

Urban Street Vending: Problems and Opportunities

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Abstract

Street vending is essential to urban economies in developing countries like India, where it provides livelihoods for the urban poor. However, street vendors often face social marginalization, legal uncertainties, and infrastructure challenges. This study examines the impact of street vending on urban development in India, focusing on relevant policies and urban planning measures. A comparison of various cities reveals management strategies such as designated vending zones, public-private partnerships, and policy frameworks like the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014. Global case studies from cities like Singapore and Cape Town highlight best practices for integrating street vending into urban planning while maintaining mobility and economic viability. The research underscores the importance of inclusive urban planning that supports street vendors. By implementing effective policies, providing infrastructure support, and involving vendors in governance, cities can create vibrant urban environments that promote economic growth and social equity.

Keywords: Street vendors, urban planning, urban environment, urban mobility

INTRODUCTION

Street vendors play an essential role in urban economies worldwide, especially in developing countries, where important services or amenities are provided to local communities. Working in the informal sector puts street vendors at risk of vulnerabilities and social marginalization. Due to India's growing urban migration and shrinking formal sector, street vending and hawking have become essential sources of income for India's urban poor.

Because of its low skill requirements and little financial commitment, vending has become a substantial source of income for many urban poor people. Vending employees try to solve their financial problems with the resources they have. They do not engage in begging, theft, or extortion, nor do they demand employment from the government. Regardless of the location and type of vendors, it appears that individuals try to live with dignity and self-respect by engaging in frequent vending activities (Ray & Mishra, 2011) [1].

The informal sector in India provides income for the urban poor due to poverty and limited economic opportunities. With diminishing protected jobs, these individuals rely on the informal economy for survival. Hawking/vending is a viable income source for the urban poor (K. Bhowmik, 2001) [2].

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While this study examines the impact of street vendors on urban development in India, considering various policies proposed and implemented by the government, several critical aspects remain underexplored (Figure 1). It incorporates the study of the impact of street vending activities on public infrastructure, such as roads and public spaces. The research aims to identify solutions that protect street vendors' livelihoods and enhance urban lovability,

ensuring a balanced approach to urban planning and integrating street vending and roadside commercial activities into urban planning. Moreover, the transformation of street vending post-pandemic and the impact of digital platforms are still yet to be fully studied. This research aims to address some of these gaps while recognizing the necessity for additional exploration of these emerging aspects.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Role and Significance of Street Vendors in Urban Context

For many people who might not otherwise have access to official employment possibilities, street vending provides a significant source of income in urban areas. For example, it has been shown that street sellers in Enugu City, Nigeria, provide easily accessible services, saving locals money on transportation and time. To guarantee affordability for low-income clients, they also implement creative pricing techniques. Additionally, street sellers enhance economic dynamism in the community by promoting consumption and offering reasonably priced goods. In addition to satisfying customer needs, their presence in public areas encourages business dealings that might not take place in more official settings (JOHN-NSA & UMOH, 2024) [3].

Street sellers enrich the social and cultural fabric of cities in addition to their financial influence. They promote social contact, aid in the development of communities, and capture the variety of urban cultures. Street vending, for instance, has become a vital aspect of the city's liveliness and everyday life in Baghdad, Iraq, where its predominance has grown dramatically over the past 15 years.

Street vendors contribute to the preservation and promotion of regional cultures by offering traditional crafts and cuisine. Their endeavors frequently operate as a link between city dwellers and their cultural legacy, enhancing the urban environment (Al-Jundi et al., 2022) [4].



Figure 1. Street vending in India.

Despite their contributions, street vendors frequently deal with issues like social security, lack of license, and persecution from the government. They are susceptible to evictions and legal ambiguities because of their informal status. Some urban policies are moving towards incorporating street vendors into city planning in recognition of their significance, making sure that public areas can support their operations without sacrificing hygienic conditions or safety.

Incorporating street vendors into urban planning improves the inclusiveness and vibrancy of urban areas while also protecting their livelihoods. More resilient and vibrant urban economies can result from policies that encourage street selling (Zhang & Shao, 2024) [5].

Types of Street Vending Areas/Markets Based on Locations

Every street vending location offers unique features. The role of the location within the city, the retailing hierarchy, the kind of goods sold, and the operating hours all influence the kind of street vending locations, and the amount of space needed (Figure 2).

