

Securing, Leveraging and Sustaining Power for Street Vendors in India

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ABSTRACT

While street vendors have provided goods and services to millions at an affordable rate on their doorsteps since time immemorial, erosion of the rural livelihood base, growing informalisation and unabated urbanisation have suddenly increased their numbers in Indian cities in the 1990s. Despite the fact that these workers contribute significantly to the urban economy, they have faced and often continue to experience humiliation, continual harassment, confiscations and sudden evictions. It became imperative to advocate for their rights through the formulation of appropriate policies, the enactment of relevant laws, and the provision of adequate social protection benefits. The National Association of Street Vendors of India (NASVI) played a pivotal and catalytic role in transforming street vendors from non-entities into a formidable force to reckon with. Based on existing published works on the street vendors' movement in India, a series of key informant interviews and national consultation with stakeholders, the paper aims to document the journey of NASVI in terms of milestones, struggles and successes using the theoretical framework of power resources and capabilities. It also makes an attempt to bring out important lessons for social actors interested in organising informal workers.

KEYWORDS

informal workers; street vendors; union power; capabilities; power resources; NASVI

The Context of Street Vendors

Street vending is an ancient occupation prevalent in almost every urban settlement in India (Bhowmik and Saha, 2013: 6; Naik, 2013: 1). Street vendors' contributions and conditions have been studied widely in many countries, particularly in the Global South (Bromley, 2000; Cross, 2000; Bhowmik, 2005, 2010; Kusakabe, 2006, 2010; Roever, 2011, 2014; Roever and Skinner, 2016) including India (Bhowmik, 1999, 2001; Anjaria, 2006, 2010; Saha, 2009, 2017; Nidan, 2010; Bhowmik and Saha, 2012; Naik, 2013). In a study of street vendors in five cities across three southern continents – namely Asia, Africa and South America – Roever (2014: 53–7) argues that street vendors contribute significantly to households, communities and city life. Among others, they generate economic activities and create jobs, provide goods and services to city dwellers at their doorsteps saving them time and money, contribute to municipal revenues through taxes, fees and fines, and ensure cultural preservation by providing access to local food and goods. Furthermore,

they sustain households through income and savings, and build a social support network for the poor and vulnerable. Despite their significant contribution, the urban elite describes them as a “menace” for commuters, “intruders” on public property, a “nuisance”, and “urban eyesores that blotch the urban scenario” (Bhowmik, 2010: 1). In other contexts, they have been described as “locusts, coming in ‘plagues’, ‘droves’, and ‘deluges’, and the city is depicted as being both invaded and asphyxiated” (Bromley, 2000: 10). Hence, the very desirability of street vendors in cities has also been a matter of public debate. By comparing arguments brought forward in the debate on the perpetuation of street vending activities in cities, Bromley (2000: 4–10) found that more arguments were brought forward against street trading but that these were often more trivial than those in favour. Generally, they contribute to a negative perception of street vendors in the public debate.

In contrast, each study reviewed for the present paper paints a sordid scenario of the living, working and socio-economic conditions of street vendors across the world. Informal workers are known to lack essential security with regard to the labour market, employment, skill reproduction, income and representation (ILO, 2002: 3–4). Like other workers in informal sector, street vendors are also being denied these securities across different contexts (Roever, 2011: 4–5) including India (Saha, 2017: 134–57). These denials make their lives uncertain and vulnerable; they are exposed to a range of occupational hazards that jeopardise their livelihoods and well-being. Their workplaces lack running water, toilets and waste-removal systems, which makes them susceptible to many diseases. Exposure to a high concentration of air pollutants, to the hot sun and to inclement weather also exacerbates their vulnerability to a number of health hazards. Children, who almost invariably accompany their mothers, are even more at risk. In most cases, municipal regulatory regimes are ambiguous and unstable, and are misused by local authorities for forcible evictions, confiscations and harassments (Saha, 2017). Big events, elections, city beautification projects and infrastructure development projects often led to street vendors’ eviction without any notice. Mostly living at or below the US\$2 a day poverty threshold, only a minuscule percentage of street vendors have access to social protection and insurance schemes (Roever, 2011).

