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# Street Food Policy in a Growing Economy: A Case Study of Street Food Vendors in Hanoi's Old Quarter

Alexandra J. Pill  
*SIT Study Abroad*

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# STREET FOOD POLICY IN A GROWING ECONOMY:

A CASE STUDY OF STREET FOOD VENDORS IN HANOI'S OLD QUARTER

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Alexandra J. Pill

World Learning

School for International Training

Vietnam: Culture, Development, and Social Change

Fall 2011

**ABSTRACT:**

Street food vending is a global phenomenon present in both the developed and developing worlds and it is increasingly evident as countries continue to modernize, urbanize, and globalize. Street food policy is interdisciplinary in nature, incorporating economic, social, cultural, and health dimensions in order to account for urban planning, food safety, and tourism development. In Vietnam, street food is rampant, and in particular, in Hanoi's Old Quarter, street food vendors can be spotted on every street at all times of the day.

This study explores the role of street food vendors in Hanoi's Old Quarter from the vendor's perspective. Complementing this ethnographic approach, research further explores the ways current governmental policy and regulation impacts street food vendors in Hanoi, Vietnam. Through participant observation and semi-structured interviews with ten street food vendors and six policymakers and researchers involved in street food safety and street vending policy, this research examines the current policy affecting street food vendors in Hanoi's Old Quarter. This research aims to contextualize the street vending debate in Hanoi's Old Quarter and explore the ways street vending policy can positively impact street vendors while maintaining the flexibility to adapt to the rapidly developing market economy.

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## INTRODUCTION:

Along the 36 streets of Hanoi's Old Quarter resides a vast social, economic, and cultural life. Within the remarkable variety of commerce and social interaction lies the omnipresent existence of street vendors<sup>1</sup> in Hanoi's Old Quarter. This study explores the role of street food vendors in Hanoi's Old Quarter from the perspective of ten street food vendors' voices. Complementing this ethnographic approach, research further explores the ways current governmental policy and regulation impacts street food vendors in Hanoi, Vietnam.

In 1986, the Vietnam's Communist Party implemented a set of social and economic reforms known as *Doi Moi*, or 'Renovation', shifting from a state-directed, planned economy to a market-based economy with a Socialist orientation. Since *Doi Moi*, Vietnam has experienced rapid economic growth, bringing the country to the forefront of international investment and trade interest in the global market economy. While becoming a player in the global economy, internal migration and the informal workforce have naturally increased. Today, the informal sector represents approximately a quarter of the total jobs in Vietnam (Cling et al 2010).

Although the informal sector is incredibly diverse, street vending is the most visible occupation accounting for approximately 11 percent of total informal employment in Vietnam and about 26 percent of the total informal employment in Hanoi (WEIGO 2011). Street vendors usually enter the informal sector because they lack the skills and education to enter the formal workforce and therefore they are left with no other choice. Street vendors are both mobile and stationary; work part-time, seasonally, and full-time; and, offer a variety of services and goods including, but not limited to, shoe shining, fresh produce, and prepared, ready-to-eat foods.

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<sup>1</sup> Street vendors are both stationary and mobile and work in public areas. Refer to the "Methodology: Definitions" section of this paper for the definitions of *street food vendors* and *street food* used in this study.

Due to street food's central role in Vietnam's culture and economy, it is of particular interest to Hanoi city administration and health officials. Furthermore, additional interest is placed on Hanoi's historic Old Quarter due to its tourism appeal and "high pedestrian and vehicular congestion," resulting in greater agglomerations of people, businesses, and traffic (Bromley 2000:16). Coupled with the current discussions regarding the management, regulation, and promotion of street food vending, is the historic significance of street food as a cultural identity and linkage between social groups; this debate represents the crux of social, cultural, health, and economic policy, thus providing for an interesting, yet controversial, field of study.

This study examines the perceptions of street food vendors in light of the current and planned regulatory policies regarding authorized vending areas, vendor licensing, and sanitation and food safety standards. Ten street food vendors in Hanoi's Old Quarter were interviewed and six semi-structured interviews were held with various policymakers and researchers in Hanoi. The study's findings help to expose the need for balance between vendor autonomy and government regulation and aim to answer the following research questions:

1. What is life like for street food vendors in Hanoi's Old Quarter?
2. To what extent do policymakers and street vendors agree and disagree on their role in the Vietnamese society, and how might Vietnam best approach future policy to regulate street food while maintaining economic prosperity and culture?

In order to address these questions, the study incorporates the current debate regarding street vending policy and regulation – the extent to which street vendors should be regulated – and further contextualizes this debate through a case study of street food vendors in Hanoi's Old Quarter. Through ten short vignettes, vendors share their experiences, opinions, and stories. By incorporating vendor experiences and opinions within the current street vending and food safety

policies, this research aims to understand the role of street food vendors in Hanoi's economy and culture.

## **BACKGROUND:**

### **UNDERSTANDING THE PLAYING FIELD: A GLIMPSE INTO THE STREET VENDING DEBATE**

Due to its role in culture and economy, street food vending exposes a deep, historic, and convoluted debate. On one hand, vendors contribute to economic activity, symbolize a city's cultural and social identity, and demonstrate grass-roots entrepreneurship. On the other hand, street vendors work in contested public space, challenge urban governance and pose public health concerns, and according to some, create an image of poverty and underdevelopment. The current debate centers on the formalization and acknowledgement of street vending in the global economy. It is important to note that there are many arguments for and against street vending; however, the following section will focus on the arguments aforementioned. The variety of approaches for regulating, mandating, and promoting street vending reflect an array of political, economic, social, and cultural motivations.

### **Arguments in Support of Street Vendors**

#### Benefits of Street-Vended Foods

- a source of inexpensive, convenient and often nutritious food for urban and rural poor;
- a source of attractive and varied food for tourists and the economically advantaged;
- a major source of income for a vast number of persons, particularly women; and
- a chance for self-employment and the opportunity to develop business skills with low capital investment

Source: World Health Organization. 1996. *Essential Safety Requirements for Street-Vended Foods (revised edition)*

As a contributor to economic activity, the provision of goods and services, and a linkage between social groups, street vendors are integral to the economy. Additionally, street vendors provide a key role in preserving culture, traditional society, and localizing commerce. Street



vendors fill a niche that supermarkets and other more traditional markets cannot fulfill because by their very nature, street vendors are mobile and small-scale. Furthermore, street vendors are convenient and flexible, working at all hours and selling a variety of affordable goods. Street vendors provide a dependable source of cheap goods, including foods, to their customers, which are often the urban poor (Bhowmik 2005).

In addition to providing a service to urban populations, street vending also promotes and preserves a culturally authentic identity for a city. Many tourists view street vendors as part of the “authentic experience” and an image of traditional society (WIEGO 2011). For example, in Vietnam, street vendors often represent a traditional rural culture by wearing conical hats and carrying baskets suspended by a bamboo shoulder-pole. Although this dress may be intentional and subject to stereotypes, the image in itself is unique to Vietnam’s history and heritage. Street vendors are commonly viewed as the life of the street and provide a unique atmosphere that positively influences the tourism appeal (Bromley 2000).

