



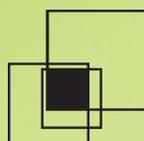
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Fighting Poverty from the Street

A Survey of Street Food Vendors in Bangkok

Narumol Nirathron, PhD



Informal Economy, Poverty and Employment

Thailand Series | Number 1

Informal Economy, Poverty and Employment

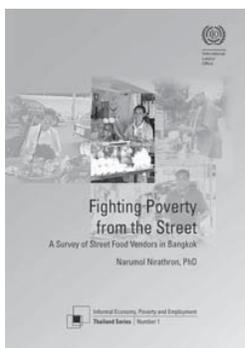
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Narumol Nirathron, Ph.D.
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Foreword

Street vending and urban space for micro enterprises constitute an important policy theme that needs to be advanced further in development literature and policy. In many countries, space tends to be a highly political issue, involving many interests. Partiality towards modern infrastructure results in a rejection of traditional livelihoods conducted on sidewalks and shop houses. Some large retail stores, begrudging competition from nearby informal traders, may lobby for the latter's suppression. Where street vendors are allowed to ply their trade—whether legitimately or not—they do so under inhospitable conditions, with no basic facilities, and under constant fear of harassment and damage to their goods.

A cursory view of cities with brisk street vending activities shows that this economic activity is a veritable sponge that can absorb large numbers of surplus labour, especially women. Their market base consists of a mass of consumers who welcome their accessibility and inexpensive goods and services. To be sure, some studies have shown that when urban management policies allow vendors to conduct their trade, positive impact results on several fronts: on poverty, employment, entrepreneurship, social mobility, and peace and order. Economic and social resources are democratized, including between women and men.

This study, “Fighting Poverty from the Street: A Survey of Street Food Vendors in Bangkok,” traces the impact of street food vending on the economic status of the urban labour force. Bangkok and its thriving street scene provide a dynamic backdrop for such an inquiry. With its tradition of street vending kept alive for decades, we are provided with a unique opportunity to view and analyse this economic activity in a historical and progressive perspective. We see the impact of street vending on the economic mobility of households that have relied on vending for years—even decades.

This study is based on ILO's approach of analysing informal economy occupations based on the four components of decent work: rights, employment, social protection, organization and representation. We thank Dr. Narumol Nirathron, Associate Professor of Thammasat University, for preparing this report based on her doctoral dissertation, which was funded by the Royal Golden Jubilee Ph.D. Programme and which won the Thailand Research Fund's Outstanding Research Award for 2005. We are grateful to be part of this research endeavour given its potential impact on policy making in Thailand and other countries.

The methodology used in this study has been adapted for use in Mongolia. This report was prepared under the DFID-funded ILO Informal Economy, Poverty, and Employment Project, which covers Thailand, Cambodia, and Mongolia. Its results have inspired these countries to explore the potential of an inclusive municipal and national policy on street vending.

Several colleagues closely collaborated to produce this publication and to further related initiatives. Sandra O. Yu, Chief Technical Advisor, and Rakawin Leechanavanichpan, National Project Coordinator of the Informal Economy Project, initiated and coordinated the preparation of this report for publication. Ginette Forgues, Senior Specialist on Local Strategies for Decent Work, provided technical backstopping. Other ILO colleagues provided encouragement and support for pursuing this policy area not only in Thailand, but also in Mongolia and Cambodia. Most notably, William Salter of the Conditions of Work and Employment Programme (TRAVAIL) in Geneva, and Kees van der Ree of the Poverty Reduction through Small Enterprise Development (PRISED) in Viet Nam, generously provided related references and encouragement to the project's initiatives in promoting favourable street vending policies. This publication was further supported by the project INT/03/M57/UKM, Knowledge Sharing on Decent Work and the Informal Economy in the Context of Poverty Reduction, implemented by the Policy Integration Department, ILO Geneva, and funded by DFID.

It is our hope that this study will inspire policymakers, academe, and city administrators to explore the potential of street vending as a legitimate and viable business endeavour and regard urban space allocation as an important policy tool to create employment for their growing labour force.



Christine Evans-Klock

Director

Subregional Office for East Asia

Bangkok, Thailand



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Author's acknowledgement

Working on this research brought back memories of the time when I was much younger and still living with my parents in Chinatown.

As a third generation ethnic Chinese, I was born and raised in the old Chinese community of Songwad. My family lived in a three-storey row house where mobile food vendors frequently passed. Three of these mobile food vendors—all Chinese—regularly came to our house. One was a female noodle vendor who had a good relationship with my mother. Another was a male vendor who sold steamed duck and came regularly at 2 o'clock in the afternoon. My mother used to order steamed chicken and duck from him for special occasions such as the Spring Festival. The third one was a male bean curd soup vendor who came early morning at 5 o'clock daily. He regularly stopped near our house before moving to another location an hour later. We learned later on that he was actually the owner of the factory in Thonburi that made the bean curd which he peddled everyday.

A couple of blocks from our house were two vendors who set up their stalls at the entrance of Wat Samphantatwongse (also known as Wat Koh). The first was an elderly Chinese woman who owned a coffee stall and had a good relationship with the abbot at the temple. Her son, *Hia* Seng (Brother Seng) and his wife now own this coffee stall. The couple not only sells coffee but they also have a noodle stall. All of their four children have finished college.

The second stall belonged to an elderly Thai woman, *Pa* Mane (Auntie Mane), who sold sweet glutinous rice with assorted toppings, grilled yam, and grilled taro root. *Pa* Mane lived in a shack built on the land that belonged to the temple. As *Pa* Mane grew older, she could no longer prepare a variety of foods as she used to do. When the temple had a major renovation, the land where her shack stood was transformed into a pay parking lot. *Pa* Mane had to live in a boat on the canal in the Talad Noi area, another Chinese community. Since she was too old to commute between her place and the stall, she abandoned it. *Hia* Seng and his family later occupied her stall.

Many years later, in 1994, I met Jit and Boonma while doing research on social protection schemes for homeworkers. Jit and Boonma, both vendors, went through very different experiences with their ventures. One was successful, the other very much less so.

The vendors I met since I was very young made me inquisitive about what leads them to success—or failure. Many underprivileged people depend

on street vending for their survival and I wanted to understand what makes them successful. I believe that identifying the success factors—and formulating appropriate interventions—would benefit the mass of hardworking people earning a living from street vending.

I am deeply grateful to the following people for their support:

- The food vendors in Ratburana District, particularly Jit and Boonma, who served as the inspiration for this study. I first met them in 1994. From their experiences, I developed a hypothesis on levels of success.
- The street food vendors in Klongtoey and Dindaeng, who not only enabled me to work on my hypothesis, but also enabled me to construct a body of knowledge about micro-enterprise development in the informal economy. They have been living examples of a life of perseverance and adaptation.
- Professor Dr. Apichai Puntasen, my advisor and founder of Thammasat University's Ph.D. Program in Integrated Sciences; Professor Terry G. McGee of the Institute of Asian Research, University of British Columbia, Canada; Dr. M.R. Akin Rabibhadana, Advisor for Community Development, Crown Property Bureau; and Professor Yupa Wongchai of the Faculty of Social Administration, Thammasat University. Professor Terry G. McGee, who provided valuable advice while I was working on my dissertation both in Thailand and at the University of British Columbia in Canada in 2002, suggested the title of this study. This devoted group of teachers guided me in my research.
- The Royal Golden Jubilee Ph.D. Programme, Thailand Research Fund, which made it possible for me to complete my doctoral dissertation and this research.
- Ms. Sandra O. Yu and Ms. Rakawin Leechavanichpan of the ILO's Informal Economy Project for encouraging me and giving me the opportunity to have this research published. I also thank Ms. Ana Maria Clamor for editing the manuscript.
- Thai society and Thammasat University, my alma mater and present workplace.

Lastly, this research would not have been completed without the support and encouragement of my family in Songwad and Nonthaburi. I dedicate this study to them.

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1

Introduction

In 1994, while working on an ILO/DANIDA-funded research project on social protection schemes for women home-based workers, the author met a number of homemakers who did piece work or operated food stalls in a public space in a community in Bangkok. Two of these women were Jit and Boonma.

Jit was a 42-year-old homemaker from Pichit, a northern province of Thailand, who came to Bangkok in 1976. She was married to a motorcycle taxi driver and had four children. Three of her older children dropped out after finishing high school in order to work.

Jit's husband earned approximately three times the minimum wage while the boys earned a little over the minimum wage. Jit was involved in four rotating funds which brought in a lump sum of money at different times. These schemes required regular payments—daily, weekly, fortnightly, and monthly. Jit's family also had to make monthly payments for the motorcycle and electrical appliances that they bought on credit.

Having to stay at home, Jit's main income came from sewing shoes that earned her eight baht per pair. There was a high demand for these shoes in the community but she could not sew more than 20 pairs a day. She also had a small coffee stand in front of her house, which was located along a thoroughfare. Although her earnings were not consistent, she made some profit. Sometimes her youngest daughter helped tend the stall after school and during the school break. Overall, their income was good.

Her daughter took over the coffee stall in 1995 while Jit sold Chinese fish soup in another location also within the community. In 1996, the author met Jit again. She no longer sold Chinese fish soup because she was about to occupy a space in a night market near the community to sell cooked food. In just a few years, she has expanded her business.

Boonma was a 36-year-old housewife who had five children aged 2 to 12. Her two eldest children helped her sew shoes. Because they went to a school located far from the community, their travel costs added to the family's mounting expenses.

Her husband worked as a manual worker at the nearby port and earned the basic minimum wage. He spent most of his earnings on drinks and cigarettes and treated Boonma badly.

Boonma opened a food stall in front of their rented house to sell papaya salad and grilled chicken. She borrowed 500 baht from a loan shark to buy a small glass shelf and ingredients. Her stall, however, was not located along a thoroughfare. Boonma also participated in three rotating funds that required daily, weekly, and fortnightly payments. Curiously, she did not know the due dates of the payments.

When the author returned to the community in 1995, the family had already left. Neighbours said that they were heavily in debt and had to flee.

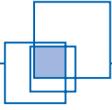
Many underprivileged people depend on street trade for their survival. They experience success or failure in varying degrees. Learning about the fate of vendors like Jit and Boonma has led the author to ask: What is the role of vending in Thai households? What has contributed to the vendors' success or failure? The author consequently embarked on this study in order to understand the role of street vending and to determine the factors that influence the outcome of these ventures.

Street food vending is an economic activity that normally uses a small space, such as a pavement or alley, as a trading area. Street food vending can be either mobile or fixed.

This paper examines the many aspects of street food vending in Bangkok, particularly its role in poverty alleviation and entrepreneurial development. It also looks into the economic performance of food vendors and their own perceptions of success. Three categories of self-rated outcomes are used: (a) remaining on subsistence level; (b) able to accumulate capital; and (c) considering expansion. Indicators for each category are explored.

This study used four sets of data:

- Literature review provided the theoretical framework for the study and elaborated the historical, economic, social, and cultural dimensions of street food vending in Bangkok.
- Survey information obtained from a random sample of 236 mobile vendors, 508 fixed vendors, and 385 buyers in Klongtoey and Dindaeng districts shed light on the following:
 - a. Socio-economic characteristics of food vendors, economic and social aspects of food vending, and the vendors' evaluation of their own success.
 - b. Socio-economic characteristics, purchasing behaviour, expenditures of food buyers, and their expectations on food vending.
- Qualitative data from: (a) participatory observations; (b) two focus group discussions; and (c) in-depth interviews, from which five cases presented here are drawn.
- Interviews with two former Bangkok governors, Mr. Samak Suntaravej and Mr. Bhichit Rattakul, and the former Director-General of the City Law Enforcement Department, Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, Mr. Tanakorn Kunavut. Both former governors actively monitored street food vending activities in Bangkok during their term.



This study is divided into five parts: The first part provides an interdisciplinary perspective on street food vending in Bangkok. The second part explains the conceptual framework and methodology. The third part presents survey findings and qualitative information. The fourth part discusses the success factors. The final part provides policy recommendations.

2

Street food vending in Bangkok

This section provides an interdisciplinary perspective to understanding the prevalence of street food vending in Bangkok by looking at the historical, economic, social, cultural, legal, and policy dimensions.

Historical dimension

In the early Bangkok period, street food vending took place both in the canal and on land. Vendors sold their food from fixed locations in the floating markets. Itinerant vendors sold from house to house. Vending on the street became more popular after the construction of roads that started during the reign of King Rama IV (1851-1868).

There were also many Chinese vendors in the city. As Kanchanakphand (2002) wrote:

“...in the Bang Luang canal there were only Thai food and Thai desserts sold by the Thai... in central Bangkok there were only Chinese food and Chinese vendors. (Here) Thai vendors selling Thai food and desserts were nowhere to be found. They were just like two different towns...” (p. 213).

While Thai vendors were predominantly women, most Chinese vendors were men as most Chinese migrants were men (Skinner, 1957, p. 95). Thai women were more likely to engage in street vending because Thai men were conscripted in the *sakdina* system¹ (Chivakul et al., 1982, p. 8). However, even after the abolition of the system in 1905, most Thai males chose to engage in rice farming. Statistics indicated that during the reign of King Rama V (1868-1910) until the pre-World War I period, farmers earned higher income than other occupations in the city due to the expansion of rice exports and the high price of rice in the world market (Ouyyanond, 1996, p. 140). Thai men also preferred to serve in the court since it gave them a better opportunity for social mobility (Kanchanakphand, 2002, p. 13).

Unlike Thai vendors, street vending for the Chinese offered upward mobility and turned them into capitalists. The typical career path of Chinese immigrants then started with wage work where they would earn money to sustain their families back in China (Skinner, 1957, pp. 97-98). When they have accumulated enough capital, these wage workers would go into street food vending and thus accumulate more capital to expand into larger scale businesses (Skinner, 1957, p. 94). For many Chinese migrants, street food vending offered them a vehicle to

¹ The *sakdina* system, which started in the thirteenth century, granted land ownership to the princes, noblemen, and soldiers. Common people were able to farm the land but male adults had to spend six to eight months per year working or fighting in battles under the command of noblemen or soldiers who were granted ownership of the land. (<http://thaiarc.tu.ac.th/thai/peansiri.htm>)

move to higher income levels in Thai society. The rags-to-riches stories of Chinese merchants in many Thai novels are testimonies to this phenomenon (Sevikul, 1992; Virachon, 2001). In fact, some owners of large Thai business conglomerates started out in vending (Yasmeen, 2001).

The 1952 statistics on street vendors in Bangkok not only highlighted the significant numbers of Chinese vendors in Bangkok, but also indicated the limited opportunities for Thai vendors:

Occupation	Male		Female		Total	
	Thai	Chinese	Thai	Chinese	Thai	Chinese
Market vendors	290	4,390	450	400	740	4,790
Street vendors	120	1,880	230	170	350	2,050

Source: Skinner, 1957, pp. 301-2

The Thais were latecomers in food vending in Bangkok. Three factors that pushed Thais into joining the street trade in Bangkok: (1) economic mobility of Chinese vendors, which was partly the result of the Chinese’s eagerness to improve their economic and social status (Skinner, 1957, pp. 91-92, 305); (2) Thai government’s encouragement to Thai people to engage in trade and industry (Skinner, 1957, p.262); (3) difficulties experienced by Thai farmers due to the significant decrease in the price of rice in the world market and the economic depression after World War I. Farmers in suburban areas such as Sukhumvit, Klongtoey, and Prakanong, and from the central plains gave up their lands and migrated to Bangkok for wage work especially when tanning and cement factories were built in Klongtoey and Bang Sue (Tantuvanit, 1999, p. 291).

