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Economic Contribution of Street Vendors to the Urban Society in Nepal

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Abstract

This study explores the economic contributions of street vendors to society, focusing on their roles in self-employment, employment generation for others, and the provision of affordable goods and services, as well as the challenges they face in sustaining their businesses. It aims to highlight the significance of street vending in urban economies and the need for supportive policies. The research employed qualitative methods to collect data from nine street vendors through semi-structured interviews. All street vendors within Ratna Park and Sundhara in Kathmandu were included in the population, and purposive sampling was used to select the interview sample. The research demonstrates that street vending supports livelihoods by generating self-sustaining income, jobs for families and acquaintances, and affordable goods for communities. However, its sustainability is threatened by strict regulations, limited operating hours, and harassment from authorities. The streets of urban areas generate employment through vending that assists low-income families and enables their financial independence. The system's stability is constrained by regulatory challenges. This research demonstrates that vendors require both government recognition of their economic contributions and formal regulatory systems to safeguard their sustainability. This research contributes new empirical knowledge on the functions of the formal economy and the monitoring difficulties that affect street vendors in Kathmandu. The research proves the need for government policies that merge urban governance activities with the development of informal entrepreneurial opportunities.

Keywords: street vending, informal economy, self-employment, urban livelihoods, economic contribution, regulatory challenges

Economic Contribution of Street Vendors to the Urban Society in Nepal

The street vending venues are public places where people implement their commercial and service operations at low prices. The economic system is reliant on street vendors since they sell goods at relatively low prices. Self-employed vendors generate employment opportunities for their relatives and additional members of society. Street vending supports the monetary needs of numerous families who continue doing business in this way through successive generations. Through their operations Vendors extend access to basic necessities at prices that low-income citizens can afford. The vendors endure multiple difficulties due to strict rules, as well as police harassment and restricted working times. The absence of established policies creates confusion in their profession while making their tasks more complex. The extent of public backing for street vendors enables them to maintain their work activities while making valuable economic contributions to the community.

Urban economies work thanks to basic traders who serve everyday goods and services to millions of consumers throughout each day. Many vendors work from non-regulated sites where they provide budget-friendly goods that benefit customers from lower- and middle-income brackets (Hossain et al., 2022). Despite official job restrictions, guests use street vending as their main opportunity to generate income and become self-employed (Sharma & Pradhan, 2017). Numerous barriers stand in the way of street vendors' economic benefits because they endure harassment and eviction while lacking regulatory backing (Dahal & Sharma, 2023). The fact that these vendors are crucial in improving the urban growth and poverty alleviation underscores the need to comprehensively develop policies that will help them transition to formal organization in the process of urban planning (McGranahan et al., 2016).

The street vendors of Dhaka, Bangladesh, supply millions of people with financial independence that enables them to support their families, according to Hasan and Alam (2015). The public areas of the Indonesian city Medan are controlled by street vendors who establish economic prospects for the urban population (Takeuchi, 2023). The street vending sector in Nagaland, India, provides dual employment benefits that reduce family poverty, according to Jamir and Pongen (2022). The daily needs of urban populations receive vital support from street vendors through their affordable goods and services distribution. Street vendors throughout Dhaka, Bangladesh, supply affordable vegetables to the low-income population because of their reasonable pricing (Reazul Haque & Rahman, 2023). Ethiopian street commerce functions as an

urban livelihood system that provides budget-friendly products to disadvantaged social groups (Singh, 2020). Affordability enables the poor sections of society to buy basic essentials that support social inclusion, together with economic stability. The street vendor community in Dhaka, Bangladesh, continues to operate under dangerous conditions because they get forced out of public areas and excluded from official city planning (Reazul Haque & Rahman, 2023). In Pakistan, street vendors overcome these economic barriers since they do not have access to credit and must eliminate government bureaucracy (Dharejo et al., 2022).

Despite their continued significant role in economic growth and poverty alleviation, street vendors face numerous challenges due to physical and institutional barriers. This study explores the contribution that street vendors made to society in various ways, such as self-employment development, income and workforce development among family members and other individuals, and the hindrances that cannot allow street vendors from maintaining their businesses.

