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FROM SHADOWS TO SUNSHINE TO SHADOWS AGAIN? STREET VENDORS AND THEIR STRUGGLE FOR LIVELIHOOD

“Basically what we need is a change of perception, so that business and planners see vendors as entrepreneurs and vending as legitimate employment. After all, neither industry nor government is able to provide jobs to the citizen.”¹

- Ela R. Bhatt²

The sun beat down as Kaliben adjusted the burden on her head and the many bags on her shoulder. Her throat was dry and her skin was burning as the temperature soared to over 40 degrees centigrade. She carried a long stick in one hand to fend off street dogs, while keeping a sharp eye on the guards and policemen bent on chasing her away. Her mind was clouded with insecurity. “The city is for everyone, yet there is no space for me, not even once a week to sell my goods....Do I not have a right to earn my livelihood? How will I feed my children?!” she thought.

Kaliben from Raghbir Nagar³ is one of more than half a million street vendors⁴ in West Delhi.⁵ Delhi vendors are a diverse group. Some sell from shops and markets, while others roam the street to hawk their products. Kaliben does both types of vending, static and mobile, while

¹ Bhatt, Ela R. Interviewed by: Chatterjee, Mirai (July 2000), Seminar # 491, <http://www.india-seminar.com/2000/491.htm> (accessed 4 January 2015).

² Bhatt, Ela R. popularly known as ‘Elaben,’ is the Founder-member of SEWA (Self Employed Women’s Association). She was a Member of Parliament and a member of the government of India’s Planning Commission. She has received the ‘Padma Bhushan’ and the ‘Ramon Magsaysay Award,’ as well as honorary doctorates from Harvard and Yale Universities.

³ Raghbir Nagar is a resettlement colony in West Delhi, which is largely inhabited by migrants from Gujarat.

⁴ ‘Street vendor’ means “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 space or private area, from a temporary built up structure or by moving from place to place and includes hawker, peddler, squatter, and all other synonymous terms which may be local or region specific.” The Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act (2014) para.2. (1)(l), <http://www.indiacode.nic.in/acts2014/7%20of%202014.pdf> (accessed 4 January 2015).

⁵ Delhi is the national capital of India.

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selling old clothing. Her economic activity involves both barter and monetized exchange. During the week, she roams the streets, bartering used clothes for new utensils. On Sundays, she sells the old clothes in a weekly market after she has sorted, repaired, washed and ironed them.

Street Vending

Street vending is the most visible segment of the ‘informal economy.’⁶ It is an important source of employment for a large number of the urban poor, as it requires few skills and little capital. However, vendors’ jobs often involve harassment. Vendors sell their wares on public land like bus stops and street corners. They are accused of blocking pedestrians, causing traffic jams and having links to criminals. Municipal authorities and the police routinely evict them. Consequently, they face exploitation and assault by police and city workers. The urban elite see them as a bane of city life, and their right to livelihood is largely unrecognized.

Street vendors have many strong opponents: urban planners, whose mind-sets do not allow them to see the urban poor as citizens; the land mafia bred by increasing urbanization and escalating real estate prices; the police and the municipality, who see vendors as encroaching on public spaces and a threat to public safety; and middle and upper class residents, who buy from the vendors because it is convenient, but hesitate to give them space in their neighborhoods. “It is also the most cruel in its competition for expensive urban space, marked by the vendors facing the wrath of the police and the city governments. Perhaps as no other citizen, the street vendor becomes the focus of interaction of almost all city pressure groups — the municipality, police, politician, consumer, real estate agent, shop owners, vehicle owners.”⁷ Unfortunately, among all occupations the world over, street vending is the most regulated and least legally protected.⁸

“Street vending is the most lucrative of all activities and the most available of all employments open to the poor, one which could lead the way out of poverty.”⁹ The number of migrants pouring into cities in search of livelihood is rising. The loss of formal jobs leads to the growth of informal employment. Street vending has emerged as a viable earning opportunity for a sizable chunk of the urban poor due to ease of entry and low capital requirements.¹⁰ This leads to a large number of illegal vendors, who pay bribes to police and municipal authorities to be allowed to sell without being evicted or fined, or having their goods confiscated. The local underworld may also demand protection money.

