

VULNERABILITY OF STREET VENDORS IN AIZAWL CITY, INDIA

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Abstract

Street vending is one of the most visible informal occupations and a notable source of income for the urban poor. Contrary to what is projected in urban planning models, informal sector proliferates in cities of the Global South due to the combined processes of increasing urbanisation and globalisation. The present paper is an attempt to measure spatial vulnerability of street vendors in Aizawl City where street vendors work under diversified legal and socio-environmental conditions. By using simple random sampling method, 400 street vendors from five prominent street markets were interviewed through scheduled questionnaire. Vendors' Vulnerability Index (VVI) was developed with the help of 14 indicators which are categorized under three broad dimensions - socio-economic, occupational and environmental dimensions. The analysis of data shows that the socioeconomic condition of street vendors and the environmental quality of street markets varies spatially and, low level of vulnerability is highly interlinked with presence of proper regulation and provision of basic infrastructures. The second part of the study examines how street vendors in the city negotiated and adapted to remain in the informal sector and, lastly, it appraises the role of the local government and communities in the process of regulation of street vending for livelihood protection of street vendors.

Keywords: Street vending, Vulnerability Index, Spatial Analysis, Aizawl, Mizoram

1. Introduction

The urban economy in the Global South is characterised by predominance of an informal sector (Martinez et al., 2017; Martinez et al, 2018; Ojeda &Pino, 2019). Although there is no reliable information for most of the countries, it is estimated that the informal sector accounts for more than half of total employment in the Global South (Vanek et al., 2014). Contrary to what is projected in urban planning models, informal sector proliferates in less developed cities due to the combined processes of increasing urbanisation and globalisation mainly due to privatisation, lowering production cost and increasing competition which often resulted in unemployment for low and un-skilled workers (Gauvain, 2007; Bhowmick, 2005; Kiaka et al., 2020).

Street vending is one of the most visible informal occupations and a notable source of income for the urban poor (Roever & Skinner, 2016; Martinez et al., 2018). It is either

"mobile or space-bound, predominantly urban economic activity" (Graaff and Ha, 2015:2) that takes place on sidewalks, parks, intersections, leftover spaces and privately owned spaces such as outdoor shopping malls (Cupers, 2015). Also known as street trading or hawking, it is considered as one of the most vulnerable occupations due to absence of regulation, social acceptance, provision of infrastructure, low profit and difficulty in access to resources (Chen, 2012;). In spite of negative perceptions from shopkeepers, local communities and municipal authorities, it remains a structural feature of cities due to lack of opportunities in the formal sector. As a free entry segment which does not require financial capital in the two-fold classification of informal sector (see Fields, 1990), less educated and poorer migrants see street as an economic space that provides opportunities to carry out business (Williams, 2010). A strong representation of low skilled rural-urban migrants as well as skilled unemployed who were terminated from the formal sector due to economic restructuring is observed among street vendors in cities of the Global South (Bhowmik, 2005; Turner & Schoenberger, 2012).

Street markets are diversified and spatial difference in environmental conditions of vending places as well as income and quality of life of vendors are observed (Martinez et al. 2018). The profitability of street vending is determined by location of vending and length of occupancy (Cohen et al., 2000; Sales, 2018). Generally, street vendor prefers to occupy vacant spaces nearby prime locations including city centres, traffic intersections and entrances of shopping centers and stations (Kamalipour and Peimani, 2019). There is a competition for good location in every market among street vendors. Having a good space for vending is one of the significant factors that affect the income of street vendors (Cohen et al., 2000). In Hanoi, stationary or fixed stalls are dominated by long-term city residents of the city while mobile or itinerant vendors most belong to recent migrants (Turner & Schoenberger, 2012). Maintaining a consistent presence in almost exactly the same market spot is a critical component of business practice within the industry. Even though different spots in a market may be only a few meters apart, many vendors insist on staying in one place (Lauermann, 2013). In Mumbai, good spots are controlled by long time vendors who even 'sublet' to other vendors while less favourable isolated spots are occupied by more vulnerable groups like migrants, lower caste, women and elderly (Sales, 2018).

