Street Food Vending in Dhaka: Livelihoods of the Urban Poor and the Encroachment of Public Space

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Introduction

Hardly any other city in the world has been growing as rapidly in the last few decades as the capital of Bangladesh. Today there are 14 million people in Dhaka: 34 times more inhabitants than in the 1950s (UN, 2008). Thirty to forty percent of the megacity's population now live in marginal, partly illegal settlements and under conditions of extreme poverty (World Bank, 2007). Due to this ongoing rapid urbanisation and due to the weak formal governance structures (Siddiqui et al., 2004), both the provision of basic amenities such as drinking water, sewerage systems and electricity for all the cities inhabitants and the creation of secure employment in the formal economy are beyond the capacity of the city's administration and the national government.

Nevertheless, vulnerable populations in Dhaka manage to sustain their livelihoods in innovative and flexible, however, precarious ways, for instance, by involving themselves as street vendors in the informal economy. This paper discusses the role of street food vending in the megaurban food system, the different types of vending in the city, the livelihoods of the street food vendors, and the implications that their use of the highly contested public space in Dhaka has for urban planning – and indeed for urban governance.

Street Food Vending in Dhaka

In Dhaka, just like in the Indian megacities Delhi (te Lintelo, 2009) and Hyderabad (Dittrich, 2008), in Bangkok/Thailand (Nirathron, 2006), in Bogota/Columbia (Donovan, 2008), or in Lagos/Nigeria (Basinski, 2009), the sale of food along streets and in public places is, at present, a highly contentious topic. While street food vending is a good self-employment opportunity for the urban poor and an important functional element in urban food systems in countries of the Global South (Tinker, 1997), it is seen as obsolete, unhygienic, disorderly and `in the way´ by city authorities and planners. Nonetheless, everyday vendors claim the streets, consciously ignoring formal rules in order to sustain their livelihoods and serve the food needs of the megurban consumers (Etzold et al., 2009:16ff).

The Role of Street Food in the Megaurban Food System

Small tea and food stalls on pavements and more mobile vendors selling from baskets, push-carts or rickshaws at the roadside are a common sight in Dhaka. Street food includes "any food that can be eaten without further processing and is sold on the street, from pushcarts or baskets or balance poles, or from stalls or shops having fewer than four permanent walls" (Tinker 1997:52). Street food is easily available everywhere at most of the time of the day and also meets the food requirements of the poorer sections of the urban population, who – most importantly – can also afford it. The street food vendors, therefore, fill an important niche in the food provisioning system of the megacity and crucially contribute to the food security of the urban poor.

A survey of the food consumption patterns of slum dwellers in Dhaka[1] showed that 52 percent of the respondents consume different kinds of street food on a daily basis, whereas 23 percent stated that they never eat any street foods. It is interesting to compare the respective figures for the relatively poorest and `richest´ income groups in the slums (table 1): 46 percent of respondents from the poorest quintile take some street food everyday, 39 percent of them state that street food is important or highly important for their daily diet, and on average this group spends 18 BDT everyday on street food (17 percent of the total food expenditure). In contrast, 74 percent of members of the `richest´ quintile (can afford to) buy street food everyday, even two third of them say that street food is (highly) important for them; hence, this group also spends most per day with 29 BDT (but `only´ 13 percent of their total food budget). If one differentiates these findings according to the food products that are consumed (table 2), it shows that a greater share of the `richest´ quintile in the slums (26%) takes full rice meals from street vendors on a daily basis compared to the poorest quintile (15%) – it is still cheaper to cook rice and dhal for a few persons at home than buying a full rice meal from outside.

Highly important in this regard is, however, the occupation of the consumer, the mobility that is required in that economic sector, and how this affects the food consumption behavior. Most working people in Dhaka cannot go home for their lunch due to high costs in terms of time and transport. As the great majority of the population prefers to eat a good, home-prepared meal, they depend on food brought by themselves from home, or which is delivered directly to their workplaces in metal-carriers (*tiffins*). For those who cannot use these services, there are innumerable small restaurants (*bather hotels*) that offer rice meals in different price categories. However, considering the great demand, the number of food stalls, where food of a good quality is available for a low price, is rather small. Therefore, hundreds of thousands of physically hard-working laborers in agriculture (29%) or the construction industry (15%), van and rickshaw pullers (14%), petty traders (18%) and other service-personnel (20%) rely more heavily on full rice meals from the street than factory workers (6%), for instance in the ready-made garments sector, or domestic helpers (0%), who bring their food to their workplace or get something to eat there [The figures stand for the share of the respondents in the respective economic sector, who said that they buy full rice meals from the street every day; in total 15 percent of all respondents did so, whereas 69 percent stated that they never take rice meals from the street].

