



Women in Informal Employment:  
Globalizing and Organizing

# Street Vendors and Public Space

Essential insights on key trends and solutions



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**Cover photo:** For more than 35 years, Mary Asomani has been selling her goods at the Makola Market in Accra, Ghana.

Photo credit: Jonathan Torgovnik/Getty Images Reportage



# Foreword

By *Sally Roever*

In cities all over the world, streets and squares bustle with women and men selling everything from fresh fruits and vegetables to cell phone covers to colorful fabrics and clothing. These street vendors and market traders bring everyday goods to residents at affordable prices in places convenient to them: at transport hubs, near office parks and outside of residential clusters.

But as cities grow, land values escalate, and public space becomes more contested and privatized, street vendors are being pushed out. Though employment represents a key pathway out of poverty, these workers are losing their livelihoods, and cities are becoming more exclusive in the process.

WIEGO's Urban Policies Team closely monitors urban trends, with a view to supporting inclusionary practices that contribute to more equitable cities and economies. In the face of the global political shift to the right,

Caroline Skinner and Pilar Balbuena looked at developments across continents to gain insight into global patterns. Their article shows that street vendors in many cities—from New Delhi to New York—face intensified evictions and harassment. That article is the first in this new collection of WIEGO's current writing on street vendors and public space.

This new e-book, a compilation of writings from the WIEGO team and collaborators, provides readers with an essential overview of the role street vendors and market traders play in cities and dives into some of the daily challenges these workers face as cities aim to “clean up” public spaces and “modernize” their urban environments. In that quest, street vendors are being removed, as you will read in articles here on Lima, Peru, and the Queens neighborhood of New York City.

But street vendors are also organizing, strengthening their collective voice, and experimenting with new strategies to work with governments and other stakeholders. In Monrovia,

street vendors successfully negotiated a memorandum of understanding with the local government, and in Durban, one street vendor's quest for the right to vend resulted in a landmark legal precedent.

These promising developments signal some concrete ways forward as

global agreements, such as the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, aim for more inclusive cities. We hope this collection provides important context and insights to move more collaboratively toward creating cities for all.



News from across continents shows increasing hostility toward street vendors everywhere. Vendors in Lima, Peru, have been facing ongoing evictions.

*Photo credit: Juan Arredondo/Getty Images Reportage*



# PART I: Overview & Global Trends





# Where are the inclusive cities? Street vendors globally face increasing hostility

By Pilar Balbuena and Caroline Skinner

*The WIEGO Urban Policies Team analyzed news articles on street vendors from six continents over an 18-month period to gain a better understanding of how these informal workers are—or, more precisely, “aren’t”—being incorporated into 21st-century cities. A troubling portrait emerged of widespread evictions in urban hubs everywhere—from New York to New Delhi.*

We have all seen the disturbing headlines and images from Bangkok to Buenos Aires with riot-gear-ready police facing off with street vendors. Although WIEGO’s previous research has shown the pervasiveness of exclusionary practices faced by street vendors in cities—50 cases of major evictions in a three-year period—we wanted to look at up-to-date information to see if the situation has improved.

Street vendors run from police in Rome, Italy. A troubling portrait has emerged of widespread evictions in urban hubs in both the Global North and South.

Photo credit: Steve Rhode/Creative Commons



Using WIEGO's Global Monitoring System (GMS), which systematically curates informal economy news and to date has over 5,500 street vendor articles, we reviewed over 500 articles in four languages—English, French, Portuguese and Spanish—from six continents to gain insights into the global reality.

With economic recession lingering, the rise of the right in many countries, and an increased flow of migrants, we wanted to know if exclusionary trends have intensified. What follows is a disturbing picture of eviction after eviction—sometimes quite brutal in action and outcome.

We take you continent by continent through the situation of street vendors as reflected in the media in hopes that this dismaying global picture will inspire more collective action and political will to fulfil globally agreed commitments contained in the Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda. This review is more than a global portrait; it is a global call to action, and at the end, we showcase ideas for moving forward an inclusive urban agenda.



**Vendors in Monrovia, Liberia, have worked with city officials to address concerns, which has reduced harassment and improved the situation for street vendors in the city.** Photo credit: M. Agyemang

**IN AFRICA,** Zimbabwe is facing its worst economic crisis in a decade. Zimbabweans have long relied on informal vendors for all manner of necessities. Yet street vendors are subject to constant harassment. The violence the Mugabe regime frequently meted out against vendors (and slum dwellers) has continued under President Mnangagwa's regime.

Notable evictions occurred in August 2018 when anti-riot police were deployed across Harare, clearing informal traders—a move widely seen as the president's revenge for vendors voting for the opposition in the national elections. In September 2018, street vendors were banned in response to a cholera outbreak.

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**Nigeria has similarly repressive legislation, with the additional caveat that purchasing from vendors is criminalized.**

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Zambia, like Zimbabwe, has a long history of ambivalence towards vendors, peppered with violent evictions. A 2007 ordinance bans vending in the capital. In early 2018, the police and army invoked this legislation and demolished over 10,000 stalls. This operation was in response to a cholera outbreak, but in other Zambian cities, like Kitwe, street vendor evictions are motivated by beautification efforts.





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**The Bangkok Metropolitan Administration reports to have moved 20,000 street vendors from 478 locations and has identified 205 more locations “to address”.**

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Nigeria has similarly repressive legislation, with the additional caveat that purchasing from vendors is criminalized. The Lagos State’s law enforcement unit—Kick Against Indiscipline—is a constant threat to street vendors.

Kampala, Uganda, is another case of periodic vendor evictions driven by political expedience. As has happened before in the city, in November 2018, the Minister of Kampala issued a directive to evict all street vendors to create “order in the city”.

There were only two notable cases of inclusive practices reported in the media from Africa. In a rare case of cooperative street vendor management, the Monrovia City Corporation signed a memorandum of understanding with the Federation of Petty Traders and the Informal Workers’ Union of Liberia (FEPTIWUL) in September 2018 as part of an effort to ensure a smooth

working relationship between petty traders and the municipal government of Monrovia. In Kenya, the Draft Protection to Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending Bill promises to license street vendors, providing livelihood rights and social security and shielding them from police harassment.

**IN ASIA,** street vending in Bangkok continues to receive significant media attention. Prior to the military coup of 2014, Bangkok was viewed as a case of progressive integration of vendors. However, since 2014, under orders from the military junta, the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) has systematically removed vendors under the motto “return the footpath to pedestrians”.

The BMA reports to have moved 20,000 street vendors from 478 locations and has identified 205 more locations “to address”. These figures reflect only licensed vendors; thousands more unlicensed vendors have also been affected. The local and international press have widely condemned these actions, and there has also been significant resistance from vendors.

India’s Street Vending (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street



A street vendor in Bangkok, Thailand, sells food to a customer, even as night falls. Her livelihood and those of her fellow vendors are being threatened by Bangkok’s policy of eviction.

*Photo credit: Pailin Wedel*

Vending) Act of 2014 is widely cited as a good model. The Act mandates local authorities to create rules, schemes and local governance structures (Town Vending Committees) that include vendors and legitimize their right to vend. Concerns, however, have been raised about the pace and nature of implementation. These concerns are reflected in the media.

In August 2018, in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, for example, while the municipal corporation was conducting a street



**ASIA: Bangkok authorities evict thousands of its famous vendors, while India struggles with implementing progressive street vending legislation.**



In Lima, Peru, street vendors marched to Lima's City Hall to call for a halt to harassment and evictions.

Photo credit: Carmen Roca

vendor census (a process stipulated in the Act), a demolition squad was reported to have erased 5,000 street vendors and 19,500 structures.

In Delhi, a Special Task Force created to deal with premises not conforming to the 2021 Delhi Master Plan has been regularly evicting vendors throughout the city. There are also cases where the implementation of the act may well lead to a reduction in the number of vendors, for example in Mumbai and Chandigarh.

In February 2019, the Centre for Civil Society, a Delhi-based think tank released its analysis of the implementation of the act, based on interviews across 30 states and scrutiny of court judgements. The report concluded that vendors continue to be excluded from critical urban space management decisions and describe implementation as 'sluggish'.

Vendor organizations in India are increasingly looking to the courts for relief. Notably, the Supreme Court

of India ruled that state governments must publish their street vendor rules. But not all rulings favour vendors. For example, in November 2018, the Punjab and Haryana High Court instructed the director general of police to remove all unauthorized businesses from footpaths.

A previous review of WIEGO's GMS suggested that China was a "hot spot", with a dedicated urban security force called the *Chengguan*, which regularly harassed and removed vendors, confirmed by academic analyses. Recently, very little coverage could be found from online sources.

**IN LATIN AMERICA**, the deepening crisis in Venezuela has led to the mass movement of people across the region. While estimates of Venezuelans on the move vary from 1.6 million to 4 million, it is argued to be the fastest escalating displacement of people

across borders in Latin American history. With few other job opportunities, migrants often have no choice but to create their own employment in the informal economy.

The *Universidad del Rosario* in Colombia estimated that 425,000 Venezuelans are working informally in Colombia alone. In Ecuador, the Metropolitan Municipality Control Agency estimated that of the 30,000 vendors in 2018 (an increase from 8,000 the previous year), at least 10 per cent are Venezuelans. This influx is generating tensions.



**LATIN AMERICA:**  
Pressures on the streets intensify amid the Venezuelan crisis and economic recession.



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**Across Latin America, vendors are subject to periodic removals with those operating in historic centres being particularly vulnerable.**

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In November 2018, in Cali, Colombia, the right of Venezuelan street vendors to vend was challenged. In February 2019, in Lima, Peru, a Venezuelan street vendor lost his life while fighting for space to trade.

These tensions are exacerbated by increasing levels of unemployment in much of Latin America. In Brazil, 12.9 million people are now estimated to be unemployed, with one report estimating that the economic crisis has pushed another 200,000 people to work as vendors.

Local authorities often respond with harsh policing. In November 2018, the Sao Paulo City Hall launched an operation to “retake” public space in the city, where the police used tear gas to evict 100 street vendors. Brazil’s approach has long been to clear the streets of vendors, allowing some of them to work from off-street “popular

malls”. In Belo Horizonte, Brazil, 1,200 street vendors were moved to these off-street areas, but vendors reported significant decreases in sales and higher rents than originally agreed.

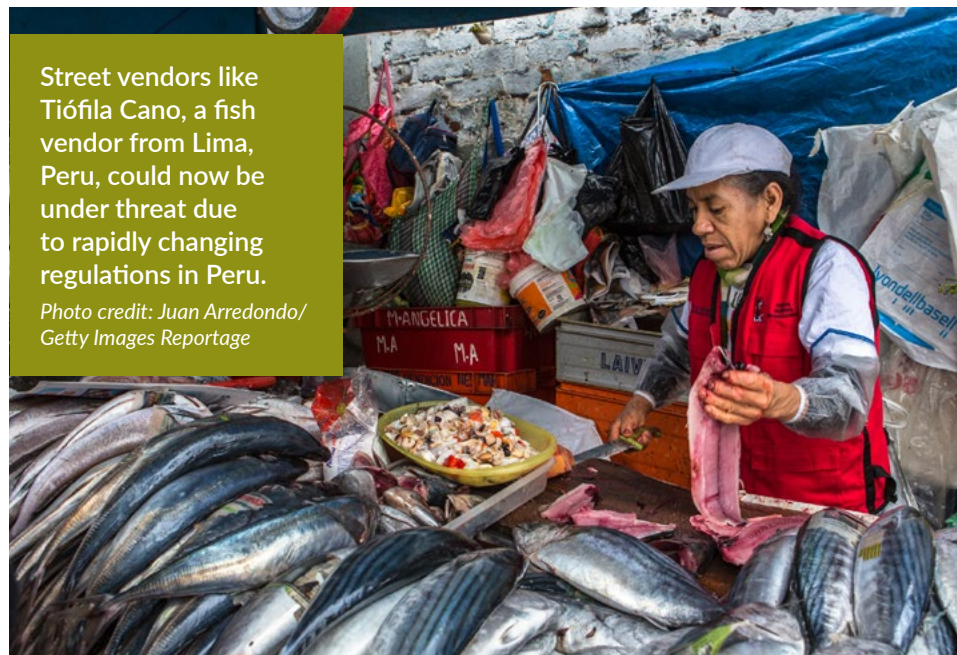
Across Latin America, vendors are subject to periodic removals with those operating in historic centres being particularly vulnerable. Cases from Trujillo, Peru; Tegucigalpa, Honduras; Cartagena, Colombia; and Merida, Puebla and Tabasco in Mexico all hit the news.

In Lima, Peru, despite a progressive street trader ordinance, and a history of vendor-local government dialogue platforms, recently elected local politicians have embarked on a campaign to rapidly change regulations without consultation and remove street vendors, with an estimated 30,000 vendors under threat.

There are also concerning levels of violence during evictions. In November 2018, in Santa Tecla, El Salvador, evictions left a street vendor dead and another 50 injured, and in Providencia, Chile, a similar operation resulted in numerous arrests with the police accused of excessive violence. In March 2019, in Argen-

Street vendors like Tiófila Cano, a fish vendor from Lima, Peru, could now be under threat due to rapidly changing regulations in Peru.

Photo credit: Juan Arredondo/  
Getty Images Reportage



tina, longstanding vendors from *Feria de San Telmo*, an iconic craft market in central Buenos Aires, protested against planned removals, resulting in a violent crackdown by riot police. In all of these evictions, the need to restore “order” is a constant refrain.

In Bogotá, Colombia, in July 2018, the mayor instructed the removal of over 2,000 vendors. His actions, however, were heavily criticized by fellow councillors. Evicted and

harassed vendors in Bogotá have previously sought protection using a court ruling that said the mayor was to convene conciliation roundtables with the street vendors. In February 2019, the issue of harsh treatment of vendors was discussed in the Colombian Congress, and it was agreed that alternative employment needed to be found for evicted vendors. This move shows that vendors in Bogotá have achieved visibility and secured some important allies.

