



WEBINAR - BRIEF

Street Vendors in Islamabad – Voice from the Ground

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PREAMBLE.

PIDE has been raising the voice for the inclusion of the poor. And street vendors remain a potent manifestation of these excluded segments. It has rolled up its sleeves by teaming up with Ehsaas, the premier poverty alleviation initiative in the country. Purpose is to establish an evidence-based support for the government to streamline governance and livelihood of street vendors in Pakistan. And PIDE has also ventured in action through a pilot project, whereby it has conducted the first street vendors' survey in Islamabad on their profile development. This webinar is meant to present the voice from the ground of both regulators and regulates of the local street economy.

SURVEY FINDINGS.

Survey discovers that Market trumps Law in the Street Economy

- Zia Bandy, a senior fellow at PIDE, has led a 6-member team for conducting a street vendors' survey in Karachi Company area of G-9 Markaz, a major commercial hub of Islamabad. Methodology comprises of face to face interview with a structured questionnaire. 302 street vendors were reached out for the survey, out of which 198 consented for participation in the survey.
- Over 95% of the street vendors were migrants from mostly backward regions of the country. KPK tops the origin list with 43% vendors coming from the province, among which terror-affected areas of agencies have greater presence. Survey also corroborated the general observation about the presence of Afghan street vendors. 6% of the street vendors were Afghan nationals.
- 8% of the street vendors were below 18-years of age. Youngest among them was 15-year old, whereas there is a possibility of more under-18 street vendors, as a number of young street vendors didn't have CNIC. Over 10% vendors were in the age range of 50-years and above, with oldest being 70-years of age. If the age factor is linked with the years in vending, then it appears that a significant number of vendors have started vending at a much younger age.
- In terms of educational attainment, two-third of the street vendors were under matric, with 29% vendors were totally illiterate. Poverty and large households limits the affordability and the focus of number of youngsters for education or skill development. In the initial age, street vending emerges as a reluctant livelihood option for most, which eventually becomes the life-long vocation for many.
- Over half of the street vendors are residing within 1-2 kilometer radius of their workplace and commute by foot daily. This majority is mostly living in pool accommodation with 4-5 persons sharing a single room. Others are mainly living in far flung slums or low lying areas of Islamabad and Rawalpindi, using local transport or motorcycles to commute to their workplace. Long commutes become a necessity for those vendors, who are living with families, as they can only afford living in slum areas.
- Length of vending period reflects tenacity of street vendors, despite all the frequent eviction campaigns to uproot them. Around a quarter of the street vendors are vending in the Karachi Company area for 14-years and more. Most experienced street vendors have been vending for 30-years. Survey did find that during the course of their vending career, a large number of street vendors have been vending in different locations in both Islamabad and other cities.
- Majority of the street vendors have been frequently evicted and their material confiscated by the city authorities. It takes at least 3-weeks to retrieve their carts and material from the government after paying penalties and incurring a loss of 50% to 100% over the material. Reviving their livelihood, after these evictions, has resulted in heavy indebtedness for many of the street vendors. Number of them have become patients of hypertension, blood pressure and other diseases.

- Not a single street vendor possesses any vending license or authorization from the city authorities. However, the street economy of Karachi Company is alive and running around with all the fickleness about its existence. It has well-established supply chains spread through to suppliers located across the country and even overseas. Formal shopkeepers are providing shop front public spaces to vendors on rent inclusive of electricity charges. It is alleged that lower staff of city authorities have a regular underhand payment flow from street vendors. Ecosystem is much stable, resulting in high footfall and sales for the whole market. It may defeat the purpose of urban design of dedicated sidewalks for pedestrian traffic and car parking, but is serving the local economy well.
- Survey data also include information on income, investment, vending categories and financial formalization. It is further analyzed for causal linkages and a detailed survey report will be published soon by PIDE.

DR. SANIA NISHTAR, SPECIAL ASSISTANT TO PRIME MINISTER ON POVERTY ALLEVIATION.

Ehsaas will be utilizing survey findings in formalizing its policy response for street livelihood



- Dr. Nishtar mentioned that Prime Minister, Imran Khan, has shown his concern on the plight of street vendors in the country. He desires government initiatives for the betterment of this neglected and exploited segment of the society. Ehsaas is on the task and is pleased to collaborate with PIDE on the issue. She did mention about the various recent meetings and communication between Ehsaas and the PIDE team on the street vendors' initiative, where she herself and Secretary Ehsaas were personally involved. She applauded the PIDE efforts in creating a knowledge base on street economy and conducting the street vendors' survey in a very short period. She is looking forward to the survey report to plan the next steps for the engagement on street livelihood.
- She indicated that the government is cognizant of the rentier component of the street economy in Pakistan. However, it wants to proceed with implementable solutions while taking into account the constraints of the operating environment. It requires multi-stakeholders' engagement with consultations on the necessity of a law change or introduction of bye-laws and regulations within existing legal framework. As the proposal for the reform firms-up, she will present it to the Prime Minister and if required, to the federal cabinet. She reiterated government commitment to the cause for the betterment of street vendors.

