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3 Informal Economy: Livelihood Opportunity to Poor or
4 Challenges for Urban Governance

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8 **Abstract**

9 Issues are contested whether informal sectors of Economy are opportunity to urban poor or
10 challenge for urban governance. This article argues that street vending has become an
11 important source of earning livelihood for rural poor in the urban areas, and not only rural
12 poor are getting livelihood opportunities in the informal economy, this has been providing
13 goods in cheaper price to another section of urban poor that neither urban authorities nor
14 other can provide. Thus, street vending has become an opportunity of marketing space to
15 most of the urban poor in Kathmandu Metropolitan City. However, issues relating to urban
16 management and controlling over the deteriorating city environment due to increase vending
17 activities are, of course, challenging for urban governance. Therefore, there are confrontations
18 between authorities and vendors over licensing, taxation, encroachment of public places and
19 pavements and on increasing social problems. In spite of its crucial role for providing
20 employment and livelihoods to both urban and rural poor, its economic importance is rarely
21 recognized either in national poverty reduction strategies or in city governance initiatives.

22

23 **Index terms**— livelihood, urban poor, informal economy, urban governance, street vending

24 **1 I.**

25 **2 INTROCUCTION**

26 The informal economy has experienced rapid growth in developing countries and has consequently attracted
27 increasing attention among academics, researchers, social development activists, and policy planners. It is
28 generally believed that the rapid growth of the sector has been influenced by increasing unemployment in
29 developing countries. According to ??LO (2004), the lack of jobs in the formal sector of the economy as well as
30 the lack of skills in a large part of the labour force has resulted in the growth of a substantial informal sector in
31 which most workers are in low-paid employment under unregulated and poor working conditions. Informal sector
32 encompasses largely unrecognized, unrecorded and unregulated small scale activities including; small enterprises,
33 household enterprises, self-employed sectors such as street venders, cleaners, shoe-shiners, hawkers etc.

34 With the lack of governmental regulation or lack of institutions that provide job security and benefits, this
35 sector comprises the largest part of the economies of developing countries ??Suharto, 2003:115).

36 Characterized by a large number of small-scale production and service activities that are individually or family
37 owned and labour-intensive, the informal sector does not fall under the purview of organized economic activities.
38 Most workers entering this sector are recent migrants unable to find employment in the formal sector and their
39 motivation is usually to obtain sufficient income to survive, relying on their own indigenous resources to create
40 work (Singh, 2000). As many members of the household as possible, including women and children, are involved in
41 income generating activities, and they often work very long hours. It is difficult to estimate the exact magnitude

42 of the informal sector but there is general agreement that the informal sector comprises a growing proposition of
43 economic activity. Particularly in less developed countries 50 per cent of the labour force engaged in the informal
44 economy ??Gottdiener and Budd, 2005:77).

45 At the same time, it should be noted that in both developed and developing countries, the informal sector
46 is connected to the formal sector of the national and global economy through subcontracting networks and
47 commodity chains. For example, street vendors sell goods such as cigarette, clothes, newspapers, electronic
48 goods, clothes and other branded products obtained from the formal sector. In Nepal, the informal economy
49 is growing at a faster rate than the formal economy. The informal sector proves to be the major mechanism
50 for economic growth and development. In most of the less developed countries; the informal sector including
51 with street vending is the largest source of employment, investment and government revenue. This is because
52 the informal sector offers the best opportunity for the upward mobility in lifeline of the poor people and their
53 children ??Brown, 2005:5).

54 However, these aspects are unfortunately ignored by the urban authorities because street vending is considered
55 an illegal activity and street vendors are treated as criminals. Studies show that in almost all the Asian countries,
56 street vendors have no legal status to conduct their business and they are constantly harassed by the authorities
57 ??Bhowmik, 1999:4). Furthermore, the role of informal sector including with street vending has not been well
58 perceived. It is rather regarded to be a non-profiting activity, as it does not contribute to the national economy
59 in terms of tax. It is marginalized from the development agenda, and hence has been severely affected by the
60 functioning of macro socio-economic policies. Particularly improper or lack of policy support has made the sector
61 to be unsecured (Bhowmik, 2005 ??Bhowmik, :2258)), which adversely affects the livelihoods of the urban poor.
62 Yet they are popular because they provide the urban population with much needed services that neither the
63 municipalities nor the larger retailing outlets can provide.