The decade of the 1990s saw massive growth in the number of street vendors in the developing world, including India. This may be attributed to two processes, both offshoots of macro processes of globalisation, privatisation and liberalisation (Bhowmik, 2001: 1–2, 2005: 2256; Bhowmik and Saha, 2013: 6–7). Firstly, under fierce competition from multinational corporations many domestic industries were forced to shut down, resulting in massive lay-offs of workers. Secondly, the new opportunities created in cities and the simultaneous erosion of the rural livelihood base pushed people out of villages, leading to an accelerated rate of urbanisation. Together, growing informalisation and unabated urbanisation suddenly increased their numbers in Indian cities. For want of any other alternative, most of the laid-off workers and rural migrants ended up joining the informal economy as street vendors (Bhowmik, 2001: 1–2).

In a context where the collective bargaining power of workers in the organised sector has been dwindling (Sharma, 2006: 2083), informal workers, including street vendors, are bound to live more precarious lives due to their marginalised and unorganised status. Besides improving working and living conditions, organising is also an important prerequisite for negotiating with the state and various stakeholders (ILO, 2016: 4; Saha, 2017: 157).

Due to the fact that informal workers are not wage earners, they are incapable of interrupting production process or restricting the valorisation of capital and, therefore, command only weak structural power. However, due to their vast numbers, they have the potential to harness significant

associational power. A social actor is needed to facilitate the unionisation process and thereby to advance advocacy of street vendors' rights through the formulation of appropriate policies, the enactment of relevant laws, and the provision of adequate social protection benefits. This paper aims to document the journey of such an actor, the National Association of Street Vendors of India (NASVI), which played a pivotal and catalytic role in transforming street vendors from non-entities into a formidable force to be reckoned with. By bringing various social actors under one banner, and through a series of media campaigns, positive framing of issues, ceaseless advocacy activities and a holistic understanding of vendors' needs, NASVI could pave the path, first for a national policy and then for a law to safeguard the rights and promote the interests of the vendors.

Schurman and Eaton (2012), in their comprehensive global review report on trade union organising in the informal sector, point out that not much is known about organising informal workers and that successful efforts have not been reported on in sufficient detail. Hence, responding to this call, the first objective of this paper is to document the journey of NASVI in terms of milestones, struggles and successes. For our analysis, we use the theoretical framework of power resources and capabilities, which is summed up in the next section. The following section analyses the development of the Indian street vendors' movement and NASVI's struggle since the late 1990s. A third section reflects on important lessons on organising street vendors and on applying the framework in the context of informal work, thereby leading to some conclusions on NASVI's future work.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Street vending varies considerably in scale, timing, location, income, types of goods and services, as well as work schedules (Bromley, 2000). This poses manifold challenges for unionisation (Sundar, 2003; Schurman and Eaton, 2012; ILO, 2016: 5). While these challenges demand innovative solutions, the acquisition and utilisation of union power remains key for ameliorating conditions of marginalised workers (Lévesque and Murray, 2010). Following earlier work by Wright (2000), Silver (2003), Brookes (2013, 2015) and others, the editors of this Special Issue identify four dimensions of union power – namely structural, institutional, associational and societal power. *Structural power* derives from the position of wage earners in the economic system, while *associational power* refers to bringing workers together for collective action. Other than numbers, associational power also rests on infrastructural resources, organisational efficiency, member participation and internal cohesion (Lévesque and Murray, 2010: 337–40). Trade unions can also mobilise *societal power* in order to ensure support from societal groups and society as a whole. Within societal power, *coalitional power* refers to alliances of unions with civil society organisations, and *discursive power* describes the power of unions to successfully influence public discourses and public opinion (Schmalz, Ludwig and Webster, this issue). Finally, *institutional power* derives from laws, regulations, procedures, practices and other formal and informal rules that formalise the relationship between trade unions, employers and the state and thus secures rights for workers (Brookes, 2013: 187ff.). However, although power resources are necessary for union revitalisation, they are insufficient to ensure it (Lévesque and Murray, 2010: 336). As Lévesque and Murray argue, trade unions need *capabilities* to develop, recognise and utilise power resources. These can refer to the ability of unions to intermediate between different demands (consensus-building), to frame their interests so that they resonate with workers and appeal to the

broader public (developing the discourse), to learn from previous experiences and to adapt to changes through organisational flexibility (Lévesque and Murray 2010: 341ff; see also Introduction in this Special Issue).

