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## Street Vending in Northeast India: Socio-Economic Impacts and Policy Gaps with Focus on Nagaland

Rokoneisano Medoze\* and Dr. Papiya Dutta<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Rural Development, University of Science & Technology Meghalaya, Ri-Bhoi,  
Meghalaya, India, 793101. Email: rokoneisanomedoze@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup>Department of Rural Development, University of Science & Technology Meghalaya  
Corresponding Author: Rokoneisano Medoze

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### ABSTRACT

Street vending is a critical livelihood in the informal economy, supporting millions in developing countries. In India, where over 90% of the workforce is informal, street vending sustains urban economies, particularly for marginalized communities. This review examines street vending in Nagaland, Northeast India, focusing on its socio-economic impacts and policy gaps. In urban centres like Dimapur and Kohima, vending empowers women and migrants while linking rural-urban economies. However, vendors face inadequate infrastructure, financial exclusion, and poor implementation of the Street Vendors Act, 2014. Tribal and gender-based dynamics further complicate the landscape, often exposing women vendors to heightened vulnerability and marginalization. The review synthesizes existing literature to identify key policy gaps, socio-economic vulnerabilities, and proposes interventions, including vending zones, microcredit access, and strengthened Town Vending Committees. These measures aim to enhance livelihoods and promote inclusive urban development, aligning with global sustainable development goals for poverty alleviation and gender equality in Nagaland.



## Introduction

The informal economy forms a significant backbone of economic activity globally, especially in developing countries where formal employment opportunities remain limited. According to the International Labour Organization, the informal sector comprises over 60% of global employment, offering livelihoods to those excluded from formal systems (Roever and Skinner, 2016). In India, the informal sector is even more pronounced, accounting for approximately 92% of the total workforce (Borah, 2014; Trivedi, 2020). Within this sector, street vending stands out as one of the most prominent and visible forms of informal employment, particularly in urban settings.

Street vending offers a low-entry barrier economic activity, making it an accessible livelihood option for individuals with minimal capital, education, or formal training. Historically, street vending has served as a survival strategy for the urban poor across continents- including Latin America, Africa, and Asia and continues to thrive even in urban centres of developed countries (Trivedi, 2020; Ndlovu *et al.*, 2024). In India, street vendors not only provide affordable goods and services to urban consumers but also bridge rural and urban economies through the distribution of local produce and handmade goods (Pappeswari and Rajalakshmi, 2014; Roever and Skinner, 2016). The enactment of the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014, marked a significant policy milestone, legally recognizing this segment and aiming to regulate it without undermining its economic viability (Gandotra, 2024).

The Northeast region of India presents a distinct socio-cultural and economic landscape, characterized by tribal communities, geographic isolation, and a scarcity of formal employment opportunities. Among the Northeastern states, Nagaland is particularly noteworthy due to its high rate of urban informal employment and the centrality of street vending in sustaining livelihoods. Urban areas such as Dimapur and Kohima are witnessing rapid urbanization, which has intensified informal economic activities, including street vending (Changkery, 2016). Additionally, socio-cultural norms in Nagaland often discourage locals from engaging in low-status jobs, resulting in a heavy reliance on migrant labour for vending activities (Ao and Riongchang, 2023). The intersection of gender, ethnicity, and economic vulnerability makes the study of street vending in Nagaland particularly significant.

## Street Vending: An Overview

Street vending is a widespread phenomenon embedded in the informal economies of both developing and developed nations. Across sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, and



Asia, street vending has emerged as a critical source of income for the urban poor. In sub-Saharan Africa alone, informal trading activities, including street vending, account for about 43% of all non-agricultural informal employment (Roever and Skinner, 2016). Cities such as Dakar in Senegal and Lomé in Togo report street vending participation at 13% and 24% of informal non-agricultural workers, respectively (Roever and Skinner, 2016). In Latin American countries like Peru and Bolivia, vending is often integrated with cultural practices and indigenous trade systems, highlighting its deep historical roots (Trivedi, 2020). Similarly, in Southeast Asia and South Asia, vending has long served as a buffer against poverty and unemployment, offering accessible income-generating opportunities in urban areas (Pappeswari and Rajalakshmi, 2014; Ndlovu *et al.*, 2024).