64 Despite the fact that street vending is an important source of livelihood to urban poor, street venders occupy
65 the footpath leaving no space to the pedestrians. This has become a public concern because it creates problem for
66 smooth vehicular and pedestrians' movement, and has polluted the environment of the surroundings. Similarly,
67 vendors occupy public places and roads, which can create social problems like pick pocketing, hoodlum and theft.
68 This situation has created several problems in management, development and has destroyed the morphology of
69 the city. Therefore, much more needs to be understood in Kathmandu about the role of the informal sector -to
70 what extent street vending provides a means of livelihoods to the urban poor, to what extent urban authorities
71 are facing challenges for urban governance. This article provides understanding of whether street vending in
72 an opportunity for livelihood to urban poor or challenges for urban governance and concludes that, of course,
73 challenges are bulging with increasing informal activities in Kathmandu but this sector can be of important
74 source of livelihood to urban poor for making their living.

75 3 II.

76 4 METHODS AND MATERIALS

77 This article is based on both primary and secondary data which was collected in 2007 during the process of writing
78 MPhil thesis in Development Studies. In social science research, field work is the central and important method
79 for collecting the primary information. Standardized open-ended interview, key informants interview, informal
80 conversational interview, observation (participatory and non-participatory) methods were used to collect primary
81 information whereas secondary information were collected from published and unpublished literature. Four
82 highly concentrated locations of street vendors namely Asann-Bhotahity, Sundhara-Khichapokhari, Indrachowk
83 and Ratnapark from core city of Kathmandu were purposively selected to include most of the types of street
84 vending activities of Kathmandu. Thirty street vendors from those four locations were selected through snowball
85 sampling for open-ended interview. Similarly, key informants including representative authorities of Kathmandu
86 Metropolitan City, representative of Nepal Street Vendors Union, local residents were selected for interview.
87 Besides, observational information were also used to come up with the findings about the nature of street vending,
88 vendors' response to authorities, authorities' response to vendors and so on. Qualitative textual explanation
89 method is used to analyze the findings whether street vending is livelihood opportunity or challenges for urban
90 governance in Kathmandu Metropolitan City.

91 5 III.

92 6 STREET VENDING AS URBAN LIVELIHOOD

93 The livelihoods of the poor are determined predominantly by the context in which they live and the constraints
94 and opportunities this location presents. This is because context -economic, environmental, social and political
95 -largely determines the assets accessible to people, how they can use these ??Meikle, 2002:38), and thus their
96 ability to obtain secure livelihoods. Rural people see new opportunities in the urban areas in terms of employment,
97 physical facilities and others. As a result, rural landless agricultural workers had little incentive to remain in
98 agriculture. Instead they choose to migrate to nearby towns or cities in search of more remunerative non-
99 agricultural jobs. It is important to examine whether they get more remunerative jobs after migration or end up
100 swelling the ranks of unemployed in the urban labour market as predicted by Todaro (1976). But those migrants,

101 who were working in the rural vulnerable situation, see themselves more beneficial working in the urban informal
102 sector. Migrants' livelihoods vary according to their level of education and the skills they have. Competent and
103 skilled migrants may find urban formal jobs either in the government or in the private sectors.

