairy Project in Thailand* (English)
No. 13 *Child Care: Meeting the Needs of Working Mothers and Their Children* (English, Spanish)
No. 14 *Breaking New Ground: Reaching Out to Women Farmers in Western Zambia* (English, Spanish, French)
No. 15 *Self-Employment as a Means to Women's Economic Self-Sufficiency: Women Venture's Business Development Program* (English)
No. 16 *Wasteland Development and the Empowerment of Women: The SARTHI Experience* (French, Hindi)
No. 17 *Supporting Women Farmers in the Green Zones of Mozambique* (English)
No. 18 *Out of the Shadows: Homebased Workers Organize for International Recognition* (English)
No. 19 *Empowering the Next Generation: Girls of the Maqattam Garbage Settlement* (English, Arabic)

If you would like additional copies of this issue or any of the editions of SEEDS listed above, please write to us at the address given below. Copies of selected SEEDS issues in local languages have been published by organizations in the following countries: Egypt, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Nepal, Pakistan, Thailand, and Vietnam. Please write to us for more information if you are interested in these materials.

SEEDS, Population Council
One Dag Hammarskjold Plaza, New York, New York 10017 USA

Women Street Vendors: The Road to Recognition

by Monique Cohen
with Mihir Bhatt and Pat Horn

Introduction

> *"There's the sticky-rice vendor." My mother knew, from the vendors' songs, the coded cadence of their voices, the distinctively nuanced tap-tap-tap of their wooden sticks, what it was they were hawking. There was no getting around the difficult makeup of their selling language (Lan Cao 1998).*

It is only when they are not *where* we expect to find them, *when* we expect to find them, plying a particular path or occupying a particular spot, that we even become aware of the role street vendors play in our everyday lives. In most cities, people's awareness of this trade begins with an association with a seller of street food: a woman vending *satay* sticks in southeast Asia, a vendor selling *foul* and *ta'amia* from a handcart in Egypt, a woman with a plate of freshly made *beignets* or a bucket of roasted corn in Africa, a seller of roasted chestnuts and pretzels in New York City. Other images of street vendors come to mind as well: women selling religious trinkets, boys delivering newspapers, cigarette vendors, makeshift street stands offering great deals on everything from T-shirts to books to the latest cassette tapes. And then there are the neighborhood vendors of fruits and vegetables, ice cream, and household services who make their daily rounds, their familiar cries echoing as they pass.

The symphony of alley cries from the secondhand clothes seller, the knife sharpener, and the vegetable vendor reflects old traditions. In both industrialized and developing countries, street vendors have long existed as purveyors of goods and services to a large public that spans class and income. The integral role street vendors play in the daily lives of much of the world's population stands in sharp contrast to the precariousness of their own lives, however. Street vendors work in the informal sector, a large segment of the economy about which there is limited information. As such, their enormous contribution to the economy has yet to be fully recognized by economists, urban planners, and policymakers.

This issue of SEEDS explores the experience of women working and organizing as urban street vendors.[1] It is part of the SEEDS series on the economic empowerment of women workers in selected occupations that employ large numbers of low-income women around the world. It continues our exploration of how economically marginalized women are pursuing income-generating activities amid escalating global competition for access to markets, low-cost commodities, and low-waged workers.

Too often, street vendors' rights to ply their trade are limited by regulation, harassment, and new urban initiatives, making women especially vulnerable. As urbanization continues, both the volume of demand and the number of vendors are expected to grow.[2] Economic reforms and downsizing in the public and private sectors over the past two decades have driven many new entrants, often men, into this highly competitive market as jobs in the formal sector disappear. This has affected women greatly, causing downward pressure on earnings and driving out the weakest hawkers, who are usually women. These and other pressures help explain why the need for women to organize as vendors has intensified so dramatically and why initiatives such as those outlined in this issue of SEEDS are becoming linked internationally.

Lisa Kallenbach

Women as Street Vendors: Where, Why, and How?

Poor women in particular have always had to work; in many cities around the world, they work as street vendors and formal traders. They are rarely included in a country's labor statistics because they are far more likely to be working in the informal rather than the formal sector (and thus are not "counted" among the employed or economically active). Faced with a paucity of statistics on street vendors in general, and women hawkers in particular, it is difficult to quantify with any precision the extent of female participation. However, walking down the Prado in La Paz, visiting a market in Lagos, or passing through a residential neighborhood in Kampala confirms what we know: Women supply visible and invisible labor in street vending activities. Table 1 illustrates the importance of the informal sector, and of women in this sector, in selected countries of Africa and Asia.

Street vending is one of the few readily accessible avenues of employment open to women who need to earn a living. The low cost of entry into many types of hawking and vending as well as schedule flexibility is an attractive factor for some women. In addition, in certain situations women actually inherit their

Table 1 Informal-sector activities as a percentage of total employment and GDP, and female informal traders' share of informal employment and informal GDP in selected countries of Africa and Asia

	Informal sector as a percentage of		Female informal traders as a percentage of	
	Total trade employment	Total trade GDP	Total informal trade employment	Total informal trade GDP
Africa				
Benin	99.1	69.8	92.2	64.3
Burkina Faso	94.7	45.7	65.9	30.1
Chad	99.2	66.7	61.8	41.2
Kenya	84.9	61.5	50.2	27.3
Mali	98.1	56.7	81.3	46.1
Tunisia	87.6	55.6	7.9	4.4
Asia				
India	96.4	90.0	12.4	11.2
Indonesia	93.0	77.2	49.3	38.0
Philippines	73.1	52.3	72.0	21.6

Source: Charmes 1999 (Charmes's personal compilation on the basis of official labor force statistics and national accounts).

vendor status. In Ghana, daughters often join their mothers in business as adolescents, starting, perhaps, with a basin of toiletries or other goods, and gradually moving to a small table and then a stall.

For some women, vending and hawking are the only occupations they know, while for others they are occupations of last resort. With limited literacy and mathematical skills, poor women have few alternatives:

> *I have been a vendor for some time, for about five years. Before that, I worked at the Ghana Commercial Bank as a subaccountant. I stopped working at the bank because of my ill health. Money was running out and then my husband died and I decided to become a street vendor. I was unable to find another job because of my weak eyesight.*
>
> *Street vendor from Accra, Ghana*

> *Gladys trades in Durban. Since her husband left her she has been the sole breadwinner in her extended family. Her youngest child lives south of Durban with a friend. Two other children are cared for by an unemployed sister who has four children of her own. Apart from her friend, all of these eight people are dependent on her for support (Lund, Nicholson, and Skinner 2000, p. 14).*

Street vending is an important domain of poor women's economic activity that requires endless juggling of family and work responsibilities. Women traders perform many different tasks in a day:

> *I get up between four-thirty and five o'clock in the morning. . . . (After caring for three children under the age of three). . . . get to the bus station . . . and arrive in town at about eight o'clock. (After buying goods) . . . I am at the trading site . . . trading by nine-thirty. . . . At four in the afternoon I take my goods to the storage space. . . . When I get home I make supper and go to bed at eight or nine o'clock.*
>
> *Street vendor from South Africa*

In Mexico City, a survey of female street vendors indicated that, on average, women vendors are 27 years old and have up to three children under the age of four. Childcare is a constant problem for vendors: Many mothers care for at least one of their children on the job (i.e., on the street). Availability of childcare is vital not only because it gives poor women more freedom to earn a living wage, but also because it protects the health and wellbeing of their children, who otherwise may be exposed to unsanitary conditions in the market. The same study found very high rates of disease in Mexico City vendors' children—40 percent of children under the age of one and 21 percent of those older than two (Hernandez et al. 1996).

Frequently women must leave or stop work to handle family emergencies such as illness and accidents. In addition, women working long hours on the street are subject to pollution from cars and motor bikes and, when commuting home, face the usual threat of violence and sexual harassment common to low-

Susan Poats

income women living in marginal settlements around the world.

Traditionally, the preparation and sale of food has been an important source of income for women. The Equity Policy Center's groundbreaking study on street foods in the mid-1980s showed that even when women did not own and operate a business themselves, they were still major contributors to its operation. Indeed, male-owned enterprises generally depended on the labor of women working at home for many of the products sold (Table 2). This is particularly striking for Bangladesh, Egypt, and Indonesia (in fact, for all Muslim countries). The typical scenario is exemplified by the *lassi* (a drink made from yogurt) vendor in Bangladesh. While the husband walks the streets with a pushcart, his wife is in charge of the production process at home. Similarly, in Tunisia women still produce *malsouka*—fine pastry dough used in *brik,* the traditional and popular Tunisian snack—at home while it is sold in city markets mainly by men, who compete with commercial firms.