The economic and social contexts of the post- and pre-World War II years were different in the following respects:

- Post-war recession limited the accumulation of capital.
- Government began to enforce regulations on street food vending. In 1939, the Ministry of Education ordered all government schools and offices connected with the Ministry to permit only Thai food vendors on their premises. Within a few months, other government ministries issued similar orders (Skinner, 1957, p.262). Two local legislation monitoring street vendors were enacted in Bangkok in 1942 and Thonburi in 1944.
- Thai vendors had to compete with Chinese vendors who had more experience in trade.
- Competition among Thai vendors was also prevalent. However, the accumulation of capital was contrary to Thai cultural and religious values,² which “emphasized merit-making and salvation and condemned as worldly any excessive concern for the material advancement of self and family” (Skinner, 1957, p.91-93). Street food vending was more a survival strategy for the Thai rather than a means for economic and social mobility.

The development strategy of the country emphasizing industrial development at the expense of the agricultural sector induced mass rural-urban migration

2 According to Skinner, “the Thais were generally said to be uninterested in money or economic advancement” (p. 91).

even before the inception of the First National Economic Development Plan in 1961 (Siamwalla and Sethbunsang, 1989). With huge income disparities between Bangkok and the provinces, many rural people flocked to the capital city (Sungthongjeen, 1991). Migration was partly encouraged by the construction of the road that connected the northeastern provinces and Bangkok. The emergence of many slums in Bangkok, including Klongtoey, was testimony to such developments (Tantuvanit et al., 1999 and Patpui, 1984, p. 1).

The expansion of industrial, commerce, and service sectors created a demand for diverse commodities and services such as food and transportation and caused the rapid increase in the number of people engaged in self-employment.

Those who engaged in street food vending were from Bangkok or were rural migrants, especially women (Suvatti et al., 1980). Kusuma Koseyayothin's (1983) study showed that street food vending was one of the occupational choices of women migrants.

Much of the succeeding research on street vending tended to use the economic dualism framework to investigate street vending in Bangkok. These studies regarded street vending as a "survival strategy" or a means to reduce poverty rather than an activity that could be "expanded." These studies, however, confirmed the diversity in economic levels of street food vendors (Loprayoon, 1991; Sirisamphand, 1993; Nirathron, 1996; Bamroongchon, 1998; and Charncheongrob, 2001).

Prachum Suvatti's (1980) research emphasized that street food vending offers cheap goods which enables workers to subsist under low wage conditions. Other studies argued that consumption of street food was not limited to people in low income households (Van Esterik, 1992; and Bamroongchon, 1998), confirming the significant role of street food vending in Bangkok. Thus, consumption of street food can be explained by reasons other than economic factors.

Economic dimension

Street food vending in Bangkok developed from an activity in the subsistence economy to an activity in the market economy. Before World War I, food vending in Bangkok was largely in the hands of Chinese vendors. As described previously, the number of Thai vendors started to increase after World War I when the government encouraged Thai people to engage in the trade during economic recession. The country's path to development, which formally took place after the inception of the First Economic Development Plan, saw growth in wage employment in the industrial sector. In-migration of farmers around Bangkok and the central provinces became pronounced.

Trade liberalization and globalization in the 1980s created employment fluctuations because of competition at the global level. Self-employment became an option for many people (Redclift and Mingione, 1985, pp. 1-11) and the number of street vendors increased thereafter.

The 1997 financial crisis resulted in mass lay-offs. Many laid-off workers took up street vending (HomeNet, 2002, p. 38). The Labour Force Survey of 2000 showed that there were 390,600 workers under the category of "hawkers,

peddlers and newsboys” as compared to 310,500 workers in this sector in 1997 (National Statistical Office, 1997 and 2000).

The table below shows the number of laid-off workers and establishments closed:

Year	Number of Workers		Number of Establishments	
	Total	Laid-Off	Total	Closed
1997	7,609,700	465,304	338,501	5,725
1998	7,600,997	356,367	344,392	5,864
1999	8,134,644	119,019	326,683	6,316
2000	7,807,367	173,057	343,576	6,747
2001	6,799,000	77,456	354,649	4,457

Source: Yearbook, Department of Labour Welfare and Protection

Although street food vendors were considered marginal in many respects, a comprehensive study in 1986 carried out among fixed street food vendors and consumers of street food in Chonburi showed that, while vendors earned a net average of 90 baht a day, most of those in the middle and upper levels earned substantial net average incomes of 206 baht and 504 baht, respectively. Consumers were grouped into four levels of monthly income: less than 2,000 baht; 2,000-4,000 baht; 4,001-8,000 baht; and 8,001 baht and above. This study discovered that the two middle income groups had the highest level of purchase of street food and found that 13 percent of households relied solely on street food. In the study, the total monthly income of street food vendors was 4.3 million baht and total annual household income was 50.8 million baht (Sirisamphand and Szanton, 1986).

Napas Sirisamphand (1994) reported that a mobile vendor selling dessert had a daily stock value of 320 baht and a net earning of 100 baht while the cooked food vendor had a daily value of stock of 300-400 baht and earned a net income of 200-300 baht. The fixed vendor selling fruits invested 5,000-7,000 baht per day and earned a net income around of 20,000 baht monthly. Fujimaki's 1995 study found that the daily stock value of fixed food vendors was between 200 and 1,000 baht.

Pongpaichit and Chasombat's 1988 study of food and non-food vendors found vendors who showed interest in expanding their trade. Sirisamphand's 1994 study of mobile food vendors found that vendors were keener to return to their home provinces. McGee and Yeung (1977) argued that there has not been a solid conclusion on whether street vendors could expand their trade. Irene Tinker's 1996 study on fixed vendors in many developing countries indicated that the expansion of street vendors' trade occurred in a horizontal manner and is kept within the household. She posited that though the horizontal expansion did not bring in employment, there was no justification in regarding street food vending as simply being “survivalist.” Horizontal expansion occurs involving, for example, increase in the number of outlets or in the range of products offered.

Social dimension

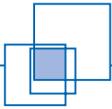
Once considered part of the traditional economic and social life of Bangkok people, street food vending has come to be viewed as a marginal occupation aimed to alleviate poverty. This was reinforced by the country's industrial development strategy where its labour force, particularly farmers in Bangkok and the provinces, had to find a living in order to survive in a growing industrial economy. They found their living in street vending.

The demographic characteristics of street vendors in 1980 were as follows: (a) there were as many vendors born in Bangkok as those who came from the provinces; (b) there were more female vendors than male vendors; (c) most vendors did not go beyond primary education or did not have education at all; (d) most vendors were between 16 and 40 years old; and (e) most vendors were married (Suvatti et al., 1980).

Subsequent research on street vendors revealed similar demographic characteristics and thus confirmed the marginality of street vending. Additional information included the following: (a) vendors were rural farmers who migrated to Bangkok in search of better economic opportunities; (b) reasons for entering street trade were not limited to economic factors—street vending also provided flexible work schedule that enabled women to take care of family-related responsibilities; (c) low investment was one main reason for selling food; and (d) street vendors were harassed by state officials (Koseyayothin, 1983; Sirisamphand and Szanton, 1986; Pongpaichit and Chasombat, 1988; Sungtongjeen, 1991; Sirisamphand, 1994; Nirathron, 1996; Bamroongchon, 1998; Charnchoengrob, 2001; and Suksomboon, 2002).

The economic and social contribution of street food vending was underestimated due to its marginal character and link to poverty. Its image of marginality, however, provided some “protection” because poverty was always cited as the reason for leniency towards street vendors in Bangkok. Street vendors were occasionally exempted from paying fines for violating city ordinances on cleanliness and orderliness.

Such a lenient attitude also allowed vendors a source of income during economic crises. This is not always the case however. Vendors were relocated and arrested in some areas. Vendors at times had to pay bribes in exchange for “rights” to sell in non-designated locations. Data on revenues generated from street vendors are shown on the following page.



Year	Number of arrests	Fines	Revenues for BMA
1996	52,927	19,650,720	9,793,810
1997	55,052	19,569,100	9,782,550
1998	68,649	23,500,124	11,749,062
1999	91,003	27,743,630	13,736,815
2000	68,049	20,639,730	10,319,865
2001	105,729	30,001,855	15,000,928
2002	148,043	43,576,228	21,788,114
2003	177,432	53,352,567	26,676,284
2004	211,308	66,749,137	33,374,569

Source: City Law Enforcement Department, Bangkok Metropolitan Administration

As to other social factors for success, housing was cited as important to food vending (Askew, 2002, p. 143; Department of Regional and Urban Planning, Chulalongkorn University, 2000, Ch. 6). Many food vendors live in slum areas, particularly in Klongtoey. Though selling locations are outside the communities, the social network and social resources in the community are vital to their occupation. This explains why some vendors refuse to relocate to housing provided by the government.

Social factors also included relationship with regular customers. Geertz (1978) referred to this as “clientelization.” This refers to the informal relationship that benefits both the vendors and the consumers. The study confirmed that, in many cases, transactions between street vendors and their consumers emerged out of a relationship of trust, one which assures quality of food and reasonableness of the price (Murray, 1992, p. 49). As for the vendors, maintaining regular customers means that they have to maintain quality products or provide food variety. This relationship, which is considered “warm and powerful,” is vital in the activity in the informal sector (Aeoursivongse, 1998).

Social dimensions also provide some explanation to level of success. Some studies pointed out gender relations as having influence on the decision to expand trade or not. Murray (1992) found that female street food vendors in Indonesia preferred to save money for a pilgrimage to Mecca rather than to expand trade. Once the business started to expand, women vendors would rather give their business to their husbands.

Cultural dimension

Besides the economic and social dimensions, the persistence of street food vending in Bangkok is also attributed to cultural dimensions, particularly food culture—explaining both the demand for and supply of street food in Bangkok.

In the early Bangkok period, food sold by vendors were mostly fresh food and semi-processed food that needed to be cooked since eating out or buying cooked food was not popular. Purchase of cooked food was limited mainly to food vendors who had to leave home early to catch the sale in the floating market (Plainoi, 2001, p. 59). This is in line with Pawewan Norapallop’s (1993)



A vendor selling grilled pork and sticky rice in the Tha Chang area.

observation that cooking has been transformed from a household activity into activity having division of labour and one that is market-oriented. Cooking became an activity in the public sphere. This is also in line with the observation that the persistence of street food is the result of urbanization in Asian countries (McGee and Yeung, 1977; and Drakakis-Smith, 1990).

Changes in food consumption patterns of Bangkok people has led into what Gisele Yasmeen (1996) called “public eating.” Yasmeen traced “public eating” back to the time when cooked food catered to Chinese migrants in the early Bangkok period. She cited the rural-to-Bangkok migration, small living spaces, skills, time, convenience, and the amount of preparation required to cook food, as contributing factors to the culture of “public eating” in modern Thailand. Askew (2002) had the same observation when he mentioned the purchase of *pak soi* food or food sold at the entrance of the alley as a food strategy of Bangkok people. The changing role of women also contributes to the persistence of street food and the culture of “public eating” (Komin, 1995).

However, the above explanation does not take into account selling of fresh food on the street. Most fresh food vendors gather in front of the open market—what McGee calls “focus agglomeration”—because selling space inside the market is limited. Buyers also find it more convenient to buy food outside the market.³

As in the early Bangkok period, food sold on the street are of many varieties. There are fresh food such as fresh meat, vegetables that need to be prepared, and cooked food that can be consumed or taken away. This is also the case of dessert. Fruits and drinks are also available. Of all types of food sellers on Bangkok streets, cooked food sellers constitute the highest percentage. A February 2003 survey of Bangkok sellers in the designated areas found that, out of a total of 26,733 vendors, 13,126 (49.1 percent) sold food. Among the food vendors, 2,092 sold

³ Interview with former Bangkok Governor Samak Suntaravej, 9 June 2003.



Vendors in action. Food vendors selling tapioca dumpling, grilled banana, and drinks in Dindaeng district.

fresh food, 5,222 prepared and sold food on the street, 1,440 sold cooked food, 1,605 sold desserts, and 786 sold drinks (City Law Enforcement Department, Bangkok Metropolitan Administration).

The high percentage of cooked food sold on the street explains the reason why most studies on street food vending focused on cooked food. To some extent, statistics on monthly food expenditures in 1990 and 1998 reflect the demand for street food as seen on the table below:

Type of food consumed	1990		1998	
	Whole Kingdom	Bangkok	Whole Kingdom	Bangkok
Food prepared at home	1,494 baht (76%)	1,616 baht (52.3%)	1,269 baht (50%)	3,263 baht (50.0%)
Prepared food taken home	173 baht (8.8%)	457 baht (14.8%)	506 baht (19.9%)	1,112 baht (17.0%)
Food eaten away from home	300 baht (15.2%)	1,014 baht (32.9%)	763 baht (30.1%)	2,152 baht (33.0%)

Source: Household Economic Survey, National Statistical Office (1990 and 1998)

According to Kanchanakphand (2002), during the reign of King Rama V (1868-1910), vendors in Bangkok at that time sold throughout the day. In the daytime, vendors sold Chinese food such as noodles, pork rind soup, rice sausage, fried tofu, turnip cake, fried mussels, sweet and salty dumplings, black jelly, coconut milk on lotus seed, deep-fried dough stick, and chestnut. At night, vendors sold congee, dumpling, grilled duck, *sia po⁴* rice, and assorted desserts. In contrast, vendors in Bang Luang canal sold Thai food such as curry, fried banana, and assorted sweet glutinous rice, sugar cane, and the like.

As globalization brought in more cultural influences, food sold on the street in Bangkok have increased in variety. Instead of *sia po* rice, “Siriwat sandwich”⁵ came into the scene. However, food that were sold in ancient times such as noodles, pork rind, dumpling, deep-fried dough stick are still available. In a handbook on Bangkok street food that featured those sold in Tha Prachan, Theves, Klongtoey, Pratunam, and Sukhumvit, the authors recommended 113 kinds of food (Yee and Gordon, 1993, pp. 12-28).

Different cooking methods also provide variation in street food. For instance, between two vendors selling grilled pork spareribs in the Tha Prachan area, one uses soy sauce to marinate spareribs and the other uses garlic and chili (Norapallop, 1993, p.74). Three vendors selling the Chinese flour snack in Nang Lerng market offer the same kind of snack, but the tastes are different so the consumers can buy according to their preferences (Tantuvanit et al, 1999, pp. 22-23).

Patrons of street food in Bangkok are not limited to low-income people (Van Esterik, 1992). Consumption of street food in Bangkok is related to culture. Not only is this manifested in the culture of “public eating,” but also in the variety of food that can be consumed throughout the day and in the rituals and religious activities that call for diversity of food. The abundance of raw ingredients also encourages creativity in food production (Sukphisit, 2003, p. C2).

Legal and policy dimension

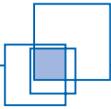
The Thai government’s attempt to monitor street food vending in Bangkok took shape in 1941 when then Bangkok Municipality enacted separate regulations monitoring fixed and mobile vending.

After the establishment of Bangkok Metropolis in 1972, the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration enacted a new law to monitor street food vending. The task of restoring order in street vending has always been on the Bangkok Governor’s priority list (Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, 1982, p. 55). The attempt to clear the pavement of vendors started in 1973. However, the oil crisis that brought economic recession in 1979 and 1982 compelled the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration to support the return of street food on the pavements (Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, 1991).