The lack of recognition of the role of street vendors results in a multitude of problems: difficulty in obtaining licenses; insecure income; no fixed space in which to sell their wares; officials and musclemen who issue eviction threats; the imposition of fines; and harassment by traffic police. All this fosters illegal rent-seeking with the active connivance of the municipality, police and

⁶ ‘Informal economy’ captures “the large share of economic units and workers that remain outside the world of regulated economic activities and protected employment relationships.” Chen, Martha A. (2004) “Rethinking the Informal Economy: Linkages with the Formal Economy and the Formal Regulatory Environment”, http://wiego.org/sites/wiego.org/files/publications/files/Chen- Rethinking-Informal_WIDER_paper.pdf (accessed 19 January 2015).

⁷ Jhabvala, R. (July 2000) “Roles and Perceptions”, Seminar # 491, <http://www.india-seminar.com/2000/491.htm> (accessed 10 January 2015).

⁸ Bhatt, Ela R. (2008) *We Are Poor but So Many: The Story of Self-Employed Women in India*, 3rd impression, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p.97.

⁹ Jhabvala, R. (July 2000) “Roles and Perceptions”, Seminar # 491, <http://www.india-seminar.com/2000/491.htm> (accessed 10 January 2015).

¹⁰ Bhatt, Ela R. (2008) *We Are Poor but So Many: The Story of Self-Employed Women in India*, 3rd impression, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p.94.

dalals.¹¹ Vendors also face intense competition from other vendors. The demand for licenses, when available, far exceeds the supply.

The fact that street vendors contribute to the city economy and are a boon for the urban poor is rarely recognized. Street vendors provide valuable services and support the small-scale industries from which they procure such goods as clothes and hosiery, leather and moulded plastic goods, and foodstuffs, all manufactured in small-scale or home-based industries. Kaliben's income is critical not only for her family, but for many others: households that can dispose of old clothes in exchange for new utensils; utensil-makers, for whom she provides an otherwise inaccessible market; and the urban poor to whom she sells recycled clothes cheaply.

Street Vending in India

It is estimated that the total number of street vendors in India is approximately ten million, or 2% of the urban population,¹² accounting for 14% of all informal urban employment¹³. Street vendors or 'hawkers' have been in existence since ancient times, selling a wide array of products. Some vendors are mobile, carrying products in carts and baskets, while others do business in markets held weekly or monthly.

Earnings vary between 50 to 80 rupees per day. Women earn even less. Street vendors make a significant contribution to the urban economy. It was estimated that street vendors in Delhi and Mumbai generate 15.9 billion rupees yearly.¹⁴ Even the comparatively small Bhadra market area of Ahmedabad, with 3,500 vendors and 1,400 businesses, generated an annual turnover of around 0.95 billion rupees or US\$19 million.¹⁵

Unfortunately, a large part of the vendors' income goes into paying bribes and 'protection money.' A NASVI¹⁶ study found that 20% of vendors' earnings go to the authorities and *dalals* for illegal rents. In Mumbai, bribes from street vendors amount to about four billion rupees annually. Another study, undertaken by 'Manushi' in Delhi, estimated the figure at five billion rupees.¹⁷ Ironically, all this impropriety propagates a win-win eco-system for all parties: hapless vendors who continue to sell after paying illegal rent and the rent-seekers who shamelessly extort their money. Vendors can also suffer beatings and evictions from time to time when unable to pay.

Despite their economic contribution, street vendors in India are commonly viewed as criminals and nuisances. Big shopkeepers resent the competition, and "the middle class public who liked their fresh, cheap vegetables but not their sight."¹⁸ Vendors "are either overlooked, or are looked down as something to be controlled, or as an eyesore to be removed....And because of this

¹¹ 'Dalal' is a rent-seeker or middleman.