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[1] This survey was conducted on behalf of the Food System Project of the German Universities of Bonn and Heidelberg in nine slums in April-June 2009 (n=205); it was funded by the German Research Foundation within the research program, “Megacities-Megachallenge: Informal Dynamics of Global Change”.

Table 1: Relative income groups, food expenditure and importance of street food for the diet of slum dwellers in Dhaka (based on a Food Consumption Survey conducted in nine slums in April-June 2009) .

Relative Income Group, based on total HH income per month	income per pers. in HH per month	food expenditure per pers. in HH per month	street food expenditure per day	self-evaluated importance of street food for the daily diet			
				highly important	impor-tant	not that important	unim-portant
Poorest Quintile	791 BDT	980 BDT	18 BDT	13 %	23 %	39 %	23 %
Poor Quintile	1038 BDT	1168 BDT	13 BDT	12 %	30 %	27 %	29 %
Middle Quintile	1380 BDT	1277 BDT	17 BDT	11 %	40 %	26 %	18 %
`Rich´ Quintile	2109 BDT	2057 BDT	22 BDT	7 %	40 %	27 %	20 %
`Richest Quintile	2643 BDT	1595 BDT	29 BDT	21 %	45 %	29 %	5 %
Total / Mean	1515 BDT	1320 BDT	20 BDT	13 %	36 %	29 %	18 %

Source: Own Field Survey 2009 (n=205)

Table 2: Relative income groups and street food consumption patterns of slum dwellers in Dhaka.

Relative Income Group, based on total HH income per month	share of respondents that take the following products from street vendors*									
	full meals (rice/ruti)		rice cakes *(pithas)*		salty-spicy snacks		bakery products		tea and biscuits	
	daily	never	daily	never	daily	never	daily	never	daily	never
Poorest Quintile	15%	72%	13%	51%	3%	59%	8%	56%	46%	26%
Poor Quintile	9%	74%	3%	50%	0%	59%	9%	50%	41%	35%
Middle Quintile	10%	75%	3%	56%	11%	44%	19%	53%	51%	21%
`Rich´ Quintile	13%	67%	7%	40%	7%	40%	0%	40%	40%	20%
`Richest´ Quintile	26%	57%	2%	45%	10%	38%	12%	45%	64%	19%
Total / Mean	14%	70%	5%	51%	7%	48%	12%	51%	51%	24%

* possible answers: several times a day, daily, few times a week, seldom, never

Source: Own Field Survey 2009 (n=205)

Small, but nutritious snacks also play a crucial role for the food security of the hard-working population. The poorest income quintile in our Food Consumption Survey of Dhaka's slums, for example, eats *pitha* (13%) and other snacks (3%), white bread (8%), bananas, sweets (8%) and takes biscuits and sweet tea (46%) daily in their little breaks from work or in the evening in the vicinity of their homes (see Table 2). These snacks drive out the laborers' hunger at least temporarily and enable them to continue their arduous jobs.

As the informal workers are literally the backbone of Dhaka's overall economy, one can imagine the importance of street food not only for the food security of the urban poor, but also for the functionality of the urban economy as such. Without the many snack vendors and kutcha bather hotels, the laborers could not be fed adequately at all times, and city life as such

would collapse. This aspect seems to be widely overlooked by Dhaka's urban middle-class and elites. Although, people from almost all walks of life take the occasional sweet tea from the vendor at the corner, and many are tempted by pastries filled with meat or vegetables (*singhara*, *samosa*) or taco shells filled with chickpea-potato mash, cucumber, onion and chillies (*fuchka*, *chatpoti*), most often they refrain from eating food from the streets. Although the variety and tastes of Dhaka's street food is occasionally praised in the media (e.g. in the Daily Star), like in other third world countries there is a strong upper- and middle-class discourse in Bangladesh that revolves around the apparently unhygienic and unhealthy conditions of convenience food from the streets (CAB, 2007; Haque et al., 2010), which is then often mixed with parallel discursive strands about the vendors' illegal encroachment of public space, the traffic chaos that they seemingly create, and the public order that they ostensibly threaten.[2]

Types of Street Food Vending

The most important locations for street food vending are public places, where people assemble in great numbers, in particular markets, bus and train terminals, university campuses, in front of school grounds and hospitals, and nearby clusters of working places. Furthermore, street food plays a particular role in densely populated living quarters. These public places, thereby, become nodes of informal food distribution networks.