104 In Kathmandu, there is domination of unskilled and uneducated migrants, who work in the informal sector.
105 Among various informal activities, street vending is one which is growing in the recent years rapidly. It was
106 estimated that 30,000 street vendors were earning livelihoods on the street of Kathmandu Metropolitan City
107 (Timalsina, 2007) and the number is to be predicted increasing in the recent years. There is domination of
108 migrants' street vendors predominantly poor, landlessness, conflict affected and having some expectations with
109 earning in Kathmandu (Timalsina, 2007). Street vending has become livelihood strategy to those migrants poor
110 in Kathmandu. Vendors exist in the major nodal junction of urban areas of Kathmandu and they prefer to be
111 located nearby market centres and shopping malls. Types of vending are vary with locations according to the
112 nature, composition and functions of formal sector. Almost all of the vending types are located at Asan-Bhotahity,
113 Sundhara-Khichapokhari, Indrachowk and Ratnapark areas. These locations cover main types of street vending
114 activities including cloth vending, vegetable vending, electronic goods, cosmetics, kitchen utensils, spices, fast
115 foods vending etc.

116 IV.

117 **7 STREET VENDING AS LIVELIHOOD OPORTUNITY**

118 Street vending as a profession, which has been in existence in the capital city, Kathmandu, since time immemorial.
119 Urban Street vending is not only a source of employment but it provides affordable services to the majority of
120 the urban poor. Vendors constitute an integral part of the urban economy, provide an essential service, create
121 their own employment and contribute to economic growth. The role played by the street traders in the economy
122 therefore is as important as it provides services and goods to the urban poor. At present more than 30,000 street
123 vendors are earning their livelihood on the street which is one of the huge contribution in terms of employment
124 and livelihood to urban poor.

125 In addition to this, vending attracts those who have limited opportunities for obtaining formal employment or
126 prestigious business, and minimizes chances of social exclusion and marginalization. Street vending is increasingly
127 becoming livelihood option for those marginalized people. On the one hand, urban authorities take street vending
128 as an illegal and unproductive sector; while on the other hand, it is an important livelihood securing sector for
129 the urban poor. It provides seasonal employment to the rural poor and has become a source of economic earning
130 to them. Therefore, it can be accounted as an opportunity to poor communities.

131 **8 1) Opportunities for Work and Employment**

132 Very poor people migrate to the urban areas for survival creating their own work. It is also prevalent that
133 some better off people also migrate to urban areas for work and to earn cash income. Thus, street vending in
134 Kathmandu has become an opportunity for work and employment for both poor and some other better off rural
135 people. Furthermore, this sector also links to the formal sectors by providing labour forces and by marketing
136 their products. Studies show that a lot of goods sold by street vendors, such as clothes and hosiery, leather
137 and plastic goods and household commodities are manufactured in small scale or homebased industries. These
138 industries employ a large number of workers and they rely mainly on street vendors to market their products
139 ??Gottdiener and Budd, 2005:77). In this way street vendors provide a valuable service by helping to sustain
140 employment in these industries.

141 Furthermore, street vendors are mainly those who are unsuccessful or unable to get regular jobs. This section
142 of the urban poor tries to solve their problems through their own meager resources. Unlike other sections of the
143 urban population they do not demand that government create jobs for them, or engage in begging, stealing or
144 extortion. They try to live their life with dignity and self-respect through hard work. These people work for over
145 15 hours a day under harsh conditions on the street. One respondent who has been working on the street for
146 work merely to create livelihood said:

147 I have been living on the street for 14 years. Waking up in the early morning and working till late evening
148 is my normal working schedule. I wake up at 4 in the morning and go to Kalimati (whole selling market) to
149 purchase vegetables for the day and come at this site. I put up mat until the shop owners do not come and after
150 then, I move to Bhedasing for the day time. I put up mat until late evening for whole the day where my wife
151 also works with me for looking after the shop during the lunch time. Working more than 15 hours a day on the
152 street has been hardly providing food for our family.

153 Another respondent in this regard added that: I have been selling multiple items on the street for survival. In
154 the morning, I put up vegetable shop at Asan, and during the day time I go in different locations, sometime at
155 Khichapokhari and sometimes at Sundhara with seasonal goods e.g. clothes, cosmetics, electronics and so on. In
156 the evening, again I go to vegetable selling to finish remaining vegetables because I cannot stock those perishable
157 vegetables for the next day. Sometimes, I earn more from vegetable selling and sometimes from others.