The following four major market types can be distinguished:

1. *City Market*: The city market is situated in the heart of the city and sells specialized clothing and other items.
2. *Neighbourhood Market*: Local markets that offer everyday items like bread, meat, and vegetables are situated in different parts of the community.
3. *Street Market*: The street market is situated along the street and offers items such as vegetables and cooked cuisine to passersby.
4. *Hub Market*: These are situated in pedestrian-heavy areas, such as a hospital, a center of worship, or a transit hub (Raj & Jolly, 2020) [6].

Street vending markets thrive in favorable conditions, such as high movement without any obstruction or traffic congestion and good accessibility to the market for pedestrians as well as vehicles along with the proper parking spaces for the vehicles. Natural markets occur naturally around public congregations, railway stations, bus stands, hospitals, parks, schools, residential colonies, and temples. Street vending areas should also be visually attractive so that they can be integrated into urban planning.

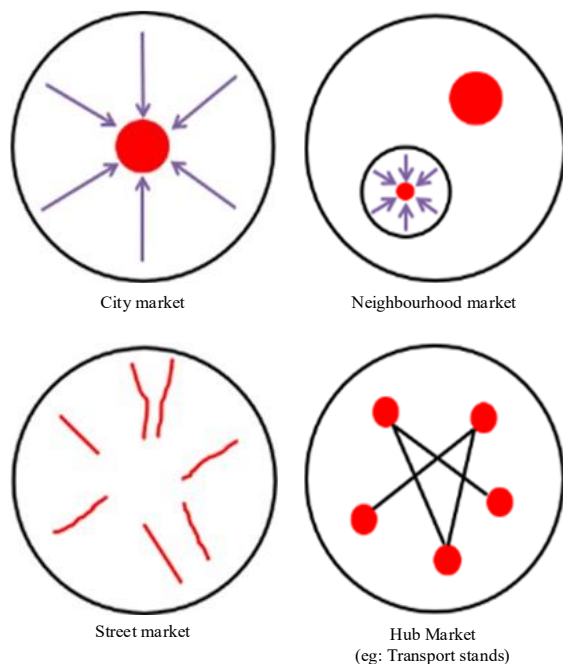


Figure 2. Types of street vending markets.

Source: Raj & Jolly, 2020 [6]

Markets must provide basic human infrastructure needs like drinking water, an area for the disposal of waste, and a clean toilet (Raj & Jolly, 2020) [6].

Space Requirement for Street Vending-Road Cross-Sections
Challenges and Issues Faced by Street Vendors in India

Street vendors face many challenges and issues due to low socio-economic profiles, (Figure 3) harassment by police, long hours, lack of urban infrastructure facilities, and climate. Vendors face long working hours, damage to goods, and additional requirements. Uncertainty in site allocation makes it difficult for vendors to move carts on damaged roads. They also lack shelter and storage space. These issues are often overlooked in urban planning and land-use planning (Jariwala, 2021) [7].

Challenges and Issues due to Street Vendors in India

In India, street vendors contribute significantly to the urban economy by offering reasonably priced goods and services, but their presence on the roadways causes several problems including pedestrian mobility, traffic, cleanliness, and urban management. Road and pavement encroachment increases the danger of accidents by pushing people onto congested streets and contributing to extreme traffic congestion. Vendors frequently take up parking spots, which results in careless car parking and further impedes efficient traffic flow. Customers congregating around booths close to moving cars create road safety risks, and improper trash disposal leads to sanitary problems and health problems as garbage builds up (Bhowmik, 2001) [2].