Vending and trading, with some notable exceptions, are seldom lucrative occupations for women. Irrespective of gender, available data suggest that even the more successful street vendors earn an income that is at, or close to, the poverty level.

If one measures economic success in terms of expanding one's business, it is clear that both the vending environment (an oversupply of goods and vendors) and the small scale of the businesses limit women's potential for upward mobility. Increasingly, expenses and consumer resistance to price increases reduce profitability for hawkers and vendors. The high cost of credit is another constraint. Once they enter this marginal economic world, women experience limited opportunities for building up the assets they need to help their businesses grow. When there is growth—as measured by hiring a part-time worker or acquiring assets, including a house—it is very slow and gradual. Some eventually leave this subsector altogether.

Operating in highly competitive markets and in environments where demand is constrained by limited purchasing power, women traders often focus on reducing their vulnerability to crisis and economic shocks. Consequently, not all women reinvest their earnings in their businesses and instead apply them to other asset-creating endeavors. For example, many women use an intergenerational strategy by which they maintain the original vending enterprise to ensure stable income and then use the surplus to educate the next generation so that younger family members can have access to higher-earning occupations.

The Scope and Unique Challenges of Street Vending

Defining the Range of Street-vending Activities

Although the terms "market vendor," "street vendor," and "vendor" are frequently used interchangeably, closer scrutiny suggests they all are very loosely defined, both across and within cultures. In some countries, the term "street vendor" covers marketplace vendors as well as pavement sellers, mobile street hawkers, and home-based vendors. In others, marketplace vendors are a separate category. Street vendors may be legal or illegal: a pavement seller in Abidjan pays a daily tax; her counterpart in other cities does not. Some street vendors are independent, while others

Table 2 Street food enterprises, by women's involvement (percent)

	Owner or operator			Enterprise with female assistants	
City	**Woman**	**Man**	**Couple**	**Paid**	**Unpaid**
Bogor, Indonesia	16	60	24	5	33
Chonburi, Thailand	78	22	—	13	31
Ile-Ife, Nigeria	94	6	—	19	15
Iloilo, Philippines	63	10	27	4	11
Kingston, Jamaica	44	46	10	—	—
Manikganj, Bangladesh	1	99	—	10	25
Minia, Egypt	17	83	—	1	34
Pune, India	13	87	—	33	51
Ziguinchor, Senegal	77	23	—	—	25

Source: Tinker 1997.

Compared to male traders, women are more likely to:

- *have lower levels of education, prior work experience, and relevant skills;*
- *be single heads of households and main income earners;*
- *have greater pressures on their time; and*
- *have less time: for trade, to learn new skills, for leisure, and for sleep.*

hawk merchandise for somewhat larger microenterprises or nearby businesses. Most women vendors are self-employed or hired by others; very few employ workers themselves, and, commonly, most have a minimal asset base.

Street vendors are involved in the entire range of economic activities undertaken by the working poor. They are not only sellers of a myriad of goods—of which food, underwear, toiletries, and car parts are among the more obvious—but they also work as purveyors of services including dental work, hair dyeing, and financial services. The prevalence of these trades, in business areas of the city as well as residential neighborhoods, suggests that significant amounts of cash flow through this sector, even though the units of transaction may be very small—a teaspoon of tomato paste, one cigarette, or a piece of soap.

The contribution these hawkers and vendors make to the economy stems from their outreach to a dispersed clientele who value affordable services available at their doorstep. Compared to many shops located in low-income neighborhoods, vendors often serve up to three times as many customers, turn over a comparable quantity of goods, charge prices 10–30 percent less, and offer flexible hours so that customers can be served at their convenience throughout the day. The persistence of street vendors across cultures indicates that they satisfy a very palpable consumer demand via the units and prices of their merchandise and services. For example, street vendors will usually sell by the item—one apple, two cigarettes, or one AA battery—which is a lifesaver for low-income consumers who can't afford the multiple-item packages sold in most retail outlets. Food vending is another activity benefiting low-income consumers as it is often more cost- and time-effective to buy prepared street foods rather than shop for ingredients and cook food at home.[3]

Intergenerational Growth

Maria has been a street vendor selling staple food products for almost 20 years, and she has been borrowing money from Acción Communitaria in Lima, a microfinance institution, for nearly as long. She first used her loans as working capital for her microenterprise, which she still operates on the same scale today. Rather than expand her business or manage more businesses, she has been remarkably successful in using her loans to launch each of her children in a profession or business. Today three of her children work as a lawyer, an Air Force pilot, and a social worker. Several others are self-employed owners of a print shop, a paper goods store combined with a beauty shop, and an appliance repair business. The youngest son is establishing a computer graphics and photocopy business (Dunn 1997).

Scale of Vending

Although the magnitude of the street vendor trade can only be approximated (Tables 1 and 3), evidence from India suggests it can be significant. In the city of Ahmedabad, for example, street vendors turn over more cash than the textile industry (the city's major indus-

Marty Chen

Table 3 Number of vendors in selected cities

City	1995 population	Number of vendors
Bombay, India	15,138,000	500,000–2 million
Ahmedabad, India	4,000,000	6,000–25,000
Manila, Philippines	9,286,000	20,000–50,000*
Bangkok, Thailand	6,547,000	11,000–230,000
Nairobi, Kenya	1,810,000	40,000*
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia	1,236,000	25,000
New York City	16,332,000	14,000*

* 1996 figure.
Sources: Bhatt 1998; United Nations 1995.

try). In Bombay they turn over more money than Hindustan Lever—one of the largest corporations in the city—and in New Delhi hawkers and vendors contribute more than 50 percent of the city's gross domestic product (GDP) (Jhabvala 2000).

However, as noted earlier, despite the cumulative amount of money that changes hands within the sector, most street vending businesses remain one-person operations utilizing unpaid family labor on an as-needed basis. Working in the family business can be part of a clearly understood, if rarely explicit, reciprocal arrangement and may offer some individuals no cash earnings of any kind.

Location Is Everything

As for most businesses, location is the be-all and end-all of street vending. While location will vary with the products sold and services rendered, certain patterns repeat themselves across cultures. Marketplaces and bus stops attract large concentrations of street vendors; preferred downtown locations include major thoroughfares and streets where pedestrian traffic is high and the sidewalks are wide. Prevalent at these locales are the vendors of low-cost apparel, small dry goods, snacks, cooked meals, and services that can be provided quickly (such as shoe repair). As cities expand, residential areas are also important domains for vendors, particularly those who sell fruit and vegetables. Newly paved roads quickly attract new car and foot traffic and act as significant catalysts for the growth of microenterprise activity.

Although street vendor operations may appear temporary or impermanent—flimsy kiosks, shoulder poles, low tables, or a square of fabric—there is rarely anything casual about where and how a street vendor conducts her business: the turf battles that ensue when an interloper attempts to usurp a vendor's established route or pavement spot are vivid testimony to this "ownership." A vendor's location is based upon the client base for her products or services. Many clients are her peers: poor people of limited means. Street food vendors who sell prepared foods in low-income neighborhoods and slum areas that lack cooking facilities are a good example. Vendors congregate at work sites, transportation arteries, and schools where they supply a captive audience with snacks, cooked foods, and other items.

For each consumer group there is a peak selling time. A Zimbabwean woman living in a

Ann Leonard

low-income neighborhood of Bulawayo pointed out that she is busiest selling bread from her home-based bakery from 5:00–7:00 a.m. and from 6:00–9:00 p.m. Other vendors move from site to site to reach more customers during different times of the day. Vendors can also be found in middle- and upper-class neighborhoods. Here the number of transactions may be fewer but the return is usually higher.

Regulation and Licensing

The term "informal sector" generally refers to economic activities that are unlicensed or operate without the requisite official permits. Therefore informal-sector workers, both owner-operators and their paid employees,[4] are not subject to national labor laws and rarely, if ever, receive job-related benefits associated with formal employment, such as sick leave, life insurance, and holiday/vacation pay; nor are they covered by job protection laws.