Assessment of level of vulnerability of street vendors has been conducted by a few scholars (see Esayas and Mulugeta, 2020). However, previous studies have neglected the spatial dimension of vulnerability. In this paper, an attempt has been made to analyse the spatial vulnerability of street vendors in Aizawl City by using vulnerability index. Measurement of spatial variation in vulnerability of informal street vendors is crucial for planning and implementation of the government policies pertaining to street vendors. The study also discusses how street vendors in the city negotiated, appropriated and adapted to remain in the informal sector and, the role of the local government and communities in the process of regulation of street vending for livelihood protection of street vendors. The entire study will expand the project of better understanding of the geographies of urban informal economy in the Global South.

2. Study Area

Aizawl is the capital city of Mizoram which is located at the southern corner of the north-eastern region of India. Founded in 1894, it is one of the fastest growing hill cities in India. As per 2011 Census of India, the city has a population of 293,416 that constitute 26.89 per cent of the entire Mizoram population. Aizawl City is governed by the Aizawl Municipal Corporation (AMC). The city is divided into 19 Municipal Wards and 83 Local Councils.

In 1941, the population of Aizawl was 4780 only and massive rural-urban migration to Aizawl took place after the Independence of India in 1947. The end of strict migration control policy of the British India after the Independence, the Rambuai or the 20 years of armed struggle to attain Independence during 1966 - 1986 that resulted in large-scale migration into the relatively safer Aizawl town and, the unprecedented increase in job opportunities in the government sector with the attainment of Union Territory in 1972 were considered as the main reasons behind the large-scale migration into Aizawl city (Saitluanga, 2017). With recent stagnation in the growth of government jobs and limited avenues in other employment sectors, urban poverty has risen considerably. It is estimated that 6.5% of the city's urban households belong to Below Poverty Line (BPL) (Zothanmawia, 2017). Many of the poor households were absorbed in the informal sector. According to GoI (2011), street vendors alone constitute 1.29 per cent the city's population which is much higher than the average figures for Mizoram (0.92%) and India (0.65%). Besides the permanent vendors, there are non-resident weekly street vendors most of which belongs to cultivators from neighbouring villages who came to the city to sell their agricultural products on Saturday market. With the passage of the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014 by the Parliament of India, the state of Mizoram has also notified the Mizoram Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Rules, 2017. The implementation of the Street Vendors Rules, 2017 including the formation of Town Vending Committee was put under the AMC by the state government.

Five major market areas of Aizawl city viz. Bawngkawn, Bara Bazar, Treasury Square, Thakthing and Vaivakawn were selected for the present study (see Fig. 1 & Fig.2). These markets are located at various traffic intersections of the city. Bara Bazar is the central business district while Treasury square is not essentially a traditional *bazaar* type market but a specially designated street vending market due to the presence of government offices including Assembly secretariat, old secretariat and Aizawl District Commissioner's office.

3. Data and Method

Random sampling technique was employed to collect primary data from 400 street vendors in the five selected markets with the help of scheduled questionnaires. From the obtained data, a total of 14 indicators were selected and categorized them into three

dimensions - Socio-economic, Occupational and Environmental dimensions to measure Vendor's Vulnerability Index (VVI) (see Table 2). The selected indicators were standardized using the following equation

$$Index_{s_d} = \frac{S_h - S_{min}}{S_{max} - S_{min}}$$

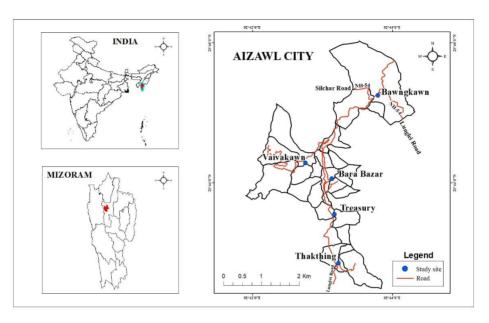


Fig. 1. The Study Area - Aizawl, Mizoram

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Where, S_{min} and S_{max} are the minimum and maximum values of each vending market. These values were used to transform the indicator into a standardized index. After each indicator was standardized, the indicators were averaged using the following formula to calculate the value of each dimension:

$$M_{d} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n} Index_{s_{d}i}}{n}$$