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*In June 2018, the Italian interior minister reportedly introduced fines of £6,000 for those purchasing fake designer goods and £13,600 for the vendor selling them.*

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**IN EUROPE,** vendors are often migrants, predominantly from Africa but also from beyond. Frequently risking their lives to enter Europe, on arrival many find securing employment extremely challenging, even if they have official documents. Many have no choice but to create their own work, including selling goods on the streets.

Much of the recent coverage on street vending in the region comes from southern Europe and reflects increasing tensions. In Italy in April 2018, an African street vendor was shot dead in Florence by a right-wing extremist, echoing the December 2011 incident when a neo-fascist opened fire at two central markets, killing two Senegalese street vendors and injuring three others.

In May 2018, street vendors protested in Rome in response to a street



A street vending site in Pisa, Italy. In April 2018, an African street vendor was shot dead in Florence by a right-wing extremist.

*Photo credit: Martha Chen*

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*Even left-leaning politicians are coming under pressure to act in places such as Barcelona, where police have used batons to control irregular immigrant street vendors.*

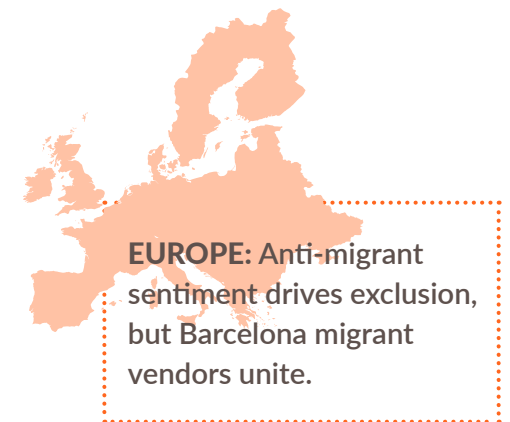
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vendor's death after a police clamp down. Following Africa and Latin America's trend to criminalize those purchasing from vendors, in June 2018, the Italian interior minister reportedly introduced fines of £6,000 for those purchasing fake designer goods and £13,600 for the vendor selling them.

Vendors in Spain operate in a hostile legislative environment. The 2015 reform of the public security legislation recriminalized vending in the

streets. Vendors face confiscations and fines of at least €500 (around US\$600), and a potential prison term of between 6 and 24 months.

Even left-leaning politicians are coming under pressure to act in places such as Barcelona, where police have used batons to control irregular immigrant street vendors. The death of a vendor after a police chase in Madrid in March 2018 generated significant debate in Spain about the treatment of migrants.





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**Food vendors in New York face particularly precarious circumstances due to the cap on the number of food vending permits**

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Some vendors have responded to these developments. The union of African vendors—the Sindicato Popular de Vendedores Ambulantes—launched in Barcelona in 2015 has regularly called for the decriminalization of vending by marching on the Spanish Congress of Deputies in March 2017 and the European Parliament in January 2018. Their clothing brand—*Top Manta*—has significant online presence and support, with regular fashion shows featuring their motto and rallying cry: “legal clothes made by illegal immigrants”.

**ACROSS NORTH AMERICA,**

confiscations are often framed as anti-counterfeiting measures, with brand protection agencies in support of confiscations.

The Trump regime’s anti-migrant stance has led vendors, many of whom are undocumented migrants, to fear immigration police. In New York,

where laws governing street vending are described as confusing, convoluted, and contradictory, the city council continues to declare new areas restricted vending zones, notably in downtown Flushing, Queens, and the area around the World Trade Center in lower Manhattan, amid charges of Islamophobia.

Food vendors in New York face particularly precarious circumstances due to the cap on the number of food vending permits, forcing vendors to work in the shadows or pay exorbitant black-market rates for permits. The New York Street Vendor Project has been working tirelessly for the last decade to lift the caps and fight for their place in the city. A new bill revisiting the cap was introduced in 2018, prompting renewed campaigning by the vending community for 4,000 possible permits. A recent class action lawsuit settlement garnered \$200,000 in compensation for vendors whose carts were improperly seized.

In a move of solidarity after the 2016 election, the Los Angeles City Council removed criminal penalties from the city’s law banning street vending to help protect undocumented immigrants vulnerable under the



**New York City street vendors call on policymakers to lift the caps on permits to legally vend in the city.**

*Photo credit: Street Vendor Project*

Trump administration. In an important follow on, in November 2018, the council unanimously voted to legalize street vending—the result of 10 years of campaigning. Supporters pointed to research that estimated that 50,000 vendors in the city contributed \$504 million annually to the local economy.

A stylized map of North America in orange. A dashed orange box highlights the United States and Mexico. Inside the box, text reads: "NORTH AMERICA: Migrant vendors are increasingly under threat, but vending is legalized in Los Angeles." The text is in bold, black, sans-serif font.

**NORTH AMERICA:**  
Migrant vendors are increasingly under threat, but vending is legalized in Los Angeles.

## Moving forward an Inclusive Urban Agenda

These news reports paint an unequivocal picture of exclusionary cities everywhere.

Reviewing 18 months of online street vendor news—even taking into account media bias to cover explosive eviction events—has further emboldened WIEGO’s work to support street vendor organizations in claiming their rights to work and to the city.

The situation is even more complicated than this coverage suggests, and there is a great need for in-depth analysis of, and discussion about, the drivers of exclusion, including the role of real estate developers

and other private sector players pressuring authorities for additional land, privatization, securitization and protection of their brands.

And while the news shows a troubling global portrait, there were a few noteworthy articles highlighting positive steps forward. Those places that did show progress include the union of African vendors in Spain, which is countering pressures from the big brands by launching their own clothing line; the innovative cooperation agreements between vendors and the local authority in Monrovia, Liberia; and the campaign to legalize vending in Los Angeles, in the face of national government hostility.

These promising examples show the key ingredients that go into

advancing inclusivity: the importance of collective action among traders and support from allies; vendors proactively proposing alternative models of vendor management; and the need for better legal frameworks. And when all else fails, there is litigation.

WIEGO’s urban advocacy and research, grounded in our particular cities, provide good examples of innovative and inclusive practices. These models show that progress is not only possible but happening. Creating more inclusive cities—as our news analysis shows—has a long way to go to become a reality, but a more equitable future relies on new legal and policy frameworks to reverse the headlines and create cities for all.

***This article was originally published on 7 May 2019, on the [WIEGO Blog](#).***

### About WIEGO’s Global Monitoring System:

Since October 2013, WIEGO’s [Global Monitoring System \(GMS\)](#) has systematically monitored informal economy news in four languages: English, Spanish, Portuguese and French. The GMS is a critical source of information for advocacy and analysis, highlighting places of concern but also, when covered, examples of inclusive practise. Articles highlighting important developments are disseminated via social media. Synthesized worker group news is regularly sent to worker-based movements and other WIEGO partners as well as to policymakers and practitioners. The goal of the GMS is to raise the visibility of worker struggles and victories across the globe, beyond the countries and cities that any one of these constituencies live and work in, building solidarity across place and space. WIEGO researchers regularly analyze the archive to highlight trends by worker group and on specific topical themes.

***To access original articles that informed this article, read the [online version on the WIEGO Blog](#).***



In Peru, members of the *Asociación de Comerciantes El Triunfador de Confraternidad* face uncertainty regarding the space they use to work. Being organized has enabled them to respond to the community’s demand to have a local market by building some infrastructure in the lot they used as a street market and to make their case for the use of that space with the municipal authorities and other groups.

*Photo credit: Juan Arredondo/Getty Images Reportage*



# Myths and facts about street vendors

By Caroline Skinner  
and Sarah Orleans Reed

*Inaccuracies about street vending are common across national boundaries. In WIEGO's monitoring of policy and practice trends, and in our research and advocacy work, we often hear these repeated. This article looks at the common myths and offers factual evidence and examples to show why these myths are misleading or false.*

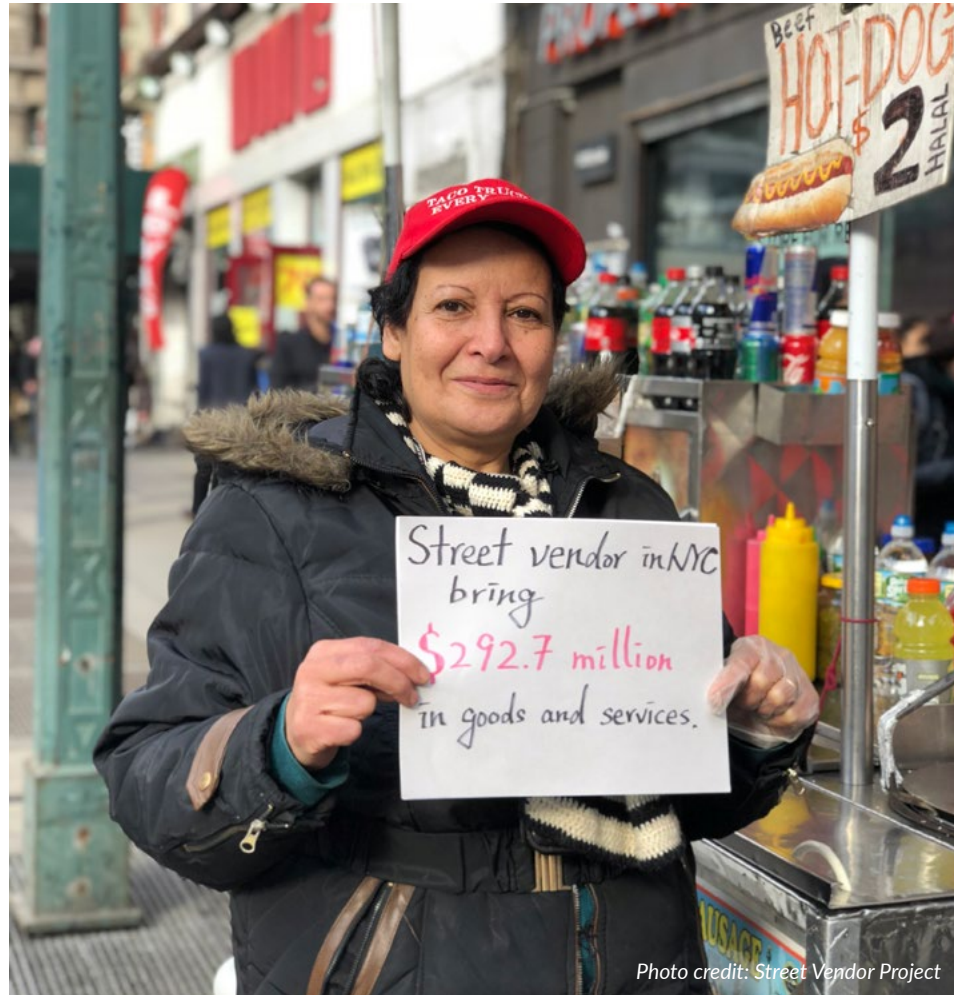


Photo credit: Street Vendor Project

**MYTH:**  
*Street vendors' work is under regulated.*

**FACT:**  
Street vendors are among the most heavily regulated occupational sectors in many cities. In Ahmedabad, India, a license for a vegetable vendor specifies 21 restrictions on when, where and how she can sell. A study by the New York City Independent Budget Office found that in 2009, the city spent at least US\$7.4 million on the enforcement of street vending regulations, which are highly complicated and cumbersome even for the police to understand. Vendors themselves generally welcome clearer, more transparent regulations that bring predictability and stability to their livelihoods.



**FACT:** Informal vendors add revenue to the tax base.

Photo credit: Juan Arredondo/Getty Images Reportage

**MYTH:**  
*Street vendors choose to operate informally.*

**FACT:**  
Most cities do not have appropriate or accessible registration systems for street vendors. Many criminalize vending and do not give vendors a way to register legally. In other cases, licenses are available, but governments elect to release far fewer licenses than there are street vendors, who do this work to earn a livelihood. A study of Nairobi, Kenya found that only 7,000 licenses and formal sites were available for the city's approximately 500,000 street traders. In 2009, the city of São Paulo, Brazil had an estimated 100,000 vendors, but only 2,200 had licenses. In New York City, the number of food vending permits is capped at 3,000, though up to 20,000 vendors are estimated to operate in the city's streets. These artificial caps on licensing keep the majority of vending populations working in the shadows.

**MYTH:**  
*Street vendors don't pay taxes.*

**FACT:**  
Street vendors commonly pay a variety of taxes, fees and levies to governments. Many pay value added tax (VAT) on their purchases, but don't charge VAT to customers nor do they qualify for VAT returns. WIEGO's Informal Economy Monitoring Study interviewed street vendors in five cities and found that nearly two-thirds of the street vendors sampled pay for a license, permit or access to public space. Market traders often pay even more: in Accra, Ghana, market traders pay yearly, quarterly, monthly, and daily tolls to local and national authorities. Prohibiting vending prevents cities from capitalizing on this important tax base: economists in Los Angeles estimated that if legalized, vending would contribute US\$33 million from sales tax alone—and much more when considering other indirect and induced tax revenue generated by sales.



**MYTH:**

*Street vendors cause congestion and make cities less walkable.*

**FACT:**

Other factors create more serious sidewalk impediments, while the presence of vendors is often considered a bonus for pedestrians. Evidence in Bangkok, Thailand, shows that vendors are among the least important sidewalk obstacles for pedestrians, compared to inappropriate infrastructure, advertisement banners and the poor condition of pavement. Pedestrians in Downtown Flushing, New York, identified a host of other factors—popularity of stores and restaurants, narrow sidewalks, and bus waiting lines, for instance—as the main contributors to sidewalk congestion. Further, observations by urban planners indicate that vending and other small businesses make urban residents more likely to walk by providing a diversity of goods and services within walking distance.

**FACT:** Findings suggest that the more informal traders are incorporated into urban plans, the safer the food they sell.

