
A Study of Street Vendors in Cachar District of Assam**Dr. Rumia Begum**Assistant Professor, Department of Economics,
Assam Women`s University, Rowriah, Jorhat, Assam, PIN-785004**ABSTRACT**

This paper is an attempt to understand the problems and prospects of street vendors in Cachar district. This study highlights the operational problems and prospects of street vendors working as entrepreneurs in the informal sector. The study is exploratory in nature and total 130 respondents from Cachar district formed the sample of this study. It is found that street vendors faced several problems during procurement and selling of the products such as problem of finance, lack of institutional credit, problem of harassment, problem of infrastructure etc. The paper has also highlighted the prospects of street vending. It is concluded that though working in the informal sector is a challenging task, but the survivors were very positive about the future prospect of the occupation and they want to continue the same occupation if some facilities such as suitable establishment, access to loan registration and technical training etc. were provided.

Keywords: Problems, Prospects, Informal Enterprise, Street vendors, Cachar**1.Introduction**

Street vendors as a group are heterogeneous in nature and differ from country to country. ILO (2002) definition identifies the location of trade as streets and other related public avenues. It may refer to the vendors with fixed stall, such as kiosk; vendors who operate from semi-fixed stalls, like folding tables, crates, collapsible stand, wheeled pushcarts etc and another is the mobile category who walk or bicycle through the streets selling their wares.

Government of India`s Street Vendors Bill (2013) defines street vendor as a person engaged in vending of articles, goods, wares, food items or merchandise of everyday use or offering services to the general public, in a street, lane, side walk, footpath, pavement, public park or any other public place or private area, from a temporary built up structure or by moving from place to place and includes hawker, peddler, squatter and all other synonymous terms which may be local or region specific.

2.Objectives of the Study:

1/ To find out the characteristics of street vendors.

2/ To identify the problems and explore the prospects of street vendors.

- Research Design: This research is exploratory in nature and survey method has been used to conduct the study.
- Source of Data: The study has used both primary and secondary sources for data collection. Primary data has been collected from Street vendors in the selected areas of Cachar district using a schedule as well as through Focus Group discussions. Secondary data was collected from journals, books, government reports, websites etc.
- Period of study: The study was undertaken for a period of two months from September to October 2014.

- Area of study: The study was carried out in the selected urban areas of Cachar district in Assam.
- Sample size: 130 respondents were selected. Convenience and quota sampling was adopted for collecting the primary data.
- Statistical Tools Applied for Analysis: Simple percentage, T-test and Weighted score have been used to describe and analyse the data.
- Limitations of the study: The present study has following limitations:
 1. Biasness of the respondents in answering the questions.
 2. The study is limited to only one district of Assam.

5. Findings of the Study

5.1 General Profile

The studied population belongs to the age group of 15–80 years. Highest number of respondents (40%) was in the age group of 31–40 years. The average age of the respondent was 40. Out of total respondents 98% of them were male. 81% belonged to Hindu community, rest were Muslim. Majority of the respondents (85%) were married, 13% unmarried and 2% of them were widows/widowers. Majority of the respondents (56%) have studied up to tenth standard, followed by primary schooling (27%) and 5% have completed tenth standard and above. Out of total respondents 107 (82percent) owned a house and 23 respondents (18%) lived in rented house. 88% of the respondents were the residents of the area and only 12% had migrated from other places.

The average family expenditure of street vendors was around Rs. 9000 per month.

5.2 Occupational Characteristics of street vendors (Ownership, location, operational premise, type of products sold, length of experience, working days and hours)

It is seen that most of the respondents (95%) preferred¹ to operate as own account enterprise¹, the rest (7 %) vendors hired one or more than one employees to run their business.⁷⁵ (48%) respondents were located in Daily Markets² and the rest 55 respondents (42%) were seen in Crowded Centres³. The preferred mode of vending (53%) was found to be 'Bicycle/Wheeled pushed cart/ wheeled stalls with display cases/ porch front window or display', followed by 'Mats/Clothes/Plastic spread on the ground, Wooden stool/Table' which constitute 46% of the population. Only 1 % preferred to work using basket or bowl placed on the ground.