Where, M_d is one of the dimensions for each market and ${\rm Index}_{s_d i}$ represents the standardized index for the i^{th} dimension and n is the number of each indicator in each dimension. Lastly, Vendors' Vulnerability Index of each market is obtained by the formula given below.

$$VVI_{d} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{3} w_{mi} M_{di}}{\sum_{i=1}^{3} w_{m_{i}}}$$

Where, VVI_d is the Vendor's Vulnerability Index for a particular market, $\sum_{i=1}^3 w_{mi} M_{di}$ is the weighted average of three dimensions while W_{mi} represents the number of total indicators. Since the concept of vulnerability bears negative connotation, the highest ranked market represents the most vulnerable market and vice versa.

Secondly, intra-market vendors' vulnerability is measured with binary-composite vulnerability index which was computed using the following formula

$$V = \frac{VI_1 + VI_2 + VI_3 + ... + VI_{14}}{N}$$

Where, V refers to the composite vulnerability index, VI_{1,2,3...} refers to vulnerability indicators and N is the total number of indicators. Here, each vendor is assigned a binary value (0=No, Yes=1) for each indicator. Depending on the assigned values, the index score for a particular vendor lies between 0 and 1. Standard deviation method is employed to categorize vendors into five classes – not vulnerable, mildly vulnerable, vulnerable, strongly vulnerable and extremely vulnerable.

4. Results

4.1 Socio-Demographic profile of street vendors

Street vending in Aizawl is dominated by females with low level of education. Only 15 per cent of the respondents were male and 80 per cent of the total vendors have not completed High School. In Mizoram, it is a common tradition among rural students to drop out of school when they failed to pass High School board examination. The age distribution of the street vendors showed that the highest number of street vendors was found in the age group of 41-50 years (38.3%), and a few of them were found to be older than 60 years (8.2%) (see Table 1).

4.2 Levels of Vulnerability of Street Vendors

As shown in Table 2, more than half of the respondents were migrant workers from different parts of Mizoram and a few non-local population from neighbouring states and countries, particularly Assam and Myanmar. It is also observed street vending is taken up by old aged vendors who constitute 23.25 per cent of the total respondents. Majority of the street vendors were illegal vendors who did not have license or permission. Robbery and harassment are the two most common forms of social insecurity faced by the street vendors in Aizawl City. A small number of vendors had reported health related problems due to pollution and rain.

Table 1. Profile of Street Vendors in Aizawl City

Indicators		Total	Percentage	
Sex	Male	61	15.25	
Sex	Female	339	84.75	
Age	Less than 30 years	50	12.50	
	31-40 years	104	26.00	
	41-50 years	153	38.25	
	51-60 years	60	15.00	
	More than 60 years	33	8.25	
	Below High School	321	81.00	
Education	Below Higher Secondary	64	16.00	
	Graduate	6	1.50	
	Above Graduate	6	1.50	

Source: Authors' Survey, 2019

Table 2. Selected Indicators of Vulnerability

Dimension	Indicators	Code of Indicators	Percen tage (N=400)
	Percentage of unmarried vendors	X1	17.3
Socio-	Percentage of vendors who have studied below High School	X2	80.3
	Percentage of vendors who have migrated from outside	Х3	66.0
demographic	Percentage of vendors who have rented a house	X4	55.3
domograpino	Percentage of vendors with income less than average income	X5	53.3
	Percentage of vendors more than 51 years	X6	23.3
	Percentage of non-local vendors	X7	5.3
	Percentage of vendors without vendor's license	X8	61.5
Occupational	Percentage of vendors with no affiliation in any association	X9	45.5
	Percentage of vendors who have faced robbery	X10	30.0
	Percentage of vendors who have faced harassment	X11	15.5
Environmental	Percentage vendors who reported problems due to street flood in vending spots	X12	38.7
	Percentage of vendors who reported health problems due to rain or pollution	X13	9.0
	Percentage of vendors who reported injury due to road traffic while vending	X14	10.7