*Photo credit: Patricia Carney*

**MYTH:**

*Food vendors are a threat to consumer health.*

**FACT:**

Research in many cities across the Global South shows the important role played by informal food vendors in urban food security. Levels of bacteria in street food have been measured in many urban areas across the Global South, with varying results. The decisive factor is traders' access to basic trading infrastructure: water and toilets, shelter, tables and paved surfaces. These findings suggest that the more informal traders are incorporated into urban plans, the safer the food they sell. Hygiene training is also shown to be an important factor in securing low bacterial counts.

**MYTH:**

*Street vending contributes to urban grime.*

**FACT:**

Crime and dirty environments are bad for vendors' businesses, so many vendors spend their own time and resources taking care of waste disposal and street cleaning. When local authorities do not provide infrastructure and facilities, cluttered, dirty environments are the result. Cases where street traders have been incorporated into urban plans, like Warwick Junction in inner city Durban, and Central Monrovia, Liberia, demonstrate the extent to which street vendors can be part of the solution to urban management challenges when integrated into urban planning.



**MYTH:**  
*Street vendors contribute to crime.*

**FACT:**  
Street vendors see enhancing safety as part of their role. They deter and report crime, alerting law enforcement to suspicious activity, and create safer, friendlier environments. This was powerfully demonstrated when a New York street vendor alerted authorities to a bomb in Times Square. Vendors are the “eyes and ears” of the street. Research from Bangkok shows that many streets became isolated after vendor evictions in 2016 and 2017, making pedestrians vulnerable to petty crime.

**MYTH:**  
*Street vendors buy and sell illegal products.*

**FACT:**  
Most vendors buy and sell goods that are legal: fruits and vegetables, prepared food, basic household goods and others. While a minority of vendors sell counterfeit goods, there is no evidence that they are more likely than formal businesses to sell them; vendors are just simply more visible targets. The success of Top Manta in Spain demonstrates the willingness among vendors to cooperate in programmes to develop their own brands and sell alternative stock.

**MYTH:**  
*Street vendors always compete against formal retailers.*

**FACT:**  
There is little evidence that vendors have a negative impact on neighboring retailers. Available research—in cities from Los Angeles and New York, USA to Taipei, Taiwan, and Cali, Colombia—suggests that formal businesses do not suffer from the presence of vendors, and on the contrary benefit from the customers that vendors attract to neighbourhood shopping districts. When street vendors were removed in Bangkok, Thailand, formal business owners reported severe reductions in sales volumes and profits.

**MYTH:**  
*Vendors cannot engage in collective bargaining.*

**FACT:**  
Just as formal sector workers bargain with their employers, street vendors bargain collectively with local authorities, whose decisions critically shape vendors’ livelihoods. Issues such as securing the right to vend, determining where vending is permitted, gaining access to infrastructure—both basic (toilets and water) and work-related (shelter and storage)—are among the issues that need to be negotiated. There are, however, very few recognized forums that formalize these negotiation processes.



**FACT:** Most vendors buy and sell goods that are legal: fruits and vegetables, prepared food, basic household goods and others.

*Photo credit: Paula Bronstein/Getty Images Reportage*



**MYTH:**

*Street vending is separate from the formal economy.*

**FACT:**

Vendors are intimately connected to formal businesses through their supply chains. In WIEGO's [Informal Economy Monitoring Study](#), more than half the sample reported sourcing their goods from formal suppliers, and selling their goods to formal sector enterprises or employees. For multinational corporations like Unilever, Breweries (e.g. Anheuser-Busch InBevIt), and Coca-Cola, vendors and other informal retailers act as the final point of product distribution. Research from Los Angeles estimates that spending by vendors and their households directly created more than 4,000 full-time employees in retail stores, groceries, and supermarkets.

**MYTH:**

*“World Class” cities don’t have street vendors.*

**FACT:**

Street vendors are a renowned feature of cities like New York, Fukoka, Seoul, and Taipei. Other cities like [Los Angeles](#), [London](#), [Portland](#), and [Detroit](#) have created new policies aimed at reviving street culture through vending and street markets.



**FACT:** Millions of women worldwide earn essential income from informal trade.

*Photo credit: Jonathan Torgovnik/Getty Images Reportage*

**MYTH:**

*Street vending is marginal to employment generation.*

**FACT:**

Street vending is a significant generator of employment. Street vending accounts for [5 per cent](#) of total urban informal employment in India and as much as [12 to 24 per cent](#) of total urban informal employment in Sub-Saharan African cities. Vending is particularly important for [women workers](#) in these countries, as well as in many countries in Latin America and Southeast Asia. It represents the main source of household income for many households.

**MYTH:**

*Street vendors are difficult to organize.*

**FACT:**

Street vendors are very receptive to collective organization because they face constant threats to their work security. As a result, there are many cases of strong, competent organizations of street vendors. The [Self-Employed Women's Association](#) in India, for example, has nearly two million members, a significant proportion of whom are street vendors. As of May 2019, [StreetNet International](#) has 559,802 members from 52 affiliates in 49 countries in Africa, Asia, the Americas, Europe and Central Asia. The vast majority of these members are street vendors and informal traders.

# Feeding cities: Informal retailers play crucial role in urban food security

A Q&A with *Caroline Skinner and Gareth Haysom*

*Supermarkets have spread rapidly across the Global South, but what implications does this growth have on informal food retailers and the food security of low-income households?*

For over 10 years, the African Centre for Cities (ACC), at the University of Cape Town, has worked on urban food security, conducting detailed research in 15 cities across Sub-Saharan Africa initially through the African Food Security Urban Network (AFSUN) and more recently through the Consuming Urban Poverty (CUP) project, as well as across the Global South through the Hungry Cities Partnership.

This research has consistently shown the importance of the informal economy in the urban food system, and particularly in the food security of poorer households.



Supermarket chains have grown rapidly across the Global South. Street vendors here in Kitwe, Zambia, continue to vend outside Shoprite, despite new challenges and competition.

Photo credit: Jane Battersby



WIEGO's Urban Research Director, [Caroline Skinner](#), has been an advisor to ACC's food security research team. In this interview, she and food security expert, [Gareth Haysom](#) of the ACC, reflect on this decade-long evidence and what it means for feeding cities.

***Given the rapid expansion of supermarkets, are consumers still patronizing informal sellers?***

ACC's survey evidence consistently finds that low-income households continue to source food from informal outlets, even when supermarkets are in the area.

By way of example, the Consuming Urban Poverty (CUP) project conducted fieldwork in three secondary cities: Kisumu, Kenya; Kitwe, Zambia; and Epworth, outside Harare, Zimbabwe, and the vast majority of those interviewed patronized the informal food economy—from street food vendors to house shops to market sellers selling a variety of foods from vegetables to pulses to meats. In Epworth, this was as high as 79 per cent, with over 50 per cent doing so every day. In Kisumu and Kitwe, over 70 per cent of



households purchased food from informal outlets more than 5 days a week.

These results echo the findings from AFSUN surveys: across the 11 cities, 70 per cent of households interviewed reported normally sourcing food from informal outlets. Nearly one third said they patronized the informal food economy almost every

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***Low-income households continue to source food from informal outlets, even when supermarkets are in the area.***

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day and nearly two thirds did so at least once a week.

What we are finding is rather than simply displacing informal trade, supermarkets and informal traders coexist.

***What does this research show about usage of supermarkets by low-income shoppers?***

While low-income consumers are doing their daily shopping in the informal food economy, they are indeed still using supermarkets.

In CUP cities, most interviewees reported patronizing supermarkets, while the AFSUN research found that 79 per cent of interviewees purchased from supermarkets, but most respondents reported shopping at supermarkets just once a month.

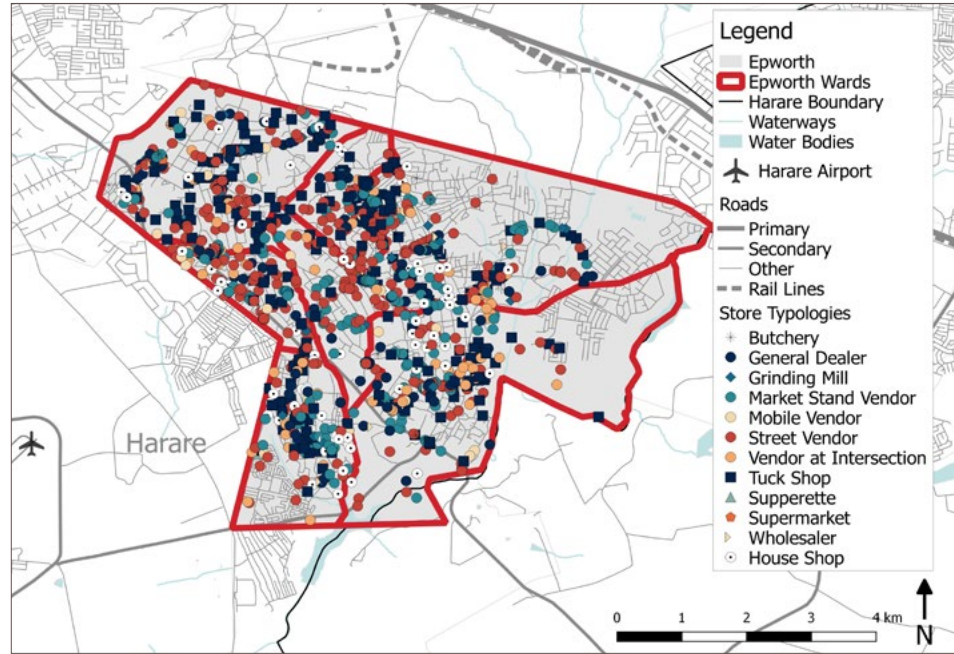
The existing evidence suggests that there was a pattern of bulk-buying staples from supermarkets while relying on the informal food economy for other daily food needs.

**What explains the continued use of informal retailers?**

Informal food retailers remain adept at responding to the needs of poor urban residents. For these consumers, their income is erratic; they may lack refrigeration and storage space; and they use public transport or taxis, which limit the quantities that can be transported.

Challenges like these force low-income households to purchase food more frequently. The research suggests that the urban poor will continue to choose to source food in the informal sector due to a combination of factors:

- **Convenient location:** Informal food traders are often located at commuter points, while mapping of informal food outlets shows how evenly distributed they are through urban settlements. Consumers, therefore, do not have to incur additional transport costs to purchase food.
- **Opening hours:** Surveys with informal traders consistently show they often open early and close late.



**The distribution of food retailers across Epworth, Zimbabwe.**

Source: Alexander and Park Ross for Consuming Urban Poverty

Such strategies mean that the informal food sector plays a central role in enabling food access and, as a result, improved food security for the urban poor.

*It is often assumed that supermarkets are a boon for poorer households. What does ACC's work show about their impact on food security?*

The research findings suggest supermarkets are most certainly not always a boon for poorer households. In a study conducted in Cape Town, Jane Battersby found that supermarkets in low-income areas often stock less healthy foods than those in wealthier areas.

Therefore, it should not be assumed that supermarkets increase access to healthy foods. In the Cape Town research, they concluded that, since supermarkets stocked processed food, they had, in fact, accelerated the transition to less healthy diets.



A vendor in Kitwe, Zambia selling oil in small, affordable quantities.

Photo credit: Samantha Reinders

- **Appropriate quantities:** Informal food retailers often break up bulk products to sell in smaller quantities, which might be more expensive per unit, but is more affordable to the urban poor.
- **Credit:** Informal food traders often offer credit, making it possible to buy food without cash in times of shortage.



***The state does have a duty to protect consumer health. Food produced under informal conditions—without access to water, toilets and shelter—must surely be an issue?***

We certainly must not discount consumer safety issues.

Levels of bacteria in street food have been measured in many urban areas across the African continent. The results show that the prevalence of

bacteria in street foods vary from high to low. The decisive factor in this is the extent to which traders have access to basic infrastructure (water and toilets) and trading infrastructure (shelter, tables and paved surfaces).

These findings suggest that the more informal traders are incorporated into urban plans, the safer the food they sell. Hygiene training is also shown to be an important factor in securing low bacterial counts.



Photo credit: Jonathan Torgovnik/Getty Images Reportage

***Urban agriculture is often a focus of current policy initiatives to improve food access and security. What do your findings suggest about this focus?***

In all the cities researched, food was available. Formal and informal food traders use multiple local, national and international networks to secure enough food to sell.

Food insecurity is rather the result of the ability to purchase food. The research conclusively shows urban agriculture is seldom a primary food source and those who do practice it very seldom sell the surplus they produce.

This suggests that a policy focus on urban agriculture might be misguided.

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***The more informal traders are incorporated into urban plans, the safer the food they sell.***

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***What policy suggestions would you make, given the findings in this research?***

The research shows that informal food traders are key enablers of food access and contribute to the stability in the urban food system. In addition, informal food trade is a significant source of employment, particularly for women.

Rather than constantly being harassed, informal food retailers should be incorporated into urban plans. The CUP project has developed [a number of policy briefs](#) to assist and guide local government. WIEGO's work on [inclusive public space](#), drawing on good practices from a range of countries and cities, provides suggestions for [a participatory approach to planning, design and management of trading spaces, guided by progressive legislation](#).

Both the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) and the [Food and Agriculture Organization](#) (FAO) recognize the importance of informal food retailers and have produced excellent guidelines for improving the health and hygiene standards of informal retailers.

# PART II: The Challenges





# For street vendors, finding water and toilets isn't just a nuisance, it's cutting into earnings

By Carlin Carr

*The daily grind of street vendors comes with a host of obvious business challenges: sourcing and preparing goods to sell; attracting a steady stream of customers; and generating enough take-home pay to survive. It's a hustle, and one that these roadside entrepreneurs know well. But the hustle only goes so far.*

Conducting their livelihoods in public spaces, street vendors face difficult challenges extending beyond their everyday business transactions. Woefully inadequate infrastructure, particularly around access to clean water and toilets, often wreaks havoc on their working lives. Multiple costs—including trips to the toilet and water delivery—cut into already meagre earnings. Limited access takes a toll on vendors' mental and physical health, further reducing their earning potential.