An important criterion for distinguishing different vending patterns is mobility. The street food vendors use different spatial practices according to the types of food they sell, the consumers' demands at specific sites, their own financial capacities and skills, and, importantly, their own opportunities to gain access to the particular vending site. Consequently, there is a great range of vending types in Dhaka that can be subsumed in five broad categories along a continuum from permanent to mobile vending units (VU) as shown in Table 3. Permanent shops have been solidly built (*pucca*, *kutcha* or *jhupri*), usually illegally. They are located in small niches right next to a footpath, or encroach on the footpath, the street or other public spaces. Their advantage is a greater stability regarding the time and place of their business and, usually, a higher volume of operation, both in terms of customers and in capital. Our survey of street food vendors in Dhaka found that 15 percent of the permanent consolidated (*pucca*) shops each sell full rice dishes and snacks, but with 62 percent most are tea stalls, where consumers not only take hot tea, biscuits and cake, bananas and water, but also enjoy a cigarette and good conversations.[3] With 68 percent, the share which serves tea and snacks is the highest for the fixed, but unconsolidated (*kutcha*, *jhupri*) shops. Semi-permanent vending units are heavy push-carts or larger tables with benches that are set up for the day (or for only few hours), for instance, at the side of a footpath, but can be dismantled quickly. At night, the vendors usually pack their equipment and food together, leave them on site or take them home. Most of these vendors sell drinks (40%), in particular tea, and fruits (27%), and some also sell full dishes and snacks (13% each), such as *pitha* or *fuchka*.

Semi-mobile vending units, such as push-carts, rickshaws or small tables and boxes, can be moved to reach consumers at different places at different times; however, they more often remain at one or two sites throughout the whole day. Fruits are the most prominent food item for this group (56%), but some also sell drinks (16%), snacks (9%), sweets or ice-cream (2%).

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[2] See DeLintelo 2008 for an example from Delhi/India on how discourses on hygiene and public order interlock.

[3] If a food shop is solidly built with more than one permanent *pucca* wall and a fixed roof, than it is by definition not any longer a \`street´ food shop.

Cigarette and paan-shupari vendors also frequently sell in this semi-mobile style (as other, 12%). Lastly, mobile street food vendors do not have fixed premises, but sell their products by walking around with a basket of banana or other fruits (42%), some light snacks (42%) such as jhal muri or peanuts, a tray with cigarettes and *paan* (as other, 8%), or a flask of tea and some *moa* (only 1 vendor in our sample, but very frequent in Dhaka). Only temporarily, they squat on footpaths, streets or other public places. Their greater flexibility not only enables them to access customers at various places at particular times, but also helps them to circumvent problems with authorities or other influential persons at the respective vending site.

Table 3: Street food vending types in Dhaka and types of street food items sold.

Street Food Vending Types	share of food items sold …								Share of all shops
	full dishes	snacks	bakery products	sweets, icecream	dairy products	fruits	drinks	other	
Permanent shop consolidated, pucca	15 %	15 %	7 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	62 %	0 %	11 %
Permanent shop unconsolidated, kutcha	8 %	4%	4 %	0 %	0 %	8 %	68 %	8 %	21 %
Semi-permanent shop on spot, possible to move	13 %	13 %	7 %	0 %	0 %	27 %	40 %	0 %	13 %
Semi-mobile shop on spot, moves occasionally	0 %	9 %	2 %	2 %	2 %	56 %	16 %	12 %	36 %
Truly mobile shop moving vendor	0 %	42 %	0 %	4 %	4 %	42 %	0 %	8 %	20 %
Total / Mean	5 %	16 %	3 %	2 %	2 %	33 %	32 %	8 %	100 %
Total / Mean Street Food only!	5.6 %	17.8%	3.7 %	1.9 %	1.9 %	37.4%	35.5%	8.4%	89 %

Source: Own Field Survey 2009 (n=120)[4]

The Livelihoods of Street Food Vendors

Selling street food is an important self-employment opportunity for the urban poor. The street vendors make up a significant share of Dhaka's informal economy. According to the Labour Force Survey 2002-03 of Bangladesh (BBS, 2004:138) 1.41 percent of all the working people (older than 15 years) in Bangladesh's cities are street vendors by major occupation. Haque et al. (2010) noted that a census in 2003 in Dhaka City Corporation areas found that there were 90,000 street vendors in the city. But the data from the Labour Force Survey suggests that at least 110 thousand hawkers roam the streets of the wider megacity Dhaka and sell clothes, household utensils, books, unprepared food such as vegetables, milk or fish or prepared food

[4] A Street Food Vendors Survey was conducted at six public sites in Dhaka in Oct.-Nov. 2009. Two study sites were general publically accessible places (in front of Dhaka Medical College Hospital, around Gulshan-1 market), two were important transportation nodes (Sadar Ghat Ferry Terminal, Saidabad Bus Terminal), and two were slums (Bishil Sarang Bari Bustee, Islambagh), while the latter also has important industrial production.

items and drinks. The share of street food vendors amongst the hawkers can, however, only be guessed.

