



# Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing

Inclusive Cities Project

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## SEWA Bharat and Street Vendors in Delhi

Ruchi Sankrit

As a livelihood, street vending is a vicious trap of poverty, especially for women workers. It is indicative of low income, physical strain, continuous struggle for space and recognition, harassment, and exploitation. This paper is an attempt to assess the various livelihood challenges a women street vendor in Delhi faces and how, since 2009, the Self Employment Women's Association, Bharat (SEWA Bharat) has worked to change those conditions under the Inclusive Cities Project.

### City Context

Delhi is the national capital of India, known for its historical importance and cosmopolitanism. According to the 2011 Census of India, Delhi's total population is over 16.7 million, making it the world's second most populous city. A centre for economic, governance, trade, and educational activities, Delhi attracts a constant influx of people looking for better lives and livelihoods.

Delhi is one of the richest states in the country. The average per capita income of Delhi at 0.2 million is three times the estimate for all of India on average. In contrast to this are the nearly 1.7 million people in Delhi that are living below the poverty line, the 15 per cent of the Delhi population that lives in slums, and the 86 per cent of total workers who work in the informal economy (Delhi Human Development Report 2013).

10 million vendors in India contribute to 50 per cent of the country's savings. 63 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product comes from vendors.

### Membership-Based Organization

The Self Employed Women's Association, Bharat (SEWA Bharat), formed in 1984, is an all-India federation of the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA). SEWA, established in Gujarat in 1972 by Ela Bhatt, is a trade union composed of women workers in the informal economy. SEWA Bharat came into being when it was clear a focused federation had to play a key role in establishing new SEWA groups across India, and in building their capacity by acting as a link between these groups, and by advocating with them at a national level. Since its formation, SEWA Bharat has organized 170,000 women in the informal across nine states in India.

Through an integrated approach, SEWA Bharat looks into livelihoods, microfinance, health, education, skills development, and capacity building needs of its members.

SEWA Bharat began organizing informal economy workers in Delhi in 1999. It played an instrumental role in the establishment of the SEWA Delhi Trust in 2007 and the SEWA Delhi Union in 2011. Since then, SEWA Delhi has worked with 40,000 members, offering services in livelihood development, microfinance, health, government welfare, housing, pension, and insurance, etc.



*This vendor is in the minority of women vendors because she sells from a pushcart. Most women vendors sell from a fixed spot on the pavement. Photo: L. Vryenhoek*



## Worker Overview

A street vendor is a person who offers goods or services for sale to the public and who does not have a permanently built structure but does have a temporary static structure, mobile stall, or head-load. Street vending contributes a significant flow of goods and services into the economy. According to Ministry of Urban Development and Poverty Alleviation, 10 million vendors in India contribute to 50 per cent of the country's savings, and 63 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product comes from vendors. It is a significant component of employment in the country and provides livelihoods to large numbers of poor workers. As per various studies, there are close to 10 million street vendors in India. In fact, roughly two per cent of the entire urban population is street vendors.

According to various estimates and studies, there is anywhere from 300,000 to 500,000 street vendors in Delhi, but the Municipal Corporation of Delhi official figure of "legal" vendors is roughly around 125,000. Eighty-two per cent of vendors in Delhi are stationary vendors who sell perishable goods. More than half of the vendors in Delhi are in the older age group (i.e., 31-50 years). At 40 per cent, illiteracy is high among vendors.

While female vendors constitute 30 per cent of the total number of street vendors in Delhi, the unionizing of women street vendors is dismal compared to that of men street vendors. As per estimates, in Delhi, only 10-15 per cent of women street vendors are part of trade unions and there is under-representation of women vendors in executive committees of bigger trade unions.

### Legal and Policy Framework

Until the enactment of The Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street vending) Act, 2014, there was no common law regulating street vending and hawking in India. Various other laws and acts determined the nature of street vending. The National Policy on Street Vendors in 2004 and 2009 led to the introduction of the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Bill, 2012, in Parliament. All the policies, acts, laws, constitutional provision and schemes governing street vendors in India are highlighted below.

Women vendors face irregular work and low income, a lack of skills, inadequate access to capital and resources, lack of property or assets, harassment and violence.