Large numbers of street vendors, indeed the majority, are also unregistered. In central Bombay, only 40,000 licenses have been issued for a population of at least 200,000 vendors; with approximately 16,000 street vendors in New York City, only 850 permits have been issued; and in Kuala Lumpur, no more than 40 percent of the 25,000 vendors are legally licensed to trade (Bhatt 1998; Hicks 1993).

In many cities the number of permits issued for street vending is frequently capped well below the number of active vendors, which inevitably results in a disproportionately high number of "illegal" operators.[5] Some experts like to argue that for many street vendors the cost of a license (price plus opportunity cost of the time it takes to get a permit) far outweighs the benefits. Others, like Ela Bhatt, the founder and former general secretary of the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in Ahmedabad, India, argue that a license is, in fact, a business asset. Purchased for a price, it can offer the vendor certain rights, in particular, protection against harassment and the confiscation of goods, which, in turn, should increase the vendor's productivity and profitability.

Comparing the situation of a market vendor, who has established rights to a fixed stall within a municipally sanctioned marketplace, to that of a street vendor, who squats on the road outside that marketplace, highlights the inconsistencies of regulation. The scale of the operation of both market and street vendors often differs little; both types of microenterprises tend to have low levels of capitalization and tend to be one-person businesses that generate small amounts of revenue. Frequently the two groups compete as complementary providers of goods and services in the same commercial zone. In cities like Abidjan, Ivory Coast, where tax collection has a long tradition, both the market vendor and the street vendor pay a daily tax (*droit de place*) to ply their trades. In other cities, the market vendor pays a tax to vend, but her counterpart on the street does not. Vendors operating out of their homes, away from downtown areas, are seldom affected by any regulations, even when the area of operation is not zoned for commercial activity.

In general, despite inconsistent regulation, vendors occupying a space within a market feel more secure in their access to this asset (even when they hold it only on the basis of squatters' rights) than those on the street. In other words, *the important issue for vendors*, irrespective of differences in their operations, *concerns the municipality granting legitimacy to one location and not the other*.

Food safety concerns associated with the cooked food trade present particular licensing issues, and regulations here too are arbitrarily and unevenly implemented, resulting in contradictory outcomes both for vendors and society at large. For example, in Ecuador only 30 percent of food vendors have a vending license, but twice as many (63 percent) have health certificates. In contrast, in Colombia the

Women traders, compared to men, are more likely to:

- *operate from an open rather than a covered space;*
- *operate from the street rather than a cart or a stall;*
- *operate from an insecure or illegal space;*
- *trade in perishable goods;*
- *generate a lower volume of trade;*
- *work as commission agents or employees of other businesses;*
- *not employ other people; and*
- *earn less.*

ratio is 2:1 favoring licenses over health certificates (20 percent vs. 10 percent). In Peru, 42 percent of the vendors had medical examinations and carried health certificates.

Urban Management of Street Vending: Overlaps and Gaps

In most cities, the regulation of street vendors is rarely the primary responsibility of any one agency. This poses problems for the vendors as well as for those responsible for regulating them. In many municipal governments, the following departments are involved:

- Police handle the regulation and licensing of vendors;
- Department of transportation monitors the obstruction of traffic flow;
- Public works department oversees the provision and maintenance of infrastructure; and
- Health department is responsible for public health and sanitation.

Not surprisingly, confusion and overlapping responsibility are common, which often puts the police in the unenviable position of enforcing laws that are outdated and not in the best interest of the vendors, the city, or its residents. While in some cities vendors are left alone to ply their trade, albeit unlawfully, in others they are subjected to periodic police action. *When accountability is unclear in the municipal system, harassment of vendors by private or public interests quickly becomes commonplace.*

Logically, urban administrations would have much to gain by locating the responsibility for street vending in one municipal office. Taxing street vendors could result in a convergence of many interests, among them the survival of vendors and enhanced municipal revenues and management capacities. The fiscal benefits that would come from more effective collection of taxes or fees from street vendors should not be underestimated. For example, inefficiency in the Brihad Mumbai Municipal Corporation's system is so great that for one year in the 1990s the city earned only Rs1,200,000 (about US$28,600) in revenues from its tens of thousands of street vendors and hawkers, a fraction of what could have been earned.

By itself, the diffusion of responsibility for street vendor activities within city government is an incomplete explanation of why urban administrations have failed to better manage vending activities. Corruption and political whims are also explanatory factors that can be counteracted only by the strong political will of vendors and city administrators (see box).

Harassment

Newspapers are filled with articles about the harassment of street vendors and the confiscation of their goods. Justifications from officials commonly include obstruction of traffic,

Monique Cohen

Where Is the Money?

Built in 1972 to accommodate 400 vendors, the Owino Market in Kampala houses 5,000 vendors and is the single largest source of employment in Kampala, providing work for 25,000 people. Stall rental fees provide the Kampala City Council (KCC) with half of its market revenues and 16 percent of the KCC's recurrent revenues.

Meanwhile outside Owino's gates and operating after 5 p.m. is an illegal market. Large numbers of vendors trade on the streets here with the implicit sanction of local authorities. By providing sanitation and waste collection services and requiring each vendor to pay a fee each evening to collectors appointed by the Market Management Committee, the KCC is, in effect, managing this trading space as well as the market. However, while revenues that totaled about ten million Uganda shillings monthly were generated in 1994, it is a mystery where this money went. The general belief is that it went to individuals in the KCC and the Ministry of Local Government (Gombay 1994).

trading in unauthorized space, and the absence of a permit or license. In some municipalities, policies regarding confiscation of goods, fines, or jail terms for vendors are unclear or inconsistent. Not surprisingly, the police even harass vendors who are selling legally.

> *Police will beat us, accusing us of selling stolen goods and taking bribes too. Sometimes, the municipal people will come and remove all our things in their van. Of course, we get back the clothes after paying fines, but even then, we suffer because all the goods get mixed up and we have to sort them out. Often, this starts a quarrel amongst ourselves.*
>
> *Trader of old clothes*
> *(cited in Bhatt 1998)*

Although many vendors view harassment and confiscation of goods as part of doing business, in surveys it tops their list of grievances. Among the 504 vendors in the fast-growing town of Idar, India, 66 percent reported harassment from three "responsible" agencies: the Public Works Department, the Nagar Panchayat officers (the unit of local government), and the police.

Police harassment is not limited to goods confiscation or clearing illegally occupied space. Corruption is also significant. Paying bribes to public and private interests is so widespread there is a global vocabulary for it. Hawkers in Kathmandu, Nepal, call them "private fees for public space." Elsewhere bribes and protection monies are called "speed money," "gifts of honor," "routine offerings," "dog feed," "protection fees," and "friendship fund." As a percentage of daily income, bribes can range from a low of 3–4 percent of vendors' income in Yokohama, Japan, and Chennai, India, to a high of 6–8 percent in Bangkok, Thailand; Colombo, Sri Lanka; and New York City.

Bribes can add up to substantial sums. For example, Indian research has suggested that in Mumbai, where 12,000 hawkers ply their trades on suburban trains, the bribes paid to railway officials coupled with those paid to community extortionists (linked to gangs and street-vendor organizations) total as much as US$2,400 per month (Bhatt 1998).

Hawkers and vendors deal with these various financial demands in different ways. Some pay a one-time-only lump sum in cash, others a regular monthly fee, and others a percentage of daily revenue. Payment in goods and services is also common (a kilogram of vegetables, a weekly basket of fruit, cleaning the front pavement of a competing restaurant, and so forth). Sexual favors may also be required, a problem specifically affecting female vendors. *No matter the form, bribes diminish vendors' livelihoods and dignity.*

Political opportunism can also lead vendors to be targeted as easy scapegoats when high-level officials feel pressed to show their power or need additional resources. A mayor of Mexico City exemplified this approach. Elected without the vendor vote, he sent the police into a downtown area "to reestablish, to recover, a state of law" by arresting a few sidewalk vendors and confiscating their merchandise. With pride he proclaimed, "Mexico City has an ordinance against sidewalk vending downtown, and the law must be respected" (Berman 1998).

Access to Infrastructure and Services

Street vendors are also constrained by lack of access to a wide range of services, including childcare, public utilities (water and electricity), municipal services (such as waste removal and latrines), storage, shelter near trading sites, and financial services. There are endless examples of marketplaces and roadside street vending areas that lack any basic services whatsoever.