50 Street Vendors (38%) were food sellers, followed by 43 respondents (33%) who were selling personal wear, another 17% were selling personal accessories (artificial jewellery, ladies bag, belt, hat etc.) and remaining 12% were vending household articles. Out of 130 respondents, 80

¹The business does not have any hired employees (except family help)

² A market is any place where the sellers of a particular good or service can meet with the buyers of that goods and service where there is a potential for a transaction to take place.

(<http://economics.about.com/cs/economicsglossary/g/market.htm>)

To differentiate street vendor's location, these two divisions i.e. crowded centres and daily market has been made. Difference between crowded centre and daily market is that crowded centres are the places where people gather for some other purposes, but due to availability of the products, they buy products, in case of daily markets people purposefully go for shopping.

³ Crowded centre includes all the natural markets such as school, college, bus stop, hospital areas, court or any other institution where street vendors grow naturally.

respondents (61%) had been working for more than ten years and 48 respondents (37%) had been working less than 10 years, only 2 of them (1%) were new or inexperienced in their present occupation. Almost all of the respondents worked throughout the week from 8 to 10 hours per day.

5.3 Problems faced by street vendors

Street vendors faced several problems during procurement and selling of their products. For example street vendors get harassed persistently in terms of eviction, confiscation of their merchandise. Out of total 130 street vendors, 124 (95%) of them faced harassment in the form of eviction, confiscation of products from municipal authorities, demands of bribe from police official as well as sometimes threats of eviction from local goons. Out of 130 respondents, 124 (95%) of them reported non-availability of adequate finance as one of the biggest problem to start and run the business. Due to their informal status they did not approach bank for funding and hence ended up operating at low scale with limited fund. Some of the street vendors faced problem during procurement of products, because of absent of receipt for their merchandise. Due to low amount of product procurement, suppliers were not willing to give them receipts and hence if caught they had been troubled by the police and sometimes bribery became the way out. Street vendors faced competition among themselves as well as from formal market. Moreover, they also suffer lack of trust from their suppliers as well from their customers, due to lack of identity. Suppliers were not willing to supply high quality goods. Even if vendors had some quality products, there was a lack of trust among the customers regarding the quality of the products. Street vendors were dependent on daylight to run the business; they were affected by bad weather, government holidays, large political meetings etc. all leading to loss of business. They also felt the problem of insecurity of vending premises. Although a National Law on Street Vendors has been enacted, its implementation is yet to be seen in Assam. Some of the vendors had applied for licenses and registration but were not able to get it, leading to insecurity of their occupation as well as their working premise.

5.4 Prospects of Street Vending

Most of the respondents (87%) joined the occupation as a 'last resort' for income generation as they were unable to find employment, or were retrenched from formal sector or they had previous experience (as apprentice or wage worker) in the present occupation. Though they joined the occupation out of distress or necessity, for most of them (97%) present occupation is the primary source of income and 73% have stated that there is good scope in their present occupation. Most of them (61%) have been continuing the occupation for more than 10 years and wanted to continue their present occupation in the formal sector.

6. Conclusion

Street vendors are a major contributor to the urban economy. Though street vending is a last resort for distressed unemployed labour or residual sponge for retrenched labour; it is an attractive occupation with low barriers of entry, low requirement of education and skill, as well as low requirement of capital. Being in the informal sector, street vendors do face some problems such as finance, harassment from public authorities, and problem of infrastructure but surviving with those constraints have made them more tactful to run the business and learn the entrepreneurial skill and hence they are positive about the future prospects about their occupation. They wish for some facilities like suitable establishment, access to loan, registration of the business as well as legal protection to operate the business smoothly and expand it in near future.

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