A Study on Economic Prospect and Problems of Fast Food Street Vending: with special reference to Guwahati City

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Abstract: Fast food street vending is an important part of urban life and food supply in developing countries. It is an integral part of cities with diverse communities, distinct food cultures, and large population engaged in unskilled and low paid jobs. Although street fast food vending is an important part of urban informality, this sector has always been underestimated and neglected. In this paper the prospects and problems of street vendors associated with their workplace have been studied.

(Keywords: Street vendors, Informal sector, Fast food, Government)

Introduction:
Street vended fast foods are defined as foods and beverages that are ready-to-eat, prepared and sold in the street and other places, for immediate consumption or consumption at a later time without further processing or preparation. Street fast foods include foods prepared in small scale at the home of vendors and brought to the street for sale or the food prepared and sold at street food stall. Those who sell street foods are regarded as micro-entrepreneurs and constitute a part of the informal sector. The informal food vending segment is expanding in many urban areas due to limited work opportunities in the formal sector and increase in demand for low cost ready to stuff.

Objectives of the study:
1. To study the problems of street vendors .
2. To study the level of satisfaction and living standard of people engaged in the fast food street vending.
3. To study the insecurities of livelihood faced by the street vendors.

Methodology:
The study has been carried out systematically on the basis of both primary and secondary data. The secondary data has been collected from various published literature like text books, magazines, newspapers, journals and internet. In order to collect primary data, the vendor’s survey has been undertaken from different sample areas in the city with the help of structured schedule. Observation method also made used to understand the real feelings of the respondents. Guwahati City has been selected as the study area for data collection.

Review of Literature:
Street fast food vending is a prevailing and distinctive component of a broad informal sector. It is commonly observed in public places of in urban areas.

(Tinker, 1997) defines street food as any minimally processed food sold on the street for immediate consumption. Street food is defined as ready-to-eat food or drink sold on a street or other public places, such as a market or fair by a hawker or vendor often from a portable stall.

Jonathan Shapiro Anjaria (2006), in his paper on ‘Street Hawkers and Public Space in Mumbai’ studied the life of street vendors in Mumbai. It was revealed that in central Mumbai, many formers, null workers and their families have been compelled to take up hawking. Many street hawkers were migrants from rural areas. It was because of ease of entry and the limited requirement of capital, they have entered street vending and they did it also due to of lack of other employment opportunities. Many hawkers pay a regular payment to the police and the BMC in the form of money or kind.

Sharit Bhowmick(2001)’s study on ‘Hawkers and the Urban Informal Sector: A Study of Street Vending in Seven Cities’ was based on 2100 street vendors from Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Calcutta, Imphal, Patna, Bhubaneswar and Bangalore. The study focused on the problems of street vendors in urban areas. The study identified that features of street vendors are common in all the seven cities. The average income of the street vendors ranged from Rs 50 to Rs100 for males and Rs 35 to Rs 40 for females per day. They were persecuted by the municipal authorities and the police. The situation of Patna was worst where bribery was high. The working conditions of the hawkers were very poor and most live a very hard life. They have to work for more than 10 hours a day to earn a meagre income.
According to FAO (Food and Agriculture Organisation) (2007), over 2.5 billion people eat street food every day. A longitudinal study of food consumption patterns in Bamako showed that street food accounts for 19-27 percent of food expenses and provides 134.417 kcal per day per person (WHO, 2006).

An assessment of some street foods widely consumed in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso showed that vendors did not respect hygienic practices (WHO, 2006).

Mohan B.E et al., (1999) in his article “Surveying Vendors of Street Food” analyses the safety of street vended food. The vendors have good knowledge of food safety and choler but persist in unsafe practices. Around 87 percentage of the vendors used stored water, usually in wide mouthed vessels prone to contamination. Data for public health planning and intervention can be gathered rapidly with this method of surveying street vendors.

Parthasarathy. G.,(1996) in his article “Unorganised Sector and Structural Adjustment” addresses the issues of relative efficiency of the organized and the unorganised sectors, the exploitation of unorganised sector by the organized. This study also focuses on the adverse implications of structural adjustment for the unorganized sector and street food vendors, the unprotected and neglected workers who sit and toil on the platform or near waste disposal place to sell their food product.

Discussion:

Socio-economic Role of the Street fast food sector:
The street fast food sector has grown explosively in the last decades and is now widely recognised by food and health agencies to possess a huge socio-economic power and important for developing countries (FAO, WHO).