Infrastructure problems come to a head in dealing with vendors of cooked food, fruits, and vegetables. Food safety is usually the responsibility of municipal governments, and a range of regulations, intended to protect the health of consumers, governs vendor activities. However, in situations where levels of food hygiene at home and on the street may be equally precarious, the dangers of food contamination are often ignored by vendors and consumers alike. Nevertheless, the provision of clean water, garbage-removal services, and latrines near popular vending sites could quickly improve the safety of street food. For example, an investment in improving public health following a cholera crisis linked to consumption of *ceviche* (marinated raw fish and a widely consumed street food) in Peru has proven to be very effective.

Representation: A Voice in Urban Planning

Because most have little if any formal education and work without the benefit of organizational representation, vendors are usually unaware of either their rights or their obligations. There are particular difficulties involved in organizing hawkers, including high turnover, mobility, and scattered locations. Their numbers, combined with their very small scale of activity, require vendors to come together in some way if they are to exercise any political clout. This is true whether the issues to be addressed are at the neighborhood, city, national, or international level.

What type of organization best serves the interests of street vendors? Most associations of vendors and hawkers limit themselves to representing sellers at a single location or those who sell a single type of commodity. Where local community-based organizations have been successful in organizing vendors by location or along product lines, they often have had a limited basis for collective action in terms of broader citywide and urban policy issues. Too often their leaders fail to see a convergence of interest beyond their neighborhood. When vendor organizations attempt to come together to form federated bodies large enough to attract significant political attention, they frequently stumble over petty issues that prevent them from becoming united. Hence successful vendor associations seem to be more the exception than the rule.

For example, in Manila a citywide vendors' organization could not be sustained be-

Joanne Bloch

Organizational Priorities Among Traders

- *Establish and defend legal rights*
- *Set up effective channels to represent members*
- *Raise the profile of street traders and protect their interests when policy is made*
- *Build leadership through empowering members*
- *Form alliances with trade union movements and other external organizations*

Source: Lund, Nicholson, and Skinner 2000, pp. 94–100.

cause, over time, members ended up competing with each other for the ideal location and most profitable product and thus saw limited gains from collaboration. Eventually, they were able to come together around the need for certain urban services, creating a cooperative structure that provides vending-related services such as water, credit, daycare, and protection against threat.

Despite the inherent obstacles, when unity is forged, it can be a very effective tool in assisting vendors to demand better services and treatment by the authorities. Organizations are crucial in providing vendors with access to information—in usable and appropriate forms—and offering affordable legal representation to vendors facing harassment. In addition to advancing vendor rights, effective organizations have gone a step further and now regularly engage in dialogue with municipal authorities on a range of economic and urban planning issues.

Promising Responses and Lessons Learned

As we look at how cities can productively accommodate vendors and support them to operate legitimately in urban sites, we need to keep in mind that the street vending population is a persistent proportion of the working population in most cities. As Lund, Nicholson, and Skinner (2000) have noted:

> *The informal economy is here to stay. It is not something temporary. It is not a pause on a road leading to jobs for everyone in the formal economy. . . . [In this context,] street traders are permanent players in the economy who make an important contribution to it, particularly to certain sections of it. . . . They are entrepreneurs with important trading skills who are able to analyze key problems in their environment in economic terms. Their economic activities also create employment for others (Lund, Nicholson, and Skinner 2000, pp. 9, 39).*

Recognizing this reality is an important step that needs to be taken in reformulating policy. In the following sections we present examples that shed additional light on other key elements in achieving win–win situations for women vendors and cities around the world.

Access to Space and Location

An ambitious goal of the mayor of Lima, Peru (who was elected in 1996 without the support of vendors) was to revitalize the old city and relocate the vendors working there. Unlike earlier interventions, this time the city acknowledged the vendors as a viable commercial class, integral to the larger urban marketing and distribution system. Operating from the principle that Lima belongs to everyone (including informal producers, sellers, and customers), the mayor worked closely with the head of the 8,000-member vendor association in planning the relocation. Collaboration included identifying new vendor sites and providing access to credit and other services. In fact, vendors self-financed the construction of a new, larger marketplace where they could operate legitimately. Unfortunately, because the construction cost was high, “poorer” vendors were excluded.

This experience has led vendors and officials in other urban districts of Lima to realize that self-financing does not always work. Since most vendors who serve a poorer market (usually women) lack the resources to cover new market construction, different infrastructure solutions must be developed to support them. The SEWA example, below, illustrates how the concerns of women vendors can be taken into account.

Case Study: The Self Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) and the Vendors of Ahmedabad, India

In Ahmedabad, an estimated 45,000 people (one-third to one-half of whom are

Why Organize as Women?

- *Women tend to trade and vend in the most vulnerable circumstances because of discrimination against women in most economies. Targeted support and policies can redress some of the effects of this discrimination.*
- *Leadership positions both in unions of formal economy workers and street trader organizations are generally male dominated.*
- *Women need space and opportunities to develop their leadership skills and assertiveness and to establish an action agenda that focuses on their needs.*

women) work as hawkers or petty traders selling vegetables, fruits, and other foods; housewares; tools; clothes; and a wide variety of self-made goods. In the 15 main hawker markets across the city, most vendors either squat on the ground or sell from small handcarts. The Manek Chowk market houses the greatest number of vendors, providing space to about 400. As befits the prime marketing area for consumer goods within the city, the market area of Manek Chowk is crowded and congested, yet it also serves as a major thoroughfare for traffic across the city and is used as a parking place by shop owners and pedestrians.

For some time, Manek Chowk had been at the center of a struggle for vendor rights and space led by SEWA, a trade union for working women.[6] Vendors account for about 30,000 (or approximately one-third) of SEWA's membership; they make up the wing of SEWA that is growing most significantly. The fight over Manek Chowk sprang out of municipal authorities' repeated efforts to evict the vendors in order to create parking zones. The municipality also charged that vendors were obstructing transportation arteries and ordered them to be "cleared off." In the eyes of the law, the vendors were encroaching on government land, which is against the law.

For SEWA, this municipal policy was an infringement of women's right to work, as vending in Manek Chowk constituted many women's only means of earning a livelihood. Most of those affected were well entrenched, occupying trading spots that had been in their families for generations (passed down from mother to daughter since a time when neither cars nor shops existed). Without the right to vend there, these women and their families would be destitute.

In keeping with its tradition of working within the established political and legal infrastructure, SEWA went to the supreme court to seek injunctions against the city to stop the vendor evictions. The court ordered SEWA, the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC), and the police to sit down together and find a

Marty Chen

solution. This proved less daunting than anticipated. With fewer than 400 vendors in Manek Chowk and the neighboring area, mutual accommodation was possible. The solution of choice was to relocate vegetable vendors to a terrace at the top of the Manek Chowk market in order to lessen congestion on the streets, which was the original concern of the city.[7]

For SEWA, the Manek Chowk Agreement (Appendix 1) represents a satisfactory outcome because it recognizes those factors that ensure the rights of male and female vendors to ply their trade, namely, securing more licenses for members and securing a place to vend without police harassment.

The actions agreed upon by the stakeholders also ensured that the vendors, both SEWA members and others, were relocated where their clients are, not at a site away from their customer base, as often occurs. The emphasis on a license with a photograph is central to SEWA's vendor policies because it is seen as an asset that entitles vendors to legal protection against harassment and confiscation of goods. Other important provisions of the agreement, such as protection from the elements (i.e., a roof) and access to utilities, will enable vendors to work in a healthier, cleaner, and less polluted environment.

Supportive Regulations and Licensing Policies

For many years, elimination of street vending has been associated with being a "modern" city. In many cities around the world, town-planning acts had their origins in the colonial period when strict zoning regulations were in force that, in effect, restricted the legitimate presence and the growth of these microenterprises. Gradually, and for a variety of often contradictory reasons, this has begun to change. For example, in the early 1990s, 29 regulatory acts were overturned in Harare, Zimbabwe, because they restricted entry and stifled business development at a time when economic reforms were beginning to take their toll on employment options. Many Zimbabwean women were pushed into street vending to access cash income to support their households during this period. Responding to this reality, new sites, including part of the center city, were made available to vendors. In Bulawayo, Zimbabwe's second largest city, a major government parking lot was turned into a Sunday market, and local authorities relaxed enforcement of regulations regarding operation of enterprises from individual residences (Barnes and Keogh 1999).