¹² Bhatt, Ela R. (2008) *We Are Poor but So Many: The Story of Self-Employed Women in India*, 3rd impression, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p.94.

¹³ Chen, Martha A. and Raveendran, G. (2011) "Urban Employment in India: Recent Trends and Patterns", WIEGO Working Paper (Statistics) No.7, Table 7, <http://wiego.org/sites/wiego.org/files/publications/files/Chen-Urban-Employment-India-WIEGO-WP7.pdf> (accessed 20 January 2015).

¹⁴ "Factfile" (July 2000) Seminar, # 491 <http://www.india-seminar.com/2000/491.htm> (accessed 10 January 2015).

¹⁵ Brown Alison, Michal Lyons and Mahadevia, Darshini (2012) "Claiming Urban Space: Street Vending in Ahmedabad, Working Paper 2: Law, Rights and Regulation in the Informal Economy", ESRC-DFID Research Project, Cardiff University, Figure 4.2, http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/cplan/sites/default/files/Law-rights-regulation_working-paper-2.pdf (accessed 31 January 2015).

¹⁶ NASVI is an acronym for the 'National Association of Street Vendors of India'. More information about NASVI can be found at its website www.nasvinet.org.

¹⁷ Bhowmik, Sharit K., ed. (2010) *Street Vendors in The Global Urban Economy*, New Delhi: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, p. 26.

¹⁸ Bhatt, Ela R. Interviewed by: Chatterjee, Mirai (July 2000), Seminar # 491, <http://www.india-seminar.com/2000/491.htm> (accessed 4 January 2015).

negative attitude....they are bypassed” by urban planners and national policy-making bodies.¹⁹ Naturally, this sets them against the authorities responsible for maintaining law and order. In the absence of a transparent regulatory environment,²⁰ city authorities either tolerate, forcefully evict or attempt to regulate them. None of these regulatory tasks is undertaken in consultation with the vendors or their organizations, yielding further conflict.

Kaliben’s Struggle for a Vending Space

Kaliben used to sell her old clothes once a week at the Lal Quila Sunday Market. This market can be traced as far back as the time of Mughal rule in Delhi. Known as ‘Bibi Khanam Bazaar’ during the Mughal era, later renamed ‘Kabadi Bazaar’ during British rule, the market would come to life once a week, on Sundays. It was one of the oldest ‘natural market[s]’²¹ in Delhi, where street vendors sold a variety of items, old and new.

Conveniently accessible, the market catered mostly to the needs of the poor. The market was relocated several times on grounds of causing congestion, but in 1987 vendors ultimately found a haven just behind the Red Fort, and became popularly known as the Lal Quila Sunday Market. In 2000, the vendors were evicted, ostensibly for security reasons. Officials assured vendors they would be given an alternate marketplace. The situation was best narrated by Kuldip Nayar, an eminent journalist, in a national daily, *The Hindu*: “The bazaar was a veritable treasure-trove where people would often chance on things they desperately wanted. It was a poor man’s market, but now it is a stone wall. Some hawkers are still sitting cross-legged nearby, wondering where to go...”²²

With no alternative marketplace for vending, vendors’ income dropped sharply. In desperation, many vendors started clamoring for alternative spots in lucrative areas of the city. Abrupt eviction by municipal authorities and harassment by police became a perennial problem. Rent-seeking, which became rampant, further aggravated the misery. With no social-security umbrella to turn to, some vendors pawned their jewelry, while others incurred debt. Their children dropped out of school to contribute towards the meager family income. It was a very difficult time for Kaliben. One vendor, Ratan Singh, committed suicide. It was obvious that giving the vendors access to a legitimate marketplace was essential to shield them from constant threat and enable them to achieve secure and sustainable livelihoods.

The Crusade —The Sewa Way

Kaliben realized her vulnerability. She could not fight the system single-handedly and yet she had to fight for her livelihood.