NASVI, the umbrella organisation of street vendors in India, aimed to build the associational power of street traders and to shape public perception on the relevance of street trading. The increase in associational and societal power assisted NASVI in successfully influencing policies and laws, thereby increasing the institutional power of street vendors in India. This promoted both their security and livelihoods.

The case study is based on a combination of document analysis, in-depth interviews and participant observation. The literature review focused on the already existing literature on street vendors in India and on NASVI (Sinha and Roever, 2011; Bhowmik, 2014; NASVI, 2014), including published and unpublished union documents such as annual and event reports. The research was furthermore based on five in-depth interviews, each approximately ninety minutes in duration, with representatives from NASVI and its affiliates. These interviews were conducted in the period July to September 2016.

Besides document analysis and in-depth interviews, the research was supported through participant observation at NASVI meetings and at a national consultation meeting in Delhi on 13 August 2016. The national consultation was attended by seventeen participants including officials from NASVI, representatives from NASVI's affiliate organisations across the country, and from supporting agencies as well as researchers. The meeting also provided an opportunity for the research team to present initial research results and to receive inputs and feedback from participants which were included in the research process.

As one of the authors has been part of NASVI since its inception, this provided the research team with deep knowledge about NASVI's evolution over the years. At the same time, the research team was aware of the need to minimise any biases and to increase the validity of the information. The in-depth interviews, therefore, aimed at capturing a broad range of voices within NASVI. Overall, the cooperation of an insider and an outsider was experienced as an advantage for the research process, not only in terms of the provision of access to NASVI but also because of the active involvement of street vendors' organisations in the research process and the mutual knowledge transfer.

NASVI: Milestones, Struggles, Successes

Observing ruthless and inhuman eviction of street vendors by the state government of Bihar in 1995, Adithi, an NGO headquartered in Patna, decided to galvanise this unorganised section (Nidan, n.d.).¹ Around the same time, a consultation was organised with various like-minded individuals and institutions which soon resulted in the registration of an independent institution, Nidan, solely dedicated to the cause of informal workers with a focus on street vendors.² To begin with, Nidan conducted a survey in 1996 in the state capital, Patna, with a sample size of nearly 6 000 street vendors. This exercise helped the team understand the situation of street vendors, outline the exploitative regime and forge a relationship with the vendors which would form the foundation for

¹ For more on Adithi, see <http://www.adithi.in>.

² For more on Nidan, see <http://www.nidan.in>.

developing associational power. However, realising the insufficiency of mobilisation at the city or state level for long-term transformation, Nidan began to feel the need to raise the advocacy for street vendors also at the national level. At this level, activists were able to frame issues, link national and local issues, and to develop the capabilities of future leaders in order to advance the organisation of street vendors. Those young leaders developed an understanding of the issues at the grassroots level, learned that these issues needed to be addressed holistically, and were prepared to take the first steps towards developing associational power.

In September 1998 a workshop for street vendor organisations was convened at Ahmedabad (Bhowmik, 2001: 2). All of the participants expressed very serious concerns about increasing attacks on street vendors across the nation. The participants agreed that it was not enough to secure short-term relief from the brutality of the authorities through the usual methods of protest meetings and litigation, but to effect a change of perception regarding street vendors in the minds of administrators, legislators, elected representatives, urban planners and the public at large. This aim could only be advanced once a national movement was established with a view to fostering a holistic and comprehensive policy in favour of street vendors. As a consequence, the National Alliance of Street Vendors of India was formed. Given the mandate and track record of Nidan, it was decided that this alliance would be hosted at Nidan's headquarters at Patna, and its founder was named the coordinator of the alliance.

