

Akbar Ali (Street Vendor)

The government initiated a street vendors' facilitation project under the Ehsaas program. PIDE conducted a preliminary survey in G-11 Markaz for this project to assess the existing situation and implement actions accordingly. The pilot project involved provision of standardized vending cards and licenses to the vendors. The vending space could not be agreed upon during the stakeholder's engagement (discussions with the trade union of G-11) due to which these vendors were allocated new spaces near the main Markaz. This interview is a feedback on the said initiative and an account on how the situation of street vendors can improve further.

Q No. 1. How has the government facilitated street vendors at your location (G-11) under its pilot project of Ehsaas Street Hawkers' Initiative? How satisfied are you?

Initially, students from PIDE came to survey our location and asked for our data. We were very afraid to share our information, but they convinced us that this information will be confidential and only be used for our wellbeing. Mr Zia Banday was in regular contact with us and paid regular visits, which gave us hopes of a good time. After few days of the survey, Adviser to Prime Minister Sania Nishtar came to G11. She listened to our concerns and promised to address those and facilitate street vendors in every way possible.

We have received a three-day training workshop at the office of MCI on food safety. We have learned how to handle food in a hygienic way. This training has given a very positive impression to our customers.

Around sixty-two vendors at this



location have received design carts from Ehsaas Program. We have been moved from our original place but to a good location near the main road adjacent to the footpath. Every vendor is allocated a specific place ranging between 4 to 6 feet, depending on their need. For poor people like us, this new initiative is a blessing. We are extremely happy and praying for all those who helped us.

Q No. 2. Has the relocation of vending space increased your sales?

The allotted place to street vendors is near the main road, which has rendered the stalls accessible to anyone who comes by. People park their car in front of the specific stall they want to buy from. We take the order and deliver it in few minutes. Doing business has become easy and our customers are very happy with this initiative. Some vendors have reported a slight decline in their footfall since they have moved from their original place where they were stationed for years. But word is getting around and the old customers are now aware of the new stations.

Q No. 3. Are you satisfied with the functionality of the new carts? Can you store your vending stuff inside?

Our carts are designed in a very sophisticated way. It stores all our

vending stuff inside. We can lock them from outside, and without any worries, we can go to our home. There are two small solar panels on the top of the carts, which are used in charging our mobile phones and lighting our cart at the night. It has reduced our dependency on the shopkeepers for electricity (and ultimately reduced our contribution to the bill, which was the case earlier). The carts are mobile and have four wheels, but we have fixed them in one location.

Q No. 4. Do you have the facilities of electricity, drinking water and washroom?

The solar panels are not sufficient to fulfill our electricity needs, especially the vendors with juice stalls. We need more electricity at night because the footfall is high in the evening and night. The stalls remain opened till 12 at night and even beyond for some. We have an arrangement with the market committee. They provide us electricity and we are charged a certain amount, which is still higher.

The washroom facilities are promised by MCI and Ehsaas Program. They have assured that they will provide a proper washroom for the vendors. As for clean water, we still don't have this facility. We need this facility direly here because majority stalls are selling food items, and clean water is required to sell hygienic foods. We have decided to collect money and arrange for a clean water facility.

Q No. 5. Do you have a security guard and cleaning staff at the vending site?

We have hired a security guard whom we are collectively paying. Each vendor contributes 50 rupees per night. Early morning, the CDA's staff comes to our location and cleans it before our arrival.

Q No. 6. How is the behavior of CDA now? Are they facilitating you?

The behavior of CDA has transformed now. They have transited from a very inhumane attitude to a respectful and dignified one. Before this initiative, they would abuse and treat us like criminals. Now, they address us with our names, and in general, as a person. They buy food from us and have a chat with us. For a poor person like me and my other colleagues, this respect is above everything. We are extremely thankful of the students of PIDE, Sir Zia Banday, Madam Syed Shafaq, and Madam Sania Nishtar. They have given us a respectful life.

Q No. 7. Have you received your vending license? Can you work in peace now?

We have received our vending license from the office of MCI. We can work in a peaceful environment. I give time

to my family. In the past five years, I haven't spent time with my family. Every morning, my kids would go to school and I would come to my vending location with a worry that CDA would come and evict me from my station. Sometimes they did, sometimes they did not. But the uncertainty was taking a huge toll. At midnight, when went back to my home, my kids were already asleep. Now, I have breakfast with my family and take my children to school every morning. At 2 PM, I bring them back to home from school and we have lunch together. Only then I return to my vending place. All this has changed because now I know I would not have to work extra to set off the eviction loss. There is certainty in my routine and my life. I feel happy; with this one initiative, my family is happy and living a peaceful life.

Q No. 9. What do you demand from the government?

Being a member of Ehsaas Rehriban Association, G11, firstly, I thank the current government for listening to our concerns. Then, I demand to facilitate us with drinking water facilities, washroom facilities and direct electricity connections, because the market committee and shopkeepers are selling us electricity at a very expensive rate.

Q No. 10. Is there any established vender's union to spread your voice and unite for your rights?

Yes. With the help of Mr. Zia Bandey, we have established a street vendors union at G11. I am one of its pioneer members. Although not all vendors have joined this union now, we are very positive every vendor will join it over time. Collectively, we will work for our rights.

BOOK REVIEWS