With limited capital assets to meet opportunities in urban areas, poor groups have developed livelihood strategies- vending street food being one of those and the sector has an immense employment and income generating potential. The benefits from street food trade also extends throughout the local communities and economies since vendors buy their food locally, thus linking their enterprise directly with local farms and market.

It can be seen from the study that particularly poor, uneducated men and women are involved in street fast food vending. Most vendors are from the lowest income groups and thus vulnerable to small changes in income.

Growing Demand of street foods with respect to Guwahati city:
The urban population in Guwahati city is increasing rapidly. In the last decade, the number of people living in the city almost doubled. This development has led to an increase in the demand for relatively inexpensive and ready-to-eat foods as many urban residents spend most of the day outside of the house and have little time and money to spend on food. The rapid growth of urbanisation also turned street-food vending into an important business. The low cost accessibility and convenience are the key factors for the growing of fast foods. Women also play a very vital role in the street food sector through their direct or indirect involvement in the business. Additionally a significant number of street vendors in the city are men. The diversity that exists among street food vendors is reflected in the type of food they prepare or sell, the scale of their business, the mode in which they are operating, the locations in which they prepare and sell food, the type of customers to whom they sell food, and so forth. There are many varieties of street food which include panipuri, chola boot, bhel puri, momo, samochas, etc. as well as drinks like sugar cane juice, gola and so on. Other popular snacks include ghugni boiled and mashed white onion with spices, rolls, chowmeins and so on.

Realities and Living Standard of the vendors:
In most countries, street fast food trade is a family enterprise. Even if the women are not visible, they more often play an essential role. Most vendors have family members always around helping them, buying ingredients, preparing the food, cleaning utensils, moving the cart into place selling and eating the leftovers. Spouses and children mostly work unpaid. The quality of housing improves with the increase in per capita income. Moreover, the street vendors avail of poor quality of housing at low prices in order to use the limited savings for the purchase of consumer durables and to meet other urgent needs and responsibilities in life determined by the individual preferences. The meagre earnings generated through street vending in the face of a high cost of living in the urban areas force the street vendors to reside in slums. Several of the street vendors are migrants from rural areas. Most of the vendors residing in rented houses with their family members and the remaining vendors reported to be living in own houses by and large lived in huts (jhuggis) and constantly lived with the fear of eviction. Throughout the survey it has found that the vendors hardly had any electricity and drinking water facility.

Insecurities of their livelihood:
The existence of street vendors is not only about a section of poor people trying to earn a livelihood in the informal sector, but also about the provision of valuable services to the urban population. Thus, it is the duty of the State to protect the right of this segment of the population to earn their livelihood. However, the ground reality is that they are largely considered as unlawful entities and eyesores, and are consequently subject to constant harassment by the local police as well as the municipal authorities. This is usually seen to result in a financial burden of bribes to smoothen the path of their daily vending. The absence of legalisation is the main problem of this occupation and this study finds that all their job becomes uncertain and insecure.

In addition to work and income security, the street vendors face other forms of vulnerability at workplaces. Street vending is full of insecurity and uncertainty, since vendors work at the roadsides and accidents may occur at any time. The street vendors work for very long hours under extremes of climate, amidst high levels of air and noise pollution, which results in several forms of ailments like hypertension, hyperacidity or even diseases related to stress due to uncertainty of income. The workplaces of these vendors being public spaces, there is often no provisioning of toilet facilities, which result in several form of diseases. Hence, it is seen that this vending activity lacks any security and safety conditions that results in increases vulnerability among the vendors.

**Income Pattern:** The vendors’ earnings are very low and vary from trade to trade and from location to location. The monetary problem intensifies as vendors have a scantiness of resources for their trade and need to get credit for running their enterprises. The monthly income of a majority of street vendors was ranging from Rs. 3000-4000. Most of the vendors during the survey reported they generally borrow funds from their relatives and friends. Sometimes, they also buy the items from the whole sellers in credit in order to run their vending business. Due to low income some vendors could not even manage to send their children. They earn a very low amount of profit per day through which they can manage to take care of their families. Some of the vendors during the survey reported that due to low income they could not even manage to send their children in schools.