Immediately after formation, the biggest task for the new alliance was to identify and associate organisations working with street vendors. A series of four regional multi-stakeholder meetings were organised in Mumbai, Bangalore, Delhi and Patna – the four corners of the country. Each meeting was attended by street vendors, vendor leaders, municipal administrators and elected representatives, as well as civil society organisations and the media. Perhaps for the first time, all the stakeholders shared a common platform and listened to each other's perspectives. This intermediating process initiated by NASVI helped the respective parties to articulate their arguments and to find common ground. Because municipal officials were also present, in most cases the issues of local vendors were solved. This helped to increase the trust of vendors in NASVI and thereby contributed to building associational power. Furthermore, most of the participants who attended these meetings became partners or allies of NASVI and stood by it in all of its future initiatives. The platform also assisted in building NASVI's societal power. These meetings were covered extensively in the media, and suddenly the issues of street vendors started to gain a national focus. In the states in which these meetings were organised, advocacy for vendors' rights accelerated.

NASVI helped street vendors to register their organisations and strengthened them by investing a great deal of energy in leadership development. At the same time, NASVI realised that in order to advance policy interventions, it was important to engage with administrators and planners, which warranted availability of a robust dataset. Gaining deeper knowledge about the situation of street vendors was important in order to frame the issues, to articulate the arguments and to ultimately develop discursive power through an effective dialogue and advocacy. Keeping this in mind, NASVI commissioned a study by Sharit Bhowmik (2001) entitled *Hawkers in the Urban Informal Sector: A Study of Street Vending in Seven Cities*. The report became the basis for all ensuing dialogue and interventions on street vendors, not only in India but internationally as well (Sinha and Roever, 2011: 2).

After the survey was completed, NASVI discussed the findings with the concerned ministry of the Indian government and pressed for serious steps to improve the conditions of street vendors. Due to NASVI's persistent efforts, in May 2001 the Ministry organised a National Workshop on

Street Vendors in Delhi. In the valedictory session, the Minister announced that his Ministry would establish a National Task Force to draft a National Policy on Street Vending, which led to the formation of a drafting committee (Sinha and Roeber, 2011: 3). The draft national policy was revised on the basis of inputs from concerned ministries and departments of government and other stakeholders.

Given the magnitude and complexities of its work, NASVI was finding it increasingly difficult to function as a network, although it was not clear yet which form it should take in the future. A consultation was organised with all stakeholders towards the end of June 2002. The majority felt that if NASVI chose to register as a trade union it would come into competition with existing trade unions. Furthermore, since many trade unions are affiliated to various political parties, NASVI wanted to avoid conflicts on the issue of political affiliation.

Hence, it was decided that, in its new avatar, NASVI would be a membership-based organisation registered under the Societies Registration Act 1860, with membership open to trade unions, community-based organisations, non-governmental organisations and individuals working with street vendors. At the same time, under the Societies Registration Act, members could participate in its general body which was to be organised annually and they could be elected to positions, thereby promoting democratic norms and the participation of members. An Executive Committee consisting of twenty-five members, with one-third women and one-third street vendors, was envisaged. The prescribed structure of and the mandatory processes in organisations registered under the Society Act in 2003 fostered equitable relations and democratic decision-making processes, which proved vital for strengthening associational power and internal cohesion. NASVI's strategy of building a hybrid organisation open to individual membership and a variety of institutional members has assisted in avoiding conflicts with so-called "traditional" trade unions, thereby helping to bridge the gap between informal and formal workers. As a Society, NASVI was furthermore able to receive both government and foreign funds. Over time, the government started to earmark funds for securing vendors' rights and ensuring their well-being.

