

Vegetable Street Vending in Dhaka, Bangladesh: A Socioeconomic Perspective on Entrepreneurship in Informal Sector

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Abstract

Street vending is a widespread phenomenon in many developing countries, providing a source of livelihood for millions of people and a convenient and affordable service for consumers. However, street vendors often operate in precarious and hostile conditions, facing harassment from local authorities, eviction from public spaces, and marginalization from formal planning processes. This study aims to explore the problems and prospects of street vending in Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh, with a focus on the socioeconomic situation of vegetable vendors and their potential role in urban development. The study is based on primary data collected through semi-structured interviews with 42 vegetable vendors in several areas where street vending is prevalent, as well as secondary data from relevant literature and reports. The study reveals that street vending is not a hindrance to urban progress and sustainability but a vital component of an alternative street economy that contributes to reducing poverty, enhancing social inclusion, and diversifying urban culture. The study argues that instead of trying to eliminate street vendors, it is necessary to adopt a more inclusive and participatory approach that recognizes their rights and needs and integrates them into the existing regulatory framework. The study also suggests some policy recommendations for improving the working conditions and livelihoods of street vendors, as well as for enhancing their contribution to urban development.

Keywords: Informal Sector, Street Vendors, Income Generation, Employment Creation, Entrepreneurship, Capability Approach

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1. Introduction

The unregulated sector of the economy, also known as the informal sector, is a vast and diverse entity that operates independently of state regulations. This sector encompasses many endeavors, including home-based manufacturing, transportation workers, waste recycling, domestic labor, and street vending (Beneria and Floro, 2006). The informal sector is a crucial source of income for those in developing countries who are marginalized and lack the skills, education, or access to participate in the formal economy (Bhowmik, 2005). However, this sector also presents economic development obstacles, such as low productivity, substandard working conditions, tax evasion, environmental damage, and social exclusion (Beneria and Floro, 2006). Understanding the dynamics and effects of the informal sector is therefore crucial for developing policies and interventions that promote entrepreneurship, fair work, social protection, and inclusive growth.

Street vending, an entrepreneurial activity that operates outside the formal regulatory framework of the state, is a dynamic element of the informal sector. In public spaces, street vendors, who are frequently marginalized individuals such as women and migrants, sell a variety of goods and services, including food, clothing, and accessories. Despite barriers to entry into the formal economy, street vending provides these vendors with a source of income, a sense of dignity, and a degree of autonomy (Kartik & Srikanta, 2007). In addition, they play an essential role in urban economies and societies by providing affordable food to low-income households, supporting small-scale industries, creating jobs, and contributing to the cultural diversity of urban spaces (Bhowmik, 2001; Tiwari, 2000). However, street vendors frequently lack access to credit, storage, transportation, market information, legal protection, and safe working conditions and often work in hazardous environments (Mitullah, 2004). In addition, they face harassment and eviction by authorities (Bhowmik, 2005). It is crucial to recognize and support the role of street vendors in the informal sector and urban economy. Street vending should not only be viewed as a survival strategy for these people but also as an entrepreneurial endeavor that can help alleviate poverty and promote inclusive growth.

In Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, street vendors are a common sight, catering to the needs of millions of city dwellers. Among these vendors, those who sell vegetables are a significant part of the informal economy, supplying residents with fresh, inexpensive produce. These vendors, frequently poor rural migrants, have difficulty entering the formal sector and choose vegetable vending to make a living and leave their mark on the urban landscape (Rahman, 2019). However, they face numerous obstacles, such as a lack of resources, infrastructure, information, and legal rights, as well as exploitation, harassment, and eviction (Hosain et al., 2015). Unlike other street vendors, vegetable vendors have unique economic, social, environmental, and cultural leverages and challenges that make them relatively more vulnerable regarding sustainable entrepreneurship in this informal sector. Despite their contribution to the urban food system and society,

policymakers often overlook them, creating a vacuum of researching proper policy implications and underlying political settlement for them relative to associated stakeholders. Therefore, we intend to conduct a socioeconomic study on Dhaka's vegetable vendors utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to explore the following research questions:

1. How do vegetable vendors impact the economic and social well-being of themselves, their households, customers, and communities?
2. How do vegetable vendors deal with the opportunities and challenges they encounter in business activities, potentially affecting their vulnerable position in the informal sector?
3. How can policy interventions and their effectiveness improve the situation of vegetable vendors in Dhaka, considering other stakeholders?

The paper is divided into several sections, beginning with an in-depth review of existing pieces of literature to conceptualize street vending in the informal sector, including its scale, nature, and context, as well as how vegetable vending fits within its boundaries and potential opportunities and challenges for this exclusive segment of entrepreneurs. Then, we present Amartya Sen's capability approach to understand the actual capacity of these vegetable vendors through the lens of freedom by analyzing the opportunities mentioned earlier and the challenges. The Findings section provides a simple statistical overview of various indicators and the narratives of vendors, which we used to comprehend sociodemographic dynamics, economic conditions, and vulnerability assessment matrices. Based on these insights, we have attempted to discuss the prospects and issues of these vendors through the lens of the capability approach to demonstrate where they stood concerning the complex social and psychological challenges they faced to achieve relative economic success. The concluding sections have contributed to a better understanding of the underlying power dynamics that influence these potential challenges and the ineffectiveness of existing policies, as well as how policy implications should be implemented to alleviate these struggles for vegetable street vendors.

