

Working Paper No. 55

**WOMEN AND THE URBAN STREET FOOD TRADE:
SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY**

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Acknowledgements

The publication of the Gender and Planning Working Paper series has been made possible by a grant from the Ford Foundation, New York. These papers have been developed as resource materials for the Development Planning Unit's Short Course on 'Planning with Women for Urban Development'. The course has been running annually since 1984.

These working papers could not have been completed without the cooperation of a number of people - Caroline Moser, Course Director; Caren Levy, Associate Course Director; Linda Peake, Editing Consultant; and Jane Wisner, who typed the papers.

The views expressed in these papers are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the Development Planning Unit.

I. Introduction¹

For our breakfast, Service gave me a shilling to buy some yoki-gari from a woman who stationed herself just across the road from our house ... The woman put fourpence worth of in the pan I gave her, added fourpence worth of beans and then the oil which added to the flavour of the whole mixture. (Duodo 1969, 111)².

Such a description of daily life in the city, taken from an African novel, is all too often perceived by the outsider as 'quaint colour', part of the indigenous and non-modern part of life in a developing country. A headline such as 'Street Food in Singapore' makes not only colourful copy in a travel magazine but also a delightful culinary experience for the tourist or researcher passing through. Yet behind these words lies a stark reality in which the production, sale and consumption of street foods often play a key role in the economic survival of many of the urban and rural poor. In Bogor, a city of over 200,000 in Indonesia, Chapman (1984) estimated that one in sixteen of the urban population is involved in some aspect of the supply side of the street food trade. Moreover, nearly 30% of this vending population are involved in the preparation and sale of the dietary staples of mixed rice meals and noodle soups. For many eating meals and snacks outside the home, particularly in urban areas, appears a growing if not always recognised aspect of the urban lifestyle. Nearly 77% of the households surveyed in the medium sized city of Ile-Ife, Nigeria, admitted to purchasing breakfast four to seven times a week rather than preparing it (Pease 1984).

The very pervasiveness of this economic activity contrasts with the sparse documentation on the processing, preparation, sale and consumption of ready-to-eat meals and snacks. Yet a knowledge of how this trade operates can not only provide insights into the survival strategies of the urban poor but also assist in the formulation of reasonable and responsible policies towards them. The discussion below examines the dynamics of this economic activity from the perspective of the implications for policy and planning. It is important to stress that many aspects of the preparation and sale of street foods are often the domain of women. Thus, an underlying theme is whether programmes and policies affecting street foods should be gender specific. Experience has shown that all too often when a change in policy or innovation upgrades technology or brings higher returns to a field in which women are the dominant participants, men take over. While not wishing to advocate that women remain locked into what some may regard as their traditional role - food processing - recognition of the importance of this activity as a source of income generation for women makes it incumbent to add gender specific criteria to any assessment of policy implications.

¹ The author was formerly the director of the Equity Policy Centre's Street Foods Project which was funded by the Office of Women in Development, USAID and the Ford Foundation. The views expressed are those of the author.

²Gari is a cassava-based staple eaten in Ghana.

II. The Street Food Trade

What are Street Foods?

The Equity Policy Centre's definition of street foods included all foods that could be eaten at the point of purchase (EPOC 1985). They include both those eaten on the spot as well as those bought for inclusion in the family meal or to be eaten later as a snack. Typically, for example, tempe, fried or boiled soya bean cake food, is widely consumed in Indonesia, and yoghurt, better known as lait caille, in Senegal, is bought to be eaten immediately or for later consumption at home³.

Both processed and unprocessed foods can be included under the rubric of street foods. While the many fruits bought in small units as immediate refreshments play an important role in diet and make up a noticeable segment of the trade, the emphasis here is on the transformation of foods, e.g. the salting and dehydration of fish to make petit poissons, or the puffing of rice into muri⁴. In the Philippines, Indonesia and Senegal at least 75% of vendors process some or all of the food they sell; in Bangladesh 42% of the vendors transform their stock. Explicit in this definition of street foods was the requirement that street foods be sold from a cloth on the ground, from carts or out of shops with fewer than four permanent walls. Recent work suggests that in some countries it is appropriate to include four-walled gargotes or cook-shops. Such simple restaurants provide the same low cost food and can be clearly distinguished from the more capitalised and formal sector food provision establishments (Barth and Kuo 1984).

The physical characteristics of the street food establishment have tended to place this activity in the category of the informal distributive and services sector. However, while some street food enterprises are essentially food catering establishments, others are involved in the more productive activities of transforming the raw ingredients into processed foods. Identifying this 'processing' aspect of the street food trade is important since it acknowledges the role of some of the enterprises as part of the traditional food processing sector. Whether the cooking of cereals into varieties of porridge such as millet based bouille or bubur ketan hitam, a black glutinous rice porridge consumed in Indonesia, the preparation of these foods can be likened, albeit on a much smaller scale, to the production process involved in the large scale manufacture of cereals such as Weetabix or Rice Krispies.

Women's Participation in the Street Food Trade

The traditional economic role of women in rural areas is that of producer and processor of food crops. While their primary goal is to meet the subsistence requirements of the household, any commodity surplus generated, processed or unprocessed, is sold for cash. According to tradition, the cash so generated may provide the woman with discretionary funds or is turned over to the family pot under the control of her husband. In many cases this surplus can be the primary source of household cash income (ECA 1981).

Transformation of roots, cereals, fruits and vegetables into convenient foodstuffs and drinks is well

³Unless otherwise indicated the street foods data presented for the Philippines, Indonesia, Bangladesh and Senegal are based on the Equity Policy Centre reports for these countries.

⁴In Senegal, 25% of the vendors handled fruit, 20% sold fruit and fruit drinks in Bangladesh, and 9% sold fruit in Indonesia.

accepted as rural women's work. It is their gainful source of employment. In the aggregate it defines a food producing 'industry' characterised by its small scale, simple technology and low level of labour productivity (Carr 1984). As the prevailing wisdom about rural off-farm sources of income generation has moved away from the encouragement of handicrafts, attention has been drawn to providing assistance to women in this area. Carr's (1984) list of project assistance to rural women involved in activities as varied as fish smoking and processing in Ghana or pappad (a type of bread dough) rolling in India and muri in Bangladesh attests to how attempts to raise productivity levels in this area can have beneficial results.