During economic recession, street food vending is regarded as a “solution” to unemployment and high cost of living. However, during times of economic progress, street food vending is viewed as a “threat” to orderliness. This dual attitude towards street vendors is reflected in policies at the national and local

4 Rice topped with assorted meat.

5 Siriwat Sandwich is a product of Siriwat Voravetvudhikun, a former Thai stock broker and property developer who suffered from the 1997 economic crisis. He shifted into food vending to sell sandwiches and later expanding into other kinds of foods. Sandwich is considered a western type of food.



levels. In the Fourth Bangkok Metropolitan Development Plan (1987-1991) and the Fifth Bangkok Metropolitan Development Plan (1992-1996), street vending was depicted as a “threat” to orderliness. “Bangkok as a city must be systemic, orderly, and livable” (Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, 1991, p. 47). As street vending was perceived to represent “underdevelopment,” the Fourth Plan aimed to reduce the number of street vendors in all 36 districts of Bangkok. The Fifth Plan likewise limited the increase of street vendors and prohibited the preparation of food on the streets.

Despite the direction set out in the Plan, however, street vending policies in Bangkok were dependent on the incumbent governor’s predilection (Tungkasamit, 1995). For instance, former Governor Major General Chamlong Srimuang (1985-1989 and 1989-1992) promulgated a policy that focused on convenient and safe co-existence between pedestrians and street vendors. Vending near the bus stops and on pavements narrower than two metres were prohibited. Street vendors were asked to stop selling on Wednesday to clean the selling area. Chamlong’s successor, Krisda Arunwongse na Ayudhya (1992-1996), introduced more rigid measures towards street vendors. Krisda’s successor, Bhichit Rattakul (1996-2000), paid much attention to measures on food hygiene.

Samak Suntaravej (2000-2004) proposed a policy that accommodated street vending. Vendors were allowed to sell on Wednesday. The governor was also known to have tried to eradicate the *suay* or fees collected by some city law enforcers. Vendors are required to pay cleaning fees in accordance with the newly enacted law of 2002. The Governor also introduced the mobile dishwasher for vendors in Chinatown.

By 2003, policies concerning street food vending could be found in a number of city regulations besides the Regulation of Bangkok Metropolis on Hawkers B.E. 2519 (1976), which provides a definition of “fixed vending” and “mobile vending.”

The Act on Maintaining Public Cleanliness and Public Order B.E. 2535 (1992) authorized the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, with the approval of the Traffic Police Division, to designate areas for street vending.⁶ The Public Health Act B.E. 2535 (1992) authorized the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration to designate areas prohibited from vending. The Regulation of Bangkok Metropolis on Selling in Public Spaces B.E. 2545 (2002) provides guidelines for food vendors. Vendors must have an authorization to sell. The regulation also stipulates guidelines for food sellers such as dress code, personal hygiene, and care for cooking utensils. While the regulations for mobile and fixed vendors are slightly different, the law was not strictly enforced.

Apirak Kosayothin, the present Bangkok governor who took the office in 2004, proposed a new policy that vendors must not sell on Mondays.

Before 2002, the Thai government came to regard street food vending as a means to eradicate poverty and offset uneven income distribution. It used petty enterprises to respond to the economic downturn in 1997. It provided grants to the less privileged amounting to 4,000 baht which is to be used as seed money (Kaewsalapsi, 1999, p. 5). In addition, funds were earmarked from the World Bank

6 Until April 2005, there were 268 selling locations occupied by 15,289 vendors. In May 2005, the designated selling location increased to 683 locations in 50 districts of Bangkok. The current number of vendors is estimated to be around 25,000 (Interview with Pongsathorn Siritham, Local Affairs Officer 6, City Patrol Division, City Law Enforcement Department, September 2005).



The Bangkok Metropolitan Administration's sign, dated 31 May 2005, permitting vending activities. The sign says that vending is allowed from 5 am to 11 pm.

and Miyazawa loans under the Social Investment Fund to support petty enterprises through occupational groups and savings groups in the community.

Petty trade, which has been regarded as a “means to reduce poverty” since the Fifth Economic and Social Development Plan (1982-1986), has been “repositioned” as “a means for economic self-reliance” in the Ninth Plan (2002-2006) (National Economic and Social Development Board, 2001).

The government's attempt to encourage self-employment was first outlined in the Sixth National Economic and Social Development Plan (1987-1991)—the first time since the inception of the National Development Plan (Sirisamphand, 1994, p. 34). Measures such as provision of skills training, social protection schemes, and capital money were introduced for the implementation by the following government agencies: the Department of Public Welfare, the National Housing Authority, and the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration.

In the Seventh National Economic and Social Development Plan (1992-1996), petty traders (or self-employed people) were listed as one of the six groups of poorest people that the government singled out for special attention. However, research indicated that despite the government's efforts to encourage the improvement of livelihood of the less privileged through petty enterprise, its initiatives were inaccessible to many people (Community Organizations Development Institute, 1993; Sirisamphand, 1994; Nirathron, 1996; Thonguthai, 1996; and Raviwongse, 1999).

The establishment of the Bank of People's Project under the supervision of the Government Savings Bank was a significant step to support petty enterprises. Put into effect on 25 June 2001, the Project offers a monthly interest rate of one percent for an initial loan of 15,000 baht.

3

Theoretical framework

Globalization, industrialization, urbanization, food culture, and government policy—all of these have a bearing on the proliferation of street food vending in Bangkok. Since street food vending is affected by economic, social, cultural, historical, and legal factors, this research adopts a multi-disciplinary approach.

Theories on petty trading and economic dualism

The concept of self-employment can be derived from Karl Marx's discussion of petty commodity production. According to Marx, petty commodity production, which is pre-capitalist, has low division of labour and little specialization. It was widespread in the transition from feudalism to capitalism (Scott 1979, p. 109-110). Use of family workers makes this mode of production mere survivalist, intended for social reproduction rather than capital accumulation. Since only family labour is used, there is no surplus value extracted from wage labour.

Post-war studies on the economy of developing countries found that in most cities of these countries, there were two systems of production: the “bazaar economy” and the “firm-centered economy” (Geertz, 1963). This dualistic model highlights the distinction between self-employment and wage labour. The bazaar economy, in which a large proportion of the population of these cities was engaged, was seen as a disadvantaged sector comprising low-income people. This model also served as the basis of the informal-formal sector dualism by Keith Hart. Hart first coined the term “informal sector” before it was popularized by the International Labour Office Report on Kenya in 1972 (Harper, 1996).

The proliferation of informal sector activities in developing countries in the 1960s was attributed to the employment crisis emerging from rapid population growth and limited employment opportunities. Informal sector activities were regarded as marginal.

Thereafter, the informal sector was characterized by the following: ease of entry, reliance on indigenous resources, family ownership, small scale production, use of labour-intensive technology, and facing competitive markets (ILO, 1991, p. 4). Having low productivity, low technology, and highly labour intensive, these activities were considered transitional. The informal sector functions as a “sponge” that absorbs surplus labour.

Informal activities were further recognized when high competition in international trade and structural adjustment programmes resulted in huge labour displacement in the formal sector, leading to the proliferation of the informal sector, particularly in Africa (Meagher and Yunusa, 1996, pp. 1-3; Mishra, 1999, pp. 23-27). Global competition has made “flexibility” a keyword. As globalization made economies vulnerable to competition, diversity in income generating activities became important for household survival (Smith and Wallerstein, 1992, p. 15).

Around this time, informal sector activities came to be regarded as valuable economic endeavours—not only because of their role in employment creation in the face of uncertainties in formal wage employment but also because of their role in promoting entrepreneurship. (McGee, 1996, p. 12).

It became apparent that economic dualism is no longer sufficient in explaining small self-employed activities. As economic arrangements become more flexible with globalization, linkages also increase between small economic activities and larger enterprises. Economic activities in developing countries are increasingly linked to external markets as well.

Self-employment and street vending

Types of self-employment

In contrast to wage employment, self-employment is characterized by one's ownership of the means of production. Self-employed persons are those who run their own businesses, alone, or in association with other owners. They appropriate the profits from the businesses and do not regularly employ remunerated workers (Scott, 1979, p. 107).

Bromley and Gerry's 1979 classification of categories of self-employment in third world cities can be conceived as a continuum across three categories:

- a. **Disguised wage work.** This is a type of self-employment where the vendor works as a commissioned seller selling products of one firm or a few related firms. In many cases, vendors are supplied with equipment, credit, and raw materials.
- b. **Dependent work.** The vendor is dependent on one or more larger enterprises for credit, the rental of premises or equipment, a monopolistic or oligopolistic supply of materials or merchandise.
- c. **True self-employment.** The vendor works autonomously with considerable choice of suppliers and outlets.

This classification draws out the diversity in street food vending and linkages between small vending activities and larger establishments. Among Bangkok food vendors, some have started from disguised wage work before achieving true self-employment status (see Case Study 3). Other workers start from true self-employment before shifting into dependent work dealing with a large multinational company (see Case Study 2).

Types of food sold

Another form of diversity among food vendors is the type of food sold. In a research on street vending in six Southeast Asian countries, McGee and Yeung (1977) classified food into unprocessed, semi-processed, and prepared food—reflecting the predominant types and range of street food found in the countries studied.

Research on food vending in Thailand revealed different types. It is sometimes classified by the kind of meal in which they are usually taken: breakfast, lunch, supper, and snack. It is also classified as rice with viand, light meals, snacks, desserts, drinks, bakery products, and *Isan* or northeastern food (Sirisamphand and Szanton, 1986, p. 79-81). Food may be categorized based on religious beliefs, such as Muslim or vegetarian food, or it can be viewed from a health perspective based on Chinese beliefs, such as “cold food” and “hot food” (Norapallop, 1993, p. 36). A 1993 handbook on street food in Bangkok classified food sold on the streets of Bangkok as main dishes, noodles, snacks, desserts, and drinks. Classification by the cooking methods such as grilling, roasting, steaming, and deep frying is also used (Yee and Gordon, 1996, p. 11).

The Regulation of Bangkok Metropolis on Selling in Public Spaces B.E. 2545 (2002) defined “food” as edible things, including items that are eaten or consumed directly and ingredients that are used to prepare food. The definition excludes drugs and medicine. Articles 6 and 7 of the Act also classify the different types of ready-to-eat food sold on the street: food that is already prepared and food that is prepared on the street.

In this study, food is classified into fresh food, cooked food, food prepared on the street, packaged food, fruits, and others. A vendor who operates a “one-stop service” may sell all types of food indicated above.

Types of street vending

There are two major types of vending units: the mobile vending unit and the fixed or static vending unit. In the mobile vending unit, the vendor does not have fixed premises but moves from one location to another. It also incorporates the so-called semi-static vending unit in which the selling unit is removed after a relatively long period of selling. The static or fixed vending unit is permanently located. The major advantage of being mobile is accessibility to the buyer. This advantage makes the mobile vendor less dependent on location. On the other hand, mobility limits the amount of food that is carried due to the weight of goods. Fixed or static vending units tend to be more stable. The volume of operation of fixed vending units is reportedly higher than the operation of its mobile counterpart (McGee and Yeung, 1977).

Definitions of vending unit

The definition of vending unit used in this study is based on the following: The Regulation of Bangkok Metropolis on Hawkers B.E. 2519 (1976), Tinker's definition of fixed vendors (1997), and McGee's types of vendor locations (1973).

The 1976 Bangkok Metropolitan Administration Act differentiates fixed and mobile vendors. The mobile vendor is defined as a hawker who sells food or ice on land or in the canal. The fixed or static vending unit is defined as a “stall in a public space or building, mat, ground, boat or boathouse for selling food, ice, or other items.” BMA’s definition implies that food was a major commodity of street vendors.

In general, fixed vending units are found in public markets or in a building where conditions are different from those selling on the streets. In many cases, fixed vending units extend from a house or is part of a shophouse. This study uses the term “stall” as defined by Tinker in her comparative study on street food in developing countries. A stall is defined as “a place having no more than three permanent walls” (Tinker, 1997, p. 17). This definition is consistent with the focus of this study which is smaller ventures.

McGee (1973) divided vendors according to three main types of locations:

- a. Vendors who sell in places where people assemble, such as markets and bus terminals.
- b. Vendors who sell on the street. This type of vendor poses problems of congestion and obstruction.
- c. Vendors who sell in a bazaar. A bazaar is equivalent to the seasonal or periodic market where vendors sell on a piece of public or private land. According to McGee, a bazaar is a place for entertainment as well as a place for selling. It is the “department store” of a dual economy’s traditional sector.

McGee’s classification did not include street vendors who sell in communities and alleys. These vendors are often not included in official statistics. In Bangkok, the type of location may indicate the amount of capital needed or the size of

An alley in Dindaeng where vendors sell food right in front of their house.



the venture. The first two types of vendors in McGee's classification are required to pay the official cleaning fees as administered by the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration. Some vendors have to pay "unofficial fees" collected by corrupt city police to ensure their right to a selling space. On the other hand, vendors in the bazaar have higher fixed costs as they have to pay the annual fee, daily fee, and monopoly fee. The latter is paid to prevent other vendors from selling the same items in the market.

Success factors

While most vendors belong to low-income groups, studies have found that vendors in Bangkok have different levels of earnings. Some operate on a subsistence level, others are able to accumulate capital, and some are considering further expansion. There are also vendors who were not successful and thus eventually gave up their ventures (Loprayoon, 1991, p. 38; Sirisamphand, 1994, p. 87; Nirathron, 1997; Tinker, 1997; and Tantuvanit et al, 2000, p. 23). Although income is not the only indicator of quality of life, it indicates the opportunities that could be available to a person or household (Girod, 1986, p. 261).

The economic performance of the self-employed generally involves two factors: personal factors (such as entrepreneurial skills) and environmental factors (such as supportive government policy). Babb (1989) pointed out that environmental factors are more important than personal factors for the less privileged self-employed vendor who faces many constraints.

This study incorporates three frameworks regarding the context of street food vending activity:

- a. The work on self-directed employment of the disabled as proposed by Neufeldt and Albright (1998).
- b. ILO guidelines on self-employment, which provide working definitions for terms such as "self-confidence" and "business knowledge" (ILO 1996, pp. 30-34).

(Left) A family enterprise in Klongtoey. The wife prepares the drinks for the husband to sell. (Right) The head of the drink seller group in Klongtoey with a sample of his product.



- c. Studies pertaining to street food vending in Bangkok and other countries that provide general conclusions on their economic performance.

The use of the framework for people with disabilities, especially target groups of the abovementioned work, is based on many considerations. First, they are considered marginal. Second, many of them belong to low-income groups. Third, many of them have limited employment opportunities. Fourth, the scale of operation of ventures owned by people with disabilities is often small and family-based. Five, government policy plays a crucial role to the success of the operation of the venture. This framework, however, does not consider the different levels of economic performance.

Neufeldt and Albright (1998) proposed that personal and environmental factors play a crucial role in the economic performance of self-employed people with disabilities. Corresponding to the International Labour Organization's views on self-employment, the four foundations for successful self-employment are as follows:

- Personal characteristics
- Knowledge
- Resources
- Supportive environment

The **personal characteristics** foundation, which Neufeldt and Albright derived from the ILO's proposition on self-employment, incorporates self-confidence, risk-taking, and energy. The **knowledge foundation** comprises literacy, knowledge of production, and knowledge in management. The **resources foundation** involves capital, and the **environment foundation** entails support or enabling measures from government (Neufeldt and Albright, 1998, p. 295).