### Human Rights and Fundamental Rights

In the late 1980s, a street vendor named Sodhan Singh was evicted from New Delhi by the New Delhi Municipal Corporation. An appeal was filed in the Supreme Court on the pretext that the act of eviction violated his fundamental rights, more specifically his right to carry on business or trade (article 19(1)g). What followed was a landmark judgement that stated the right to carry on a trade or business was covered by Article 19(1)(g) but was to be reasonably restricted by law under Article 19(6). Article 16 (equality of opportunity in matters relating to employment or appointment of any office under the State) and Article 21 (forcible eviction of hawkers without prior notice is an infringement of Right to

Life of the Constitution) have also been established by the constitution in reference to street vending.

The Constitution of India further recognizes the right to work through the **Directive Principles of State Policy**, which directs securing adequate means of livelihood for both men and women, the right to free choice of employment, protection against unemployment, and just and favourable conditions of work. Under the **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966)**, rights are guaranteed under Human Rights. This covenant reiterated that in no case should people be deprived of their own means of subsistence, and it recognizes the right to work.

### Municipal, Police, and Traffic Control Laws

While the above constitute the basic human and fundamental rights guaranteed to street vendors, let us exam-

*This vendor earns her livelihood at a busy road-side market.  
Photo: S. Pathak*



Delhi Municipal Corporation Act	Indian Penal Code, 1860	Motor Vehicles Act, 1988
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Corporation may frame by-laws relating to permission, regulation or prohibition of use or occupation of any street or place by vendors/hawkers (<b>Section 481</b>)</li> <li>Prohibits deposit of things in streets (<b>Section 321</b>)</li> <li>Simple imprisonment up to six months or fine up to Rs. 5,000 or both for anyone contravening (<b>Section 321</b>)</li> <li>Has power to remove anything deposited or exposed for sale in contravention of the Act (<b>Section 322</b>)</li> <li>Without proper authority, no person can displace, damage, or alter anything on pavement maintained by Corporation (<b>Section 397</b>)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Anyone causing danger or obstruction in public way or the line of navigation will be fined up to Rs. 200 (<b>Section 283</b>)</li> <li>No person shall cause obstruction in any street or public place by exposing anything for sale or setting out anything for sale in or upon any stall, booth, and board cask basket or in any other way whatsoever (<b>Delhi Police Act, 1978, Section 34</b>)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Section 201</b> penalizes anyone who obstructs the flow of traffic on the public highway. It is specially designed for avoiding unnecessary traffic blocks and is applicable to both motorized and non-motorized vehicles.</li> </ul>

ine the conflicting laws and rules governing vending. The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (and the New Delhi Municipal Corporation) has the full authority to permit "hawkers and squatters" on the sidewalks under the provisions of the Delhi Municipal Corporation Act, 1957. Hawkers are not permitted to squat on every road, and vending is regulated through earmarked hawking zones. However, contradictory provisions in the Police Act and Indian Penal Code are a hindrance to the recognition of legal licensed vendors.

### National Policy and Law for Street Vendors

An urban street vendor law has been needed for a long time. The Bellagio International Declaration of Street Vendors, 1995, recognized street vending as an informal, unrecognized trade. In 2004, a task force for the creation of an urban street vendor law was created. SEWA representatives were part of this task force. A decade later, two National Policies and a bill were formulated. In February 2014, the bill was enacted into **The Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014**. The salient features of the act are as follows:

- Registration:** Vending certificates are compulsory for street vending and will be received after registration. On the basis of the vending certificate, identity cards will be issued.
- Town Vending Committee (TVC):** The TVC should consist of a Municipal Commissioner, street vendor representatives, local authorities, planning authorities, local and traffic police, resident welfare associations, CBO banks, and trader associations. The TVC should publish a charter for the issuance of vending certificates, audits of activities, and a database of registered vendors.
- Eviction and Relocation:** The local authority can relocate the street vendors for: (a) creating a public nuisance; (b) obstructing public movement; or (c) any other public purpose. The street vendor shall be entitled to a new vending site. The local authority shall give seven days notice to the street vendor before relocating or evicting him.