158 This sector on the one hand, provides livelihood earning opportunities for the poor and on the other hand, it
159 provides employment opportunities to some of the educated people. Because of decreasing formal employment,
160 and to some extent, people do not get job even if they are having good education and skills. One educated

161 respondent in this regard said: I am a graduate. I did my Bachelor Degree in 1990 and came to the city hoping
162 to find some jobs. Once I had gone for a post in a company with my first division certificates, but the employer
163 said to me that I could able to get that post if I would give them Rs.50,000 (\$715) as bribe. Since, I had not
164 much to give them as bribe. So I decided to work on the street for survival.

165 Another respondent added: I left my home dreaming about higher education. Since, it was difficult to continue
166 higher education in the hardship of my economic background, I tried to find some jobs, but unfortunately I did
167 not find any job. Then I started vending on this site. Now, I put up mat on the street during the morning and
168 the day time. In the evening I go to the evening college. I work morning to evening during the week-end and off
169 days.

170 In addition to this, as the goods sold are cheap, the poorer sections too are able to obtain their basic
171 necessities mainly through street vendors. The lower income groups spend a higher proportion of their income
172 in making purchases from street vendors, mainly because their goods are cheap and thus affordable (Bhowmik,
173 2005 ??Bhowmik, :2257)). In this way one section of the urban poor, helps another section to survive. Hence,
174 though street vendors are viewed as a problem for urban governance, they are in fact the solution to some of the
175 problems of the urban poor. By providing cheaper commodities street vendors are in effect providing subsidy to
176 the urban poor, something that the government should have done. One public customer emphasizing this said: I
177 always use to buy goods with the vendors. I have never entered into the shop because I cannot afford the goods
178 those are being sold in the stores and supermarkets. For poor people like me, street vendors provide goods in
179 affordable price. If there was no street market, I would not able to provide even clothes to my children.

180 Those examples and explanations explore that street vending in Kathmandu has become livelihood opportunity
181 to most of the poor and some better off people have also been living on the street. Poor people are making a
182 living with hard work on the street and some educated follows are pursuing their higher education. Hence, street
183 vending in Kathmandu has become opportunity for work, employment and livelihoods. It has been providing
184 livelihoods not only for the rural migrants, but also to the urban poor by providing goods and services in affordable
185 price.

186 9 2) Livelihood to Dependent Family

187 Street vending provides earning opportunity and livelihoods to the dependent family members. Because of the
188 rural conflict and increasing livelihood vulnerability at the household level, some of the migrants have migrated
189 with dependent family members, for example, children and old parents. Providing basic necessities to those
190 dependent family members becomes the responsibility of youths and adults. In Kathmandu, many vendors are
191 working on the street for surviving to their dependent family members. One respondent quoting this said: I have
192 been living in Kathmandu for 5 years with my three small children and mother in-law aged 65. Last year my
193 husband went abroad (Malaysia) to earn but he has not sent any money to me. Since then, I have to bear all
194 the responsibilities for my family. I have been working on this site from early in the morning to late evening and
195 hardly been able to get livelihoods to my family.

196 During the field work, some vendors were living on the street with their small children. Explaining to the
197 questions about the living situation and their involvement on the street, one woman said: I was living with my
198 husband with good enough family status in the village. One night some armed men came and took my husband
199 forcefully. Now, I do not know where he is living and in what situation. I asked and reported many times to
200 Human Right Commission, but still his situation is unknown.

201 Showing her small children she further said: I have four children and I have to look after them. I hardly earn
202 Rs. 100 (about 1.2 \$) per day on which five family members have depended. If my husband was with me, it
203 would be easier struggling for livelihoods together. But I am alone and it has become very difficult to earn a
204 livelihood for my family.

205 Moreover, some vendors are working on the street as partial fulfillment for their livelihoods. Working only
206 in other sectors, for example, driving (taxi, tempo, micro-buss etc.) and labour work in small industries cannot
207 survive their families. One respondent whose husband was driving, but could not cover all the household
208 necessities, went on the street even if she was having small kids. She was working on the street taking care
209 of her children. The following pictures show two dimensions of urban livelihoods. One (first picture) is about
210 livelihood dependent situation whose husband had gone abroad and another (second picture) is about whole
211 family work for survival on the street whose husband was working as driving.