Protection from Harassment

Change is possible, but it depends on transparency and accountability. One approach is for policymakers and other authorities to involve vendors themselves in regulating markets. The following example from Bolivia gives testimony to vendors' efforts to formalize their rights and position within the local economy and government.

Case Study: Street Vendors' Association of Santa Cruz

Organizing vendors began in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, in 1963. By 1965, a federation of street vendors had been established. However, it was not until 1973 that the federation became legally registered. Today the federation includes 63 organizations.

Until 1980 vendors in Santa Cruz faced few problems. Their relocation to a new market in 1966 was a relatively orderly process. A census was undertaken of all the vendors, and each vendor retained her license in the new site. The move itself went smoothly, with the military providing assistance. A change in government in Bolivia in 1980, however, brought with it confrontation and violence. Some of the new leaders of the Street Vendors' Association of Santa Cruz were killed, and others were jailed and tortured. Upon their release from prison, the association's leadership regrouped and entered into a collaborative relationship with a large national labor union that promised to facilitate provision of licenses to the vendors. When the union was unable to deliver on its promise, the vendors found themselves conducting their businesses illegally, with even less security than before.

Currently the Street Vendors' Association of Santa Cruz represents street vendors who have access to approximately one meter of street space each. They pay one peso (US$0.21) a day to sell on the streets. A few have two-year licenses for which they paid US$20, but the majority are still unlicensed. Irrespective of their licensing status, all vendors are continually subject to police harassment, with traffic obstruction the most common accusation.

Monique Cohen

Members have indicated a willingness to pay license fees in exchange for the city granting them the positive benefits they seek, but the city has not responded. In light of this apparent impasse, the association is assuming the role of intermediary between its members and the city, negotiating for better services. According to Lorida de Rendon, president of the Santa Cruz Street Vendors' Association, this advocacy role with the municipality is laid out in the association's well-defined vendor rights, which include:

- to have a set of laws at local and national levels that guarantee the fundamental rights of street vendors;
- to have a social security system that would guarantee various forms of insurance to street vendors;
- to have an education system that is adequate for street vendors' needs;
- to have an adequate legal aid service to protect this sector, and to improve legal literacy so that street vendors are informed of their rights and how to defend them;
- to strengthen the grassroots organizations that protect this sector; and
- to get solidarity support from other grassroots organizations around the world.

Access to Financial Services

Where financial services have reached the community of vendors and hawkers across the globe, there has been an enviable record of success. Today there is hardly a country where some nongovernmental organization (NGO) has not attempted to introduce microfinance services, mostly working capital loans, to groups of street vendors. Indeed, street vendors make attractive clients, as sales from their microenterprises are seen as a primary source of loan repayment. The following organizations, which cater exclusively or predominantly to the needs of women, illustrate what is possible:

- Out of more than 30,000 borrowers in 1997, close to 90 percent of Acción Communitaria del Peru's clients in Lima were traders selling from their homes, in the marketplace, or on the street.
- SEWA Bank, with 55,000 savers and nearly 10,000 borrowers, provides credit and savings and insurance to its Ahmedabad members.

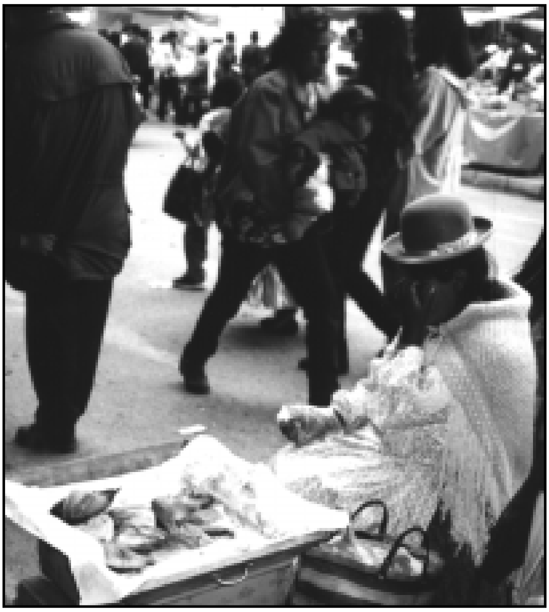
As delivered in most countries, microfinance is well suited to the resource capacity as well as working capital requirements of vendors. Entry requirements are low and first loans are usually small, often between US$50 and $150. Lacking traditional collateral, vendors usually guarantee their loans through a peer lending structure. Terms are short, with weekly, biweekly, or monthly repayment schedules of small amounts, in keeping with the cash flow cycle of the poor. Successful savings services provide a safe place for deposits and rarely require minimums that are beyond the financial capabilities of street vendors.[8]

The global success of microfinance programs demonstrates that economically active, low-income women like street vendors are credit worthy. Impact studies have also shown that vendors can effectively use credit and savings services to improve their lives. Financial services make a difference, by enabling the poor to build assets, diversify their income sources, and practice good money management. For those who must operate at the margin, financial services offer choice: microfinance provides women street vendors with options regarding allocating resources for ongoing expenses, such as the purchase of raw materials or the payment of children's school fees, as well as unanticipated expenses like treatment for illness. Even when household incomes do not grow, they may at least stabilize, and the use of a loan to invest in household and business assets protects vendors against multiple crises that can arise.

While microfinance opportunities are reaching an ever-increasing number of poor women, insurance coverage is not. Insurance services, an emerging area of financial services, are designed to respond to risk. Illness or death of a family member is frequent in low-income communities and can bring a woman's microenterprise to a screeching halt. In fact, such losses can rapidly force even better-off street vendors into poverty. Providing insurance and savings services can help mitigate risk and greatly reduce the vulnerability of street vendors.

Gaining a Voice and Representation

Given the economic and regulatory problems faced by vendors and the additional pressures faced by women vendors, the need for membership or advocacy organizations to represent vendor interests and press for change is a serious one. Effective organizations can take the form of cooperatives, trade unions, or NGOs. Experience suggests that no one model works for all. Trade unions have worked in South Africa and India. Membership organizations have been effective in Bolivia and New York City. Structure alone cannot ensure success, however. Strong leadership is vital if an organization is to have a voice and be effective. To this end, the Self Employed Women's Union (SEWU),[9] is making important inroads locally, nationally, and internationally—challenging us to think about the standards for effective organizational response.



Monique Cohen

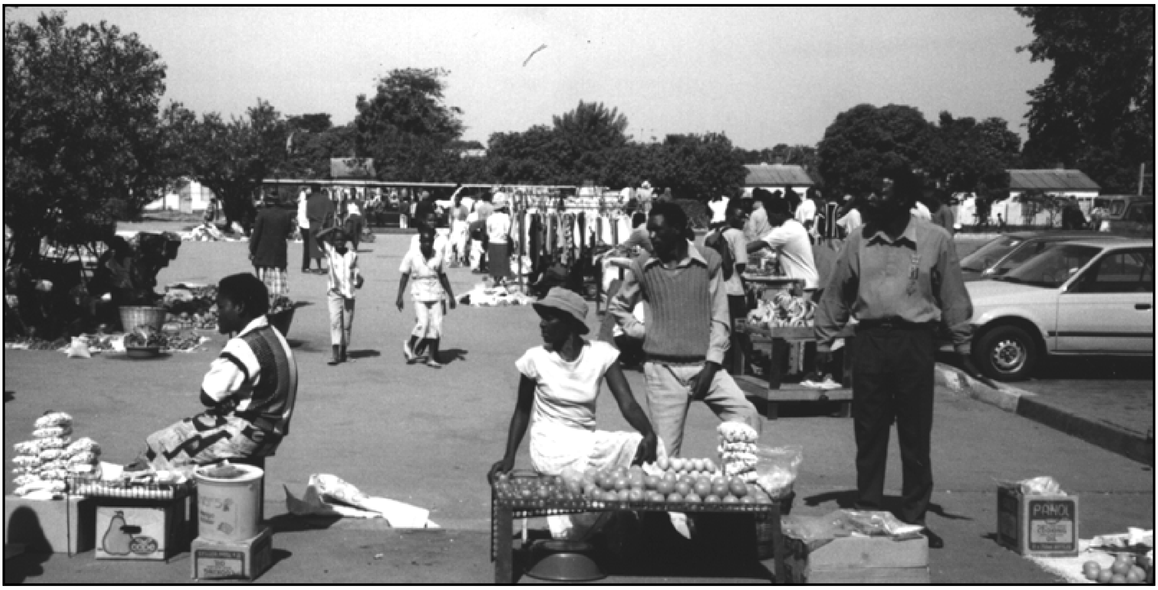
A Loan Can Make a Difference

When Luisa started a small business in Honduras selling household goods, she had no assets or capital. She financed her purchases by borrowing from loan sharks whose exorbitant daily interest rates ate up all of her profits and kept her on the margin of survival despite her dawn-to-dusk efforts. Then Luisa joined a community bank started by the Organización de Desararollo Empresarial Femenino [Organization for Women's Economic Development]. As a community bank member, Luisa received a loan of US$68, business training, and support from other women. With this help, she opened a fish stand in a busy marketplace. Netting more and more sales, Luisa now employs three people (including her husband) and has expanded her product line to include vegetables, fruit, and natural medicines.