As an easy entry point into the economy, street vending provides a large portion of the informal and rural labor force a source for supplemental income. Through street vending, workers can respond to seasonal and temporal employment demands, and therefore maintain occupational flexibility and spontaneity. Many vendors rely on street vending to support their families and make ends meet. Furthermore, by requiring low capital to enter the informal market, street vending allows the poor working class to create their own jobs; in this way, street vending provides a “social safety-net” for the poor, unskilled, and uneducated population (Bromley 2000). Street vending provides vendors the chance to learn entrepreneurial skills and promote themselves in an economy that does not provide them training or other necessary skills

to boost their status and bring them into the formal economy; street vending “is a vital bottom rung in the ladder to upward economic mobility” (Bromley 2000:5).

### **Arguments Against Street Vendors**

Public space is constantly contested in the street vending debate (Drummond 2000). Since street vending sites are usually viewed as ‘pseudo-public’ space, in which vendors manage a private vending unit in a public vending area, the argument tends to focus on taxation and urban space use. Furthermore, street vendors tend to cluster in similar areas in response to customer demand; these agglomerations represent “conflict zones” for city planning regulations and land use controls and plans (Bromley 2000). Moreover, vendors and their customers may also contribute to overall city congestion, traffic, and pollution (Bromley 2000).

Components of urban governance and street vending policy primarily focus on regulating vendors, establishing authorized vending zones, and creating monitoring systems to track, manage, and control or inspect vendors. City and health officials must work together to insure that food safety, hygiene, and sanitation standards are met; “in theory, food safety laws of a general nature extend to street food, but because of the special nature of street food activities [...] more specific and targeted provisions are generally required” (Jayasuriya 1994:223). The following table raises several public health concerns for street foods:

<u>Street-vended foods may pose significant public health problems</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Lack of basic infrastructure and services, such as potable water supplies.</li> <li>· Difficulty in controlling the large numbers of street food vending operations because of their diversity, mobility and temporary nature.</li> <li>· Insufficient resources for inspection and laboratory analysis.</li> <li>· General lack of factual knowledge about the microbiological status or the precise epidemiological significance of many street-vended foods.</li> <li>· Poor knowledge of street vendors in basic food safety measures.</li> <li>· Inadequate public awareness of hazards posed by certain street foods.</li> </ul>
<p>Source: World Health Organization. 1996. <i>Essential Safety Requirements for Street-Vended Foods (revised edition)</i></p>

Health officials are not only worried with street food's exposure to pollutants and possible contaminants, but they are also concerned with the hygiene and food safety practices and knowledge of the street vendors for preparation and handling. In addition to health concerns, city officials also scrutinize street vendors for unfair competition in the economy since the majority of vendors do not pay business taxes, record transactions, or legally rent vending space.

Due to urban development's market oriented principles, cities are often challenged to determine whether or not street vending can exist in a modern economy (Cross 2000). Cities must determine how best to balance the image of being developed and globalized with the traditional ideals that street vending might portray. For those with the assumption that street vendors are a negative force in a city, street vendors are often seen as an image of poverty and underdevelopment (Bromley 2000). In other words, "[t]he proliferation of street vendors is seen as dysfunctional to the economy as a whole," and thus further demotes street vendors in a growing and modernizing economy (Bromley 2000:10; Cross 2000).

### **STREET VENDING IN ASIA**

Street vending is a global phenomenon present in both the developed and developing worlds, and as countries continue to modernize, urbanize, and globalize, street vending continues to expand throughout urban areas. Following the 1998 financial crisis in Asia, the number of street vendors increased dramatically (Bhowmik 2005). In Asia today, street vending is present in almost every city and it is estimated that street vendors make up 10-15 percent<sup>2</sup> of the total non-agricultural workforce in Asia (WIEGO 2011). "A veritable sponge that can absorb large numbers of surplus labor," street vending continues to increase as economic development pushes cities to become urbanized powerhouses (Nirathron 2006:3).

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that since street vendors represent a mixture of permanent and temporary workers, statistics are often misrepresented because street vendors do not have a single 'place of work' and many of them are migrants that split their time between the city and their hometown.

Although most countries in Asia have varying degrees of policy and regulation regarding the informality and formality of street vending, many follow similar models of regulation, management, and implementation of street vending policy. Dr. Sharit K. Bhowmik's (2005) *Street Vendors in Asia: A Review* explores the differences and similarities between country policies and management of street vendors while assessing the overall vending population and the extent to which governments must reform and enhance their response to street vending policy. Dr. Bhowmik explains that "in almost all Asian countries, street vendors have no legal status to conduct their business and they are constantly harassed by the authorities" (2005:2256). Given this reality, "street vendors in most Asian countries live a precarious existence as they face the constant threat of eviction and destruction of their property" (Bhowmik 2005:2263).

Although some countries have put forth policies and protection measures for street vendors, successful implementation of such policies tests the true strength of a government's ability to serve the underrepresented. Bhowmik (2005) argues that the first step for governments is to remove any sense of indifference toward the informal sector; governments should then prioritize and develop support measures to sustain the continually growing informal workforce. Legislation and policy affecting street vendors in Asia tends to follow several modular paths that incorporate city planning, tourism development, transportation routes, urban expansion, and food safety and hygiene. As evident in Asia's successes and failures in implementing street vending policies, in order to be effective, such policies must be interdisciplinary in both theory and practice; in other words, policy must not only be evident on paper but also on the street.

In order to regulate street vendors, countries must first develop registration and licensing programs. In addition to tracking vendors, licensing provides the opportunity to offer vendors educational training programs to promote hygiene and good business practices (Bhowmik 2005;

Jayasuriya 1994). For example, in Singapore, the Hawkers' Department licenses all vendors and provides them educational training courses (Bhowmik 2005). Governments have also consolidated street vendors into authorized vending areas and food centers; for example, in Kuala Lumpur, many street food vendors have been relocated to food centers by the Department of Hawkers and Petty Traders (Bhowmik 2005). Such food centers provide vendors with clean water, sanitary vending space, and an orderly space for their transactions.

With primary support from NGOs, street vending unions and organizations have created to better support and organize vendors. For example, in India, vendors receive support from the National Alliance of Street Vendors in India, and in South Korea, vendors receive support from the National Federation of Korean Street Vendors (Bhowmik 2005). Such organizations help push legislation in favor of vendors' rights, such as India's 2011 Street Vendors (Protection and Promotion of Livelihood) Bill, which petitions the Indian government to recognize, support, and protect street vendors and their vital role in the economy. Unfortunately, since "most of the street vendors in Asia are not unionized," many vendors do not have any sort of protection nor voice in policy reform, development, and implementation (Bhowmik 2005:2263).

Following an International Labor Organization (ILO) Seminar titled the Informal Economy: Labor Protection and Street Vending in May 2006 it was concluded that,

"the answer to improving the quality of life of vendors may not lie in the law, but in the organization and real empowerment of the vendors themselves so that they are freed from a state of permanent uncertainty" (ILO 2006:10).

Although there is no ultimate solution to organizing, regulating, and managing street vendors, there are many things to learn from the models developed by various countries in Asia.