Review of Literature

Studies of street vending demonstrate its essential economic importance for urban centers, specifically in developing world nations. Street vendors support self-employment through economic activities that produce income while creating jobs and providing cheap goods, yet handle various obstacles. This analysis examines these concepts thoroughly using current scholarly research to explain street vendors' complete economic value regarding social functions.

Self-Employment and Income Generation

People without formal job opportunities find street vending to be their main source of self-employment. City residents use public spaces as locations to generate earnings by selling products to the public, thus supporting family finances in urban areas. Through street vending, millions earn their living and support family members who reside in Kathmandu metropolitan city (Adhikari) 2011. The commercial activities of street vendors dominate public areas to generate opportunities for economic development among residents of urban areas throughout Indrachowk Square in Kathmandu, Nepal (Singh & Keitsch, 2014). The income potential of street vendors remains restricted because of the absence of formal recognition, which requires immediate implementation of inclusive policies to solve this problem.

Employment Generation for Family Members and Others

The street vending business creates opportunities to employ both vendors directly and their family members, together with others who live in the community. Family members make

up a common labor force for vending business operation which helps generate joint financial resources. By offering employment Street vending enables workers to maintain themselves and their relatives in Kathmandu Valley, Nepal (Sharma & Pradhan, 2017). Street vending helps create additional employment because it enables basic commercial chains from producers to distributors of vendor products. Bhattarai and Pathak (2020) performed an extensive examination that investigated street vending and income generation and poverty-related effects in Kathmandu Valley. According to their research, street vendors achieved a combined business income of NPR 22,500 per month on average. This income level was impacted substantially by vendors' educational background, combined with their experience level, as well as their daily sales and daily hours of work. Vending activities enabled 54% of street vendors to sustain their consumption expenses above the poverty line threshold. Street vending generates essential employment for citizens in marginalized groups to help eliminate poverty throughout the regional area, according to research findings. The research by Bista, Adhikari, and Dhakal (2024) investigated the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on Nepalese street vendors using Structural Equation Modeling as their methodology. The study discovered practical evidence showing that poverty, along with joblessness, acted as the main motivations that drove people toward street vending activities throughout the pandemic. This study demonstrated that migration served as a key mechanism that explained how these factors affected each other. The research supports street vendor support by calling for government regulatory bodies to establish laws and policies that will boost their economic standing while shielding them from crisis-related difficulties. Chaudhary (2024) performed an investigation into the problems faced by street vendors operating in Lalbandi Municipality. Multiple barriers were discovered during the research, such as security problems, price changes, and funding shortages, as well as payments needed for official bribes.

Contribution to Society by Providing Goods and Services at Low Cost

The urban population depends on street vendors because they supply necessary items at budget-friendly costs. The essential vegetable products sold by street vendors in Dhaka, Bangladesh, come at budget-friendly prices, which allow low-income consumers to access them (Reazul Haque & Rahman, 2023). Street commerce operations in Ethiopia maintain urban livelihoods through their offer of affordable products intended for marginalized neighborhoods (Singh, 2020). Affordable goods available through street vendors benefit low-income citizens

who cannot afford the expenses from other markets, thus leading to financial stability and social equity in the community. Effective urban planning needs to address overcrowding and sanitation issues caused by weaknesses in management systems and informal structures of urban environments. Singh (2020) reports that street vendors present necessary items that cost little money so disadvantaged community members can buy their required necessities. Low prices among street vendors help both society and urban areas achieve greater economic stability and social integration.

Facing Challenges at the Time of Business and Survival

The operations of street vendors struggle to survive since they experience harassment and eviction, and lack proper regulatory backing. The vendors in Dhaka, Bangladesh, work under dangerous circumstances because they commonly face removal from public locations, and official urban planning ignores their needs (Reazul Haque & Rahman, 2023). Strategic vendors operating in Pakistan encounter financial limitations from restricted access to capital and face regulatory barriers that restrict their economic expansion (Dharejo et al., 2022). Street vendor stability becomes uncertain because there are no defined operating times and the lack of well-established rules (Roever, 2014). Multiple obstacles create difficulties that lead to an unstable condition for the businesses operated by street vendors. Better support systems, together with clear operational rules, will enhance their safety at work. The rights of street vendors need proper protection through policies that incorporate them into urban development processes.