Kaliben knew she could not address the challenges she faced on her own. It was at this time that someone told her about SEWA and its efforts to mobilize street vendors and other informal workers, in another part of Delhi [see **Exhibit 1**]. She learned others were facing similar

¹⁹ Bhowmik, Sharit K., ed. (2010) *Street Vendors in The Global Urban Economy*, New Delhi: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, p. 290.

²⁰ The absence of a policy or law refers to the period when the Kaliben case study was being played out. Since then, the Government of India has rolled out the ‘National Policy on Urban Street Vendors, 2004’, which benefited street vendors by elevating their profile and need for a secure livelihood. However, the implementation of the policy remained challenging, and finally, in 2014, a law on urban street vendors was passed. These developments are discussed later in the case study.

²¹ A ‘natural market’ means a “market where sellers and buyers have traditionally congregated for the sale and purchase of products or services and has been determined as such by the local authority on the recommendations of the Town Vending Committee.” The Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act (2014) para.2.(1)(e), <http://www.indiacode.nic.in/acts2014/7%20of%202014.pdf> (accessed 4 January 2015).

²² Nayar, Kuldip (8 October 2001) “Hounded and harassed”, *The Hindu*, <http://www.thehindu.com/2001/10/08/stories/05082523.htm> (accessed 3 January 2015).

problems and that long-term solutions were possible. She began to hope and gathered more information about SEWA Delhi's activities, which centered around mobilizing female vegetable vendors, procuring police-issued Identity Cards, and other such initiatives. She was struck by the idea of Identity Cards that allowed street vendors to access previously-closed gated colonies, and which also liberated them, to some extent, from rent-seeking. SEWA also motivated vendors to form self-help groups (SHGs) to extricate themselves from moneylenders and set-up education centers for school dropouts.

Kaliben also learnt that SEWA had a long history, going back to the early 1970s, of mobilizing unorganized vendors. One of the five women who started SEWA in 1972 was a street vendor. Kaliben decided to approach SEWA for help and was able to convince the Delhi wing of SEWA to take the matter up. In order to break the vicious circle of poverty and insecurity and to achieve its twin goals of 'full-employment'²³ and 'self-reliance'²⁴, SEWA decided to work assiduously towards relocation of the historic market.

SEWA adopted a dual strategy through a rights-based approach of 'struggle and development' in its quest for entitlements, such as hawking zones, representation in town vending committees and designated space for vendors in city plans, as well as empowerment, such as strengthening vendors' bargaining and decision-making power. As a first step a *sammelan*²⁵ was organized. Elaben and Renanaben (Renana Jhabvala)²⁶ were invited to share their experience of successfully mobilizing Ahmedabad vendors. Several Ahmedabad vendors attended the meeting and highlighted the need for protecting livelihood, ending exploitation at the hands of various agencies, and providing street vendors a permanent space and legal identity. Kaliben found their stories inspiring, and was fired by the spirit of collective activism. She felt empowered by being a part of a large organization comprising many women like her, and suddenly realized she was not alone.

SEWA convened a General Body Meeting of street vendors in Raghbir Nagar, and a 13-member Vendors' Committee was elected as their representative. The Committee's first task was to finalize a list of all the vendors previously in the market, so genuine claims for alternate markets could be made on their behalf. The other responsibility undertaken was to build vendors' strength and unity in order to engage with government officials, police authorities and other union leaders. The Committee thus became a vital link between vendors and other stakeholders. SEWA trained Committee members to engage with the city bureaucracy and the Vendors' Committee represented SEWA at all public forums.

Engaging with Stakeholders

Engaging with street-level bureaucracy was a daunting task, especially for poor, illiterate female vendors. SEWA Delhi adopted a two-pronged strategy. On the one hand, the Vendors' Committee negotiated with the police and municipal authorities not to evict vendors from the spots where they were already squatting. On the other, the Committee advocated that the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) honor its promise of providing an alternate market site. The Vendors' Committee met police officials and municipal authorities regularly. As expected, they initially received a lukewarm response. Some street-level and municipal bureaucrats even warned the vendors they would be evicted if they continued to occupy their current spots.