However, the acceptability of this role of women in rural areas and the increasing attention now being given to food processing in rural areas by development practitioners contrasts noticeably with the invisibility of food processing and sale of prepared foods as a source of income generation for urban women. Little urban research has been done in this area. Project assistance specifically targeted on this segment of the informal sector has been negligible. Moreover, since traditionally processed foods, including street foods, are perceived as unsanitary, even a danger to health, suppression rather than support has been the prevailing policy directive in many countries. Yet, as the data in Table 1 show, the street food trade is very much the domain of women. The high levels of female involvement in the Philippines, Thailand, Nigeria and Senegal came as no surprise. All reflect well established traditions of visible female participation in the market place. No less unexpected are the lower figures for Bangladesh, Indonesia and Egypt, which reflect cultural factors, in particular the restrictions imposed by Islam on the open participation of women in the urban economy.

At the same time these gender data may underestimate the female role. In the Philippines, where 27% of the firms are operated by husband and wife together, women were found to control the income.

Table 1
Street Food Vendors, by Sex, in Various Third World Cities

| City | Number of vendors | Operators (by sex) | | | % invisible involvement by women* |
|------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|-------|-----------|-----------------------------------|
| | | % women | % men | % couples | |
| Bogor (Indonesia) | 17,760 | 16 | 60 | 24 | 40 |
| Iloilo (Philippines) | 5,000 | 63 | 10 | 27 | 90 |
| Ziguinchor (Senegal) | 1,534 | 53 | 47 | - | 53 |
| Manikganj (Bangladesh) | 37,996 | 1 | 99 | - | 37 |
| Minia (Egypt) | 784 | 24 | 76 | n.a. | 35 |
| Ile-Ife (Nigeria) | 2,603 | 94 | 6 | - | 94 |

* Involvement in aspects of the food trade but not visible on the street.

Source: Owens and Hussain 1984; Posner 1983; Barth 1983; Chapman 1984; Loza 1985; Kujore 1985.

Approximately one quarter of the male vendors in Indonesia and Bangladesh are assisted by their

spouses. In Egypt the comparable figure is 14%. These street foods participation rates reflect only the visible women retailers: everywhere there are urban as well as rural home-based producers processing ready- to-eat foods. In Indonesia and Bangladesh the contribution of women may in fact be closer to 35% or 40%, the balance being made up by the more invisible aspects of food processing. In Indonesia, most of the traditional rice-based sweets are made by women and retailed by vendors and grocery stores; the puffed rice - muri - and fried lentil snacks sold in Bangladesh are made by women and sold to middlemen. In addition, in many countries processed food is prepared and sold on a contractual basis with the meals and pastries delivered directly to the consumer's door rather than sold on the street.

The Role of Street Foods in the Urban Economy

Considering the policy implications associated with this trade necessitates weighing these participation rates against both the size of the street foods trade in the urban economy and the likely role of the trade in the future. The estimated volume of sales generated by this activity ranges from US\$67 million in Bogor to a figure of US\$2 million in Manikganj (see Table 2).

Table 2
Economics of the Street Food Trade

| City | Population | Number of Enterprises | Aggregate Annual Sales (million US\$) |
|------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Bogor (Indonesia) | 248,000 (1980) | 17,760 | 67 |
| Iloilo (Philippines) | 244,827 (1980) | 5,000 | 28 |
| Ziguinchor (Senegal) | 86,295 (1980) | 1,534 | 4 |
| Manikganj (Bangladesh) | 37,996 (1981) | 550 | 2 |
| Minia (Egypt) | 200,000* | 784 | n.a. |
| Ile-Ife (Nigeria) | 135,000 (1963) | 2,603 | n.a. |

* Estimate

Source: Owens and Hussain 1984; Posner 1983; Barth 1983; Chapman 1984; Loza 1985; Kujore 1985).

As a sector composed of a myriad of micro-enterprises - as many as 17,760 in Bogor, over 5,000 in Iloilo City, 1,534 in Ziguinchor and 550 in Manikganj - the significance of the street food trade at the level of the city applies as much to its contribution to output as to its role as a source of employment. Nearly all the establishments are in the hands of the self employed. An exception is the sale of ice cream. Exclusively in the hands of men, in all countries this product is sold on a commission basis for a larger enterprise. At least one quarter of the owners employed either paid or unpaid labour with the average number of persons per establishment between 1.5 and 2 in Indonesia and Bangladesh and about 2.9 for the Philippines. Working with the figures in Table 2 and assuming that the urban labour force in each city equals 40% of its population, one can derive an approximation that 6% of the labour force in Ziguinchor and Manikganj and between 15% and 26% in Iloilo City and Bogor, respectively, depend on street foods in part or in whole for their household income. For women, whose rates of labour force participation are lower than men's, these findings translate into a significant source of female

employment.

Street foods generate a high volume of sales and a high level of employment. As businesses, they can also provide many of the participants with a reasonable income. Average profits have been estimated to be above earnings from alternative sources of employment:

Average gross earnings of vendors in Iloilo were 54 pesos daily; this compares with the daily minimum formal sector unskilled wage of 33 pesos daily, a level of income only paid by registered medium and large scale formal sector firms.

50% of the street food vendors in Bogor made daily net incomes in the range of 1,700 to 3,100 rupiah, an income that is about twice the daily wage of construction workers.

Gross profits per street food firm in Ziguinchor averaged 370 FCFA daily. This is slightly above the legal minimum daily wage of a maid (250 FCFA) which is the main alternative source of employment sought and open to many of the women who practice this trade.

The daily net income of a street vendor in Manikganj approximates a level of earnings (77 thaka) more than three times that of the daily agricultural wage.

Such observations cast a new light on the conventional wisdom that tends to perceive activities such as street food preparation and sale as a source of employment of last resort and hence the domain of women. In part, this reflects documentation which focuses on this and similar informal sector activities in terms of the seeming ease of entry into the trade and the associated low levels of capitalisation and productivity. In addition, because the processing of cooked foods is perceived as an extension of women's reproductive roles in the household, it is often deemed of marginal economic value.