The new National Association of Street Vendors of India placed its focus on the realisation of a national policy for street traders. The final draft policy was prepared and approved by the Cabinet on 20 January 2004. NASVI did not only influence the policy as a part of the drafting committee, but also helped its partner organisations to influence the policy-making process of the respective state governments. The adoption of the National Policy on Urban Street Vendors registers a moment of historic significance. For the first time in the history of India, street vendors were officially recognised as contributors to the urban economy and not as encroachers into public space, a paradigm shift in the true sense of the term. At the same time, it was a landmark for the informal urban economy in general, because for the first time the government had taken steps to formulate regulations for a significant portion of self-employed workers. The Policy aimed to "provide and promote a supportive environment for earning livelihoods to the street vendors, as well as ensure absence of congestion and maintenance of hygiene in public spaces and streets" (Government of India, 2004: 2). Another major advantage of the policy was that the contract system of collection of municipal taxes by private contractors across India was abolished; this practice had fostered organised crime and corruption.

This policy was the first comprehensive document which gave pivotal institutional power to the entire movement spearheaded by NASVI. The ideas encapsulated in this document provided a formal framework for future interventions for securing the livelihoods of a sizeable proportion of

the urban poor. Interestingly, the adoption of this policy gave a new, more tangible incentive to the street vendors to organise themselves, largely because they could see a road map for securing better conditions for themselves (Sinha and Roever, 2011: 11). They were able to use the policy as a reference point to protest against forced evictions and other harassment. Small and locally active street vendors' organisations even sought affiliation to NASVI in order to increase the pressure on the respective state governments and municipal bodies for implementation of the National Policy on Urban Street Vendors. Immediately after ensuring recognition and rights of vendors, NASVI's membership base swelled. Consequently, the increase of street vendors' institutional power went along with a significant increase of NASVI's associational power.

As its prime mandate to push for a national policy was achieved, NASVI sought to ensure the implementation of the Policy. Since India is a federal country, policies serve merely as guidelines (Sinha and Roever, 2011: 1). For implementation, they need to be adopted by the state and municipal bodies. Invigorated with the newly found visibility of vendors' issues, vendors' organisations started to mount pressure on municipal bodies. While initially few states made sincere efforts for effective implementation, the process of implementation brought forward innovative ideas (Sinha and Roever, 2011: 10). For example, while Odisha created fifty-two vending zones in its state capital, Madhya Pradesh identified numerous hawkers' corners across the state, and Delhi came up with a two-tier independent grievance redress structure headed by district judges. Other innovative ideas included the setting-up of women's markets. These small but significant local victories built the credibility and strengthened the position of NASVI and its affiliates in local politico-administrative environments and paved the way for stronger future actions (Sinha and Roever, 2011: 12).

When the National Commission on Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (NCEUS) was set up, it was assigned the task of reviewing the Policy of 2004. The commission consulted street vendors through NASVI and, based on their vital inputs, a chapter on street vendors was added in the first major report by the commission (NCEUS, 2007). Later, in 2009, the Policy was revised and accompanied by a model law on street vending which could be adopted by state governments with modifications suited to their geographical and local conditions. However, since the implementation of the policy had not been satisfactory in several states, in 2009 NASVI decided to fight for both policy implementation *and* the enactment of a central law to protect the livelihood and social security of street vendors. Following a suggestion made by external consultants, NASVI moved to New Delhi in order to intensify its efforts for central legislation. This strategic shift helped NASVI tremendously in the ensuing years.

In the meanwhile, a verdict of the Supreme Court of India in October 2010 boosted the federation's initiative. The verdict said that vendors had the fundamental right to carry on their businesses under Article 19(1)(g) of the Indian Constitution and that this right must be protected by law (Supreme Court of India, 2010). The Court directed the "appropriate" government to enact a law for vendors by 30 June 2011, although the term "appropriate" government engendered conflicting interpretations. Bureaucrats argued that a central law was not possible because, according to the Constitution of India, urban issues were a responsibility of the state governments and only they had the authority to modify or change municipal rules (Bhowmik, 2014: 2). This view was challenged by NASVI and it argued that street vending should not be seen as an issue of urban policy, but rather as an issue of livelihoods. Earlier, in 2005, the Government of India had taken a similar policy decision by introducing the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act which provided for 100 days of employment in rural areas (Bhowmik, 2014: 2). This was a central law which was

implemented by the local self-governing bodies within the states. This reframing of street vending as an issue of livelihoods helped in gaining discursive power through bringing it into a larger debate on employment and social security in Indian society which created an enabling environment for the enactment of the law.