²³ 'Full-employment' entails organizing members to obtain work, income, food and social security.

²⁴ 'Self-reliance' demands individual and collective effort in taking informed decisions and risks.

²⁵ 'Sammelan' refers to a symposium.

²⁶ Renana Jhabvala is President of SEWA Bharat.

Around this time, in early 2000, a supportive environment was emerging in India. Several studies²⁷ had highlighted the prevalence of street vendors in the country and the positive role they played. The media was getting sensitized to the issue, largely due to the efforts of SEWA and similar organizations, and had started reporting the harassment and humiliation vendors faced. The mindset of seeing vendors only as encroachers was slowly being challenged.

SEWA had also gained national and international credibility as a legitimate organization of the poor. Elaben Bhatt, SEWA's founder, had emerged as a crusader for women's economic rights and highlighted the vendors' plight in the Indian Parliament. "If we are able to increase our organized strength, make strategic alliances and link up with other groups like planners and academicians, we will be in a better position to dialogue with the political structures."²⁸ The well-known 1995 'Bellagio International Declaration of Street Vendors'²⁹ was followed by the establishment of several international and national advocacy networks, such as WIEGO in 1997,³⁰ NASVI in 1998, and Streetnet in 2002.³¹

SEWA's judicial activism during the previous years had yielded several court judgments in favor of street vending as a legitimate form of livelihood. In 1985, the Supreme Court of India ruled that the "hawkers have the right to do their business" and schemes should be framed to regulate 'hawking' and 'non-hawking' zones.³² Four years later, in a landmark judgment, the Supreme Court acknowledged street vending to be a 'fundamental right' and stated that "the right to carry on trade or business mentioned in Article 19(1)(g)³³ of the Constitution, on street pavements, if properly regulated, cannot be denied on the ground that the streets are meant exclusively for passing or re-passing and for no other use."³⁴ In the same judgment, the court remarked that "the small traders on the said walks can considerably add to the comfort and convenience of the general public, by making available ordinary articles of everyday use for a comparatively lesser price."³⁵ Several other judgments underscored the street trade's contributions and citizens' right to earn a livelihood using the public streets for trade and business. These judgments and strategic alliances became important legal tools for advocacy and networking, and for convincing policy-makers of street vendors' legitimate rights. In 2001, the Indian government set up a national task force, with SEWA as a member, to frame a national policy for urban street vendors.

Two years after the government's decision, however, the Vendors' Committee was still shuttling from one office to the other. The Committee decided to adopt a more aggressive posture and started exerting pressure on the people's representatives, Ministers and Members of Parliament (MPs). When members of the Vendors' Committee met the local MP, he referred the matter to the Municipal Commissioner and the police chief. The dynamic Municipal

²⁷ Bhowmik, Sharit K. (2001) "Hawkers and the Urban Informal Sector: A Study of Street Vending in Seven Cities", <http://wiego.org/sites/wiego.org/files/publications/files/Bhowmik-Hawkers-URBAN-INFORMAL-SECTOR.pdf> (accessed 5 January 2015).

²⁸ Bhatt, Ela R. Interviewed by: Chatterjee, Mirai (July 2000), Seminar # 491, <http://www.india-seminar.com/2000/491.htm> (accessed 4 January 2015).

²⁹ <http://nasvnet.org/userfiles/file/BELLAGIO%20INTERNATIONAL%20DECLARATION%20OF%20STREET%20VENDORS.pdf> (accessed 15 January 2015).

³⁰ Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) is a global action-research-policy network that seeks to improve the status of the working poor, especially women, in the informal economy. More information about WIEGO can be found at its website, www.wiego.org.

³¹ Streetnet is an international alliance of street vendors which aims to promote the exchange of information and ideas on critical issues facing street vendors, as well as practical organizing and advocacy strategies. More information about Streetnet can be found at its website, www.streetnet.org.za.

