**Original Research Article**

**Street Vendors Act, 2014: Lacunae of Gender Perspective**

**Abstract**

Street vendors are an important part of the urban economy by providing livelihoods to millions of people in India and around the world. They contribute significantly to the local economy through creating job opportunities, and provide goods and services to the poor. However, they face lots of challenges including lack of social security, harassment, poor working conditions, and competition from formal retail sectors, police and municipal authorities. The street vendors especially women need to create a supportive and regulated environment where vendors can grow their business. Therefore, this study aims to critically examine the street vendors Act 2014’s advantages and drawbacks with the respect to women street vendors. The author feels that the Act ignores their particular requirements. Therefore, this paper provides several recommendations as well as a gender-inclusive act should be implemented, that will improve the status of female street vendors and give them equal access to opportunities, protection, and rights.

Keywords: Street vendors, Livelihood, Vending zone, Social security, Gender Provisions, Street vendors Act

JEL Classification: B54, E26, D78

**Introduction**

The Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014 was implemented on March 4, 2014 to legalise and regulate street vending as a profession for those who have ‘no other means of livelihood’ (Chaudhari, 2014). The Act tackles the two biggest issues facing street vendors first, intimidation by local authorities and second is the fear of being evicted. The Act gives them a safe place to sell their goods.

Street vending is one of the most visible and important sustainable occupations in the urban informal sector in India. Street vendors are identified as self-employed workers in the informal sector who offer to sell goods and services on the street without having any permanent built-up structure (National policy on urban street vendors-NPUSV, 2006). According to Begari (2018) street vending is not only a source of self-employment for the poor in cities and towns but also a means to provide ‘affordable’ as well as ‘convenient’ services to a majority of the urban population.

According to the street vendors Act 2014, street vendor defines “a person engaged in vending of articles, goods, wares, food items or merchandise of everyday use or offering services to the general public, in a street, lane, side walk, footpath, pavement, public park or any other public place or private area or from a temporary built-up structure or by moving from place to place”. In this study, the term "street vendor" refers to both stationary and mobile vendors. Street vendors may be stationary if they temporary occupy a space on sidewalks or other public/ private spaces, or may be mobile if they carry their goods from place to place on carts or in baskets on their heads (Bhowmik & Saha, 2012).

In this study author states that despite the passes of decades Street Vendors Act, there has been no significant improvement in the status of street vendors. Even though after the Act, they are often harassed, threatened, and evicted by government and local municipal authorities especially women. Therefore, the prime focus of this paper is to highlight the lacunae street vendors Act 2014 as gender perspective.

*Street Vendors Act, 2014: An Analysis*

The 2014 Act on Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) is most important for safeguarding the rights of street vendors. It aims to control and regulate street vending through the provision of identity cards, vending licenses, and other safeguards, as well as a specified area for their operating business. Additionally, the Act requires the establishment of Town Vending Committees (TVCs) to guarantee that street sellers are given assigned vending areas and are shielded from eviction. Implementing the Act's requirements locally is the whole responsibility of TVCs. Nevertheless, in spite of this legal structure, enforcement is sometimes uneven, and many sellers still experiences of harassment, eviction, and legal action.

The Indian Constitution's Article 19 (1) (g) guarantees its citizens the basic right to engage in any employment, trade, or enterprise. It implies that neither the state nor local governments can prohibit vending occupation. There are 49.5 lakh street sellers in the nation, the largest concentration is found in Uttar Pradesh, which accounts for 17.2% of all street vendors nationwide. In Sikkim, no street vendor is recognized.

**Figure 1: State-wise Number of Street Vendors Identified**

**Figure 2: State-wise Number of TVC Constituted**

**Figure 3: State-wise Number of Vending Zones Notified**

Source: Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No. 3452 of Mar 24, 2022

Through, The Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014 state governments can identify street vendors, keep track of their records, and grant them vending certificates. With a maximum number of 664 TVC, Tamil Nadu leads the state, followed by Uttar Pradesh with 651 TVC. Since its establishment, TVC has been in charge of ensuring that street vending in that city runs well. Establishing infrastructure for vending zones and designating zones are the main components of the town vending’s proposal. Vending zones totalling 3,047 have been found in Uttar Pradesh, with 2,080 in Madhya Pradesh. It is clear seen in the above figure, some states including Himachal Pradesh, Ladakh, Sikkim, Haryana, Jharkhand, and West Bengal, do not have designated vending zones.