2. Reviewing the Underlying Context of Street Vendors

The informal economy is diverse and unregulated. Self-employment, small enterprises, and everyday occupations are often driven by the need to generate money and employment in the face of limited options, resources, and protections (Mitullah, 2003; Bhowmik, 2012). Street vending, which involves selling goods and services on public streets, sidewalks, parks, and markets, is an everyday informal economic activity (Bhowmik, 2005). Street vending is diverse in context, culture, and geography. It can be a means of survival for the impoverished and disenfranchised, income diversification for the middle class, or creative enterprise and innovation for the ambitious. Street vending also causes disputes and negotiations between street vendors, customers, store owners, local officials, law enforcement, and civil society organizations (Bhowmik, 2003).

The informal economy and street vending are complicated and varied, as definitions may stress various aspects, aims, and presumptions about informality, affecting data collecting, analysis, and policymaking. One of the most common definitions of the informal sector is ILO's statistical approach, which classifies industrial units by legal status, size, labor regulations, and social security (ILO, 2013). This method has been criticized for being too rigid, supply-oriented, and limited. It ignores the informal sector's size, productivity, profitability, legality, social protection, relationships with the formal sector, and dynamic nature. Thus, other definitions may be needed to understand better and manage the informal economy and street vending's issues and prospects.

Street vending supports many people in underdeveloped nations due to its low entry barriers and versatility. It can help the marginalized people survive and launch new businesses. Street sellers also create informal sector jobs in transportation, storage, garbage management, and security (Mitullah, 2003). They buy from legitimate businesses, pay municipal taxes, and service formal consumers. 11% of the world's 2 billion informal workers are street sellers (ILO, 2013). Street sellers account for 13% of the non-agricultural casual workforce in developing nations and 19% in sub-Saharan Africa (Cheng, 2002). According to Bhowmik (2012), 2.5% of urban Indians are street sellers and 14% of urban GDP. Budlender et al. (2001) found that South African street vending accounts for 8–10% of GDP. According to WIEGO (2012), 39% of urban Ghanaian women and 10% of males are market dealers, while 5% and 1% are street vendors.

WIEGO's 2012 Informal Sector Monitoring Study (IEMS) showed street sellers' intimate links to the formal sector (Rover, 2014). They improve urban demand and supply by circulating money and commodities. Street vending also adds variety and attraction to urban culture and society. Street sellers preserve their cities' cultural legacy by selling traditional arts, crafts, and memorabilia. They also deter crime and violence by watching the streets. However, street vending highlights economic structural concerns (Cross, 2000; Racaud & Owuor, 2018). Financial crises, massive unemployment, and the growth of the informal sector have spurred street hawking. Street vendors suffer poor income, investment, competitiveness, unpredictability, harassment, and discrimination from authorities and others. Natural population expansion and rural-to-urban migration increase street vendor demand for fresh vegetables and other commodities. Street vendors provide fresh, nutrient-rich food at lower prices than supermarkets, according to Mitullah (2003). Diversifying crops meets market demand. Hawkers supply durable and affordable goods to the economy, according to Saha (2011).

Street selling, a prevalent kind of informal work that sustains millions of people globally, has garnered more inquiry due to its social and spatial consequences (Asiedu & Agyei-Mensah, 2008). Due to seasonality, street vendor population estimates are challenging (Mitullah, 2003; Skinner,

2008). Street vendors work in the informal sector, which employs 80% of the global workforce (Banik, 2011). They are often excluded from the formal sector and denied social protection, licenses, and permits (Bhowmik, 2003). They struggle with unpredictable revenue, low prestige, consumer exploitation, authority intimidation, long hours, and poor urban infrastructure (Kumar & Singh, 2013). The lack of accurate statistics on their numbers, which increase when formal work opportunities are scarce, worsens their situation (Bhowmik, 2003). Poor shelters, storage, and site placement limit their mobility on deteriorated roadways (Kurniawati, 2012). They work on contentious, congested, hazardous, unsanitary sidewalks, streets, parks, and markets. They must fight pedestrians, merchants, landowners, police, and politicians to claim these spaces (Mitullah, 2004). Street sellers face road accidents, noise pollution, high temperatures, and natural disasters (Recchi, 2021). They lack education, formal skills, information, training, technology, credit, insurance, and public services that may improve their well-being, productivity, and development. They often do not know their economic and civic rights. Gender, color, religion, and financial class may also lead to prejudice, stigma, and exclusion (Mitullah, 2004). Lack of collective action, representation, and solidarity alienates street vendors, making it harder for them to overcome shared challenges and better their conditions (Peimani & Kamalipour, 2022).

Street sellers selling fresh produce are ubiquitous in Dhaka, Bangladesh. These vendors provide fresh, cheap produce to urban residents who may not have access to marketplaces or farms (Muzaffar et al., 2009). They face legal ambiguities, harassment, eviction threats, weak infrastructure, limited bargaining power, and susceptibility to shocks and disasters (Moniruzzaman et al., 2018). Chowdhury et al. (2015) found 2.5 million street vendors in Bangladesh, classified into four operational modes and locations. However, there is no such calculation of the percentage of vegetable vendors in this population. Some vegetable merchants set up permanent kiosks on sidewalks or near crossroads, selling their colorful produce in baskets or crates. Some cart or rickshaw merchants stop in busy areas or residential neighborhoods to entice consumers. Some sellers wander around with their produce on their heads or shoulders, advertising their pricing. Seasonal merchants sell water spinach and gourds in the monsoon and cauliflower, cabbage, and spinach in winter. Vegetable street vendors in Bangladesh are primarily destitute rural migrants seeking better economic chances. They have low education and skills and have trouble getting financial services, social protection, and healthcare. According to Muzaffar et al. (2009), most Dhaka vegetable street vendors were male, married, and 26–45. Their average monthly earnings were BDT 12,500 (\$147), and they essentially had primary education (Islam et al., 2019). Few were unionized, and they averaged 11 hours a day (Rahman, 2019).