*Often lacking access to childcare, many women vendors must bring their children to their vending sites. Photo: S. Pathak*

- Penalties:** A maximum penalty of Rs. 2,000 may be imposed on a street vendor if he: (a) vends without a vending certificate and/or beyond the designated zone or specified times; or (b) violates the terms of the vending certificate or any other provisions. The goods of the vendors may also be confiscated in the manner specified in the street vending scheme.
- Dispute Resolution:** Street vendors who have a grievance can appeal to a dispute redressal committee constituted by the local authority. The committee shall consist of one sub-judge/judicial magistrate or an executive magistrate and other persons experienced in street vending and natural markets. Appeals against the decision of the committee or TVC will lie with the local authority.
- Civic Facilities:** Provision of civic facilities like solid waste management, electricity, drinking water, storage, protective cover, parking, and cleanliness.



## Situation Prior to Intervention

Women workers face these fundamental issues: irregular work and low income; lack of skills; inadequate access to capital and resources; poor health and nutrition conditions; lack of property or assets; illiteracy; absence of basic services like housing, water and sanitation; and lack of organization, voice, and recognition. Other concerns include harassment, violence, and the extra burden of household work.

### Low Income

Women in street vending are largely stationary and sell their goods on pavement and streets, unlike male vendors, who use push-carts for vending. Women vendors may also vend through baskets on their heads. The income earned by vendors is meagre and depends on various factors: location, as income from residential areas is less than from busy markets; items, as perishable goods generate lower income than garments or electronics; and mobility, as mobile vendors selling same the goods earn less than stationary vendors. A vendor's income is also hugely affected by the availability of lucrative space to vend, transportation costs, terms and conditions set by the wholesaler, working capital, illegal extortions, bribes, and so on.

Women vendors earn less than their male counterparts. While the range of income in seven cities by male vendors was US \$.60 (Rs. 40) to US \$1 (Rs. 70), female vendors earned somewhere between US \$.50 (Rs. 33) to US \$.80 (Rs. 50) on a daily basis. Based on survey results of SEWA members in the Qutub road market (selling refurbished clothes), on average, the sale value of goods is US \$16/week.

### Extortions and Illegal Payments

The majority of vendors have to struggle for space to vend not only with authorities but also with trade unions and other vendors. These lead to unscrupulous extortions by middlemen and by authorities (bribes). Around 60 to 70 per cent of vendors in all cities have paid bribes to the authorities on a regular basis. The bribes ranged from Rs. 2 to US \$1.60 (Rs. 100) per day. The highest bribe was paid by vendors who sold shoes or clothes in the Sunday market at the Red Fort. Most vendors pay between US \$8 (Rs. 500) to US \$11 (Rs. 700) per day.

### Capital

Vendors also have to invest in their trade, and they lack working capital to expand. Getting loans from a wholesaler is common, especially in the case of perishable items. The vendors have to pay a fixed sum of money, including exorbitant interest, to the wholesaler at the end of the day in spite of fewer sales. The moneylender and wholesaler charge exorbitant rates on loans, at times reaching 100-125 per cent. Formal financing mechanisms exclude informal economy workers in general. For street vendors, this is particularly grave as they remain in the grip of middlemen or money lenders.

### Transportation Costs

Transportation costs are also a high expense for street vendors, especially in bigger, metro cities. Markets are a considerable distance from where vendors live. Vendors are also not allowed to carry their stock and travel on public transport. As a result, they have to invest in costly private transportation. Vendors residing in Raghbir Nagar, Delhi, end up paying US \$11-16 (Rs. 700-1,000) every month to vend in the weekly market, which is 20-25 km away.

### Displacement and Eviction

Vendors also face the constant threat of eviction and displacement. Because of their desire for Delhi to become a "World-Class City", the country's planners and developers seem fascinated by cities in the West and are ignoring their own city's attributes. The "World-Class City" vision leads to frequent demolition and eviction not only of markets but also of street vendors' housing.