Case Study: Self Employed Women's Union (SEWU) and Vending in Durban, South Africa

SEWU, established in 1994 with its head office in Durban, South Africa, is a trade union for working women who do not have wage-earning employment but instead earn income by:

- working for themselves with no more than three employees;
- working as an employee but without permanent status;



Monique Cohen

- undertaking work not covered by another trade union; or
- doing casual work.

Its central objective is to improve the economic condition of working women, particularly the large and growing numbers who today eke out a living in the wide array of activities in the informal sector.

A central and successful part of SEWU's agenda has been its negotiations with Durban's city council on behalf of its members, many of whom are hawkers and vendors. SEWU has been instrumental in bringing the numerous and diverse interests of vendors located throughout the city to the bargaining table with the Durban municipality. By obtaining consensus on vendor rights to trade freely, SEWU has helped traders gain access to secure trading spaces and improved work conditions (including the provision of water and sanitation facilities).

To understand SEWU's success in this urban political arena, certain features of this ongoing dialogue are worth considering. Under apartheid, black South Africans were barred from cities unless they had formal employment, and thus effectively were prohibited from street vending. With economic liberalization in the mid-1980s, urban street vending mushroomed. In 1991, the Businesses Act replaced the Licensing Act, which had prohibited most black people from trading on city streets. Vendors could now trade wherever they wished, and large numbers of unemployed women and men began migrating to the cities to pursue a living through street trading.

Unlike the excessive controls of the past, under the Businesses Act vendors and hawkers faced less regulation; however, the new street trade bylaws designated some areas as limited trading areas and required permits and the payment of rental fees. But fee levels varied from city to city, and in some instances were negotiated directly with street traders themselves.

In 1994, SEWU set out to identify the key municipal negotiating partners and began a dialogue with the Informal Business Unit of the Durban city council, an entity established to deal with small business development. A number of issues affecting hawkers and vendors were raised, including:

- access to market facilities;
- support for food safety and sanitation;

Organizational Features that Support Women Traders

- *Member driven/democratic*
- *Women-led, with dedicated capacity-building activities*
- *Women at center of all negotiation processes*
- *Women-focused strategies for support, eliminating barriers*
- *Self-conscious, pro-women approach to globalization*

- provision of daycare centers for children;
- access to permits; and
- establishment of mechanisms for ongoing hawker input.

SEWU members representing different localities were present for the negotiations and were able to block the eviction of vendors from certain sites. They participated in the planning of a new market for street traders selling traditional medicines and in the upgrading of existing market facilities. By attaining a memorandum of understanding with the municipality, SEWU also secured a written guarantee ensuring its participation in the review of new street trading laws.

Local politicians and municipal officials from the various governmental departments, however, have consistently undermined the negotiation process by passing responsibility from one group to another. In 1996 the city council formed an Informal Trade Task Group, consisting of formal and informal trade representatives and city council officials, including the city police. SEWU was encouraged to submit proposed amendments to the street trading bylaws through this task group, which it did, forwarding amendments to decriminalize street vending and all related activities. To replace an approach that criminalized street vendors who sleep on the streets for lack of affordable overnight accommodation and to improve vendor conditions, SEWU challenged the city council's right to confiscate street traders' goods and to impose bylaws that would ban late-night trading in the beachfront area during holiday periods (when tourists and visitors abound). SEWU also recommended that the city council:

- provide affordable overnight accommodation to street vendors who live too far outside Durban to go home every night; and
- retain primary responsibility for cleaning the streets (and not transfer this responsibility entirely to the street vendors trading there).

Following the next local elections, however, a new city council dissolved the standing Informal Trade Task Group and created a new one that consisted only of councilors from several parts of the city. This new group ignored SEWU's proposed bylaw amendments and came up with its own bizarre proposal to scrap the Businesses Act in the Durban metropolitan area. SEWU stubbornly persisted and forced the municipal body to address the legal and constitutional rights of local hawkers and vendors.

Despite the roadblocks, delays, and changing city players, SEWU was able to sustain negotiations with all of the numerous departments of the city council that would listen and has successfully defended the legal rights of hawkers and vendors to ply their trade (Xaba-Shezi and Sithole 1995). Over time, SEWU's leadership position has become well recognized, and the organization is now taken seriously as a negotiating partner.

The Road to Recognition: Reform and Organizing

The sidewalk changed a little everyday: the sidewalk and the edge of the roadbed are lined with stalls offering bootleg tapes, bogus Teva sandals, Hindu-print camisoles, and flyweight silver jewelry, along with hair-braiders and the banana-pancake makers. One teenager was peddling electronic pagers, next day he was gone and a chatty woman was selling burlap handbags (Orlean 2000).

The problems of vendors have changed little over time, yet their role in the economy is evolving, with new products and expanding market opportunities, and they are gaining recognition as being important to urban development. Even economists must admit that the informal sector is a large and vital component of the global economy that will not disappear anytime soon. Still, municipal and other officials face substantial challenges in reconciling "the city beautiful" with the desire for an urban economy that can provide work and a decent income to an increasing number of urban poor. In order to promote more stable urban environments and solve the nagging problems dividing vendors, officials, and other residents, a number of strategies are being pursued.

Under the stewardship of SEWA, the five-year-old Bellagio International Declaration of Street Vendors (see box, page 18) represents an international campaign to improve the situation of street vendors around the world. However, the declaration is only the tip of the iceberg; there are many efforts ongoing at the community, municipal, and national levels to gain recognition

The Bellagio International Declaration of Street Vendors

Having regard to the fact:

- that in the fast growing urban sector there is a proliferation of poor hawkers and vendors, including those who are children;
- that because of poverty, unemployment and forced migration and immigration, despite the useful social and economic service they render to society, they are looked upon as a hindrance to the planned development of cities both by the elite urbanites and the town planners alike;
- that hawkers and vendors are subjected to constant mental and physical torture by the local officials and are harassed in many other ways which at times leads to riotous situations, loss of property rights, loss of livelihood, or monetary loss;
- that there is hardly any public policy consistent with the needs of street vendors throughout the world.

We urge upon Governments to form a National Policy for hawkers and vendors by making them a part of the broader structural policies aimed at improving their standards of living, by having regard to the following:

- Give vendors legal status by issuing licenses, enacting laws and providing appropriate hawking zones in urban plans.
- Provide legal access to the use of appropriate and available space in urban areas.
- Protect and expand vendors' existing livelihood.
- Make street vendors a special component of the plans for urban development by treating them as an integral part of the urban distribution system.
- Issue guidelines for supportive services at local levels.
- Enforce regulations and promote self-governance.
- Set up appropriate, participatory, non-formal mechanisms with representation by street vendors and hawkers, NGOs, local authorities, the police and others.
- Provide street vendors with meaningful access to credit and financial services.
- Provide street vendors with relief measures in situations of disasters and natural calamities.
- Take measures for promoting a better future for child vendors and persons with disabilities among them.

Signed by vendors, hawkers, union leaders, lawyers, bankers, architects, planners, and academics from 11 cities across five continents in Bellagio, Italy, 21–24 November 1995.

for this sector. In cities around the world, vendors are gaining a voice and finding a way to participate in urban planning and policymaking decisions. Appropriately, many of those speaking out on behalf of vendors are women, as the vendor community worldwide is predominantly female. A central theme is the emergence of new partnerships and dialogue to bring all the stakeholders toward mutual agreement on the continued and constructive role of street vendors in the urban economy. We summarize some of the inroads that have been made and explore the potential for future action.