Research Gaps

Careful assessment of street vendors' economic value exists, yet researchers must conduct extensive investigations regarding their influence on urban development, together with poverty reduction. Studies on street vendors often research particular areas, which reduces the overall usefulness of their findings. Research on inclusive policies between street vendors and urban planning interventions requires additional investigation into their sustained effectiveness for their economic well-being and plan integration across long periods. The presented investigation evaluates street vendors' economic value in urban areas through an analysis that builds effective strategies to include them within formal urban planning systems. The analysis will come up with information required to come up with rights-asserting inclusive policies that will help street vendors in their economic development contribution and poverty alleviation efforts.

Methodology

This study performed a qualitative investigation by conducting personal interviews under thematic analysis to study the everyday realities of street vendors operating at Ratna Park and Sundharas within Kathmandu. The chosen exploratory research design enables comprehension of street vending economic and social elements in an urban setting. Qualitative research provides an excellent fit for analyzing intricate social systems by observing people in their authentic environments (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This research method gives researchers an effective way to study street vendor economic functions by permitting examination of their circumstances as well as obstacles and contributions in metropolitan markets. The exploratory research approach fits this study's main goal to evaluate the economic and social implications of street vending through the development of community-oriented policy recommendations.

The main research technique involved personal interviews for data gathering, and researchers performed semi-structured interviews with nine vendors based in Ratna Park in Kathmandu. Ratna Park, along with Sundhara serve as the research area because this area contains a large number of street vendors while also operating as a commercial center. Interviews pursued insight from vendors regarding their economic profit activities, as well as facing difficulties and street vending for their daily sustenance. Nine street vendors were interviewed through semi-structured questions selected based on purposive sampling (Braun et al., 2016) that followed four major themes from Roever and Skinner (2016), Bhowmik (2005) and Mitullah (2003), and Cross and Morales (2007). The identified themes served as foundations to develop questions that investigated vendors about their reasons for business and economic effects on jobs, alongside community impact and difficulties with sustaining operations. The interviews lasted between 30 to 45 minutes while being held in Nepali to achieve smooth communication and participant comfort. The respondents granted permission for audio recording, which was later transcribed for analysis purposes. Thematic analysis serves to analyze interview data according to the approach described by Braun and Clarke (2006). This approach consists of three stages, which include recognizing regularities among qualitative data points known as themes before creating corresponding reports. Thematic analysis produces ordered findings about street vending economics, which show its economic value for urban areas and provide guidance for legislative control and supportive measures.

Results

Demographic Analysis

This section discusses the demographic features of the respondents who were involved in the study.

Table 1

Respondents' Details

Respondent Code	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Education
R1	Male	30	Married	Below SEE
R2	Male	35	Married	Below SEE
R3	Male	48	Married	Plus-Two
R4	Male	22	Unmarried	Bachelor
R5	Male	21	Unmarried	Bachelor
R6	Female	45	married	Below SEE
R7	Male	52	married	Below SEE
R8	Female	35	married	Plus-Two
R9	Female	40	married	Plus-Two

The sample is made of nine participants, including six males and three females. The respondents are aged between 21 and 52 years, meaning that there is an age diversity. Concerning marital status, most of them are married, and only two respondents were found to be unmarried. Education is strongly dispersed over the sample, with some of the respondents receiving low education levels as low as the Secondary Education Examination (SEE) and high levels of education as Plus Two or a Bachelor's Degree. Overall, the demographics profile shows that the population is diverse in terms of gender, age, marital status, and education, which contributes to the balanced representation of the study.