Past research on street vending pointed to other factors contributing to the economic performance of vendors:

- Knowledge of markets such as knowledge on products in demand, price fluctuation, cheap sources of materials, and production process.
- Selling and housing location.
- Good relationship with other people such as other vendors and state officials.
- Availability of social capital that provides assistance when needed.
- Having own capital and not having to seek external funding.
- Having support from family.
- Quality of food sold (Teilhet-Waldorf 1978; Moser, 1980; Loprayoon, 1991; Norapallop, 1993; Sirisamphand, 1994; Nirathron 1996; Nophirun, 1997).
- Creativity (Pongpaichit and Chasombat, 1988, p. 3).

Muhammad Yunus, founder of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, asserted that all low-income people have survival skills and are thus capable of being self-employed. With hard work and perseverance, these people will be able to survive. However, not all would be able to manage beyond the survival level. To be able to achieve higher than subsistence level, factors other than hard work count (Yunus, 1998).

Research by Caroline Moser (1980) provides an insight into why some traders cannot lift themselves out of poverty. In her article, “Why the Poor Remain Poor,” Moser highlighted the following factors which influence the economic status of market traders in Bogota, Colombia: (a) life crises, such as illness or death in the family, (b) life situations, such as old age, health problems or having no children old enough to work, and (c) direct or indirect investments, such as sending children to school or purchasing property.

In the case of unsuccessful vendors, some research studies indicated contributing factors such as lack of family support, lack of capital, and having dependent children (Loprayoon, 1991; and Nirathron, 1996). Being unsuccessful meant that the vendors were not able to earn enough income and had to give up their businesses.

Based on the research mentioned above, the success factors considered in this study are as follow:

- a. Personal characteristics such as self-confidence, risk-taking and creativity.
- b. Knowledge of sources of inexpensive materials, financial planning, marketing, and food production.
- c. Moral support from family members, assistance, and thrift.
- d. Availability of capital or low-interest loans.
- e. Social network.
- f. Selling and housing locations.
- g. Food-related factors such as price, taste, and food hygiene.
- h. Dress and behavioural factors related to sellers.

Introduction to the research coverage

Research sites

The study’s two research sites were Klongtoey and Dindaeng districts, which are located in the inner area of the Bangkok Metropolis. Besides their proximity to each other, the two districts share some similarities.

Klongtoey and Dindaeng both started out as low-income areas. The settlement in Klongtoey in the 1950s was a response to the demand for cheap labour in Klongtoey port whereas Dindaeng was the city’s garbage dumpsite in 1950s. The dumpsite was a significant source of income for scavengers and garbage collectors. Both districts are considered transitional zones in the city and have high numbers of food vendors due to the density of population and proximity to employment sources.

Klongtoey district is located near the port and has the largest slum area in Bangkok. Slum dwellers live under constant threat of forced relocation. By contrast, Dindaeng is a sweatshop district where thousands of subcontractors in the garment industry work. Government offices, schools, and universities are also found in Dindaeng. These provide ideal sites for mobile vendors who can bring cooked food to their customers’ doorsteps by pushcarts or balance pole.



(Left) A noodle vendor occupying the pavement near the University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce. (Right) A fruit vendor near the University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce in Dindaeng.



Dindaeng is also known for its network of little alleys and lanes that enable mobile food vendors to move easily through the area.

Statistics from the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration in 2000 indicated that there were 1,200 and 778 fixed vendors of all types of commodities in Klongtoey and Dindaeng, respectively. The author, however, counted far higher numbers of vendors in 2003 as they included fixed and mobile vendors in many non-designated areas.

Methodology

Field data collection used both quantitative and qualitative methods. The sample for this study consisted of (1) mobile and fixed vendors in Klongtoey and Dindaeng districts and (2) buyers of street food in both areas.

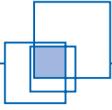
Respondents were selected by means of random sampling. The sample sizes of the mobile and fixed vendors in Klongtoey were 121 and 246, respectively. In Dindaeng, sample sizes were 115 and 262, respectively.⁷

In the two districts, 385 food buyers were also randomly selected. The table below shows the sample sizes for each type of respondent:

Respondents	Klongtoey	Dindaeng	Total
Mobile vendors	121	115	236
Fixed vendors	246	262	508
Buyers	190	195	385

Participatory observations, two focus group discussions, and in-depth interviews were carried out to gather qualitative data. Twenty vendors were selected through purposive sampling based on the type of vending unit, level of success, and their consent to an in-depth interview. Five cases are presented in this report (see case studies in Section 4, Research findings).

7 The calculation of the sample size is based on Yamane's formula that states that at the significance level of 90 percent, the minimum sample size for the unknown population is 100 (Yamane, 1969). The statistical values obtained include descriptive statistics and inferential statistics, namely Chi-square and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA).



The final set of data was obtained from interviews with former Bangkok governors and the former Director-General of the City Law Enforcement Department. Former governors Mr. Samak Suntaravej and Mr. Bhichit Rattakul actively monitored Bangkok street food vending during their terms.

Data collection was done from March 2003 to January 2004.

4

Research findings

The sections below present the findings on two types of vendors—mobile and fixed.

Mobile vendors

Below is the socio-economic profile of mobile vendors (Table 1):

- The majority (88 percent) of these vendors came from provinces outside Greater Bangkok.
- The highest percentage of vendors came from the northeast, the region with the lowest per capita income in Thailand.
- A high proportion (35 percent) of vendors came to Bangkok during the 1997 economic crisis.
- Around 70 percent of vendors were from the agricultural sector.
- The percentage of male and female vendors was almost on par, indicating that women no longer predominate in selling food on the streets of Bangkok.



An elderly vendor selling vegetables and desserts.



A vendor selling Thai desserts in the Tha Prachan area.

- The youngest vendor was 20 years old and the oldest was 78 years. More than half of the vendors sampled were between 30 and 50 years old.
- The majority (85 percent) had received not more than six years of formal education or none at all. Only 3.4 percent of those sampled identified themselves as ethnic Chinese.

In terms of the length of time engaged in vending (Table 2):

- Half (53 percent) have been vending less than five years.
- Almost a third (26 percent) have been vending from five to less than 10 years.
- Over a tenth (14 percent) spent more than 20 years vending.

Over 90 percent of mobile vendors were in the “true self-employment” category. Around 3 percent were involved in “disguised wage work;” and 6 percent in “dependent work” categories (Table 3).

As for the type of operation, 56 percent were engaged in individual operations and 44 percent were in family operations. Among those engaged in family operations, only one percent reported employing workers (Table 4).

Majority (84 percent) of mobile vendors sold food that could be consumed on the street, reflecting a culture of “public eating.” Only 16 percent traded in uncooked and other non-ready-to-eat types of food (Table 5).

About a third said they worked no farther than one kilometer away from their homes.

Unlike previous research studies, the vendors in this study cited quick cash turnover as the main reason for vending food. Types of food sold were determined by the amount of capital investment, knowledge about food, the number of sellers selling similar types of food, and the complexity of the preparation. Many sellers did not limit themselves to selling only specific types of food. A fourth (23 percent)

Papaya Salad Vendor

A vendor may sell more than one type of food. The decision on the type of food sold is based on which type of food fetches the highest income. Papaya salad is categorized as “food prepared on the street.” Below are the different types of food sold by a papaya salad vendor in Dindaeng district (July 2003):

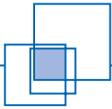
Types of food	Food
Cooked food/food prepared on the street	Fresh green papaya, mangoes that are sold individually as fruit or prepared on the street as salad.
Packaged food/cooked food	Thai noodles with fish curry sauce without coconut milk (The noodles are pre-packaged food; the curry is home-cooked).
Cooked food	Boiled snails, fried noodles, and boiled quail eggs.
Packaged food	Boiled peanuts and corn, assorted Thai desserts such as layered cake, egg cakes, sugar-coated fried banana, and the like (purchased from Mahanak market).
Fruits	Fresh fruits in season

The variety of food that this vendor sells demonstrates the following:

1. The vendor has considerable knowledge of food that enables her to prepare more than one dish. She also has sufficient knowledge in cost accounting, enabling her to calculate the balance between various kinds of foods she sells.
2. The types of foods sold indicated high stock value. The stock value for that day was 700 to 800 baht.
3. The vendor spends considerable time preparing the food she sells. Usually, she leaves her place before 1 am to purchase materials at Mahanak market, where she spends two hours shopping. Food preparation begins shortly after her return from the market, lasting for about two hours. Afterwards, the vendor rests and gets up at around 8 am to arrange her basket for the day's sale. Selling starts at around 10 am.
4. The vendor buys food from small shops in the public market that are open around the clock, catering to local buyers' taste and culture.
5. The decision on what products to offer for the day requires some sort of “consumer research.”
6. With the variety of food that the vendor sells, her small eatery functions as a “one-stop shop” that offers a complete meal consisting of several dishes and desserts.
7. Mobile street food vendors provide “home delivery service”, which responds to the needs of sweatshop workers in Dindaeng district who do not have the time to eat out.

of the vendors reported changing the types of food that they sold. Under tight competition, knowledge about food and having some savings are therefore very important.

In general, the majority of mobile vendors had a stock value ranging from 201-500 baht and 701-1,000 baht. Using McGee and Yeung's classification of vendors, the vendors in this study fall into three groups:



- Those with less than 500 baht stock value (41.5 percent)
- Those with stock value between 501 and 1,000 baht (39.7 percent)
- Those with more than 1,000 baht stock value (18.8 percent)

Differences in stock value confirmed that those who had low capital could engage in street food vending. Some of the vendors who had low stock value were vendors who worked as commission sellers, which is disguised wage work.

Packaged food had the lowest stock value. Among mobile vendors who had no more than 200 baht stock value, most sold packaged food. In contrast, vendors who had over 1,000 baht stock value sold fresh food, which necessitates a higher stock value.

With regard to daily earnings (Table 6):

- More than a fourth (29 percent) of the mobile vendors earned up to 500 baht
- Almost half (43 percent) earned between 500 and 1,000 baht
- A fourth (27 percent) earned more than 1,000 baht.

The mobile vendors who reported earnings of less than 200 baht accounted for only 5.1 percent.

- Mobile vendors who sold fresh fruits topped daily earnings of 1,598 baht.
- Mobile vendors selling fresh food, packaged food, food prepared on the street, and cooked food earned 979 baht, 870 baht, 845 baht, and 760 baht, respectively.
- More than 80 percent had net earnings of less than 500 baht. Around 21.4 percent had net earnings of less than 200 baht per day.

These figures, however, have to be used with caution for there have been variations among mobile vendors selling each type of food. At least three factors account for the variations: First, the instability of daily earnings is confirmed by 38 percent of vendors who reported incurring losses. Second, the food that they sell is also consumed by family members, making it difficult to calculate net profit. Third, vendors were reluctant to reveal the real earnings for fear of being taxed or subjected to higher fees.⁸ The high percentage of vendors who reported both daily stock value and earnings, however, make it possible to correlate the two variables.

A large proportion of mobile vendors (84 percent) reported that earnings were adequate. This confirms the significance of street food vending as a means of livelihood (Table 7).

A cross-tabulation of adequacy of earnings and other variables indicated the following (Table 8):

- Mobile vendors whose daily stock value was between 201 and 500 baht and daily gross earnings of less than 500 baht were more likely to report inadequate earnings.
- Female vendors selling fresh food who have spent more years in vending are more likely to have inadequate earnings.

8 In McGee and Yeung's 1977 research, they suggested the use of daily stock value.

- Inadequate earnings are represented within all types of vendors—representing different types of food, different levels of stock value, and different range of earnings.

Food vending was not the first occupation of most vendors. Many of them were previously engaged in other occupations like farming, manual labour, and monthly wage work. This could be related to other research findings that self-employment entailed prerequisites such as capital, social network, and knowledge of food and market demand.

The most important reason for going into food vending was economic, with 48 percent stating that they needed more income. Around 22 percent cited desire for autonomy; 17 percent said their former company closed down; 10 percent cited unproductive farming; and 4 percent said they inherited the business from their parents. This finding further confirms the income opportunity derived from food vending.

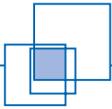
Previous research studies indicated that selling food required low investment. This study, however, found that the most cited reason for selling food was the promise of quick cash when compared to other commodities. The quick cash turnover guaranteed availability of capital for reinvestment the following day. The second most cited reason was the vendors' knowledge about food. The third reason was low investment. A fourth reason cited was that food sold could also be consumed by the family.

The majority of mobile vendors (86 percent) said that they were satisfied with their occupation, especially with the earning opportunity and autonomy that vending offers (Table 9). Mobile vendors who reported low satisfaction (14 percent) cited low earnings and homesickness as reasons. Compared to the basic minimum wage of 169 baht in 2004, earnings from street food vending were relatively higher.

When asked if they wanted to be in the same occupation all their life, more than half of the mobile vendors (53 percent) replied in the negative. Reasons cited included being too tired, wanting to go home, and planning to open a shop (Table 10b). Those who preferred to continue with vending cited high earning opportunity and autonomy as important factors (Table 10a).

Around 97 percent stated that the earning opportunity from vending was high; and 83 percent said that they would encourage friends to undertake this business (Table 11). However, only 20 percent said they would encourage their own children to do the same (Table 12). It appears that many vendors would like to change occupations after accumulating enough savings. This is consistent with McGee and Yeung's position that after a period of time, vendors who were able to accumulate capital would change their occupation.

This survey also revealed that more than 70 percent of fixed vendors formerly worked as mobile vendors, suggesting upward mobility among vendors. The upward mobility of vendors also meant high turnover that allowed new vendors to operate on the streets of Bangkok.



The information above leads to the following conclusions and policy implications:

1. Street vending creates opportunities to fight poverty. It also assures livelihood for new generations of less privileged people.
2. Street food vending is a means to accumulate capital. This is particularly remarkable when one considers that many of the vendors were impoverished farmers with limited education, and skills, and employment opportunities. They migrated to Bangkok to seek better livelihood.
3. Street food vending supports earnings and entrepreneurial skills. Many vendors have proven their entrepreneurial skills—with many of them having over a decade of entrepreneurial experience. They are not newcomers looking for low interest loans since they have accumulated savings through the years. Rather, they are waiting for the opportunity to expand their ventures.
4. Bangkok streets provide a training ground for handling brisk competition. Vendors must be well equipped with skills to survive amidst high competition. Those who were able to accumulate capital have passed the test.
5. The percentage of vendors who wanted to continue this occupation for life and those who wanted their children to follow in their footsteps reflected the significance of street food vending as a means for upward mobility. Upward mobility of existing vendors also allows entry of newcomers. Thus, instead of suppressing vending activities, policymakers should provide greater opportunities in terms of vending space and appropriate knowledge about food and food hygiene. Such a policy would support upward mobility of vendors and help upgrade them into bigger business ventures.

Food vendors have varying definitions of success:

- A small number (12 percent) said that they would feel successful if they earned enough to survive for another day.
- Around 63 percent defined success as being able to accumulate savings.
- A quarter (24 percent) would feel successful only when their trade expanded.

When asked to evaluate their present success using their own definition of success (Table 13):

- More than half (56 percent) of mobile vendors saw themselves at subsistence level.
- More than a third (38 percent) of mobile vendors said they have savings.
- Only a small number (6 percent) said they are considering expanding their venture.

