

# **Vulnerability And Urban Conflicts: A Descriptive Analysis Of Street Vendors In Guwahati**

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## **I. Introduction**

Any functioning economy must include street vendors because they offer clients a wide variety of goods in public areas. They are a sizable portion of the marketplace and employ countless numbers of individuals. Many individuals are employed simultaneously by various entities that fall within this economic activity. They function as distinct structural elements of the economy. The high-income segments in the market whose incomes are not formally recorded are street sellers (*McBride & Gillespie, 2000*). They may go from one location to another while carrying items on bicycles, carts, or baskets on their heads; they may be stationary in one location while selling their items to people in public or private places on sidewalks; and they may be observed in public buses reaching out to clients. Vending on the streets adds colour and life to the streets, keeps them safe and busy, and helps create a positive atmosphere for the city. It is an essential aspect of the informal sector and makes significant contributions to the urban informal sector (*Shailaja et al., 2017*). People who aren't able to find work in the official sector but still want to try their luck on the job market have chances in this area. In spite of the fact that they provide a significant contribution to the economy, street vendors are frequently stigmatised as being unlawful, undesirable, a nuisance, and disruptive to the people as well as any incoming towns or cities about urbanisation. Street sellers are almost always cited as encroachers by the local government because they occupy significant public places. Due to this attitude, street merchants no longer receive respect or acknowledgment in society. Street sellers have been a part of our society for a very long time, but we still classify them as part of the informal economy today. The present-day laws, which were all created during British colonial control in India, include the Bombay Provincial Municipal Corporation Act (1949), the Bombay Police Act (1951), the Motor Vehicles Act (1988), and the Improvement Trust Acts (under which city planning was carried out). Under the guise of protecting the public interest, our government has strengthened these laws in a variety of ways and has continued to do so. The vast majority of them are, by their own definitions, outmoded rules, ordinances, and regulations that were initially enacted with the purpose of regulating, controlling, and supervising the functioning of the local enterprises. Because of all of these regulations, it is against the law in our nation to engage in the practise of street vending. Due to street vending's low administrative priority in the city, its administration and management are constantly taken for granted. Street vending is not one of the state government's top goals for governance. This policymakers' mindset is in opposition to the goal of our constitution, which calls for a society where everyone is treated equally, respected, and protected, and has the right to live a life of dignity. The fundamental elements of street vending are governed by a few fundamental rights that are guaranteed to all Indians by the constitution. Every city in our country has a similar story of street vendors being harassed by police. Numerous studies have been conducted on the problems that street vendors confront, including harassment by police, local authorities, and goons; confiscation of their belongings; relocation to safer places; improved cleanliness; improved health; and increased protection for women. Every street vendor will one day enjoy a dignified and honourable existence, but only when regulations are enacted to protect the interests of the millions of vendors (*Manickavasagam, 2018; Banik & Bai, 2018*).

### **Objective:**

- (i) The purpose of this research paper is to highlight the features of the Street Vendors Act of 2014.
- (ii) To understand the daily challenges of the street vendors in Guwahati

## **II. Methodology:**

This is qualitative research relying on both primary and secondary sources of information. Face-to-face interactions with street vendors are the primary source of information collection. All secondary data was collected from periodicals, newspapers, etc.

### **Features of the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood & Regulation of Street Vending) Act of 2014**

- Each ward, local authority, or zone must have a minimum of one and a maximum of three town vending committees, or TVCs, in order to carry out the act. The municipal commissioner, officials from the traffic police, banks, civil society, and, essentially, an NGO, should make up the TVC's membership.
- Anyone who has reached the age of 14 or older is eligible to register with the TVC to take use of the identification card service that verifies the legitimacy of street vendors. The only people eligible to receive an identity card and work as street sellers are those who have registered with the TVC. In addition, if any inconsistencies are discovered, TVC has the sole ability to invalidate the authenticity of the identity card.
- Every five years, the local authorities in each notified zone will be expected to devise a plan for the particular area that they are responsible for. The plan needs to specify places that fall under the vending zone and on the non-vending zone, making room for both the existing and potential new vendors.
- The municipal authorities have the authority to remove street vendors from any location if they do not follow the rules outlined in the statute. They have the authority to remove vendors in the public interest if they cause any nuisance, disruption in public movement, or undesirable activities in any public location.
- There must be a dispute redressal body in place in the event that any complaints are brought up by the street vendors. The committee ought to be led by a magistrate, and its members ought to have prior expertise in dealing with problems that are associated with markets that cover natural vending markets. The local authority is responsible for forming the committee and putting it to use.
- The statute emphasises that in order to improve the communities of street sellers, the government should make it easier for them to obtain financing, insurance, and other assistance programmes. "Social security plans" are social assistance programmes for the martialized section.

