



A STUDY OF THE ROAD-SIDE VENDORS ON NH8 THROUGH THE 'HATHAI KOTOR' RANGE IN TRIPURA

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ABSTRACT

A street vendor is a person who offers goods or services for sale to the public without having a permanently built structure but with a temporary static structure or mobile stall (or head-load). Street vendors could be stationary and occupy space on the pavements or other public/private areas, or could be mobile, and move from place to place carrying their wares on push carts or in cycles or baskets on their heads, or could sell their wares in moving buses. In this study, the vendors are small vendors sitting in the road-side of National Highway (NH8) through the Hathai Kotor (the then Baromura) hill range between Champaknagar and Teliamura of Tripura, India, who sell mainly agricultural produces grown in their kitchen garden or collected from the hill slopes and jungles. The socio-economic condition of these vendors; the challenges they are facing and their economic condition during covid19 pandemic is studied in this paper. They are facing challenges from various fronts including number of buyers, locational and geographical disadvantages. Covid19 restrictions have worsened their economic condition and posed threat on their subsistence.

KEY WORDS: road-side vendors, agricultural goods, subsistence

INTRODUCTION

National Policy of Urban Street Vendors (2004) defines street vendors as, "A street vendor is a person who offers goods or services for sale to the public without having a permanently built structure but with a temporary static structure or mobile stall (or head-load). Street vendors could be stationary and occupy space on the pavements or other public/private areas, or could be mobile, and move from place to place carrying their wares on push carts or in cycles or baskets on their heads, or could sell their wares in moving buses."

Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014 was enacted by the Parliament of India to regulate street vendors in public areas, to protect their rights and to provide social security and livelihood rights to street vendors. According to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, there are 10 million street vendors in India, with Mumbai accounting for 2,50,000, Delhi has 4,50,000, Kolkata more than 1,50,000, and Ahmedabad 1,00,000 (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Street_Vendors_Act,_2014).

The terms market vendor, street vendor and vendor are often used interchangeably. Across the countries and cultures,

they are slackly defined. In few countries, the term street vendor covers marketplace vendors as well as pavement sellers, mobile street hawkers, and home-based vendors. In others, marketplaces are a separate category and may be legal or illegal (Cohen *et al*, 2000).

Cohen, Bhatt & Horn, (2000) mentioned that the street vendors are often taken for granted and their importance is only realized when they are not found in the place where they are expected to be (sitting under a temporary shed in the street or carrying out their business in a particular pathway).

This study is carried out on the vendors selling commodities in the road-side of the Assam-Agartala National Highway (NH8) through the Baramura range (now known as 'Hathai Kotor') between Champaknagar & Teliamura in the state of Tripura, India. These vendors are commonly seen all through the hilly roads on the range at certain gaps of one or two kilometres. The vendors are mostly from the scheduled tribe communities. The commodities sold are mainly perishable agricultural goods.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Valte, T. (2020) identified street vending to be a safe space for many migrant people and marginalised population,



who move to the urban from the rural areas looking for new venues new scopes for earning their livelihoods. These people show a positive and determined mindset when they are able to earn for their families and raise up their children in spite of their hardships.

Bhowmik S. K. (2005) observed that number of street vendors increases with the scope of jobs shrinking in the formal sector and reduction of employment opportunities in the rural areas. The rural unemployed, possessing no or low skills and education, tend to move to the urban areas for finding employment opportunities. Entry into street vending is comparatively easier as it does not need high skills and high capital. Street vending is widely seen in the countries like Bangladesh, Cambodia, Malaysia, Nepal, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, etc.

The street vendors face problems associated with requisite capital as well as credit from formal sources. Sheik A. and Saeswathy (2016) pointed out problems related to financial inclusion of street vendors, that include lack of identity proofs, lack of financial literacy, lack of regular significant income, larger family to feed that reduces the capacity of saving money to refund credit, uncertainty of income, etc.