**Literature Survey**

According to Sundaram (2008) Most of the cities in India have a large number of urban vendors and they do not have any alternate way of survival. Therefore, in 2004, the government formulated the national policy for urban street vendors to address the concerns of vendors who are constantly harassed by the police and local administrators.

The local authorities especially police and municipal authorities consider as encroachment of public spaces. Most of the street vendors are evicted during the widening of roads, beautification of the city or construction of new buildings and shopping malls. Gender discrimination is also a major issue where female vendors sell smaller quantities and earn less profit than male counterparts (Bhowmik, 2010; Saha, 2011).

Karthikeyan & Mangaleswaran (2014) Street vendors are an integral part of urban workforces with no permanent shops and market area. Street vending on urban public spaces leads to overcrowding, traffic jams, accidents, and considered as illegal encroachers upon public spaces.

Mathur (2014) examines the National Policy on Urban Street Vendors estimates the number of street vendors in a city as 2% of its population. Street markets a viable place to carry out the informality of work schedule and working conditions that broadly allow to individual street vendors to sell at places of their own choice and schedules of selling.

Rattan (2015) stated that the Street Vendors Act 2014 is a tool for empowerment of the vendors. Considering the level of exploitation both economically and mentally, this Act is a saviour for the vendors. Although most government offices claim that non-harassment and non-eviction notices have been sent to the local authorities, but both exploitation and harassment continue faced by street vendors in the markets.

Manucha & Singh (2019) explored street vendors contribute significantly to the urban supply chain system, but in return, they have to face humiliation, harassment and, confiscation threats from the local governing bodies such as police and Municipal authorities. Even the street vendors have little access to welfare schemes run by the government. They always face the risk of displacement, and it often increases in the context of elections, mega-events or efforts to beautify city.

According to Bhushan (2023) although legislation makes provision for protection of street vending businesses against their exploitation but there are certain lacunas, which create obstacle for proper implementation of street vendors Act. The local governing bodies and police authorities misuse their powers for personal benefit, that caused exploitation to informal sector and this turns into violation of their rights. This study also found the certain factors responsible for increased of harassment are lack of education, lack of awareness and migration.

**Gaps in Street Vendors Act, 2014: Gender Approach**

The Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation) Act, 2014 was introduced to safeguard the livelihoods and rights of street vendors in India. However, from a gender perspective, the Act has several gaps that fail to address the specific challenges faced by women street vendors.

List 1-- Gaps in Street Vendors Act, 2014

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Sl. No. | Gender Provisions |  | Details |
| 1. | No specific mention of women street vendors |  | The Act ignores the special risks that women vendors face, including safety issues, unpaid care labour, and harassment.  There are no provisions for women to participate in policy-making bodies or for women-only vending zones. |
| 2. | No protection against gender-based violence (GBV) |  | Although police, local officials, and male vendors frequently harass women sellers, the Act offers no particular procedures to deal with these problems. There is also no grievance redressal process or legal protection for instances of gender discrimination or sexual harassment. |
| 3. | Gender Discrimination in the allocation of Vending Space |  | Women vendors frequently receive less desirable vending locations than men, particularly older women and single moms. Women who sell perishable goods—like fruits, vegetables, and flowers—are not given preference in vending zones, despite the fact that their daily sales are more important. |
| 4. | Poor sanitation & lack of women-friendly infrastructure |  | The Act makes it more difficult for women to work long hours by lacking of restrooms, drinking water, or childcare facilities in vending zones. It is also women's wages are negatively impacted when they work late hours due to safety concerns in vending areas. |
| 5. | Difficulty in obtaining vendor certificates |  | Although the Act mandates that street vendors get licenses of vending, many women do not have the necessary paperwork (proof of residence, Aadhaar, etc.). Women vendors face greater challenges from corruption in municipal offices and bureaucratic processes, particularly widows and migrants. |
| 6. | Financial inclusion is not taken into consideration. |  | The Act doesn't deal with women's restricted access to formal banking, credit, and loans. Female involvement in the PM SVANidhi Scheme, which lends money to street vendors, is low because of documentation obstacles and a lack of awareness. |
| 7. | Low participation in Town Vending Committees (TVCs) |  | The Act requires street sellers to make up 40% of TVC members, although there is no quota for the female vendors. The voices of female vendors are ignored, and decisions made by male-dominated committees fail to take gender-specific issues into account. |

Source: Compiled by author

**Implementation Issues at Various Levels**

To protect street vendors' rights throughout India, the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014 was passed. There are obstacles to the national, state, and local application of gender-specific provisions in street vendor acts. These issues affect the rights, safety, economic empowerment, and participation of women street sellers in policymaking.