## VIETNAM: THE INFORMAL SECTOR AND STREET VENDING

In 1986, Vietnam implemented a set of social and economic reforms known as *Doi Moi* shifting from a state-directed economy to a market-based economy with a Socialist orientation. Most notably, *Doi Moi* increased economic growth and international interest and investment; however, the economic reforms have also led to several cascading effects including an influx in internal migration, growth in the informal sector, and a widening wealth gap. In Vietnam today, the informal sector is the largest workforce in the economy. Although there is a wide spectrum of income and success in the informal sector, the average salary for an informal sector worker is 1.1 million VND/month, which “is almost the lowest of all the institutional sectors, being higher only than average agricultural income” (Cling et al 2010:16). As a twofold response to the rapid economic development and the growing income gap, the informal sector continues to grow.

When informal workers attempt to move up the economic ladder, they experience many difficulties as they struggle to escape the informal sector and gain enough skill to competitively participate in the formal sector. The informal sector walks along a fine line of economic integration and self-reliance; in other words, the informal economy serves as a cultural and social connection to all institutional sectors of the economy while at the same time distancing itself from the security and protection of the formal economic sector. Regardless, given its overwhelming presence, the informal sector is integral to Vietnam’s economy.

### **Informal Sector: Hanoi, Vietnam**

In Hanoi, the informal sector represents approximately 30 percent of the total jobs, making it the number one job provider (Cling et al 2009). The median monthly income for Hanoi’s informal workers is 1.5 million VND (Cling et al 2009). While the informal sector

creates a unique identity for Hanoi, the discrepancy between rapid economic development and a growing informal sector creates very visible, and possibly compromising, juxtaposition.

The most recent survey by the GSO-ISS/IRD-DIAL Project (Cling et al 2009) on the informal sector in Hanoi, exposes an immediate need for public policy to address the growing informal sector and the difficulties workers face. Policy must focus on vocational training, improved access to credit, improved working environment, and sustainable taxation programs to allow for the creation of financial assistance programs (Cling et al 2009). In particular, “it is also important to improve the environment in which the sector operates, by avoiding action limited to policies that undermine the way the sector works (e.g. restricting street vendors’ operating condition)” (Cling et al 2009:15). By placing an emphasis on street vending policy, this report recognizes the need for reform and action to protect street vendors in the growing economy.

### **Street Vending: Hanoi, Vietnam**

The most visible activity of the informal sector is street vending. Street vendors are both mobile and stationary, selling goods and services in public areas to all social groups. Not only are most vendors temporary migrants that lack the education to enter jobs in the formal sector, but they also are desperate for the supplemental income to support their families. Additionally, the majority of street vendors in Hanoi are women, working in harsh conditions and experiencing very little integration into the city life (Agergaard and Vu 2010; Jensen and Peppard 2003).

Hanoi street vendors tend to exhibit ‘in-betweenness’ – a term coined in Agergaard and Vu’s (2010) research on the role of female migrant workers in Hanoi’s informal economy. This sense of ‘in-betweenness’ reflects the migrant workers pressure to maintain their rural home life while working in urban informal settings (Agergaard and Vu 2010). The majority of street vendors in Hanoi are not permanent residents and “relatively few of them have severed their

connection to rural economy” (Jensen and Peppard 2003:73). Since vendors are constantly interacting with people, whether from rural or urban areas or higher or lower incomes, they must also take advantage of social capital in order to be successful (Jensen and Peppard 2003).

Correspondingly, vending success also depends on a vendor’s ability to navigate the political and economic environment. Through examining this political and economic playing field, Turner and Schoenberger (2011) reveal Hanoi’s heterogeneous street vending population and homogeneous political acknowledgement and spatial restrictions – specifically, the lack of recognition and legalization of vendors and the bans placed on certain streets throughout Hanoi. Vendors must take “under-the-radar approaches [that] either to comply with the laws in a manner that suits [vendors] or to work around regulations and their enforcement” (Turner and Schoenberger 2011:5). By exploring the role of Vietnam’s ‘diverse economy’ in light of its Socialist ideology, this study illuminates the immediate need to revamp policies to better support vendor livelihood in Vietnam’s expanding market economy (Turner and Schoenberger 2011).

Due to the limited available information on street vending policy in Hanoi, background research lends to several news articles discussing the July 2008 ban on 62 streets and 48 public spaces as well as two studies that discuss the repercussions of this ban (Lincoln 2008; Turner and Schoenberger 2011). This ban, although severe, was implemented with the primary goal to improve traffic and congestion problems and make Hanoi more appealing for tourists (Lincoln 2008; VNA 2007). It is important to note that even with this regulation vendors are still not legally recognized and there is no sole governing office for street vendors (IRIN 2008). Despite improving Hanoi’s traffic problems, this ban negatively affects vendors, placing their livelihoods as well as the future of street vending in Vietnam in danger (Finlay 2008; VNA 2007). Furthermore, since the ban, enforcement has been sporadic at best (Lincoln 2008; Malik 2008).



## STREET FOOD VENDING: A CASE STUDY IN HANOI'S OLD QUARTER

Approximately one-third of the 36 streets in the Old Quarter are included in the July 2008 banned streets. Moreover, it is estimated that there are approximately 2,000 street vendors in the Old Quarter (Finlay 2008). As Vietnam continues to urbanize, the need for convenient, affordable ready-to-eat food continues to increase (Jayasuriya 1994). Despite the diversifying food supply chain in Hanoi, “more people may come to believe that what they dislike about street vendors is not offset by the convenience of their ubiquity in older areas of the city” (Jensen and Peppard 2007:244).

In July 2011, Vietnam enacted a new food safety law, impacting all levels of food production and services, functional foods, import-export foods, and street foods. Despite much scrutiny and debate the year before its implementation, this law aims to improve food safety in Vietnam in the coming years (DDDV 2011; VNS 2009; VNS 2010). Following, in August 2011, Hanoi's Food Safety and Hygiene Department proposed to establish designated food vending areas to improve street food safety (VNS 2011; Vietnamica 2011). If approved, this five-year, 70 billion VND project to create designated street food vending sites will funnel vendors into centralized areas and provide them with clean water and hygienic vending stations (VNS 2011). Although this model has been effective in other countries, there are several obstacles Vietnam must overcome before this project will be successfully implemented.

With regard to the policies aforementioned and cultural significance of street vending in Hanoi's Old Quarter, it is clear that there are several challenges to studying and evaluating street food vending policy. Given the multifold potential, structure, and implementation for policy and regulation of street food vendors, this research will only begin to explore this complex debate. Firstly, it must be determined how best to reach out to vendors so that city and health officials

can track and communicate with vendors, and finally, license them. Secondly, sanitation and food safety standards must be implemented through training, monitoring, inspection, and regulation in order to provide safe, healthy foods to customers. Such policy involves many cascading challenges including allocating enforcement and monitoring policy progress.

### **METHODOLOGY:**

#### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

This research was conducted in Hanoi's Old Quarter during November and December 2011. This research focuses primarily on the voices of ten street vendors in Hanoi's Old Quarter and complementary interviews with individuals in academic and policymaking positions in Hanoi. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and participatory observation.

#### **JUSTIFICATION**

Following the *Doi Moi* reforms in 1986, Vietnam experienced rapid economic growth. The political, social, and cultural repercussions of such economic growth have greatly colored the current state of affairs. As a country with a Communist government and a market-oriented economy, Vietnam faces a constant need to re-balance political and economic ideology; in turn, this balancing act affects many sectors within the economy and society as a whole.