Further statistical tests confirm a relationship between levels of success and levels of earnings. Here are other findings (Table 14):

- Mobile vendors who considered themselves at subsistence level were more likely to have daily stock value and earnings of less than 500 baht. Many of them have not completed primary level education. Although they have been engaged in this activity for a long time, the vendors in this group were not satisfied with their occupation. Besides the need for quick cash, the main reason cited for selling food was that they had no other viable livelihood alternatives. There were indebted to informal creditors or loan sharks. However, they generally used the money they borrowed for household consumption rather than for business investment. This was mostly true for vendors over the age of 50 who had been selling on the streets for more than 10 years.
- Mobile vendors who were at a higher level of success had higher stock value and gross earnings. Number of years in vending was also high but still lower than the vendors in the subsistence group. They had higher educational level and were relatively younger—at less than 50 years. They indicated that street food vending not only provides opportunity for income generation but also opportunity for economic mobility.

Fixed vendors

The socio-economic characteristics of fixed vendors are as follows:

- They are more likely to come from Bangkok and the central region rather than from remote provinces. A third of them were born in Bangkok. Among those who were from outside Bangkok, an almost equal percentage was from the central and northeastern regions. More than 80 percent of the migrants cited economic reasons for coming to Bangkok.
- Fixed vendors have been in Bangkok longer than mobile vendors. Around a quarter of fixed vendors came to Bangkok before 1982. The length of time that they have stayed in Bangkok may be linked to the migration of people from the central and northeastern provinces during the construction of the harbour in Klongtoey and when Dindaeng was still a dumpsite.
- Over 60 percent of vendors were between 30 and 50 years of age; and 7 percent were older than 60 years. The youngest vendor was 15 years and the oldest vendor was 78 years.
- Over 70 percent of vendors were married. Over half reported that their spouse helped in selling food. Unlike mobile vending activity, fixed vending was a family enterprise.
- There were slightly more male respondents than female respondents in this study. This was partly because the wives preferred their husbands to be interviewed.
- More than 70 percent of vendors only attained primary level education.
- Only 10 percent identified themselves as ethnic Chinese.

Regarding their experiences in vending:

- More than two-thirds (72 percent) of vendors had been selling for less than 10 years. A fifth (20 percent) were in business between 10 and 20 years. Only 7 percent reported being in the vending business for more than 21 years (Table 2).
- Majority (95 percent) of fixed vendors engaged in “true self-employment” (Table 3).
- More than a third (37 percent) were individual operators. Among family enterprises, only one percent reported employing wage workers (Table 4).
- Only 30 percent of vendors sold in legally designated areas. The majority (70 percent) sold in the non-designated areas, which included public spaces in communities (46 percent).
- Notably, 70 percent of fixed vendors had worked as mobile vendors before.

The most often cited reason for food vending was to gain autonomy. Similar to mobile vendors, quick cash turnover was also a common reason.

The high percentage of vendors selling ready-to-eat food (70 percent) attested to the culture of “public eating.” Nevertheless, the percentage of fixed vendors selling fresh food was much higher than among mobile vendors. This could be due to the fact that fixed vendors have more available space to display fresh food (Table 5).

More than half of the vendors bought their ingredients from public markets in both Klongtoey and Dindaeng. More than half of the vendors worked farther than two kilometers from their place of residence.

Market Synergy

Fixed vendors sold less variety of food than mobile vendors. “We should let other vendors sell other types of food,” explained one fixed vendor. “I sell only stuff that I am good at preparing.”

Therefore, instead of the “one-stop shop” of mobile vendors, market synergy, as suggested in Gaber (1994), characterized the selling strategy of fixed vendors. The selection of food depends not only on factors such as knowledge of food and required capital; but also on the food already being sold in the area.

This could explain why a quarter of food vendors said they have changed the type of food they sold through time. A vendor, for example, sells durian in the summer. Then she switches to Thai desserts when durian is out of season.

Another vendor who used to sell Thai desserts switched to selling drinks such as tea and coffee. The decision to sell drinks came after much consideration. First, a friend set up a dessert stall in front of the alley, making it difficult for her to sell desserts. Second, the drink vendor whose stall was opposite hers moved out and there was demand for coffee and other kind of drinks, particularly in the morning. Third, the vendor knows how to sell drinks because she used to help her mother in managing a drink stall. Fourth, the ingredients for drinks had a longer shelf life than desserts. Finally, the vendor accumulated enough savings to invest in a drink stall, which has a higher mark-up.

Fixed vendors generally have higher daily stock value than mobile vendors, indicating that their enterprises are larger than mobile vendors. Fixed vendors could be categorized into three groups according to daily stock value (Table 6):

- Those with less than 500 baht (21.2 percent)
- Those with 501 to 1,000 baht (33.3 percent)
- Those with more than 1,000 baht (45.5 percent)

Daily stock value varies by types of food sold, revealing a similar pattern to that of mobile vendors:

- In contrast to the findings in McGee and Yeung's 1977 study, the fresh food and the fruit sellers had the highest daily stock value.
- Almost half (48 percent) of vendors had average daily earnings of more than 1,100 baht.

The fixed vendors were very reluctant to reveal their income during the interview. Thus, the gross income figures cited above must be taken with caution. It is more accurate to look at daily stock value as suggested by McGee and Yeung (1977).

More than 80 percent of vendors reported that their earnings were adequate (Table 7). The socio-economic characteristics of vendors whose earnings were inadequate were as follows (Table 8):

- Those who sold packaged food, which required lower investment, were more likely to have inadequate earnings.
- Vendors whose daily stock value was between 501 and 1,000 baht and whose earnings were less than 1,000 baht were likely to have inadequate earnings.
- Many in this group of vendors were males, over 50 years of age, and had not completed primary education.

Most of the fixed vendors (88 percent) reported to be satisfied with their occupation (Table 9). Good earnings and autonomy were the most often cited reasons for their satisfaction.

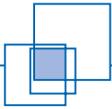
Satisfaction, however, did not guarantee that they would be vending for the rest of their lives. Only 62 percent said that vending would be their lifetime occupation (Table 10). However, compared to mobile vendors, the percentage of fixed vendors who want to take up the occupation for life was much higher.

More than three quarters of fixed vendors (77 percent) would encourage their friends to take up vending (Table 11). However, less than one third would encourage their children to do the same. The fixed vendors would rather have their children work in a more privileged occupation. However, it is worth noting that slightly more fixed vendors than mobile vendors responded that they would encourage their children to go into vending (Table 12).

Less than half (42 percent) of fixed vendors said they did not want any support from the government. Among those who wanted government assistance, they cited selling space as the most important form of support.

Of the 506 fixed vendors (Table 13):

- Half (56 percent) saw themselves as being at subsistence level



- A third (32 percent) said they had savings but not considering expansion
 - A fifth (12 percent) said they were considering expanding their ventures
- A further statistical test confirms a relationship between levels of success and adequacy of earnings. The following are some correlations (Table 14):
- Fixed vendors who categorized themselves at subsistence level are not limited to those who had low stock value and low daily gross earnings.
 - Vendors who placed themselves at higher levels of success represent the “real” vendors or the true self-employed. The percentage of fixed vendors at higher levels of success was relatively higher than among mobile vendors.
 - Fixed vendors at subsistence level were more likely to be in disguised wage work and had lower stock value and daily earnings of less than 500 baht.
 - Fixed vendors at subsistence level were more likely to be male and elderly.
 - Vendors who were the “true self-employed” and who worked on the franchise type of enterprise were more likely to achieve higher levels of success. The latter also had daily stock value and earnings of over 1,000 baht.
 - The length of time they spent in the vending business was shorter than the mobile vendors. They also had a higher level of education.

Case studies

Case Study No. 1

Mobile vendor with subsistence income

Auntie Ging is a native of Nakorn Ratchasima. She is 56 years old. Her 70-year-old husband works as a taxi driver. Ging has been living in the community for 18 years. Ging has three grown-up children. Two of them are married and live in other provinces. The youngest daughter stays with Ging. She is 24 years old, married, and has three children. She works as a mobile vendor selling dessert. Her husband is unemployed.

Ging came to Bangkok in 1985 when she was 38 years old. She stayed with her aunt near St. Louis Hospital. It was from her aunt that she learned how to prepare many kinds of food such as papaya salad, chili paste, and assorted dishes. She started selling cooked food in Klongtoey after she got married. As the business was not very good, she decided to shift to manual labour after six years of vending food.

In 1991, she began to work as a manual labourer in Klongton, a sub-district of Klongtoey. The earnings were inadequate and inconsistent. Above all, she did not like the work. She decided to return to food vending. Ging said she preferred selling food because she enjoyed cooking and already had many regular customers.

Case Study No. 1 (Cont.)

Since 2001, Ging has been selling assorted cooked food. She managed to earn 700-800 baht daily, with a net profit of around 200-300 baht. She sold between 2 and 6 pm.

Ging is a member of a savings group, managing to save 100 baht monthly. She saves for her granddaughter's education. Ging takes care of household expenses as her husband refuses to chip in. Instead, he spends his earnings on gambling and alcoholic drinks.

Since the money she earns from selling food is not adequate, Ging borrowed money from an informal creditor. As a result, she had to set aside 100 baht daily for her creditor.

Ging thinks that success in food vending is achieved through perseverance and hard work. To achieve this, Ging sells hygienically prepared food, keeps her mobile shop clean, and maintains good rapport with her customers.

Case Study No. 2 Fixed vendor with savings

Prasert is a 27-year-old vendor selling grilled chicken in Tesco Lotus Superstore. He is married with one son. His family stays in Surin province. Before 1995, Prasert worked as a farmer on his own land, which he inherited from his parents.

Since income from rice farming was not sufficient for his family of three, Prasert decided to go to Bangkok to find work and further his education at Ramkhamhaeng University in 1995. During the first two years at the university, he was able to juggle study and work. After two years, Prasert decided to quit school. Instead, he opened a fixed stall in Klongtoey selling grilled chicken. The idea of selling chicken came from his uncle who also sold grilled chicken in another community. This same uncle also lent him seed money to open the chicken stall.

The business went very well now that he had more time to concentrate on the work. His customers were from the nearby government agencies such as the Klongtoey Port and the Customs Department. According to Prasert, he earned around 1,000 baht daily, with a net profit of 300-400 baht. His daily stock value was around 700-800 baht. Earnings doubled during weekends. After six years of hard work, Prasert managed to save money for further investment.

In 2001, a friend persuaded him to apply for a selling location in Tesco Lotus Superstore's new branch in Klongtoey. He was selected due to his experience and the taste of his grilled chicken.

Prasert has been selling in the store for two years at the time of the interview. His gross earnings were around 55,000 baht per month. He was

Case Study No. 2 (Cont.)

able to make a monthly net profit of 18,000 baht. As the lone grilled chicken vendor in the store, his earnings remained consistent even if he did not have regular customers. After eight years of hard work, he was able to establish himself.

Prasert believes that his success is due to many factors. First, he has social capital—the uncle who provided social and economic support. Second, his grilled chicken is tasty. Third, he does not have many competitors in the same area.

He was able to pay back the money he borrowed from his uncle with the savings that enabled him to expand his trade.

Prasert is satisfied with his present work as the sales are good and his location is secure. However, he does not plan to stay in Bangkok for the rest of his life.

Case Study No. 3 Mobile vendor expanding her trade

Mali, 45, is a native of Roi-et, a northeastern province. When their earnings from rice farming became insufficient, she decided to take up other livelihood activities. As the eldest child, it fell on Mali's shoulders to take care of the family. After working a few years as a manual labourer, Mali was able to save some money. She invested it in raising four pigs that she later sold to buy a buffalo. After a year, she sold the buffalo. She invested the money she earned in setting up a small grocery store and buying a refrigerator. The business went well at the beginning only to collapse later with so many debtors who bought grocery items on credit. At that time, she was already married and had a daughter. Seeing no future in her hometown, Mali, then 19-year old and her husband decided to migrate to Bangkok in 1980, together with her younger sister and brother-in-law, leaving her daughter under her mother's care.

Mali's first job in Bangkok was a commission-based ice cream vendor. What she earned was "not worth the effort, but I had no choice," she said. Her husband worked as a *tuk tuk* driver. The 4,000 baht they earned in the first month was not much; but better than what they earned from farming. After a year and a half, Mali decided to sell grilled eggs on her own, which required low investment. In less than a year, she changed to selling grilled chicken and pork to earn higher profits. This happened when Mali's sister persuaded her to move to Dindaeng with her in 1987. Dindaeng was at the center of the city. There were many small factories in the area. The house that her sister rented in Soi Prachasongkroh was spacious.

After selling grilled pork and chicken in Dindaeng for six months, Mali saw the opportunity for a new venture. She persuaded a friend in the village to

Case Study No. 3 (Cont.)

invest in selling coconut pudding. Both Mali and her friend chipped in 5,000 baht each, the largest investment she had ever made. She also persuaded five women in the village to work as commission-based sellers. Mali worked as both producer and seller. The business went well at the beginning. Unfortunately, sales declined after two years. Her sellers had to walk much longer distances to sell everything.

Later, all of Mali's sellers became individual vendors selling similar food. In 1990, Mali gave up the pudding business and switched to selling curry. The idea of selling curry came from one of her old customers. The business went quite well. From selling only curry, Mali gradually added products to her balance pole basket to cater to her customers' demands. At the time of the interview in 2003, Mali sold papaya salad, mango salad, and assorted types of food. Curry was no longer her top product. Mali also had boiled snails, boiled quail eggs, and other kinds of food and desserts that she bought from Mahanak market.

Everyday at around one o'clock in the morning, Mali and her friends who shared the rented house would hire a *tuk tuk* to Mahanak market. The shopping took one hour and the vendors would return to prepare the food until four o'clock. Then they back went to sleep only to get up again at 6 o'clock to arrange the balance pole. They would set out to sell at around 9.30 in the morning.

Mali sells at a location near the University of Thai Chamber of Commerce where she stops everyday from 11 o'clock in the morning up to 2 in the afternoon before moving to another location. Before acquiring the space, Mali had been selling in the area for a few years. Though the area already has two papaya salad vendors, it is an ideal place for food vending. There is a university, dormitories, rented houses in the neighbourhood, and small alleys linked to two major roads. Mali, however, does not have a good relationship with the city police because she refuses to give them "payment".

For Mali, the decision to come to Bangkok was prompted by the debt that she had with the Bank of Agriculture and Cooperatives. However, she would have come to Bangkok anyway because "we wanted to have more conveniences, like television and microwave". She said that some women in her village did not go to Bangkok because they felt embarrassed about becoming vendors. "I would be more embarrassed of being poor," Mali said.

Mali no longer farms her land but instead rents it out. She visits her hometown twice a year—during Songkran Festival in April and Bun Bang Fai in May—because of family pressure. But she only stays home briefly because she has regular customers waiting for her in Bangkok. "Bangkok never runs out of money," Mali said.

Case Study No. 3 (Cont.)

Mali is proud of her success. The earnings from more than two decades of hard work were spent building a house in Roi-et. The house had to be beautiful. “I don’t want my daughter to be embarrassed of her house,” she said.

Mali does not want to open a shop because the rent is too high. Instead, she is considering investing in other ventures after her daughter graduates from Rajaphat University.

Case Study No. 4 Mobile vendor who plans to expand his trade

Amnaj is 50 years old; his wife is 46 years old. Both had four years of education. Amnaj has a daughter who is studying marketing at Rajabhat University.

Amnaj is a native of Roi-et. Before coming to Bangkok in 1986, Amnaj worked on his rice farm but did not earn much. He and his wife decided to move to Bangkok with his sister who migrated to Bangkok earlier.

