

STREET VENDING AS A VIABLE SOURCE OF LIVELIHOOD IN NAGALAND, INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Street vending is a vital means of livelihood for women in the informal sector of Nagaland, India. This study, conducted during the year 2021 in Dimapur district, aimed to examine the socio-economic status, work patterns, income levels, and motivations of women vegetable vendors operating in four key markets. A descriptive research design was used, and data were collected from 100 randomly selected women vendors across Dimapur New Market, Wednesday Market, Chümoukedima Saturday Market, and Medziphema Friday Market. Findings revealed that 76% of the respondents operated in only one market week⁻¹ due to high transportation costs, limited produce availability, and family responsibilities. Most vendors (36%) worked for 7–9 hours daily while managing household duties. All respondents expressed pride and job satisfaction in their work. A notable 68% of the women reported earning more than ₹ 1,00,000 annually, especially those selling leafy greens, which are in high demand due to their health benefits and perceived organic quality. The study concludes that street vending is not only a survival strategy but also a meaningful source of income and self-reliance for women in Nagaland. There is a need for formal recognition, policy support, and infrastructure development to enhance the economic security and dignity of women street vendors.

(Key words: Naga, women, street vendors, Dimapur, livelihood, unorganized market)

INTRODUCTION

Vegetable vendors act as a linkage between the farmer and the market. It is very common to see women as vegetable vendors and we find hardly any or no men in this marketing sector. Street vending is a widespread form of informal employment that provides critical livelihood opportunities, especially for women in developing regions.

In many parts of India, including Nagaland, women dominate vegetable vending in local markets, serving as important intermediaries between small-scale farmers and urban consumers. Their role is not limited to selling produce but extends to maintaining local food varieties, ensuring food security, and supporting family economies (Sankaran *et al.*, 2006). Women's participation in this informal sector provides self-employment opportunities with minimal capital investment, flexibility to balance household responsibilities, and a pathway out of poverty (Pawar, 2016; Bhat and Nengroo, 2013 ; Rani and Reddy, 2015).

Despite its significance, street vending remains largely unrecognized and poorly supported by formal policies in Nagaland. Factors such as limited transport

options, irregular supply of goods, and family obligations restrict vendors' operational scope (Diwakar and Anand, 2014; Husain *et al.*, 2015). Yet, the sector continues to grow, driven by increasing urbanization, migration from rural areas, and rising consumer demand for fresh and organic vegetables (Chandra and Jain, 2015; Mengistu and Jibat, 2015).

In Nagaland, women's participation in the informal sector are limited to selling locally grown farm produce in the daily and weekly markets in and around the main town square like district headquarters. This self-employment strategy of the rural and semi-urban women for livelihood and poverty alleviation is not acknowledged and almost unseen. Understanding the socio-economic characteristics and challenges faced by women vendors is essential to designing targeted interventions that can improve their livelihoods and promote inclusive urban development. This study focuses on women vegetable vendors in Dimapur district, the commercial hub of Nagaland, aiming to assess their working conditions, income levels, and motivations, thereby highlighting their contribution to local economies and family welfare.

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MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study was conducted during year 2021, in the state of Nagaland, the 16th state of India, which covers an area of 16,579 sq. km. It has a total population of 19, 78,502 out of which, 9, 53,853 are women (Anonymous, 2011). Dimapur district was selected purposively as it is known as a commercial hub where many vendors come from different places to sell their goods. Four Popular markets of Dimapur were selected for the study namely, Dimapur New Market, Dimapur Wednesday Market, Chumoukedima Saturday Market and Medziphema Friday Market. 25 women vendors from each of the above mentioned markets were selected as respondents. Data were recorded on distribution of respondents based on average working hours, number of markets covered, job satisfaction, purpose of street vending and earning level from vegetable vending. The data collected from the respondents were scored, tabulated and analysed using suitable methods. The statistical methods used in the present study were frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation and ranking.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Average working hours

Table 1 shows that the majority (36%) of respondents worked for 7–9 hours daily. This can be attributed to their dual role as homemakers and vendors, requiring them to complete domestic chores before starting vending activities. The need to return home earlier also led some to sell at lower prices for faster sales. Similar findings were reported by Bhat and Nengroo (2013), who observed that women street vendors in Kashmir worked for 6–10 hours day⁻¹, balancing household duties with vending. Pawar (2016) also noted that women in Kolhapur faced time constraints due to family responsibilities, leading to moderate work hours.