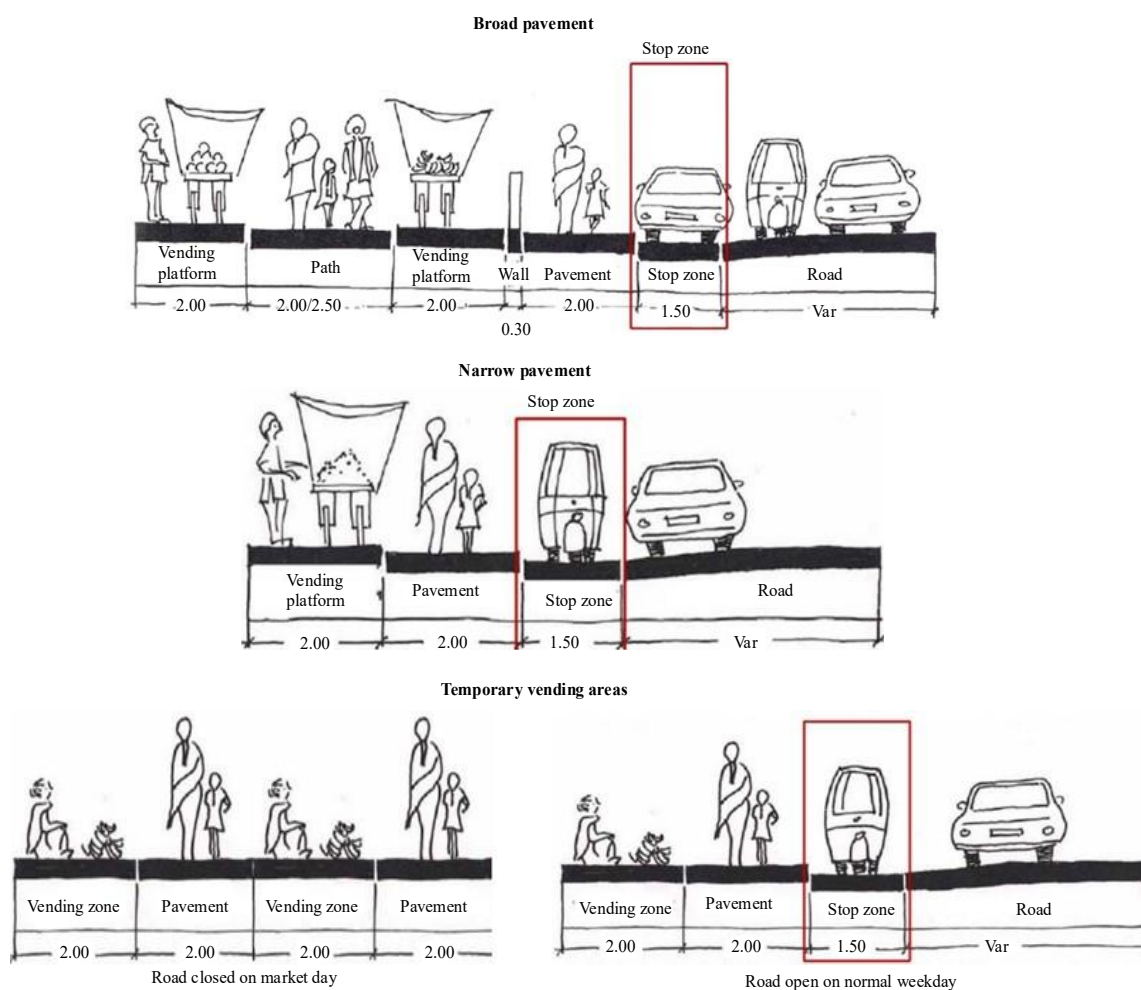


Figure 3. Road sections showing the relation between street vending and other activities on the road.

Source: Raj & Jolly, 2020 [6].

Policies, Schemes, and Guidelines for Street Vendors

The Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014, is a law in India that regulates the livelihood and Regulation of street vendors. It establishes Town Vending Committees (TVCs) to assign vending zones, grant certificates, and conduct surveys. The Act also outlines relocation criteria, dispute resolution procedures, and conditions for vendors to operate under (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2014) [8].

The Uttar Pradesh Scheme for Street Vendors, 2016

For the registration of street vendors, a survey is conducted. After that survey data filling is done and within a span of 60 days license of vending is issued to street vendors.



Figure 4. Landmark court judgments and policies on street vending between 1980 and 2014.
 Source: Centre for Civil Society, 2019) [9]

There are certain terms and conditions for issuing the license to the street vendors:

1. Restrictions on building permanent structures for stationary vending.
2. Regular and timely payment of fees determined by the Town Vending Committee.
3. Waste from street vending is not to be thrown on roads, footpaths, or sewer lines.
4. Cleanliness and hygiene of vending areas and adjoining areas.
5. Vending only in the allotted place and time mentioned in the certificate.
6. Maintenance of civic amenities and safety of public property.
7. Ensure smooth flow of traffic/vehicles and public convenience.
8. Prohibition of selling prohibited goods and activities polluting the environment.
9. Relocation of street vendors to adjoining vending zones if necessary.
10. Variation of vending fees timely by street vending committee Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending 2017) [10].

A Comparative Study of Street Vendors from Indian Cities

Street vendors comprise people who have been unable to get regular jobs (Figure 4). This section of workers also helps the urban poor get their necessities at affordable prices. Thus, street vending is an important occupation for the survival of the urban poor (Dasgupta Sur et al., 2024) [11].

The case studies were selected strategically to gain an understanding of different challenges, policies, and practices that would provide insight into the management of street vendors and integration into urban planning.