Whatever the truth of these assertions, the fact is that these competitive incomes can and do afford an opportunity to generate an income which women usually control. The money earned also allows some of the women to pursue what is often their primary goal after meeting their household's basic needs, investment in the next generation, i.e. social investment in their children's education. Improving one's business was cited as a secondary priority in Ziguinchor when compared with children's educational needs. Women in Iloilo said they came back into the market, after staying at home to raise children, in order to earn money to pay their children's school fees. At the same time, an investment in children's education may be seen as part of a long term strategy of insurance for one's old age as well as for improving the viability of the enterprise. This generational process of upward mobility is exemplified by a female university professor in the Philippines. Her education was financed by the earnings of her mother who has spent her working lifetime in the street food trade. As a young girl, she assisted her mother in this business and, to this day, street foods are an integral part of her diet. Literate children can also bring access to formal sector resources, customarily unavailable to, or not used by, illiterate informal sector operators. Credit is a case in point and the Trickle-Up programme which gives small loans well illustrates how this process works. To receive a loan the borrower must keep records. Illiterate entrepreneurs can and do rely on their children to meet the record keeping requirement.

The Demand for Street Foods

In looking to the future and weighing alternative policies, more than the income earned and the social benefits of the vendor must be considered. Questions such as will the traditional street food trade be displaced by 'modern fast foods' or by industrial food processing - both of which are higher priced competitors - will arise. Answering them requires an understanding of who eats street foods and why.

Around a quarter of urban household food expenditure in Bogor and Iloilo goes on street foods⁵. At the same time, the data show only limited variation by income level: the share of the food budget allocated to street foods varied by only 3.5% around the mean in Iloilo City, increased by 4% for the upper income quartile in Bogor and remained constant for lower income levels. Thus, street foods are eaten by everyone, including the more affluent. As a civil servant from Indonesia and a university professor from the Philippines both pointed out, 'we all grew up on a diet of street foods, we are used to eating them and it makes our meagre salaries go further'.

While the demand for street foods within a country may be relatively inelastic with respect to income, the available evidence, though tentative, does indicate that urbanisation may be a variable affecting the trade. Looking again at who eats street foods (see Table 3), we find that generally the vendors' peers are the primary street food clientele. Moreover, for many urban residents, especially women, the purchases of street foods may represent a rational urban survival response.

Where staples as well as other foods are scarce, the high time cost of obtaining these commodities can give a strong impetus to the street food trade. Pease (1984), in her review of the role of street foods in the Yoruba diet, attributes part of a very recent expansion of the street food trade in Ile-Ife to the impact of the economic recession in Nigeria and the difficulty householders face in obtaining foodstuffs and cooking materials. A good rainy season in Ghana in 1984 dramatically increased availability of maize. As a result the retail price of one tin of maize dropped from 300 cedis to 25 cedis. This led many families to return to cooking their own kenkey, a maize based staple eaten with fish, thereby reducing demand for the ready-made product provided by street food vendors (Ocloo 1984). Faced with the increasing price and scarcity of fuel, many households appear to find it cheaper to purchase street food meals where cost of a serving is equal to if not below the cost of home preparation (Cohen 1984).

Economic necessity leads many women to substitute time spent in food preparation for time spent in income generating activities. The purchase of street foods provides a mechanism for women as well as men to do this. Many of the basic dishes consumed, in developing countries, involve long hours of cooking prior to consumption. Filipino native cakes involve between four to five hours' work at home before they can be sold. Matha, a milk based drink, is boiled for three hours prior to being left to ferment overnight. The cost effectiveness of such a decision is clearly stated by a laundry woman in the Philippines who finds that time spent marketing and cooking is put to more productive use in working for extra clients. Thus, she no longer cooks at home. Rather she feeds herself and her family with the purchase of street foods meals.

Table 3
The Street Food Customer, by Occupation

| Customer | Iloilo | Bogor | Manikganj | Ziguinchor |
|----------|---------------------------|-------|-----------|------------|
| | (Percentage distribution) | | | |
| Children | 16(a) | 33(a) | 8 | 21 |

⁵These observations do not deviate substantially from a 1978 estimate obtained for urban Peninsular Malaysia which found that an average of 21% of the urban household food budget went on foods consumed outside the home (Lam 1982).

| | | | | |
|----------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Students(b) | n.a. | n.a. | 4 | 14 |
| White collar workers | 21 | 14 | 19 | 24 |
| Informal sector | 47 | 37 | 43 | 10 |
| Housewives | 16(c) | 16(c) | 1 | 17 |
| Unemployed | n.a. | n.a. | 1 | 7 |
| Other | 0 | 0 | 24(d) | 7 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| (number) | 246 | 464 | 436 | 240 |

- a Includes students
b High school and college students
c Includes the unemployed
d Includes 22% farmers
n.a. = not available

Sources: Barth 1983; Posner 1983; Chapman 1984; Owens and Hussain 1984.

The shift towards eating meals outside the home is most clearly seen in the levels of sales and consumption of cereal based breakfast foods which take two to three hours to prepare. In Ziguinchor where the eating out tradition is not strong, 50% of street food customers eat breakfast daily on the street. The comparable figure for all households in Ile-Ife is 77%, while a different study found that 96% of schoolchildren daily purchase their first meal of the day from a street food vendor (Kujore 1983). Such observations are reinforced by the results of a food consumption survey carried out in Dakar. The evidence indicated that while 32% of the families eat millet couscous for their evening meal, only 12% of the urban women actually prepare it daily (CILSS 1980). A time consuming product to process and a highly perishable foodstuff, couscous is very likely to be purchased ready made from vendors.

Another aspect of the relationship between urbanisation and the demand for street foods is reflected in the spatial location of many of the vendors in some of the cities studied. Around 80% of the street food trade in Iloilo and Bogor is concentrated in residential areas, rather than in the central city. In the smaller towns, distances are not so great and the vendors are more spatially dispersed. Numerous, though not necessarily as obvious physically to the outsider and passerby, are the many 'doorstep' vendors - predominantly women - who set up a table and chairs on the sidewalk outside their homes or hawk foodstuffs on a nearby corner or directly in front of their doors. Their numbers and location suggest an informal food preparation and vending sector catering to daily household demand.

III. The Persistence of the Street Food Trade: Some Implications for Policy and Planning

The consumption, preparation and sale of street foods are established facts of urban life in most developing countries. Their very ubiquity is indicative of an activity that is responding to real needs which are likely to persist for years to come. For policy makers and planners this means that the street foods trade can no longer be ignored or swept away. It is time to recognise that, while vendors do pose problems, these need to be addressed positively. The challenge is to reduce the negative problems associated with traditional food processing and trading while leaving intact the constructive contribution this sector makes to the economy.