Vegetable street vendors have several problems despite their vital role in feeding the urban people. They face legal challenges, lineman and police harassment, eviction drives, terrible working conditions, and health hazards. Hosain et al. (2015) found that female vegetable vendors are more subject to societal stigma, domestic duties, and a shortage of public bathrooms. While Dhaka street

vendors sell food, clothes, literature, electronics, and more, vegetable dealers have similar issues, but they may have more prospects and opportunities. Some street food sellers draw clients from diverse income classes with exceptional offerings. Some street sellers sell branded or imported goods at lower prices, increasing their profit margin. Some street sellers can also choose their location and hours. Thus, vegetable street merchants in Dhaka have varied potentials and issues. Vegetable street vendors confront low demand, severe competition, perishable items, and gender discrimination. They encounter intense competition from official retailers and intermediaries. They also face floods, fires, accidents, and violence and lack social insurance and aid services. Due to their poor income and informal position, they depend on informal networks for healthcare and education. With already being a much vulnerable spectrum of vendors, it increases their social and psychological burden even more and shrinks their already low-profit margin. It demands a vulnerability assessment for this particular group to understand the actual capacity of their economic leverage.

Street merchants in Dhaka pay daily, weekly, or monthly rentals to different actors (Hosain et al., 2015; Lata et al., 2019). Licenses, penalties, bribes, commissions, donations, and protection money are rents. Rent amounts and frequency depend on the vending business's location, nature, size, bargaining power, and network. Some vendors pay multiple actors for the same business at varying rents. Vendor rent averages 10–50% of daily income (ILO, 2013; IEMS, 2019). Rent-seeking lowers street merchants' income and makes them vulnerable. If street sellers refuse to pay rent or pay late, local authorities or other actors may harass, evict, confiscate, or destroy their wares (Hosain et al., 2015). Rent-seeking activities disrupt street vending markets by allocating public spaces and resources based on rentability rather than efficiency or demand. It does ask for an understanding of political settlement in this informal sector to measure the effectiveness of policy implications for these vendors.

3. Capability Approach to Street Vendors: A Conceptual Framework

The capability approach, developed by Amartya Sen (1999), can be used as a framework for evaluating the well-being of vegetable vendors in Dhaka based on the premise that they have a reason to value various aspects of their lives, such as income, health, education, social interactions, safety, etc. It also considers their ability to achieve these aspects, i.e., their genuine opportunities and freedoms, which may depend on various factors, such as market dynamics, infrastructure, policies, institutions, societal norms, etc. In addition, it evaluates their quality of life based on their achieved aspects and potential and compares them to other groups or benchmarks using various methods and indicators. Last, but not least, it acknowledges their power to pursue their own goals and values and to influence the social structures that impact their lives, such as their voice, participation, empowerment, rights, etc.

By employing this approach, we can shed more detailed and nuanced light on the opportunities and challenges faced by vegetable vendors in Dhaka than by simply focusing on income or resources. For instance, we could recognize their potential as businesspeople who contribute to the food security and economy of the city and who may have access to fresh, organic produce. We could also acknowledge their obstacles, including low wages, poor working conditions, lack of social protection, health risks, environmental hazards, market volatility, etc. We could also investigate how their potential is affected by various factors at various levels and how these factors could be enhanced or altered to enhance their quality of life. We could also investigate how they use their influence to overcome obstacles, improve their standard of living, organize themselves, participate in decision-making processes, assert their rights, etc. It also recognizes the economic and social liberties of street vendors as essential human rights for escaping poverty. The potential approach encourages city officials to consider how their policies will shape the future of society, particularly for disadvantaged groups, beyond the city's outward appearance.

4. Methodology

This is a qualitative study with quantitative statistics as additions that utilizes data from both primary and secondary sources. Using structured questionnaires and case studies, 42 vegetable street vendors in various areas of Dhaka were surveyed to obtain preliminary data. The secondary data comes from multiple sources, including books, articles, reports, websites, journals, and publications. This study aims to comprehend the socioeconomic profile, business challenges and opportunities, and urban development integration of Dhaka's street vendors. The interviewer administered the questionnaires to prevent any confusion or misinterpretation. This also ensured that all queries were answered, including the more challenging ones. This method also permitted information collection from illiterate respondents. There were both open-ended and closed-ended queries on the questionnaire. The purpose of the open-ended questions was to elicit the respondents' uninhibited opinions. The purpose of the closed-ended queries was to collect as much data as possible from respondents without wasting too much time. The study aims to provide solutions for incorporating street vendors into a rapidly expanding city. Using descriptive analysis, rudimentary statistics, tables, and graphs, the data is analyzed. The research adheres to ethical considerations such as obtaining consent, explaining the purpose, ensuring anonymity, and recognizing the right to refuse or withdraw.