As an occupation and way of life, street vending encompasses the multifold effects of economic growth, social change, and cultural innovation. After a close literary review, it is evident that are few studies regarding street food vendors' understanding of their situation, role in the informal sector, and personal ideas for change in Vietnam. There is also almost no research conducted specifically with street food vendors serving ready-to-eat foods in Vietnam.

With only a month to complete data collection, analysis, and writing, time constraints limited the sample size and magnitude of this research. Despite this, there are several benefits to conducting a small study. Given the small sample size and use in-depth, qualitative interviews, this research highlights ten personal vignettes derived from the stories heard during the interviews with street food vendors. Each vignette etches a vivid reality faced every day on Hanoi's streets. Furthermore, these stories provide a compelling glimpse into future research on street food vendors. Finally, this study is designed to illuminate the understandings and misunderstandings between street food vendors and policymakers regarding the current regulatory policies and plans facing Hanoi's street food vendors.

#### SAMPLE

The sample included two main population groups: (1) street food vendors; and (2) academic researchers, policymakers, and city officials. Ten street food vendors were randomly recruited based on their willingness to be interviewed and time availability. All vendors interviewed were street food vendors<sup>3</sup> that sell prepared, ready-to-eat foods and work in public spaces in Hanoi's Old Quarter. Vendors were either *fixed* vendors, selling in one location, or *mobile* vendors, selling around the Old Quarter, most often using either a bicycle or two baskets suspended by a bamboo shoulder-pole to transport their goods. Vendors were recruited at their respective vending locations throughout the Old Quarter. I made initial contact as an observer and sometimes as a customer. I then explained my project and intentions as a researcher and upon receiving oral consent I interviewed the vendors (see Appendix A).

For interviews with academic researchers, policymakers, and city officials, I contacted the individual or their office to set up official interviews. Contacts were made with the help of Dr.

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<sup>3</sup> Please see the "Methods: Definitions" section of this paper to clarify the requirements necessary to be classified as a *street food vendors* and *street food* in this study.

Nguyen Do Huy, the Vice Director of Food and Nutrition Training Center at the Institute of Nutrition, and Mrs. Dao Thi Khanh Hoa, the Deputy-Chief of Cabinet at the Ministry of Health. All academic researchers, policymakers, and city officials interviewed were informed of my research intentions, and upon receiving oral consent, these research participants were interviewed (see Appendix B). A total of six qualitative interviews were conducted; all of these research participants were involved in research or work involving street vendors and street food.

### **DATA COLLECTION**

Research took place during the day on the street in public locations. Participation was completely voluntary and subjects were allowed to leave the study at any time. Interviews with academic researchers, policymakers, and city officials were conducted at their respective offices. Interview data was collected using field notes and a digital voice recording device (where agreed with the research participant); for participatory observations, I took field notes following anthropological participatory observation research methods. Qualitative data was drawn from both participatory observations and semi-structured interviews.

Interviews were conducted in-person and when necessary a translator was used; a translator was used for all the interviews with street food vendors. I was careful to make sure that the relationship between me (the researcher) and the research participant was public and conversational. Interviews lasted between thirty minutes to an hour, and focused on the guiding research questions previously stated and semi-structured interview questions that were prepared beforehand. I made a conscious effort to check in throughout the interviews to ensure the subject was comfortable with the questions being asked and subjects being discussed.

Field notes and records of interviews and observations were typed up upon completion of the interview. All data was kept completely confidential and de-linked from individual

reference; all street food vendors were assigned pseudonyms to insure their anonymity and respect the confidential nature of this research. Analysis was based on the qualitative data collected during semi-structured interviews and participatory observations.

### DEFINITIONS

Due to the wide array of vendor types and units in the informal economy, the following definition was used to classify the *street food vendors* interviewed in this study: “one selling ready-to-eat foods from a [public] place having no more than three permanent walls” (Tinker 1997:17). In this study, street food vendors were either *fixed* vendors, situated in one location every day, or *mobile* vendors, using a bicycle or two baskets suspended by a shoulder-pole. All vendors sell in a public space, such as on the street or sidewalk; any private vending locations or homes were excluded from this study. In order to distinguish between street restaurants and “hole-in-the-wall” establishments, all street food vendors in this study must have prepared the food in advance and may not have a menu or electrical outlets.

In this study, *street food* includes any prepared food ready-to-eat upon purchase on the street or in public space; this study excluded beverages and fresh fruits and vegetables. Additionally, foods could not be commercially packaged nor prepared from scratch upon ordering; however, since many Vietnamese noodle soup dishes require some preparation before eating, I could not fully exclude foods that were prepared upon ordering. The following example adheres to the criteria I set forth to determine street food for this study: for miến cua, a crab vermicelli soup, noodles must be soaked in the hot broth upon ordering, the vendor then places the soaked noodles, pre-cut vegetables, pre-prepared seasonings, additional meats, and pre-made broth into a bowl and the customer may then enjoy the dish. This example reflects the extent of preparation allowed for street food in this study

**RESEARCH FINDINGS:**  
**STREET FOOD VENDORS<sup>4</sup>**

Through ten short vignettes derived from semi-structured interviews with street food vendors in Hanoi's Old Quarter, this section of the paper provides a glimpse into life as a street food vendor and the impact of government regulations on their business and livelihood. Before delving into the vendor's stories, the following demographics provide a better understanding of the ten street food vendors interviewed for this research: vendors ranged in age from 28-60 years-old; nine of the vendors were women; three of the vendors were originally from Hanoi and the rest were temporary migrants; and, half the vendors interviewed were mobile, while the other half were fixed. Although most vendors have yet to be impacted by the hygiene and sanitation requirements outlined in the law on food safety enacted in July 2011, all vendors were aware of and impacted by the July 2008 ban on specific streets and areas in Hanoi.

**Lan**

Lan, a mother with two sons, wakes up at 4:00 am every morning to go buy ingredients for miến cua, a Vietnamese glass noodle dish with crab. She then prepares the broth, cuts the vegetables, and loads her two baskets suspended by a bamboo pole and carries it into the Old Quarter to sell for lunch and into the evening.

Lan discontinued her formal education after completing primary school because her father passed away and she had to work to help support her mother and six siblings. She moved to Hanoi when her own children were toddlers – her sons are now grown up, one has just finished university and is working as an architect, the other, is in the military – and she began her work in the city as a recycler; three years later she learned how to make miến cua and has been

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<sup>4</sup> Pseudonyms are used in place of actual names of all research participants in order to insure confidentiality and protect their identity.

selling it ever since. Lan rents a place two kilometers from the Old Quarter with other vendors and she rarely gets to go home to visit her family. On a good day, Lan earns 200,000 VND (about \$10 USD)<sup>5</sup>.

Since the Hanoi city officials implemented a severe ban on street vending in 2008, “I have been arrested many times,” explains Lan. If they don’t go so far as to arrest her, they fine her, taunt her, chase her, and sometimes confiscate her mobile vending unit. Sometimes Lan has to run away from the police to protect herself from being fined and having her vending unit confiscated. When she runs, the hot broth often burns Lan; she worries that she will further injure herself. Lan is scared and knows that she is breaking the law, but she is strong and determined. She must continue vending to earn enough to support herself and her family in the growing economy. Her only request is that she be allowed “to vend some hours of the day.”