**Problems of street vendors:** The vendors happen to carry out their vending despite the constant fear of eviction and threat by Municipal Authority. Very often, the goods kept for selling are thrown away or taken away. The street vendors keep facing problems from different categories of people and authorities such as Municipal Authority, Police, and Shopkeepers in and around the place where they are vending. It was reported that the vendors had to pay bribe in order to save themselves from being harassed. The vendors are regularly threatened to vacant their carts and goods are taken away. The shades and shelters which are created to protect from the vagaries of weather, are also destroyed by the staff of the Municipal Authority during their raids which happens every five to seven days. To get them back the vendors make many visits to the office of the Authority and at times getting tired of paying bribes and the visits they preferred to forego their belongingness. Though some amount is collected by the Authority during their raids in the name of licence fee it was reported during the survey that they do not get any receipts for the payment made and there is no licence. Despite paying some money in the form of fee to the Resident Welfare Associations, they do not come to their rescue in case of harassment from the Municipal Authority. The Resident Welfare Association charges a very high fee from the vendors for allowing entry into the residential areas. In case if they enter the residential areas for vending without due permission then they are charged for which no receipt is given and the security guards are instructed to take away the cart as well as goods and getting them back is very difficult.

The vendors also experienced problems due to harassment by police. The police ask for money every tenth or twelfth day when they visit the vending site, if vendor fail to pay they verbally and physically abuse the vendors. The police also consume juice and other eatables without paying the cost. But when there is a theft of the vendor’s products even after filing FIR, the police do not take any action.

Despite of Police and Gauhati Municipal Authority, Residential Welfare Association, vendors also faced problems due to co-vendors. There is constant competition among the street vendors which are at times results in petty fights. Compared to the day time vendors, the frequency of harassment faced by those who carry out vending at night is more.

The vendors perceived that they had to face several problems because many of them are illiterate, ignorant and poor. No specific areas or zones have been allotted for the purpose of vending and it is very unfortunate that government do not make any schemes for those who try to earn their livelihood through vending in the absence of employment avenues. The vendors frequent spoilage of food due
to lack of appropriate storage facilities. Most of them being migrants, they face language problems and the locals make fun of their language and call them by the name of the place where they hail from. There is hardly any step taken to unionize them so that they can raise their voice and grievances collectively.

Findings: One of the noticeable feature in the study of Guwahati city is the growing number of street vendors. Street vendors increases with the shrinking of jobs in the formal sectors and with lack of gainful employment in rural areas. The rural unemployed tend to move to the cities in search of employment. They usually possess low skills and have low levels of education. Both factors make it almost impossible for them to find regular jobs in the formal sector. Street vending is one of the few options they have for earning a living. Entry into this trade is easier because it does not require high skills and the capital involved is low. 

During the survey, it was expressed that they don’t know what to do as their livelihood is affected every now and then. The vendors have to pay to the Guwahati Municipal Corporation as well as to the Police for running their vending business there, but still sometimes the Municipal people disrupt their businesses. They cease the vending businesses every week or months. They are totally unaware of their rights and obligations which are provided by the Government. However, street food fast foods provide an affordable source of nutrients to most of the lower income sectors of the population who appreciate the food due to its taste, low price and availability at the right time. Street vendors perform an important role in providing services to the urban population, especially the poor. Their contributions are unfortunately hardly ever recognized by the government. Instead, the governments are more often than not hostile to them. This is a result of a broader issue concerning the informal sector as a whole. Instead of protecting this sector and ensuring that its workers get their dues, the governments are indifferent to their existence.

Street vendors are an important part of the informal sector not only because of their numbers but because of the crucial roles they play in preserving the urban population who view street vendors as encroachers. However, the street food vendors in the area can potentially improve their businesses if given necessary support.

Conclusions:
Street vendors perform an important role in providing services to the urban population, especially the poor. Their contributions are unfortunately hardly ever recognized by the government. Instead, the governments are more often than not hostile to them. This is a result of a broader issue concerning the informal sector as a whole. Instead of protecting this sector and ensuring that its workers get their dues, the governments are indifferent to their existence.

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Recommendations:

1. Organising the street vendor is very important to make them self-reliant.
2. Proper awareness about the rights of street vendors is required to be raise among them through meetings or public gatherings or through any other oral mean.
3. Municipal Corporation should immediately act on issuing the registration or licence to the street vendors.
4. The local authority, together with other food control authorities needs to come up with a legal framework for the vendors to operate in.
5. Experienced social organizers should come forward to organize or unionize vendors to enable them to raise voice collectively.
6. Provide permanent sheds for vendors with proper shade and at least which bear minimum facilities such as drinking water, toilet, etc.
7. The government should evolve a mechanism to listen to the grievances of the street vendors periodically.
Reference:

9. www.streetfoodglobalnetwork.net