The need exists to replace the controversy and ambivalence that surrounds street foods with positive actions. Planning with rather than without the preparers, vendors and consumers of street foods means an accommodation of this activity. Focusing on policy planning issues the discussion that follows addresses this subject on three different planning scales:

- (i) the micro-scale, or the scale of the individual vendor's model of operation;
- (ii) the middle level, the city context in which the street vendor practices his/her trade;
- (iii) the macro level, where national development policies define the priority accorded both to this order of economic activity and the issues that surround this type of trade, in particular, food policy and nutrition.

In weighing up policy options cognizance needs to be taken of their gender impact, especially on women. In an economic environment where few opportunities for income generation exist for unskilled women, food processing, preparation and sale is an area where they are not disadvantaged and where they can build on their skills in a productive manner. At the same time any innovations should attempt to prevent the displacement of women by men.

Planning at the Micro scale Assistance to Street Food Entrepreneurs

The post-1970 introduction of basic needs and equity values into the mainstream of development assistance brought with it an impetus for projects aimed at assisting small scale entrepreneurs and those operating at the micro-level, such as street food vendors. The rationale for these actions reflected a view clearly expressed by the World Bank:

... that small scale enterprises play a major role in providing employment and income to the urban poor and that past neglect and policy bias need to be corrected to give small enterprises a fair chance in competition with large firms. (World Bank 1979)

The response for many years has centred on supplying credit. Extensive research had suggested that obtaining capital is a major problem confronting small and micro-entrepreneurs (Fraser 1979; Hill 1982; Liedholm and Chuta 1976; Reno 1981; Sebstad 1982). Traditional sources of capital - moneylenders, rotating credit associations and family - were either too expensive, or were ill suited to meeting the overwhelming need for working capital. Formal banking institutions regarded this sector as outside the purview of their field of operations; the majority of vendors were unable to meet the banks' collateral criteria and the costs of administering a lending programme to micro-entrepreneurs were regarded as prohibitive. Confronting these constraints, indigenous and international development agencies implemented a diversity of credit assistance programmes targeted on the informal sector, a grouping within which street food operators were an undifferentiated component.

Since that time a multiplicity of credit programmes have been introduced utilising varying types of institutional arrangements for the delivery of the capital.- These can broadly be grouped into:

- (i) Specialised credit institutions that give individual loans.
- (ii) Loans to individuals that are guaranteed and administered by community-based PVO organisations, e.g. the National Christian Council of Kenya (NCCCK).
- (iii) Group-based or solidarity loans which are granted to individuals who form part of a group of peers that guarantees the loan, e.g. PRODEME in the Dominican Republic.

Experience has shown that with appropriate design such credit programmes have been able to reach street foodsellers. The EUS programme in San Jose, Costa Rica, with interest rate charges of 21.5% on a declining balance, has in two years granted loans to 83 solidarity groups and 447 members⁶. The recipients were as follows:

- 27% were street vendors
- 35% were owners of very small stores - usually fruit stands, tiny restaurants, etc.
- 34% were owners of micro-industries and services, most frequently shoemakers and seamstresses (Ashe 1985).

Most of the loans disbursed to the female recipients of the small and micro-enterprise assistance programme administered by Euro Action Accord in Port Sudan are home- and market-based processors and sellers of *kisra*, a pancake made of sorghum, which is a staple in the population's diet. Moreover, experience with many credit programmes able to reach this stratum of the self employed has shown that rates of default tend to be low, especially when the loans have short payback periods (Farbman 1981). In its first five months of operation the credit programme funded by EPOC in Manikganj, Bangladesh, upon completion of its street foods project gave out 57 loans totalling US\$2,000. Within this time one third of the loans had been repaid and there had been only one temporary default: that of a fruit vendor-recently divorced from his wife - who used to prepare the food he sold (EPOC 1985).

This supporting evidence aside, many small enterprise assistance programmes also fail to reach street food vendors. The conditions of the loans can lead to the exclusion of 'street' vendors, or the outreach structure of the loan programme is ill suited to reaching the home- based producers, both areas of female economic enterprise in many countries. While both may be administratively costly constraints to overcome, they require a more targeted approach to credit assistance and a clarification of the conceptual underpinnings of many of the projects.

Discussion earlier in the paper took issue with the popular notion of food preparation and sale, especially when it takes place on the street, as a source of employment of last resort. It is also equally clear that the guiding assumption of many of these credit assistance programmes - enterprise expansion, enabling one to cross the divide between informal micro-economic activities into small scale and more formal operations - is often not the primary goal of many street food vendors, especially women. The data collected in the course of the EPOC street foods project found that among vendors able to build up a reserve, the tendency was not to expand the existing enterprise. An examination of formal sector food

⁶Emprendamientos Urbanos con Garantía Solidaria (EUS).

catering establishments in Iloilo indicated that none had 'crossed the gap' from micro-enterprise to small scale firm (Barth and Kuo 1984). Rather the trend was for the street food vendor to invest the surplus either by diversifying into other activities (particularly the sale of non-perishables) or in education for the next generation. Indeed, for an enterprise of this size, levels of supply and demand for their product may be in a delicate balance. Expansion is not necessarily a business objective, since growth may bring with it the need to increase prices to levels outside the purchasing power of many of the vendor's customers.

Access to credit, while possibly not sought for growth reasons, is still needed as working capital and as a buffer against bankruptcy that strikes when household emergencies inevitably force the drawing down of operating capital. At this level of enterprise, household and enterprise finances are frequently inseparable. Thus such loans programmes can be the difference between operating on the margin of economic survival and self sufficiency for the many street food vendors for whom this is their sole source of income - 86% and 56% in the Philippines and Bangladesh respectively - and especially the many women operators who are heads of households - 59% in Senegal. Moreover, social investment in the children's education or health care, the popular alternative uses of such capital by women are without question long term if not as easily measurable developmental benefits (Cohen 1984).

Credit is but one of many constraints confronting street food vendors. Others include: lack of various business and/or technical skills; incomplete knowledge of the market; restrictions and harassment by local authorities; unreliable sources of raw materials; intense competition; illiteracy; and a general lack of information about types of assistance available to small scale entrepreneurs. In addition to the business related barriers, women also encounter problems pertaining to childcare, possible sexual harassment and the laws governing male/female relations (Heyzer 1981; Savara 1981; Singh 1980).