When one walks through Dhaka on a normal week day it is, however, clearly noticeable that the food hawkers contribute significantly to the megacity's food supply (Etzold et al., 2009). But in contrast to many other developing countries, where the street food trade is largely organized and maintained by women (Tinker, 1997; Nirathon, 2006), the majority of street food vendors in Dhaka are male. Nevertheless, women play a crucial role in securing the city's food supply, because they often cook meals at home and help to prepare the snacks that are sold by the men.

A street food vendor in Dhaka earns between 100 and 1000 Takas per day, depending on the food product sold, the vending site, the number of customers, and the time spent working. This is quite a substantial income compared to the wages of factory workers, day-labourers and rickshaw-pullers. Our survey found that the permanent vendors, who sell from consolidated `huts´, are clearly better-off than the other vendors: with an average of 781 taka per day (this adds up to monthly net-income of almost 24,000 BDT) and a overall household income of more than 6,000 taka per person living in the household they can also afford to spent more than double of the food expenditure per person of the mobile vendors (see table 4). They are, then, also in a similar income and expenditure position like the most affluent quintile in Dhaka's slums (compare with table 1). Moreover, the illiteracy rate is lowest amongst them (23%), and their health status is above average (only 8% compared to 11% are in fair or poor health). Interestingly, none of the permanent shops (both consolidated and unconsolidated) was run by a woman.

Table 4: Types of street food vending and livelihood characteristics of the vendors (shares, mean values).

Street Food Vending Types	age	years in Dhaka	run by women	vendor has fair/poor health	illite-racy rate	living in bad housing	food expenditure p. pers. in hh p. month	hh income p. pers. in hh, p. month	business profit per day
Permanent shop consolidated, pucca	38	14	0 %	8 %	23 %	0 %	1553 BDT	6423 BDT	781 BDT
Permanent shop unconsolid., kutcha	41	19	0 %	16 %	40 %	8 %	906 BDT	3389 BDT	300 BDT
Semi-permanent	41	25	20 %	7 %	60 %	13 %	800 BDT	4648 BDT	291 BDT
Semi-mobile	37	16	7 %	12 %	37 %	5 %	772 BDT	4032 BDT	309 BDT
Truly mobile	39	13	0 %	8 %	54 %	29 %	758 BDT	2497 BDT	220 BDT
Total / Mean	39	17	5 %	11 %	43 %	11 %	886 BDT	3927 BDT	338 BDT
Total / Mean street food only	39	18	5.6 %	11 %	45 %	12 %	804 BDT	3624 BDT	284 BDT

Source: Own Field Survey 2009 (n=120)

If one only looks at the criteria of housing, food expenditure, household income and business profit, it clearly shows that the continuum of vending types is also a continuum of vulnerability. Among all vendors, the mobile vendors are clearly the least successful with regard to the profit of their business (only 220 BDT compared to a total average of 338 BDT), they are the income poorest (2497 BDT; compared to 3927 BDT), the most food insecure (with a monthly food expenditure per person of only 758 BDT; compared to 886 BDT), and face the worst housing conditions (29% live in slums in kutcha or jhupri structures or even on the street). There are however exceptions to this general trend, some of the semi-permanent

vendors, of which 20 percent are women (this also explains the higher illiteracy rate of 60% compared to the total average of 43%) are also in a very vulnerable position. As our comparative case studies of two semi-permanent *pitha* vendors show (one woman, one man), even if they manage to generate quite a substantial income, they are particularly exposed to evictions and harassment. As these very small food-stalls are put up illegally and as there are no licenses for food hawkers, they sometimes face evictions from their vending sites by the police, by security officers of companies or public institutions or by local powerful people. They sometimes have to cope with confiscation of their equipment or total displacement from `their´ vending spot. Their business success or poverty therefore not only depends on their economic capital, but particularly also on their social networks, whether they have access to politically influential people who can help them, and their own knowledge of and influence in the "politics of the street" (Bayat,1997).