Self-Employment and Income Generations

Street vending is a self-employment opportunity with high flexibility because a vendor does not require a lot of capital to enter the business. A majority of the respondents emphasized that they got into this business due to its low cost and self-sufficiency. R001 stressed that little money could help him launch his business and earn his living to cover the daily expenses of his family, their education, and medical care. R003 was initially invested in with an initial capital of Rs. 1500, and this has seen him venture into business easily. R009 also stated that he started

selling on the street with only Rs. 1000 in his hands, which proved that even a small capital is sufficient to make this kind of business an attractive choice. R002, who was involved in an accident, said that street vending takes up half of the money spent by the family. R008 is juggling various sources of income through working during the day and operating as a vendor in the street at night to make ends meet. Similarly, both R004 and R005 are students who are taking their undergraduate degrees in the morning and working as street vendors in the evening to cover their personal and school costs. R007 also mentioned that student participants have a good experience of vending since they use a few hours of employment to pay their expenses. Nevertheless, several respondents, such as R002 and R009, admitted that the income has been on the decline over the recent years, which makes livelihood management more complicated. R002 has also tried to find other sources of income like cow farming, thus showing that, as much as street vending is a relief to them in financial terms, it is not always sustainable in the future.

Street vending offers a very crucial self-employment opportunity as it requires minimal investment to start, and one can be financially independent. Many vendors rely on this business to cover essential expenses such as household needs, education, and healthcare. The activity provides flexible income, but many vendors augment earnings through employment and different entrepreneurial practices. The income levels vendors have experienced during the past years have created difficulties in sustaining financial stability.

Employment Generation for Family and Others

Street vending not only brings an independent employment opportunity to the vendors, but also creates job to their families and other individuals. The respondents accepted widespread participation of their family members in street vending. R003 operates a family business where his wife, together with his daughter join him in street vending activities. R006 stated that her husband first brought her into the business, which led him into bringing more family members to join later. The motivation to begin street vending came from his son, who used the revenue for the education expenses of another son for R007. R004 began her street vending career after her mother introduced her to the trading practice to support her health needs when sickness occurred. Street vending continues from generation to generation since family members use this occupation to achieve economic stability. Some vendors support friends by promoting them to enter the business sector. The street business participation of R005 stimulated many extended community members and relatives to start vending, which expanded job opportunities in addition

to his own household. R009 states that his involvement in the sector has resulted in establishing six to seven new positions for people who joined the street vending business. Street vending serves as an economic driving force that enables sustainment of more than one dependent person and creates employment opportunities throughout affected communities.

The economic activity of street vending achieves its vital employment role by creating jobs not just for single individuals but also for their full family members. The sector operates in an interfamily pattern through which economic stability passes from one generation to succeeding groups. The business growth of street vendors creates additional job opportunities because they can persuade others within their social networks to become part of their business. The society's level of employment and economic stability largely relies on the activities of street vending. The industry is critical in terms of providing livelihoods and allows self-reliance, providing work to families and society at large.

Contribution to Society by Providing Goods and Services at Low Cost

Affordable prices and accessibility in the neighborhoods that street vendors provide to their localities enable the community members to access the basic goods and other necessities. The respondents described how their products were cheaper than those sold by the stores since their businesses do not incur rental costs, wage charges, and other operational costs. R001, R002, and R005 added that their business model allows them to reduce prices to attract low-income customers who require the services of street vendors. As R008 revealed, factory workers constitute an important part of their customer base, which shows that street vending targets the working-class market segment and provides people with affordable shopping opportunities. Also, street vending creates close relations between the sellers and the clients. As R006 pointed out, they have quite a number of regular customers who order products on a regular basis, and some of them even pre-order certain products that they come back to retrieve. This is an indication of trust and reliability that is established between vendors and their customers. R009 observed that, despite the time of the day, say 9 PM at night, the customers are still going to street markets to display the fundamental importance of vendors in serving consumers when they are outside of the normal working hours. They emphasize that street selling is not merely a means of livelihood among the people who sell, but it is also an essential economic and social aspect of urban life, especially to the lower-income groups of people. The prices of the products that are offered by the street vendors are low, and thus, they become a source of affordable products to the low-

income customers. Interestingly, even police officers of the metropolitan level, who tend to impose the ban on street vending, buy the products of the vendors, introducing themselves and asking for a discount, saying it is their job.