The following cities were studied Ahmedabad, Bhopal, and Bhubaneswar (Raj & Jolly, 2020) [6]. Virtually along with live study of two cities: Chandigarh & Noida.

Indian cities like Ahmedabad, Bhopal, and Bhubaneswar have implemented diverse street vendor management strategies to address urban planning challenges (Table 1). These include innovative reuse of under-flyover spaces, time-sharing models, and dedicated vending zones. These strategies improve urban mobility, infrastructure, and sustainability. Collaborative planning and adherence to the Street Vendors Act, 2014 ensure vendor rights protection and promote organized urban development.

Street vending plays a crucial role in urban economies, providing livelihoods for millions and enhancing the vibrancy and cultural diversity of cities. This case study focuses on street vendors in Chandigarh's Rehri Market and Noida's Sectors 29 and 37, exploring their unique challenges, strategies, and contributions to the local economy.

In Chandigarh, the Rehri Market serves as a bustling hub for vendors offering a wide variety of goods, from fresh produce to handmade crafts, showcasing the city's rich cultural heritage. In contrast, Noida's Sectors 29 and 37 are famous for their vibrant street food scenes, drawing locals and visitors who seek affordable and diverse culinary experiences [12].

By examining the operational dynamics, regulatory environments, and community interactions of these vendors, these case studies aim to highlight the critical role of street vending in urban settings and the necessity for supportive policies that promote their sustainability and integration into the fabric of the city.

A Comparative Study of Lesson Learnt from Best Practices of Street Vending Across the Globe

To enhance our understanding of street vending in Indian cities, (Table 2) valuable lessons can be drawn from international case studies, including those from Singapore (Lim LY) [13] and Cape Town (South Africa). These cities demonstrate innovative strategies for integrating street vendors into urban and transportation planning, effectively balancing the needs of vendors with urban mobility, public space usage, and the overall aesthetics of the city.

Table 1. Comparative analysis of Indian cities (compiled by author).

Comparative Analysis of the case studies				
<i>Parameter</i>	<i>Bhubaneswar (Vending zones)</i>	<i>Ahmedabad (Jamalpur)</i>	<i>Bhopal (Bitten Market)</i>	<i>Key Takeaway</i>
Approach for the planning	Public-Private-Community Partnership for organized vending zones.	Utilization of under-flyover spaces.	Time-sharing model for flexible space use.	Cities can adapt their approach based on spatial constraints: repurposing spaces or shared usage.
Utilization of the spaces	Dedicated zones for vendors.	Optimized incidental spaces under infrastructure.	Multipurpose use of open spaces (playgrounds).	Different approaches (repurposing, sharing, and dedicated zones) suit specific urban needs.
Vendor Capacity	2000 vendors across 30 zones.	249 stalls with structured allocation.	Variable based on space availability.	-
Vendor Fees/Revenue	₹500 annual license fee.	Not specified.	₹20/day vendor fee + electricity charges.	-
Infrastructure Provided	Semi-permanent kiosks, waste bins, and CFL lighting.	Parking spaces, lighting, and stall structures.	Toilets, water, and temporary shades.	Infrastructure provisions significantly enhance vendor compliance and customer satisfaction.
Parking Infrastructure	Lack parking.	Dedicated parking spaces.	No formal parking provision.	-
Impact on Pedestrian Movement	Enhanced sidewalks with reduced blockage.	Organized stalls improved safety.	Marked zones minimized encroachments.	Demarcation and relocation are critical for pedestrian safety and traffic flow.
Traffic Congestion	Decreased bottlenecks through vendor organization.	Reduced road congestion by relocating vendors.	Minimized conflicts by limiting operational days.	Planned relocation effectively reduces congestion across various scenarios.
Urban Aesthetics	Semi-permanent kiosks enhanced visuals.	Structured markets improved landscape.	-	-
Sustainability measures	Eco-friendly lighting and waste management systems.	Reuse of flyover space reduced land pressure.	Temporary structures-maintained flexibility.	-
Stakeholder Involvement	Multi-stakeholder collaboration (public-private-community).	Limited to municipal planning.	Vendor cooperation in time-sharing agreements.	Collaboration leads to higher compliance and acceptance among vendors.
Policy alignment	Strong adherence to the Street Vendors Act, 2014.	Limited adherence to the Street Vendors Act, 2014.	Partial alignment with urban planning norms.	Policies aligned with national frameworks yield sustainable and scalable outcomes.
Challenges	High initial organization costs.	Dependency on local body approvals.	Limited days of operation for vendors.	
Replicability	High for cities with land availability for dedicated zones.	Medium for areas with shared spaces.	High for cities with underutilized infrastructure.	Cities should choose strategies based on their spatial and demographic dynamics.