Street Vendors' work is informal in nature and as such they continue to be in a vulnerable position with unstable financial condition. Consequently, they are unable to access formal credit sources that increases dependency on money lenders who usually charge high interest rates for advancing credit (Valte, 2020).

Study by Dey B.K. (2021) shows that savings habits has increased among the street vendors by which they can fulfil their unpredicted sudden economic requirements. In this sense, they have attained economic empowerment. Likewise, the women vendors achieved social empowerment as they are involved in decision-making in family affairs.

OBJECTIVES

1. To study the socio-economic condition of the road-side vendors.
2. To study the challenges that they are facing in selling their goods.
3. To study the condition of the road-side vendors during and after covid crisis.

DATA SOURCES & METHODOLOGY

The study is based on primary data collected through structured questionnaire and interviewing the road-side vendors selling commodities through the NH8 on the *Hathai Kotor* range. The secondary data are seen primarily for review of literature. A sample size of 36 respondents is taken for analysis. Simple statistical and mathematical tools are used only to have an idea of the conditions of the road-side vendors in the specified area.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Objective 1:

The study, as stated earlier, is based on the empirical survey of the respondents in the highway between Champaknagar & Teliamura on the *Hathai Kotor* range. The unit of study is 36 individuals selected purposively and interviewed through structured questionnaire.

These road-side vendors are all non-licensed and are found to sell mainly agricultural commodities that are perishable. The quantities of the commodities that are brought for sale by these vendors are so meagre that the earnings can only keep them at a subsistence level. The buyers include mostly the passengers or tourists passing through this area. The vendors are mostly found to be women.

Table 1: Type, age & caste of the respondents:

| Type of the respondents | |
|------------------------------|--------------------|
| Type | No. of respondents |
| Men | 10 (27.8%) |
| Women | 22 (61.1%) |
| Children | 4 (11.1%) |
| Total | 36 (100%) |
| Age-group of the respondents | |
| Age group | No. of respondents |
| 0 - 14 | 4 (11.1%) |
| 15 - 40 | 15 (41.7%) |
| 41 - 59 | 16 (44.4%) |
| 60 & above | 1 (2.8%) |
| Total | 36 (100%) |
| Caste of the respondents | |
| Caste | No. of respondents |
| Scheduled tribe | 29 (80.6%) |
| Scheduled caste | 5 (13.9%) |
| General | 2 (5.5%) |
| Total | 36 (100%) |

Source: Primary data



There are approximately 4 crore street vendors in India, out of which one-third are women, who support their families to provide an extra cushion of income. In India, a large section of women are employed in low-paid informal sectors who earn less wages compared to men. It is interesting to note that, in this study also, 61.1 percent of the vendors are women. But it is a matter of concern, that few children are also involved in selling of agricultural commodities.

As regards the age of the respondents, 4 respondents are below the age of 14, who have to involve themselves in selling of their home-produced agricultural produce as their parents are not in a position to be engaged in such activity. 86.1 percent of the respondents are found to be in the active age group of 15 to 59 years, out of which 41.7 percent are in the age group 15-40 years and 44.4 percent are in 41-59 years age group. Only one respondent is having an age of above 60 years.

As stated earlier, the respondent vendors are mainly from scheduled tribe community. About 81 percent of the

sample are from scheduled tribe community of which majority are women vendors. Rest are from scheduled caste and general categories.

All the 22 women vendors are from scheduled tribe community, who are generally hard-working and are considered to the pillars of the families. Of the 22 women scheduled tribe vendors, 17 are married and entered this occupation after their marriage in order to support their family. They expressed their happiness in getting involved in such occupation. After doing the household activities, they engage themselves in road-side vending in their respective locality only to add-on to the family income for meeting their daily needs. The women shoulder this responsibility with their male counterpart, as revealed by them, to maintain their livelihood, to come out of their poor economic condition and to make their children educated.

