SOJOURN: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia Vol. 22, No. 2 (2007), pp. 230–54 DOI: 10.1355/sj22-2d

ISSN 0217-9520 print / ISSN 1793-2858 electronic

Food-buying Habits in Hanoi

Rolf Jensen and Donald M. Peppard Jr[1]

One common but increasingly threatened source of fresh fruits and vegetables in Hanoi is roving street vendors. These vendors are mostly rural women who come to work in Hanoi's informal sector because agricultural income alone is insufficient. As Vietnam continues the transition from a planned to a market-oriented economy, the availability of other more modern sources of food and government policy to eliminate their presence on the streets pose a threat to the informal sector incomes of these women. We analyse these threats using the results of a survey of food-buying customers about various ways and places to buy food in Hanoi.

Keywords: Hanoi, Vietnam, street vendors, rural people, economy, food-buying habits, government policy, consumer attitude, survey.

Introduction

As the second-fastest growing economy in Asia, with its GDP rising by 8.4 per cent in 2005 (Bradsher 2006), change in Hanoi is constant and readily apparent. Cars are proliferating, motorbikes jam increasingly crowded streets, new buildings rise up even in established neighbourhoods, new urban districts encircle the city, and the government predicts that by 2020, 45 per cent of the population will be urban, up from 26 per cent in 2005 (Webster 2004, p. 14); World Bank 2007). In this paper, we have chosen to focus on a small aspect of the ongoing changes, because we believe it will help understand some of the effects of the development and urbanization processes on rural households in Vietnam.

The changing food-buying habits of Hanoians represent the effects of higher incomes and changing tastes as a result of twenty years of change in the economy. In addition, what these urbanites choose to do in the ways they shop for food affects rural families whose agricultural lives are also changing as a result of the economic changes occurring in Vietnam. The kinds of places from which urbanites choose to buy food may not directly affect the food-growers themselves: city dwellers still need rural people to grow their food for them. Rather, the methods by which the food gets from the farm to the table reflect those other changes going on in Vietnam. The group most likely to be adversely affected by the attitudes of food-buying customers is roving street sellers. Therefore, this article focuses on roving street sellers who are rural people and whose presence in Hanoi has increased in recent years along with the increased difficulty of surviving on agricultural incomes alone.

In previous articles, we have written about the jobs of many of these sellers, who sell from baskets suspended from poles carried on their shoulders as they work in Hanoi (Jensen and Peppard, 2000 and 2003). These published pieces are the result of 379 interviews conducted in 2000, but in the years since then, we and our students have talked with more than 700 other roving street vendors. The overwhelming majority of these sellers, more than 90 per cent of whom are women, do not live in Hanoi: they are temporary migrants of some sort. That is, they retain their rural residences but come to Hanoi either on a daily basis, returning home each night, or as circular migrants who come for days, weeks, or even months at a time before returning to their families. Those who come to Hanoi for extended periods return home for parts of planting and harvest seasons, for ceremonies, and for child rearing and household chores. These sellers have been widely seen in older Hanoi because they are numerous and because they walk many kilometers each day. Because they do not grow the produce that they sell, they rely on wholesale produce markets for their wares. One reason they have to walk so far each day is that there are few wholesale markets, which means that after they buy their goods early in the morning, they often must travel far to the parts of the city in which they usually sell.

As far back as 1998, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) noted in writing about Vietnam that “farm families can rarely survive…unless they are successful in finding or creating supplementary household or off-farm sources of income (UNDP 1998, p. 27). Roving street vendors come to Hanoi because, as the UNDP noted, the incomes their families earn from farming are inadequate (Jensen and Peppard, 2000 and 2003). The income they earn in the city ranges from US$1 to $2 per day on the days they work, which means that because they do not work every day throughout the year, their average daily earnings are much lower than even those small amounts. However small, that income is essential to their families' survival and to their ability to retain their rural residences. (See also Nguyen 2005 and Djamba, Goldstein, and Goldstein, 1999.)

We have studied and written about the close ties to rural life and the "business" practices of these street vendors. With respect to the latter topic, we have examined what economists call the supply side of the market for the products of these roving street vendors: we know how they do business and make decisions about their daily economic activities, including pricing their goods.