### **Binh**

My first observation upon meeting Binh was his thin disposition and his Vietnamese army hat. Before vending, Binh was in the military. For the past 24 years, Binh has been selling two types of chè, or sweet soup, from his bicycle in the Old Quarter. Every day he travels 100 kilometers to Hanoi to sell; on a typical day, Binh works from 7:00 am to about 5:00 pm. “I sell chè because it is suitable for me,” he explained. Binh continued to explain that he does not earn much of an income, “just some million a month,” and he sells his sweet soup for 5,000 VND a bowl. His wife runs a small restaurant in their hometown, but they need the supplemental income from selling chè in Hanoi’s Old Quarter to make ends meet.

When I asked Binh about the 2008 ban on vending in Hanoi, he replied, “I know of it, but because of life, I still have to work as a vendor [...] so when I see a policeman, I run.” The irony here is that I interviewed Binh on a banned street in the Old Quarter. Binh thinks it is

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<sup>5</sup> For all other monetary values hereafter: approximately 21,000 VND = \$1.00 USD.

“impossible that the government will ever help him” he continued to explain that “the government just bans, it never helps.” Binh plans to continue vending until he has poor health.

### **Linh**

Linh, a 32-year-old mother, has been vending in Hanoi’s Old Quarter for four years. She rents a place near the Old Quarter and is only able to visit home, which is 200 kilometers away from Hanoi, four times a year. Linh was only able to attend primary school because the schools were of very low quality in her home town – this leads me to wonder if she would have attended more school if the opportunity for a good education was presented to her. Linh is married and has one child who is seven-years-old. Linh used to sell miến lươn in her hometown, but now she sells it in Hanoi because she can earn more money. Linh wakes up early in the morning to buy her ingredients at Long Bien market, north of the Old Quarter. She then prepares her food and brings it to her stationary spot along with a table and small plastic stools for her customers to sit on around 1 pm; she sells miến lươn until she runs out in the evening.

As a vendor in Hanoi’s Old Quarter, she earns between 4 and 5 million VND a month. Linh sells miến lươn every day for 20,000 VND a bowl. She negotiates with the police to secure her permanent vending spot. Despite rising tensions with the police, Linh will continue to sell miến lươn because she earns much more than she would in her hometown. If presented with a better opportunity for work, Linh will most definitely take it.

### **Mai**

For 15 years, Mai, a 65-year-old woman from Hanoi, has been selling rice accompanied with various meat and vegetable dishes in the opening of the alley that leads back to her home on a makeshift wooden table. Every day Mai rises at 6:00 am and goes to local markets to gather the produce and goods she needs to prepare the food she will sell for the day during lunch and



dinner. Mai's small business keeps her busy; during our conversation she was busily chopping cabbage and preparing various hot dishes to go on top of rice.

Although she does not know how many customers she serves in a day, Mai said that "most of [her] customers are other vendors and people of lower income that work in small businesses or restaurants nearby." Mai sells her rice with vegetables and meat for 15,000-25,000 VND per a plate and on an average day she earns between 100,000-200,000 VND. Mai does not feel a sense of competition to other vendors because she is the only one who sells rice with vegetables and meat on her street. Every morning the police check Mai's street, but since she vends in the afternoon and evening "[she] is not bothered." On that note, Mai said, "I have no complaints."

### **Phuong**

"I sell corn because I have no other choice," proclaimed Phuong, a 28-year-old mother of two. Phuong spends four months of the year in Hanoi, renting a room with her husband, so that they can better support their family in Ha Nam province, which is 50 kilometers away from Hanoi. Phuong wakes up at 2:30 am and goes to the market to buy corn, she then comes back to her home, steams the corn, and loads the corn onto the back of her bicycle.

Phuong begins selling in the Old Quarter around 5:00 am and sells until she runs out of corn; she sells 120 ears of corn a day for 5,000 VND an ear. Seemingly Phuong earns 600,000 VND a day, but it is important to note that this figure does not subtract for personal costs, the cost to buy the corn from the market, transportation costs, housing costs, and other miscellaneous costs Phuong may incur throughout her day (these costs are similar to the costs incurred by all of the other vendors interviewed). Phuong is aware of the 2008 vending regulations, and is sometimes fined by the police, but that does not stop her from vending. Phuong is desperate for

the supplemental income and although she seemed rather pessimistic, she said that “[she] would like governmental support.” Phuong did not provide any concrete ideas for the ways in which she would like to receive governmental support; she just wants to be able to feed her family.

### **Thao**

On a touristy street near the old cathedral I met Thao, a 60-year-old woman, who has been selling cháo, a Vietnamese porridge made with rice and meat and served with fried dough, for ten or more years. Thao is from Ha Tay province, which is now part of Hanoi’s city limits; she is married and has two children. Sadly, Thao’s husband is disabled and cannot work, and therefore Thao is the sole provider for her family.

During the twenty or so minutes I talked with Thao, she had over ten customers; she gets even busier as it gets into the evening. I have walked by Thao’s stand many times in the evening and I always see huge crowds of people sitting on little plastic stools eating her cháo. In order to keep up with her busy fixed vending stand, Thao hires another woman to help her serve customers and collect payment. At 12,000 VND a bowl, Thao does not make much, but she is somehow still able to support her family.

“I am bothered by the other vendors, but I have to put up with it,” explained Thao. On her block there are three other vendors that sell cháo; two vendors are across the street from her and one vendor is next to her. In addition, Thao explained that “the police always bother me” and that they sometimes fine her or confiscate her vending unit. Thao “just wants to stay here and vend without being bothered.” I asked Thao if she would be interested in vocational training or future opportunities to work, she said that she would be interested, but that “it would be hard to be in school and also vend.” When asked if it would be helpful to have a street vendors’ union, Thao immediately laughed it off saying that “[she] would not believe in such a thing.”

### Thuy

Roaming the Old Quarter carrying baskets suspended by a bamboo pole, Thuy, a 40-year-old mother of three, has been selling plates of bánh trôi, a sweet Vietnamese treat, for the past ten years. Thuy rents a place one-kilometer from the Old Quarter with her husband; she rarely gets to visit her children who live in Thai Binh province with the rest of her family. Every morning Thuy wakes up at 4:00 am to go buy ingredients and then spends two hours making bánh trôi. By 7:00 am she is out roving the streets of the Old Quarter selling her sweet treats until they run out. Thuy covers her baskets with plastic to keep the bánh trôi protected from exhaust and pollutants on the street. At 7,000 VND a plate, earns about 100,000 VND a day.

Although Thuy does not feel a sense of competition toward the other vendors, she lives a very difficult life. Thuy is aware of the 2008 ban and she explained that “at first [she] was affected [by the police],” but she has now learned to cope with the ban. Thuy would appreciate help from the government and would definitely take another job if it allowed her to visit her children more often. Thuy “just wants the government to protect street vendor’s rights.”