5. Findings

5.1. Demographic and Social Profile of the Vegetable Street Vendors

Table 1: Demographic and social profile of the Vegetable street vendors

Indicators	Categories	Percentage
Gender	Men	67%
	Women	33%
Age Distribution	10-20	11.90%
	20-30	26.19%
	30-40	26.19%
	40-50	23.80%
	50-60	11.90%
Educational Level	Illiterate	21.42%
	Able to write name and sign	38.08%
	Primary Level	33.32%
	Secondary Level	7.14%
Marital Status	Unmarried	19.08%
	Married	80.92%
Family	Neuclear	90.44%
	Joint	9.56%
Nature of living	Building	26.19%
	Semi-building	33.35%
	Shed	40.46%
Recreation	Chatting with Friends/Neighbours	61.88%
	Chatting with Family	45.22%
	Attending Social Events	70.88%
	Watching TV	49.98%
	No Recreation Time	83.3%

According to the data, more men (67%) are involved in vegetable vending than women (33%). This could indicate a gender imbalance in the population under study, which, depending on the nature of the research, could impact the findings. 20-30, 30-40, and 40-50-year-olds each account for roughly a quarter of the population. Each represents 11.90% of the population; the 10-20 and 50-60 age groups are underrepresented. This could suggest that the median age of vegetable street vendors is probably in the thirties. Most vendors are illiterate (21.42%) or can only write their name and sign (38.08%). 7.14% of the population has secondary education. This suggests that these individuals have a low level of formal education. However, most are married (80.92%), with only a tiny proportion remaining single (19.08%). Most vendors (90.44%) reside in nuclear families, while a small percentage (9.56%) reside in blended families. This could be a reflection of urban societal norms or economic conditions. The proportion of respondents living in buildings (26.19%), semi-buildings (33.35%), and sheds (40.44%) further exacerbate the problem. Attending social events is the most popular form of recreation (70.88%), followed by chatting with friends/neighbors (61.88%) and watching television (49.98%). Nevertheless, a sizeable percentage of the population (83.3%) reports having no leisure time, which may indicate long work hours or other obligations for the vendors. It is essential to note, however, that these themes are interconnected and can influence one another. For instance, the low level of formal education may be associated with the high percentage of people living in sheds and the high percentage of people with no leisure time.

5.2. Economic Profile of the Vegetable Street Vendors

Table 2: Economic Profile of the Vegetable Street Vendors

Indicators	Categories	Percentage
Reason for choosing vegetable vending	Decent Profit	4.10%
	Low Cost and Entrance Barrier	60.9%
	Low Requirements of Skill	27.12%
	Manageable livelihood assurance	7.88%
Source of Capital	Micro Finance Loan	38.08%
	Savings	59.50%
	Bank Loan	2.38%

Size of Capital Investment	0-5000	4.76%
	5000-10000	35.70%
	10000-15000	30.94%
	15000-20000	19.04%
	20000-25000	7.14%
	25000-30000	2.38%
Type of operation mode	Seasonal	73.81%
	Whole Year	26.19%
Working Hours	0-5	59.50%
	5-7	35.41%
	7-9	5.75%
	9-11	2.39%
Daily Earnings	0-500	9.17%
	500-700	61.33%
	700-900	21.27%
	900-1100	8.73%
Years in Business	0-5	38.08%
	5-10	19.04%
	10-15	26.19%
	15-20	7.14%
	20-25	9.5%
Physical Space of Business	Permanent	25.74%
	Temporary	74.26%
Member of Trade Association	Yes	21.42%

	No	78.54%
Capable of Managing Livelihood	Capable	14.28%
	Roughly Capable	76.16%
	Not Capable	9.52%
Necessity of a permanent shop	Yes	59.05%
	No	41.95%
If I get funds from Bank/NBFI, I will expand my business	Yes	72.77%
	No	27.23%
Vegetable Sourcing Difficulties	Yes	91.88%
	No	8.12%
Understanding of vegetable Preservation Methods	Yes	17.90%
	No	82.1%

The data demonstrates a variety of price points, indicating a mixture of new and seasoned vendors. Most vendors (60.90%) selected this industry due to its low cost and low barrier to entry. This suggests that street vending is an accessible form of employment for those with limited capital and skills. Most vendors rely on savings as their primary source of capital, indicating that they are self-funded. Microfinance loans also play a substantial role (38.08%), showing that financial institutions catering to low-income individuals are essential in this sector. Most vendors (35.70%) have a capital investment between BDT 5,000 and 10,000 (\$50-\$100), indicating a relatively low entry barrier in initial capital. Most vendors earn between BDT 500 and 750 (\$5-\$7) daily (61.33%), showing a modest income. The fact that most vendors (59.50%) work between 0 and 5 hours per day suggests that many may be part-time or juggling multiple jobs. The data is evenly divided between seasonal and year-round operation modes, indicating a variety in the types of products sold or local climatic conditions. While the majority of vendors (76.16%) are capable of sustaining themselves, there may be room for improvement concerning their financial stability. Most vendors (74.26%) operate in temporary spaces, possibly due to the flexibility it provides or the high cost of permanent areas. They believe they need a permanent location, indicating a desire for growth and stability. A significant majority (72.77%) of respondents indicated a willingness to grow and develop their businesses by stating that they would expand their business if they received

funding. Most vendors (91.88%) have difficulty sourcing vegetables, indicating supply chain problems. Most (82.10%) do not comprehend vegetable preservation methods, meaning a training and development opportunity to reduce waste and boost profits. Most (78.54%) are not trade association members, suggesting a lack of organization or representation in this industry.