While some needs, such as training in management and book keeping, are general to all micro-enterprises, others including health, hygiene, food safety and technological improvement are specific to those enterprises processing and selling food. Indeed, assistance targeted on these aspects of the trade has shown what can be achieved. Some states in Nigeria have long had programmes that aim to do just this, i.e. upgrade the quality and safety of the preparation of foods sold by the street vendors who sell to schoolchildren. Operating either in or around school premises, these sellers are required to be licensed. To be eligible for such a permit the vendors, nearly all of whom are women, must participate in short training programmes concerned with health, nutrition and hygiene. The project has improved the nutritional quality of the food sold and has afforded the vendors an improved business status. Furthermore, given these women's roles as gatekeepers to the food system in their own homes, it is assumed that the knowledge gained from such a training programme will be applied to food preparation and dietary habits practiced within the household.

Raising levels of productivity and income of the entrepreneurs and the quality of the food sold through the introduction of improved technology and the processing of new foods is often proposed as an area of project assistance. The Nutrition Faculty at the Agricultural University in Bogor convinced bakers of bread and another wheatflour-based product, bakwan, to fortify their products with soy flour. The resulting product, which was much richer in protein, was sold by vendors operating canteens on school property. Both products were readily consumed by the children who perceived no difference between the fortified product and the items made from the traditional recipe. A similar experiment was conducted with krepuk, a high calorie chip made from cassava flour. Acceptance of the product was unquestioned (EPOC 1985).

The introduction of new foods for processing or even new equipment requires us to return to the issue raised initially in the paper, of whether assistance should be targeted specifically on women as opposed to men street food entrepreneurs and if so, how? Although there is considerable overlap in what men and women sell among traditional foods, many of the street foods using new foodstuffs are in the hands of

men. In Ziguinchor lait caille made from powdered milk which is imported is the monopoly of men; the traditional product using fresh milk is undertaken by women (Posner 1983). A similar trend was identifiable in Bogor where both women and men sell rice-based noodle products. By contrast, the preparation and sale of 'new' wheat-based noodle products is exclusively in the hands of men (Chapman 1984). Thus, it would seem that the introduction of new foods tends to be associated with an increased participation of men in the traditional food processing sector and the design of project assistance in this area should take note of this gender distinction. Extending the link between food aid and nutrition programmes to food vendors suggests one potential mechanism for ensuring that women vendors have access to the new imported foods. A project along these lines which involves selling food aid commodities to kiosk sellers in Zaire is now being implemented and a programme in which food aid commodities are sold to vendor organisations has been proposed in Indonesia (ORT 1984).

Urban Planning and Street Food Vendors

The success or failure of a development project depends heavily on its design. However, external variables are crucial determinants. In the case of street foods, most vendors operate in urban environments that are intrinsically hostile. Lack of legal status and a history of harassment and forcible removal from the streets have been more the rule than the exception. But the trade is resilient. Usually, within three or four days of clearing the street~ the vendors return. However, political and administrative hostility creates an economic environment inimical to the improvement in a street food entrepreneur's income regardless of the design of any street food assistance programme. The challenge for city governments is to mitigate problems associated with the street food trade while leaving intact the constructive contribution this sector makes to the urban economy. Since this sector flourishes both in the face of official suppression as well as when the regulatory environment grants it total legitimacy, a strong argument can be made that recognition of the legitimacy of the trade is a first step in this process. Legitimising street foods is a difficult recommendation to implement.

As a first step local governments should allow street food traders in the cities. °While there is a growing pattern of de facto if not de recognition for many street vendors, including many of their cooked foodseller colleagues in many countries, this process is purely ad hoc. For example, the vast majority of hawkers in Kenya continue to operate outside the law; the willingness of the Ministry of Local Government and the Nairobi City Commission to discuss the issue and recommend a revision of the hawker bylaws represents a positive step forward (USAID 1986). Outside Manila, municipal officials in the Philippines take an accommodating view toward street vendors. There is little evidence of the harassment and banishment from the streets than has occurred in the capital. In Lima, the Instituto de Libertad y Democracia is working with government and business towards restructuring the legal system in order to lower the barriers that keep this dominant sector legally outside the economy (de Stoto 1985).

Figure 1

A Policy Paradigm for Hawkers (the policies range from positive to negative going from left to right in the table).

| Policy Actions | A | B | C | D |
|----------------|--|---|--|---|
| Locational | Allow hawkers to sell legally from locations they desire | Allow hawkers to sell legally from some of their locations but remove from others to public markets or approved "sites" | Relocate hawkers in locations chosen by government authorities | Clear hawkers from all locations in city and do not allow them to sell within city |
| Structural | Encourage hawkers by: a) Government loans b) Inducements to enter hawking profession, e.g. no military service if a hawker c) No legal action against hawkers for employing children on stalls d) Allow existing marketing chains to remain e) Make large firms distribute commodities through hawker outlets | Limited encouragement of hawkers by small-scale operation of measures put forward in Column A | Limited discouragement of hawkers by small-scale operation of measures put forward in Column D | Discourage hawkers by: a) High licence fees b) Make hawking punishable by many legal restrictions c) Offer high salaries to hawker enforcement agencies' employees |
| Educational | Encourage hawkers by: a) Typifying them as examples of successful entrepreneurs b) Educating public to utilize services to hawkers c) Encouraging philosophy of education that emphasizes experience as against schooling | Limited encouragement by small-scale operation of measures put forward in Column A | Limited discouragement by small-scale operation of measures put forward in Column D | Discourage hawkers by: a) Emphasizing the immorality of hawking b) Stressing the possibilities of corruption, petty crime that exists in hawking c) Stressing the dangers of hawkers from the point of view of hygiene, etc. |

The discussion that follows draws on the policy paradigm developed by McGee and Yeung (1977) (see Figure 1). Three foci of policy actions, locational, structural and educational, provide the framework for assessing how municipal or local governments have approached and should deal constructively with this sector.

(i) **Locational policy actions.** Moving towards this recognition of the integral role of street vendors in the urban system brings with it other requirements which must be addressed by city government. Among them are locational priorities. The provision of functional space for street food activities is advised by many urban development experts as an alternative to the congestion that plagues so many streets and pavements where street foodsellers conduct their trade (Bromley 1978; McGee and Yeung 1977).

