



National Street Vendor Association: Lobbying for a national urban street vendor policy in India

Highlights The National Street Vendor Association (NASVI) in India is an association of Indian street vendor organisations working to protect the rights of vendors across the country through sustainable macro-level policy interventions. Engineered and promoted by NASVI, the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act was passed by the Parliament of India in 2014. NASVI now works to effectively implement the policy for the welfare of Indian street vendors.

Introduction

Throughout India, street vending provides valuable livelihood generation for an estimated 15 percent of the informal urban population, usually the least educated with limited capital. It is a profession with low barriers to entry, requiring relatively little education and start-up capital and thus is popular among the urban poor. It also provides cheap and popular services to large parts of the population; an integral part of urban retail distribution systems. Whereas previously the Supreme Court of India had declared that vendors have a right to gain a livelihood on the streets, provided they operated within the broad parameters of public policy, neither municipalities nor central government put in place appropriate policies. Instead, city legislation managed street vendors' use of public space for gaining a livelihood through highly restrictive and opaque licensing systems, which were arbitrarily applied and responsible for creating elaborate



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systems of rent-seeking by the police and a range of municipal agencies (who took payments from vendors).

Timeline

1995	1998	May 2001	June 2001	2004	2014
Representatives from 5 continents come together at the 1st International Alliance of Street Vendors in Italy	National Association of Street Vendors of India (NASVI) is formed	NASVI presents findings from their study to India's Ministry of Urban Development	National Task Force on Street Vendors is formed with government, NASVI and SEWA	India's First National Policy on Urban Street Vendors is passed	Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act is passed

How It Works

The National Street Vendor Association (NASVI) is a federation of trade unions, community-based organisations, non-governmental organisations and professionals who promote the well-being and empowerment of street vendors in India by strengthening street vendor organisations and coming up with sustainable solutions that involve dialogue between decision-makers and varied stakeholders.

Primarily, NASVI acts to assist street vendors in accessing and practicing their right to conduct business. This includes capacity building, such as informing members of their rights and duties, how to deal with harassment and how to bring grievances to the appropriate body. Members can also access microfinancing, insurance schemes, bank accounts and assistance in receiving remittances through their membership with NASVI.

As part of their efforts, an advocacy coalition comprised of NASVI, the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), academics, and others set out to develop a national policy for street vendors. They began by conducting comprehensive research on street vendors in seven cities in India which helped to frame new narratives regarding vendors' economic contributions to city life. Next, NASVI brought street vendors together from federated local organisations, who were active in demonstrations, marches on elected assemblies, etc.

The research evidence presented to the Ministry of Urban Development combined with the pressure of activism resulted in the Government of India forming the National Task Force on Street Vendors in August 2001. Along with members of federal, state and local government, NASVI and SEWA were invited to participate in the Task Force, which had responsibility for developing a national policy. A first draft of the policy National Policy on Urban Street Vendors was completed in 2002, and in 2004, India's first National Policy on Urban Street Vendors was passed. It was followed by amendments in 2009 and by the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act of 2014, which has codified restrictions on evictions, relocations, and property seizures.

Enabling Participation

NASVI, as a federation, regularly consults and hears from its members from across the country. It is run by a 'General Body' of representatives of its member organisations. All representatives have a right to vote, except NGOs and individuals. While leadership has primarily come from civil society organisations, some opportunities appear to exist for members to rise through the ranks. The organisation also advises on local advocacy efforts by its members. Rules of participation include knowledge and expertise, carrying local legitimacy (federated member organisations elect leaders) and willingness to accept and behave in accordance with membership rules, e.g. regarding transparency and openness, and financial appropriateness.

Overall, the legalisation and recognition of street vendors has given them greater voice and strength to continue to organise and advocate for their rights. Street vendor organisations

continue to work to hold city politicians and officials to account for the implementation of the street vendor policy in a manner that is participatory and transparent.

Outcomes

The National Street Vendor Policy is the first time the government of India has begun to regulate a large section of self-employed workers in the informal economy while simultaneously providing them increased protection. Where previously street vendors were seen as counter to urban development in India, NASVI has successfully brought attention to them: highlighting the challenges they face as well as the positive contributions they make to urban living. The result has been to shift the narrative towards street vendors as important entrepreneurs essential to moving commerce within cities: providing merchandise and food to common people at affordable prices in convenient locations – from late night food to household goods to tea; and providing small scale or home-based industries the means to market their goods.

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