These are key findings from research by WIEGO and International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) with street vendors in Nakuru (Kenya) and Durban (South Africa). Funded by DFID's ICED facility, the study was conducted with WIEGO partner Asiye eTafuleni (AeT) and StreetNet International's affiliate Kenya National Alliance of Street Vendors and Informal Traders (KENASVIT).



Street vendor Victoria Odonkor cleans and cuts vegetables in Makola Market, Accra, Ghana. Accessing water can be a challenge for many vendors.  
Photo credit: Jonathan Torgovnik/Getty Images Reportage

The partners examined how inadequate access to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) has affected vendors, and found that the resulting economic, health and environmental burdens can have long-term consequences that may further entrench workers' poverty and exclusion.

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***In Nakuru, these cost burdens were even higher: vendors spent approximately 20% of their incomes on WASH.***

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In Durban, water and toilet expenses cut out 8-12% of vendors' monthly earnings. In Nakuru, these cost burdens were even higher: vendors spent approximately 20% of their incomes on WASH.

"Improving economic opportunities for the poor cannot happen in a vacuum," explains Laura Alfors, director of WIEGO's Social Protection Programme. "Street vendors are out there every day trying to earn an income, but policymakers need to address these structural inequities that hinder those at the base of the pyramid from making a living and a life."



Vendors often pay for toilets and have to wait in long queues. Monica Agyei in Accra stands in front of her array of foods for sale.

*Photo credit: Jonathan Torgovnik/  
Getty Images Reportage*

## Charges even for toilet paper

Street vendors already struggle to make enough to survive; the cost of accessing toilets and clean water only adds to that burden. WASH services are needed on a daily basis and often several times in a working day, which means that these recurring fees can be endless.

Most vendors use pay-per-use toilets in Durban and Nakuru, where some facilities may even charge extra for toilet paper. Paying for services, however, doesn't guarantee quality. Many vendors still struggled to access clean or convenient sanitation, even when free options were available. In Durban, free toilets may fall into disuse, often close early, or have excessively long queues. In addition, many vendors need WASH



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*In Durban, more than 35% of surveyed vendors spent upwards of 30 minutes to access water—and nearly 10% spent over an hour a day.*

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to conduct their businesses and for women, the burdens of meagre WASH are especially challenging. Women often need to visit toilets more frequently and may also bring their children, who often accompany them to work.

Food sellers are overwhelmingly female, and these vendors particularly depend upon water to wash their dishes, hands, and vegetables or other foods. However, WIEGO's Informal Economy Monitoring Study found that only 28% of vendors in Durban had access to water and 47% in Nakuru.

As a result, vendors in Durban must pay for water drums—R5 for a 20-litre or 25-litre drum—plus extra delivery charges (another R3 to R10 per drum). That also means that female food-sellers are unequally burdened with WASH-related costs of conducting their livelihoods.

All of these fees—multiple trips to the toilet, toilet paper, water delivery costs, water itself—are just part of the economic losses for vendors lacking adequate WASH.

## Time away results in lost customers

For these small entrepreneurs, time is money—and running after all these services takes a toll on their business in myriad ways.

In Durban, more than 35% of surveyed vendors spent upwards of 30 minutes to access water—and nearly 10% spent over an hour a day. In the cut-throat world of street vending, potential customers can easily be snatched up by neighbouring sellers.

As one respondent from Durban noted: “Sometimes when someone is at your table without you being there, another trader will say, ‘come this side’”.

Even more insidious are the extractions from local officials for leaving goods unattended, which represent a violation of Durban's bylaws.



**For vendors, having to seek out toilets results in time lost interacting with customers and making sales, the Durban study found.**

*Photo credit: Jonathan Torgovnik*

## Mental and physical health stresses add up

Alongside the economic costs, there are the major yet invisible burdens upon vendors' physical and psychosocial well-being. Finding, waiting and paying for toilets multiple times a day is a stressful endeavour.

Vendors also recognised that inadequate water and sanitation may affect their relations with customers and with fellow traders. In Nakuru, vendors linked the lack of toilets

to business closures, several health impacts, environmental pollution, and family- or employment-related conflicts. As they explained: "Lack of toilets can lead to conflict between employers and employees if the employee takes long to access toilets, and this becomes a source of stress for the employee".

Traders in both cities also identified several pathways between inadequate WASH and health burdens, including medical expenditures and the opportunity costs of seeking treatment.

## Addressing WASH has far-reaching potential

Clean, safe and affordable WASH facilities are among the most vital infrastructure that municipalities can provide. With adequate provision, there can be multiple positive outcomes, both for the workers and the city overall.

Hygienic conditions can address customer-confidence issues, reduce stigma against vendors, and improve their workplaces. These outcomes not only significantly improve vendors' earning potential, but can also create safer and healthier communities.

To meet the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) for ending poverty while providing decent work and universal access to WASH, solutions must address the daily challenges faced by

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*Alongside the economic costs, there are the major yet invisible burdens upon vendors' physical and psychosocial well-being.*

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those at the base of the pyramid. It's not a one-size-fits-all answer, and for real change to happen, informal workers should be given a voice in key decision-making processes affecting their lives. Only then can we begin to measure and achieve meaningful progress.

The blog was originally posted on the [ICED Facility's page on Medium](#) on 29 June 2019. This blog also draws upon inputs by partners at [Asiye eTafuleni \(AeT\)](#), [Kenya National Alliance of Street Vendors and Informal Traders \(KENASVIT\)](#), [University of Nairobi](#), and [IIED](#).



**A first aid station in Durban, South Africa's bovine head market. Lack of toilets and water add physical and mental burdens to the daily lives of street vendors.**

*Photo credit: Street Vendors South Africa*



# In a New York neighborhood, it's the rich pushing out street vendors, not the majority

By Ryan Thomas Devlin and Sarah Orleans Reed

*“Lin’s” BBQ cart was once a busy operation in the center of downtown Flushing, a prosperous and predominately East Asian neighborhood in Queens, New York City. People used to wait in long lines for five-to-ten minutes just for a taste of lamb or chicken skewers, fresh off her charcoal grill.*

*Now Lin sits with her cart on a quiet side street in the shadow of a parking garage. Instead of ten-minute lines, ten minutes pass between single customers.*

Lin’s whole life changed in 2018, when business and political elites in Flushing decided that Lin and other vendors like her were no longer welcome.

Their official argument was that vendors caused congestion, but less officially, they saw vendors as unpleasant eyesores. Their comments echoed the rhetoric of anti-vendor governments and elites around the world.



**New York street vendors face challenges for space in changing neighborhoods.**

*Photo credit: Aftab Uzzaman/Creative Commons*

But our forthcoming research tells a different story: The majority of people who work and live in Flushing want Lin and other vendors like her to stay. Our findings are a reminder that issues around public-space access are controlled by powerful interests—a story not so different between the Global North and South, whether it’s a city like New York or Bangkok, Lima, or Lagos.

## A changing Flushing

Flushing, Queens, is home to one of New York’s largest concentrations of Asian immigrants. The area is a dense mix of people from Taiwan, Hong Kong and mainland China.

The downtown shopping area is where most street vendors ply their trade. The majority of Flushing’s food vendors are Chinese immigrants selling foods that provide residents with a taste of home: grilled meat skewers, sweet egg cakes, and roasted chestnuts.

But Flushing is changing. Developers and investors are working to turn Flushing into a home and destination for wealthy people with expensive tastes, rather than the working class neighborhood it has historically been.

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*Developers and investors are working to turn Flushing into a home and destination for wealthy people with expensive tastes, rather than the working class neighborhood it has historically been.*

*As part of this plan, in October 2018, a new law was passed banning all street vending in the downtown area.*

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As part of this plan, in October 2018, a new law was passed banning all street vending in the downtown area. Opponents of vendors made two distinct kinds of arguments against vending.

The first was based on objective criteria, such as crowding. As one

**Customers line up for Lin’s barbeque at her old vending site. Her relocation to a desolate area has devastated her business.**

*Photo credit: Ryan Thomas Devlin*

business leader argued in a public hearing, “...especially during lunch time, our sidewalk is very congested and I often see people walking on the street and it’s very dangerous there... because there are so many carts on the street.”

It made sense that leaders would use crowding as an excuse to ban vendors. Their rhetoric echoes

the arguments made by officials in places like Bangkok, Thailand, who have similarly attacked vendors under the motto “return the foot-path to pedestrians.”







Street vendors in Bangkok have faced attacks similar to those faced in New York under the municipality's motto "return the footpath to pedestrians."

Photo credit: Paula Bronstein/Getty Images Reportage

But during hearings and in the New York press, the real reason for vendor restrictions often slipped out: vendors just didn't fit the luxury image that Flushing's business interests are trying to create.

So, claiming to speak for the entire neighborhood, political and business elites complained that vendors sell shabby merchandise and low-quality food that "nobody" wants and that they operated "at the expense of

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*Upper-class residents didn't like vendors because they were "visual reminders of poverty".*

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their community". According to one community member we spoke with, upper-class residents didn't like vendors because they were "visual reminders of poverty" and didn't want to see them on the sidewalks.

## What Flushing residents really thought about vendors

These negative claims were getting a lot of airtime, but were they true? We developed a research methodology to investigate this question. Our work draws on a study conducted by researchers in Bangkok to assess the underlying causes of sidewalk congestion in that city.

With the help of volunteers, we collected 250 surveys over three days in Flushing. We targeted three groups: vendor customers, people hanging out in public space, and commuters. The people we surveyed were an accurate representation of the neighbourhood: about 70% of respondents were from Flushing; 71% were immigrants; and nearly half of all respondents were born in China.

So did the views of average people in Flushing conform to those statements being made on their behalf by real estate tycoons and their allies in city government? The short answer is no.

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*Experience from Bangkok to Flushing demonstrates the need to challenge "official" wisdom about vending.*

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Vendors were blamed for crowding by proponents of the ban. While 84% of people agreed that Flushing was crowded, they did not name vendors as a major cause of crowding. Of 10 reasons for crowding in Flushing, street vendors ranked 7th, just after "people passing out flyers". This resonates with findings from Bangkok.

To justify the ban, anti-vending advocates argued that nobody likes vendors and that the community wanted them gone. According to our research, this is not the case. The majority of commuters and public-space users (55%) wanted vendors to stay; this number increases to 70% when including street food consumers, as well.

When asked why, respondents said things like, "people rely on these vendors", "vendors work hard; we should support them", and "street vendors are

some of the best parts of Flushing”. Hardly the words of a community that doesn’t think vendors belong.

In general, people with lower incomes had more favorable views about vendors, while higher-income people were more likely to perceive vendors as a problem and more likely to be in favor of the vendor ban. In comments, wealthier respondents were also more likely to see vendors as “unclean”, as selling “unhealthy” or “dirty” food, or see them as causing “security risks”.

On the other hand, many of the people who agreed with the vendor ban did not identify vendors themselves as a problem. Instead, they indicated a more general malaise with Flushing: “Too many people. The neighborhood is unclean. The air is poor quality.”

In the end, we can say that the data shows that social class informs feelings about vendors, and class bias drives vendor exclusion, not objective planning or policy criteria. It also shows that business leaders who claim to speak for the public do not represent the public interest, but rather are advocating for their own narrow economic interests when they seek to ban vending.

## Lin’s BBQ cart and the global fight for inclusive public spaces

When we spoke with Lin, the BBQ meat vendor, after the ban was enacted, she was worried about her future. Her revenue had been cut in half by her move to this new out-of-the-way location. She seemed trapped and unsure of how to move forward. She wasn’t making enough money to cover her costs and didn’t know what to do.

Before starting her vending business she held a job as a home health care aide. But she said she was too old now to help clients into beds and out of bathtubs. She couldn’t go back to dealing with low wages, long hours, and emotionally draining conditions. Street vending had been a way for her to escape exploitative wage labour, a path toward independence. Now, thanks to a law passed for the benefit

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*In general, people with lower incomes had more favorable views about vendors.*

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of developers of luxury condos and fancy new malls, Lin’s once-successful business—her source of hope—had been taken away from her.

Experience from Bangkok to Flushing demonstrates the need to challenge “official” wisdom about vending, which is so often dominated by elites in public statements and via social media. We wager that in most places, anti-vendor rhetoric does not match the reality of public opinion. Gathering the perceptions of from ordinary people who regularly use public space pokes holes in justifications for vendor restrictions, and can help advocate for more just and inclusive public spaces for informal workers.

*This article was originally published on 6 August 2019 on the [WIEGO Blog](#).*

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*The majority of commuters and public-space users (55%) wanted vendors to stay; this number increases to 70% when including street food consumers, as well.*

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# In Lima, modernization makes work harder for some

By Leslie Vryenhoek

*Modernization in cities is meant to ease the commute for workers and offer convenience, to make lives easier. But too often, it's the poorest urban workers who pay the price for change.*

Just after 4 a.m., Lima is asleep, the streets nearly empty and the sidewalks deserted except for a few women in municipal jumpsuits and masks who clean the streets. Even the densely populated San Juan de Lurigancho district of this sprawling metropolis is quiet. Then the newspaper vendors—*canillitas*, they're called—appear, arriving at the distribution point where they buy the papers they will sell today.

It's cold this morning and occasionally the mist turns to drizzle. The sidewalk is damp as they get to work, sleeving sections together and bundling the newspapers—a selection of harder news and lighter fare, sports and entertainment. For each paper sold,



Juana Corman Pérez takes the early morning in stride.

Photo credit: Juan Arredondo/Getty Images Reportage

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*It's just one way a changing world is increasing the daily struggle for some of this capital city's poorest workers.*

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they will earn 20-25 per cent of the cover price.