No examination of any market is complete, however, without an investigation of the demand side of the market, which is affected by the decisions that buyers make and by the economic and socio-political context in which the market functions. In this article, we analyse the economic aspects that contextualize the market for retail food in Hanoi. We use survey data to discuss consumer preferences for different sources of foodstuffs, and we describe recent government policies with respect to the selling activities of these and other street vendors. Our hypothesis is that consumer attitudes combined with government policy pose threats to the ability of roving street vendors to survive in their jobs.

In a recent book about government in Hanoi, David Koh devotes a chapter to efforts by various levels of government in Hanoi to reduce the number of street vendors, including what he calls "roaming" street vendors and what we call "roving" street vendors. Koh describes unsuccessful efforts in 1983, 1986, 1991, and 1995 to enforce "order on the pavements" (Koh 2006, chapter 4).

Our more recent work, which concentrates on this decade, indicates that the pressures that Koh discusses continue to exist. There continue to be periodic crackdowns on street vendors and continued threats to their ability to earn income in Hanoi, perhaps the harshest of these being in the nine-month period leading up to the Southeast Asia (SEA) Games held in Hanoi in December 2003. Such pressures could force many street vendors to quit this work. These government policies form an important part of the context in which we hope this article is understood, but it is important as well to note that we are not attempting to analyse those policies. Rather, we believe that whether roving street sellers continue to work, perhaps in spite of government policy, depends more importantly on whether food buyers continue to want to patronize them. Thus, our focus is on the market forces — customer attitudes and competition from other places to buy food — that impinge on roving street sellers in a context of government policy to discourage this activity.

Background to the Survey

A food buyer in Hanoi has many choices of places or people from whom to buy: these now range from large modern supermarkets to individual roving vendors who walk the sidewalks and enter the small, winding alleyways that characterize Hanoi's older residential districts. In addition to these quite different types of sellers, there are markets that sell fresh food, from fruits and vegetables to meat, poultry, and fish, and also prepared and processed foods. Markets are usually made up of individual stalls in large spaces, sometimes in buildings, often covered but open on the sides. There are also fixed-location street vendors and small storefront shops that usually sell a smaller variety of items than supermarkets or markets.

In terms of numbers of sellers, roving street vendors far outnumber the others, although no census has been or could be done of these itinerants. Fixed-location vendors come next, then shops, since both are small and scattered throughout most neighborhoods in the city. Many markets are large enough to attract customers from outside the immediate neighborhood and consequently are less numerous, but there are small, neighborhood markets as well. Even though they have proliferated in recent years, supermarkets are the least common of these options.

The recent increase in both large, district-level, and smaller supermarkets has been part of official plans for Hanoi for almost a decade (UNDP 2000, p. 5). Further, beginning in 2004, a program to privatize some markets began in Ho Chi Minh City, and plans to do the same spread to Hanoi in 2005 (*Vietnam News* 2004; 2005). In Hanoi, there was also discussion in 2006 of plans to eliminate some older markets and construct new ones (*Vietnam News* May 2006). Given the contemporaneous rapid increase in urban incomes,[2] a reasonable hypothesis is that customers would turn away from what might be considered "old-fashioned" sources of food when their incomes rise and modern shopping alternatives become available. Increased use of motorbikes and cars, available because of higher incomes, means increased mobility and reduced inconvenience of travel within or among districts to shop for food.

Therefore, we decided to conduct a survey among food-buying customers. We wanted to know about their purchasing behaviour — who buys what, where, and how often — and about the customers' likes and dislikes with respect to various places and/or people from whom they buy food. We also wanted to know how customers felt about the government's policy of trying to eliminate roving street vendors. With respect to the latter issue, we also asked what the customers believe the vendors *should* do and *will* do if the ban on their selling activities were successful.

When we undertook the survey in 2004, the conditions for answering the latter questions were close to ideal: throughout most of 2003, there was a well-publicized police crackdown on street vendors of all types, for the purpose of "cleaning" the streets leading up to Hanoi's hosting of the December 2003 SEA Games (Cohen 2003). Thus, at the time of our survey, only four or five months after the SEA Games, the crackdown was likely to be fresh in the minds of Hanoi food shoppers.