### Cam

“I was unemployed, so I decided to sell noodles,” explains Cam. For the past 15 years Cam, a 50-year-old Hanoian, has woken up every morning at 4:00 am to go to the market to buy the ingredients to make bún riêu, a crab and tomato noodle soup, which is often served with fried tofu, additional meat, or snails (bún riêu ốc) and raw vegetables. Once she prepares the bún riêu broth and other additional ingredients, Cam sets up her fixed vending unit on the sidewalk outside of her home in the Old Quarter. Since interviewing Cam, I have eaten breakfast at her stand several times; each time I notice the cover she carefully places over the fresh vegetables and that she soaks the bowl and the tips of the chopsticks in boiling hot water before serving a

customer. Such measures to ensure hygiene display that Cam is conscientious of the importance of sanitation and food safety, yet is unclear whether or not her actions are second-nature or with the intention to insure the safety of her food.

On a typical day, Cam will serve about 60 customers, most of which are regulars. Cam sells bún riêu for 15,000-27,000 VND depending on what additional meats are ordered. Cam does not feel a sense of competition toward other vendors and explains “there are two other vendors selling the same thing nearby, but we are at peace”. Furthermore, Cam is aware of the 2008 ban, but is not bothered by it because she can quickly move her vending operation into the narrow hallway that leads back into her house if the police come and harass her. When asked what she thought the government could do to support her, she replied, “I do not think they can.” Since Cam is “content with the work [she] has,” she only voiced an interest in having support to purchase ingredients and supplies to run her vending stand.

### **Thien**

Having only attended school through junior high, Thien, a 51-year-old mother of two, worked in a leather shoe factory for 15 years. A year ago, Thien retired and began selling breakfast in front of her mother’s house in the Old Quarter in order to earn some extra income. Some of the breakfast items that Thien sells include: trứng vịt lộn or fertilized duck eggs (7,000 VND), bánh giò or rice pork wraps in banana leaves (8,000 VND), and bánh mì trứng or fried egg sandwiches (15,000 VND). Thien wakes up every morning at 5:00 am to buy breakfast supplies and ingredients, prepare the spices and vegetables to go along with her breakfast items, and transport her vending supplies to her mother’s house. By 7:00 am she is all set up and ready to serve. On average, Thien sells breakfast to 20 customers and earns about 100,000 VND.

Thien explained that she does not feel much competition for her breakfast stand. With regard to the 2008 vending regulations, Thien told me that she was sometimes bothered by the police, but because she sells in front of her mother's house, she can just take her vending unit inside. Thien would appreciate support from the government and thinks that a vendor's union or forum to express their thoughts would be beneficial. Thien's last remark was that "[she] wants vendors to be allowed to sell on the streets."

### **Khanh**

For 20,000 VND a night, Khanh, a 35-year-old mother of two, rents part of a crowded room with other vendors in Hanoi<sup>6</sup>. When I met Khanh she was struggling to carry full baskets of steamed root vegetables suspended by a shoulder-pole. She looked tired, and although willing to speak with me, it was clear that she was eager to sell her vegetables. Originally from Ha Nam province 50 kilometers from Hanoi, Khanh came to Hanoi to earn more money. Every day for the past ten years, Khanh wakes up at 4:00 am, goes to the market, and steams the various root vegetables that she will sell; by 7:00 or 8:00 am Khanh is roaming the streets of the Old Quarter.

In one day's work, Khanh will only earn about 100,000 VND. She only sells in the Old Quarter because "[she] knows her way around." Khanh is very aware of the 2008 vending restrictions and is often affected; when the police get a hold of her they either fine her 100,000 VND or confiscate her mobile vending unit. Unfortunately she has had her vending unit confiscated several times; when this happens it costs her 500,000 VND to replace her unit.

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<sup>6</sup> In an interview with Mr. Dominic Smith at HELVETAS Swiss Corporation, I learned that most often vendors will rent a room along with anywhere from 10-20 other vendors. Most often vendors are charged per floor tiles, which are approximately 40x40 centimeters according to Mr. Smith; for example, usually a vendor will rent 4 tiles for approximately 20,000 VND a night.

## STREET FOOD VENDING POLICY

The following section explores the current policies and laws affecting street food vendors as learned through semi-structured interviews with city officials, policymakers, and researchers. Despite several limitations<sup>7</sup> to studying policy in Vietnam, the following section will provide a basic understanding to the street food vending policy situation to date. This section is divided into three parts based on the current policies impacting street food vendors: the July 2008 ban on specific streets in Hanoi, the recent law on food safety implemented in July 2011, and the newly proposed program to centralize vendors so to better manage hygiene and food safety. Each section incorporates the dynamic cultural, social, economic, and health factors influencing street food vending policy.

### **Regulating Public Space: July 2008 Ban on Specific Streets in Hanoi**

In July 2008, the Hanoi city government passed a partial ban on street vending; this ban encompasses 62 streets and 48 public areas, including significant historical and cultural sites. This ban was intended to help modernize the city and minimize traffic and congestion problems in the city center. In an interview with Mr. Dominic Smith, the Senior Technical Advisor at HELVETAS Swiss Corporation and former Team Leader for the Asian Development Bank's Markets for the Poor (M4P) project, he explained that prior to the ban, when vendors were allowed on these major streets, transportation flow in Hanoi was greatly hindered as motorbikes would pull over to purchase food. In addition to causing traffic problems, Mr. Smith discussed the "romanticized notion of street vending in Vietnam," or rather, the cultural image street vendors represent. Although the image of a woman wearing a conical hat and carrying twin baskets on a bamboo shoulder-pole often resides in the minds of tourists as a symbol of Vietnamese culture, for city planners and policymakers, this image represents a symbol of

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<sup>7</sup> These limitations will be further explored in the "Discussion: Street Food Vending Policy" section of this report.

congestion, explained Mr. Smith. Whether or not the ban's underlying intention was to "beautify" the city or reduce traffic problems, there has been a significant decrease in vendors along these banned streets.

However, despite the ban, many vendors still take the risk to sell on banned streets. Mr. Smith believes that it might be best for the government to somehow continue implementing street vending policy, while not fully eliminating vending from the economy; in other words, if vending was to become less of an informal, clandestine, and illegal operation, the vendors would have a greater sense of security from state recognition of their entrepreneurship. In its current state, street vending can be "a really terrible way of living, if you are breaking the law and you've got all your cooking equipment around, somehow you cannot just run away because you will lose everything," remarked Mr. Smith. This ban creates a slippery slope between vendor's compliance with the law and their need to break the law to make ends meet. In other words, this ban exposes the "flexible mix of compliance and subaltern resistance" thereby further illuminating the need to make the law clearer and provide alternative outlets for vending (Turner and Schoenberger 2011:3).

Possibly, the way forward for Vietnam is to recognize that vendors can exist in a modern city, and therefore the recognition, management, and organization of vendors may be the key to balancing vendors in the rapidly developing economy (Smith 2011). Correspondingly, Dr. Vu The Long, a professor of anthropology in Hanoi, explained that despite desperately wanting to follow the Western model of modernization and development, the Vietnamese government fails to recognize the fact that there are also vendors in the West. Complementing street vending's existence in a modern country, Dr. Long elaborated on the role of street food in Vietnamese diet and culture, explaining that street food behaves as a linkage between the old and new, rural and

urban, and rich and poor. In this way, not only is street vending a defining factor commerce and culture in Vietnam, but also an outlet for self-driven entrepreneurship.