At the Local Level: Working with and for the Community of Vendors

The Pushcart War, a children's story by Jean Merrill in which New York City's street vendors successfully wage their war with the large moving vans that often block the city streets, shows how a spatially dispersed group of fictitious New York vendors came together with an aggressive strategy that permitted them to achieve the right to conduct their businesses safely and without harassment. While the real world does not always follow the best practices of fiction, not all the differences between street vendors and municipal authorities, or between street vendors and private interests, end in acrimony. Deals are struck that serve the interests of all, including the retail customer.

Multiple strategies for gaining recognition of vendor priorities are in evidence; some depend more on media, some on litigation, some on protest, and others on relentless negotiation. Examples of successful vendor/municipal collaborations have been mentioned, but another important one comes from Jamaica, where itinerant food vendors formed an association to lobby for a permanent and secure site from which they could pursue their trade. By reaching out to the Negril Chamber of Commerce, the office responsible for improving the quality of Jamaica's tourism, the association of food vendors forged a collaboration that attracted public and private financing to construct such a space. With all parties working together, the Negril Vendors' Plaza opened in 1994, and 56 vendors moved from the streets to the new facility.

Jointly owned and operated by the vendors' association and the Negril Chamber of Commerce (through a nonprofit corporation), the plaza has yielded immediate benefits. Not only has it alleviated the area's notoriously heavy traffic congestion, it has also enabled vendors to operate and even expand their businesses in a hygienic and secure environment. The proven entrepreneurial and organizing talents of the association's leadership will support the vendors in continuing to have a voice in decisions regarding their welfare and the quality of their operations. In fact, the association's founder has since been invited to serve on the Negril Chamber of Commerce, becoming the first street vendor in Jamaica to be so honored.

Organizing: From Local to National Organizations

Throughout this issue, reference has been made to the emergence of community and citywide organizations that represent street vendors, enabling them to speak with one voice in their negotiations with officials and residents in their immediate neighborhoods and throughout the city. In most instances a central part of their agenda has been working to secure licenses for all vendors, thus insuring their legal status. In a few cases, vendors have even gained the power to convene monitoring commissions to oversee vendor and police compliance with city bylaws on vending (effectively appointing them as civil prosecutors to punish those who break the law).

Effective street vendor organizations that have secured rights and benefits for their members often operate from the premise that their members are workers whose activities need collective recognition and protection. Negotiations with authorities, by extension, are a form of collective bargaining appropriate to street vendors and their conditions of work. Such negotiations can be on a bilateral basis, with individual street vendor organizations, or on a multilateral basis, with joint forums of street vendor organizations. In the latter case, organizations have come to recognize they can maximize their effectiveness by forming alliances with each other and cooperating on common problems and demands.

Another function of street vendor organizations is to change negative public perceptions of street vendors through effective media strategies and publicity campaigns. Through such strategies, the perceived illegality of street vending can be effectively challenged in the public eye, and support for street vendors can be mobilized. For example, in November 1996 an alliance of street vendors' unions in Calcutta amassed widespread public support for street vendors evicted in the municipality's infamous Operation Sunshine, by waging a systematic media campaign against the plan. This public support continued in 1997 and succeeded in blocking the passage of the "Black Bill" that had sought to criminalize street vending and impose a minimum three-month jail sentence with no option for bail.

At the national level, an important function of street vendor organizations is to proactively litigate in order to establish important precedents that can protect street vendors' legal rights. In some European countries there is a long history of such activism; for example, the Associazone Nazionale Venditore Ambulantore (ANVA) in Italy was started in 1947 and today has about 80,000 members and 180 branches.

There are fewer such national-level institutions in the developing world. One example

Selected Elements of Good Local Authority/Trader Relations

- *Location of street trading in an appropriate municipal department*
- *Approachable officials*
- *Capacity building for traders/trader organizations and officials*
- *Accessible, gender-sensitive materials*
- *Good and regular channels of communication*

Source: Lund, Nicholson, and Skinner 2000, p. 77.

Disseminating examples of positive directions, or “best practices” from across India, NASVI has publicized:

- *Litigation that led to municipal action:*
  - *The Karnataka High Court’s interim order led the Bangalore Municipal Corporation to formulate a city policy for vendors.*
  - *The New Delhi Municipal Corporation established committees to allocate space for vending following the Supreme Court’s ruling that hawking is a fundamental right.*
- *Municipal planning to allocate vendor space:*
  - *The Lucknow Development Authority has provided vendors with space in new shopping complexes and is helping vendors buy stalls to sell their goods.*
  - *Mumbai has originated the concept of “earmarking” space for vendors (e.g., hawkers’ plazas), exemplified by Fashion Street’s provision of specialized space—in the heart of the city’s commercial area—for garment sellers.*

is the National Alliance of Street Vendors of India (NASVI). Established in 1998, its membership includes vendors from 27 cities and towns across the country. As a result of a series of national and regional meetings, and the dissemination of its publication *Footpath Ki Aawaz,* NASVI has been able to raise awareness and lobby for change across India.

National organizing can also stimulate the creation of a broader agenda that will secure vendors’ rights as working people, pressing for such elements as:

- educating vendors about their rights and building their capacity to participate in collective bargaining;
- initiating legal and functional literacy programs leading to the collective self-empowerment of vendors;
- developing training and workshops to reduce fear of the police, and sensitizing the police and other enforcement agents;
- pressing for social security programs that accrue to vendors in accordance with their economic and civic roles (independent of their affiliation with a particular political party or office seeker);
- establishing collective bargaining and other participatory structures to ensure street vendor involvement in the formulation of appropriate policies and regulations governing street vending;
- attracting investment and financial support to build markets with appropriate structures to be managed with the participation of vendors or their associations; and
- developing a body of litigated precedents guaranteeing the constitutional and legal rights of street vendors.

In addition, those organizations that grow and broaden their base generally are the ones that can connect micro and macro issues to affect policy from a focused advocacy perspective. To help others reach this stage, resources are required to build vendors’ capacity to make these links and advance them.

New Rules for Institutional Players

At the municipal level, proposals that can benefit both vendors and their customers have been put forward, including proposals to streamline urban management responsibilities for street vendors’ activities and restructure the regulatory environment. Not all change is beneficial, however, at least in the short term.

Until 1995, hawkers in Ghana were subject to the Street Markets Laws of 1948, passed when the country was still a colony of Great Britain, cities were smaller, and vendors were fewer in number. In 1993, Metropolitan or District Authorities Bylaws were enacted as a means of regulating street vending activity throughout the country. Two years later, with the capital city growing rapidly, the Accra Metropolitan Assembly established Hawkers’ Permit Bylaws. This new package of laws and regulations contained many contradictions. The municipality of Accra confronted a situation where a shortage of available market space was escalating competition between market and street vendors. Not only was resolution of these problems difficult but to arrive at any agreement required initiating a dialogue among local authorities, market vendors, and street vendors to establish a workable policy direction.

Reproduced from a 1996 SEWU videotape

To reach consensus so that all players may benefit, some basic questions need to be asked about proposed regulations and laws:

- Are they appropriate?
- Do they reflect the practical reality in which market vendors, street vendors, and hawkers ply their trade (particularly in areas where the traffic is heavy and the available street market space is far outweighed by demand)?
- Does the municipality have the capacity to implement and enforce the proposed laws effectively and efficiently?

Most lawmakers and regulators, no longer debating whether to regulate or deregulate street trade, are now facing the challenge of establishing appropriate and workable regulations for street vending. In doing so, they frequently have to resolve the following questions and issues:

- Whether to use a licensing system to regulate trade or a permit system to regulate space;
- How to enact spatial bylaws or regulations that contain equitable criteria for specifying who will receive priority in access to vending space (e.g., weighing common-law rights of occupation against those of new entrants, or favoring small-scale traders over syndicates or large business interests);
- How to establish provisions that:
  - do not criminalize those in breach of regulations or bylaws;
  - specify neutral enforcement agents (to avoid protecting certain interest groups at the expense of others);
  - contain user-friendly appeal procedures (to be invoked in cases of perceived injustice in enforcement);
- How to create an integrated taxation system (incorporating license fees, payments for services, and fees to rent space) in an overall revenue system that equates vendors' payment of these fees with the payment of taxes, which, in turn, accords vendors certain social benefits.