Upon arriving in Bangkok, his sister suggested that he work as a commission-based seller for a friend who opened a dessert shop in the market. Amnaj decided to take the job for it required no investment. He was able to make a 20 baht profit on the first day. The profit increased gradually but was not sufficient for his family of three. After working as a commission-based seller for a month, Amnaj decided to produce the dessert himself. He borrowed 200 baht from his sister to purchase the ingredients. He was able to make 300 to 400 baht profit. Later, his earnings jumped from 3,000 baht to around 9,000 to 10,000 baht.

In 1990, Amnaj formed a group of drink sellers by persuading relatives from his home province. He worked as a group leader and was able to form a six-member group. The group expanded into 15 members.

In 1995, Amnaj began to expand his venture by adding assorted drinks. He started by trial and error, experimenting on various kinds of drinks until he knew which types of drink sold well.

In 1999, Amnaj received a grant from the Social Investment Fund and Miyazawa Project. He used the money to buy pushcarts. He was also selected to join a field trip in Lopburi where he learned some occupational skills that he later applied to his work.

In 2000, Amnaj and his group formed a savings group. Their savings reached 40,000 baht in 2003. When it was first established, the Community Development Organization Institute (CODI) monitored them for the first few months until it was assured that the group would be able to run independently. Amnaj’s savings group worked well with the community’s savings group.

Case Study No. 4 (Cont.)

In 2003, Amnaj started selling “pearl tea”, a drink originating from Korea. He got the idea from his supplier. The sale was good in the first few months but began to fall afterwards because there were many vendors selling the same kind of product. He thought of selling roselle drink since his brother owned a roselle farm in Buriram.

Amnaj believes that the mobile vendor has an advantage over the fixed vendor because the former is able to reach customers. This enables the mobile vendor to conduct some sort of “consumer research”. He thinks that a beginner’s selling area should be close to where he lives. However, for those who are already stable in their business, other factors are more important.

Amnaj suggests that vendors could sell many types of food in Bangkok. However, he cautions against a high initial investment. The vendors must also have some savings for the “trial and error” of new products. He also warns against gambling, saying that many vendors who wanted to earn “quick money” ended up being in debt because of gambling.

Amnaj plans to set up a community enterprise. He believes that if the people in the community cooperate in running an enterprise, it will generate income and provide security for the community. In turn, the community will be stronger. The most important thing is economic self-reliance. He does not encourage community enterprise from debt creation. He believes in the King of Thailand’s philosophy of economic sufficiency.

Case Study No. 5 Unsuccessful fixed vendor

Forty-five-year-old Somsak had six years of education. Somsak and his wife, Suvaporn, work as manual labourers. Their only son is 15 years old.

Somsak came to Bangkok in 1983 and settled in Klongtoey where he had neither friends nor relatives. He got a job at the port. His wife worked in a nearby construction site. Both worked until they managed to set aside some savings.

When their son was born in 1989, Somsak decided to change his occupation. For 4,000 baht, he bought a house in the community located along a thoroughfare. Somsak decided to set up a noodle stall like he used to do for his family back in the province. Selling noodle did not need much preparation. The investment was not high and there were no other noodle vendors in the area. His wife could also help out at the stall.

After two weeks of preparation, Somsak set up a shop in front of his house. At the beginning, the earnings were not consistent. After two to three months, sales began to pick up and became consistent. There were a number of people in the community who frequented his noodle shop.

Case Study No. 5 (Cont.)

In 1998, sales began to drop and production costs started increasing. He used to buy ingredients every two days. But after the economic crisis, he had to buy ingredients everyday. There were also more food shops in the community as people began to engage in self-employment. Afterwards, earnings fell sharply. In the meantime, Somsak began to drink and gamble. Having lost a lot of money, Somsak decided to borrow money from a loan shark at 20 percent interest rate. He also borrowed money from a friend. Later on, his bad reputation spread and affected sales. Somsak had to close his noodle shop.

When the Bank of People's project came into operation, Somsak applied for a loan and was granted 15,000 baht. However, he was not able to meet the payment schedule and was disqualified from applying for the next batch of loans.

In 2003, Somsak and Suvaporn returned to manual work. Their only boy had to drop out of school after finishing secondary education.

Buyers

A survey of 385 buyers in Klongtoey and Dindaeng districts found the following socio-economic characteristics (Table 15):

- More than half of the buyers (57 percent) were female.
- Almost half (47 percent) of the buyers were under 30 years of age. A quarter (25 percent) was between 31 and 40 years of age.
- Almost half (43 percent) of the respondents had bachelor's degree of education.
- More than half of the buyers (58 percent) were monthly wage workers, civil servants, and public enterprise workers.
- Two thirds (60 percent) of buyers earned less than 10,000 baht per month and one third (36 percent) earned more than 10,000 baht. Half of the buyers lived in their own house.
- Data on the educational level and income of buyers confirmed findings from previous research that consumption of street food is not limited to people of humble backgrounds.

Their purchasing behaviours are as follows (Table 16):

- More than 70 percent of the food bought were those that are consumable at the point of purchase.
- Dinner meals were the most frequently purchased.
- Over half of the buyers bought street food at least once daily. Around 75 percent of buyers spent not more than 60 baht per purchase. Around 50 percent spent not more than 60 baht per day. Almost half (48 percent) of buyers spent 60 to over 100 baht daily for street food.

A vendor and her helper accommodate a regular customer.



The above data have many implications:

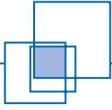
- First, they confirm the importance of ready-to-eat food.
- Second, the high percentage (30 percent) of buyers who purchase street food more than once a day confirms the earning opportunities of street food vending.
- Third, the economic value of street food contributes to the country's economy.

Buyers cited many reasons for buying street food such as “proximity to home,” “proximity to office,” “saves time,” “variety of food,” and “being a regular customer” (Table 17). A fraction (6 percent) said that they just wanted to “help” the vendors. More than two thirds (70 percent) of buyers cited convenience, employment opportunity, and cheap price as among the advantages of buying street food. As for the disadvantages, buyers cited obstruction to traffic, lack of order, and unhygienic food (Table 18).

Almost all (96 percent) of the respondents think that street food vending is necessary for Bangkok people. Notably, all of the respondents (100 percent) coming from the following occupations said that street food vending is necessary for Bangkok: manual labourers, students, and respondents who have higher than bachelor's degree. Likewise, almost all (91 percent) of the other categories of respondents (i.e. government employees, those who have bachelor's degree, those who own a house) think that food vending is necessary (Table 19).

Buyers, however, said that they are concerned about the following issues:

- Cleanliness of food preparation and hygienic condition of selling areas
- Use of chemical substances in food
- Price



The buyers made the following suggestions (Table 20):

- Vendors should not obstruct thoroughfares.
- Zoning by types of food should be applied.
- Parking space should be provided.
- Vendors in some areas should not be overcrowded.
- Vendors should wear clean attire and head cover.

5

Success factors

The success factors studied in this research are as follows:

1. Personal characteristics such as self-confidence, risk-taking and creativity
2. Knowledge of sources of inexpensive materials, financial planning, marketing, and food production
3. Moral support from family members, assistance, and thrift
4. Availability of capital or low-interest loans
5. Social network
6. Selling and housing locations
7. Food-related factors such as price, taste, and food hygiene
8. Dress and behavioral factors related to sellers

Vendors were asked to indicate the level of importance of factors that contributed to their present level of success using a three-point Likert⁹ scale—starting from “very important”, “important”, and “not so important”. The success factors with an average score of more than 2.41 are presented by types of vendors in the succeeding paragraphs below.

The list of factors that contributed to failure as rated by the vendors is also presented. The case studies indicated that failure not only meant “outright loss,” but also “no profit” and “no savings”—all of which can lead to fund shortage and eventual business collapse.

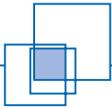
Mobile vendors

Mobile vendors noted a number of success factors (Table 21). Mobile vendors at all levels of success cited self-confidence as the most important characteristic.

Factors that mobile vendors of different levels of success regarded differently were: knowledge, family, capital, and social network.

- Those operating at subsistence levels gave much importance to knowing how best to obtain inexpensive materials.
- Those who had accumulated savings pointed out that cost-profit calculation, financial planning, business planning, and production of food in demand were also important in addition to having sources of inexpensive ingredients. Cooperation of the family in terms of thrift and moral support also contributed to their success.

⁹ A Likert Scale is a rating scale designed to measure user attitudes or reactions by quantifying subjective information. Respondents indicate where along a continuum their attitude or reaction resides.



- Those who planned to expand their ventures valued information about producing food in demand as well as knowledge about sources of inexpensive ingredients. Moral support from the family was also important. This group of vendors was the only one that gave importance to low-interest loans and good social networks.

Mobile vendors also listed the following factors: having their own capital; being able to carry on their trade adjacent to densely populated areas; living near their business area; and selling clean, tasty food at a reasonable price.

Good rapport and clean attire were considered important. Obviously, in comparison to vendors at higher levels of success, mobile vendors at subsistence level tended to give less importance to having their own capital. This is probably because they had to rely more on credit as compared to vendors of higher levels of success who have accumulated savings. Mobile vendors at subsistence level also gave more importance to selling locations and living areas.

Analysis of variance confirmed differences in indicators as specified by mobile vendors at different levels of success. They were business planning, financial planning, cost-profit calculation, thrift of family members, having own capital, and social networks.

Mobile vendors attributed the following factors to unsuccessful ventures:

- Unsuccessful ventures were attributed to factors such as lack of confidence, laziness, lack of business knowledge, which is not knowing what kinds of food to sell and routing problems. Vendors also pointed out that over-investment; lack of knowledge in cost-benefit calculation; sources of cheap materials; and knowledge on food were among factors that contributed to failure. In addition vendors pointed to lack of capital and high household expenses and behaviour such as gambling and overspending.
- For those who could not make a profit, vendors indicated lack of creativity, laziness, lack of business knowledge and cost-benefit calculation, over-investment, and routing problem. Factors such as high costs of materials, over-spending, and gambling were also cited. Interestingly, lack of regular customer and problems with city police were mentioned as factors contributing to the inability to make profit.
- For those who could make a profit but were unable to accumulate savings, vendors mentioned factors such as household expenses, children's education, gambling, overspending, no regular customers, and problems with city police.

It is evident from the mobile vendors' point of view that factors contributing to losses are related to knowledge and capital whereas factors pertaining to the inability to have savings are related to cash outflow factors such as household expenses and problems with city police (Table 23).

Fixed vendors

Fixed vendors noted a number of success factors (Table 22). Like mobile vendors, all groups of fixed vendors cited self-confidence as most important to their success. They also regarded knowledge of cheap sources of materials, financial planning, having their own capital, selling location and place of residence, clean and tasty food, and good rapport with customers as very important to the success of their ventures.

Compared to fixed vendors at higher levels of success, those who were at subsistence level were inclined to focus less on production planning and production of food in demand and more on having their own capital. Fixed vendors who wanted to expand their trade were more concerned about the trade of vendors in the nearby area.

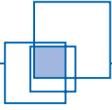
Indicators that fixed vendors at different levels of success regarded differently were knowledge, family, capital, social network and selling and living location.

Fixed vendors operating at subsistence levels gave much importance to knowing how best to obtain inexpensive materials and to financial planning. Those who had accumulated savings went further in stating that business planning and production of food in demand were also important. Those who planned to expand their ventures valued the cooperation of the family in terms of assisting in trade, thrift and moral support. The latter group of fixed vendors was the only one who gave high regard to family, having low-interest loans and good social networks.

Analysis of variance confirmed differences in the success factors specified by fixed vendors at different levels of success. These were: financial planning, business planning, cost-profit calculation, spouse assisting in business, having own capital, having low-interest rate loans, and sellers.

Fixed vendors attributed the following factors to unsuccessful ventures (Table 24):

- Loss resulted from personal characteristics such as lack of confidence and laziness in addition to lack of knowledge in business planning, financial planning, cost and profit calculation, and knowledge about food.
- The inability to make profit is due to lack of financial knowledge, which results in over-investment, erroneous cost-profit calculation and pricing. Bad location was also mentioned in addition to high production costs, bad economy, and high competition.
- High debts, high household expenditures such as children's education in addition to gambling and over-spending constrained them from accumulating savings.



Conclusions

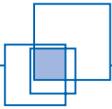
1. Success factors that were important to vendors at all levels of success were: self-confidence; knowledge of cheap sources of materials; selling location and place of residence; good attire of vendors and good rapport with customers; and the taste, handling and price of food sold.
2. Success factors that vendors regarded differently: knowledge, family, capital, and social network.
3. Subsistence level vendors relied more on knowledge of cheap sources of materials and ingredients. Vendors at higher levels of success tended to have a high regard for business and financial knowledge. They also benefited from family support, social network, and low-interest loans.
4. Factors that contributed to unsuccessful ventures were: lack of self-confidence; lack of knowledge; lack of working capital; gambling; and over-spending.

6

Policy recommendations

Survey findings confirm that the policies on street food vending should take into consideration the structural and individual context; diversity of food vendors ranging from types of vending unit; economic performance; types of food sold; food hygiene; and more importantly the role of street food vending in strengthening grassroots economic reliance.

1. At structural level, the persistence of street food vending is a response and a reaction against the state's orientation to economic development and the trend of globalization limiting employment opportunities. The Bank of People's Project, which provides money for the self-employed, is a testimony to the government's desire to support economic ventures at the grassroots level. Nevertheless, findings from the survey confirm that capital is not the only factor contributing to the success of street food vendors. Other factors such as location and selling space also contribute to success. The local government's perception that the presence of street food vending is unsightly and creates disorder in the city must be changed. It must regard street food vending as nurturing a space for entrepreneurship that creates cultural capital. The flexibility entailed in street food vending creates diversity in the family's income generating activities, which is important at this time of economic globalization.
2. People who engage in street food vending are no longer limited to the less privileged. They are likely to be middle class people. For instance, Siriwat Voravetvudhikun is a stockbroker-turned-vendor. The question is—how can the less privileged survive in this environment of high competition? The survey and case studies indicate that success is the result of a variety of factors such as education, knowledge of financial and business planning, and cost-profit calculation. In many cases, practical knowledge can be learned from successful vendors who, unlike the government, have “hands-on” experiences. Learning from real life experiences is vital. The government should help strengthen the networks in the community. The government should also provide support such as housing, allowing selling in populated areas, and help reduce negative factors such as gambling.
3. Vendors who achieve higher levels of success deserve more support from the government. These vendors are not beginners seeking funding for their ventures. They are “professional” business people who have



already “passed the probation period” and have already shown their capability. The government can help by providing housing and selling space; understanding the vendors’ needs; and having relevant agencies disseminate information on how people can access government assistance to small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Efforts should also be made to educate vendors on measures concerning health and food hygiene.

The following are the policy recommendations of this study:

General recommendations

Street food vending is a very important income generating activity, hence its persistence in Bangkok. In many cases, vending activities lead to upward mobility and contribute to economic self-reliance.

The government should make economic self-reliance its goal and realign its attitudes towards street food vending accordingly. At the same time, it should recognize the diversity among food vendors and thus, should not apply a single policy for different groups of vendors.