Number of markets covered in a week

Table 2 discussed about the number of market covered by the respondents and the study inferred that, a significant number of women (76%) covered only one market week⁻¹, primarily Medziphema Friday Market, due to limited produce, high transport costs, and family obligations. Diwakar and Anand (2014) observed that women street vendors often limited their operational areas due to similar constraints, such as the burden of childcare and lack of affordable transportation. In Bangladesh, Husain *et al.* (2015) found that most vendors operated within close proximity to their homes to manage both economic and family duties efficiently.

Job satisfaction

Table 3 established that, all respondents (100%) expressed satisfaction and pride in their work. They felt empowered by earning honestly, supporting their families, and improving their standard of living. Mengistu and Jibat (2015) noted a similar trend in Jimma, Ethiopia, where street

vending was a source of pride for disadvantaged women due to its role in poverty alleviation. Sankaran *et al.* (2006) emphasized that for many women, vending is not merely a job but a pathway to dignity and identity in public spaces.

Purpose of street vending

Table 4 Interpretation revealed about the purpose of street vending and found that, most women (78%) engaged in vending to supplement household income due to large family sizes. Financial independence was also cited by 75% of respondents, indicating that vending was not only a necessity but also a means of self-reliance. Pawar (2016) reported that vegetable vending was the primary source of income for urban women with limited education, contributing to financial independence. Husain *et al.* (2015) found that in Dhaka, Bangladesh, women vendors sought vending as a stable income source to escape poverty and assert economic agency.

Earning level from vegetable vending

Table 5 presented their income generated through the vegetable vending. A majority (68%) earned more than Rs. 100000 annually, primarily those selling leafy vegetables, which are popular due to their perceived organic nature. The trend reflects changing consumer preferences toward health-conscious diets. Chandra and Jain (2015) emphasized that urban consumers increasingly prefer fresh and organic vegetables from local vendors. Similarly, Diwakar and Anand (2014) found that women vendors with niche or perishable products like greens earned more than those selling dry goods.

This study reveals that street vending serves as a vital livelihood strategy for women in Dimapur, Nagaland. Women vendors, despite facing constraints such as transportation costs and family responsibilities, manage to sustain themselves through vegetable vending, often achieving substantial earnings and expressing high job satisfaction. Their role is crucial in supporting household incomes and maintaining food availability in local markets.

Recognizing the economic and social contributions of women street vendors is imperative. Policymakers should develop supportive frameworks that include formal recognition, provision of affordable transport, access to microfinance, and dedicated vending spaces. Such measures would enhance vendor welfare, promote financial independence, and strengthen the informal sector's role in urban economic development.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents based on average working hours (N = 100)

Sl.No.	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	4–5 hours	6	6.00%
2	5–7 hours	33	33.00%
3	7–9 hours	36	36.00%
4	More than 10 hours	25	25.00%

Table 2. Distribution of respondents based on number of markets covered (N = 100)

Category	Frequency	Percentage
1 market	76	76.00%
2 markets	17	17.00%
3 markets	7	7.00%

Table 3. Distribution of respondents based on job satisfaction (N = 100)

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Proud	100	100.00%
Not proud	0	0.00%

Table 4. Distribution of respondents based on purpose of street vending (N = 100)

Purpose	Frequency	Percentage
Subsidiary income	78	78.00%
Financial independence	75	75.00%
Others	53	53.00%

Table 5. Distribution of respondents based on earning level from vegetable vending (N = 100)

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Low (< 1 50,000/year)	10	10.00%
Medium (1 50,000–1 1,00,000)	22	22.00%
High (> 1 1,00,000/year)	68	68.00%

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