Table 2: Family type & size and education

| Type of family of the respondents | |
|---|---------------------------|
| <i>Type</i> | <i>No. of respondents</i> |
| Nuclear | 23 (63.9%) |
| Joint | 13 (36.1%) |
| Family size of the respondents | |
| <i>Family size</i> | <i>No. of respondents</i> |
| 0 - 2 | 2 (5.6%) |
| 3 - 6 | 21 (58.3%) |
| Above 6 | 13 (36.1%) |
| Educational level of the respondents | |
| <i>Educational level</i> | <i>No. of respondents</i> |
| Illiterate | 2 (5.6%) |
| Class 1 to 5 | 11 (30.6%) |
| Class 6 to 8 | 11 (30.6%) |
| Class 9 to 10 | 8 (22.1%) |
| Class 11 to 12 | 4 (11.1%) |
| Graduation | 0 (0.0%) |

Source: Primary data

About 64 percent of the vendor-respondents are from nuclear families, very few of whom migrated from some other places due to different distinct reasons. Quite expectedly, family size ranges from 0 to 6 in case of almost 64 percent of the sample. Again, 36 percent of the respondents are from joint families, which is also apparent from 36 percent of the respondents coming from families with size exceeding 6.

The educational level is not so mentionable. Four respondents reached the higher secondary standard, but only one could manage to pass Higher Secondary Examination. 30.6 percent studied upto primary level. Some of the reasons for not able to continue their studies, as revealed by the respondents, include financial stringency of their parents, work pressure in the family, health issues of parents, lack of interest to study, etc.

Table 3: Ownership of ration card, assets, etc.

| <i>Ownership & facilities</i> | <i>Yes</i> | <i>No</i> |
|--|------------|-----------|
| Ration Card | 33 | 3 |
| Land owned | 26 | 10 |
| <i>Kutchcha/Pucca/semi-pucca house</i> | 36 | 0 |
| Domestic animals | 22 | 14 |
| Drinking water | 36 | 0 |
| Electricity | 33 | 3 |

Source: Primary data



As revealed by the respondent-vendors, most of them have ration cards (58 percent APL & rest BPL), owned lands (used for dwelling houses, agricultural purposes and for rearing of domestic animals), dwelling houses (56 percent have semi-pucca houses, 39 percent have *kutchcha* houses), domestic animals (that include cows, pigs, goats, hens and ducks). They have access to drinking water and electricity (some under *kutir jyoti* scheme).

Objective 2:

The interviews with these road-side vendors reveal huge challenges that they are facing for earning subsistence level of income their survival. These vendors sell their own produce as well as traditional vegetables collected from the hills and jungles. The vegetables include potato, bamboo shoot (*karul*), bamboo sapling (*muia*), *dheki shaak*, *gandhari*, one type of arum called *Oi (Batema)*, various parts of banana plant, arum, mushrooms, maize (*bhutta*), various roots and tubers, traditional vegetables consumed by the scheduled tribe population, etc. They either bring these produce from their own kitchen garden and field or collect these from the nearest hills

(locally called *muras*) or jungles. Most of the vendors do not have any temporary, semi-temporary or permanent shed to sit with their products and are found to sit on plastic sheets. However, the small market sheds provided by the government are also seen to be used by these vendors in two or three places.

The respondent vendors, in response to query regarding reasons behind accepting this type of occupation, informed selling of agricultural produces to be most feasible option to earn in a situation when they do not have any scope of employment. Their low educational qualification would not allow them to be absorbed in any work as per their preference. Producing of agricultural goods (vegetables, crops, etc.) in small scale requires less capital. About 77 percent of the sample entered this occupation only to support their family. Another section of the respondents accepted this occupation as they have no other employment.

But the sample respondents expressed few challenges or hindrances that they are facing regularly in their fight for survival while selling their produces. Table 4 gives an idea of the challenges.