Source: Authors' Survey, 2019

Spatial analysis of our data shows that street vendors in Bawngkawn market are the most vulnerable vendors in socio-demographic dimension (See Table 3). The reported income of vendors in Bawngkawn market is also the lowest among all the street markets. Majority of vendors were less educated, migrant and tenants. The market has also relatively higher percentage of old age vendors in comparison to other vending places. On the other hand, vendors in Treasury Square market are the least vulnerable ones. The average income of the vendors in Treasury Square is the highest among all vending markets. Again, vendors in Bawngkawn market are the most vulnerable vendors in occupational dimension. The market has the highest number of vendors who did not possess license or permission from any authority. More than two-third of the vendors were not affiliated to any kind of vending association. On the other hand, vendors in Thakthing market are the least vulnerable vendors in occupational dimension. Incidence of robbery and harassment was very low in Thakthing market. In environmental dimension, Vaivakawn market is the least ranked market. In this market, majority of the vendors were severely affected by street flood due to absence of proper drainage and, health problems like cold and fever were reportedly prevalent among the street vendors. On the other hand, vendors in Treasury Square market reported fewer problems with respect to pollution, flood and road accidents.

Table 3. Vendors' Vulnerability Index (VVI), Aizawl City

Dimension	Indicators	Bawngkawn	Bara Bazar	Treasury Square	Thakthing	Vaivakawn
	X1	0.117	0.223	0.117	0.200	0.115
	X2	0.800	0.750	0.783	0.875	0.865
	Х3	0.583	0.628	0.767	0.688	0.673
Socio-	X4	0.700	0.608	0.450	0.338	0.673
demographic	X5	0.683	0.595	0.367	0.438	0.519
	Х6	0.385	0.209	0.200	0.238	0.212
	X7	0.033	0.088	0.033	0.075	0.038
	M _d	0.413	0.388	0.340	0.356	0.387
Occupational	X8	0.450	0.412	0.000	0.300	0.308
	X9	0.700	0.345	0.583	0.313	0.558
	X10	0.233	0.412	0.250	0.175	0.308
	X11	0.050	0.230	0.117	0.075	0.231
	M _d	0.358	0.350	0.238	0.216	0.351
Environmental	X12	0.233	0.135	0.100	0.875	0.865
	X13	0.150	0.068	0.033	0.010	1.000
	X14	0.083	0.135	0.050	0.138	0.077
	M_d	0.156	0.113	0.061	0.341	0.460
VVI	1.0	0.372	0.346	0.275	0.338	0.460

Source: Authors' Survey, 2019

As shown in Table 4 and Figure 2, the lowest VVI is observed in Treasury Square while Vaivakawn market has the highest VVI. Treasury Square is located nearby the old central secretariat where the state government has properly reserved vending space. Most of the vendors were given license and are locally called 'hawkers' (see Fig. 3a & b). Roads are relatively wider and proper sidewalk is constructed for the pedestrians. Most of the vendors were provided roofed vending stalls or kiosks by the state government. The average income of vendors in Treasury market was also relatively higher than those in other markets. On the other hand, our analysis shows that vendors in Vaivakawn market were the most vulnerable vendors in the city. This market stretches along one of the busiest intersections in Aizawl city. The market has no proper sidewalk and the busy roads leave inadequate space for vendors. Besides, the catchment area of the market mainly includes the less developed and peripheral parts of the city.