### **The Street Vendors of Guwahati City**

#### ***No official data currently***

In India, Guwahati is one of the future cities with the fastest-growing urban population. With the city's growth comes the problem of housing the expanding population, and street sellers further exacerbate this long-standing problem for the state. Street vendors are one of the city's distinguishing features; they may be seen in every street and alley of this booming metropolis. According to a survey done by the Guwahati Municipal Corporation back in 2015, there are 7,183 street vendors in the city. The Assam Street Vendors Association, often known as ASVA, estimates that there are roughly 40,000 street vendors operating in the city alone. Since the last survey was completed in 2015, there hasn't been any recent official information on the number of street vendors working in the city. In the absence of any official data, it becomes challenging for policymakers to establish any social programmes for those in this occupation.

#### ***Absence of proper vending zones***

Regulating and controlling the actions of the sellers is impossible without first obtaining the necessary legal authorization and establishing appropriate vending zones. Because there are no designated areas for street vendors to set up shop, the number of people selling wares on the streets of the city has exploded, which has added even more difficulties to the already serious issue of traffic congestion. The Street Vendors Act of 2014 was passed in order to safeguard the interests of people who make a living selling goods on the street by arguing for their entitlement to use public areas in which to engage in their trade. According to the regulations, all of the street vendors must operate within the authorised vending zones, and sales are not allowed in places that do not fall under the category of vending zones. The irony of the situation is that even after many years have passed since this act was approved by the parliament, the local authorities have still failed to put it into practise by coming up with defined vending zones around the city.

#### ***Case I: Ulubari Daily Market (Mary-name change)***

*"If someone else occupies my space, I will yell at them and wrestle with them until they move. In the event that this does not work, I will dispose of his vegetables."*

#### ***Non-existent Town Vending Committee***

The Town Vending Committee was established by the Street Vending Act of 2014, which also created the committee. It is the duty of the TVC to look out for the well-being and security of the individuals who are engaged in the business of street selling. The act stipulates that the local municipal authorities are the ones who

are responsible for establishing the TVC for each ward or zone. The TVC maintains the same unchanging stance towards the people selling their wares on the street. Regular meetings are held, but no progress is ever made towards finding a workable answer to the problems that the vendors face on a daily basis. The complaints raised by the street vendors are never addressed in a timely manner.

### ***Frequent eviction drive***

In the name of public interests, traffic bottlenecks, space congestion, VIP visits, international events, or other major events, eviction drives are being carried out with alarming regularity in the city. But the local authorities haven't made much of an effort to solve this potentially dangerous conflict between the street vendors and the Guwahati Municipal Corporation. The vast majority of the time, the GMC officials pointed the finger of blame at the street sellers, asserting that they were the ones who were engaging in illegal operations on the streets by setting up shop in locations that were easy for them to do so. On the other hand, those who sell their wares on the street say that the authorities in their area never listen to their complaints about the difficulties they confront. They referred to the eviction drive as an illegal operation. They accused the authorities of carrying out an unexpected eviction effort without providing them with any prior notice. Their possessions are taken, and in addition to that, they face severe punishments.

### ***Case II: Jalukbari Daily Market (Suraj-name change)***

*"I had been unemployed for a very extended period of time. Recently, my aunt provided me with some financial assistance so that I might launch a business and make an attempt to support myself. However, I am currently in the same position as before after the eviction drive."*

### ***Tussle between NGOs and the local authorities***

It is not uncommon for the Guwahati Municipal Corporation (GMC) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as the Assam Street Vendors Association (ASVA) to come into conflict with one another. It is common practise for the ASVA as well as the communities of street vendors to stage demonstrations whenever they are harassed during the eviction process. In times of crisis, the city is home to a large number of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that have proven helpful to the vendors. The ASVA routinely organises campaigns to raise awareness among street vendors and educate them on their legal entitlements. The GMC, like everyone else, is aware of the constitutional rights that are held by the people who participate in vending activities. The Assam Street Vendors Association has asserted that the government has failed to administer the act despite the fact that it was passed in 2014 and has been in effect since then. "

### ***Harassment of the street vendors***

Under the pretext of conducting routine checks, the police may be observed harassing the street vendors on a regular basis. One of the greatest concerns that the stall owners have is that they would be evicted from the market against their will by the government officials and law enforcement officers in the area (*Mathew, 2015*). The vendors are subjected to financial blackmail by the local gangs. If they voiced their concerns, there is a good chance that they would be subjected to verbal and physical assault. They are subjected to extortion by local adolescents as well, who collect money under the guise of bihu, festivals, and other social gatherings. The local tax collectors are a significant contributor to the problem of harassment in the community. The street vendors are subjected to regular tax collection by these individuals. When merchants are unable to satisfy the needs of the tax collectors, this frequently results in the loss of their locations in the market.