Vegetable sellers have made the most of their competitiveness significantly since they can grow for generations. An experienced vendor named Kamal says,

I've been selling vegetables on the streets of Dhaka for more than a decade. It's hard work, but it's better than being unemployed. I make about BDT—20,000 (\$200) a month, more than I would make if I worked in a garment factory. But money isn't the only reason. This family business was started by my grandfather and passed down to my father. We are who we are because of it (Dhaka, February, 2023).

The price and convenience of vegetables for Dhaka's ever-growing customer base make that premium even more real. Ruhul says,

The city is getting bigger, and people want more fresh vegetables. Every day, rain or shine, we're here to help people get what they need. But it isn't simple. Even the Wholesale Vegetables Market competes with us. But we also have things going for us. We sell fresh produce at fair prices, and we bring them right to people's doors (Dhaka, February, 2023).

As a result, it has been a good source of jobs for people with few skills, especially in areas where poverty is high. Monir, a young farmer who just moved to the city to sell vegetables, says,

I was out of work for a long time before I started this. I didn't have any luck finding a job. But this...I can do this. To get started, you only need a small amount of money and hard work. And the best part is that I can choose how I work. I have no one to answer to (Dhaka, February, 2023).

Ruhul grows even longer,

Yes, we're poor. But this job is a chance for us—a chance to make money and provide for our families. Not much, but at least it's something. And in Dhaka, where there is a lot of poverty and few jobs, something is better than nothing (Dhaka, February, 2023).

These sellers are very aware of what they bring to the table because they know their value and growth potential. But problems keep coming up for them. Rehana, who has been selling veggies for over ten years, says,

We're not just vendors; we're part of the city's food system. We help ensure everyone can find, buy, and eat vegetables. But we have a lot to deal with. Lack of schooling, lack of social status, high medical costs, and high family costs make life hard. But we keep going. We've got to." We're proud of what we do, even though it's hard. But the government and the people often don't pay attention to these contributions (Dhaka, February, 2023).

5.3. Vulnerability Assessment of the Vegetable Street Vendors

Table 3: Vulnerability Assessment of the Vegetable Street Vendors

Indicators	Categories	Percentage
Affected by Natural Disaster (Flood, Heavy Rainfall, Excessive Hot or Cold Weather)	Yes	63.08%
	No	36.92%
Availability of Basic Facilities	Yes	17.96%
	No	82.04%
Other Income Sources apart from Vegetable Vending	Yes	41.91%
	No	58.09%
Able to pay off bills (House rent, utilities)	Yes	38.92%
	No	61.08%
Able to pay off health expenses with earnings from vending	Yes	34.77%
	No	65.23%
Able to pay off educational expenses of children with earnings from vending	Yes	36.31%
	No	63.69%
Received Social Support from Government or Private Initiatives	Yes	22.97%
	No	77.03%
Received any Formal Identity	Yes	25.25%
	No	74.75%
	Yes	66.41%

Affected by Civil Unrest (Strikes, Demonstrations, Blockades)	No	33.59%
Affected by Extortion from City Authorities	Yes	91.77%
	No	8.23%
Obligated to pay Bribe to Police/Local Thugs	Yes	97.07%
	No	2.93%
Experienced Harassment for being woman	Yes	95.33%
	No	4.67%
Experienced confiscation of goods by Authorities	Yes	91.77%
	No	8.23%
Feeling of mental pressure (stress/depression) in vending	Yes	87.28%
	No	12.72%
Feeling of exclusion/disrespect	Yes	93.19%
	No	6.81%
Struggling with problems in Family/ Social Life	Yes	83.92%
	No	16.08%
Satisfaction with standard of living	Yes	30.67%
	No	69.33%

Based on the provided data, the thematic analysis can be divided into four major categories: Natural and Social Disruptions, Economic Stability, Social Support and Identity, and Personal Well-Being. 63.18% of the population is affected by natural disasters, and 66.41% is affected by civil unrest. A very high proportion (91.77%) also reported being subject to extortion. A similar proportion (97.07%) reported being forced to pay bribes to police or local thugs. These indicators suggest a high degree of social instability and environmental vulnerability. According to the data, most of the population struggles to maintain economic stability. A substantial proportion (82.04%) lacks basic amenities, and more than half (58.09%) have no other source of income. The inability

to pay off bills (61.08%), health expenses (65.23%), and educational expenses (63.69%) with earnings from vending machines is also a significant obstacle for the majority. Most of the population (74.75%) lacks a formal identity and does not receive social support from government or private initiatives (77.03%). This indicates a lack of social safety nets and official recognition, which can exacerbate economic instability and susceptibility to disruptions. Also suggested by the data is a high level of personal distress among the populace. A large proportion of respondents reported experiencing harassment for being a woman (95.33%), confiscation of goods (91.77%), the feeling of mental pressure at vending machines (87.28%), a sense of exclusion/disrespect (93.19%), and family/social problems (83.92%). Moreover, most individuals (69.33%) are dissatisfied with their standard of living.

The vendors face daily challenges in trying to earn a living, including evictions, spoilage of goods due to weather conditions, and harassment from police and municipal officials. Hasan, a young vegetable vendor in Dhaka, says,

Every day is a struggle for survival. We are constantly on the move, trying to avoid the police and municipal officials who want to evict us. They say we are dirtying the city, but we are just trying to earn a living (Author's Interview, February, 2023).

