

Policy but no Practice

Women fish vendors of India's Tuticorin District take to the streets demanding the implementation of a national policy on urban street vendors

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On 20th January 2009, over one thousand women headload fish vendors from Tuticorin city and nearby villages in the coastal state of Tamil Nadu in south India, staged a demonstration demanding that the National Policy for Urban Street Vendors be implemented in the state of Tamil Nadu.

The National Policy for Urban Street Vendors, launched on 20 January 2004 by the Government of India, emphasizes the need to: "Provide and promote a supportive environment for earning

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Women fish vendors at a demonstration in Tuticorin, Tamil Nadu, India

livelihoods to the street vendors, as well as ensure absence of congestion and maintenance of hygiene in public spaces and streets," and "to make street vendors a special component of the urban development/zoning plans by treating them as an integral and legitimate part of the urban distribution system".

Drawing attention to this policy, the petition, addressed to the District Mayor, the District

Collector and the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu included the following demands:

- The national policy on street vendors should immediately be implemented in Tamil Nadu;
- Women fish vendors should be provided with identity cards;
- Fisherwomen should be provided with bank loans and access to credit facilities;
- Basic facilities such as hygienic spaces and conditions for procuring, preserving, storing, processing, and selling of fish, clean toilets and access to clean running water, need to be provided in proper, well-designed and conveniently located markets;
- Spaces need to be clearly allocated for women fish vendors, eliminating all forms of discrimination against them and securing their safety against sexual abuse;
- Women fish vendors should have access to reliable and inexpensive public transportation in order to carry their products to market areas;
- Appropriate shelters at harbours should be provided to ensure security and safety of women who are otherwise prone to being violated sexually in the hostile environments of harbours during the night.
- Facilities for drinking water, toilets and crèches should be provided. This would contribute to hygienic fish handling and processing, while ensuring that basic needs of women are met in a dignified manner;
- The government should immediately release ice boxes to headload vendors affected by the tsunami, as agreed immediately after the tsunami of December 2004;
- Fish, a valuable source of nutrition, should be served as part of government-run noon meal schemes. ❏