Table 4. Classification of Vending Market based on Vendors' Vulnerability Index (VVI), Aizawl City

Class	Range of Vulnerability	Market
Weakly Vulnerable	0 - 0.29	Treasury Square
Mildly Vulnerable	0.30 - 0.32	
Vulnerable	0.33 - 0.39	Thakthing, Bara Bazar, Bawngkawn
Strongly Vulnerable	0.40 - 0.43	
Extremely Vulnerable	0.44 - 0.46	Vaivakawn

Source: Authors' Survey, 2019

4.3 Intra-market Vulnerability

Variation in vulnerability is not confined only at inter-market level. Intra-market analysis of vulnerability shows that significant variation is observed among street vendors in different markets of the city. Table 5 shows that Treasury Square which has the lowest VVI has the least percentage of vendors under 'extremely vulnerable' and the highest percentage of vendors under 'weakly vulnerable' category. On the other hand, Vaivakawn market has the highest percentage of 'extremely vulnerable' and 'strongly vulnerable' vendors. Bawngkawn market is another vending area where relatively large percentage of more vulnerable street vendors is found.

5. Discussion

Spatial disparity in vulnerability of street vendors in Aizawl City is related to variations in availability of vending spot and institutional management of vendors. The state government has earmarked vending spots and freely distributed vending stalls to licensed hawkers in and around Treasury Square market Apart from this, the state government has hardly taken up welfare measures for the street vendors. Street vendors in other markets were not given permission by the state government but were recognised by the local community councils. These vending markets are usually crowded without leftover spaces for vending activities.

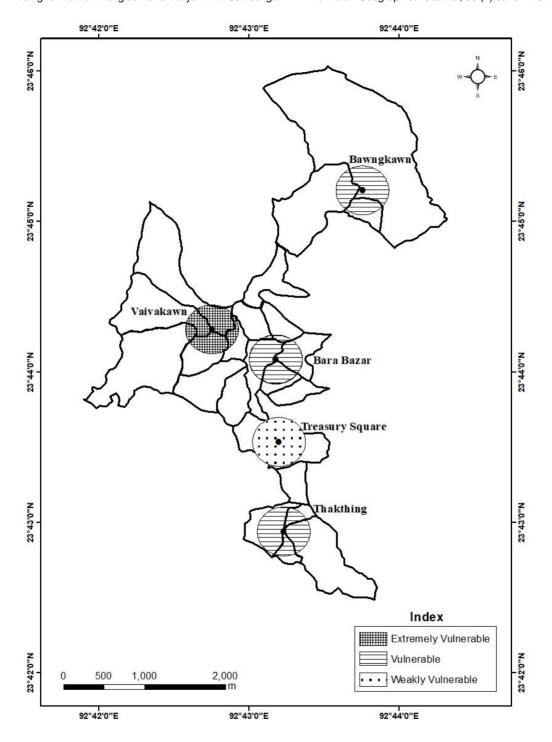


Fig. 2. Vendor's Vulnerability Index (VVI), Aizawl, Mizoram

Table 5. Vulnerability Class of Street Vendors in Aizawl City

Class	Range	Bawng- kawn	Bara Bazar	Treasury Square	Thakthing	Vaiva- kawn
Weakly Vulnerable	0 - 0.19	1.67	4.73	6.67	2.50	1.92
Mildly Vulnerable	0.20 - 0.30	5.00	14.86	8.33	3.75	1.92
Vulnerable	0.31 - 0.52	66.67	62.84	68.33	77.50	59.62
Strongly Vulnerable	0.53 - 0.63	21.67	16.89	16.67	13.75	30.77
Extremely Vulnerable	0.64 - 0.74	5.00	0.68	0.00	2.50	5.77

Source: Authors' Survey, 2019

In the absence of proper regulation from the state government, local communities have actively involved in regulating street vendors within their neighbourhoods. The Local Councils (LCs) – the lowest tier of the urban local body - have been entrusted to by the municipal corporation to manage and issue license to vendors in the nearby markets. They also supervise vending arrangement of the weekly Saturday market by allocating seats and vending time for the vegetable street vendors. In some places, they alter the street traffic by turning the two-way road into one-way during the vending period to make the vending spaces more spacious. There is only one market in the city that is Bara Bazar where the street is open for vegetable vendors during weekdays. In this market, vegetable vendors are allowed to occupy the whole street in the evening. Vendors would come close to the street and when the whistle goes exactly at 5 PM, they would rush to occupy a good spot. Among them are the vendors or co-vendors having permanent seats inside the market. Knowing that the street is more profitable than inside, they changed their location by trying to maximise their incomes.