*National Level*

Despite the Act's protective measures, street vendors still face harassment and forced evictions. This is often due to outdated bureaucratic viewpoint that see vendors as barriers to urban growth. Lack of a dedicated **central monitoring body** to ensure gender-sensitive implementation of this Act. There is lack of national-level data collection on **women street vendors** leads to **exclusion from policy planning.** There is a significant lack of awareness about the Act among state authorities, the general public, and the vendors themselves.

This ignorance causes the Act’s provisions misinterpretation and not followed by the authorities as well as street vendors also. Street vendors have less representation in TVCs, which are frequently controlled by local government in urban places. Women vendors are also frequently only symbolically represented in these committees. The 2014 Street Vendors Act makes reference to female vendors but does not contain any gender-sensitive clauses that address financial inclusion, safety, or harassment. The involvement of female vendors in urban planning and decision-making is not guaranteed by any national framework. **Smart city projects and urban revitalization which, forces women vendors to relocate to other locations. Public spaces are not designed for women’s safety,** discouraging them from working as street vendors.

*State Level*

Many states have not formed **functioning TVCs**, therefore the registration process being delay of women vendors. Several states do not require TVCs to have 50% female representation, which lowers the number of women involved in decision-making. Women vendors face **greater hurdles in getting permits**, due to lack of the necessary paperwork or confirmation of local residency. However, male vendors are given preference when it comes to space allotment, forcing women into less lucrative or dangerous places. **There is no specific helpline or support network** for women vendors facing harassment or discrimination. **Women vendors struggle to access loans and credit** due to lack of collateral and banking documentation. Women vendors are dependent on informal sources because state-level financial programs do not prioritize gender-specific needs.

*Local or Municipal Level*

Women vendors face **harassment from municipal or local authorities as well as police, and male vendors. Vending areas that are unsafe** because of poor lighting and lack of security increase the possibility of **theft and gender-based violence**. Since women vendors lack strong networks and legal knowledge, they are more susceptible to being forcibly evicted. Local authorities frequently evicted over informal vendors without any notice. There is n**o public toilets or childcare facilities** in vending zones, makes it difficult for women to balance work and family responsibilities. Poor waste management and lack of sanitation create **health hazards,** affecting women vendors disproportionately. Women vendors are **limited to low-profit businesses** like food and clothing, while men dominate high-earning sectors like electronics, repair services etc. **Limited access to digital payments and e-commerce** further restricts women’s ability to expand their businesses.

**Initiatives taken by Street Vendors Organizations**

To protect the street vendors, many non-government organizations came forward, associations were formed which started representing the street vendors. These are raising voice in favour of street vendors and protecting their interests by opposing the eviction drives of local municipal authorities. Membership-based organizations help street vendors navigate their relationship with the authorities, build solidarity, and solve problems with other vendors. Several such organizations have developed innovative ways to work with cities to keep the streets clean and safe while gaining a secure livelihood for vendors. Some of the examples are discussed below:

*NASVI (National Association of Street Vendors of India)*

**NASVI (National Association of Street Vendors of India)** is a prominent advocacy group and network representing street vendors across India, including women vendors. It is founded in **1998.** NASVI has been a powerful ally for women street vendors in India, providing them with the support, legal protection, and resources needed to thrive in the informal economy. Through advocacy, training, legal assistance, and solidarity, NASVI continues to work toward a more inclusive and equitable environment for women vendors, helping to ensure that they have the opportunity to succeed while facing fewer gender-based barriers. However, more efforts are needed to address ongoing challenges such as cultural biases and violence, and NASVI’s continued advocacy is vital to improving the conditions of women street vendors in India.

*WEIGO (Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing)*

**WEIGO** is an international organization that advocates for the rights of women working in the informal economy, including women street vendors. Founded in **2005**, WEIGO brings together a global network of women workers from various sectors such as street vending, domestic work, home-based work, and waste picking. WEIGO works to empower these women by promoting policies that ensure decent work, fair wages, and improved social protections. Through its global network, WEIGO also helps women street vendors participate in international dialogues about labour rights, poverty reduction, and economic justice, ensuring that their voices are heard on the global stage.