The Commonwealth Games, held in New Delhi in 2010, were one such "World-Class City" event. Vending in prominent places was prohibited before the Games, which resulted in significant losses in vendor income. Furthermore, the Commonwealth Games were preceded by unprecedented infrastructural and beautification drives in and around the city, leading to the eviction of many markets. According to the National Association of Street Vendors of India (NASVI), Delhi authorities evicted more than 55,000 street vendors from their sites of livelihood in different areas across the city. Furthermore, many vendors use their homes as a storage place for their goods. The cloth and utensil vendors often use



More than half of the vendors in Delhi are between 31-50 years.  
Photo: M. Chen

their homes to re-work old clothes or shoes to sell in the markets. Displacement is a threat vendors face at the workplace and at home. Many resettled slums are relocated to fringes of the city, severely affecting the livelihoods of the workers.

### Access to Health, Education, Water, and Social Security

Among informal sector workers in general, access to health, education, water, and social security is an issue. Markets face major infrastructural issues with little access to sanitation and water. Vendors are also exposed to extreme weather conditions in summer, winter, and during monsoon. All these are critical factors in vendors' health and well-being. Ill-health not only leads to more expenses, but also to the loss of working days. Since a lot of women vendors have to work in the market, their children are either left at home or accompany their parent to the markets, sometimes in harsh weather conditions.

The vendors earn their living by selling from the pavement.  
Photo: M. Chen



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### Model of Intervention or Theory of Change

In Delhi, like in other parts of the country, the problems street vendors face stem from a variety of factors, including inadequate organization, government policies, the lack of legal protection, the internal dynamics among vendors, and the absence of social security. SEWA believed that by adopting the SEWA strategy of struggle and development, women vendors would develop and lead organizations of their own to bring forward the issues fellow members face.

Furthermore, an integrated approach was required to address the challenges emerging from the social and economic structures in which the vendors found themselves. The proposed solution was as follows:

#### To Organize and Unite the Vendors In Order to Fight for Their Rights

- Bring all SEWA members together, strengthen their union, and bargain with the government/municipal authorities.
- Protect the livelihoods of the vendors by protecting their markets and by preventing them from being removed in the name of beautification.
- Develop leaders among the vendors and build platforms for representation and discussions, such as committees.
- Improve the working conditions or work areas by developing and beautifying markets.

#### To Implement the National Policy for Urban Street Vendors, 2009

- Get licences, and therefore legal identity, for street vendors through the municipal authorities.
- Create adequate and well-planned hawkker zones where vendors can vend legally with dignity.
- Represent vendors' issues and concerns to the concerned authorities.
- Protect the vendors from harassment and exploitation at the workplace.

#### To Create More Livelihood Opportunities for Vendors

- Create new marketplaces for vending.
- Develop existing markets so as to improve vendors' working conditions.
- Maintain hygiene in public spaces and streets.

#### To Undertake Development Activities

- Provide better health access through health linkages, camps, and awareness.
- Provide access to microfinance, including insurance and pension.





A street vendor prepares vegetables for sale.  
Photo: J. Luckham

- Create linkages with government welfare schemes.
- Build skills of second-generation vendors.

## Intervention, Details of Strategies

### Advocacy for National Policy and National Law for Street Vendors

#### Demand for National Law for Street Vendors

The National Policy for Street Vendors was first drafted in 2004. The Government of India set up a task force to formulate this policy. SEWA was a member of this task force and a member of the drafting committee. These efforts culminated in the National Policy on Urban Street Vendors, published in 2004 by the Department of Urban Employment and Poverty Alleviation, Ministry of Urban Development & Poverty Alleviation. In 2007, SEWA filed an intervening application in the Supreme Court for the case “Sudhir Madan and Ors. Vs. MCD and others”, drawing the court’s attention to the Municipal Corporation of Delhi’s (MCD) responsibility in developing a scheme for hawking as per the requirements of the National Policy. This led MCD to produce the “Scheme of MCD for squatter/hawkers, 2007” as per the court’s direction. This led to the constitution of the ward vending committee, the zonal vending committee, the process for allotment of vending sites, registration, and so on. As a result, in 2008, 13,000 vendors received licenses when MCD called for applications to allot vending rights. Vendor members of SEWA interacted with the MCD for demarcating space for vendors

Since 2007, however, the MCD’s implementation of the scheme had been lackluster. SEWA filed another intervening application in the ongoing case, “Gainda Ram and others vs. MCD and others” before the Supreme Court in 2009, praying the Supreme Court would direct the MCD to apply the national policy. It sought the regularization and stabilization of three markets (i.e., the Vellodrome Road Market, the Qutub Road Market, and the Book Bazaar) through necessary demarcation, issuance of identity cards to receipt holders, and timely collection of tehbazari (municipal tax). On this basis, the Supreme Court directed the government (central/state) to enact a law by June 2011 to recognize the livelihood rights of street vendors and regulate vending activities.