The historical continuity of street vending, dating back centuries, underscores its resilience and adaptability. It has evolved through colonial and post-colonial periods, adjusting to changing economic systems while maintaining its socio-cultural relevance (Gandotra, 2024). Even in developed countries, such as the United States and Australia, vending has re-emerged as part of the gig economy and urban food culture, further affirming its global relevance (Trivedi, 2020). Despite differing socio-political contexts, common features include informal operations, limited state support, and vulnerability to eviction and regulation.

In India, street vending occupies a prominent place in the informal sector, employing a vast number of urban poor who are otherwise excluded from formal employment avenues. According to estimates, over 10 million vendors operate in Indian cities and towns, offering essential goods and services to consumers at affordable prices (Borah, 2014). This mode of self-employment is particularly significant for low-skilled individuals, migrants, and marginalized groups including women and scheduled communities (Arora, Khurana and Rani, 2024). Recognizing this, the Government of India enacted the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014, aimed at safeguarding vendors' rights while ensuring regulated use of public spaces. The Act mandates the formation of Town Vending Committees (TVCs), issuance of identity cards, and zoning plans to create inclusive urban environments (Gandotra, 2024).

Despite this legal recognition, street vendors in India continue to face numerous challenges. Harassment from municipal authorities, eviction without notice, and confiscation of goods remain common (Roever and Skinner, 2016). Vendors often operate without licenses due to bureaucratic hurdles, rendering them vulnerable to exploitation and legal penalties (Saha, 2011). Additionally, intense competition among vendors, lack of access to credit, and minimal infrastructural support limit their



income and security (Basumatary, 2013). The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed these vulnerabilities, with many vendors losing their livelihoods overnight due to lockdowns and restrictions on public movement (Jamir and Pongen, 2022). These systemic issues highlight the gap between policy intent and ground-level implementation, necessitating more inclusive and responsive governance mechanisms.

### **Objectives and Research Questions**

This review aims to examine the socio-economic impact of street vending in Nagaland, with an emphasis on understanding its role within the broader informal economy of Northeast India. The key objectives of this study are:

- To analyse the socio- economic characteristics of street vendors in Nagaland.
- To identify the infrastructural and regulatory challenges that vendors face.
- To evaluate the implementation of the Street Vendors, Act, 2014, in the context of Nagaland.
- To propose actionable policy interventions that can enhance the livelihoods and dignity of street vendors.

The research questions include:

- What is the socio-economic profile of street vendors in Nagaland?
- What are the major infrastructural and policy challenges hindering their growth?
- How effective is the implementation of national street vending legislation in the state context?
- What initiatives are necessary to strengthen the informal vending economy in Nagaland?

### **Methodology**

The review synthesizes existing literature on street vending in Nagaland's informal economy, focusing on socio-economic impacts and policy gaps. Studies were sourced from academic publications and regional outlets, including research articles, books, and local reports. Regional sources provided contextual insights. The review prioritized studies on street vending and informal sector in Nagaland or Northeast India, emphasizing demographics, economic contributions, policy implementation, or gender dynamics. The literature was thematically analysed to identify patterns in vendor characteristics, infrastructural and policy challenges, and gender-specific vulnerabilities, aligning with the objectives of



evaluating street vending's role and proposing actionable policy interventions for sustainable urban development in Nagaland.

## Results and Findings

### Street Vending in Nagaland: Socio-Economic Dimensions

Street vending in Nagaland is deeply intertwined with the state's unique socio-cultural composition, marked by tribal diversity, gender roles, and high levels of unemployment. The majority of vendors in urban centres such as Dimapur and Kohima are women, many of whom come from various tribal communities and marginalized social backgrounds (Vupru and Chophy, 2021; Ao and Riongchang, 2023). According to estimates, nearly 30,000 vendors operate in Nagaland, with a significant proportion being women who are either primary earners or sole breadwinners in their families (Bharadwaj, 2022). Education levels among vendors are generally low; most have studied only up to Class 8 or are illiterate, reflecting the low entry barriers of the trade (Jamir and Pongen, 2022).