³² Bombay Hawkers' Union vs. Bombay Municipal Corporation (1985) 3 S.C.C. 525, p. 9, <http://judis.nic.in/supremecourt/imgs1.aspx?filename=9252> (accessed 5 January 2015).

³³ Article 19(1)(g) of the Indian Constitution gives the Indian citizen a fundamental right to practice any profession, or to carry on any occupation, trade or business.

³⁴ Sodan Singh vs. New Delhi Municipal Committee (1989) SCR (3) 1038, para.16, <http://judis.nic.in/supremecourt/imgs1.aspx?filename=7835> (accessed 3 January 2015).

³⁵ Ibid.

Commissioner invited the Vendors' Committee to engage in a relocation process. There was hope for Kaliben and the other vendors. The police invited the Vendors' Committee for talks and conducted a joint survey to identify suitable sites for market relocation. SEWA short-listed five locations after careful consultation with vendors, other trade unions, urban planners and architects. These were forwarded to the traffic police for a 'no objection' clearance. The official machinery had finally started crawling into action.

SEWA delegations met the Lieutenant Governor of Delhi³⁶ and other senior government officials to push their agenda. Meantime, the Indian government rolled out the 'National Policy on Urban Street Vendors, 2004,' a milestone for the street vendors' movement. The policy categorically stated that "no hawkker/ street vendor should be arbitrarily evicted in the name of 'beautification' of the cityscape."³⁷ Wherever vendors had to be relocated, the policy goes on to assert the "affected vendors/representative's involvement in planning and implementation of the rehabilitation project" and that they "should be assisted in their efforts to improve their livelihoods and standards of living or at least to restore them, in real terms to pre-evicted levels."³⁸ The vendors could sense victory.

A Different Sunday

One of the identified market sites was Velodrome Road near Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium. Luckily, the police department did not have any objection, nor did any other government agency. The Velodrome Market was finally allocated to the vendors on 21 May 2005 but there were still several unresolved issues, such as failure to demarcate the vendor squatting area and to issue licenses, which delayed the opening.

The Vending Committee continued to interact with the MCD Commissioner, highlighting problems and proposing solutions. Some competing unions were not keen on regularization of the space and made threats, even resorting to violence. SEWA's strategy all along had been to maintain a corruption-free eco-system. It sensed mischief and met with the MCD Commissioner again. The Commissioner promised to visit the market soon and directed his officials to finalize the issuance of licenses prior to his visit.

The Commissioner visited the market on 19 June 2005. It was a 'different Sunday' for the street vendors of the erstwhile Lal Quila Sunday Market. After more than four long and grueling years of struggle, the vendors finally had smiles on their faces. The establishment of the Velodrome Road Market was a dream come true. Kaliben was the most excited of the lot. Her life was transformed. She could now think of paying her debts and putting her children back in school. She experienced the power of organized strength in giving her an identity, generating confidence, and enhancing her dignity by repositioning and re-branding vendors as hardworking 'micro-entrepreneurs'.

Back to Square One

The happiness was short-lived. In early 2009, ahead of the 2010 Commonwealth Games, the construction of a flyover over Velodrome Road once again dislocated thousands of street vendors. The vendors were assured that the market would be reinstated after the Commonwealth Games. SEWA used this opportunity to design a model vendors' market, which they submitted

³⁶ The Lieutenant Governor of Delhi is the administrative head of the local Delhi Government.

³⁷ National Policy on Urban Street Vendors, 2004, para.5. <http://www.nasvinet.org/userfiles/file/National%20Policy-2004.pdf> (accessed 5 January 2015).

³⁸ Ibid.

to municipal authorities. SEWA's initiative to develop Velodrome Road Bazaar as a 'Model Market' would demonstrate that vendors could also beautify their vending places, and this would further protect them. SEWA sought architectural guidance in redesigning space allocation so as not to impede traffic. After hectic parleys with the Public Works Department, MCD and the police, SEWA managed to execute a memorandum of understanding (MoU) in 2011[see **Exhibit 2**].