*SEWA (Self Employed Women’s Association)*

**SEWA (Self Employed Women’s Association)** is a prominent organization that advocates for and supports self-employed women workers in the informal economy, including street vendors. It is founded in **1972** in India by **Ela Bhatt**. SEWA has grown to become one of the largest women’s labour unions globally, with millions of women members across various sectors. By joining SEWA, women vendors are able to come together and amplify their voices when negotiating with local authorities, businesses, or government entities. SEWA also offers training programs to women vendors on a variety of skills, including **entrepreneurship, productivity enhancement, business management, marketing,** and **customer relations**. SEWA's work has been recognized internationally for its efforts in supporting women workers in the informal economy. As part of its broader network, SEWA connects women vendors with global organizations and platforms, such as Street Net International, which focuses on advocating for informal economy workers worldwide. SEWA’s involvement in international advocacy helps raise awareness of the specific challenges faced by women street vendors and influences global policy discussions.

**Recommendations for a Gender-Inclusive Street Vendors Act**

To provide equal access to opportunities, protection, and rights for men and women street vendors, a Gender-Inclusive Street Vendors Act should be created. Along with promoting equality, gender inclusion tackles the particular difficulties faced by female street sellers, who frequently face more obstacles than their male counterparts, including discrimination, limited resources, and gender-based violence. Here are some key **recommendations** for developing a Gender-Inclusive Street Vendors Act:

1. Equality of Access to Public Areas and Vending Licenses

* Equal access to vending permits, venues, and public areas for the sale of commodities should be guaranteed to women sellers.
* Set limits or regulations that promote a fair distribution of vending possibilities in public locations, guaranteeing that both sexes take advantage of the spaces that are accessible.

1. Defence Against Harassment and Gender-Based Violence

* Provide clear instructions for protecting street vendors especially women from abuse or harassment by customers, law enforcement, or local government representatives.
* Provide methods or safe areas where vendors can report and deal with violence or harassment.
* Provide training courses on how to interact politely with female merchants and stop gender-based violence for local and law enforcement officials.

1. Access to Legal and Social Protections

* Ensure that women street vendors have equal access to legal protections as men, including fair contracts, procedures for resolving dispute, and legal action in the cases of exploitation.
* By recognizing their dual roles as caregivers and employees, include opportunities for maternity leave, health insurance, or child care choices for women who are also mothers.

1. Encouragement of Female Vendors in Business Growth

* Provide business training programs that are gender-sensitive and take into account the particular requirements of female vendors, such as market access, financial literacy, and entrepreneurial abilities.
* Provide financial resources, such as loans or microcredit, with an emphasis on facilitating financing for women who could encounter more obstacles to credit.

1. Provisions for Health and Safety

* Establish clear policies and tools to help women vendors, particularly those in the unorganized food industry, follow to health and safety regulations.
* Training in proper food preparation, sanitation, and hygiene should be given, keeping in mind the gendered character of domestic duties that female vendors might face.

1. Facilities and Infrastructure That Are Sensitive to Gender

* Make sure that vending locations have both gender-neutral infrastructure, including child-friendly areas, well-lit vending zones, and gender-segregated public restrooms.
* Facilities like as restrooms, changing rooms, and chairs should be easily accessible and accommodate both male and female vendors.

1. **Addressing Gender Wage Gaps**

* Establish measures to reduce gender-based wage discrimination within the street vending sector, ensuring that both women and men receive fair compensation for similar work.
* Promote pay equity within organized vendor groups or cooperatives by setting clear wage guidelines based on work output rather than gender.

1. Family and Caregiving Duties

* Provide supportive measures like flexible working hours, access to childcare facilities, and the option to bring children to vending locations if necessary, acknowledging that many female vendors have caregiving duties (such as looking after elderly family members or children).
* To meet the needs of the family, allow for part-time vending or job-sharing arrangements.

1. **Access to Gender-Specific Support Networks**

* Create or support women-only vendor groups or associations that can address gender-specific issues, build solidarity, and support women in negotiating with local authorities or developing business skills.
* Provide mentorship or peer support systems where experienced female vendors can guide and support new vendors.

1. Inclusive Policy Design and Monitoring

* Include gender analysis in the policy design process, ensuring that gendered needs and challenges are considered in the creation and implementation of laws and regulations.
* Establish gender-sensitive monitoring systems that track the participation and success of both male and female vendors in the program, identifying and addressing any disparities that arise.
* Conduct regular gender impact assessments to ensure that the act is achieving the goal of gender equality and improving conditions for women vendors.