While street food vending is a survival strategy for less privileged people, it has potential for expansion. As such, vendors should not be simply treated as the impoverished but as small and medium enterprise owners. To support these people as entrepreneurs means more than providing capital or funding for their venture; but incorporating wider and integrated measures that contribute to their economic performance such as housing, cheap sources of materials, and good selling location. Backward linkages between street vendors, micro-enterprises, and small businesses in many public markets point to a thriving grassroots economy. Supporting street food vending therefore helps many small businesses that are important in the globalizing economy. However, supporting small businesses requires a rethinking of the development strategy that favours large capitalistic establishments.

Employment generation, poverty alleviation, and economic mobility

Data on success factors confirm that vendors who earned subsistence level of earnings or below subsistence level were likely to be elderly women who had to look after children who should already be independent. This makes the earnings of older vendors inadequate, diminishing their capital. In this case, the real problems of these vendors are actually not the shortage of funds but the economic burden caused by their dependents. It is likely that this situation will produce another generation of subsistence food vendors.

The factors that keep vendors at subsistence level are economic with corresponding social causes. The measures to support these vendors economically, such as accessibility to cheap credit, are insufficient because they deal only with the “capital inflow” side. The support measures should also work on the “cash outflow” side, particularly strengthening the community and family to help generate a network of knowledge and joint consultation that eventually leads to problem solving. This approach not only provides a “cushion” for the younger generation but also helps support income generating activities.

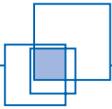
Debt was among the problems that vendors cited. Although the study did not delve into the causes of debt, it can be concluded that debts originated from the lack of working capital and household consumption. The government recently launched the “registration of the poor” in the context of *eua arthon* or “compassion” aimed to reduce the debt burden among vendors. Though it frees people from high interest debts, this kind of initiative must be accompanied by structural level measures that create an enabling environment to make these people self-reliant—such as housing and accessibility of cheap sources of materials. At the same time, there should also be measures to help stabilize the family, particularly the poor in slum communities.

For subsistence vendors, the low interest rate credit—which was inaccessible to some vendors—did not address the problems at the structural level. It merely provided a “quick fix” solution that was not sustainable. Moreover, it encouraged debt creation, reflecting the lack of understanding of the vendors’ reality. Worse, what was supposed to be low interest credit in the Bank of People’s Project turned out to be the opposite. The borrowers who should have paid an interest rate of 1 percent ended up paying 22.1 percent (Bangkok Post, 24 March 2002).

Elderly vendors who earned subsistence income were actually the target group of the project. However, many of them could not access the low interest loan, putting into question the terms and conditions of the loan. For instance, the elderly vendors in the study were not entitled to social welfare as stipulated in the Elderly Persons Act B.E. 2546 (2003) because they were younger than 60 years old. The framework of support should incorporate factors such as gender, age, number of dependents, types of food sold, and ability to repay debt. Mobilization of community organizations should also be factored in.

To enhance employment opportunities, holistic measures that incorporate enabling factors must be taken. These include proximity of place of residence to source of materials and selling space; the provision of space for vending activities; the increase in family stability; and the nurturing of thrift consciousness. The survey data confirms these factors. However, the government has been very selective in initiating measures to enhance the earning opportunities of vendors. For instance, the low interest loan was the flagship feature of the policy. However, the government has been relocating slum communities or congested areas to make the land available to projects that guarantee higher economic returns.

This study confirms that knowledge is a prerequisite to successful ventures at different stages of the enterprise. The provision of knowledge is therefore important; but different kinds of knowledge should be provided to different types of vendors. For instance, financial planning and cost-profit calculation are important knowledge for all groups of vendors. However, for start-up ventures, business planning knowledge is crucial. Knowledge about the different aspects of street food vending is often disseminated through social networks and not through formal institutions of learning. Thus, strengthening social and community networks is important in disseminating knowledge and organizing vendors to monitor themselves.



For vendors at higher levels of success, the study confirms that they have worked their way up through sheer hard work. Their achievement is attributable to many factors such as family support, thrift, access to space, social capital, and knowledge that includes financial management and understanding of food production.

Vendors at higher levels of success need other kinds of support to sustain their level of success, such as selling space and the strengthening of their business to cope with brisk competition from newcomers. Instead of loans—food knowledge, long-term financial planning, and management are but a few examples of knowledge important to this type of vendors.

Vendors who are considering expanding their trade said that they need knowledge pertaining to the management of larger ventures and food production. The rags-to-riches stories of these successful vendors should be publicized to serve as models of people whose hard work, thrift, and adaptation had paid off. Moreover, there should be efforts to strengthen community-based enterprises.

Female vendors who chose to delay business expansion for the sake of family reflect the typical gender role prevalent in many countries. Delaying the expansion of the business has economic consequences but is justifiable in social terms because the family is the most important social unit. Be that as it may, women should have the right to choose. Those who opt for expansion should be supported to run a larger venture. This can be done through the exchange of experiences between vendors who have achieved higher levels of success and learning opportunities.

Selling space is more important to fixed vendors than mobile vendors. Although the study found that having a secure selling space is one success factor, lack of space was not cited as a reason for failure. This implies that vendors can manage space problems. Past researches, however, point to the importance of a secure selling space. Limiting selling space runs counter to globalization trends and reflects the lack of understanding of changes in the global economy on the part of the Royal Thai Police and the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration. This study recommends that authorities recognize that public space is a factor of production that helps people achieve economical self-reliance. Thus, they should open more selling spaces for the vendors. Monitoring the orderliness and cleanliness of the place should be the responsibility of both the traders and the officers. In addition, the traders should organize themselves to protect their own rights.

Food hygiene

Hygiene has been the weak point of street food. The study confirms that Bangkok buyers are highly concerned about cleanliness of street food. Despite the existence of laws concerning food hygiene, many vendors have not followed it and officers have not properly monitored the cleanliness of street food. The authorities should focus more on monitoring food hygiene rather than pushing the food vendors out of the streets. At the same time, vendors themselves

should adhere to higher standards of cleanliness when handling food; while buyers should be selective in buying from vendors who sell hygienically prepared food.

Orderliness and pedestrian safety

Food vending has been regarded as the major cause of disorder and obstruction in thoroughfares due to the crowding of too many sellers in particular areas. This can be attributed to lack of monitoring, corruption (i.e. police taking bribes), and in many cases, reluctance of officials to enforce regulations because they do not want to be seen as “picking on the poor.”

Regarding food vending as the cause of disorder in the streets comes from the perception that street vending represents outdated modes of trading and underdevelopment—a nuisance to modern city life. Fortunately, former governors of Bangkok believe that rather being a mark of underdevelopment, street food vending portrays the life of Bangkok people, representing the city’s cultural capital.

The problem of chaos and obstruction of streets results from the congestion of vendors in one place. To minimize this problem, officials have to monitor and control overcrowding. The vendors should also play a role in monitoring and controlling overcrowding. A good example is Soi Prachasongkroh 24 in Dindaeng where the vendors take responsibility in ensuring order in the *soi* or alley.

Food culture

Street food in Bangkok is well known for its ubiquity and good taste. The Bangkok Metropolitan itself uses this cultural capital to describe the city in the book, *Bangkok, Bangkok*. In the book, street food is portrayed as one of Bangkok’s many tourist attractions.

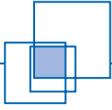
The prevalence of street food is partly due to the popularity of Thai food. For instance, *tom yum koong* is a well-known “health food”. Policies on street food vending build on this phenomenon that is closely linked to Thailand’s cultural identity.

Vendors should have thorough knowledge about Thai food and exercise creativity in concocting new dishes. Such knowledge will not only publicize Thai food; but also increase earning opportunities of street food vendors.

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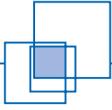
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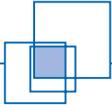
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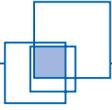
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Statistical tables

Table 1. Socio-economic profile of food vendors

Characteristics	Mobile Vendors (n = 236)	Fixed Vendors (n = 505)
<i>Domicile</i>		
Greater Bangkok	11.9	65.9
Other Provinces	88.1	36.6
Central Region	-	10.2
Northern region	9.1	36.3
Northeastern region	70.2	4.3
Eastern region	2.4	7.9
Western region	1.0	33.3
<i>Reasons for coming to Bangkok</i>	(n = 203)	(n = 303)
Find work	92.2	83.2
Accompany family members	7.8	16.8
Duration of stay in Bangkok		
1997-2003 (less than 7 years)	34.5	11.8
1992-1996 (8-12 years)	23.5	25.9
1987-1991 (13-17 years)	18.5	17.6
1982-1986 (18-22 years)	11.8	18.4
Before 1982 (23 years & above)	11.7	26.3
<i>Ethnicity</i>	(n = 117)	(n = 499)
Thai	96.6	89.6
Ethnic Chinese	3.4	10.0
<i>Age</i>	(n = 121)	(n = 499)
Less than 25 years	3.3	6.8
25-less than 30 years	10.7	9.2
30-less than 40 years	42.1	27.2
40-less than 50 years	26.5	31.7
50-less than 60 years	12.3	18.4
Above 60 years	5.1	6.7

Table 1. Cont.

Characteristics	Mobile Vendors (n = 236)	Fixed Vendors (n = 505)
Sex	(n = 121)	(n = 503)
Female	50.4	45.1
Male	49.6	54.9
Education	(n = 101)	(n = 485)
None	16.5	4.7
Primary education	68.6	73.6
Secondary education	9.9	9.6
High school	5.0	12.0

Table 2. Length of time engaged in vending activity

Length of time	Mobile Vendors (n = 236)	Fixed Vendors (n = 505)
Less than 5 years	52.9	41.5
5-less than 6 years	11.1	5.6
7-less than 10 years	15.3	25.1
10-less than 15 years	-	9.4
16-less than 20 years	6.7	10.9
21 years and above	14.0	7.0

Table 3. Percentage of vendors by type of employment

Types of employment	Mobile Vendors (n = 236)	Fixed Vendors (n = 505)
True self-employment	91.1	94.7
Disguised wage work	3.4	1.0
Dependent work	5.5	3.2

Table 4. Types of business operation

Type of operation	Mobile	Fixed
Individual business	(n = 236)	(n = 404)
	56.0	37.1
Family business	(n = 103)	(n = 255)
- Spouse and children	99.0	86.0
- Other family members		
Employees/family members	-	13.0
- Employees	1.0	1.0

Table 5. Percentage of vendors selling different types of food

Types of food	Mobile Vendors (n = 236)	Fixed Vendors (n = 505)
Fresh food	8.1	23.5
Prepared food	30.8	35.2
Food prepared on the street	15.1	14.6
Ready-made or packaged food	19.1	10.4
Fruits	18.9	7.5
Others	8.4	8.8

Table 6. Daily stock value, earnings, and net profits

Amount	Mobile Vendors (n = 236)			Fixed Vendors (n = 505)		
	Stock Value	Earnings	Profit	Stock Value	Earnings	Profit
Less than 200 baht	9.9 } 41.5	5.1 } 29.4	21.4 } 83.0	4.9 } 21.2	- } 21.0	0.0
201-500 baht	31.6 } 41.5	24.3 } 29.4	61.6 } 83.0	16.3 } 21.2	21.0 } 21.0	65.0
501-700 baht	17.5 } 39.7	15.5 } 43.3	6.9 } 15.0	8.7 } 33.3	14.0 } 31.5	24.7
701-1,000 baht	22.2 } 39.7	27.8 } 43.3	8.1 } 15.0	24.6 } 33.3	17.5 } 31.5	24.7
1,001-1,500 baht	7.5 } 18.8	18.0 } 27.4	2.0	9.5 } 45.5	18.4 } 47.5	10.3
1,501-2,000 baht	3.6 } 18.8	5.6 } 27.4	2.0	12.4 } 45.5	11.9 } 47.5	10.3
2,001 baht up	7.7 } 18.8	3.8 } 27.4		23.6 } 45.5	17.2 } 47.5	10.3

Table 7. Percentage of vendors according to amount of earnings

Amount of Earnings	Mobile Vendors (n = 236)	Fixed Vendors (n = 505)
Adequate	83.9	81.2
Inadequate	16.1	18.8

Table 8. Characteristics of vendors with adequate earnings

Characteristics	Mobile	Fixed
<i>Type of food sold</i>		
Fresh food	73.7	85.5
Prepared food	76.6	81.9
Food prepared on the street	90.6	84.8
Ready-to-eat food	93.0	79.4
Fruits	88.9	90.7
<i>Daily stock value</i>		
Below 200 baht	82.5	83.7
201-500 baht	85.4	80.8
501-1,000 baht	83.6	75.6
1,001-2,000 baht	83.3	83.8
2,001 baht up	86.7	85.8
<i>Daily earnings</i>		
Below 500 baht	79.1	76.9
501-1,000 baht	84.7	77.8
1,001-1,500 baht	83.3	83.7
1,501-2,000 baht	92.3	85.0
2,000 baht up	100.0	85.0
<i>Length of time in vending</i>		
Less than 5 years	85.4	82.5
5-less than 10 years	84.1	82.9
Above 10 years	66.7	77.0
<i>Sex</i>		
Female	79.5	84.1
Male	88.1	78.9
<i>Educational attainment</i>		
Below than primary level	83.8	79.5
Primary level and higher	84.4	87.6

Table 9. Satisfaction with occupation

Satisfaction with occupation	Mobile Vendors (n = 236)	Fixed Vendors (n = 505)
Yes	86.0	87.8
No	14.0	12.2

Table 10. Number of respondents who want to be a street food vendor all their life

Would you like to be a street food vendor all your life?	Mobile Vendors (n = 236)	Fixed Vendors (n = 505)
Yes	47.0	62.0
No	53.0	38.0

Table 10a. Reasons for wanting to be a street food vendor all their life

Mobile Vendors (n = 110)		Fixed Vendors (n = 225)	
Want to save money	58.0	Want to save money	65.3
Autonomy	16.9	Autonomy	23.5
Too old, having no other choices	10.7	Too old, having no other choices	11.2
Off-season occupation	9.8		
Waiting for children to finish school	3.4		

Table 10b. Reasons for not wanting to be a street food vendor all their life

Mobile Vendors (n = 124)		Fixed Vendors (n = 150)	
Want to go home	29.4	Want to open store	70.5
Too old, want to rest	21.0	Going home	15.0
Tired	8.4	Want to do something else/ change commodity	10.5
Want to do something else/ change commodity	23.5	Too old, want to rest	4.0
Want to open store, have fixed selling location	17.7		

Table 11. Attitudes toward earning opportunity of food vending in Bangkok

Attitudes towards earning opportunities	Mobile Vendors (n = 234)	Fixed Vendors (n = 505)
<i>Opportunity for food vending in Bangkok</i>		
Yes	97.4	94.7
No	2.6	5.3
<i>Would you encourage friends into food vending?</i>	(n = 233)	(n = 462)
Yes	82.8	76.8
No	17.2	23.2

Table 12. Number of respondents who want their children to be street food vendors

Do you want your children to be street food vendors?	Mobile Vendors (n = 234)	Fixed Vendors (n = 505)
Yes	20.2	29.0
No	79.8	71.0

Table 13. Percentage of vendors at different levels of success

Levels of success	Mobile Vendors (n = 236)	Fixed Vendors (n = 505)	Total
Subsistence level	56.0	55.9	56.0
Have savings but not considering expansion	38.0	32.4	35.0
Have savings and considering expansion	6.0	11.7	9.0