But sales of newspapers have dropped precipitously in Lima in recent years, as they have most everywhere, due to the availability of news on the internet. There's also been a shift among readers in favour of the less serious, sensationalist tabloids. And those cheaper papers offer a lower return to vendors.

It's just one way a changing world is increasing the daily struggle for some of this capital city's poorest workers.

## Newspaper vendors: daily challenges before dawn

One of the *canillitas* on the sidewalk this chilly September morning is Juana Corman Pérez. She takes the weather and the early hour in stride. Like many

of these vendors, she's been doing this work for decades, offering an important service to the public. And like many of her colleagues, she's un-happy about a lack of support from local authorities in Lima.

Case in point: recently, the newspaper vendors' union asked about setting up tents to shelter the vendors while they worked. But even though the sidewalks are deserted in these early hours, the municipality refused, saying it would have to charge them to use the public space if they set up shelters.

And then there's the modern transportation system that's been established here. This multi-lane road has become a major bus corridor while overhead the Lima Metro, an electric transit system, runs. It's all designed to offer Lima's labour force a convenient way to get to work while helping to alleviate the city's big traffic problems. But modernization has also bisected this community and interrupted the ecosystem of informal livelihoods that used to thrive here. Where once vendors sold tea and food, there are now just these empty sidewalks.



**Papers are prepared for sale while a moto-taxi waits.**

*Photo credit: Juan Arredondo/ Getty Images Reportage*

The informal moto-taxis that proliferated on this street have been forced out, too. That's a particular problem for newspaper vendors, who are not permitted on affordable, modern public transport with their newspapers.

Juana must contract a moto-taxi to pick her up and take her to a small kiosk that is her workplace. The journey, more expensive than before, costs her 7 soles. And that means

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*The municipality refused, saying it would have to charge them to use the public space if they set up shelters.*

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the first 35-40 units she sells each day—more than a third of her daily turnover—simply pay to cover her transportation.



## La Parada's vendors: moved out to pave the way for "progress"

By 5:30 a.m. the city is awake. As the sun slowly cuts through a gray mist, the traffic begins in earnest. And in the markets, the vendors begin to welcome customers. But like the *canillitas*, many of these vendors have already put in hours getting ready for the day's sales.

*La Parada* was, until a handful of years ago, Lima's main wholesale market. Centrally located, it thrived. About

7,000 vendors made their living here, supported by a well-organized legion of market porters. However, the city decided to build a new wholesale market where wholesalers could rent space. Despite workers' protests, the relocation went ahead in 2012, and sparked violent clashes between vendors and authorities.

This market vendor tells visitors from WIEGO how her daily journey to the wholesale market is now more arduous and perilous.

Photo credit: Rhiana Chinapen



Though the wholesale market was relocated to a massive, modern facility at Santa Anita, a smaller number of medium-scale street vendors still operate at *La Parada*.

Wholesalers who have stayed at *La Parada* dot the periphery of the empty park that was once a thriving market.

Photo credit: Juan Arredondo/Getty Images Reportage

The problem is, they must go to Santa Anita to acquire their goods. For many, that means waking well before dawn and travelling for hours so they can be ready for their early morning customers.

Meanwhile, the area that had been the wholesale market in *La Parada* is now a park—the Park of the Migrant—spanning 3.4 hectares. Difficult to access and open only part of the week, locals say it is most often

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*Big, modern supermarkets that promise convenience have taken about 30 per cent of revenue out of traditional markets, so these vendors need to offer added value.*

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empty, while on its periphery, a busy informal market continues to serve residents and restaurants.

## Market vendors: long days and big competitors

At *Mercado Modelo de Pamplona Alta*, a retail market, a woman who sells dry goods goes to the wholesale market in the evening, after a long day of selling, to buy inventory for the next day. It's a dangerous trip after dark, and she worries about the risk because she carries so much money to pay for goods—money that, if stolen, she will have no way to replenish.

She notes that the women and men who sell perishable goods must also travel in darkness to be at the wholesale market by 4 a.m. For some, she says,

this can amount to a 150-kilometer round trip through congested Lima traffic. But it's an essential journey, every day, to ensure their produce is fresh.

Freshness matters. Big, modern supermarkets that promise convenience have taken about 30 per cent of revenue out of traditional markets, so these vendors need to offer added value. That's become a major focus for organizing and mobilizing.

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*Most buyers must depend on private vehicles to get to Mercado Mayorista and pick up their goods. For small-scale vendors, the journey adds time and expense.*

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The vendors' association, The National Federation of Market Workers, is developing strategies to help members compete with gigantic retailers. If traditional market vendors can't beat the supermarkets on price, they can on quality, freshness and friendly, personal service. And because a lot of workers have come here from rural areas, they provide authentic, traditional food that can't be found at a supermarket.



The new wholesale market in Santa Anita is massive and built for efficiency.

Photo credit: Megan Macleod



At the wholesale market, there's plenty of space to load a private vehicle but few other transportation options for buyers.





Traditions hold on despite the modern facility.

Photo credit: Megan Macleod

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*If traditional market vendors can't beat the supermarkets on price, they can on quality, freshness and friendly, personal service.*

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## The modern market: a mix of modern efficiency and tradition

Decades ago, Lima's municipal government hired consultants from the United States to design a plan for a wholesale market in Lima. *Mercado Mayorista* was finally constructed in Santa Anita in 2012. Today, it turns over 6-7 thousand tonnes of goods daily, which arrive here on about 600 trucks. Whereas at the old facility it took 20 hours to unload the goods, the new facility's ample space for trucks means the job is done in one-tenth that time.

There are a total of about 3,000 workers at the wholesale market, including porters and vendors, and an additional 200 people working in administration. The campus includes a medical center, a pharmacy and a worker facility with showers, lockers and a kitchen. (However, the market manager acknowledges some workers have set up their own, informal facility, because the official one is too small and limits their activity).

Most buyers must depend on private vehicles to get to *Mercado Mayorista* and pick up their goods. For small-scale vendors, the journey adds time and expense. A metro link adjacent to the campus is expected to open soon, but that more affordable option also has limitations. Workers are only permitted to carry a small amount of goods onto it—and for traditional vendors in many of Lima's 300,000 market stalls, small amounts simply don't give them enough income to survive.

This massive facility may be thoroughly modern, but some traditions hold on. Vendors and porters continue to specialize in certain products. And each product is still said to have its particular patron saint. In the case of onions and garlic, the *Virgen de Chapi*.

## Lima's informal workers: long days full of challenges.

Juana's kiosk sits on the corner in a largely residential area. It's small—three or four people could fit inside, snugly—and the walls are covered with the snack foods and trinkets she also sells. Juana pays 40 soles a year to lease this kiosk from a company; the municipality requires that she maintain a clean four-meter area around it.

She'll sell here until 2 p.m. Then, after she closes up the kiosk, Juana will spend hours volunteering with the National Federation of Newspapers, Magazines, and Lottery Vendors (Federación Nacional de Vendedores de Diarios, Revistas y Loterías del Perú, FENVENDRELP), where she helps with legal matters. (Juana recently completed her bachelor's degree in law. Unfortunately, she doesn't have money to buy the expensive license required to practice law officially.)

One fight that FENVENDRELP has undertaken involves a social protection scheme, of sorts, that had offered limited access to healthcare and pensions to the *canillitas*. It was put in place in the mid-20th century by industry players and designed without any input from vendors, so it was far from perfect. But it was something, and now it has been frozen for eight years while a

criminal investigation looks into allegations of corruption perpetrated by its administrator.

That sort of story, too, seems to be all too common in the modern world.

It will be 9 p.m. before Juana can call her day done and get some rest—though she'll be up and on the go again long before the crack of dawn.

*This article was originally published on 6 November 2018 on the [WIEGO Blog](#).*

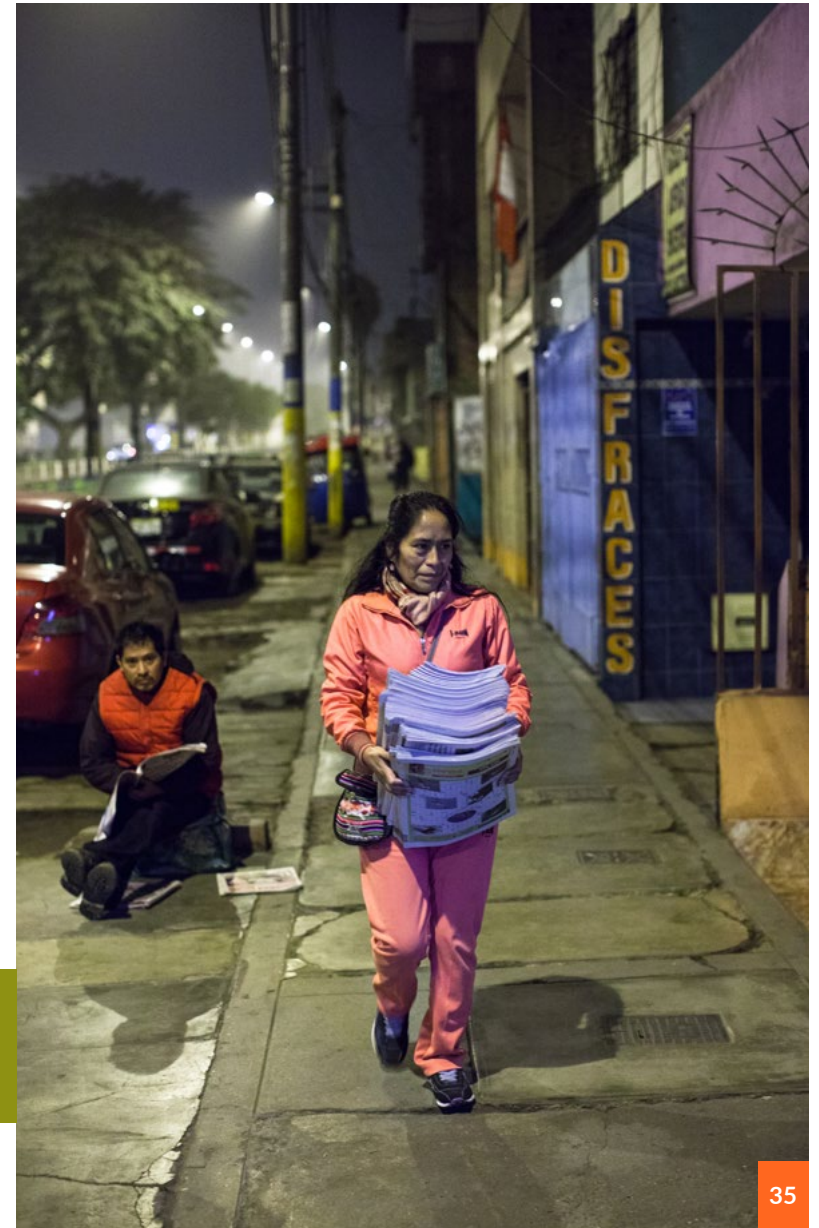
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*She'll sell here until 2 p.m. Then, after she closes up the kiosk, Juana will spend hours volunteering with the National Federation of Newspapers, Magazines, and Lottery Vendors, where she helps with legal matters.*

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**JUANA** puts in a full workday in her small kiosk—and hours more outside it.

*Photo credit: Juan Arredondo/Getty Images Reportage.*





# PART III: The Solutions



Photo credit: Paula Bronstein/Getty Images Reportage

# How cities can achieve public space for all

By Jenna Harvey

*Public space provides a window into the soul of a city. It is where collective urban life plays out—cycling to work, playing in a park, enjoying hot food from a street corner, performing music for a tip, coming together in celebration or resistance. This diversity of activity can make public spaces rich, but it can also make managing public space difficult.*

Most urban authorities recognize that everyone should be able to access public space, whether it is for transportation, leisure, or earning a livelihood. However, cities across the globe face common challenges in making public space for all a reality.

For example, intense pressures to raise local revenues can lead cities to privatize public space, reducing the amount available to the public. Also, varying interests in, and visions for, public space from city residents can result in conflict that falls on urban authorities to manage.

## Informal workers in public spaces

In many cities, conflict around public space affects informal workers. Street vendors, shoe shiners, musicians, waste pickers, transport workers, and others who work in urban public space face daily challenges as they struggle to earn a living.

Often, vocal groups like residents' associations, business groups, and urban mobility advocates call on urban authorities to reduce or eliminate the number of informal workers in public space to clear pedestrian walkways or eliminate perceived business competition. Sometimes the push comes from the city authorities themselves, often with the aim of creating a city with a more “modern” or “world-class” image.

*This diversity of activity can make public spaces rich, but it can also make managing public space difficult.*



In Bangkok street vendors line the streets in the evening, attracting foot traffic from locals and foreign visitors alike.

*Photo credit: Pailin Wedel*



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*Their work is thoroughly modern—with linkages to formal businesses and even to global supply chains.*

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Informal workers who work in public spaces play a central role in urban economic and social life in cities around the world—both in the Global North and South. In some cases, these workers are preserving centuries-old cultural traditions; at the same time, their work is thoroughly modern—with

linkages to formal businesses and even to global supply chains.

Informal workers are often misunderstood and undervalued, and negative stereotypes and myths about their work persist, including, for example, that they evade taxes, shirk regulations, and create public health risks and unfair competition. These narratives are often deeply entrenched in the public imagination and can motivate calls to remove informal workers from public space.

## Creating inclusive public spaces: Step-by-step resources

Although there is no one-size-fits-all solution to the challenge of managing public space in an equitable way, experiences from cities big and small—from New York City to New Delhi—reveal lessons on what works and what doesn't.

Through a recent project, “Public Space for All,” with the Cities Alliance Joint Work Programme (JWP) on Equitable Economic Growth in Cities, the WIEGO Network explored some of these experiences through consultations with informal workers—primarily street vendors—policymakers, and other stakeholders in our five Focal Cities: Accra, Ghana; Dakar, Senegal; Delhi, India; Lima, Peru; and Mexico City, Mexico.