Case study 1: Rice cakes in a `plastic world´ – a woman continues against all odds

Minara is a 32 year old woman who sells rice cake in Islambagh. 20 years ago she came to Dhaka in search of a better life. She first worked as a domestic maid, then as laborer in the plastic industry. Six years ago she started her street food business beside the heavily used embankment road in front of one of Islambagh's many plastic processing factories. At that time, her husband, who used to work as a rickshaw puller, could not support the family sufficiently, because he fell ill. Now, she operates her small permanent shop, just a very small wooden table, a water bucket and three clay stoves (not even taking up one square meter), with her 10 year old son.

For two taka she sells one piece of *vapa pitha* or *chitoy pitha*. Most of her customers are the local plastic laborers, who value this snack because it is tasty, nutritious and cheap, and quickly available for them in the short breaks that they have. If she sells all day, she earns about 100 taka. It is, however, getting extremely difficult for her to survive by this little money. In contrast to Selim (see case study 2), who is subject to regular police evictions, she does not fear the police, but rather other local people. Although nobody wants to harm a vulnerable woman like her, there is nobody there to protect her either. Since starting, she was forced to shift her business place three times. In order to keep her vending spot and sustain her livelihood in the longer run, she thus has to try to be on good terms with more powerful people at her site. A local plastic factory owner, for instance, gave her the permission to sell at her current place.

In addition to this permanent `tenure´ insecurity, the recent price hike of food has hit her very hard: her business' profit margin is smaller now as rice is more expensive, and they had to cut their personal food expenditure even further. During the monsoon season she cannot work most of the time as she has no roof over her shop. Moreover, heavy rain frequently causes water logging on the embankment road; she then gets only very few customers. If her business is interrupted like this for too many days, or if she becomes severely sick herself, then not only her family's food security is at stake, but also her husband's medical treatments and her son's education, and thus their future. [Source: own interviews, 2008/09]

The Politics of Public Space in Dhaka

The Quiet Encroachment from Below

The aforementioned vending types can be considered as different expressions of how public space is being used and at the same time `produced´ through the "quiet encroachment of the ordinary" (Bayat, 1997:2) of the street vendors on publicly accessible space. But as "the issue of space is simultaneously an issue of order and ultimately an exertion of power" (Bayat

1997:145) state actors are compelled to react to these encroachment activities of footpaths, streets, roadsides, market squares or parks. The mobile vendors, for instance, do not threaten the state's monopoly in regulating public space, therefore they are largely tolerated. In contrast, the more permanent vendors not only challenge the state's authority through their appropriation of public space, but they also question the state's formal rule system by making their own operating rules for their respective vending sites. Our empirical evidence shows that the time of presence at a vending site (most often) goes hand in hand with more power in the local arena. The longer established vendors have better contacts (more social capital) to the important `power-brokers´ at the site then the newcomers. As the mobile vendors have often entered the arena later then the more permanent vendors (see table 4), they do not participate actively in this `rule making´, but rather react to the prevailing rules of the street.

Evictions of Street Food Vendors

For long, despite being declared illegal by law (Pure Food Ordinance, 1959; Dhaka Metropolitan Police Ordinance, 1976; Dhaka City Corporation Ordinance, 1983), the unlicensed sale of food in public places has been tolerated by Dhaka's authorities, such as the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) or security officers of other public institutions. However, with shifting public discourses around hygiene, security, corruption and the use of public space towards modern, western norms, the street food business is increasingly impeded in order to `improve food safety´ and `clear public space´. This has become even more evident during the rule of the military-backed Caretaker Government in Bangladesh (January 2007 - December 2008) the police have been more rigorous against the hawkers on Dhaka's streets. As indicated above, the more permanent the vendors occupy a vending site, the more likely it is that the state feels threatened by their presence; they are, thus, the major targets of evictions. `Clean-up´ drives of Dhaka's streets were more frequently carried out (often violently) by the police during the reign of the Caretaker Government, who thereby also demonstrated the authority of the state (Etzold et al., 2009). In turn, the vendors adapted flexibly to the state's efforts to re-claim the streets, so as to reduce business loss and secure their livelihoods in the longer run. While the mobile and most semi-mobile food hawkers simply move their vending units quickly when they perceive a threat, the more permanent vendors hide their food and vending equipment near their vending site. However, many vendors wait-and-see and then draw on their social capital to reduce their loss, bridge income shortages and reclaim `their´ vending site, for instance by bribing the police or seeking help from local power brokers (local political leaders and *mastaans*). Knowing `the right people´ is, therefore, not only the key to getting access to a specific vending site, but also determines the vendor's use of space and the extent to which the vendors can participate and shape the "politics of the street" (Bayat, 1997).