Table 14. Socio-economic profile of vendors at different levels of success

Variables	Mobile Vendors			Fixed Vendors		
	Subsistence	Have savings	Considering expansion	Subsistence	Have savings	Considering expansion
Sex						
Female	57.0	36.0	7.0	49.6*	36.7*	13.7*
Male	55.0	40.0	5.0	62.2*	27.6*	10.2*
Age						
Less than 30 Years	56.0	38.0	6.0	45.1*	35.2*	19.8*
31-50 Years	52.9	41.1	6.0	52.7*	33.8*	13.5*
51 Years and above	73.3	23.3	3.3	65.8*	31.5*	2.7*
Year of schooling						
Less than 6 years	59.1	35.5	5.4	58.4*	32.7*	9.0*
More than 6 years	38.1	54.8	6.5	51.0*	26.9*	22.1*
Types of food						
Fresh food	57.9	31.6	10.5	53.2	37.9	8.9
Prepared food	62.0	32.9	5.1	61.7	26.8	11.5
Food prepared on the street	53.1	40.6	6.3	45.6	35.4	19.0
Ready-made food	60.0	31.1	8.9	65.1	22.2	12.7
Fruits	43.5	52.2	4.3	44.2	37.2	18.6
Daily stock value						
Below 500 baht	63.2	29.9	6.9	67.0	24.3	8.7
501-1,000 baht	51.8	44.7	3.5	59.4	30.0	10.6
1,001 baht and above	50.0	37.5	12.5	50.0	36.7	13.3
Daily earnings						
Below 500 baht	79.7*	18.8*	1.4*	69.3	23.9	6.8
501-1,000 baht	53.0*	39.0*	8.0*	58.7	23.8	17.5
1,001 baht and above	35.9*	56.3*	7.8*	50.6	38.6	10.8
Adequacy of earnings						
Adequate	51.8*	42.0*	6.2*	52.3*	35.0*	12.7*
Inadequate	77.8*	16.7*	5.7*	76.8*	15.8*	7.4*
Length of time in vending						
Less than 5 years	54.0	39.5	6.5	45.5	30.9	23.6
6-10 years	54.3	40.0	5.7	51.5	43.9	4.5
11-15 years	46.7	46.7	6.6	53.1	37.5	9.4
16 years and above	73.9	21.7	6.6	67.7	25.3	7.0
Types of self-employment						
True self-employment	55.7	37.6	6.7	56.3	31.8	11.9
Disguised wage work	62.5	37.5	-	77.2	22.2	-
Dependent work	46.2	46.2	7.7	60.0	30.0	10.0
Satisfaction with occupation						
Satisfied	50.5*	43.0*	6.5*	55.0*	33.6*	11.5*
Not satisfied	90.9*	6.1*	3.0*	71.0*	16.1*	12.9*

* P ≤ 0.05

Table 15. Profile of street food buyers

Socio-economic characteristics	Percent
Sex	(n = 385)
Female	57.40
Male	42.59
Age	(n = 382)
Less than 30 years	47.38
31-40 years	25.39
41-50 years	15.45
51 years and above	11.78
Levels of education	(n = 380)
Primary education or less	14.74
Secondary education	11.05
Higher secondary education	27.63
Bachelor's degree	42.89
Higher than bachelor's level	3.68
Occupation	(n = 385)
Government/Public enterprise	22.08
Monthly wage worker	29.87
Self-employed	9.61
Daily wage worker	5.71
Housewife	4.16
Students	19.74
Others	8.83
Average monthly income	(n = 368)
Less than 5,000 baht	21.20
5,001-10,000 baht	42.66
10,001-15,000 baht	14.40
15,001-20,000 baht	11.41
20,001 baht and above	10.33
Types of residential unit	(n = 383)
Rented house/room	38.90
Own house	50.13
Others	10.97

Table 16. Purchasing behavior

Purchasing behavior	Percent
<i>Frequency</i>	(n = 385)
More than once per day	33.2
Once per day	21.3
More than once per week	29.4
Once per week	10.6
Others	5.5
<i>Foods most frequently purchased</i>	(n = 384)
Fresh food	17.7
Food cooked on the street	8.9
Cooked food	43.5
Ready made food	20.6
Fruits	8.6
<i>Meals most frequently purchased</i>	(n = 384)
Breakfast	19.3
Lunch	28.4
Supper	47.9
Late supper	4.4

Table 16a. Amount of purchases

Purchases	Percent
<i>Expense per one purchase</i>	(n = 370)
Less than 20 baht	27.0
21-40 baht	27.6
41-60 baht	25.1
61-80 baht	3.0
81-100 baht	10.5
101 baht and above	6.8
<i>Daily expenses on street foods</i>	(n = 327)
Less than 20 baht	11.9
21-40 baht	14.7
41-60 baht	24.8
61-80 baht	6.1
81-100 baht	26.6
101 baht and above	15.9

Table 17. Reasons for purchasing street food

Reasons	Percent
1. Proximity to home	44.7
2. Cheap	39.2
3. Time-saving	34.0
4. Has variety	33.0
5. Along the way	28.6
6. Proximity to workplace	20.3
7. Regular customer	15.3
8. Can bargain	7.5
9. To help vendors	6.0

Table 18. Advantages and disadvantages of food vending activities

Advantages	Percent
1. Convenience/saves time	70.1
2. Employment and income generation	68.8
3. Cheap food, good taste	40.5
4. Traditional	17.7
Disadvantages	Percent
1. Obstruction to pedestrians	53.5
2. Disorder	47.0
3. Unhygienic foods	44.9
4. Unhygienic environment	26.2
5. Causes traffic problems	11.4
6. Noisy	5.2

Table 19. Necessity of street food vending for Bangkok people

Response n = 385	Percent	Daily wage worker n = 22	Students n = 78	Government/ State enterprise officers n = 85	Higher than bachelor's degree n = 14	Bachelor's degree n = 163	Own house n = 192
Yes	96.1	100.0	100.0	90.5	100.0	97.5	97.9

Table 20. Suggestions to improve street food vending in Bangkok

Suggestions	Percent
1. Orderliness (n = 246)	
- Should not obstruct thoroughfare	52.8
- Provide zone by types of foods and provide parking space	44.8
- Cart should be kept & not left in the public space	2.0
- Vending should be strictly prohibited in some certain areas	0.4
2. Accommodating buyers (n = 90)	
- Should not be overcrowded	61.1
- Zoning by types of food	22.2
- Vending should be close to areas where people gather	16.7
3. Foods (n = 339)	
- Clean in production	32.5
- Free from chemical substances such as borax, saccharin, and other dangerous substances	25.4
- Clean selling area	12.7
- Cheap	29.4
4. Sellers (n = 125)	
- Wear clean attire with apron and head cover	56.0
- Loyal, not sell substandard food	24.0
- Good rapport with customers	20.0

Table 21. Success factors identified by mobile street food vendors at different levels of success

Subsistence	Have savings	Considering expansion
Characteristics Self-confidence ($\bar{X} = 2.68$)	Self-confidence ($\bar{X} = 2.80$)	Self-confidence ($\bar{X} = 2.45$)
Knowledge Cheap source of materials ($\bar{X} = 2.44$)	Cost-profit calculation* ($\bar{X} = 2.63$) Financial planning* ($\bar{X} = 2.52$) Business planning* ($\bar{X} = 2.48$) Cheap source of materials ($\bar{X} = 2.43$) Production of food in demand ($\bar{X} = 2.41$)	Cheap source of materials ($\bar{X} = 2.67$) Production of food in demand ($\bar{X} = 2.50$)
Family	Thrift-conscious family* ($\bar{X} = 2.61$) Moral support* ($\bar{X} = 2.52$)	Moral support* ($\bar{X} = 2.46$)
Capital Have own capital ($\bar{X} = 2.40$)	Have own capital ($\bar{X} = 2.76$)	Have own capital ($\bar{X} = 2.64$) Having low-interest loans ($\bar{X} = 2.42$)
Social network		Assistance from relatives or friends when needed* ($\bar{X} = 2.58$)
Selling and living venues Proximity of selling venues to densely populated areas ($\bar{X} = 2.86$) Proximity of selling venues to place of residence ($\bar{X} = 2.76$)	Proximity of selling venues to densely populated areas ($\bar{X} = 2.73$) Proximity of selling venues to place of residence ($\bar{X} = 2.56$)	Proximity of selling venues to densely populated areas ($\bar{X} = 2.47$) Proximity of selling venues to place of residence ($\bar{X} = 2.40$)
Food Hygienic ($\bar{X} = 2.71$) Tasty ($\bar{X} = 2.61$) Inexpensive ($\bar{X} = 2.55$)	Hygienic ($\bar{X} = 2.76$) Tasty ($\bar{X} = 2.73$) Inexpensive ($\bar{X} = 2.70$)	Hygienic ($\bar{X} = 3.00$) Tasty ($\bar{X} = 2.90$) Inexpensive ($\bar{X} = 2.55$)
Sellers Good rapport ($\bar{X} = 2.76$) Clean attire ($\bar{X} = 2.50$)	Good rapport ($\bar{X} = 2.80$) Clean attire ($\bar{X} = 2.71$)	Good rapport ($\bar{X} = 2.75$) Clean attire ($\bar{X} = 2.64$)

* $P \leq 0.05$

Table 22. Success factors identified by fixed street food vendors at different levels of success

Subsistence	Have savings	Considering expansion
Characteristics Self-confidence ($\bar{X} = 2.65$)	Self-confidence ($\bar{X} = 2.72$)	Self-confidence ($\bar{X} = 2.81$)
Knowledge Cheap source of materials ($\bar{X} = 2.52$) Financial planning ($\bar{X} = 2.44$)	Cheap source of materials ($\bar{X} = 2.66$) Business planning* ($\bar{X} = 2.60$) Financial planning* ($\bar{X} = 2.41$) Production of food in demand ($\bar{X} = 2.41$)	Business planning ($\bar{X} = 2.68$) Cost-profit calculation* ($\bar{X} = 2.59$) Financial planning ($\bar{X} = 2.57$) Cheap source of materials ($\bar{X} = 2.53$) Business by other vendors in the same area ($\bar{X} = 2.41$)
Family		Spouse assisting in business* ($\bar{X} = 2.55$) Thrift-conscious family ($\bar{X} = 2.43$) Moral support ($\bar{X} = 2.41$)
Capital Have own capital ($\bar{X} = 2.46$)	Have own capital ($\bar{X} = 2.76$)	Have own capital* ($\bar{X} = 2.90$) Having low-interest loans* ($\bar{X} = 2.15$)
Social network		Good relationship with neighboring vendors ($\bar{X} = 2.45$)
Selling and living venues Proximity of selling venues to densely populated areas ($\bar{X} = 2.78$) Secure selling location ($\bar{X} = 2.56$) Proximity of selling venues to place of residence ($\bar{X} = 2.47$)	Proximity of selling venues to densely populated areas ($\bar{X} = 2.81$) Secure selling location ($\bar{X} = 2.62$) Proximity of selling venues to place of residence ($\bar{X} = 2.46$)	Proximity of selling venues to densely populated areas ($\bar{X} = 2.90$) Secure selling location ($\bar{X} = 2.65$) Proximity of selling venues to place of residence ($\bar{X} = 2.61$) Proximity of selling venues to source of materials ($\bar{X} = 2.44$) Secure place of residence ($\bar{X} = 2.43$)
Food Hygienic ($\bar{X} = 2.69$) Tasty ($\bar{X} = 2.55$) Inexpensive ($\bar{X} = 2.50$)	Hygienic ($\bar{X} = 2.81$) Tasty ($\bar{X} = 2.62$) Inexpensive ($\bar{X} = 2.55$)	Hygienic ($\bar{X} = 2.70$) Tasty ($\bar{X} = 2.66$) Inexpensive ($\bar{X} = 2.56$) Clean selling space ($\bar{X} = 2.55$)
Sellers Good rapport ($\bar{X} = 2.74$) Clean attire ($\bar{X} = 2.61$)	Good rapport ($\bar{X} = 2.74$) Clean attire ($\bar{X} = 2.81$)	Good rapport ($\bar{X} = 2.67$) Clean attire ($\bar{X} = 2.82$)

* $P \leq 0.05$

Table 23. Factors that contributed to failure as identified by mobile vendors

Have to give up business due to losses (n = 203)		No profit (n = 235)		No savings (n = 200)	
<i>Characteristics</i>	(%)		(%)		(%)
1. Lack of self-confidence	22.2	1. Lazy	4.4		
2. Lazy	6.9	2. No creativity	1.5		
Knowledge					
1. Business planning		1. Not knowing cheap sources of materials	3.0		
- Not knowing products that sell well	8.4	2. Financial planning			
- Imitation of vendors' products	4.9	- Over-investment	7.4		
- Bad routing	7.4	3. Business planning			
2. Financial planning		- Bad routing	11.1		
- Over-investment	4.9	4. Lack of knowledge in cost-profit calculation	2.2		
3. Lack of knowledge in cost-profit calculation (Bad pricing)	6.9	(Bad pricing)			
4. Not knowing cheap sources of materials	4.9				
5. Lack of knowledge on foods	0.5				
Capital					
1. High household expenditures	8.4	High debt	16.3	1. High debt	19.9
2. Lack of capital	4.9			2. High household expenditures	11.5
3. In debt, have to pay interest daily	3.0				
Food					
Not delicious	6.9	Not delicious	11.1		
Others					
1. Gambling	5.4	1. High costs of ingredients	13.3	1. Gambling	31.4
2. Over-spending	3.4	2. Gambling	11.2	2. Over-spending	33.4
3. Bad luck	1.0	3. High household expenditures	7.4	3. Problems with city police	1.9
		4. Bad economy	5.9	4. No regular customer	1.9
		5. No regular customer	3.0		
		6. Problems with city police	2.2		

Table 24. Factors that contributed to failure as identified by fixed vendors

Have to give up business due to losses (n = 462)		No profit (n = 462)		No savings (n = 466)	
<i>Characteristics</i>	(%)		(%)		(%)
Lack of self-confidence	20.7				
Knowledge					
1. Lack of knowledge on foods	5.4	1. Financial planning - Over-investment	2.2		
2. Business planning - Not knowing	7.0	2. Not knowing cheap sources of ingredients	9.2		
3. Lack of knowledge in cost-profit calculation	5.0	4. Lack of knowledge in cost-profit calculation	11.3		
Capital					
In debt, have to pay interest daily	14.0			1. High debt 2. High household expenditures	24.8 21.8
Location					
Bad location	14.0	Bad location	13.3		
Food					
1. Too expensive	6.0	1. Too expensive	9.3		
2. Not delicious	6.0	2. Not tasty	6.0		
Seller					
Bad rapport with customers	6.0				
Others					
1. High competition	6.0	1. High costs of ingredients	9.3	1. Gambling	47.0
2. Gambling	4.1	2. Gambling	12.2	2. Over-spending	6.4
3. Over-spending	5.9	3. Bad economy	8.6		
		4. High competition	8.6		

Fighting Poverty from the Street

A Survey of Street Food Vendors in Bangkok

Narumol Nirathron, PhD

Bangkok—home to nearly 400,000 street vendors—is one city that shows how its population can progress on the back of a vibrant street vending industry. Viewed as an eyesore in many countries, street vending plays an important role in generating incomes for a vast urban population who otherwise fall into unemployment, poverty and destitution.

This report examines the role of street food vending in reducing poverty. It shows how local policies and social attitudes that legitimize street vending can produce benefits not only to vendors but also to consumers who gain access to cheaper basic goods. Through satisfaction ratings, this research also shows that street vending can provide adequate incomes, mobility across generations and a viable means of livelihood for a city's population. Factors for success are analyzed and tested statistically. The research concludes with policy recommendations.

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