Informal workers who work in public spaces play a central role in urban economic and social life in cities.

*Photo credit: WIEGO*

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*Although there is no one-size-fits-all solution to the challenge of managing public space in an equitable way, experiences from cities big and small—from New York City to New Delhi—reveal lessons on what works and what doesn't.*

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These learnings, combined with our existing knowledge base and our experience with informal workers' organizations in cities, informed a new set of resources on supporting informal livelihoods in public space.

These resources include a discussion paper, a toolkit for urban planners and policymakers, and a worker education manual for street vendors. Together, these resources outline guiding principles and practical actions that can help cities build a more inclusive path forward.

We have included some of these lessons below, but first we'll look at some trending exclusionary policies and why they don't work.



## Lose-lose policies for public space management

Many cities have taken a zero-sum approach to clearing public spaces of informal workers with little or no dialogue, partnership, or understanding of on-the-ground realities. Experience shows that these exclusionary policies and practices are not a solution, and, in fact, they can make an already difficult situation worse.

**Evicting street vendors from public space:** Evictions are a lose-lose policy response to the challenge of managing the use of public space. These policies can have an enormous negative impact on street vendors' earnings and the well being of their families. In addition, these costly operations cut into city coffers, hurt consumers who depend on vendors for essential needs, and, most often, simply aren't effective in keeping spaces clear.

In the Central Business District (CBD) of Accra, Ghana, for example, "decongestion exercises" are frequently carried out to clear vendors from the area. After these exercises, the

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*Evicting street vendors can also make cities less desirable places to visit, which can negatively impact the local economy in multiple ways.*

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vendors have consistently returned to their previous locations, out of necessity or lack of better options, and the cycle of evictions begins again.

Evicting street vendors can also make cities less desirable places to visit, which can negatively impact the local economy in multiple ways. For example, relentless evictions in Bangkok, formerly a site of good practice for the inclusive management of public space, have diminished the city's reputation as a world-class destination for street food. A lull in tourist traffic could hurt formal businesses and reduce city tax revenue.

**Other exclusionary practices, such as confiscations and harassment from local police or task forces, are similarly ineffective and damaging to vendors' livelihoods, in addition to often being unlawful.** Indeed, in South Africa in 2015, street vendor



A street vendor in Lima, Peru, sells herbs. Exclusionary practices, such as evictions, push already-vulnerable workers deeper into poverty.

*Photo credit: Juan Arredondo/Getty Images Reportage*

John Makwicana presented a legal challenge to the confiscation of his goods and won.

Most importantly, exclusionary practices like these serve to push already-vulnerable workers deeper into poverty, rather than harnessing

the poverty-alleviation potential of policies that support and enhance informal work.

**Taking decisions that affect vendors without their input:** City planners, often with good intentions, have tried to create solutions to the



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*An inclusive agenda can only take shape when those impacted on the ground have a voice in identifying ways forward that actually work.*

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dilemma of public space management without consulting street vendors. One of the most common responses is the designation of specific spaces for vending and the relocation of vendors to these spaces.

These solutions typically fail, as they are designed without the intimate knowledge that vendors have about their customers, pedestrian flows, and optimal spots for making sales, and, as a result, are not responsive to their needs.

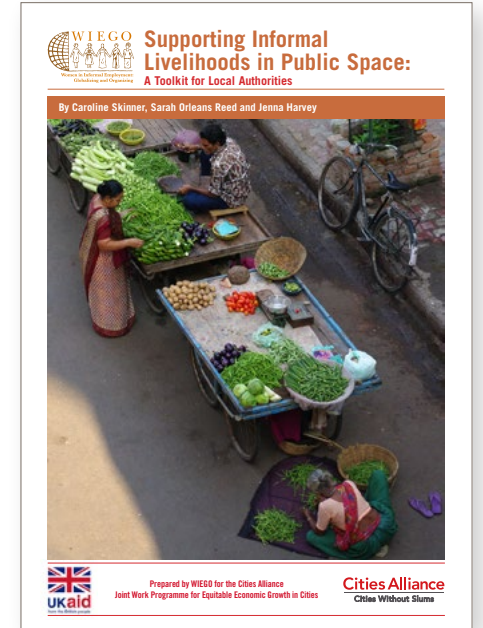
For example, in Accra's CBD, vendors were evicted to make room for *Makola Mall*. Authorities assured vendors they could be accommodated in the new structure, which was designed without their input. Today, large areas of the mall are



empty. Vendors could not afford expensive rents, and the spaces on upper floors of the mall were not appealing to them due to lack of foot traffic. They needed ground floor space to be able to access a regular customer base.

**Street vendors in India wait for customers to come and buy their produce.**

*Photo credit: SEWA*



[Download WIEGO's Public Space Toolkit](#)

## What an inclusive agenda looks like

Urban authorities have the opportunity to create more vibrant, equitable cities with and for informal workers, but an inclusive agenda can only take shape when those impacted on the ground have a voice in identifying ways forward that actually work. Although each city must adopt its own unique approach to the challenge of managing competing claims to public space, the following guiding principles should apply:

**Recognize street vendors' contributions to cities:** The foundation for building an inclusive approach to managing public space should be a commitment to better understanding the contributions of street vendors' contributions to cities.

Persisting negative narratives can act as blinders in preventing policymakers and others from seeing the ways in which informal workers make cities run better—through contributing to the revenue base with value-added tax (VAT) and other fees, creating demand for goods and services from informal and formal businesses,

enhancing food security and public safety, and making cities more desirable places to visit.

**Work with street vendors to find and implement solutions:** Recognition alone is not enough. An inclusive regulatory framework is needed to protect street vendors' livelihoods and promote their positive contributions to cities. There is no perfect regulatory framework model that can be taken from one context and applied directly to another, although notable good practice examples exist.

One promising example is India's Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014, which establishes an inclusive framework based on the core principles of recognition and accommodation. It acknowledges the positive roles vendors play in cities and commits to accommodating existing vendors.

A key feature of this model is a statutory participatory governance structure in the form of Town Vending Committees (TVCs), which bring together vendor representatives with city officials and other community stakeholders to play an

ongoing role in defining plans for accommodating street vendors and monitoring implementation. Although implementation of the street vendors' act in India has been weak to date, there is much to be learned from this model, especially as Delhi moves forward with elections for town vending committees this year.

## Future cities for all

To develop a regulatory model and overall approach that is responsive to individual city needs, it is critical to involve street vendors and other affected stakeholders in the process.

Participatory processes that involve stakeholders in the design as well as the ongoing governance of public space management have the potential to create buy-in, trust, and accountability, and ultimately result in more sustainable and mutually beneficial outcomes.

Mediating competing claims over public space may be challenging, but the potential of multi-use public spaces to create future cities that are more appealing, safe and inclusive is enormous. The true “world-class city”

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*There is no perfect regulatory framework model that can be taken from one context and applied directly to another, although notable good practice examples exist.*

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must be one where public spaces work for everyone.

Although there are many informal workers in public space, this project focused specifically on street vendors. See the next blog in this series to learn more about strategies used by workers' organizations in the WIEGO Network to defend the right to vend in public space and to access a workers' education manual that was developed through the project, “Public Space for All.”

*This article was originally published on 22 November 2018 on the [WIEGO Blog](#).*



# Liberia's street vendors pioneer new approach with city officials

By Sarah Orleans Reed and Mike Bird

*Street vendors from Bangkok to Bogotá face constant, daily harassment as they go about selling their goods to earn a living. For years, the situation in Liberia's capital city of Monrovia was no different.*

Until, that is, street vendors in the city organized. They established the Federation of Petty Traders and Informal Workers Union of Liberia (FEPTIWUL)\*; got savvy with their negotiation skills; gained the respect of officials; and, in 2018, worked with the municipality to devise a pioneering approach that includes street trade as part of the city's future.

But to make it happen, they had to pass a test—one that came straight from the top.

Street vendors in Liberia organized and voiced their concerns and solutions to city officials to create public spaces that could work for all.

*Photo credit: Sarah Orleans Reed*



## The mayor's challenge

When Monrovia's new mayor, Jefferson Tamba Kojee, stepped into office last year, street vendors saw an opportunity.

FEPTIWUL's leadership was no stranger to working with the Monrovia Municipal Corporation (MCC). They signed their first memorandum of understanding (MOU) under former-mayor Clara Doe Mvogo, but the agreement collapsed in 2015, leaving vendors on their own yet again. They had been waiting for the right occasion to reignite discussions.

That moment came last year. Just weeks into his new administration, FEPTIWUL's leaders approached Mayor Kojee to broker a deal: they wanted to work with him to regularize street trading.

They had been preparing non-stop for this moment since their formation 10 years earlier—taking part in negotiation trainings, building on-the-ground relationships with many different municipal offices, expanding their member base and strengthening neighbourhood-level vendor branches.

The new mayor, knowing he had an ever-growing public space challenge in front of him, was interested in FEPTIWUL's offer. Sorting it all out with a single negotiating counterpart would be easier, but he wanted proof that the organization could legitimately represent and mobilize the city's vast number of street traders.

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*Having regular dialogue allows the parties to work out the kinks together.*

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The mayor called in his chief of staff, Franco Grimes, to "test" FEPTIWUL by calling for a meeting on short notice. In no time, FEPTIWUL arrived with leaders from every block in Central Monrovia.

Both Grimes and Mayor Kojee were impressed. "It demonstrated that you're working with an organization that touches most or many of our street traders," explained Grimes. The mayor gave the go ahead to work together.



**Member of FEPTIWUL at the Red Light Market Branch. FEPTIWUL's leaders approached Mayor Kojee to broker a deal: they wanted to work with him to regularize street trading.**

*Photo credit: Sarah Orleans Reed*



## A new agreement in place

Just nine months later, Monrovia's street vendors had a big win to celebrate.

On 27 September 2018, after rounds of detailed negotiation, they signed a landmark MOU with the MCC. It was a major turning point in a decade-long struggle—and showed the power of strong informal worker organizations in making positive change happen in urban areas.

## A cutting-edge deal: Equality and commitment

The new agreement is superior to FEPTIWUL's own previous deal with MCC for reasons that, according to StreetNet International, also make it a model for street vendor management frameworks worldwide.

**First is the principle of equality between the two parties.** Both MCC and FEPTIWUL face penalties if they do not uphold their end of the deal, giving the other party leverage in the case of a breach.



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*It was a major turning point in a decade-long struggle—and showed the power of strong informal worker organizations in making positive change happen in urban areas.*

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Vendors in Central Monrovia holding a block-level meeting to discuss public space concerns in their area.

*Photo credit: Sarah Orleans Reed*

### **Secondly, the MOU commits the parties to meeting on a monthly basis.**

This is important because the new MOU is complex, with six annexes detailing issues like street zoning, sanitation, and spatial layout of individual vendors. Having regular dialogue allows the parties to work out the kinks together, negotiating and modifying their agreement before small issues become big problems.

Both of these points are crucial to the success of the solution. Arrangements between government and vendors often fail at the implementation stage, where unforeseen complications or challenges inevitably arise. This framework allows for equal, ongoing dialogue to ensure a positive outcome for both sides.

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*Vendor leaders gradually gained the confidence to express what they, as citizens and workers, could rightfully demand from their government.*

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## FEPTIWUL's three key strategies for success

What was FEPTIWUL's formula for building such an effective movement and building trust with government over less than a decade? It's all much easier said than done, but below are a few of their strategies.

### ***FEPTIWUL invested in their leaders' negotiation skills.***

FEPTIWUL leaders realized at an early stage that they had to gain negotiating skills. StreetNet International's experienced trainers provided intense training, introducing concepts, techniques, and skills of negotiation: how to identify a negotiating counterpart, approach them, plan for meetings, divide up roles at the negotiating table, and follow-up on documented agreements.

This education wasn't limited to the classroom. At one workshop, participants hopped in cars to go meet with their negotiating counterparts, the Liberian National Police and Liberian Revenue Authority, to learn more about how these agencies understood FEPTIWUL—an unconventional but insightful look in the mirror.

Vendor leaders gradually gained the confidence to express what they, as citizens and workers, could rightfully demand from their government. They honed their understanding of chains of command, learning to redirect conflict from the street level upwards and to formulate arguments powerfully and succinctly.

### ***Elected branch leaders are responsible for developing relationships with police and local government on behalf of the traders, sorting out issues like where traders can sell, when they can operate, and how to clean trading areas.***

"We understand about the responsibility of authorities for the citizens," said the coordinator of the Red Light Market Branch. "It helped me come face to face with authority and tell them what is right and what is wrong."

### ***FEPTIWUL organized fiercely at the grassroots level and empowered local branches to do the same.***

As demonstrated by Mayor Kojjee's initial "test", there is a tight feedback loop between FEPTIWUL's leverage with city government and its local-level organizing and management capacity. When FEPTIWUL struts its capacity to manage trade and to promote regulations without resorting to force, smart politicians take notice.

"We explain to them that we can help them beautify the city," explained FEPTIWUL's National Chairperson, Comfort Doryen.

### ***FEPTIWUL's Red Light Market Branch—in the country's largest market—started its own sanitation committee that is responsible for collecting solid waste at the end of each day.***

Organizing starts at the local level. Elected branch leaders are responsible for developing relationships with police and local government on behalf of the traders, sorting out issues like where traders can sell, when they can operate, and how to clean trading areas. At the street

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*"We explain to them that we can help them beautify the city," says FEPTIWUL's National Chairperson, Comfort Doryen.*

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level, block leaders act as focal points for traders. They take the lead in interacting with police, mediating conflict, and encouraging traders to comply with rules.

This formula keeps street trade tidy and smooth. In bustling Front Street in Central Monrovia, for example, traders have long respected a yellow line that separates the market from the road. FEPTIWUL's Duala Market Branch collaborated with Liberian National Police in 2018 to construct a low wall that similarly protects traders from vehicle traffic. To promote compliance with this rule and other standards in the market, Duala Branch leaders launched a member-led task force. FEPTIWUL's Red Light Market Branch—in the country's largest market—started its own sanitation committee that is responsible for collecting solid waste at the end of each day.