## Vendors in Delhi have faced constant threats to their vending sites.

In 2012, demands for major schemes under 2009’s Model Bill (as a result of the amendment of the National Policy, 2009), were proposed to the standing committee in Parliament. In 2013, the Bill was passed in the Lower House of Parliament. SEWA Bharat has since put pressure on the government and the opposition for speedy enactment of the law. In the process, SEWA has organized many campaigns, meetings with ministers, Members of Parliament, Speakers of Parliament, sit-ins, hunger strikes, and press conferences. SEWA organized continuous sit-ins for 600-1,000 vendors at Jantar mantar (a landmark for popular protest) when Parliament was in session in January 2014. In February 2014, the bill was further approved in the Upper House of Parliament.

### Protection of Natural Markets

The vendors in Delhi have faced constant threats to their vending space, evidenced by their frequent evictions from markets in Delhi. As Sundariben said while speaking about the eviction and nature of street vending, “I have been given tax to municipality since the time their rates were 2 paise. It increased to Rs. 1, then to Rs. 2, Rs. 5 and Rs. 10. I have vended for years, and then I was beaten during eviction of the Qutub Road Market”.

SEWA Bharat’s work with three markets in Delhi (namely the Vellodrome Market, the Qutub Road Market, and the Book Bazaar) has been significant. All three markets posed different sets of challenges and needed different interventions.

#### Qutub Road

After the Republic Day celebration in 2008, the Qutub Road market remained closed for weeks. After an intense period of negotiation with the police department, the market reopened only to be closed again in January 2009. While the police department reason for closure was cited as a precaution against a terrorist threat, the MCD then declared Qutub Road as a non-hawking and non-squatting zone. And, while the National Policy on Urban Street Vendors clearly called for the rehabilitation of the vendors in case of eviction, the Municipal Corporation was non-committal on relocation.

Accordingly, SEWA Bharat submitted a petition to the Ward Vending Committee and the Zonal Vending Committee. Because it received no response, SEWA approached the appellate jurisdiction in 2009. The judge heard the members and asked the MCD to respond. In its response, the MCD contradicted itself by stating that the market fell into a no-hawking zone although its scheme had clearly identified Qutub Road as one of the recognized markets in Delhi. SEWA Bharat won the case in 2010, and the market was reinstated. Since then, the market has been functioning well.

#### Book Bazaar

The Sunday Book Bazaar is a weekly market, held near Daryaganj in Delhi, where vendors sell old and second-hand books. It is one of the oldest weekly markets in Delhi, and readers, students, and scholars throng to it, looking for cheap and rare books. The Municipal Corporation was recognized as a natural market in 2007. But in 2009, the Book Bazaar received eviction notification—a step taken without consulting the Zonal Vending Committee of which SEWA Bharat was part. This issue was highlighted in the intervening application filed before the Supreme Court in 2009, which agreed the market was extremely important for the sale of the books. In the end, the MCD regularized the market in 2009 along with 268 weekly markets. Since then, vending fees have been collected regularly in the Bazaar, and the market is functioning properly.

#### Vellodrome Road Market

Previously known as the Sunday Bazaar or Kabadi (scrap) Bazaar, the Vellodrome Road Market’s history can be traced back to the Mughal Era. The market has been shifted several times in the past: the market was first removed in 2000, then reinstated in 2005 near Vellodrome road. It was closed again in 2009 for construction of a fly-over before the Commonwealth Games.

SEWA Bharat’s struggle in the market had been against several parties, including the municipal authorities, police, trade unions, and competing vendors. However, SEWA has also developed an innovative solution for the market by working with the Government of Delhi’s Department of Public Works and private companies.