Migration plays a critical role in shaping the demographics of street vendors in Nagaland. A considerable portion of vendors in Dimapur, the state's commercial hub, are migrants from other parts of India or neighbouring districts. The reluctance of many Naga youth to engage in what are culturally perceived as "low-status" occupations creates space for migrants to dominate the vending landscape (Changkery, 2016). This complex demographic composition points to both the inclusivity and the precariousness of street vending in Nagaland.

### Economic Contributions

Street vending contributes substantially to Nagaland's urban economy by ensuring food security, sustaining livelihoods, and facilitating rural-urban trade linkages. Vendors sell a wide array of goods, including vegetables, fruits, dry fish, fast food, meat, handicrafts, second-hand clothing, and traditional tribal products (S. Temsusenla Ao and Riongchang, 2023). This product diversity highlights their role not just as economic agents but also as cultural intermediaries, maintaining the flow of rural goods into urban consumption spaces. Many vendors source products directly from rural producers or harvest them from their own villages, reinforcing a circular local economy that benefits multiple stakeholders (Vupru and Chophy, 2021).

Financially, street vending provides self-employment for individuals with limited formal employment opportunities. However, incomes remain modest. Daily earnings range from ₹250 to ₹2,000



depending on the product type and season, while monthly earnings typically fall between ₹10,000 and ₹15,000 (Bharadwaj, 2022). These earnings are often sufficient for basic subsistence but inadequate for savings or investments, particularly when vendors face additional expenses such as transportation and informal loan repayments. Most vendors are self-financed or rely on informal credit from local moneylenders, with limited access to institutional financial support (Jamir and Pongen, 2022). Despite these economic constraints, street vending remains a vital fallback occupation for marginalized groups—particularly tribal women and migrants—underscoring its relevance in addressing urban poverty and social exclusion in Nagaland.

### **Challenges Faced by Street Vendors in Nagaland**

**1. Infrastructure Deficiencies:** One of the most pressing challenges faced by street vendors in Nagaland is the lack of basic infrastructure essential for safe and dignified vending. The absence of market sheds, drinking water facilities, and toilets significantly affects both vendor welfare and the hygiene of public spaces (S. Temsusenla Ao and Riongchang, 2023). Vendors, particularly those dealing with perishable goods, suffer frequent losses due to the lack of cold storage and proper display arrangements. In Dimapur and Kohima, the problem is compounded by narrow roads, congested markets, and inadequate public transport systems, which lead to high transportation costs and limited customer footfall (Jamir and Soundari, 2024a). Seasonal disruptions, such as monsoon rains, often result in damage to goods due to the lack of protective shelters, further reducing vendor income and security (Vupru and Choppy, 2021).

**2. Financial Vulnerability:** Street vendors in Nagaland operate within an economically fragile environment. With limited or no access to formal banking and credit facilities, most vendors rely heavily on self-financing or high-interest loans from local moneylenders (Jamir and Pongen, 2022). This dependence traps them in cycles of debt and limits opportunities for business expansion. Compounding this issue is the vendors' low awareness of existing government welfare schemes such as PM SVANidhi and other financial inclusion programs (S. Temsusenla Ao and Riongchang, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic severely worsened their financial stability—lockdowns and quarantine measures caused sudden income losses, increased borrowing, and forced many vendors to sell their goods at reduced prices to clear stock (Bharadwaj, 2022; Morung Express, 2020). Post-pandemic inflation continues to erode profit margins, making recovery even more difficult.

**3. Legal and Policy Limitations:** While the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014 is in force nationally, its implementation in Nagaland has been inconsistent



and largely ineffective. Although Town Vending Committees (TVCs) have been formed in major districts like Dimapur and Kohima, they often fail to function due to irregular meetings, lack of coordination, and limited vendor participation (Bharadwaj, 2022). Furthermore, vending certificates are often issued without transparency, with non-vendors at times benefiting from schemes meant for genuine street vendors. The absence of designated vending zones and continued eviction drives by local authorities reflect a disconnect between the law and its practical enforcement. Many vendors remain unaware of their rights under the Act, leaving them vulnerable to harassment, fines, and loss of livelihood (S. Temsusenla Ao and Riongchang, 2023).