Table 2. Comparative Analysis of Indian Cities-Live study (compiled by author).

Parameter	Brahmaputra Market (Sector 29, Noida)	New Brahmaputra Market (Sector 30, Noida)	Rehri Market (Sector 15, Chandigarh)	Key Takeaway
Planning Approach	Evolved organically; currently undergoing redevelopment to enhance infrastructure and aesthetics.	Purpose-built to accommodate vendors from Sector 29, aiming to decongest the original market.	Relocated vendors from informal setups to planned market space in 1985; further formalized in 1992.	A planned market layout is essential to avoid later conflicts.
Space Utilization	High-density with a mix of permanent shops and street vendors; redevelopment aims to improve space utilization.	Structured layout with designated stalls to ensure organized vending.	The linear arrangement of 264 booths, each measuring 2.4m x 2.4m, connected by covered corridors and open courtyards.	A structured, modular design with adaptable spaces will optimize usage.
Vendor Capacity	-	Designed to accommodate vendors relocated from Sector 29; specific capacity details are limited.	Comprises 264 designated booths.	A structured, modular design with adaptable spaces will optimize usage.
Other facility			Weekly Vegetable market every Wednesday.	Weekly Markets for different kinds of products.
Vendor Fees/Revenue	-	-	Vendors pay a monthly license fee of ₹3000 per booth.	Implement a regulated fee system to ensure sustainability and fairness.
Infrastructure Provided	Undergoing improvements, including covered drains, uniform signage, and enhanced waste disposal systems.	Equipped with permanent structures and basic amenities like electricity and water.	Features semi-permanent booths with covered corridors and sanitation facilities.	Prioritize covered walkways, waste management, and basic amenities from the start.
Parking Infrastructure	Limited parking leads to congestion; redevelopment plans may address this issue.	Provides dedicated parking spaces for vendors and visitors.	Provides dedicated parking spaces for vendors and visitors.	Integrate dedicated parking spaces to prevent future congestion.
Impact on Pedestrian Flow	Encroachments by informal vendors hinder pedestrian movement; redevelopment aims to create a pedestrian-friendly environment.	Organized stalls facilitate smoother pedestrian flow.	Designated vending areas help maintain clear pathways for pedestrians.	Design wide pedestrian corridors to avoid obstruction and ensure smooth movement.
Traffic Congestion	Experiences significant congestion due to unplanned vending; redevelopment seeks to alleviate this.	Planned design contributes to reduced traffic issues.	Faces moderate congestion; better managed compared to informal markets.	A traffic management plan with separate zones for vendors and vehicles is needed.
Waste disposal charges	-	-	Vendors pay a monthly fee of ₹250 per booth.	Established waste disposal systems.
Stakeholder Involvement	Involves collaboration between the Noida Authority and vendors for redevelopment.	Managed by municipal authorities with vendor participation.	Represents a collaboration among public authorities, private entities, and the community.	Engage vendors and municipal bodies early to ensure cooperation and smooth functioning.

Policy Alignment	Moving towards better regulation and policy adherence through redevelopment efforts.	Operates under structured municipal policies.	Strongly aligns with the National Street Vendors Act, of 2014.	Ensure compliance with street vending policies to maintain legal protection for vendors.
Challenges	Overcrowding, informal operations, and lack of facilities; redevelopment aims to address these.	Needs effective enforcement and vendor compliance to maintain order.	Needs effective enforcement and vendor compliance to maintain order	Implement clear rules, enforcement, and vendor participation programs.
Replicability	Needs effective enforcement and vendor compliance to maintain order.	A structured approach is adaptable to other urban areas.	The planned market relocation strategy is replicable in other cities.	A planned, scalable model can be replicated in similar urban zones.
Urban Aesthetics	Cluttered; redesigned for a uniform look.	Less visually appealing than Sector 29.	Moderate Clean and structured layout.	Include green spaces, waste segregation, and solar lighting for sustainability. Implement uniform signage, structured vendor spaces, and aesthetic elements.

Table 3. Lesson learnt from best practices across the globe (compiled by author).