SYEDA SHAFaq HASHMI, CHIEF OFFICER, METROPOLITAN CORPORATION ISLAMABAD (MCI).

Municipality resources are limited for managing the high influx of street vendors

- Syeda Shafaq has informed that under the local government act, MCI is the authority for the issuance of vending licenses in Islamabad. Till date, it has issued over 300 vending licenses, but pressure for the issuance of new licenses is enormous. And it understands well that the existing governance regime of street vendors is in need of reform to cater for the changing realities. However, till the change is not made in the legal framework, municipal administration is bound to implement the existing law. Municipality has limited resources to monitor the movement and emergence of street vendors in different parts of the city. It is the influx of poor people coming to the city in search of livelihood and they find easy refuge in street vending. Municipality look towards PIDE for the research support, which enables them to design effective intervention for managing street vending in Islamabad.

DR. SHAHID MAHMOOD, MEMBER-PLANNING, CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (CDA).

Vending inside markets cannot be supported, however vendors can be accommodated in separate vending spots or zones

- Dr. Mahmood remains of the view that vending in the market creates nuisance for formal shopkeepers, pedestrians and car parking. It creates unfair competition for the shopkeepers, who are paying thousands of rupees in rent and taxes, which are not paid by the street vendors. These street vendors occupy the public space meant for pedestrians and car parking. And existing laws don't allow street vending in the markets, hence all the ongoing such vending is illegal and needs to be removed. He did recognize that irrespective of its illegality, vending is on in many markets of the city, where vendors are sitting in connivance with government staff or shopkeepers. Even if CDA would like to legalize the street vendors in the market, it needs to work out the criteria of qualifying street vendors and their numbers that can be accommodated in the given market.
- CDA is presently more focused on working out the alternative of establishing vending spots for moveable vending vehicles in different public spaces of Islamabad. Process is still going on and he welcomes the research support of PIDE for making the system more inclusive for urban poor to participate.

SARDAR YASIR, PRESIDENT, ISLAMABAD CHAMBER OF COMMERCE & INDUSTRY (ICCI).

Business Community is looking to support a conducive regulatory and operating environment for street vendors

- Sardar Yasir did elaborate on the ICCI efforts on collaborating with CDA and MCI for the phased removal of unauthorized vendors from all the main markets of Islamabad. However, ICCI also cared about the livelihood aspect of street vendors.
- He suggested a more participatory approach for the arrangement of alternate vending zones for the relocated vendors. ICCI is giving a number of suggestions to city authorities for the establishment of dedicated vending markets for perishable and general products in different parts of the city. He remains of the view that zoning compliance should be effected for the existing markets, hence removal of vendors to bring markets to their original form to cater for pedestrians and others. However, space may also be created for vending zones in the existing master plan of the city for the protection of the livelihood of street vendors.

BEDAR & ARIF, STREET VENDORS FROM KARACHI COMPANY, ISLAMABAD.

Attainment of legal status remains the main demand, for which street vendors are willing to pay regular government charges & comply with its regulations

- Both the vendors have been vending in the Karachi Company area for over 11-years. They informed about their plight in vending, where most of the vendors have only vending as their main livelihood source. They get little empathy from the system, where they have to bear all the agony to feed their large families. After every eviction, they have to resurrect their business, most often by taking loans. In absence of any credible livelihood alternative, they have to work on streets. If the government gives them a legal status, then they will be willingly taking care of the cleanliness of their surroundings and invest in their business.

KEY TAKEAWAYS.

1. Street vending remains more of an economic issue than legal matter; it is the reluctant option for the urban poor with all the stigma attached with it
2. Greater participatory approach is required for the optimal solution of street livelihood with the involvement of government, street vendors, trade bodies, academia and civil society
3. Government needs to recognize street economy as an integral part of the local economy, which is contributing in job creation, investment flow, food security and consumer support
4. Academic institutions should provide more research support to the government organizations on street economy
5. Street vendors have the capacity to meet substantial portion of government commitment for creating 10 million jobs in the economy; it remains a more economical option for inducing microenterprises
6. Existing urban planning is more anti-poor in orientation, which is impeding livability of the cities, as urban poor are negotiating their path with the resultant haphazard urban outlook.
7. Street economy provides color and dynamism to the social life in city centers, while inducing the inclusion element
8. If developed countries are allowing vending in front of their King Palaces, President Houses and Parliaments; then vending should also be permitted on Constitutional Avenue, Islamabad
9. Vending is here to stay, as it is in every part of the world; it is better that government should regulate it with an open approach, while addressing legitimate concerns of other stakeholders
10. Labor department of ICT Administration could play a supportive role in identification of legitimate candidates for street vending.



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