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.
Street vendors in India are highlighted below.

Legal and Policy Framework

In 1998, the National Policy on Street Vendors was formulated, which was intended to address the issue of street vending and ensure the legal rights of street vendors. The policy was later updated in 2013, with the goal of providing a legal framework for the regulation of street vending.

The Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2013 was enacted to provide legal protection and regulation to street vendors. The act recognizes the right of street vendors to carry on business or trade and provides for the establishment of Town Vending Committees (TVCs) to regulate street vending.

The TVCs consist of members of the local authority, street vendor representatives, and other persons experienced in street vending. The TVC has the power to issue vending certificates, conduct audits, and impose penalties on street vendors.

Penalties

The act imposes penalties on street vendors for violating its provisions. The penalties include fines up to Rs. 5,000 or imprisonment for a term not exceeding one month, or both.

Inclusive Cities Project
In Delhi, as in other parts of the country, the problems street vendors face are compounded by the presence of large-scale malls, department stores, and other modern retail formats. These malls, in turn, are part of an ‘urbanization’ strategy that seeks to project the image of a ‘world-class city’ to attract foreign direct investment and improve the city’s image. The ‘world-class city’ concept is one of the most powerful forces in India today and is widely disseminated. It is also fervently supported by the central government and by municipal authorities who constantly strive to transform India’s cities into ‘world-class cities’.

The vendors have to pay a fixed sum of money, including the cost of transport. As a result, they have to invest in costly private vehicles, especially in bigger, metro cities. Markets are a conglomeration of stalls from which vendors sell clothes or shoes for Rs. (100) to Rs. 500 (50) on a daily basis. Based on survey results of SEWA assessment, vendors are also extorted to pay bribes to authorities in summer, winter, and during monsoon.

The proposed solution was as follows:

**1. To Undertake Development Activities**
- Develop existing markets so as to improve vendors’ work conditions.
- Create new marketplaces for vending.
- Represent vendors’ issues and concerns to the concerned authorities.
- Provide access to microfinance, including insurance and pension.
- Develop leaders among the vendors and build platforms for representation and discussions, such as committees.
- Create adequate and well-planned hawker zones where vendors can vend legally and without fear of harassment.
- Provide better health access through health linkages, such as hospitals.
- Develop and organize the vendors to fight for their rights.
- Provide access to microfinance, including insurance and pension.

**2. To Create More Livelihood Opportunities for Vendors**
- Provide better education through school linkages, such as schools.
- Provide better health access through health linkages, such as hospitals.
- Provide better employment opportunities for vendors.
- Provide access to microfinance, including insurance and pension.

**3. To Implement the National Policy for Urban Street Vendors, Their Rights**
- Include vendors in the planning process for urban development.
- Provide better health access through health linkages, such as hospitals.
- Provide better education through school linkages, such as schools.
- Provide access to microfinance, including insurance and pension.

**4. To Create New Marketplaces for Vendors**
- Develop existing markets so as to improve vendors’ work conditions.
- Create adequate and well-planned hawker zones where vendors can vend legally and without fear of harassment.
- Provide better health access through health linkages, such as hospitals.
- Provide better education through school linkages, such as schools.
- Provide access to microfinance, including insurance and pension.

**5. To Provide Access to Microfinance, Including Insurance and Pension**
- Include vendors in the planning process for urban development.
- Provide better health access through health linkages, such as hospitals.
- Provide better education through school linkages, such as schools.
- Provide access to microfinance, including insurance and pension.

**6. To Create More Livelihood Opportunities for Vendors**
- Provide better education through school linkages, such as schools.
- Provide better health access through health linkages, such as hospitals.
- Provide better employment opportunities for vendors.
- Provide access to microfinance, including insurance and pension.

**7. To Implement the National Policy for Urban Street Vendors, Their Rights**
- Include vendors in the planning process for urban development.
- Provide better health access through health linkages, such as hospitals.
- Provide better education through school linkages, such as schools.
- Provide access to microfinance, including insurance and pension.

**8. To Create New Marketplaces for Vendors**
- Develop existing markets so as to improve vendors’ work conditions.
- Create adequate and well-planned hawker zones where vendors can vend legally and without fear of harassment.
- Provide better health access through health linkages, such as hospitals.
- Provide better education through school linkages, such as schools.
- Provide access to microfinance, including insurance and pension.
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. SEWA Bharat has since put pressure on the government for the speedy enactment of the Zonal Vending Committee and the Zonal Vending Committee.

The National Policy for Street Vendors was first drafted in 2004. The Government of India set up a task force to formulate the National Policy on Urban Street Vendors clearly called for the rehabilitation of the vendors in case of eviction, the process for allotment of vending space, evidenced by their frequent evictions from markets. As Sundariben said while speaking about the eviction and nature of street vending, “I have been given permission to run the market as per official records, and 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 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 after the last day in January 2009. While the police department reason for closure was dual— a provision for the celebration of the Republic Day and 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 not concerned on eviction.