Table 4: Challenges faced by the respondents

| <i>Types of Challenges</i> | <i>Respondents</i> |
|--|--------------------|
| Irregular buyers | 32 (88.9%) |
| Bound to sell perishable goods | 36 (100.0%) |
| Unfavourable weather conditions especially in rainy season | 36 (100.0%) |
| Goods remain unsold and get spoiled | 33 (91.7%) |
| Very little or almost no capital | 30 (83.3%) |
| High rates of interest for credit | 28 (77.8%) |
| Negligible profit | 36 (100.0%) |

Source: Primary data

The buyers of these agricultural products are primarily those travelling by vehicles through NH8. The number of buyers naturally is not uniform in all the days. 88.9 percent of the respondents are of the view that the number of buyers is variable, which influences their daily sales. The NH8 (formerly known as NH44) is the life line of the state of Tripura and was the only linkage with the mainland of India, except airways. This was the only route used by the passengers preferring roadways to travel. But after the introduction of rail connectivity with various parts of the country, people started favouring rail route in order to save time. Consequence is the fall in number of passengers through NH8. These road-side vendors suffered the most due to reduced number of passengers. Few could manage to migrate in areas nearby rail station or could sit in rail station platform and others remained in their previous places of vending.

The road-side vendors are bound to sell perishable goods as they do not have any alternative. The produces from their kitchen garden or their collections from nearby hill slopes and jungles are all agricultural, and they have no option rather than bringing these goods for sale. All the respondents expressed that their unsold goods, being perishable, gets spoiled easily and cannot be sold next day, except a few.

Since they are selling the goods in open places or in temporary shed in road-sides, they have to face problem during rainy season. Recurrently they cannot bring their goods for sale. Moreover, landslides during rainy season often blocks the national way causing disruption in vehicle movement. The vendors have to face the consequence. Lack of buyers in such cases restricts their earnings.

The vendors face problem due to dearth of capital. 83 percent respondents are of the opinion that lack of capital is the main constraint in the way of enhancing production of agricultural goods. Whatever credit are available from non-institutional sources of credit are to be repaid at a high interest rate.

Objective 3:

The informal sector of Indian economy, according to International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates in 2020, occupies more than 90 percent of the total work force in India and as per the estimates, around half of India's gross domestic product (GDP) is contributed by this sector. But, Covid 19 pandemic has shattered all the countries of the world. Every section of the people suffered socially as well as economically due to this deadly virus. The sudden complete lockdown all



over the country, to curb the deadly impact of the virus, led to total standstill in all types of economic activities across the country. The unskilled section of people suffered the maximum and were in the most disadvantageous position.

The respondent-vendors under the study also faced the consequences. As revealed by them, their income from selling agricultural goods in the road-side was nil. Due to closure of all

types of economic activities and complete stoppage of movement of vehicles and people, these vendors had no alternative other than confining themselves in their respective residences. They depended on their domestic agricultural produces and domestic animals for their sustenance. However, the situation improved after the situation came under control.

Table 5: Monthly income before & after Covid19 situation

| Income Range (Rs.) | No. of Vendors before Covid | No. of Vendors after Covid |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 0 – 2000 | 2 | 4 |
| 2001 – 4000 | 6 | 9 |
| 4001 – 6000 | 8 | 13 |
| 6001 – 8000 | 6 | 5 |
| 8001 – 10000 | 11 | 5 |
| Above 10000 | 3 | - |

Source: Primary data

The table clearly shows the difference in monthly income of the respondents before and after first phase of covid restrictions. The table is self-explanatory. Monthly income has declined during post-covid period.

CONCLUSION

The road-side vendors are struggling for their survival. Though a considerable section of the respondents got the basic facilities provided by the government, yet they are suffering due to irregular & less buyers, non-availability of capital, informal credit at high interest rate, geographical constraints, etc. These constraint act in the way of their earning for livelihood. The vendors working in open unsheltered locations need to be provided permanent shed to protect them from environmental hazards. Credit facilities may be provided by banks and other institutional sources of credit at a lower interest rate. Special initiatives may be taken to adopt and implement schemes particularly for women street vendors for their social as well as economic empowerment.

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