The vendors lack basic facilities such as shelter and storage and are at the mercy of intermediaries who control the price and quality of their goods. Abdul, a long-time vendor, laments,

We are at the mercy of the paikar (wholesale intermediaries). They control the price and quality of the vegetables we sell. Sometimes, they give us rotten vegetables, and we have no choice but to sell them (Author's Interview, February, 2023).

Salma, a female vendor, says,

When it rains heavily, our vegetables get spoiled, and we lose our daily income. We don't have any shelter or storage facilities to protect our goods. And when the sun is scorching, we have to bear the heat without any shade (Author's Interview, February, 2023).

The constant fear of eviction, loss of goods, and uncertainty of income takes a toll on the vendors' mental health, leading to anxiety, depression, and hopelessness. Hasan says,

The fear is always there—fear of the police, the local gunda (hooligans), fear of natural disasters. We are always on edge, always looking over our shoulders. It's no way to live (Author's Interview, February, 2023).

Abdul further says,

The mental pressure is immense. Every day, we live in fear of eviction, of losing our goods, of not being able to feed our families. It's a constant state of anxiety that affects our health (Author's Interview, February, 2023).

The vendors, particularly females, are subjected to violence, sexual harassment, and demands for money from police and local thugs. Amina, a single mother and vendor states,

The harassment is unbearable. We are often subjected to violence and sexual harassment. The police and local mastan (thugs) demand money from us every day. If we don't pay, they confiscate our goods or evict us (Author's Interview, February, 2023).

Salma shares,

Depression is a constant companion. The uncertainty of our income, the constant harassment, the lack of support - it's all very overwhelming. Some days, it's hard to find the strength to carry on (Author's Interview, February, 2023).

Farida embarks upon,

As a woman, the harassment is even worse. We are often targeted for sexual harassment and exploitation. It's a constant battle to maintain our dignity and safety (Author's Interview, February, 2023).

The vendors also struggle to make ends meet and provide for their families, facing a constant cycle of debt and hardship. Rafiq, a vendor with a large family, says,

Life is a constant struggle. We can barely afford to pay for our children's education, medical bills, or other expenses. The dissatisfaction with life is hard to ignore. The financial pressure is immense (Author's Interview, February, 2023).

Rehana, a vendor, and mother of three, says,

It's a constant cycle of debt and hardship. We work long hours in harsh conditions with little to show. There's no security, no future. We struggle to pay for necessities like food and shelter, let alone medical bills or school fees. Every day is a struggle to make ends meet. It's a hard life, and it's hard not to feel hopeless (Author's Interview, February, 2023).

The vendors are looked down upon by society and receive no recognition or support for their contributions to the city's culture and economy. Farida says,

The social stigma is hard to bear," says Farida. "Our families and friends look down on us; our children are ashamed of us. We are treated as outcasts, even in our communities (Author's Interview, February, 2023).

Amina continues,

People look down on us. They think we are a nuisance, but we are providing a service. We are part of the city's culture and economy, but we get no recognition or support (Author's Interview, February, 2023).

Rafiq further stresses,

We need help. We need measures to prevent our vegetables from spoiling. We need protection from extortion and harassment. We need a permanent place to sell our vegetables. We need stability. We need capital. We're not asking for much, just the basic rights every worker should have (Author's Interview, February, 2023).

6. Discussion

6.1. Prospects of Vegetable Street Vendors in Dhaka City

6.1.1. Increasing Demand for Vegetables

The study highlights the significance of vegetable street vending as a viable informal employment option for economically disadvantaged individuals, as respondents like Kamal and Ruhul have mentioned. This decision is frequently motivated by poverty and a shortage of alternatives. Vegetable vendors in Dhaka earn an average monthly income of BDT 23435 (\$215), exceeding the minimum wage for garment workers of BDT 8000 (\$80). As Dhaka's population expands and urbanization accelerates, it is anticipated that the demand for vegetables will increase. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates Dhaka's population will reach 28 million by 2030, making it the third-largest megacity in the world (FAO, 2020). The report also notes that urban dwellers in Bangladesh prefer vegetables more than their rural counterparts, with vegetable consumption per capita increasing from 56 kg in 1995-97 to 75 kg in 2013-15 (FAO, 2021). Urban vending has the potential to meet the increasing demand for vegetables in Dhaka, thereby contributing to food security, nutrition, income generation, and environmental sustainability.

Nonetheless, supermarkets, online marketplaces, and wholesalers compete with street vegetable vendors. Urban consumers who pay a premium for vegetables can obtain convenience, quality assurance, and home delivery services from supermarkets and online platforms. Yet, the availability of fresh produce at reasonable prices and the convenience of door-to-door delivery give street vendors an advantage over their rivals, as is evident in Cheng's (2002) and Bhowmik's (2012) findings on the rise of vegetable vendors to cover up this demand. This highlights Sen's (1999) reflections on the significance of autonomy and mobility due to their inherent qualities, which include the capacity to engage in marketplaces and exchange, a trait valued by individuals.