However, six years later, the market's reinstatement has still been stalled indefinitely. Ironically, now it is the vendors and their competing unions that have failed to resolve issues pertaining to the allocation of space and the number of vendors to be accommodated. Several cases have been filed in the courts to settle the issues. Meanwhile, an illegal market has cropped nearby under the auspices of some of the unions, the MCD and the police. Alamudin Dehlvi, President of the 'Saptahik Merchants Welfare Association,' justified the emergence of the illegal market as an economic necessity for thousands of street vendors in the absence of a functional Velodrome Market.³⁹ Illegal rent-seeking has again become rampant.

The Velodrome Road weekly market's vendors have been facing acute hardships for more than six years now. Ashwini Sharma, General Secretary of the 'Old Edward Park Bazaar Association,' had a different take on the impasse and alleged that SEWA is stalling efforts to reach an amicable solution.⁴⁰ SEWA's efforts at reconciliation have not succeeded. SEWA, however, continued to maintain a calculated patience.

Conclusion

India's cities encounter problems familiar worldwide, such as increasing urbanization, congestion, lack of sufficient formal job opportunities, and growing informal economies. These issues, coupled with the urban-elite dream of achieving the status of a 'world class city,' have led to large-scale street-vendor evictions. Poor vendors are pitched against strong and powerful adversaries.

Until recently, even the policy environment was hostile to the cause, with the police and other authorities acting vindictively. However, vendors have been able to make small wins and get their voices heard only by building strong and responsive organizations that give them a collective voice and bargaining power. Kaliben's struggle may not yet have a tangible outcome, but she has found her voice and gained recognition in the city's policy-making arena. Kaliben's story is a hopeful one. Initially treated as an illegal inhabitant by city authorities, she was later invited to design a street-vendor market.

Kaliben's struggle and SEWA's intervention highlight two key challenges bearing on the issue of street vendors and urban planning. First, any hard-won vendor rights are often short-lived owing to urban growth and infrastructural pressure. The rising cost of land and implementation of new infrastructure projects sharply increases the pressure for vendor removal. Second, the illegal rent-seeking eco-system poses an obstacle to any legal, corruption-free solution. Even after a legal and appropriate space was allocated, the market was not allowed to function. Six years later, the story, far from over, is poised at a critical juncture. Will the once-flourishing market be established again? Will SEWA's campaign mitigate the social and economic exploitation of street vendors, and help alter their social image by legally empowering them to become an essential and valuable part of city life? Will the contribution of street vendors as an integral part of the city's economy ever be fully recognized?

³⁹ Dehlvi, Alamudin Interviewed by: Singh, Sudhir Pratap (4 February 2014).

⁴⁰ Sharma, Ashwini Interviewed by: Singh, Sudhir Pratap (4 February 2014).

Meanwhile, a welcome new development in the policy arena was the enactment of a street-vendor law. The Indian Parliament passed ‘The Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act’ in March 2014. This legislation has several provisions for protecting the livelihood, social security and human rights of millions of urban street vendors and will empower many poor urban households that subsist on vending to attain the necessities of life in a secure, sustained and dignified manner. While the law has been hailed as ‘an enabling legislative instrument, aimed at empowering the lives of more than 10 million urban street vendors and hawkers of India’⁴¹, its effectiveness has yet to be proved. If implemented properly, the legislation could help put a stop to the extortion racket run by police and municipal inspectors. Formalized interaction between street vendors and municipalities would contribute to the design and implementation of more inclusive city development plans, in which street vendors would occupy an integral place.

⁴¹ Abhigyan, R., and Shankar, Anurag (8 March 2014), ‘Street Vendors’ Livelihood Protection Act: Enabling Legislative Instrument to Empower Lives of Grassroots Entrepreneurs’, Comments, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. - XLIX No. 10, <http://www.epw.in/editorials/law-street-vendors.html> (accessed 3 January 2015).