The 1960s and 1970s saw a spate of marketplace construction projects intended to address comparable problems associated with the larger issue of perishable foodstuffs retailing. These projects were, to a large degree, a reflection of that period's development vogue - capital intensive infrastructure investment. Several years later, however, some of these serviced marketplaces are either under-utilised or stand empty, silent witnesses to the misunderstanding by governments as well as international donors of the location and socio-economic dynamics of small scale food distribution systems (Mittendorf 1978). For example, in Cali, Colombia, the new central marketplace was located at a distance well outside the time and income budgets of its users (Bromley 1981) while many vendors in Kingston, Jamaica, prefer to trade in the open area leading up to the entrance to the marketplace in the hope of catching the passing shopper.

Other strategies have been the relocation of vendors to specific sites chosen by government authorities or the provision of designated areas for vendors to 'set up shop' at certain times of the day. Alternatively there has been the experience of Bangladesh and Thailand in which traders can choose from a range of alternative trading sites including designated footpaths, or outside schools or bus stations as well as marketplaces (Cohen 1984). Of ten better matched to the needs of both buyers and sellers, these vending sites may also be provided with sanitary services.

(ii) **Structural policy actions.** The provision of serviced functional space by the municipal government raises with it the basic question of the costs involved in legalising the street food trader's operation. The designation of serviced or even unserviced trading space usually carries with it the imposition of a user tax to be paid by the vendor. The frequent image is that street food vendors pay no taxes and could not afford to do so. This enables them to charge low prices and gives them their competitive edge. Yet, even where vendors pay no or very low licence fees it is clear that other dues are paid, especially bribes to the police. In Iloilo where the rate of payment of licence fees is lowest, many of the sidewalk vendors paid fees instead to an association in return for protection from the police and competing shophouse owners; In Bangladesh similar unofficial fees are also paid; in many instances they constitute unofficial payments to the municipal bureaucracy (Barth 1983; Owens and Hussain 1984). In Egypt, among the vendors who have licences, many still pay bribes against harassment (Loza 1985).

Such levels of fee payment imply an ability on the part of vendors to pay fees and continue to provide low cost foods to their clients. Everywhere the cost of these fees was found to be manageable: in Bangladesh they came to less than half a percent of a vendor's total sales (Owens and Hussain 1984); in both the Philippines and Bangladesh they were estimated to be less than one percent of total costs (Barth 1983; Chapman 1984). Among those that did not pay there was a willingness to pay as long as this brought with it legitimacy of their operation.

The amount of user fees paid by each street vendor is small, the daily market trading tax in Ziguinchor

averages 25CFA francs or US\$0.06. But in the aggregate street food sellers can make a contribution to municipal revenues. Chapman (1984) estimated that in Bogor where 58% of the sample of street food vendors paid some form of tax, total taxes collected by the city government were about \$707,000 per annum. The collection of some official fees from street vendors as opposed to marketplace vendors is a controversial issue. Many urban finance specialists take the view that the volume of revenues that can be collected from ambulatory informal sector firms are outweighed by the costs of collection. Yet there is evidence that would seem to invalidate this argument. In Indonesia mobile vendors pay taxes. This was probably possible because most itinerants have well defined routes as they depend on a regular clientele.

(iii) **Educational policy actions.** Hand in hand with this process of legitimisation of street foods is the need to change attitudes towards street food vendors and among vendors themselves. A 1982 Pan American Health Organisation report on the 'Sanitary Control of Food' proposed several strategies attacking what was perceived as one of the most 'intractable' problems in urban areas in Latin and Central America. Without denying that some street foods are a danger to one's health, e.g. the smoked oyster so in demand in Ziguinchor scored high on measures of contamination; 80% of the cases of food poisoning in Minia, Egypt come from street food consumption; this danger should not be exaggerated. Owens and Hussain (1984) concluded that in Manikganj foods eaten relatively soon after preparation, particularly in winter, are probably safe.

It is clear that this is a problem which can and should be addressed. Earlier mention was made of the Nigerian experience of providing training in health, hygiene and nutrition to street food vendors who sell to schoolchildren. At the level of the consumer health education can be beneficial. A woman teashop owner in Manikganj assiduously cleans her cups with boiling water. Her clients, when questioned, indicated that in spite of her slightly higher prices they preferred her teashop for reasons of cleanliness and the availability of fresh milk⁷. However, even though health education is certainly a necessary step in improving food safety, it is not sufficient. Instruction in food hygiene will have only a limited impact when the recipients lack access to water, sewage disposal and adequate refuse collection. The testing of samples of street foods revealed a direct correlation between access to clean water and the safety of the food sold. This is a connection that many vendors and their customers do recognise.

The interests of vendors, consumers and government are all served by ensuring that street foods are protected against contamination. In many countries there are regulations which result in street foods being covered by a piece of plastic, a mat or a glass case as protection against dust, flies and exhaust fumes. The benefits of covering the food notwithstanding, this regulation has negative implications when it comes to packaging. Traditionally street foods have been wrapped in banana leaves or other natural fibres. Many of the wrappers have been grown in the wild and as one Nigerian has pointed out, demand is beginning to outstrip supply. The shortage of natural packing materials, together with the vendor's continual need to economise, has also led to an increasing use of recycled packaging. Unfortunately the vendor's inability to evaluate this packaging can lead to harmful results; for example, the child who became ill after eating fried bananas wrapped in a piece of cardboard from a DDT canister. With the increasing availability of plastic bags and in the desire to be 'more modern', vendors are using these bags for their food. However, a plastic bag acts as an incubator, magnifying the potential for contamination as well as changing the taste of the food.

⁷Interviewers in Manikganj were asked to rate vendors at the point of sale on a 5-point scale from very clean to very dirty. It is interesting to note that no vendors were rated very dirty and only 2.5% were at all rated on the dirty side. By contrast, 21% were rated as very clean and 61% as clean.

Policy Implementation by Municipal Government

Responsibility for the street food trade in most countries, including those encompassed by EPOC's street food project, has tended to be fragmented. For example, regulation and licensing of vendors usually falls within the orbit of the police department; health and sanitation control is the responsibility of the health department; obstruction to traffic flows concerns the department of transport; and the provision and maintenance of marketplaces falls under public works. In some countries many of the responsibilities for certain of these activities are also controlled by central government, adding another layer to the complex pattern. To take a concrete example, while the street food vendor in Manikganj pays his or her licence fees to the municipality, the levels of these fees are assessed by the Food Department of the central government (Owens and Hussain 1984).