Case study 2: Rice cakes and restrictions – Md. Selim's daily struggle for survival

Mohammod Selim is 25 years old. Together with his mother Nazira and his sister Shazia he operates two small street food shops on the campus of Dhaka University. After the death of his father, a freedom-fighter, Selim took over the street food business at the age of only 13 years. For 5 Taka a piece they are selling small rice cakes (*vapa pitha* and *chitoy pitha*). This snack is particularly popular with students, university and hospital staff as well as with rickshaw pullers and taxicab drivers.

Selling from the early morning to late at night, Selim can earn up to 500 Takas a day. Even though his family manages to make ends meet, Selim stated that it was getting more and more difficult to secure their livelihood. Regularly, the police evict the street food vendors as the university and hospital administrations disapprove of their activities. They argue that food sold on the street is illegal, unhygienic and undesirable. During the rule of the Caretaker

Government, the police have also been stricter on him. Once, the police confiscated his stove, his pots and water drum four times within ten days. Because of these events he lost about 8000 Takas. In order to continue with his business he used up his complete savings, thus diminishing his meagre resources even further. When his elder sister got married five years ago, he also had to take up a high loan from a money lender to pay the dowry. Since then his family has been living close to their vending site in a makeshift shelter made of plastic sheets and rags. Every further police raid gets him deeper into debt, thus aggravating his struggle for survival. But making ends meet is difficult enough even without these police interventions: extreme weather events such as heat waves in the early summer or heavy rain in the monsoon season can have serious health consequences. If Selim falls ill, he cannot sell his rice cakes and the only source of income for his family collapses. [Source: own interviews, 2008/09]

Informal Urban Governance: `The Politics of the Street´

One crucial aspect that needs further elaboration here is the politics inherent in the governance of urban public space. As indicated, the street food vendors' business success largely depends on their embeddedness in informal networks: Who they know and the quality of their social relations to key players in the arena opens them access to (or excludes them from) the most popular street food vending spots on the pavement, street or other open spaces. Informally, each specific vending spot is already allocated to a vendor, and each spot has its specific price. One facet of the informal operating rules of the street is the extraction of security money (*chanda*) by local muscle men (*mastaans*), who are often also part of the formal system of political parties or trade unions (Siddiqui et al., 1990:339). Each day, most street vendors pay in between 10 and 500 Takas; the bigger their shop and the higher their business volume, the more they have to pay: on average they pay 29 Taka as *chanda*; the least successful mobile (10 Taka) vendors have to pay less than the semi-mobile (40 Taka) and than the semi-permanent vendors (46 Taka), whereas the permanent vendors (29 Taka) often did not admit that they pay anything.[5] In turn, the *mastaans* allow the vendors to sell at `their´ usual spot, provide them with information regarding police evictions and serve as middlemen in negotiations with more powerful actors, such as the police or local political leaders (who also get their share of the extracted money). So for the vendors, it does not really matter which formal laws and guidelines on street vending exist, but how rigorously official rules are actually implemented at `their´ vending site, and how they are themselves positioned in the very local `street politics´.

Planning for the Needs of the Urban Consumers and the Street Food Vendors

As outlined above street food vending is a prevailing and idiosyncratic, and thus necessary, segment of the informal economy in Dhaka. Street food vending not only gratifies the demand of cheap and readily available foods for the urban consumers, but also contributes to solving the unemployment problem as it is a sound example of economic self-reliance. Ignoring these facts, state authorities, policy makers and urban planners are not taking adequate initiatives for allocating space for the vendors in the urban fabric. While the urban middle-class and the elites often applaud the eviction of vendors from the streets, they are not bearing in mind that they directly or indirectly benefit from the services of the vendors. Illegalizing and evicting the street food vendors from Dhaka's public space is neither a wise decision nor a viable

[5] While only 70% of the vendors admitted *chanda* payments in our structured survey; our in-depth interviews, however, clearly proof the existence of these payment and the general trend with the amounts they have to give everyday.

solution to the economic, planning and governance problems of the megacity. As there are no simple and quick solutions to such complex problems, academic scholars, civil society organizations, planners, the authorities and policy makers have to come together and work on realistic pathways to take in order to improve public order in Dhaka, ease the congestion of the streets, improve the food safety of street foods and enable street vending as a sustainable livelihood for Dhaka's urban poor.

Though street vending is a practices adapted by the less privileged members of the Bangladesh society, one can argue that the vendors, just as other citizens, have a `right to the city´ and thus also the right to pursue and even expand their small businesses, which are important for the growth of Bangladesh's national economy. In order to support the vendors, providing them with financial support, such as micro-credits, is only of secondary importance. Instead, if one wants to ensure that they do not encroach on public space randomly and sell their food products in a hygienic manner, then providing access to good and `tenure´-secure vending locations should be given the first priority.