6.1.2. Conducive Employment Opportunities

Bangladesh's unemployment rate in 2020 was 4.2%, lower than the global average of 5.5%, according to the World Bank (WB, 2021). In contrast, Dhaka's unemployment rate was significantly higher in 2019, at approximately 19%, indicating a significant mismatch between labor demand and supply in the capital (BBS, 2021). Underemployment and vulnerable employment situations prevalent in the informal sector, such as low income, irregular work hours, poor working conditions, lack of social protection, and susceptibility to exploitation and

harassment, are not accounted for in the unemployment rate, as Saha (2011) and Chowdhury et al. (2015) has highlighted. Vegetable street vending can provide Dhaka's unemployed, low-skilled, illiterate, and migrant population with an alternative or supplementary source of income due to its low entry barriers, minimal capital investment, flexible work hours, and high demand from urban consumers, Monir from the respondents has been a prominent example of that. It aligns with the findings of Cross (2000) and, Racaud and Owuor (2018). Vegetable vendor businesses are frequently passed down through generations, providing stable employment and combining economic and social freedom, as Sen (1999) has said in his approach. This is a family tradition for many vendors like Kamal, who continually work alongside their fathers, brothers, or cousins—indicating that increased social freedom of vegetable vendors has been entwined with increased economic freedom, as Sen (1999) has mentioned.

6.1.3. Potential for Combating Poverty

According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Dhaka's poverty rate in 2020 was 17.9%, lower than the national average of 20.5% but higher than other major cities in Bangladesh (BBS, 2021). The poverty rate in Dhaka increased from 16% in 2016 to 17.9% in 2020, indicating a decline in the standard of living for many urban residents due to factors such as population growth, urbanization, migration, inequality, inflation, natural disasters, and the COVID-19 pandemic (BBS, 2021). The future of vegetable street vending in Dhaka is contingent on its capacity to alleviate poverty by increasing the income and food security of vendors and customers, minimizing negative externalities, and maximizing positive effects on the urban environment. Vegetable street vending is a survival strategy for many people with limited or no access to formal employment or social assistance. It is frequently a result of poverty, as Mitullah (2003) has mentioned. It requires low entry barriers, minimal capital investment, and flexible work hours, and it caters to urban consumers' high demand for vegetables. It can also provide an alternative or supplementary source of income for the unemployed, low-skilled, illiterate, and migrant population of Dhaka, who face numerous obstacles in securing decent, stable jobs in the formal sector, as several respondents like Rehana and Ruhul have remained vocal about their transition from vulnerability towards resilience. Moreover, according to Saha (2011), vegetable street vending can positively affect the urban food system by increasing the availability, accessibility, affordability, and variety of vegetables for urban consumers, particularly people experiencing poverty. Both Rehana and Ruhul are found to be mindful of this contribution. This strategy can alter the lives of street vendors in the future, aligning with Sen (1999), by transforming their capacities from economic freedom to social freedom.

6.2. Problems of Vegetable Street Vendors in Dhaka City

6.2.1. Exclusions in Urban Planning

In Dhaka, the urban planning process, which involves strategically designing and regulating space, infrastructure, and services to meet social, economic, and environmental objectives, frequently overlooks the role of vegetable street vendors. This sector, which is commonly considered informal, illegal, or undesirable, is mainly marginalized, resulting in a myriad of difficulties (Mitullah, 2004). The lack of basic infrastructure and services, such as water, electricity, sanitation, and waste management, hinders their operations and poses health risks for vendors and customers (Kurniawati, 2012). Vendors like Hasan and Rafiq, who operate in public areas such as sidewalks, parks, and markets, have remained vocal about the lack of legal recognition and government support. Citizens' misconceptions, who believe a city without vendors would be cleaner, exacerbate the problem.

6.2.2 Accompanying Uncertainties

The respondents described various difficulties and obstacles they face in their daily work, including environmental factors, intermediaries, authorities, and public perception, among others. We have seen vendors like Abdul and Salma have shared experiences of some of these common obstacles in the workplace, which impact their livelihoods, well-being, and sense of dignity. Vegetable street vending in Dhaka is significantly hampered by the city's susceptibility to natural disasters such as heavy rain and scorching heat (Moniruzzaman et al., 2018). Moreover, political unrest, such as strikes, demonstrations, and acts of violence, can affect the security and income of vendors like Abdul, Salma, and Hasan and disrupt the urban food system. High temperatures, high humidity, pollution, and a lack of proper storage facilities all contribute to the spoilage and waste of vegetables. Vegetable procurement is also problematic, as vendors frequently rely on intermediaries who can manipulate price, quality, and availability (Recchi, 2021). These challenges align with the constraints of achieving the capability to change livelihood dynamics, according to Sen (1999).

6.2.3. Mistreatment and Exploitation

Vegetable street vendors in Dhaka frequently experience harassment from police, municipal officials, landowners, and local thugs, among others. This includes eviction, confiscation, extortion, violence, and sexual harassment. Authorities frequently justify the seizure of goods on food safety, hygiene, or quality. Also prevalent is extortion, with vendors forced to pay daily sums to police and local thugs. Disputes over vending spots occasionally escalate into physical violence, a reality for many vendors. These demonstrate some of the psychological and emotional effects of the challenges on the vendors, as vendors like Amina, Salma, and Farida mentioned. In addition, they described how they deal with these effects by remaining resilient and persistent in their work. It demonstrates that the vendors have a sense of responsibility and are motivated to continue working despite their difficulties, an essential social capacity to be mentioned in Sen's (1999) approach.