1. Public Awareness Campaigns

* Start campaigns to combat discrimination and negative perceptions while promoting gender equality in the street selling industry by showcasing the achievements of female sellers.
* Assist both sexes in understanding and supporting gender-inclusive policies by encouraging them to fight for equal rights.

1. Participation in Policy-Making Committees

* Ascertain that women street sellers are represented in committees that develop policies pertaining to street vending, vendor associations, and local government forums.
* Encourage women to participate in policy discussions so that their opinions are heard and their issues are taken into consideration.

**Conclusion**

The Street Vendors Act, 2014 needs urgent reforms to ensure gender equality in vending rights, safety, and financial inclusion. A sustainable, safe, and inclusive environment for female street vendors can be established by policymakers by tackling issues of women. In this paper it is also suggested that a gender inclusive street vendors act can promote equality, solve the unique difficulties faced by women in the informal sector, and build more inclusive and sustainable urban economies. Legislation of this kind can empower female sellers, lower obstacles to their economic involvement, and give them the tools and safeguards they require to be successful.

If this Act would have perfectly drafted, then practice of street vendors would have been run smoothly and won't create annoyance, hurdles to the females. Cities can create environments that allow both vendors and citizens to grow by legalizing street vending, enhancing infrastructure, insuring safety and health standards by street vending, which can only positively impact urban growth with proper urban planning, social protections, and access to modern technologies. As such, this will act as a catalyst in beautification of the urban city.

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**Appendix**

**Table 1: State-wise Number of Street Vendors, TVC and Vending Zones (As on 24.02.2022)**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Sl.  No. | State/Union Territory | Street Vendors  Identified | TVC  constituted | Vending Zones  notified |
| 1 | Andaman and Nicobar Islands | 676 | 1 | 0 |
| 2 | Andhra Pradesh | 2,56,926 | 110 | 671 |
| 3 | Arunachal Pradesh | 7,605 | 21 | 20 |
| 4 | Assam | 54,984 | 97 | 104 |
| 5 | Bihar | 1,56,965 | 142 | 64 |
| 6 | Chandigarh | 10,930 | 1 | 46 |
| 7 | Chhattisgarh | 1,06,520 | 156 | 65 |
| 8 | Dadra and Nagar Haveli& Daman and Diu | 2,928 | 2 | 0 |
| 9 | Delhi | 72,457 | 27 | 0 |
| 10 | Goa | 2,881 | 14 | 26 |
| 11 | Gujarat | 3,21,406 | 163 | 0 |
| 12 | Haryana | 1,17,028 | 81 | 0 |
| 13 | Himachal Pradesh | 6,486 | 52 | 0 |
| 14 | Jammu and Kashmir | 31,777 | 74 | 17 |
| 15 | Jharkhand | 71,923 | 50 | 0 |
| 16 | Karnataka | 2,65,477 | 277 | 67 |
| 17 | Kerala | 23,154 | 93 | 2 |
| 18 | Ladakh | 427 | 0 | 0 |
| 19 | Madhya Pradesh | 7,04,587 | 378 | 2,080 |
| 20 | Maharashtra | 5,84,416 | 257 | 1,509 |
| 21 | Manipur | 15,698 | 27 | 13 |
| 22 | Meghalaya | 1,764 | 6 | 0 |
| 23 | Mizoram | 3,960 | 6 | 139 |
| 24 | Nagaland | 4,302 | 12 | 24 |
| 25 | Odisha | 80,841 | 114 | 145 |
| 26 | Puducherry | 3,144 | 5 | 24 |
| 27 | Punjab | 1,49,215 | 163 | 241 |
| 28 | Rajasthan | 1,93,568 | 189 | 1,055 |
| 29 | **Sikkim** | **0** | **7** | **0** |
| 30 | Tamil Nadu | 3,09,449 | 664 | 889 |
| 31 | Telangana | 5,02,233 | 141 | 33 |
| 32 | Tripura | 8,666 | 20 | 59 |
| 33 | **Uttar Pradesh** | **8,49,108** | **651** | **3,047** |
| 34 | Uttarakhand | 26,483 | 78 | 70 |
| 35 | West Bengal | 673 | 92 | 0 |
|  | Total | 49,48,657 | 4,171 | 10,410 |

Source: Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No. 3452 of Mar 24, 2022