Close on the heels of Supreme Court verdict, NASVI started to approach the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation (MHUPA) to press for a central law. A ten-member delegation met the Minister and put forward the demands (NASVI, 2014). Using its associational power to its advantage, NASVI, along with its members in different states, organised a postcard campaign. More than 100 000 postcards were sent to the Minister demanding a central law. A series of demonstrations and strategic meetings of street vendors in all its constituents in the states took place to create pressure from below for a uniform law to protect street vendors. Further activities included a Ratha Yatra Campaign, chariot journeys in the form of processions, to attract the attention of state governments for policy implementation and law-making (NASVI, 2014). As a result, several states governments formulated policies and enacted state laws in favour of street vendors.

NASVI also took up the issue of the central law with the chairperson of the National Advisory Council (NAC), a body set up to advise the Prime Minister on policy matters. The NAC recommended a central law to the Government of India. Vendor organisations across India posted hundreds of memoranda and petitions in June 2011 to the Prime Minister demanding early initiation of the law-making process. NASVI urged all its member organisations to organise protests in their cities on 14 July 2011, mounting pressure on the government to initiate the process. In the next month, thousands of vendors surrounded the Parliament to demand a central law, and a seven-member NASVI delegation met with the MHUPA Minister with a ten-point charter of demands. The Minister agreed that the problems of vendors could only be solved through a law. NASVI organised a huge national convention of street vendors on the theme of “Cities for All” on 19 November 2011 in Delhi. The MHUPA Minister inaugurated it and announced that the government would bring in a central law for street vendors. The bill was drafted with vital inputs from NASVI. On 6 September 2012 the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha, the lower house of the Indian Parliament. The Bill had many key provisions enabling vendors to access rights and entitlements, but also had several shortcomings which attracted discontent from the street vendors, who expressed their desire for amendments. Subsequently, the Bill was sent to the Standing Committee of Parliament. NASVI presented its concerns and points of amendment to the Bill before the Standing Committee. To gain further momentum, on 13 March 2013, when the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Urban Development tabled its report on the floor of the houses, a huge *Rebri Patri Sansad*, or Street Vendors’ Parliament, took place in Delhi. On May Day, NASVI organised an event in Delhi called “Dialogue of Street Vendors with Political Leaders and Civil Society Representatives to Convert Street Vendors’ Bill into Act”. This dialogue, which was attended by leaders from different political parties, helped to develop a consensus over the provisions of the Bill. On the same day, the union Cabinet approved the amended Street Vendors Bill. The Lok Sabha passed the Bill in September 2013. After a series of meetings, demonstrations and another round of a huge *Rebri Patri Sansad*, and a four-day-long hunger strike by thirty vendors from different part of the country, the Bill was passed in the Rajya Sabha, the upper house of the Parliament, on 19 February 2014. The Bill became the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act 2014 after

formal ascent from the President of India. Later described as “a unique innovation in urban governance within the Global South” (Amis, 2015: 40), it was a perfect example of bringing together societal and associational power resources to secure institutional power in the form of a legal framework with a set of regulations.

This landmark legislation accorded significant institutional power to street vendors, as the Act was destined to affect more than ten million individuals (Bhowmik, 2014: 1). The Act states that no existing street vendor can be displaced until the local authorities conduct a census of street vendors in the concerned urban centre and prepare a City Vending Plan (Government of India, 2014). All existing vendors have to be provided with permits for conducting their business and a Town Vending Committee (TVC) will supervise the activities of the vendors. This committee, which will be the main policy-making body on street vending, comprises municipal authorities, police, the health department and other stakeholders. Representatives of street vendors will constitute 40 per cent of its membership and women will comprise at least 33 per cent of the street vendors’ representatives.