**Keeping street trade tidy and under control is central to FEPTIWUL's success in gradually legitimizing it.**

All of this is hard work—and sometimes means taking on responsibilities the local government should be fulfilling. But keeping street trade tidy and under control is central to FEPTIWUL's success in gradually legitimizing it.

**FEPTIWUL tried and tried, and tried again, to build trust with their government counterparts—and they succeeded.**

FEPTIWUL has worked tirelessly to build the relationships it now enjoys with multiple government agencies. Persistence is the name of their game.

“There is not just one chance to engage,” said Secretary General of the Red Light Market branch (whose market falls in the jurisdiction of Paynesville, rather than Monrovia). “City Police told us the first time to go away, but we kept engaging until we found common ground.”

A Central Monrovia block leader added, “We have learned to have a ‘Plan B,’ for when things don’t go well the first time, so we can approach

the officials again. Now we have a Plan B and a Plan C.”

In its early days, FEPTIWUL relied on key political support from former Liberian President Ellen Sirleaf Johnson. But FEPTIWUL's early negotiations with the MCC were marked by set-backs and broken promises, which it could not rely on Johnson to resolve.

As the organization matured, it sought to build its own relations with authorities directly. FEPTIWUL made inroads by holding meetings with the Liberian National Police, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the Liberian Revenue Authority, and the Monrovia City Corporation.

As FEPTIWUL demonstrated its ability to manage traders on the ground, these meetings became more and more constructive. They resulted in a diminishment of police harassment, and eventually the signing of a first

MOU in 2014. When relations with the then-Mayor Clara Doe Mvogo soured in 2015, FEPTIWUL nevertheless continued meeting with representatives of relevant MCC departments.

**As FEPTIWUL demonstrated its ability to manage traders on the ground, these meetings became more and more constructive. They resulted in a diminishment of police harassment.**

Today, FEPTIWUL is seen increasingly as a valuable partner bringing “expertise” to the field. As MCC's Director of Monitoring and Evalua-

tion described, “We are turning the streets over to [FEPTIWUL]. They have a different perspective from how we look at the streets. They understand the needs in a different way, because they see the street as a business place.”

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**“City Police told us the first time to go away, but we kept engaging until we found common ground.”**

—Secretary General of the Red Light Market branch.

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**As FEPTIWUL demonstrated its ability to manage traders on the ground, police harassment diminished. The municipality eventually signed an agreement to work with the organization on public space in 2014.**

*Photo credit: M. Agyemang*



## Global significance: All eyes will be watching

WIEGO will be keeping its eye on the Central Monrovia MOU. FEPTIWUL and the MCC both understand the global significance of what they are undertaking: “You could lift and carry this document to any city in Monrovia, in Liberia, in West Africa,” explained the mayor’s chief of staff, Franco Grimes.

It will not be easy: aspects of the agreement, such as the relocation of certain vendors and the establishment of a new task force in Central Monrovia, will require sensitivity and are likely to rock the boat for vendors and government alike. FEPTIWUL and MCC will certainly need to renegotiate terms in the MOU’s extensive annex as implementation moves forward.

But when it comes to vending, the street is the only laboratory we have. And this new, landmark agreement creates the right conditions for experimentation.

*This article was originally published on 29 January 2019 on the [WIEGO Blog](#).*



*\*FEPTIWUL was originally called the National Association of Petty Traders Union of Liberia (NAPETUL).*

*WIEGO’s work with StreetNet and FEPTIWUL in Liberia has been funded through a grant from the Cities Alliance, of which WIEGO is a member.*

Block leader on Meclin Street in Central Monrovia.

*Photo credit: Sarah Orleans Reed*



# Evicted: How Mexico City's shoe shiners fought displacement and challenged "future" cities

By Carlin Carr

*Shoe shiners in Mexico City have worked in Glorieta de Insurgentes Square for decades to earn their livelihoods. When they were unceremoniously evicted by the municipality under the guise of modernization, they decided to fight back.*

Everyone wants to look spiffy in the city, and in Mexico City, shoe shiners have kept residents looking their very best for decades.

But Mexico City, like cities around the world, is changing. The city is rapidly upgrading and on its high-speed quest to "modernize", beloved informal micro-businesses are being pushed out without discussion or notice.

The shoe shiners of Glorieta de Insurgentes Square have experienced this change firsthand.

## The 5:00 a.m. eviction

For nearly 50 years, 27 shoe shiners in Mexico City's busy pedestrian square have set up their popular outdoor service for clients emerging from the local metro. For just 20 pesos (~\$1) and in less than 10 minutes, office- and school-goers go from shabby to chic as their heels and wing-tips are cleaned, waxed and buffed back into shape.

But at 5:00 a.m. on November 5, 2017, those services quickly came to

*"Cities are displacing hard-working people under the guise of 'modernization,'" explains WIEGO's Focal City Coordinator in Mexico City, Tania Espinosa.*



Photo credit: Jane Barrett

a halt when two early-arriving shoe shiners were met not by customers but by the police. Within minutes, the workers were thrown out of the square indefinitely, as officials claimed they were in the way of ongoing renovations of the space.

“Cities are displacing hard-working people under the guise of ‘modern-

ization,” explains WIEGO’s Focal City Coordinator in Mexico City, Tania Espinosa. “This is not right. People are losing their livelihoods—the sole source of income they’ve had for most of their lives. Cities need to think about why these workers are there and the invaluable services they are providing to residents.”

Espinosa, a human rights lawyer by training, along with the Shoe Shiners Union president, Víctor Miguel Pérez Serrano, teamed up to fight the case. They brought it before the Human Rights Commission, familiar ground to Serrano who had been there before to fight for shoe shiners across the city without much success. This time he had WIEGO strategizing by his side, and, after a long battle, the shoe shiners won their places back for the first time.

The story of how shoe shiners in *Glorieta de Insurgentes Square* got back their right to work is a fascinating example of the importance of organizing—and of the ongoing challenges workers face as cities aim for a future disjointed with the everyday reality of its people.

Although not as numerous as their male counterparts, women still comprise a significant percentage of Mexico City’s shoe shiners.

Photo credit: Olga Abizaid



*The story of how shoe shiners in Glorieta de Insurgentes Square got back their right to work is a fascinating example of the importance of organizing—and of the ongoing challenges workers face as cities aim for a future disjointed with the everyday reality of its people.*



Photo credit: Lorena Reyes Toledo



## Shoe shiners in a modernizing Mexico City

Shoe shiners can be found all over Mexico City, and a decent percentage—between 15 per cent to 20 per cent—are women. As quaint and simple as these businesses can look, for the workers, they are vital sources of daily income. They set up their solo businesses out of necessity to pay their bills and feed their children. Without work, they are left with nothing.

Cities are displacing hard-working people under the guise of ‘modernization’, explains WIEGO’s Focal City Coordinator in Mexico City, Tania Espinosa.

Jose Eulogio Morales, 65, is the oldest shoe shiner in *Glorieta de Insurgentes Square* and had never faced eviction in his 47 years of operating there. However, in 2017, the city government was undertaking a major, \$6.5 million overhaul of the space by adding new lamp posts, fountains, public bathrooms, 14 small huts, free wifi and even USB connections. The park would soon have all the shiny

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*With a goal to “improve and modernize”, the shoe shiners were seen as a relic of the past.*

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fixings of what the future city was supposed to be. With a goal to “improve and modernize”, the shoe shiners were seen as a relic of the past.

Some officials promised the shoe shiners that they would be able to return after renovations. But even with many of them holding valid permits to work in the public space, they were not allowed back.

The shoe shiners decided they needed to challenge the city.

**The Shoe Shiners Union, with 3,500- 4,000 members, is one of the oldest and largest unions in Mexico City and has been around since the Mexican Revolution in 1910.**

*Photo credit: Edith Anampa*



## The highly organized Shoe Shiners Union of Mexico City

The Shoe Shiners Union, with 3,500–4,000 members, is one of the oldest and largest unions in Mexico City and has been around since the Mexican Revolution in 1910. In 1934, shoe shiners were regularized in Mexico City. A reform to that “regularization”—that is, that shoe shiners could work in the city’s public spaces with a valid permit—was passed in 1975 and continues to be valid today, no matter how officials envision an urban future sanitized of these workers.

The union has played an essential role in resolving problems both locally for shoe shiners, as well as on the city. It is divided into 53 sectors, and each sector is led by a trained delegate who is responsible for sorting out conflicts with authorities, as well as ensuring shoe shiners are neat and tidy, sober and not overly insistent on people using their services.

“The Union has a strong leader, as well as a strong internal organization and capacity for worker mobilization,”

explains Espinosa. “These were very important strengths during the whole process, and the positive outcome wouldn’t have been possible if they were not as well organized.”

When the shoe shiners from *Glorieta de Insurgentes* were evicted, for example, Eulogio, the designated delegate for the area, called the union’s leader immediately. They held an emergency meeting with the union’s executive, including all 53 delegates. The group tried approaching several institutions involved, such as the Metro and the Central Government, to defend the evicted workers, but they received no response.

Something else needed to be done.

### A fight for their rights: Straight to the Human Rights Commission

In April 2018, the Shoe Shiners Union of Mexico City, along with WIEGO, decided enough was enough.

They filed a complaint at the city’s Human Rights Commission, stating that many of the shoe shiners—21



Shoe shiners register with city officials for their vending licences.

Photos: Yuleina Carmona

out of the 27—in the square had permits and the right to work there. The Commission opened a case and carried out several field visits, even interviewing shoe shiners.

The process was slow, and in the year while they were waiting, shoe shiners needed to work. Many tried relocating to new, sometimes nearby areas, to keep their families afloat. Not working was not an option.

Jose Eulogio Morales, 65, is the oldest shoe shiner in *Glorieta de Insurgentes* Square and had never faced eviction in his 47 years of operating there.

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**They filed a complaint at the city’s Human Rights Commission, stating that many of the shoe shiners—21 out of the 27—in the square had permits and the right to work there.**

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In 2018, the Commission came back suggesting officials should solve the case by letting shoe shiners back to the square. However, officials always had excuses for why that would create chaos in their new, upgraded space. Metro representatives, for example, argued that pedestrians and public transit users should be given priority and that shoe shiners were an obstacle to them.

“Authorities did not say anything openly against the shoe shiners, but many of them used the idea of pedestrian and civil security to argue against the workers’ return,” says Espinosa.

The Commission decided to organize a site visit with all parties—both authorities and the workers—to collaboratively decide on spaces within the park where the shoe shiners could set up again.

Although officials continued to resist, a Secretariat of the Government representative decided to move things forward by pointing out spaces in the square none of the authorities had claimed as theirs. Her constructive and creative thinking was a breakthrough moment in a seemingly deadlocked situation.

Once the spots were chosen, the Ministry of Labor representatives worked quickly to renew the shoe shiners’ working permits—some of which had expired.

“This joint effort among city authorities, the union and WIEGO was another key ingredient in successfully getting the shoe shiners back to work in the park,” says Espinosa.



Photo credit: Olga Abizaid

## A win for informal workers in public spaces everywhere

Today, 14 shoe shiners work at *Glorieta de Insurgentes Square*. Winning their right to work there has been a major step forward for them—and for non-salaried workers in public spaces everywhere. “It definitely sets a precedent,” says Espinosa.

The shoe shiners of Mexico City have shown how important organizing is in defending their rights against powerful systems that seek to push them out. The example also shows how working together can bring about solutions that work for all.

“This joint effort among city authorities, the union and WIEGO was

A street vendor shows off her variety of polishes. Winning the right to work has been a major step forward for Mexico City’s shoe shiners—and for non-salaried workers in public space everywhere.

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*“This joint effort among city authorities, the union and WIEGO was another key ingredient in successfully getting the shoe shiners back to work in the park,” says Espinosa.*

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another key ingredient in successfully getting the shoe shiners back to work in the park,” says Espinosa.

And the 14 shoe shiners who still make their living off of buffing up Mexico City’s residents show they continue to have a value and place—even while nearby square-goers surf the web on iPhones and enjoy fanciful modern amenities in their shiny, clean shoes. *Glorieta de Insurgentes* continues to thrive as a popular public space—and now it is officially one where all are welcome.

*This article was originally published on 28 May 2019 on the [WIEGO Blog](#).*

# India's Town Vending Committees: An opportunity for worker participation

By *Avi Singh Majithia*

*There are close to 300,000 street vendors in Delhi, yet the Municipal Corporation of Delhi officially counts about 125,000 "legal" vendors. According to the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), around 30% are women (SEWA, 2019). Street vendors work in public space, and management of public space is one of the most pressing issues in India today.*

With competing claims on public space, its governance is an issue of extreme importance for street vendors.

The Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act (2014) is a step in the right direction to bring to light the right of vendors to public spaces. The Act protects the rights of street vendors and regulates vending activities. It clearly specifies the roles

and responsibilities of both vendors and municipal corporations and sets an important precedent for inclusive approaches to street vending.

The institutionalized form of the law is the Town Vending Committee (TVC). According to the Act, a TVC must: conduct a survey of all existing street vendors issue identity cards and certificates for vending ensure that all existing street vendors are accommodated in vending zones, and ensure that no street vendor is evicted until the above-mentioned survey is completed.

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*The Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act (2014) is a step in the right direction to bring to light the right of vendors to public spaces.*

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With the Street Vendors Act of 2014, vendors in India have gained important ground.

Photo Credit: Rashmi Choudhary



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*It was revealed that in the six months of their operation, most TVCs only met twice, with no major decisions being taken.*

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Chaired by the Municipal Commissioner or Chief Executive Officer of the municipality, the TVC is intended to be a comprehensive committee of all stakeholders—government officials, municipal officers, street vendors, bankers, traffic police, NGOs, and resident welfare associations.