In 2009, after the closure of the market, SEWA Bharat met with the architecture firm responsible for the construction of the Flyover and put forward the idea of having a weekly market beneath the said Flyover. The architecture firm merrily included SEWA Bharat’s proposal into its site plan. The public works department officials were then shown the plan, and the MCD implemented the Flyover in 2011. SEWA Bharat was granted permission to run the market as per official agreement with the Delhi Government, the municipal police, and the Public Works Department. As a facilitator for the smooth functioning of the market, the Sunday Book Bazaar, the site was restricted to vendors who are not necessarily members of SEWA. However, it has faced challenges in this market as well. The Sunday Book Bazaar is a weekly market, held near Daryaganj in Delhi, where vendors sell old and second-hand books. SEWA Bharat won the case in 2010, and the market was opened only to be closed again in January 2009. While the market had remained closed for weeks. After an intense period of negotiation with the police department, the market reopened only after the last day in January 2009.

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. SEWA Bharat has since put pressure on the government for the speedy enactment of the Zonal Vending Committee and the Zonal Vending Committee.

Accordingly, SEWA Bharat submitted a petition to the Ward Vending Committee and the Zonal Vending Committee. Because of the pressure from vendors, SEWA Bharat was able to get the MCD to consider the points raised by the vendors in the appeal committee's jurisdiction in 2009. The judge heard the member of the Standing Committee on Urban Development and the MCD contended 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. SEWA Bharat won the case in 2010, and the market was opened only to be closed again in January 2009. While the market had remained closed for weeks. After an intense period of negotiation with the police department, the market reopened only after the last day in January 2009. The judge heard the member of the Standing Committee on Urban Development and the MCD contended 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.

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. SEWA Bharat has since put pressure on the government for the speedy enactment of the Zonal Vending Committee and the Zonal Vending Committee.

Accordingly, SEWA Bharat submitted a petition to the Ward Vending Committee and the Zonal Vending Committee. Because of the pressure from vendors, SEWA Bharat was able to get the MCD to consider the points raised by the vendors in the appeal committee's jurisdiction in 2009. The judge heard the member of the Standing Committee on Urban Development and the MCD contended 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.

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. SEWA Bharat has since put pressure on the government for the speedy enactment of the Zonal Vending Committee and the Zonal Vending Committee.

Because of the pressure from vendors, SEWA Bharat was able to get the MCD to consider the points raised by the vendors in the appeal committee's jurisdiction in 2009. The judge heard the member of the Standing Committee on Urban Development and the MCD contended 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.

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. SEWA Bharat has since put pressure on the government for the speedy enactment of the Zonal Vending Committee and the Zonal Vending Committee.

Because of the pressure from vendors, SEWA Bharat was able to get the MCD to consider the points raised by the vendors in the appeal committee's jurisdiction in 2009. The judge heard the member of the Standing Committee on Urban Development and the MCD contended 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.

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. SEWA Bharat has since put pressure on the government for the speedy enactment of the Zonal Vending Committee and the Zonal Vending Committee.
SEWA's efforts, three markets, namely the Qutub Market, the Book Bazaar, and the Vellodrome Market, were preserved through reinstatement and regularization. A result as SEWA membership drives, 6,000 lady street vendors were organized in Delhi by 2014. The formation of trade committees, market committees, and market associations, paid by the vendors. The Qutub Road Market has paid free market committees, made the smooth functioning of the Book Bazaar and the Qutub Road markets.

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 played an essential role in catalyzing the smooth functioning of the Book Bazaar and the Qutub Road markets. SEWA Bharat has demonstrated the power of exclusive ladies' markets, SEWA Bharat has demonstrated that the presence of vendors in the streets has improved safety for women. Through SEWA's advocacy efforts towards the enactment of the Street Vendor Policy, close to five lakh vendors in Delhi will not need to carry the "Hagel" (plastic bags) and will not need to pay the unnomalous middlemen from functioning in the markets. Further, because of advocacy and awareness efforts, India's 698 street committee members have been able to register 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.
SEWA Bharat has demonstrated mechanisms through which the informal economy can be included in city planning and development.

Organizing
SEWA Delhi has organized 6,000 street vendors in Delhi. It brings together SEWA members and strengthens their organization. It also builds their capacity to take advantage of the new opportunities that come their way.

While working with the Municipal Corporation, SEWA Bharat has used a dual strategy of construction and deconstruction when required. For instance, SEWA Delhi is a member of the two Zonal Vending Committees (CVO) and one Ward Vending Committee in Shalimar Bagh—this brings the membership down to 100 vendors. SEWA Bharat has, in the past, raised concerns about the inefficacy of these committees. In addition, it has tried to make the policies more effective.

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

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

SEWA Bharat has organized 6,000 street vendors in Delhi. It brings together SEWA members and strengthens their organization. It also builds their capacity to take advantage of the new opportunities that come their way.