Facing Challenges at the Time of Business and Survival

Street vendors encounter a lot of challenges, which jeopardize their lives, and the most serious are the time constraints and the implementation of regulations. Most of the respondents, such as R001, R003, and R007, focused on the fact that the metropolitan authority permits street vending after 7:30 PM, and this greatly restricts their working hours. R003 mentioned that although he does not feel frustrated about it, there is no concrete and structured policy that would allow them to work without being chased away by the police, which makes their work unpredictable. Moreover, the respondents R005 and R008 added that the short duration of vending does not follow the customer basis because most of the office employees are already off to the house before vendors can even begin to sell. Metropolitan authorities often harass and seize the merchandise of the vendors. R007 and R008 fell prey to police confiscations that led to the loss of merchandise worth thousands of rupees, which they would never recover. As R009 says, vendors incur police raids that occur after 7:30 PM and therefore pose significant challenges to vendors to continue their operation and survive in their businesses. Lack of a favorable regulatory system places suppliers in constant apprehension of their products and injures the financial stability of customers by stealing street vendor products. Street vendors are faced with business effectiveness due to the fact that the metropolitan authorities impose problematic time restrictions coupled with harsh regulations that do not allow the vendors to carry on their businesses effectively. Lack of structured policy guidelines leads to the creation of uncontrollable conditions that culminates into a situation where vendors are kicked out of their respective locations and a seizure of merchandise. The vendors face reduced earnings because time limitations for business activities fail to match customer shopping patterns. Police enforcement crackdowns combined with their arbitrary actions create a dangerous situation for vendors whose future is at risk. When there is no supportive regulatory structure, both vendors and low-income customers who buy affordable products experience ongoing financial instability.

Discussion

Previous research identifies street vending as a crucial opportunity for self-employment because it serves individuals without sufficient capital and access to conventional employment.

The authors Reeve and Skinner (2016) demonstrated how street vending creates entrepreneurial opportunities that require minimal money investments for earning a sustainable living. Based on Bhowmik (2005), street vendors need their businesses to cover all household costs, starting from food to education and medical care. According to Roever and Skinner (2018), urban economy informal workers experience financial instability through incomes that change frequently and because of economic downturns. R001 and R003 demonstrate the same point in this study when they confirm that minimal startup costs allowed them to become entrepreneurs while establishing sustainable self-employment opportunities. The statements of R002 and R004 about declining income demonstrate the risk involved in street vending while verifying Roever and Skinner's (2018) arguments about economic instability in informal employment. According to the research data street vending leads to economic freedom but economic instability continues to be an ongoing problem.

Through street vending activities, people gain self-employment opportunities that lead to new employment possibilities for family relatives and neighbors in the community. According to Brown and Brown (2005) street vendors provide substantial impacts on the creation of informal employment opportunities within developing economies that require limited formal job prospects. Mitullah (2003) discovered that street vendors regularly involve members of their family in their businesses to share income between families, which stimulates survival strategies in cities. Cross and Morales (2007) proved that informal trading systems create job opportunities especially for groups who cannot enter formal employment markets. The current research supports this finding because participants like R003 and R006 show their family members working in their business operations. Based on interview data, R005 and R009 revealed they had motivated other individuals to enter the sector, thereby contributing to informal business employment. The research supports street vending as an economic protection system that creates job opportunities for families, together with members of the community.

The street vendor industry enables customers to obtain vital products at reduced prices, which allows low-income people to shop affordably. The affordability and economic accessibility of products depend heavily on informal marketplaces, based on research evidence. According to Mitullah (2003), urban populations who comprise low-income groups maintain access to economic products through street vending activities. According to Bromley (2000) vendors provide reduced-priced items since they avoid expenses such as rent and labor wages

when filling gaps in formal retail markets. According to Roever (2016), the presence of street vendors enhances urban food security through their capability to provide crucial goods to poverty-stricken neighborhoods. The research echoed former studies because respondents R007 and R008, along with others, confirmed their stores present products at reduced rates below formal retail pricing. The economic accessibility of street vendors is maintained due to their low cost of operations, due to direct purchase of producers without the overhead costs involved in tracking costs. These suppliers uphold the necessities of factory employees who join the low-waged workforce by offering cheap goods, thereby satisfying the demands of the underserved consumers. Vendors in the streets are faced with various challenges, the main causes of which are prohibitive laws and local enforcement processes. As stated by Cross and Morales (2007), state authorities regularly intimidate informal entrepreneurs since urban business laws present formal entrepreneurs as the best compared to street trading. Known regulations that are not always enforced are recorded in Skinner (2019), leading to the stealing of vendor goods, as official removal orders that have led to economic instability for vendors. The article by Steel Ujorha and Mitullah (2014) explains that street vendors have a weak legal defense that results in them experiencing losses in addition to the unpredictability of business. The outcomes of the study correspond to these concerns because the participants, such as R001, R007, and R008, mentioned selling hour restrictions, as well as the repeated practices of police enforcement in the metropolitan areas. Some vendors suffered losses in their finances due to the seizure of their goods, a fact that Skinner (2019) recorded regarding the unstable state of affairs of informal workers. The sellers stated that their financial position might be officially enhanced due to official regulations and stable working hours on the streets.