EXHIBIT1: THE SELF EMPLOYED WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION (SEWA)

SEWA is the acronym for the 'Self Employed Women's Association.' In Hindi, *sewa* means 'service.' SEWA was born out of the women's movement of the Textile Labour Association in Ahmedabad, India in December 1971 and founded by Ela R. Bhatt, a lawyer and labor leader. Formally registered as a trade union in April 1972, SEWA is the largest women's union in India and a pioneer in organizing informal labor. The SEWA Movement has expanded rapidly over the past 40 years and now has a thriving membership of around 1.9 million. Today, it operates in 13 Indian states through more than 100 cooperatives and federations working toward the economic and social empowerment of poor working-class women.

SEWA works as a cooperative union. Its members are poor women working in the informal sector as hawkers, street vendors, home-based workers, contract laborers and service-providers, or who run small businesses. SEWA's bottom-up approach provides comprehensive support and addresses a multitude of issues surrounding the working and living conditions of self-employed women. It organizes a multiplicity of services, such as banking, loans, insurance, training, healthcare and legal aid. It organizes women workers to attain the twin goals of full employment, i.e., (work, income, food and social security), and self-reliance by strengthening their bargaining power and offering them new alternatives.

SEWA has significantly influenced national and global policy on informal labor and has had an impact on the mind-set of government, industry and multilateral institutions such as the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the World Bank. This top-down approach implemented at the same time as its bottom-up strategy has changed perception and policy by giving the informal sector greater visibility. It has been instrumental in establishing several national and international networks and collaborative bodies, such as NASVI, Streetnet and WIEGO.

SEWA Bharat

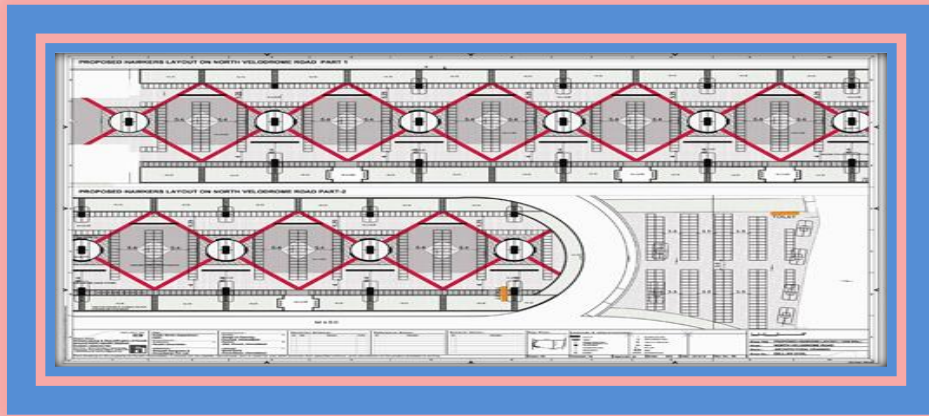
The rapid progress made by SEWA in organizing women in Gujarat led to the demand for similar organizations in other states. SEWA Bharat was established in 1982 to facilitate the formation and promote the growth of new member organizations across the country. It is a federation of SEWA member organizations, with the mandate to highlight issues concerning women working in the informal sector, and to strengthen the capacity of organizations that serve the interests of these women. Presently, there are nine SEWA member organizations.

SEWA Delhi

SEWA initiated its activities in Delhi in 1999, helping female vegetable vendors in Jehangirpuri form Self-Help Groups (SHGs). Street vendors from Raghbir Nagar joined SEWA to voice their need for a permanent and legally recognised place for their work. SEWA Delhi has been involved in a wide spectrum of programs and campaigns, ranging from livelihood protection and promotion, advocacy, micro-finance, social security, vocational training and better working conditions. It organizes and unites street vendors to protect their right to livelihood, security and legal identity, enable them to obtain licenses from municipal authorities and shield them from police harassment and exploitation.

See <http://www.sewa.org/> to learn more about the SEWA movement, its sister organizations and services.

EXHIBIT 2: MODEL VENDORS' MARKET



Source: SEWA Delhi.Used with permission.



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Street Vendors' of Delhi
Photographs by Sudhir Pratap Singh