212 V.

213 10 CHALLANGES

214 It has been difficult for controlling and managing the city environment, including managing footpath, controlling
215 of increasing vending activities and providing easy movement to the pedestrians. Hawkers and street vendors
216 spread their wares on the pavement and sometimes on the street, causing great inconvenience to the pedestrians
217 and vehicles. At present, vendors on the street have so increased that it has been difficult to shoo them away.
218 It is not good for let them stay on the street because it creates a lot of problems, including physical and social
219 problems and difficulty for public movement. It deteriorates the KMC environment by increasing social evils
220 and overcrowding. Vending activities in Kathmandu is rapidly increasing during the last 6/7 years. During the

221 evening, especially at Sundhara-Khichapokhari, Asan-Bhotahity, Indrachowk, Ratnapark vendors go on the main
222 street and put up their mats. Vendors get gathered and shout loudly to attract to the customers, which creates
223 a noisy environment. Because of the crowd on the pavement and street, it creates difficulty for vehicle flow and
224 public movement. In response to a question about physical problems, the KMC authority responded: I do not
225 have to tell you about the congestion resulting from the vending activities. You can see the situation. Especially
226 during the evening, vendors go on the street and put up their mats. Vehicle flow and pedestrians movement have
227 been entirely affected. It has now been out of control. Moreover, it has become a political issue and organization
228 like GEFONT is giving support to them. I think it is not good to have political protection to such public issues.

229 According to the officer, during the festivals (Dashain and Tihar), vendors increase by two fold and at that time
230 there will be more congestion. All street of Kathmandu, especially Ratnapark, Asan, Bhotahity, Indrachowk,
231 Sundhara, Khichapokhari, Newroad become full of street markets. It becomes very difficult even to walk around
232 those locations. During that period, garbage output from those areas becomes almost 3/4 times more than as
233 usual. Municipality has to employ double staffs and excavators to remove the garbage.

234 On the one hand, vendors claim that they should have options for living because living on the street was not
235 their wish. On the other hand, the pavement has been encroached to such an extent that if appropriate solution
236 has not been taken, probably almost all pavement and public places will be fully occupied. Therefore, the main
237 problem resulting from increasing street vending is the overcrowding and it leads to encroachment of the public
238 places and roads. Hence, increasing street vending activities in Kathmandu Metropolitan City has created the
239 physical problem relating to encroachment of public places and pavement. Overcrowding and pollution of city
240 environment in terms of garbage are also linked with this.

241 Similarly, social problems relating to theft, hoodlum, pick pocketing, burglary, crime are linked with increasing
242 street vending activities. In addition to this, conflict between vendors, between metropolitan police and vendors
243 has also been increasing. Vendors have been increasing on the street day by day. Since the space to locate their
244 mats is limited, each vendor does not get space to put up their mats and they quarrel and sometime fight each
245 other. It is said that crimes have been increasing in Kathmandu in recent years and some crimes relating to
246 pick pocketing, hooligans according to the street in charge officer are, of course, because of increasing informal
247 activities including with street vending in Kathmandu.

248 In Kathmandu, there is significant number of women street vendors. Some of the women vendors are newly
249 migrated and young as well. Some of them have been facing the problems like raging and misbehaving by the
250 male vendors. Moreover, it was also heard that vendors used to sell stolen and worn out goods. There were
251 some vendors selling worn out (they called it 'sale') goods or second hand goods. Those worn out goods were
252 especially garment products selling at Sundhara and Ratnapark areas. However, authority of the KMC reported
253 that in the past it was heard that some vendors used to sell stolen goods, but nowadays it has been stopped. In
254 response to a question relating to the goods that vendors were selling on the street, the street in charge of the
255 KMC authority said: Nowadays, there is no report about stolen goods that vendors are selling. About second
256 hand goods, some of the vendors are, of course, selling on the street. Vending on the street is not an illegal
257 market, only the problem is their encroachment of public places and pavement. Overcrowding, crimes are also
258 linked with this.