### **Food Safety: Impact of New Food Safety Law on Street Vendors**

In June 2010, the Vietnamese government began discussions on a new draft of the law on food safety. Many of these discussions, or debates, focused on the law's handling of street food, such as which government institution should be responsible and how street food safety measures should best be implemented and enforced (VNS 2010). Although the Ministry of Health was delegated primary responsibility to oversee street food safety, several country deputies also believed that it would be beneficial to have "an inter-ministerial committee or steering board" to better regulate street food given its interdisciplinary nature (VNS 2010). In an interview with Dr. Le Duc Tho, the Chief of Hanoi's Department of Food Safety and Hygiene, he said that street food safety also falls under responsibility of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development – discrepancies like this further exploit the convoluted nature of street food policy in Vietnam. Furthermore, in an interview with Dr. Nguyen Hung Long, the Vice Director of the Vietnamese Food Administration, he explained that responsibility for street food safety is also decentralized to local administration and governance. Regardless of such debates, the law on food safety was made effective 1 July 2011.

Dr. Long explained that the new law also redefines street food as prepared, ready-to-eat food and beverages sold in a public area, such as the street or pavement; previously the government defined street food as any food sold on the street. In addition, Dr. Long said that this law provides instructions to carry out licensing and certification programs. In order to get certified, vendors will be evaluated on their knowledge of food safety and hygiene practices, such as using clean water and covering food to prevent contamination. Following this, Dr. Long



said that vendors will be offered educational training courses to ensure that they are practicing and maintaining hygienic street food vending conditions. In order to raise awareness, health centers at both the ward and commune level will offer educational information along with TV and radio broadcasts. Dr. Long hopes that once vendors are certified and licensed, street food safety will be greatly improved.

Although there is no single solution or response to addressing street food safety, there are several steps that Vietnam can take in the short-term. Dr. Tho explained that in the short-term, Vietnam must strengthen the management of local authorities, improve vendor compliancy with food safety legislation, and step up propaganda to raise awareness amongst both street food vendors and customers. Likewise, in an interview with Dr. Lam Quoc Hung, the Chief of the Preventive Division of Food Poisoning at the Vietnam Food Administration, he said that in order to improve street food safety, the government, science, vendors, and customers must work together to expand and maintain street food safety law, testing, and inspection. Dr. Hung explained that enhancing the knowledge, attitude, and practice of street food vendors and customers will not only improve food safety, but also the mentality regarding street food.

According to Mr. Didier Tiberghien, a Technical Officer for Food Safety at the World Health Organization in Hanoi, such a mentality shift requires a lot of time just as policy implementation does. It is clear that there is a problem with food safety in Vietnam, but it is unclear whether or not the actual problem is with street food or if the problem is with the mentality toward or perception of street food cleanliness. Mr. Tiberghien further suggested that street food is no less cleaner than food at a five-star restaurant; although it is overwhelmingly perceived that street food is not hygienic, restaurant food may also be equally risky for a

consumer. Regardless, by making policy clearer and more available to the public, street food safety will improve overtime.

### **Organizing Street Food Vendors: Authorized Safe Food Vending Areas**

Recently, the Hanoi Department of Food Safety and Hygiene proposed to create designated food vending areas as part of the effort to improve street food safety and reduce traffic congestion in Hanoi. This project intends to provide vendors with sanitary vending space and clean water (Vietnamica 2011). Although this project may prove to be effective in the future, Hanoi must first license and certify more vendors, identify favorable locations, and ensure that these designated vending areas are convenient for both vendors and their customers (VNS 2011). Currently “only 64.4 per cent of more than 18,700 food service establishments in the city were granted with food hygiene and safety certificates,” with the addition of street food vendors, it is clear that this project is very ambitious and will most likely require additional policy to be successful (Vietnamica 2011). Although I asked Dr. Tho about this new proposition in my interview with him, he chose not to answer about the proposal’s progress; instead, he was more concerned with the implementation of the new law on food safety. While a program like this may be beneficial in the future, it is important to first determine how best to reach out, track, and manage vendors before implementing further policy.

### **DISCUSSION:**

The most significant finding in this study is that street food vendors exhibit a mix of compliancy and resistance when faced with governmental regulation of their vending space and food practices; this stems deep into the economic reality as Vietnam is experiencing rapid development alongside a growing informal sector. This compliant, yet resistant, vendor attitude

is further displayed by the overwhelming lack of confidence in the government to support them and their business. Regardless, as seen in the research findings from interviews with city officials, policymakers, and researchers, Vietnam is actively working to improve the vending environment and attitude from both sides of the playing field. The following sections will explore the major findings and limitations from interviews with street food vendors and city officials, policymakers, and researchers in Hanoi.

### **STREET FOOD VENDORS**

As defined by previous studies cited in the background research portion of this paper, the demographics of the street vending population in this study adequately represents the street vending population in Hanoi as a whole (Jensen and Peppard 2003; Turner and Schoenberger 2011; Lincoln 2008; Agergaard and Vu 2010). The majority of street food vendors interviewed in this study chose to work as a vendor because they had no other choice. With the need to support their families, vendors primarily sell street food as a means to make ends meet. Vendors choose to focus their energy on earning a living rather than showing concern for policy changes and governmental programs; most likely this lack of concern for policy is due to their informal status and their lack of confidence in the government's ability to support them.

The majority of vendors interviewed temporarily migrate to Hanoi for work, and they therefore experience a constant pull between life in their hometown with their family and life in the city for income opportunities. Although vendors expressed constant angst to be with their family, many saw that they had no other choice but vending to support and feed their family. The supplemental income that vending provides is just enough to make ends meet. The majority of vendors interviewed would gladly take up a better work opportunity if it came their way; however, given their lack of confidence in the government to support them and the lack of

external support from organizations, such as unions or nonprofit organizations, many vendors were doubtful that the government would ever implement a policy or program to positively benefit them.

Several limitations must be taken into account for this research with street food vendors. Firstly, given the limited time to conduct this research, it was difficult to gain a comprehensive view into street vendor livelihood; this was primarily dependent on the vendor's willingness share their story as well as their time availability. Secondly, the language barrier also played a limiting role in my ability to connect and communicate with the vendors. Along with the language barrier, I cannot assume that my translator always translated word-for-word and it is very probable that things were lost in translation. And thirdly, vendor mobility hindered my ability to do follow-up interviews with vendors and return to their vending unit to do additional participatory observations. Although I had several interactions with vendors outside of the primary interview, it was difficult to track mobile vendor's whereabouts – this limitation made me very sympathetic for policymakers and local enforcement and their struggle to track and implement regulations amongst mobile vendors. Despite these limitations, the short vignettes aim to provide a unique view into street food vending in Hanoi's Old Quarter.

### **STREET FOOD VENDING POLICY**

In theory, the Hanoi city government is effectively managing street food vendors by writing legislation to regulate public space and improve food safety, yet the praxis, or process of putting theory into practice, of said legislation is not fully demonstrated. Through interviews with city officials, policymakers, and researchers, this research highlights the legislation in place and the effect of governmental policy on street food vendors in Hanoi's Old Quarter. That being said, the scope of this research did not allow for adequate access to information or interviews

regarding current laws and policies facing street food vendors. Given the lack of data and literature available in this research, it is difficult to adequately evaluate street food vending policy in Hanoi – ironically, the lack of available information parallels the murky status of vendors in Hanoi.