6.2.4. *Lack of Social Dignity*

As the respondents have mentioned multiple times, many members of society view street vendors as a nuisance or an indication of underdevelopment. Their contributions to urban life and livelihoods are frequently overlooked, and they lack legal protection and representation (Peimani & Kamalipour, 2022). In addition to facing discrimination and exclusion, their contributions to the urban economy and culture are rarely acknowledged (Hosain et al., 2015; Recchi, 2021). Despite these obstacles, vendors play a vital role in fostering social cohesion and diversity in the city, establishing social spaces and networks, and providing cultural services. Respondents like Abdul, Kamal, and Rehana have described how they perceive themselves and their work concerning the city and society. They took pride in their work and contribution to the culture and economy of the town. The vendors positively perceive themselves and regard their work as a service to others. They also described how they provide cultural benefits to the city by fostering diversity and social cohesion. It demonstrates the vendors' sense of identity and belonging as a part of the city's fabric (Peimani & Kamalipour, 2022). However, vendors like Farida, Amina, and Rehana also expressed how ignored and marginalized they feel by the authorities and the general public, who do not recognize or support their work. To combat these types of deprivation, social liberties are crucial (Sen, 1999), and they coincide with the recognition of street vendors' exercise of individual and communal agency and well-being.

7.	Potential	Policy	Implications
<p>Vegetable street vendors in Dhaka, Bangladesh, face various obstacles, as we have found out, including low earnings, inadequate education, harassment, and extortion. In addition, they face barriers such as lack of credit access and health risks. In addition, they must navigate competition from other vendors and unpredictability in the market. Despite these adversities, they have displayed commendable resilience by developing numerous coping mechanisms and adaptive strategies. Their utilization of mobility, which has effectively mitigated concerns regarding identification verification obstacles, transactional uncertainty, and exploitative rent-seeking behavior, illustrates their adaptability (ILO, 2013). Their ability to provide low-priced services places them in a favorable economic position despite societal challenges and limited negotiating power (Mitullah, 2004). In light of these insights, it is clear that political resolutions recognizing the realities faced by these vendors are essential, as solutions must consider both disparities in bargaining power and the inherent fluidity of informal procedures that requires this type of institutional support. As a result, simultaneously implied institutionalization measures – regulation for protection against abuse and illicit fees; recognition for acknowledging their significant contribution to city life and economy; and collective action development for empowering them to voice demands and facilitating peer learning – may have the potential to improve their circumstances significantly.</p>			

Improving the lives of street vendors necessitates a comprehensive strategy that involves all stakeholders. This requires revising anti-vendor laws and enacting pro-vendor policies, as well as establishing institutions that give vendors a voice in city governance (Bhowmik, 2003; Hosain et al., 2015). It also requires changing the way planners, police, and society view vendors, as well as assisting vendors in developing their skills and abilities (Mitullah, 2004). One way to accomplish this is to tell the stories of vendors, highlighting the obstacles they face, the arduous work they perform, their reliance on informal credit, market fluctuations, and the exploitation and illicit payments they face. This information should be disseminated via print media, television, radio, and digital platforms to the general public. Secondly, instead of attempting to regulate the location and method of operation of street vendors, it would be more effective to manage the system that imposes informal fees on them. This could be accomplished by implementing official taxes at a reasonable rate to replace the unofficial fees currently paid by vendors. As a result, formalizing the informal sector may not always yield optimal results, potentially diminishing the allure of lower entry barriers and free market flexibility, such as providing low-cost services, as price increases cannot be sustained under such circumstances. To avoid the failure of efforts to improve vendors' capabilities, it is crucial to ensure that the recognition process does not become a means for rent-seeking mechanisms to circumvent the formal process due to asymmetric bargaining power (Lata et al., 2019; Recchi, 2021). Therefore, measures should be taken to improve their negotiation abilities and self-defense. Thirdly, it is often difficult for vendors to obtain formal loans so they may borrow from predatory lenders (Hosain et al., 2015). It is crucial to provide them with collateral-free capital from traditional sources to expand their businesses and improve their access to official loans to address this issue. Finally, collective efforts are required to foster a sense of solidarity and collaboration among vendors and to educate them on various strategies to improve their standard of living (Rahman, 2019). This could be accomplished through workshops covering leadership, legal rights, municipal procedures, police interaction, organizational management, etc. A vendor's confidence can be boosted by knowledge of events in other regions. It also involves changing the perceptions of urban planners, law enforcement, and the general public regarding vendors, as well as assisting vendors in enhancing their skills and abilities.

8. Conclusion

Street vending, a dynamic pillar of the informal sector, is an indispensable source of income for innumerable people in economically disadvantaged and developing nations. In addition to its economic contributions, immigration enriches urban societies with cultural diversity and adaptability and provides environmental advantages. Despite these benefits, street vending is frequently stigmatized and criminalized due to its perceived difficulties for urban management. The current legal regulations governing street vending are outdated and do not reflect modern realities; however, they have not been updated. This sector's expansion is accelerated by migration, urbanization, and changes in economic structures, which have led to an increase in the utilization

of public spaces. As a result, vendors face numerous threats to their livelihoods, including loss of property, limited alternatives, and waste of resources. They are trapped in a cycle of poverty characterized by vulnerability and minimal influence or participation in society. Their survival strategies barely suffice to ensure a secure living environment. Given the persistence of street vendors in Dhaka's landscapes, eradication seems futile. Instead, it seems pragmatic to incorporate it into our urban planning process. Therefore the study examines the socioeconomic circumstances of vegetable street vendors to propose strategic solutions addressing their issues for formal inclusion in planning processes—a fertile field ripe for additional research to enhance the overall development prospects of countries such as Bangladesh. Echoing Sen's approach, we must recognize not only the economic value of street vending but also its social complexities. Legalizing this trade through legislation is one solution; it would be advantageous if vendors operated within a transparent and equitable framework. It is essential to examine the political dynamics among various stakeholders regarding the protection of gains from informal sectors that bolster vendors' capabilities.

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