259 Besides, increasing crimes relating to street vending activities in Kathmandu has been a challengeable issue.
260 Crime as a social problem is increasing with increasing street vending in Kathmandu. Crime relating issue is
261 noticed when one of the informal informants told a story. His story was like this:

262 One day I was staying in my shop, all of a sudden some hooligans shouted loudly as saying Han, Han, Chhapka
263 (blow him, blow him, kill). When I saw two young boys were showing Khukuri (national weapon of Nepal, a
264 sharp weapon like a sword) to each other, I got scared and closed my shop immediately. On the following day, I
265 heard that they were vendors, who used to stay at the same place selling vegetables for many years, and one of
266 them was seriously injured. Conflict between vendors and the KMC authorities is also a major problem which
267 is increasing at present in Kathmandu. Officer in charge of the street market said that recently they employed
268 more staffs to control encroachment and overcrowding in the public places. Still the situation was that some of
269 the locations were out of control. There were many reports that vendors and the KMC staffs quarrel. It was
270 because vendors did not want to remove their mats and the KMC staffs were given duty not to allow vendors
271 putting up mats on the street. One informal informant who was working as a metropolitan policeman in this
272 regard said: I have been working as a metropolitan policeman for 10 years. It was very easy to deal with vendors
273 when I started my job. But at present, I find it very difficult to deal with them. I have realized that vendors
274 have been increased by twofold in recent years. Public places and pavements have been occupied by the mats.
275 As a metropolitan police, my duty is to take them away from public places and pavements. Instead of moving
276 away, they attack when we go to chase them. One day I had been bitten seriously by some vendors when I told
277 them to remove their mats.

278 Hence, it can be pointed out that besides encroachment of streets and public places, social problems including;
279 conflict, theft, robbery, crimes etc. are increasing with increasing street vending in Kathmandu and these issues
280 have been more challengeable to urban governance.

281 11 VI.

282 12 CONSLUSION

283 Rural migrants, domination with low level of education and skills, are enforced to involve in the informal economy
284 for their scanty livelihood. Street vending activities has become an easy access to those migrants' vendors in
285 Kathmandu. Those vendors see street vending as an opportunity for work and employment in the urban areas
286 and take street vending as an earning opportunity and an opportunity to provide livelihoods to dependent family
287 members. Poor, better off people and some educated fallows have been engaged on the street of Kathmandu
288 for making a living. Not only rural poor are getting livelihood opportunities in informal economy, vendors are
289 providing goods in cheaper price to another section of urban poor that otherwise would be impossible to provide
290 by the urban authorities or by the urban governance system. Thus street vending has become opportunity of
291 marketing space to most of the urban poor in Kathmandu Metropolitan City. However, it has been difficult for
292 controlling and managing the city environment, including managing footpath, controlling of increasing vending
293 activities and providing easy movement to the pedestrians. Hawkers and street vendors spread their wares on
294 the pavement and sometimes on the street, causing great inconvenience to the pedestrians and vehicles. In
295 spite of increasing street vending activities in Kathmandu, it has created several problems such as overcrowding,
296 encroachment of public places, footpath and increasing social problems such as theft, hoodlum, pick pocketing,
297 burglary, crime etc which have ultimately become challenges for urban governance.

298 Of course, street vending is a challenge for urban governance but what about livelihood rights of more than 30,
299 000 migrants street vendors' as well as other urban poor who are making their scanty living on the street. Urban
300 authorities need to think to settle down these problems with a logical end. One possible solution for solving the
301 problems can be by providing vendors with a specific location for trading. It can be done with the help of local
302 clubs giving them responsibility for controlling and managing the surrounding environs. Some open spaces can
303 also be identified and provided for trading that can protect livelihoods right of the vendors and manage the city
304 environment for good urban governance.^{1 2}

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