Although the severity of the crackdown lessened after the SEA Games ended, efforts to ban street vending continue to make the lives of street vendors more difficult than they once were. For example, in September of 2004, presumably with the knowledge of city officials, a precinct-level women's association got 800 of its members to sign a letter agreeing not to buy from roving street vendors (*An Ninh Thu Do* 2004, p. 7).

Many developing countries are concerned with the rapidity of urban growth and the problem of absorbing rural-to-urban migrants. One attraction of urban areas is that wages there are often higher than in rural areas, and there are more employment opportunities in cities as well. Many migrants turn to the urban informal sector because it offers a better chance for work than the formal sector to those with less education and fewer skills. As the difference between rural and urban incomes increases, the attraction of cities grows (for a theoretical discussion see, Harris and Todaro 1970; and Ranis and Stewart 1999; for an empirical discussion of migration in Vietnam, see Dang 2005; and Djamba, Goldstein and Goldstein 1999). Further, entering this trade is relatively cheap (they need to buy baskets, pole, scale, and the first day's produce) and easy to learn, so it is easy to understand why so many rural women have turned to this work in recent years.

However, as we show below, it is possible to argue that there are many threats to the livelihoods of street vendors. It is also possible to suggest that many roving street vendors will survive these threats through successful adaptations, perhaps, or because enough other vendors will drop out of the market, leaving a smaller group to divide the remaining customers. From our previous work, we know about daily profits associated with their work and the importance of this income to the families of street vendors, but we do not know the income threshold below which street vendors and their families would conclude that other sources of income are necessary.

Methodology

From March through May of 2004, colleagues from the Economics Faculty of Vietnam National University, Hanoi interviewed 339 food-buying customers of supermarkets, markets, and street vendors. These food sellers were located in four central districts of Hanoi (Hoan Kiem, Hai Ba Trung, Ba Dinh, and Cau Giay), and the interviewees were chosen randomly from among customers. There are relatively few supermarkets and markets, so the interviewers made no attempt to choose places randomly, but the selection of street vendors was entirely random since they move around so much during the day. Willingness to participate in the short (15 minute) survey was high, and the principle reason for refusal was that the person was too hurried to answer the questions.

Shoppers were chosen in equal numbers (N = 113) from each type of seller. Since the household division of labour in the Red River delta region of Vietnam is such that women are the primary food buyers (see Knodel *et al.* 2004, Table 2), it is not surprising that 95 per cent of respondents were women.

Given the willingness of shoppers to participate, and given the variety of locations at which customers were interviewed, we believe that the results represent food shoppers' views. The reason that shoppers' views are important should be readily apparent: they will exercise their ability to choose a vendor based on their views about price, quality, and convenience, as well as, in the case of street vendors, their views on the social impacts of street vending. Thus, the future survival of street vendors may lie as much with the decisions of shoppers as with government policy. This conclusion fits with some of what Koh found in the 1990s: roving vendors were then, as they are now, seen in multiple lights: incompatible with modernity and order in the streets, but providing cheap and convenient sources of food (Koh 2006, p. 185).

Customer Buying Habits

Who Buys What Where?

We asked customers about their purchases of five categories of food: meats/fish/poultry, vegetables, fruit, rice, and prepared foods. We not only asked about the frequency with which they or a family member purchased from each type seller, we also asked them to rank the types

Table 1
Customers and the Frequency of Purchases from Each Type of Seller

	Number	Per cent	Per year	Per month	Per week
Supermarket	298	87.9	47	3.9	.9
Market	334	98.5	362	30.1	7.0
Street Vendor	270	79.6	176	14.6	3.4
Other	308	90.9	87	7.3	1.7

Source: Authors' survey.

of sellers from 1 to 4 in order of importance of the quantity of each food category that they purchased.

As Table 1 shows, most shoppers buy from all types of sellers. Markets are an almost unanimous choice, while street vendors, patronized by about 80 per cent of shoppers, are the least popular source of food. The average frequency with which customers buy from each type of seller can also be seen in Table 1. As this table shows, people go to markets an average of once a day, but to supermarkets only about once a week. Not shown in Table 1, however, is that at the time of our survey only 22 per cent shopped at a supermarket at least that often. The frequency of shopping with street vendors falls between the extremes of markets and supermarkets; that is, the average shopper buys from a street vendor about every other day (about 15 times per month).