In 2009, after the closure of the market, SEWA Bharat met with the architecture firm responsible for the construction of the flyover and put forth the idea of having a weekly market beneath the said flyover. The architecture firm meticulously included SEWA’s proposal into its site plan. The public works department officials were then shown the plan, and the Chief Minister of Delhi in 2011 gave final confirmation allowing the market below the fly-over. Accordingly, 1,200 vendors would be able to vend at the site, and SEWA Bharat was granted permission to run the market as per official agreement with the Delhi Government, the municipality, police, and the Public Works Department.

As a facilitator for the smooth functioning of the market, SEWA Bharat has tried to involve vendors who are not necessarily members of SEWA. However, it has faced challenges from vested parties, in this case, the “trade unions” who, in a way, are powerful traders controlling and exploiting the vendors in collusion with authorities and mafia.

There are six different unions functioning in Vellodrome Road that extort illegal fees from vendors in the range of Rs.

200-1,000 per vending day. In order to make more profits, the unions allow more vendors than the permissible limit to vend in the market, leading to an unorganized market. These unions, unhappy with the agreement between SEWA Bharat and the Government of Delhi, adopted unscrupulous means to make the markets dysfunctional. These unions illegally confined vendors’ licenses, thus controlling vendors’ mobility. Thus, spaces for cardholders (permanent license-holders) were left vacant. In addition, even though the market began running smoothly with temporary licensees, the unions began running unauthorized markets near Vellodrome with more vendors and products to which customers were naturally drawn. Although SEWA has taken the case to officials, no actions have been yet taken. In the past two years, two unions have filed cases with the high court, where they remain sub-judicial.

Vendors such as these can often be exploited by unofficial “trade unions,” who extort illegal fees. Photo: M. Graves





Still, vendors say their situation has improved. Leelaben states that earlier she was scared of meeting the ministers. The police would confiscate goods and beat them. Now, because of SEWA, she has gained more voice and confidence to negotiate.

#### Creation of Model Markets (Exclusive Ladies Market)

SEWA has established an innovative market: the Ladies' Market, where only women vend and can do so without harassment. SEWA put the idea before the Honorable Supreme Court through an intervening application and thus got permission to carry out an all ladies market from MCD in 2008, where vendors pay weekly fees. The market is unique because the continuous rent enables MCD to earn revenue. Contributions from the vendors are also taken to ensure the functioning of the market.

SEWA performs key tasks to make the Ladies Market functional:

- Mobilizing and organizing 200 women vendors to sell their goods in the market. These members also pay vending fees and have been issued SEWA identity cards. SEWA conducts home and market visits to monitor the sale process and to ensure that the market functions well.
- Diversifying the articles sold in the market. Members sell old shoes, clothes, and handicraft items.
- Liaising with government departments by conducting meetings and follow-ups conducted with the Municipal Corporation of Delhi for permissions. Further, meetings have been held with the police department and traffic control authority for no-objection certificates.
- Publicizing the market through banners, pamphlets distribution, word-of-mouth, and media coverage and through contacts with students of Delhi University, embassies, tourism departments, and resident welfare associations.
- Beautifying the allotted site with an architect to beautify the market. SEWA has also made arrangements for drinking water and toilets for the vendors and advocated ceaselessly until the MCD has reconstructed the roads to install sewer connections in the market area.

Through SEWA's efforts, three markets, namely the Qutub Market, the Book Bazaar, and the Vellodrome Market, were preserved through reinstatement and regularization.

#### Development Activities

##### Access to Finance

SEWA Bharat's Thrift and Credit Cooperative, a SEWA member-led institution, provides loans to vendors for housing, livelihood, health, and household consumption needs. The Cooperative also offers financial schemes in savings, fixed deposits, and recurring deposits. Thus, through the cooperative, members are not only able to earn interest on their savings, but they can also save tremendously on interest charged on loans. Since the banking is done at the "doorstep" through the bank sathis (field team), vendors and other members are also able to save money. Financial literacy classes are also conducted with members to make them aware of finances.