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### ***Case III: Beltola Bi-weekly Market (Tutumoni-name change)***

*"Even though chanda is only expected to be given out once during festivals, the young people of Beltola collect it on a daily basis at the market. Local teenagers are given 400 rupees on the first market day, then 200 rupees on the second market day, and finally 150 rupees on the third market day and every market day thereafter."*

### ***Other issues***

The space constraints that the street sellers in the city are up against are the root cause of the conflict that emerges around space in the market area. It is a typical sight to witness competing merchants engaging in violent conflict with one another in order to secure a location at which they can set up their stalls and sell their wares. In

the past, peaceful solutions were found between them by lowering expectations and reaching a compromise with one another as sellers. One of the most significant problems that the city's street vendors are anxious about is the connectivity problem. There is not a separate restroom that is shared by both sexes at this public location, which is one of the most fundamentally important amenities. When compared to menfolk, female street sellers are more frequently confronted with the issue of access to public bathrooms. The majority of men can be found utilising the local drains and corners for their various wants. Because there are not enough restrooms, many women have cut back on their water intake in order to avoid having to attend to urgent demands. Another significant challenge that street vendors face is a lack of suitable facilities for transportable drinking water. They are required to bring it from their houses or purchase it from the stores.

**Case IV: Maligaon Friday Market (Parvati-name change)**

*"Because increasing the amount of water I drink causes me to have to urinate more frequently, I try to drink as little water as possible."*

### **III. Findings & Recommendations**

- The attitude that the government has towards the people who sell their wares on the street should be the primary concern. Before the government can take any steps forward, it needs to first adjust the way it thinks about these individuals, which is necessary before taking any other kind of action. Despite the fact that government officials are aware of the contribution that street vendors make to the economy, those vendors continue to be harassed, forcibly evicted, threatened, and extorted on a regular basis. If the government were to recognise the vibrancy of the market's vendors, it could do wonders in the long run.
- Before the markets are divided into vending zones and non-vending zones, the first thing that can be done is to identify the vendors and then apply for registration within the city. This can be done at any time before the markets are divided. The registration process must be straightforward and user-friendly for vendors. It is possible to establish some criteria for the registration process, such as the state in which the farmer operates, the quality and variety of the goods offered for sale, and previous convictions. Those vendors that meet the requirements can be considered eligible to participate in the registration procedure.
- Instead of relocating the vendors to a new site, efforts should be made to figure out how they can be accommodated in the public spaces where they are currently located. Those individuals who own numerous enterprises and have someone else manage their operations are eligible to shift their vending operations to the new site. There are a lot of different sellers there, and many of them have trouble paying the rent or the tax for the space that they occupy. Moving them to a different location won't solve their economic problems and will only make things worse.
- In addition, there is an urgent need to offer legal protections to all of the vendors in order to preserve their respective interests. On a daily basis, they are frequently the targets of many acts of harassment coming from a variety of sources. Those vendors who have licences are typically in a better position to make a living, while those who sell their wares on the street without a licence are frequently the ones who have to contend with the greatest obstacles and are sometimes even labelled as criminals. Policymakers should identify these two groups of people so that appropriate corrective actions can be taken to protect their respective interests.
- Street sellers ought to be included in the planning process by all relevant parties, including decision-makers and departments responsible for urban development planning. Efforts should be made to engage this informal sector in the path for the expansion of the city, with an emphasis on strengthening the infrastructure for the vending spaces in public areas. This would be a step in the right direction. All of the suppliers need to have access to the most fundamental services and amenities. The lives of street vendors can be made easier by providing them with public restrooms, portable drinking water, a per-person market space, and warehouses, as well as clean surroundings. By making the workplace more secure for female vendors, we will encourage more women to enter this industry, which will ultimately increase their household income.

### **IV. Conclusion**

According to this study, the majority of people selling their wares on the street were women. They mostly deal in the sale of vegetables, fruits, and flowers on the streets, which provides additional benefits to society. On a daily basis, these vendors are confronted with issues relating to the availability of clean drinking water, adequate sanitation, and a risk-free working environment. The government possesses all of the resources necessary to put into action measures that will improve the well-being of communities around the country that rely on street selling (*Saradhamani et al., 2019*). The government is ignoring the demands of street vendors for a better working environment, despite the fact that the number of individuals working in this industry is growing at a rapid rate. The demands of the urban population can be met by street vendors who sell a range of commodities. Additionally, street vendors can provide a means of subsistence for the most disadvantaged members of society. In many nations throughout the world that are still considered to be developing or underdeveloped, the informal urban economy

includes street vendors as an essential component. It is one of the easiest trades or companies to strike out into, requiring less capital; no educational credentials or training are required to begin as a street vendor. Moreover, there are fewer restrictions on what a street vendor can sell. A more in-depth understanding of the rights of street vendors is possible because of a law that was implemented in 2014 with the intention of preserving those vendors' rights (Alva, 2014). Not only because of the large number of individuals who engage in it, but also because it contributes to the expansion of the economy, selling goods on the street is an important occupation. This market is where most of the minor commodities that are produced in the informal sectors are sold. The fact that the government barely acknowledges the significance of the work done by street sellers is a scandalous oversight that has to be corrected immediately. The informal sector continues to be the primary economic force in the majority of Asia's nations, despite its enormous size and scope (Kiran & Babu, 2019). People who sell their items on the streets are subject to a variety of restrictions and regulations imposed by the government. The fact that the vast majority of sellers are ignorant of it is particularly startling.

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