Under sections 36 and 38 of the Act, state governments were expected to frame rules and schemes within one year, but so far only eleven states have done so. NASVI continues to provide relevant input to both the state governments and the vendor’s organisations. It also ensures that provisions which are not in favour of vendors are not inserted into the rules. Nearly 300 cities have constituted Town Vending Committees so far (NASVI, 2017a). As these committees are becoming functional, a number of powerful models and initiatives are being tested. Vending zones have been set up in many cities across India. It is envisaged in the Act that local urban bodies will conduct training programmes to school the street vendors on aspects such as their rights and responsibilities, about specific polices or law related to street vendors, on food safety, maintenance of hygiene, waste disposal and similar issues. This process has been supported by NASVI, among others through further surveys on street trading (NASVI, 2016).

Key Lessons from NASVI’s Story

The story of NASVI has vital lessons for social actors who wish to organise the unorganised. As pointed out earlier, street vendors are not wage earners, which limits their structural power. While street vendors went on strike on a few occasions, these efforts did not have a significant economic effect. However, the strikes can be seen as a demonstration of street vendors’ associational power. Street vendors were heard not because they could disrupt production processes but because they demonstrated their togetherness, they formed a huge electoral constituency, and they were too many to ignore! To be successful, NASVI had to rely primarily on strong associational power, thereby also influencing public discussions and increasing NASVI’s discursive power. Yet it was not easy to bring street vendors together, primarily because they were absent from statistics and they were mobile, fragmented and spatially dispersed due to the very nature of their occupation. In most cases they were not organised. In instances where vendors’ organisations existed, they were small, temporary and unregistered. NASVI started to help street vendors form and register unions and bring them under the national umbrella, providing support to fight on local issues through legal aid, informational input and a capacity-building programme. Among others, a series of training programmes were held on negotiating, organisation-building, leadership development, accounts management and promotion of cooperatives. Local victories drew new member organisations to its

fold. Of course, the adoption of the National Policy on Urban Street Vendors and the Street Vendors Act were important political victories which for the first time established institutional power for all street vendors in India. This helped to make NASVI a household name in this sector and the rate of unionisation of street vendors increased. For example, in 2007–2008 the total number of affiliates was 59, which rose to 952 in 2016–2017 (NASVI, 2017b). Today NASVI consists of 1 054 affiliate organisations and 707 695 members across 25 provinces (NASVI, 2017c).

Attracting members was important but building cohesion among existing members was even more important. It was ensured by attending to vendors' calls, supplying them with requisite documents, arranging for material resources, providing them with legal aid and, most importantly, by building their capacities through awareness, skills training and exposure visits. In local struggles, NASVI always remained in the background and pushed the local organisation to the centre stage. This assisted in enhancing the stature of the local organisations and their image in the media, bolstered their confidence and, most importantly, helped them to become self-reliant. This has had the effect that member organisations are taking up the responsibilities in their respective cities and sometimes even pursuing advocacy at the state level.

The internal cohesion of the organisation was further enhanced through the publication and distribution of NASVI's weekly internal *Hotspots*, a digest of news from the street vending sector and its fortnightly newsletter *Footpath Ki Awaaz* (Voices from the Sidewalk). The publications provide information about ongoing local struggles, news related to successes and failures, and examples of good practice, informing, inspiring and educating its readership and developing bonds between street vendors emanating from a sense of shared lives and struggles.

Another factor which brought vendors closer to NASVI is its holistic understanding of vendors' needs. NASVI does not only take care of their emergent legal and regulatory concerns, it also looks at their health issues and the provision of microcredit, as well as enhancing their employability through skills training, health insurance and related facilities (NASVI, 2016).

There is a consensus among the participants of this study that NASVI's leadership team has played a significant role in strengthening street vendors' organisations by following the principle of local empowerment and of building capacity among worker representatives. Furthermore, the leadership was able to build continuous alliances with partner organisations by acting as "bridge builders" over the years. For instance, NASVI has identified a fleet of lawyers who fight for the street vendor issues pro bono and researchers who have done research on street trading. They have also linked up with sympathetic administrators and policy-makers. Taken together, through these initiatives of local empowerment and NASVI's role as an umbrella organisation that tends not to aggressively interfere in its members' local politics, NASVI's coalitional and associational power was significantly strengthened.