#### Health

Health camps, including eye camps, gynaecology camps, and immunization camps, are conducted in areas members can reach. Further, referrals to hospitals and linkages with government health services are provided from time to time. Surveys conducted over the course of a year of health camps and free medicine revealed that vendors in one locality where SEWA Bharat worked were able to save US \$1,370 (Rs. 85,000). Through referrals and subsidized treatment in government hospitals, at least 11 patients in one year from one locality were able to save US \$3,104 (Rs. 192,500).

#### Non-Formal Education Classes

SEWA Bharat also conducted non-formal education classes in Ragubir Nagar, which is inhabited largely by vendors.

*Like these women, vendors are an important source of retail trading and allow people to buy goods and services at affordable rates and with convenience. Photo: J. Luckham*

As a result of SEWA membership drives, 6,000 women street vendors were organized in Delhi by 2014.

These were done to mainstream drop-out children and to provide supplementary education. Again, as per rough estimates, 72 children receiving the classes were collectively able to save US \$2,090 (Rs. 129,600).

#### Government Schemes Linkages

Providing information to members and linking them to government schemes are important components of SEWA Bharat's work. SEWA provides linkages for old age pensions, disability pensions, insurance, maternity benefits, identity cards, and so on. This service enables members and vendors to access schemes at lower cost. The government welfare schemes processing is bureaucratic and involves bribing. A survey done with 600 vendors from Qutub Road established that due to this service, on average, a vendor was able to save US \$29 (Rs. 1,755) per annum, which is roughly 5 per cent of her income.

### Achievements and Outcomes

#### Organizing

As a result of SEWA membership drives, 6,000 women street vendors were organized in Delhi by 2014, the formation of trade committees, market committees, and market associations.

#### Preservation of Natural Markets

Three markets, namely the Qutub Market, the Book Bazaar, and the Vellodrome Market, were preserved through reinstatement and regularization.

Because of the market's reinstatement and increased vending hours, women street vendors in the Qutub Road Market saw a cumulative increase in income of 133 per cent, which translated as a monthly profit increase of 124 per cent—from US \$51 (Rs. 3,174) to US \$115 (Rs. 7,134). Additional SEWA benefits were worth US \$27 (Rs. 1,699) per worker per annum or 4 per cent of income. Benefits provided by government were approximately US \$28 (Rs.

1,755) per worker per annum or 5 per cent of income. The total turnover for the Qutub Road Market is US \$929,032 (Rs. 57,600,000).

Because of SEWA's interventions, the Book Bazaar overcame eviction, and currently provides vending space to 200 members. It's a weekly market where every member is able to earn US \$24 (Rs. 1,500) per week. The annual turnover from this market was US \$232,258 (Rs. 14,400,000). The average annual income of one member is US \$1,258 (Rs. 78,000).

Similarly, by working with architects and officials, SEWA secured the livelihoods of 1,200 vendors in the Vellodrome Road Market.

SEWA also established India's first all ladies market in Delhi, the annual turnover of which is US \$6,300 (Rs. 390,600).

### Benefits to the City

Vendors are an important source of retail trading and allow people to buy goods and services at affordable rates and with convenience. SEWA Bharat has, through organizing, enabled the smooth functioning of the Book Bazaar and the Qutub Road markets.

Infrastructural projects are here to stay, especially flyovers, malls, and roads. Through model markets below flyovers, or exclusive ladies' markets, SEWA Bharat has demonstrated mechanisms through which the informal economy can be included in city planning and development.

Financially, the city has benefitted from regularized taxes paid by the vendors. The Qutub Road Market has paid an annual tax from the government was US \$6,967 (Rs. 432,000). Similarly, taxes have been systematized at the Book Bazaar and the Ladies Market.

Through SEWA's advocacy efforts towards the enactment of the Street Vendor Policy, close to five lakh vendors in Delhi will not fall under the "illegal" vendor label. This prohibits unscrupulous middlemen from functioning in the markets.

Further, because of advocacy and awareness efforts, India's constitutional committees have acknowledged that the presence of vendors in the streets has improved safety for women.



*Through market committees formed by leaders of women street vendors, SEWA Bharat has developed strong leaders. Photo: L. Vryenhoek*



## Critical Success Factors

### Organizing

SEWA Delhi has organized 6,000 street vendors in Delhi. It brings together SEWA members and strengthens their unions, increasing their bargaining powers with government/municipal authorities.