Parameter	Singapore	Cape town	Key Takeaway
Spatial Distribution	Street vendors were relocated to centralized hawker centers, eliminating sidewalk vending.	Vendors operate in predefined zones within Greenmarket Square, balancing commercial activity with historical preservation.	Create flexible vending zones in key areas like marketplaces and transport hubs, with time-based restrictions to manage congestion.
Traffic Mobility and Congestion	Relocation to hawker centers ensures unobstructed traffic flow, significantly improving urban mobility.	Limited vendor numbers and strict zoning keep roadways and public areas free of vending-related congestion.	Designate zones to separate vending from traffic-heavy areas. Strict enforcement can prevent unauthorized vending that impacts traffic.
Pedestrian Mobility	Sidewalks and public spaces are entirely cleared, ensuring smooth pedestrian movement throughout the city.	Vendors' fixed stalls allow for unobstructed pedestrian pathways, enhancing public space usability.	Ensure clear pedestrian pathways by assigning semi-permanent stalls along widened sidewalks or designated zones.
Licensing and Regulation	A transparent licensing system ensures fair allocation of hawker stalls, reducing conflicts and ensuring legal compliance.	Vendors must obtain permits, and stall numbers must be capped to prevent overcrowding.	Introduce a vendor licensing system to regulate vendor numbers, ensure legal recognition, and reduce conflicts with authorities.
Cultural Preservation and Economic Contribution	Hawker centers preserve Singapore's food culture while supporting livelihoods, earning recognition from UNESCO.	Vendors at Greenmarket Square align their offerings with local crafts and tourism, promoting cultural identity.	Promote Anoopshahar Road as a hub for local crafts and food, integrating vendors into Aligarh's cultural and economic narrative.
Infrastructure Support	Comprehensive infrastructure in hawker centers includes covered stalls, seating, water supply, and sanitation.	Semi-permanent stalls maintain historical aesthetics and provide waste management systems.	Provide semi-permanent stalls, waste bins, and sanitation facilities to enhance hygiene and usability of vending zones.

The study of street vendors in cities like Cape Town and Singapore reveals the importance of zoning, (Table 3) pedestrian mobility, licensing, and infrastructure support. Designated zones in high-demand areas improve order and accessibility, while centralized hubs in Singapore offer long-term solutions but may restrict vendor flexibility. Licensing and regulation help limit overcrowding and promote fairness. Infrastructure support enhances vendor conditions and operational efficiency. These findings emphasize the need for balanced approaches considering urban mobility and street vendor livelihoods.

RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study highlights the significant role of street vending in urban economies, providing livelihoods while contributing to the vibrancy of public spaces. However, vendors face persistent challenges, including legal uncertainties, inadequate infrastructure, and conflicts with urban mobility regulations. Comparative analyses of Indian cities and global case studies reveal that cities with structured vending zones, transparent licensing, and inclusive governance achieve better vendor integration and urban management. To address existing challenges, it is essential to strengthen policy implementation, ensure vendor participation in urban planning, and develop designated vending spaces with proper infrastructure. Additionally, gender-inclusive policies, financial support programs, and digital payment integration can enhance vendor stability and economic opportunities. Sustainable urban planning, combined with multi-stakeholder collaboration and adaptive governance, will ensure that street vendors continue to thrive while maintaining urban order and public convenience.

Street vendors will continue to prosper while preserving public convenience and urban order if sustainable urban design, multi-stakeholder engagement, and adaptive governance are all implemented.

CONCLUSION

Seeing urban areas as multi-layered and multi-functional is essential for incorporating street vendors into the urban environment. Many approaches to urban development have viewed spaces as monofunctional, giving each region a specific role. These areas are, nevertheless, viewed and used differently by diverse people. The difficulty is in how these individuals can work together to manage and use common public areas in innovative ways, especially to provide room for street vendors in urban planning and development.

Street vendors would be involved in the decision-making processes that affect urban areas and marketplaces if they were run according to the principles of participatory governance. This strategy would encourage a multipurpose understanding of space, allowing any setting to create a management system that successfully handles its complications.

Street vending is a crucial part of urban economies, providing livelihoods while enriching public spaces. However, vendors face legal uncertainties, infrastructure challenges, and policy gaps. This study emphasizes the need for inclusive urban planning, structured vending zones, and transparent governance to balance vendor rights with urban order. Comparative analyses highlight that cities with well-regulated policies and stakeholder collaboration achieve better outcomes. However, challenges in gender inclusion, environmental sustainability, and digital adaptation remain. Future efforts should focus on policy consistency, vendor participation, and technology-driven solutions to create a sustainable and equitable framework for street vending.

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