Most importantly, the Act stipulates that street vendors representatives must constitute 40 per cent of the TVC members. An additional 10 per cent of TVC members must be from non-governmental organizations. Thus, 50 per cent of the TVC are from civil society. While the government, market and residential representatives are nominated, the street vendors (who make up 40 per cent of the TVC) are democratically elected to the TVCs.

## Challenges

However, since their constitution, these TVCs have been dogged with challenges.

At WIEGO Focal City Delhi, we recently met with street vendor representatives in the TVCs of Delhi to understand their challenges.

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*In most TVCs, the meetings are largely conducted in English, leaving out the majority of non-English-speaking vendors.*

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**Ongoing eviction remains a major challenge.** A recent analysis of news about street vendors around the world revealed that the number of evictions is growing around the world. This is a troubling trend, and the story in Delhi is no different. During the process of constituting provisional TVCs (to update vendor rolls in the city), evictions have continued at an alarming rate leading to many vendor protests across the city.

**A second issue is a lack of will on the part of the municipal players to make**

**the TVCs effective.** During the consultation, it was revealed that in the six months of their operation, most TVCs only met twice, with no major decisions being taken. With the ongoing general election, the TVCs seem to be in détente, waiting for the next phase of their operation, with the long-awaited scheme being released recently.

**The biggest challenge, however, remains that of the barriers that vendors have historically faced.**

The TVCs, despite an equitable structure that leans in favour of the vendors, operate very differently. Many reported that the government representatives do not wish to engage with them in discussion, considering them unaware of the technical implications of plans and schemes. Thus,

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*Five years on, implementation is only just beginning and is incomplete and insufficient.*

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vendors are often marginalised. In most TVCs, the meetings are largely conducted in English (leaving out the majority of non-English speaking vendors). Any minutes, if circulated,

are also in English and vendors often are unaware of what they are agreeing to implement.

The Street Vendors Act (2014) is heralded as a unique legislation which works to positively impact the lives and livelihoods of street vendors. However, the passing of a law is by no means the end of the road. Implementation remains a challenge.

Five years on, implementation is only just beginning and is incomplete and insufficient. The latest consultation with TVC members showed that while institutional systems are being put in place, their inefficiency is forcing vendors to go back to the drawing board.

In the last eight months since the constitution of TVCs in Delhi, there has been a fervour in the vendors' movement. From negotiating within the TVC to recognizing the need for capacity building, vendors are once again adapting to the changing needs of the dialogue process in order to better negotiate with the authorities.

*This article was originally published in the April/May 2019 edition of the [Delhi Diary](#), a publication of the WIEGO Focal Cities Delhi team.*

# A Durban street vendor wins precedent-setting victory in court

By Carlin Carr

*John Makwicana sells shoes and sandals in Durban's inner-city transport interchange Warwick Junction. Through this, he earns a living for himself and eight dependents. He is also an activist who serves as chairperson of Traders Against Crime, an association of local traders which works with the metro police to fight crime in Warwick Junction, and deputy president of Masibambisane Traders Association, an association of street trade organizations which works to defend the rights of their members against unfair practices by municipal officials. John has had a permit to trade in Warwick Junction since 1992 and was authorized to employ an "assistant trader."*

Early morning on 6 August 2013, John set his goods out on display and then left to do some of his activist work, leaving his assistant to tend his table. At midday, his assistant went to buy lunch from a nearby supermarket, and left John's trading permit with a nearby vendor.

John Makwicana, a street vendor from Durban, South Africa, challenged his eviction in court.

Photo Credit: Tasmu Quazi





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*The nearby vendor called the assistant who rushed back, only to find the police officer packing 25 pairs of new sandals into a plastic bag, leaving only old sun-bleached stock on John's table.*

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While the assistant was away, a police officer stopped at John's table. The nearby vendor called the assistant who rushed back, only to find the police officer packing 25 pairs of new sandals into a plastic bag, leaving only old sun-bleached stock on John's table. The officer handed the assistant a receipt for one bag of (un-itemized) goods and a notice to pay a fine of 300 rand (\$24) before 18 October 2013 or appear in court on 29 October 2013.

## **A history of challenging the rights of street vendors**

Since 2008, WIEGO has worked closely with an NGO, called Asiye eTafuleni (AeT)—which means “come to the table” in isiZulu—in Durban/eThekweni, South Africa. Founded by two former city employees who had

earlier worked together with informal workers in the Warwick Junction precinct of the city, AeT provides design, legal and other support to street vendors, market traders, barrow operators, and waste pickers in Warwick Junction.

In 2009, at the request of AeT and with support from WIEGO and others, the Legal Resources Centre of Durban filed two successful cases against the city's plans to build a mall in the middle of Warwick Junction, where 6,000-7,000 street vendors and market traders earn their living. In 2014, again with support from AeT, WIEGO and the Legal Resources Centre filed another successful case against the Durban/eThekweni municipality, this time to challenge the power of the municipality to confiscate and impound street vendors' goods.

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*The Legal Resources Centre of Durban filed two successful cases against the city's plans to build a mall in the middle of Warwick Junction, where 6,000-7,000 street vendors and market traders earn their living.*

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## **John's case goes to the High Court**

The Legal Resources Centre and AeT decided to file a test case in the Durban High Court, challenging the power of the city to confiscate and impound the goods of vendors/traders and seeking appropriate compensation for John. Caroline Skinner, Director of WIEGO's Urban Policies Programme, served as an expert witness. In addition, John Makwicana went to the High Court before the 29 October deadline to urgently seek the return of his confiscated goods. The urgent High Court application did not succeed.

In the criminal case before the Magistrate's Court, the magistrate provisionally withdrew the criminal charges and ordered that all his goods be returned. But John was unable to reclaim his goods from the municipality. He was told that the goods had likely been sold off at auction as they had been held for more than six months.

In the High Court, the Legal Resources Centre lawyer argued that the provisions in the eThekweni

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*In the High Court, the Legal Resources Centre lawyer argued that the provisions in the eThekweni Municipality's Street Trading Bylaws, which authorize confiscations, are in conflict with the constitutional right to equality, the right to choose one's trade or occupation, the right to property and the right of access to courts.*

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Municipality's Street Trading Bylaws which authorize confiscations are in conflict with the constitutional right to equality, the right to choose one's trade or occupation, the right to property and the right of access to courts.

## **Landmark judgment**

In February 2015, a judgment and an order from the High Court were made in John's favor. The presiding judge also ordered that the municipality compensate John 775 rand (\$62) with interest for the confiscated goods and also compensate him for his legal fees. The judge declared the clause in the bylaw that allows for

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***This judgment represented an enormous victory for John and his fellow street vendors/market traders across South Africa, since the judge acknowledged that street vendors are engaged in legitimate activities but remain vulnerable to unfair practices by local authorities.***

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impoundment and confiscation of street trader goods “unconstitutional, invalid and unlawful” and ruled that the city needed to redraft this section of the bylaws, which it is currently in the process of doing. In addition the court also ruled that the city is no longer exempt from liability for the loss of the goods. This means that the police can be held liable if trader goods “disappear”.

This judgment represented an enormous victory for John and his fellow street vendors/market traders across South Africa, since the judge acknowledged that street vendors are engaged in legitimate activities but remain vulnerable to unfair practices by local authorities.

The judgment is precedent setting; its legal arguments can be used by street vendors around the world in their struggle for economic justice.

John Makwicana’s willingness to fight the case in the High Court is admirable, considering the personal, financial, and political risk involved, not least the opportunity cost of spending so much time away from earning his living. John’s determination to seek justice is reflected in his testimony during the court hearings: “We as informal trader leaders have been trying to discourage police officers from impounding traders’ goods, but to no avail. It is my hope that this case is successful and results in less abuse of power and corruption by police officials and finally brings some relief for us traders. The bylaws permitting confiscations of traders’ goods need to be struck out.”

***This article was originally published on 20 July 2015 on the [WIEGO Blog](#).***

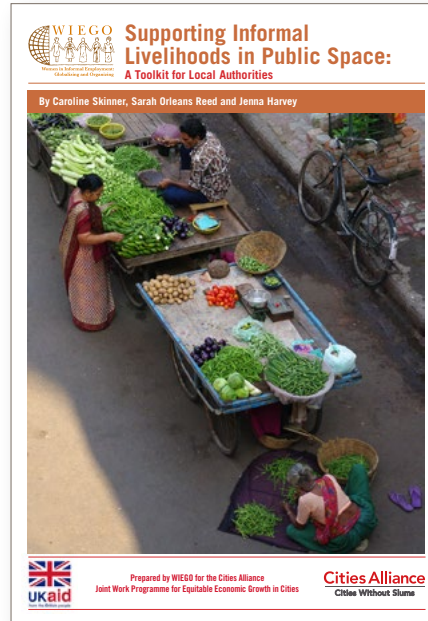
***On March 7, 2018, John Makwicana passed away at the age of 71. John fearlessly took on the challenging battle of defending the rights of street vendors in his city of Durban, South Africa—and, against many odds, won. His victory entrenched the constitutional rights of street vendors, and was a major step forward for vendors across Durban and beyond. John’s unwavering determination inspired informal workers around the world, and his legacy will be carried on in their own fight for justice.***



# APPENDIX: Resources and Publications

## Resources on Inclusive Management of Public Space

*These resources are designed to inform city governments, informal worker organizations and support organizations about inclusive management and regulation of public space. The cases presented are drawn from the experience and knowledge of the WIEGO Network and its member organizations of informal workers.*



### Supporting informal livelihoods in public space: A toolkit for local authorities

*By Caroline Skinner, Jenna Harvey and Sarah Orleans Reed  
Released: August 2018*

This toolkit is designed to assist local authorities to adopt an inclusive approach to street trading. It includes guidelines such as how to measure the size and contribution of the street vending sector, how to conduct a census to inform area planning and engagement strategies with relevant stakeholders in ongoing street vendor governance. It also contains examples of inclusive legislative frameworks.

### Working in public space: A manual for street vendors

*By María Benítez, Jenny Grice and Jenna Harvey*

This manual is for individual street vendors and their organizations to use in reflecting on their contributions and challenges working in public space and to build their capacities to defend their livelihoods.

### Inclusive public spaces for informal livelihoods: A discussion paper for urban planners and policy makers

*By Martha Chen with Jenna Harvey, Caroline Wanjiku Kihato and Caroline Skinner  
Released: 2018*

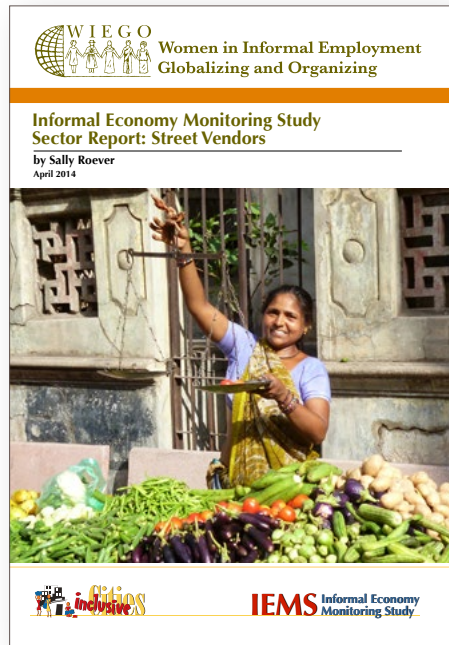
This paper presents research findings and case materials that illustrate both the everyday struggles that the urban working poor face in securing access to public space to pursue their livelihoods and the management and governance challenge faced by city governments in regulating access to public space for competing uses and users. This paper makes the case that regulated access to public space for informal workers is a key pathway to inclusive cities and, thereby, to equitable economic growth; and that another key pathway is to enable informal workers to be represented in urban planning and governance processes.

# The Informal Economy Monitoring Study

The Informal Economy Monitoring Study (IEMS) evaluated the realities that informal workers face across ten cities. Qualitative and quantitative research done in 2012 combined to offer an in-depth understanding of how home-based workers, street vendors, and waste pickers are affected by economic trends, urban policies and practices, value chain dynamics, and other economic and social forces.

The study also examines contributions made by urban informal workers, their linkages to the formal economy, and which governments, institutions, and membership-based organizations help or hinder their work and lives.

The street vending component of the IEMS interviewed vendors in five cities: Accra, Ghana; Ahmedabad, India; Durban, South Africa; Lima, Peru; and Nakuru, Kenya.



## Informal Economy Monitoring Study sector report: street vendors

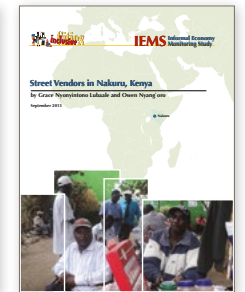
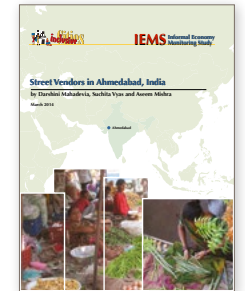
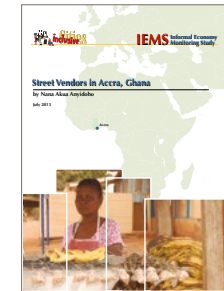
By Sally Roever  
Released: April 2014

This report synthesizes qualitative and quantitative data from the first round of IEMS fieldwork in the street vendor sector from all five cities.

Detailed city reports and advocacy materials are also available.

- [Accra, Ghana](#)
- [Ahmedabad, India](#)
- [Durban, South Africa](#)
- [Lima, Peru](#)
- [Nakuru, Kenya](#)

View all WIEGO's publications [here](#).







Women in Informal Employment:  
Globalizing and Organizing

Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) is a global network focused on securing livelihoods for the working poor, especially women, in the informal economy. We believe all workers should have equal economic opportunities and rights. WIEGO creates change by building capacity among informal worker organizations, expanding the knowledge base about the informal economy and influencing local, national and international policies.

**Stay up to date on the latest street  
vendor news and research:**