Through market committees formed by leaders of women street vendors, SEWA Bharat has also developed strong leaders. Twelve leaders are part of the Vellodrome Road Committee, 10 are part of the Qutub Road Committee, 8 are part of the Ladies Market Committee, and 5 are part of associations in the Book Bazaar. As one vendor, Rekhaben stated, this strength has changed the daily reality for SEWA vendors: “When we were unorganized, we would feel scared when Municipal Corporation staff or the police would come to evict our markets or harass us. Today we are organized and today they feel scared when we barge into their offices in groups demanding our rights.”

### Working with Civic Authorities

While working with the Municipal Corporation, SEWA Bharat's uses a dual strategy of collaboration and condemnation when required. For instance, SEWA Delhi is a member of the two Zonal Vending Committees (ZVCs) and one Ward Vending Committee in Shahdara Zone—but this membership doesn't stop SEWA from pointing out deficiencies. SEWA Bharat has, in the past, raised concerns about the ineffective processes of these committees. In addition, it has tried to make the MCD schemes more effective.

### Advocacy through the Court and Appellate Authorities

SEWA has regularly used legal measures to advocate vendors' rights. The Right to Information Act has been used on several occasions to seek information on the functionality of committees, the licences, demarcation, and so on. Further, SEWA has also filed three intervening applications, writs, and mandamus in the Supreme Court that draw attention to vendor issues and the ineffective measures adopted by civic authorities.

### Integrated Approach

SEWA Bharat looks into all issues that affect its members in their role as producers and workers. Shielaben was one

SEWA Bharat has demonstrated mechanisms through which the informal economy can be included in city planning and development.

of the vendors whose livelihood was affected after the displacement of the Qutub Road Market, which halved her sales. Now, her income is steady. She has also taken a loan from the cooperative worth US \$806 (Rs. 50,000) and has regular savings of US \$8 (Rs. 500) per month. Her family members have also benefitted from government scheme linkages like the widow pension and have also been able to get health benefits.

### Advocacy Through Media

SEWA Delhi constantly tries to garner print and electronic media support to highlight vendors' issues and to help vendors gain visibility.

### Networking with Other Organizations

SEWA Bharat is also part of the National Association of Street Vendors, India (NASVI) and the international alliance, StreetNet. NASVI is functional across 22 Indian states and has a membership of 500 organizations.

## Challenges and Their Root Causes

Organizing vendors is a challenging task. There are more vendors than there are organizations to serve them—studies conducted on street vendors in Mumbai, Delhi and Ahmedabad show that less than 20 per cent of street vendors are members of unions. Further, vendors are dispersed and scattered, they are not homogenous, and their working hours are not compatible with organizing.

SEWA's experience shows five constraints to organizing: poverty and illiteracy, cultural barriers, social pressure from families and community, discrimination, and violence/abuse by higher authorities and castes. Dealing with local authorities through informal associations is a rampant practice among street vendors in particular: to ward off eviction drives, members pay rent to the authorities through their informal association. For street vendors, continuing these arrangements is easier than organizing, which is a long term commitment.



Where SEWA has prevented market evictions, vendors incomes have a chance to stabilize. Photo: J. Luckham

## Lessons Learned

An important lesson was learning to use multi-pronged strategies to deal with the challenges street vendors face. Working with civic authorities through collaboration and struggle has been a core part of this approach.

SEWA Bharat has also leveraged situations demanding representation and dialogue with lawmakers and has, wherever necessary, undertaken rigorous advocacy. Along the way, SEWA has learned the key lesson that legal loopholes can mar the use of legal measures in advocacy work.

As ever, organizing is at the centre of all work while working with informal economy workers. Engaging with leaders and developing their voice has been instrumental in resolving several ground-level issues.

## Conclusion

The enactment of national-level law has been the biggest achievement for street vendors, and the focus now is to ensure the laws' execution. Yet the length and effort behind litigation is not as great as the enormity of threats natural markets face and so must continue.

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All currency conversions in this document is based on a rate of 1 rupee = US\$.016 as of 30 April 2014.