Conclusion

The study shows that street vending has a critical role to play in the development of income and the creation of employment, along with social benefits, despite the individual challenges. Vending in the streets creates a simple means of livelihood among people who have limited funds that can sustain them to take care of their families, besides paying their monthly bills. The street vendors get crucial job opportunities, and family members, among other casual workers, get jobs in the informal sector. Vendors benefit society by selling affordable goods to low-income earners who require basic necessities. There are two enormous challenges that confront the stability of the vendors: they have no definite time of sale and are constantly

harassed by the metropolis police. The respondents were in support of extended working hours to have more customers and improve their financial security. Inclusive policies to assist the street vendors should be implemented due to their economic and social importance to the country. This will ensure that they become sustainable.

Implications

The results of the research indicate the need to introduce formal policies to assist casual vendors through adequate regulatory processes that preserve urban order. The police should establish controlled market hours, such as long working hours, to increase the profitability of the vendors as well as reduce the hostility with the police. Authority measures defining vending zones, as well as licensing and enforcement, will protect vendors from harassment and safeguard their security, in accordance with urban planning regulations. The strength of this sector can be improved by good management practices that will integrate the financial systems of support programs and vendor associations. The policymakers ought to set up just and realistic regulations that will assimilate the street vendors into the city economy through balanced policies that sustain the city governance functions. This research is valuable in terms of knowledge on street vending since it shows the sector to play a minor yet vulnerable role in the informal economy, besides exposing the role of the sector in the creation of employment and earnings, in addition to economic practices in urban areas. This scholarly study contributes to the knowledge on the informal sector of entrepreneurship and regulatory restrictions and economic integration, as it presents empirical evidence that will guide future research regarding the sustainable urban policy and informal labor markets.

Further Research Opportunity

The studies should be conducted on regulatory policies, which have a role in the sustainability of street vending by examining both vendor sustainability and economic value and the market sustainability. Policy effectiveness regarding street vendor incorporation into urban economies, regulatory enforcement, and public space management should receive evaluation because it enables better policymaking. The measurement of street vendors' economic contributions needs quantitative research methods that enable the reporting of their income levels alongside the number of people employed and their effect on urban economic environments. Quantitative surveys and statistical breakdowns help measure the impact of regulatory frameworks on vendor business stability, together with growth, while external studies between

cities provide quantitative insights about policy effects on vendor income and financial stability, as well as sustainability rates.

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Annex

Interview Questions

Themes	Interview Questions	Key Terms	Citations
Self-employment and income generation	<p>Q1: How did you start your street vending business, and what motivated you to choose this work?</p> <p>Q2: How has street vending contributed to your personal and family income?</p>	Entrepreneurship, Livelihood	(Roever & Skinner, 2016)
Employment generation to the family members and others	<p>Q1: Do you employ family members or others in your business? If so, how has this impacted their livelihoods?</p> <p>Q2: What kind of skills or job opportunities does your business create for others?</p>	Job Creation, Informal Employment	(Bhowmik, 2005)
Contribution to the society by providing goods and services at low cost	<p>Q1: How do your products/services benefit the local community?</p> <p>Q2: How do you decide on the pricing of your goods/services to ensure affordability?</p>	Affordability, Accessibility	(Mitullah, 2003)
Facing challenges at the time of business and survival	<p>Q1: What are the biggest challenges you face as a street vendor, and how do you overcome them?</p> <p>Q2: How do government regulations and policies affect your business?</p>	Regulations, Business Survival	(Cross & Morales, 2007)