In many cities, the appropriation and modification of public space by street vendors have been negatively perceived by other stakeholders including shopkeepers, local communities and municipal authorities that often resulted in harassment of vendors (Donovan, 2008). In Aizawl city, harassment in the work place is reported by a few vendors only as street vendors negotiated to avoid conflict with shop owners by paying 'rent' to sell their items in front of the shops. By doing this, they avoid complaint and harassment from the local authorities. Unfixed or mobile vendors in Bara Bazar area carry their few products in a wooden structure so that they can move freely without paying fees to anyone. Some other vendors hang a few items, usually clothes and belts, around their necks and stand along the main roads. When they finished selling, they collect new items from the nearby shop and sell again. These kinds of arrangement enable the street vendors to avoid spatial conflict and trading competitions with other stakeholders on the market.



Fig. 3(a). Treasury Square – Street Vendors in Treasury Square have the least vulnerability in Aizawl



Fig. 3(b). Vaivakawn – Street Vendors in Vaivakawn have the highest vulnerability in Aizawl

In spite of the positive relationship between street vendors and the public, street vendors in Aizawl city are also facing a range of socio-economic and environmental problems which affected their social well-being. Vending areas are not equipped with either any form of infrastructure like garbage discharge space, clean drinking water or sanitation facilities. They are frequently disturbed by rain and flood during rainy season. Provision of street vendors with basic services in their work spaces is one of the most pressing issues to enhance the quality of life of street vendors. Jha (2018) has rightly argued that street vending has been neglected in India for a long time until the passage of the Street Vendors Act, 2014. Unlike other workers, vendors are often harassed and relocated as the public perceives street trading is associated with social disorder. The vulnerability and negative perception of street vendors may be reduced through the intervention of the state in the form of legalisation and proper regulation. However, we observed that the introduction of the Mizoram Street Vendors Rules, 2017 has little significance towards the enhancement of quality of life of street vendors in Mizoram due to poor implementation. At the same time, one of the biggest hurdles in the process of regulation of street vending is that vendors have preferred location like crowded activity centres, streets with high pedestrian flow and more visible places while rejecting locations which are better suited for provision of amenities (Kamalipour and Peimani, 2019). In a hill city like Aizawl with narrow and crowded roads, all streets along markets are not suitable and permissible for street vending. But street vendors are willing to occupy the most profitable spots and even developed collective tactics to 'own' their preferred locations.

Conclusion

Street vending is an important informal economic activity in Aizawl City. It generates not only income and employment to the urban poor but also provides goods and services to the communities. Majority of street vendors in Aizawl City are less educated, middle-aged female who have either migrated recently or a few decades ago from rural areas. They concentrate along the roads, footpaths or bus stops which are not designed for vending. Due to congestion of public spaces, the utilization of sidewalks and leftover spaces along the streets in market areas has been perceived negatively by the public. Vendors in crowded markets are more vulnerable to various dimensions of well-being. On the other hand, vendors in a designated vending site like those in Treasury Square are less vulnerable to social, occupational and environmental problems. With the introduction of the Mizoram Street Vendors Rules, 2017, the state government and the municipal corporation have been given increasing role to protect, accommodate and enhance the livelihood of the street vendors, particularly the extremely vulnerable street vendors which are found in different markets. Until now, street vendors have informally negotiated for space with other formally recognised stakeholders to avoid spatial conflicts and trading competitions. Provision of special vending sites with proper regulation would help in reduction of harassment, confiscation of vending items and livelihood enhancement of the most vulnerable sections of street vendors.

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