Table 2 provides more detail about who buys what where: large majorities of shoppers buy meat, vegetables, and fruit in markets; three quarters of shoppers go to supermarkets for processed foods; and "other" — shops and stationary vendors who specialize in selling rice — were the choice of two-thirds of shoppers for buying rice. Even though street vendors are not patronized by the largest fraction of shoppers for any food item, they clearly played an important role: at the time of the survey, street vendors were second only to markets as sellers of fruits and vegetables.

Finally, Table 3 shows how customers who shop with each type of seller ranked the importance of that seller for each food category. For example, a large numbers of customers ranked supermarkets 2

Table 2
Customers Who Buy Different Goods from Each Type of Seller

	Meat/Fish/Poultry	Vegetables	Fruit	Rice	Processed Food
	%	%	%	%	%
Supermarket	59.3	46.9	42.2	21.2	75.5
Market	98.2	95.3	93.8	53.4	65.2
Street Vendor	19.5	65.5	73.5	15.9	6.2
Other	31.0	40.1	49.6	67.3	74.0

Source: Authors' survey.

Table 3
How Customers Rank Each Type of Seller for Different Goods

		Meat/Fish/Poultry	Vegetables	Fruit	Rice	Processed Food
Supermarket	#1	25	14	16	15	122
	#2	132	68	44	35	83
	#3	39	63	59	19	50
	#4	5	13	24	3	—
Market	#1	287	262	226	119	86
	#2	35	53	83	48	97
	#3	7	5	5	12	37
	#4	1	1	1	1	—
Street Vendor	#1	17	51	67	26	4
	#2	32	114	104	15	5
	#3	15	47	63	9	4
	#4	2	10	13	4	7
Other	#1	11	15	36	228	128
	#2	52	57	64	—	67
	#3	37	47	55	—	52
	#4	4	17	12	—	2

Source: Authors' survey.

for meat/fish/poultry, but more buyers ranked them 3 than ranked them 1. Customers ranked markets first for buying meat/fish/poultry and also for vegetables and fruit. Street vendors were second in importance, far ahead of supermarkets, for fruit and vegetables. However, a much smaller group of shoppers patronized street vendors to buy their meat. Similarly, 228 shoppers ranked "other" (shops and stationary sellers) first in importance for rice purchases, and because fewer roving street vendors sell processed or prepared foods than other foodstuffs, there were few shoppers who ranked them at all in that category.

The high frequency of buying from markets and the fact that most buyers use markets to purchase a variety of goods imply that markets offer a greater variety of foods than does any other source. Markets only lag in popularity behind "other" sellers and supermarkets for prepared foods, and behind "other" sellers in purchases of rice.

The two patterns that stand out clearly from these first three tables, then, are the importance of markets to Hanoi food shoppers — virtually all go to a market for meat, vegetables, and fruit — and the lower importance that food buyers seem to attach to street vendors. Even though there is a significant group of customers who buy from street vendors every day, a far larger group uses markets as intensively. Thus, for the food items that people usually buy from them, it appears that street vendors compete for customers primarily with markets rather than with supermarkets.

That markets are as popular as they are is no surprise. As noted above, they usually contain a host of small stalls selling a broad range of goods. Markets small or large are a feature of all towns and villages in Vietnam, and they have been scattered among Hanoi's neighborhoods for many years. Supermarkets, on the other hand, are relatively new and therefore not yet as much a part of food-buying patterns. Some of the newest and largest supermarkets are located in new urban districts in less central parts of the city. In the variety of goods offered, markets compete favourably with supermarkets, and there are many items, such as cooked dog, that cannot be purchased in supermarkets but which are available in markets.

Likes and Dislikes for Each Type of Seller

Some of the reasons why there are large variations in frequency of visits to different types of sellers are doubtless explained by what shoppers told us about what they liked and disliked about each type of seller. We did not ask about specific things that buyers liked or disliked, but rather we asked the customers to list up to four items for each type of seller. We then grouped the responses into the categories listed in Tables 4 and 5 and eliminated multiple responses within each category.