Accommodating Informal Economic Activities in Urban Public Space

Despite the fact that street vending is closely related to their legal status, it should also be approached from an urban planning perspective. How `free´ spaces within the urban fabric are defined and planned is critical for the street vendors, who will occupy these spaces and fill them with food and life. The challenge for policy-makers and planners now is to acknowledge street vendors as an integral part of urban life and incorporate them in the space management systems. But street vending policies and guidelines are not just about allowing the poor to sell in a small corner of the market, but about how these spaces are integrated in relation to other urban spaces, and how the space management is strategically positioned within urban development policies. In other words, the whole framework needs to be inclusive towards the urban poor and marginalized women and men in cities, and city beautification campaigns should not be prioritized at their expense.

In this connection, Perera's (1994) work on accommodating the informal economy through restructuring urban voids is an interesting approach. He demonstrated how accommodating the informal sector both in physical and economic terms contributes to sustainable urban development. Table 5 shows the land development/redevelopment techniques summarized by Perera (1994:56). Such a multi-layered concept about the use of space is crucial to accommodating street vendors in the urban spaces in Bangladesh. However, it is not only necessary to incorporate street vending theoretically in the planning process, but also fundamental to keep in mind the everyday governance of these spaces. While special planning techniques can recognize the multiple functions and needs of urban spaces, and such an approach is certainly necessary for the allocation of street food vending in Dhaka, the vendors can still be marginalized, disadvantaged and even exploited. This can be the case, if the respective public spaces are self-governed through local power-brokers, who `distribute´ the public space that they have unrightfully appropriated according to their own vested interests.

Table 5: Urban (re-)development techniques to accommodate the informal economy in urban voids

Techniques	Type of void
Regularization of existing uses	Sidewalks, street corners, left-over land pockets, streets with low traffic movement
Allocation of land reservations	Railroad reservation, riverbank reservation
Development of prime vacant land	Unused land and open spaces within the city, e.g. a railway yard
Urban renewal / redevelopment	Dilapidated inner city blocks, low-income settlements and slums, vacated land and infrastructure, e.g. vacated railway tracks
Urban conservation	Old shopping arcade, dilapidated municipal market

Source (Perera, 1994:56)

Employment Generation and Poverty Alleviation

The opportunity of employment for Dhaka's urban poor needs drastic improvement. This requires substantial financial resources. However, both the Government and the NGOs rarely think about the possibility of generating employment by encouraging street food vending. While financial constraints to start a street food business can be met through micro-credit schemes, getting access to good and secure vending sites is far more difficult for the vendors. Moreover, the vendors have different needs according to their vending type and the food that they sell. Vendors at higher levels of success need other kinds of support to sustain their level of success. Instead of loans, they need a better knowledge of hygienic food handling and business management skills that help them to amplify their business and cope with an increase in customers. As indicated with the two case studies of the pitha vendors, poverty alleviation means, first and foremost, tenure security for the vendors: The state authorities should not be major cause for the vendors' vulnerability, but rather a source of encouragement and support, which also requires large-scale investments in Bangladesh's health and social security systems.

Food Safety

As shown in section 2.1, street food plays an important role for the food provision of the urban consumers. While most do not substitute good home-made rice meals with, for instance, lunch on the street, street food are important supplements to the daily diet of Dhaka's labour force, in particular of the working poor. But food safety has been a weak point of street food. In general, the environment in which these street foods are prepared, handled, catered, preserved and disposed is unsatisfactory and often even highly unhygienic. The drinking and washing water served to the customers is often not stored and handled properly. One reason for these practices is the fact that these vendors are illiterate and have little knowledge about nutrition and food hygiene. Even in their own daily life at home, seldom they themselves might follow hygienic food handling practices. Improving their own awareness and providing appropriate training to them, as it has been started by the Consumers Association of Bangladesh (Haque et al., 2010), will help to solve this problem. Another aspect, however, has to do with the vendors' insecure situation. During eviction drives the police often deliberately destroy water canisters and buckets that the vendors use to wash their

utensils and hands; the evictions are, thus, not only random and inefficient as such, but also further jeopardize food safety. The vendors, thus, need easier access to clean and safe water and public toilets, instead of being criminalized.