**4. Gender-Specific Struggles:** The majority of street vendors in Nagaland are women, many of whom are single mothers or primary caregivers. Their challenges are compounded by gender-specific issues such as personal safety, inadequate public toilets, and lack of rest facilities (Bharadwaj, 2022). To avoid frequent use of unclean or distant toilets, some women restrict fluid intake, increasing the risk of urinary tract infections and other health problems. Vendors must often work long hours in exposed environments with little to no physical security, making them susceptible to theft and harassment (Gogoi, 2024). Additionally, socio-cultural norms still stigmatize street vending as a “low status” job, particularly for women, which discourages community support and reduces their bargaining power in public forums (Jamir and Soundari, 2024b). The lack of alternative employment options further limits their choices, reinforcing their dependency on this precarious form of livelihood.

### **Policy Framework and Gaps**

The Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014 was a landmark step by the Government of India aimed at recognizing street vendors as legitimate stakeholders in urban economies. The Act provides for the constitution of Town Vending Committees (TVCs), issuance of vending certificates, creation of vending zones, and legal protection from arbitrary eviction (Gandotra, 2024). It mandates a participatory approach, requiring that vendors be included in policy formulation and spatial planning decisions. Despite the progressive nature of the Act, its implementation in Nagaland has been slow and inconsistent. Although the state officially adopted the Act in 2019, awareness among street vendors about their rights and entitlements remains limited (S. Temsusenla Ao and Riongchang, 2023). The issuance of vendor certificates is poorly monitored, with cases of non-vendors accessing benefits while genuine vendors are left out (Bharadwaj, 2022). The lack of designated vending zones, public amenities, and monitoring mechanisms further highlights the gap between



legislation and ground reality. Thus, while the Act serves as a robust legal framework, its benefits have not fully reached the intended beneficiaries in Nagaland.

The role of state and municipal authorities is crucial in translating the Act into actionable policy on the ground. In Nagaland, TVCs have been formed in major urban centers like Dimapur, Kohima, and Chümoukedima, but their functionality remains questionable. Meetings are infrequent, decisions lack transparency, and there is minimal vendor representation in planning processes (Bharadwaj, 2022). Furthermore, local authorities often lack the technical and financial capacity to create and maintain designated vending zones or to enforce guidelines outlined in the Act. Municipal bodies also fall short in creating partnerships with NGOs and street vendor unions, which could otherwise serve as valuable allies in policy implementation and advocacy (S. Temsusenla Ao and Riongchang, 2023). The absence of coordination across administrative levels has created confusion among vendors and led to inconsistent enforcement of policies. There is an urgent need for district-level interventions that address not just regulation, but also social protection, skill development, and access to credit facilities tailored to vendors' needs.

## Discussion

The findings show that street vending in Nagaland is a vital socio-economic activity, particularly for marginalized groups such as women, migrants, and those with limited education. Studies reveal that most vendors rely on this occupation for their primary income, with many being sole earners for their families (Vupru and Chophy, 2021; S. Temsusenla Ao and Riongchang, 2023). Women dominate this sector, not just in numbers but also in visibility, engaging in the sale of vegetables, meat, dry fish, and handmade goods across Kohima, Dimapur, and Chümoukedima (Bharadwaj, 2022). The informal nature of the trade allows for accessibility, but it also subjects vendors to vulnerability, legal ambiguity, and socio-economic marginalization.

Several socio-economic gaps have emerged from the literature. First, the infrastructural deficit, characterized by the absence of sheds, sanitation, storage, and water facilities, directly affects vendor health, productivity, and income (Jamir and Soundari, 2024a; Vupru and Chophy, 2021). Second, vendors lack access to formal credit systems, relying instead on informal moneylenders with high-interest rates, which undermines financial stability and growth potential (Jamir and Pongen, 2022). Third, the gender-specific vulnerabilities faced by women vendors, such as health risks from inadequate sanitation and harassment in public spaces remain under-addressed in existing policy frameworks



(Gogoi, 2024; Bharadwaj, 2022). These findings highlight the intersection of poverty, gender, and informality that shapes the street vending landscape in Nagaland.