From Local to Global Partnerships to Regularize Street Vending

As municipalities seek to change laws that affect how street vendors ply their trade, it is clear that vendors must have a seat at the table. As has been noted, the courts can be used to establish a legal framework within which street vendors can operate and to arbitrate differences among the various parties involved, including those at the local government level. However, *if the parties could agree to establish dialogue, partnerships, or collective bargaining forums to regulate street vending, litigation and court action could be reserved as last resorts.*

A new term for this kind of regulation is "voice regulation," implying the participation of all interest groups in determining the regulation system and appropriate regulations. The municipality of Accra, Ghana, has adopted this approach by initiating policy dialogues with market women's associations and street vendors. The municipality of Durban, South Africa, has done this through formulating appropriate policy for small business development that includes street trading. Unfortunately, there are other examples of municipalities that have started such processes but have not been able to sustain them. *Establishing voice regulation appears to be the biggest challenge municipalities face in their dealings with street vendors and their representative organizations today.*

We have seen that local-level organizational efforts need to be consolidated at the national level to cement vendors' hard-earned gains as rights in national laws and policy. Thus, national street vendor networks were formed in Italy and India. However, national-level organizational efforts also need to be consolidated at an international level to protect these rights over time (given the nature of globalization and its effects on economically marginalized groups such as street vendors).

Judith Bruce

Street traders want laws that will assist them in running their businesses and that:

- *recognize their right to trade in streets and provide sufficient space for them to do this;*
- *provide supportive services (credit, training, and so forth) similar to those offered by other businesses;*
- *establish legal rights to infrastructure; and*
- *acknowledge their contribution to the economy.*

The 1995 meeting in Bellagio conceived an international alliance of street vendors, which is now being developed under the name StreetNet. The aim of StreetNet is to promote the exchange of information and ideas on critical issues facing street vendors and practical organizing and advocacy strategies. Its four main objectives are to:

- expand and strengthen street vendor networks at the international, regional, and national levels;
- build an information base on the numbers and situations of street vendors in different parts of the world;
- document and disseminate information on effective organizing strategies for promoting and protecting the rights of street vendors; and
- build a solid institutional base from which to advance StreetNet's work.

Through StreetNet, members will gain an understanding of the common problems faced by street vendors, develop new ideas for strengthening their organizing and advocacy efforts, and join an international campaign to promote policies and actions that can contribute to improving the lives of millions of women working as street vendors.

If StreetNet is successful in coordinating the efforts of street vendor organizations around the world to promote and recognize vendors' legal rights, the result will be a more just environment for millions of women earning their living as street vendors in cities throughout the world.

Notes

1 This issue of SEEDS does not address the circumstances facing rural vendors and cross-border vendors.

2 From 1975 to 2000, the level of urbanization in less-developed countries is expected to increase from 26.7 percent to 40.7 percent and to 57 percent by 2025; by 2025 urban growth will contribute to 96 percent of total growth among less-developed countries (United Nations 1995).

3 Among the poor as much as 50 percent of total income is spent on food. A Filipino washerwoman quoted in interviews acknowledged the cost- and time-effectiveness of prepared food bought from street vendors.

4 The distinction is made here between paid nonfamily employees and unpaid family members.

5 Redressing this imbalance calls for both increasing the number of permits issued and ensuring that they conform to the need for and supply of vending space.

6 SEEDS no. 18 provides more information on SEWA.

7 Construction of the new vending space necessary for the full implementation of the agreement remains stalled while the municipal authorities appeal the judgment in court. However, the agreement in itself is a major victory, marking the first step in a collaboration between the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation and the vendors and in the recognition of the productive role of street vendors in the city's economy.

8 SEEDS nos. 3, 6, 11, and 15 provide more information on savings and microfinance services.

9 SEEDS no. 18 provides more information on SEWU.

Reproduced from a 1996 SEWU videotape

References

Barnes, Carolyn and Erica Keogh. 1999. "An assessment of the impact of Zambuko's microenterprise program in Zimbabwe: Baseline findings." AIMS paper. Washington DC: Management Systems International.

Berman, Paul. 1998. "Labyrinth of solitude." *New York Times Magazine,* August 2, pp. 50–73.

Bhatt, Mihir. 1998. Personal memorandum.

Charmes, Jacques. 1999. Unpublished table.

Dunn, Elizabeth. 1997. "Diversification in the household economic portfolio." AIMS paper. Washington DC: Management Systems International.

Gombay, Christine. 1994. "Marketplace politics in Kampala and Quito." *The Urban Edge* II(2):6–7.

Hernandez, Patricia, Alfredo Zetina, Medardo Tapia, Claudia Ortiz, and Irma Coria Soto. 1996. "Childcare needs of female street vendors in Mexico City." *Health Policy and Planning* 11(2):169–178.

Hicks, Jonathan. 1993. "Street vendors wary of council efforts to create more licenses." *New York Times,* February 7.

Jhabvala, Renana. 2000. Personal communication.

Lan Cao. 1998. *Monkey Bridge.* New York: Penguin.

Lund, Francine, J. Nicholson, and Caroline Skinner. 2000. *Street Trading.* Durban, South Africa: University of Natal.

Orlean, Susan. 2000. "The place to disappear." *The New Yorker,* January 17, pp. 37–41.

Tinker, Irene. 1997. *Street Foods: Urban Food and Employment in Developing Countries.* New York: Oxford University Press.

United Nations. 1995. *Human Development Report.*

Xaba-Shezi, Busi and Duduzile Sithole. 1995. "Legal situation of street vendors in Durban, South Africa." Paper presented at the Bellagio meeting of street vendors convened by SEWU.

For more information on StreetNet, please contact StreetNet at P.O. Box 61139, Bishopsgate, Durban 4008, South Africa; telephone: 27-31-307-4038; e-mail: stnet@iafrica.com.

Appendix 1 Manek Chowk Agreement

1. The Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) will accommodate 218 female vegetable vendors who are members of SEWA on the terrace of the existing vegetable market. Any extra space would be made available to other vegetable vendors who have been vending vegetables on the pavement in the Manek Chowk areas for more than five years. Preference would be given to 95 male vendors who are associate members of SEWA.
2. The AMC will provide to each vegetable vendor a terrace space measuring 4′ × 4′. Should it not be possible to accommodate the 313 vegetable vendors in this way, then and only then will each vegetable vendor be allocated a reduced space of 4′ × 3.5′.
3. The AMC will provide a roof on the terrace, adequate to protect the vegetable vendors from sun and rain and the work of putting up such roof shall the carried out by the AMC as soon as possible.
4. The AMC will provide a broad staircase for the vegetable vendors and their customers and shall maintain this staircase in good condition. At some point of time in future the AMC might be able to provide a lift.
5. The AMC shall also provide water and lighting facilities on the terrace.
6. The authorities of the AMC will issue licenses to the 218 female vegetable vendors and to the other vegetable vendors resettled on the terrace. The licenses issued to the vegetable vendors shall be on usual terms.
7. The male vegetable vendors shall be provided with space separate from the rows of female vegetable vendors and each of these vegetable vendors shall carry identity card with her/his photograph.
8. No vegetable vendor nor the AMC will be permitted to put up a construction—permanent or temporary—on the terrace. The objective is that the terrace should be reserved only for vegetable vendors selling vegetables from *toplas* (bamboo baskets).
9. The entire market on the terrace shall be cleared by the licensed vegetable vendors together with their baskets and vegetables at the end of the day (i.e., by 9 p.m.).
10. Until such time as the assigned vegetable vendors are relocated to the terrace all existing interim orders restraining the AMC from evicting them and from recovering any penalties imposed on them and the Commissioner of Police from proceeding with the prosecutions for alleged violations of the Bombay Police Act, will continue to remain operative.
11. Should any vendors in future be allowed to vend on any open space in the Manek Chowk and Danapith areas where the 218 female and 95 male vegetable vendors were vending vegetables prior to relocation, then the vegetable vendors will have a prior claim to vend vegetables on such open space.
12. The management of the day-to-day affairs of the vegetable market on the terrace shall be carried on by a committee called the Topla Bazaar Committee, consisting of an equal number of representatives from the AMC and the vegetable vendors. The constitution of the committee having such equal representation as also the method of appointment of representative of the vegetable vendors shall be such as may be determined by the AMC in consultation with SEWA.

Source: Bhatt 1998.