Under such circumstances the street food trade, like much of the informal sector, is not the primary interest of any single department of municipal and central governments, but rather is of marginal concern to many. City policymakers, planners and regulators have allowed the street food trade 'to fall between the cracks'. Inevitably this creates confusion both in terms of government policy towards vendors and for vendors attempting to conform with the many regulations. Illustrating this point quite clearly is the experience of street food vendors in Iloilo City. They are required to have a permit from the Bureau of Internal Revenue, sanitary and health permits as well as being registered with the city to operate on the government-owned marketplace. Not surprisingly, very few of the respondents were even able to describe the actual number of licenses and permits they were required to have, and many street foodsellers had to hire people to obtain these items for them (Barth 1983).

Against this background, a first step in successfully planning for the integration of street food vendors into the urban economy would seem to be the introduction of a coordinating mechanism at the level of city government. Without it, the implementation of any legislation not only remains very difficult, but makes it easy for city officials to justify any actions aimed at removing street vendors from the streets. Yet, advocating this type of administrative reform for dealing with street vendors is done with the clear understanding that in most developing countries successful coordination is the exception not the rule. In the past, the limited tax base of many developing country urban governments has meant that operating costs for new programmes have been borne by central government and outside resources. Moreover, these allocations are often disbursed sectorally so that the funds move directly from central ministries to their provincial and urban counterparts. As a result, they reflect national priorities rather than city needs, a point of frequent conflict (Cohen 1984).

However, a coordinated and constructive approach to street food vendors calls for not only planning for street food vendors, but also planning with street food vendors. The emergence of vendor associations should be integral to this process. Just as it is difficult to deliver credit and other assistance to a sector composed of a multiplicity of independent and atomised units of production, so too is it difficult for government to deal with this sector unless it is organised.

A primary role of a vendor association should be to provide an institutional base for communication between government and the vendors. Certainly it is more difficult for governments to harass and ignore organised vendors' demands. Yet the presence of associations that can perform these functions does not alone ensure that the city government will take a constructive approach to the street trade. While the Sidewalk Vendors' Association in Iloilo City has a president who represents their interests to the mayor, over the past ten years the association has not been able to prevent crackdowns by the police in which vendors have been arrested and their carts confiscated (Barth 1983). Similarly, hawkers' associations in Manikganj have not been effective in persuading government officials to make vending at bus stands legal (Owens and Hussain 1984).

Vendors' associations' responsibilities should not be limited to only an advocacy role. They should also meet some of the needs of their members, providing services that both the government and private sector either find themselves incapable of implementing or judging them to be not cost effective to deliver. Self regulation in terms of policing the pavements where their members trade has been an important role for the Iloilo City Sidewalk Vendors' Association (Barth 1983). Two of the vendors' associations in Manikganj collect dues from and give loans to members, a third is saving money to buy a bus which it will run as a joint business for the profit of its organisation (Owens and Hussain 1984). In addition, by providing these varied and vital services for their members, these associations can also lend legitimacy to their clients' grievances.

The emergence of vendor associations should obviously go hand in hand with a coordinated and constructive approach by government to deal with the street food trade. Unfortunately in no country that EPOC has worked are there signs of this process already in motion. Even where the government appears to take a sympathetic view towards the street trade, such as in Manikganj or Ziguinchor, the level of tolerance is often weak at best. Given that the street food trade is a too persistent and pervasive phenomenon to be ignored a more creative approach to managing and encouraging the street foods trade should be found.

National Planning and the Street Food Trade

National policies and biases are important. They define the broad parameters in which the city governments operate, in particular the allocation of investment capital and operating funds, as well as the sectoral priorities of development programming. Just as responsibility for the processing, consumption or sale of street foods within city government falls between the cracks, so do these policy biases not fall into any clearly definable category. Discussion of this sector by national governments has tended to be subsumed under the rubric of the informal sector. Yet, as shown in this paper, sectoral disaggregation of the informal sector enables light to be shed on the role of street foods and its contribution to the economy. The paper shows that street foods can no longer be ignored in formulating national food policy, even though in the past they have either gone unrecognised or dismissed as marginal to the diet and unsanitary.

The low esteem in which the informal sector is held in general and the street food trade in particular pervades the political spectrum. At one end of the scale are those who judge the informal sector to be 'unmodern'. They contend that modernisation will bring with it the demise of informal sector activities and therefore there is no need to support it. At the other end there are those who view the informal sector in general, and petty commodity producers in particular, as an undesirable consequence of capitalism and thus any assistance to the street food sector can be no more than palliative, unless it is accompanied by changes in the underlying structure of the economy⁸.

Not far beneath the surface of this rhetoric is the reality of a street food sector which is thriving in cities of both developed and developing countries. Since street food vending is an entrenched feature of the urban landscape, a more constructive approach would seem appropriate, one that sees street foods not as a relic from the past, but as a complementary, not competitive, element in the urban food system (Lam 1982).

⁸For a more detailed discussion of the alternative planning experiences of central governments, see Cohen (1983).

Mention has already been made of how city government can address this issue and of what project assistance might be given to support the sector. Reflecting past experience we find that the emphasis has been on the operating realities of the micro-entrepreneur, producer and seller alike. Much less consideration has been given to the 'product' which is manufactured or sold, and its viability as a basis on which to build a business. With the data on street foods indicating that demand for these goods will persist as incomes rise in many developing countries, it is appropriate to go beyond the entrepreneurship - and employment - issues and to assess the relevance of street foods to the formulation of the policy priorities in terms of food security and nutrition.

Drought, world recession, and population growth, together with declining food production and consumption prospects in a number of countries over the last decade have led to a policy emphasis on achieving food security through increasing domestic production of food. Increasing domestic production is not only intended to feed an expanding population, but is also aimed at reducing the adverse balance of payments impact of food imports. This has also meant encouraging a lessening dependence by low income countries on international food aid which has become an integral part of their long term food supply system (Jackson and Eade 1983).

Recently there has been an emphasis on increasing production within traditional small farmer marketing systems. Actions are being advocated that will provide production incentives for small farmers, while also improving the informal and formal distributive infrastructure for food. Reflecting the primary rural concerns of many of these projects, however, the approach largely ignores the nature of demand for this food. In most instances, demand for produce is assumed as a given. It is formulated largely using oversimplified measures such as 'tonnages' and 'calories'.

The complexity of urban and rural consumption and distribution patterns are lost from view (Lele 1982). In turn, this would seem to raise the question of whether this urban demand is being effectively transmitted to rural producers.