Generally, issues of informal workers, including those of street vendors, often remain limited to the local level rather than being seen as a town, provincial or national issue. NASVI's initiative on promoting national legislation was important not only for making street vendors' issues a national concern but also for building a national movement of street vendors in India. The transformation of this alliance into an association proved vital for securing and sustaining associational power for street vendors. It brought to its fold diverse organisations (membership-based, non-governmental, trade unions), acknowledging that finding ideological common ground was not as central as the common concern for improving the situation of street vendors through collective action. NASVI's strategy of building a broad, multi-layered organisation also helped to avoid conflicts with traditional trade

unions.

Furthermore, NASVI aimed to find innovative ways to instil a positive image of street vendors in the minds of the public at large and to influence the public discourse in order to harness societal power. One unique way to achieve this was through a Street Food Festival (NASVI, n.d.), which fostered an appreciation of vendors' lives and legitimate contributions to the city's fabric; it also gave vendors confidence that when food could be prepared in a hygienic way and presented aesthetically, it could command a premium price. Vendors could earn more money in the three days of the festival than it would usually take them months to earn. Now in their eighth edition, the food festivals have enhanced the self-esteem of the vendors exponentially. Using the framework explained by VeneKlasen and Miller (2002), it can be said that the vendors have not only realised "power-to" (agency-oriented power) and "power-with" (collective power), but these festivals have also given them a deeper sense of "power-within" (personal power). They appear to be confident in initiating action (power-to), have experienced the effectiveness of joint and collaborative action (power-with), and exhibit a higher self-esteem, self-worth and self-respect (power-within). Taking it to the next level, the NASVI Street Food Private Ltd has been established, with street food vendors as shareholders who are participating in international street food festivals. The recently launched mobile application "Street Sathi" (Street Buddy) aims at assisting customers looking for an appropriate street vendor in their vicinity, which has given a further boost to the vendors' business. The media has also played a pivotal role in strengthening street vendors' discursive power as NASVI was able to place its issues in print and electronic media.

NASVI has also placed a strong emphasis on commissioning research, which helped to frame issues and to energise public debates when engaging in multi-stakeholder consultations. To sum up, NASVI's strategy to build societal power on different levels was an important prerequisite for a central law for street vendors to become reality.

Concluding Comments: NASVI's Successes and Challenges

In the context of the informal sector, the realisation of labour power is more difficult because of the isolation and the dispersed locations of informal workers (De Ruyter et al., 2009: 9). The correlation between powerlessness and isolation necessitates the organisation of informal workers (Folkert and Warnecke, 2012: 60). In the case of the street vendors of India, NASVI facilitated their organisation as a collective. Learning from the experiences of a series of struggles, NASVI continually developed its power resources. A successful application of coalitional power brought various social actors together, which in turn strengthened associational power by building an umbrella organisation of local street vendor organisations, trade unions, NGOs and individual members. A series of studies, media campaigns and advocacy activities advanced discursive power as NASVI aimed at positively framing issues related to street vendors in the eye of the public in general and policy-makers in particular. At the core of NASVI's growth was the strategic use of associational and societal power through promoting a positive public image of vendors and through public activities such as Street Food Festivals. Increasing associational and societal power paved the path for establishing institutional power, first through the National Policy on Urban Street Vendors and then finally through the Street Vendors Act, to safeguard the rights and promote the interests of street vendors. As a consequence, street vendors have been able to increase their visibility and voice in India, making

NASVI an even stronger organisation.

However, in recent years, conflicts with municipal authorities have increased, perhaps due to the fact that, unlike earlier times, street vendors are exercising structural power confidently by resorting more to well-planned strikes and demonstrations. The increasing assertiveness is due to fact that street vendors feel emboldened by the institutional power available to them in the form of the Street Vendors Act and the consequent court judgments in their favour. In this changing context, NASVI's core challenge remains to capitalise on the existing power resources, to expand the membership base and to keep building networks at various levels.

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