It is unclear the manner in which the banned streets and food safety standards are enforced, monitored, and evaluated. Although there is some enforcement and the policing units attempt to monitor and control street food vending activities, the scope and coverage is unpredictable enough that vendors continue to access the same venues on a daily basis; this was particularly evident as several of the vendors interviewed for this research were vending on banned streets. It remains evident that there is a need to provide street food vendors access to safe production and delivery of their product, while balancing the need to adequately and consistently enforce vending regulations to increase adherence to vending policy.

It is possible that the language barrier posed an additional challenge to finding sources regarding the 2008 ban and the law on food safety as many of them may not be available in English. Although I asked interviewees for literature regarding these policies several times, I failed to receive any additional information beyond what was ascertained during interviews. The highly bureaucratic nature of regulations affecting street food vendors and the government's protection of policy and literature presents challenges to research. Given the convoluted nature of street food vendors and the government policies affecting them, it is difficult to develop a clear assessment or evaluation of the street food vending policy situation.

Given my limited time to conduct research and ability to speak Vietnamese, it was challenging to reach out to individuals without the time to develop a trusting relationship between myself and the interviewee as well as further contextualize my research. Often my

questions were left unanswered, and instead, followed up with a generalized answer. Likewise, the infrastructure for interpretation of the policies and support for street food vendors to adhere to the laws is inadequate at best, and therefore creates a lot of uncertainty on behalf of vendors, enforcement, policymakers, and researchers, like myself. Given the lack of support and organization of vendors, it is evident that street food vendors and policymakers have limited communication; this further illuminates the grey area between theory and practice and quite possibly identifies a way forward for street food vending policy in Hanoi.

### **CONCLUSION:**

Due to the ubiquitous presence of street food vendors in Hanoi's Old Quarter, the implementation of a comprehensive and inclusive policy to support vendors, while improving congestion in the Old Quarter and food safety, is vital to the future of street food vending in Hanoi. Currently Vietnam is stepping up by instating legislation to reform and reevaluate the vending situation, in an honest attempt to develop stronger regulation of street vendors throughout the country. However, although policy is written and street vending remains a 'hot' topic in legislation, there are many fine kinks that must be sorted out before Vietnam sees sustaining results and improvements in street food vending. Through evaluating the knowledge gaps between street food vendors and policymakers, this research illuminates the need for a comprehensive approach to address the multifaceted role of street vending in the Vietnamese economy in balance with its role in culture and society.

If Vietnam was to recognize street vendors for their entrepreneurship and contribution to the economy, vendors would experience a greater sense of support from and confidence in the government. Additionally, if a reciprocal relationship between policymakers and enforcers and

street vendors is built and maintained, then not only will policymakers benefit from adherence to their programs, but enforcement will also see less vendors disobeying laws and more vendors providing safe goods in authorized areas. With time it is hoped that more vendors will get licensed and certified in food safety and sanitation. As the number of licensed street food vendors increases, it is expected that not only will the food they serve improve in accordance with sanitation and hygiene standards, but that the government will also begin to see street food vendors in a positive light.

While there is evidence that Vietnam is stepping forward in street vending policy, there are several areas that require more research. Firstly, a census or survey needs to be conducted to determine how many vendors are in Hanoi; although there are estimates, there has yet to be a survey to adequately identify the number of vendors, where they vend, where they live, and what they vend. Conducting a study at this magnitude may be difficult given vendor mobility, but it is crucial to learn where vendors cluster to sell, how much time they spend vending and living in Hanoi, and what items are sold in various locations; having this information will greatly benefit street vending policy efforts. Furthermore, research needs to also focus on which steps should be taken to best support vendors and improve adherence to policy. By holding focus groups and developing a support mechanism for vendors, whether through health centers or a vendor union, vendors may begin to play an active role in providing constructive feedback regarding the policies that affect them and their work.

There is a high potential that legislation affecting street food vendors may manifest to help and support vendors, especially since there is a considerable demand for street food as an essential commodity in Vietnam. In time, street food vending has the potential to further prosper as a leading provider of food in Hanoi's Old Quarter.

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Mr. Didier Tiberghien. World Health Organization, Hanoi, Vietnam. 30 November 2011.

Mr. Dominic Smith. HELVETAS Swiss Corporation, Hanoi, Vietnam. 14 November 2011.

Dr. Lam Quoc Hung. Vietnam Food Administration: Preventive Division of Food Poisoning, Hanoi, Vietnam. 17 November 2011.

Dr. Le Duc Tho. The Hanoi Department of Health: Department of Food Safety and Hygiene, Hanoi, Vietnam. 25 November 2011.

Dr. Nguyen Hung Long. Vietnam Food Administration, Hanoi, Vietnam. 17 November 2011.

Dr. Vu The Long. Hanoi, Vietnam. 14 November 2011.

**APPENDIX A:**

Semi-structured interviews with the street food vendors:

1. Demographics:
  - a. What is your name?
  - b. Where are you originally from (how far are you from home)? Do you live in Hanoi, if so, where? If not, how often do you commute into the city to sell? How many people do you live with?
  - c. How old are you?
  - d. Are you married? Do you have children?
  - e. What formal education have you received?
2. How long have you been vending? Why did you begin street vending? What other occupations have you had before or during your street food vending endeavors? Do you have more than one job?
3. What factors do you consider in selecting which food item(s) you make/sell?
4. Where do you purchase your ingredients/produce?
5. What do you do to ensure sanitation and hygienic practices in preparing and vending your food? Are you aware of the food safety law in place?
6. Could you explain to me an average daily routine?
7. What made you choose to set up your vending unit and sell your food in this location?
8. Do you have regular customers? If so, what kinds of social groups/classes do they represent?
9. What makes your vending unit and offerings different and/or the same as others? Do you feel any competition toward other vendors? How would you describe your relationships with other vendors?
10. Are you satisfied with your occupation as a street food vendor?
11. What is your average salary? How many days a week do you work? Days a month?
12. Are you aware of Hanoi's street vending regulations that were enacted in 2008? What do you think about regulating street vending? Have governmental regulations impacted you and your vending unit?
13. Are you aware of Hanoi's new policy to regulate food vendors and create designated vending areas? What are your thoughts about the food centers the government is proposing to create?
14. In what ways do you think the regulation and organization of street food vending could be improved?
15. How best do you think the government could reach out to support you and your business?
16. What do you see yourself doing in the future?

## APPENDIX B:

Semi-structured interviews with policymakers and city officials:

1. What does your occupation or work entail?
2. Have you worked with street vending businesses or regulations?
3. What is your definition of street food?
4. What is your view or opinion of street food vendors?
5. In your opinion, what role does street food vending play in Hanoi's culture?
6. How do you understand Hanoi's regulations street vending? Street food? Urban space use?
7. Are there any specific business practices that street vendors must uphold?
8. What policies are in place or being planned to improve street food safety and monitoring?  
How will these policies be enforced?
9. Given where Hanoi is today, what are short term goals for street food vending policy? What are the long term goals?
10. In what ways do you think the regulation and organization of street food vending could be improved? What do you think are the problem areas or needs for improvement with regard to street vending and street food safety?
11. What is your relationship with street vendors? Do you think this relationship could or should be improved?

**APPENDIX C:**

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