Policy Guidelines on Healthy Street Food Vending in Bangladesh

Having to deal with similar challenges, India has developed a National Policy on Urban Street Vendors in 2004 (Government of India, 2004), which is currently being implemented all over the nation.[6] Based on this example from India, the Consumers Association of Bangladesh (CAB) has developed some policy guidelines for street food vending in Bangladesh in order to assure the safety and quality of street vended foods for the sake of the consumers, and support, empower and legally protect the street food vendors. Among CAB's recommendations are the following policy guidelines (adopted from Haque et al., 2010:79ff):

Selected Policy Guidelines on Healthy Street Food Vending in Bangladesh (Haque et al., 2010:79ff)

- Street food vendors should be registered with the local government authorities with a provision for renewal of this registration every three years. No eviction of licensed vendors from the identified vending zone would be legal unless it is proved to be in the public interest.
- Vending committees should be formed at ward level in the cities with legal authority to allocate space for vending. Representatives of the police, the public works departments, the city corporations or municipality authorities, local (micro-credit) banks and of the vendors themselves should be members of these committees – among them at least one third women.
- The local government authorities should delineate vending zones, in conformity with urban development policies and the existing formal laws, and allow genuine street food vendors to sell within these zones for a specific licensing fee. Priority should be given to vendors, who were already in business at these sites.
- Laws should be formulated within the period of this parliament to provide legal, financial and socio-economic support to the vendors as well ensure safety and nutrition of the public consumers.
- A close coordination has to be established between the relevant actors, e.g. the local government authority, police, health department and the vendors or their associations to implement the new laws and the new vending-zones through the vending committees.
- The newly installed local vending committees will charge fees for allocation vending spots and issuing the licenses. They will keep record of the number of registered vendors, map and record the vending zones and individual plots allocated to the vendors with the agreed day(s) and time(s) of vending, record the collected fees, promote activities undertaken by the vendors to improve the hygienic conditions of food vending, as well as register complaints by concerned consumers.
- Public awareness should be raised on the food safety of street food.
- The public analysts of food inspection, National Food Safety Advisory Council members, law enforcers, school authorities and vendors should be informed and trained on the Pure Food Ordinance, the City Corporation and Municipality Ordinances and this guideline on street vending.

[6] See Bhowik (2006), Dittrich (2008) and te Lintelo (2009) for case studies of the successes and problems of the implementation of this policy in India.

According to CAB, the existing laws, acts and ordinances in Bangladesh and the recommendations of the Joint FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius Commission would serve as useful points of reference for developing and implementing these guidelines effectively. But since these policy guidelines will be applied for the first time in Bangladesh, they suggest to implement these guidelines on a pilot area basis first and then evaluate the results before implementing this new policy nationwide (Haque et al., 2010:79ff).

As indicated in the section on `Informal Urban Governance´, again the importance of the very local politics of urban public space can only be highlighted. As the human rights of the vendors as citizens need to be ensured, they need to be safeguarded against the extortion of such `security´ payments. In the policy guidelines proposed by CAB, it is critical that the allocation of vending spots is transparent and fair and that it is by no means be influenced through bribes and political affiliation. Any urban planning and street vending policy, which fails to acknowledge the presence and significance of the very local modes of governance and the extent to which informal `street politics´ influences all aspects of urban governance and life, is bound to fail.

Conclusions

Megacities like Dhaka can be regarded as `arenas of risk and insecurity´, but they can also be looked at as "laboratories of the future" (Kraas, 2007: 80) in which solutions to some of the key challenges of the 21st century, such as eradication of poverty or adaptation to climate change, can be designed, tested and implemented. Our surveys and many interviews with street food vendors and consumers all over Dhaka show that street food indeed plays an important role for the megacity Dhaka. Not only in terms of urban food security and the provision of food for Dhaka's labour force, but also in terms of the livelihood opportunities for the urban poor. Illegalising the vendors and evicting them from their vending sits are no appropriate solutions and are clearly not constructive in order to ease the situation of vendors in the longer run.

Therefore, policies to accommodate street food vending in the urban economy, in urban governance and planning, are urgently needed, but it goes without saying that a mere draft of policies, guidelines and plans is not enough. The implementation of these policies, even against the resistance of some political sections, needs to be carefully thought about. Despite the role we believe the state and other formal institutions should have in urban governance and planning, we must come to terms with the fact that many actors with different and often divergent interests are involved in the formation of our cities' economy, society.

It is, thus, necessary to understand the politics inherent in the urban informal economy. Scrutinizing the present modes of governance of public spaces in Dhaka as applied by local power-brokers and experienced by the street food vendors is not only highly critical, and indeed political, but of paramount importance, if we do not want to see utopian urban development plans continue to fail in the future, but rather want to evoke discussions about realistic pathways to take in order to improve the public order in Dhaka, ease the incredible congestion of Dhaka's streets, improve street food safety, and in order to support the majority of Dhaka's population – the urban poor – in sustaining their livelihoods.

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