Conventional wisdom - has it that urban consumers prefer imported grains such as rice or wheat. Local cereals are perceived as 'inferior' goods and much more inconvenient to prepare, an idea that has long had support from government as well as the private industrial food processing sector (Kaplinsky 1979)⁹. While many street foods are made from locally grown staples which in some instances are those the government is trying to promote, imports have led to the introduction of new processed food into the trade. Reflecting this trend, some governments and donor agencies have begun to turn their attention to improving the quality, convenience and palatability of domestic grains. Designed by Western trained food processing and technology experts, these initiatives focus attention on the feasibility of establishing modern plants to manufacture these traditional staples. The millet transformation project in Senegal is a case in

point. Another means to the same ends - and thus far largely overlooked - is the fuller utilisation of the already existing networks for preparing local grains and other staples, i.e. the street food sector.

In transforming local output, the street food trade is an unseen link between producers and consumers. It

⁹Kaplinsky (1979) in a comparison of unit nutrient costs of different breakfast cereals eaten in Kenya found a 90:1 price differential between the cheapest traditional staple (maize flour, 100% extraction) and an imported breakfast cereal (Special K). This was further exaggerated by the superior nutritional content of the traditional staple.

is estimated that the street food sellers in Ziguinchor process over 3 tons of millet weekly during the peak season. This economic activity also generates value added as well as income in rural and urban areas. At the same time it creates jobs in numbers far greater than those created in its formal sector industrial counterpart. In Senegal it has been estimated that the traditional food processing sector employs 40,000-50,000 people while employment in the agribusiness industrial food processing sectors equalled only about 6,800 in 1979 (Bricas, Treillon and Muchnik 1984). Thus the street foods sector meets a criterion of all food policies and programmes: improving food consumption by expanding the productive employment and income of men and women who at present lack the purchasing power to obtain adequate food (USAID 1982).

Going one step further, street foods would seem to have a role to play in stemming malnutrition. Yet among the traditional responses to this problem, programmes for the provision of fortified foods - weaning foods, school feeding and maternal and child health - there is rarely, if ever, a mention of street foods. The evidence presented would seem to argue that this oversight should be corrected. It is time to raise the nutritional ratings accorded to street foods. Street foods are not marginal. Rather they are integral to the diet of their consumers, children and adults alike. Moreover, whether measured in terms of the amount consumed, expenditure incurred or their nutritional value, most street foods were found to make a positive contribution to diet. For example, in Bogor it is possible to obtain more than half the recommended daily allowance of protein, iron, vitamin A and vitamin C from a rice-based meal costing 300 rupiah.

Raising the nutritional ratings of street food will only occur if questions on these foods are included in household nutrition surveys. It is clear from the example below that this omission can lead to biased results. A 1978 survey undertaken by the Food and Nutrition Institute indicated that in Visayas, the region of Iloilo, the amount of fats and oils consumed met only 28% of the recommended daily allowance. Street food establishments in Iloilo use cooking oil and fats in the preparation of many meal and snack items. Since the nutrition survey failed to include street foods, it can be induced that the average diet may be more balanced than had been assumed. This explanation would seem well supported by the observation that for the frying of food the comparative cost advantage lies with the vendor rather than the household.

The provision of food aid for maternal-child health and school and institutional feeding programmes is inseparable from nutrition policy. A diversity of methods have been attempted, among them the distribution of ready-to-eat commodities, the establishment of communal kitchens and the operation of canteen feeding facilities in schools. Among the impediments to the success of these initiatives have been weaknesses in their delivery systems or the inappropriateness of the new foods being recommended. In the Philippines, attempts were made to put additives into school lunches with the intention of improving the nutritional quality of the food. Among the effects was an increase in the price of the food at times placing it outside the budgets of the consumers.

An alternative approach might be to use existing institutions well suited to the delivery of low cost food to much of the population. Mention has already been made of the Nigerian training programmes whose objectives are to improve the quality of street foods sold to schoolchildren. Such a programme has the added advantage of introducing standards of food preparation and safety to segments of the population that are otherwise difficult to reach (Berg 1981; PAHO 1982). The communal kitchen programme in Peru also meets similar criteria and suggests a nutritional mechanism for reaching an even larger sector of the population (Sara-Lafosse 1984).

IV. Conclusion

The pervasiveness of the street foods sector, its employment, income and nutritional potential, makes it imperative for policy makers to plan for its orderly development. Viewed creatively, the street food sector can enlarge the programming options available for dealing with numerous sectoral concerns. A first priority might be to shift perceptions of this sector from that of a problem to that of a vital segment of the urban economy. At the city level, actions addressing vendors need to be coordinated. Resource constraints may preclude immediate ambitious improvements but several key issues could be acted upon promptly, including the designation of serviced trading spaces and the introduction of realistic regulations.

At the level of the street food trader, both the processor and vendor, the biggest constraint to any assistance focused on the entrepreneur may be the atomisation of the unit of production. Yet the sheer numbers involved, and the importance to the urban economy, can offset the weaknesses associated with the small size of the individual unit. Access to credit can be seen not only as a problem solving mechanism, but also as a tool to meet other objectives such as a basis for developing collective action among a segment of the economic community that is largely without political power. Such collective action has been effective in bringing about beneficial changes from the bottom up, for the city and the traders.

Many street food vendors are women and many of these women are heads of households. In some cities this is the dominant activity for women, akin in economic importance to subsistence agriculture for rural households. It requires skills that many women already have, minimal capital outlays, and trading in street foods allows for an accommodation of women's other responsibilities as reproducers and managers (Moser 1985). Recognition of the importance of this activity for women suggests that gender aware actions might be advantageous. Avoiding the displacement of women with the introduction of new technologies and food seems a recurrent need, while working through nutrition and hygiene programmes would seem to provide another natural area for reaching women food processors. Otherwise an integrated approach that recognises the role of both men and women is advocated. Thus, the conditionality of a loan should reflect both sexes' access to resources.

Street foods are too persistent a phenomenon to be ignored. Viewed from the perspective of the developing country's urban economy, their significance both as consumption goods and as a basis for income generation is probably equal to other traditionally provided goods and services. Unfortunately, government officials have at times approached this sector unconstructively, dictated more by the principles of crisis management than urban planning. In the absence of mechanisms that consistently commit funds to the needs and services of the urban poor, this situation seems likely to persist. At the same time, it is an area of policy and action where substantial gain can almost surely flow from rather low cost measures.

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