

MEXICO

MANAGING INFORMAL STREET TRADERS IN MEXICO CITY

Reorganising Mexico City's 100,000 street traders was among the priorities of the first democratically elected city government (1998-2000). A new programme developed under this government focused on managing street traders through administrative changes at local level, citizen participation, constructing good relations between public officials and street traders, and resolving congestion in some specific zones.

The Programme to Reorganise Street Vendors (PRCVP), implemented between 1998 and 2000, was part of the Mexico City government's objective of improving urban administration, promoting sustainable development and citizen participation, and reducing corruption. With a modest budget, the centrally coordinated programme trained small teams of selected officials who then formed a parallel administrative structure within the existing departments responsible for street vendors in the 16 municipalities of the city. This new layer of public officials were given exclusive responsibility for granting permission (licenses) to traders to use public spaces in order to carry out their work. The previous practice of permission being granted through the street trader's organisations was discontinued and new criteria came into operation, whereby applications were only considered on an individual basis. The setting up of new computerised registration procedures and coordination with the municipal Finance Departments that receive the permit charges were essential for this task. The individually granted licenses enabled the authorities to implement new regulations with regards to the size, location, type and condition of street traders' stalls, and also to set up meetings between stallholders and other users of public spaces with the aim of resolving conflicts in specific zones.

The programme personnel worked in coordination with the Social Development departments in the municipalities to set up short training programmes for vendors of prepared foods (who make up a third of total street vendors). The new officials, often in coordination with the permanently employed ones, were on the streets daily to publicise and enforce the programme, paying special attention public to safety (eg ensuring that gas tanks used for cooking

complied with the safety valve and capacity regulations, and confiscating equipment when vendors persistently refused to comply).

The officials also regulate the obstruction of entrances of buildings, residences and stops, roads, pavements and parks. These cases usually involve a third party (such as schools, hospitals or transport authorities, or neighbourhood groups). Usually the vendors were located away from the immediate point of obstruction and obliged to meet regulations on the size and type of stall. Sometimes they modified their working hours to accommodate other users and were obliged to remove their stall from the sidewalk while not working in the afternoons or at night. In other cases, an agreement could not be reached and forced evictions occurred. The programme officers are also responsible for removing unused stalls, which are quite common in the large concentrations of vendors outside stops or along highways. This apparently simple measure can be complicated due to the concentration of stalls in the hands of a few owners, who leave stalls abandoned when it is not convenient to occupy them. These owners do have the right to prevent their removal if the correct legal procedures are not rigorously followed by the authorities.

These measures have led to some significant changes in the relation between street traders, the public and the local authorities. Many traders are glad to shake off a difficult relationship with street trader organisations that do not offer them any real protection, and are looking to regularise their situation with the authorities. In some cases, traders receive information on a range of new benefits, such as education grants for their children, through the programme officials on their daily rounds, with whom they have built a courteous relationship.

In other cases, particularly the very large concentrations of traders, the programme has not met with such success. This is due to several factors: they require larger reorganisation projects, which in turn require more resources for their implementation. They are often the areas most penetrated by corrupt practices, or where the street traders organizations have a firmer hold over the sellers. However, the overall result of the programme has been improved regulation of street traders by developing a closer working relationship between them and municipal officials.



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