While the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014 offers a legal foundation, implementation remains inadequate. Town Vending Committees (TVCs), though established in major cities, lack transparency, regular engagement, and proper vendor representation (Bharadwaj, 2022). The absence of designated vending zones and a clear licensing system leads to frequent evictions and harassment, undermining the very intent of the Act (S. Temsusenla Ao and Riongchang, 2023). Furthermore, poor inter-agency coordination and lack of municipal capacity weaken the delivery of social protection schemes. These policy bottlenecks not only perpetuate informality but also widen socio-economic disparities among urban informal workers. Case studies from other Indian states offer valuable insights. For example, Bhubaneswar's model of vending zones with inclusive planning and active TVCs has been recognized for its effectiveness. Similarly, Ahmedabad's partnership with SEWA (Self-Employed Women's Association) showcases how vendor unions can collaborate with local bodies for mutual benefit (Roever and Skinner, 2016). Adopting such models in Nagaland-with appropriate cultural and geographic adaptations-could significantly enhance the institutional support for street vendors and pave the way for inclusive urban development, ultimately contributing to poverty reduction, gender equality and economic growth.

## Recommendations

To enhance support for street vendors in Nagaland, the following recommendations draw from successful models and local needs:

- 1. Awareness Campaigns:** Conduct targeted campaigns in local dialects through community leaders to educate vendors about their rights under the Street Vendors Act, 2014, and welfare schemes like PM SVANidhi (S. Temsusenla Ao and Riongchang, 2023).
- 2. Mobile Infrastructure:** Introduce collapsible stalls, handcarts, and portable kiosks to enable vendors to operate in regulated zones while addressing space and hygiene issues (Bharadwaj, 2022).
- 3. Microcredit Access:** Enhance access to low-interest credit through SHGs, NGOs, and cooperative banks to reduce reliance on informal moneylenders and support working capital needs (Jamir and Pongen, 2022).



- 4. Skill Development:** Implement programs focusing on financial literacy, hygiene practices, and digital tools to improve vendor productivity and engagement with formal systems (Gogoi, 2024).
- 5. Vendor Identification:** Issue unique vendor ID cards verified by municipal bodies and TVCs to track and extend social benefits to legitimate vendors (Gogoi, 2024).
- 6. Permanent Infrastructure:** Construct gender-sensitive permanent sheds, sanitary facilities, and childcare spaces in major vending zones like Dimapur and Kohima to enhance working conditions and compliance with urban safety norms (Jamir and Soundari, 2024a)
- 7. Strengthen TVCs:** Ensure regular meetings, vendor representation, and transparent decision-making in Town Vending Committees to bridge the implementation gap of the 2014 Act (Bharadwaj, 2022).
- 8. Urban Planning Integration:** Incorporate Street vending into city development plans, zoning laws, and vendor-inclusive infrastructure for inclusive urbanization (Roever and Skinner, 2016).
- 9. Digital Financial Inclusion:** Train vendors in mobile payments and link them to e-wallets and formal banking systems to improve financial resilience, transaction security, and access to formal credit (Roever and Skinner, 2016).
- 10. Adopting models:** Adopting successful models in Nagaland with appropriate cultural and geographic adaptations could significantly enhance the institutional support for street vendors and pave the way for inclusive urban development.

## Conclusion

This review highlights the multifaceted role of street vending in Nagaland's informal economy, where it serves as a critical livelihood source, especially for women, tribal communities, and migrants. Despite its socio-economic importance, vendors continue to face challenges such as poor infrastructure, financial exclusion, legal ambiguity, and gender-based vulnerabilities. While the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014 offers a strong legal framework, its implementation in Nagaland remains insufficient due to inactive Town Vending Committees, weak awareness, and limited infrastructure development. These gaps have far-reaching implications for poverty alleviation, gender equality, and inclusive urban growth. Therefore, formal recognition of vendors must be coupled with structural reforms-ranging from basic amenities and skill development to institutional strengthening and financial inclusion. Policies must be holistic, participatory, and tailored to Nagaland's unique socio-cultural landscape, ensuring that street vendors are not merely accommodated



but empowered as key actors in sustainable development. Bridging policy with practice will not only improve vendor livelihoods but also foster resilient, equitable urban spaces in the Northeast.

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Rokoneisano Medoze and Dr. Papiya Dutta collaborated on the writing and editing of the manuscript.

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### Data Availability Statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

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### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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