Table 4
What Customers Like

	Supermarkets		Markets		Street Vendors	
	Customer Responses	Per cent of All Responses	Customer Responses	Per cent of All Responses	Customer Responses	Per cent of All Responses
Quality of Goods	205	34.2%	82	14.5%	14	3.2%
Choice of Goods	163	27.2%	111	19.6%	7	1.6%
Goods are Cheaper	17	2.8%	137	24.2%	114	26.1%
Prices are Known	71	11.8%	2	0.4%	2	0.5%
Confidence in Seller	17	2.8%	15	2.7%	11	2.5%
Convenience	53	8.8%	204	36.1%	195	44.6%
Place is Clean and Cool	38	6.3%	—	—	—	—
Other	8	1.3%	3	0.5%	22	5.0%
Nothing to Like	28	4.7%	11	1.9%	72	16.5%

Source: Authors' survey.

Table 5
What Customers Do Not Like

	Supermarkets		Markets		Street Vendors	
	Customer Responses	Per cent of All Responses	Customer Responses	Per cent of All Responses	Customer Responses	Per cent of All Responses
Quality of Goods	29	7.3%	163	50.5%	200	47.3%
Choice of Goods	14	3.5%	8	2.5%	19	4.5%
Goods are Expensive	215	53.9%	62	19.2%	26	6.1%
Lack of Confidence in Seller	2	0.5%	28	8.7%	150	35.5%
Inconvenient	136	34.1%	45	13.9%	13	3.1%
Traffic & Appearance Problems	—	—	3	0.9%	8	1.9%
Other	3	0.8%	14	4.3%	7	1.7%

Source: Authors' survey.

Supermarkets

The most prominent, but perhaps not surprising, aspect that customers liked about supermarkets was their confidence in the quality of the goods. As Table 4 shows, favourable opinions about quality and choice of goods made up more than 60 per cent of responses. Customers appreciated knowing the origin of the goods, and they liked the fresh and clean goods in supermarkets. On the other hand, as Table 5 shows, the most common dislikes had to do with prices, that goods in supermarkets are too expensive — 50 per cent of responses — and the inconveniences (location and time spent in check-out lines, for example) associated with supermarkets — about 32 per cent.

Markets

People liked markets most because their convenience. This characteristic includes being nearby home or on the way home, that it saves time to buy there, that one can buy small amounts, and that markets are easy places in which to buy. These reasons were 36 per cent of responses. The next most desirable aspect of markets was that the prices there are cheaper or more reasonable than elsewhere. Buyers also liked the variety of goods that are available in markets. With so much to like about markets, it follows that there were few comments saying there is nothing to like and a large group (more than 19 per cent) that say there is nothing to dislike about markets.

Interestingly, about 11 per cent of unfavourable comments about markets mentioned their lack of convenience: they are too far from home or too crowded. However, 41 per cent of unfavorable comments were about the low or uncertain quality of goods, and 15 per cent of responses mentioned a dislike of the prices in markets.

Street Vendors

The 16.5 per cent of comments that said there is nothing to like about street vendors is far higher than for any other type of seller. On the other hand, 45 per cent of comments were favourable toward various aspects of their convenience to shoppers. Convenience of vendors includes their coming near the shopper's home and the customers' ability to buy in small amounts. Another 26 per cent found attractive the fact that buying from vendors is usually cheap; a few shoppers even liked to bargain.

While 7 per cent of responses had nothing bad to say about street vendors, 44 per cent mentioned something about the poor quality of the goods. These comments ranged from complaints about dirty goods and lack of freshness to uncertainty about the origin of the goods. The most common reasons for a lack of confidence in street vendors (33 per cent) are that street vendors do not weigh accurately or are thought to cheat on the weight of what they sell. Finally, we note the lack of complaints about the problems street vendors allegedly cause with respect to traffic and cleanliness. The lack of such comments here is in striking contrast to the comments about street vendors made in response to the question about their being banned. We have more to say on this below.

Discussion

Before presenting further results of the survey, it is appropriate to discuss the implications for street vendors of these patterns of buying and of the opinions of buyers about each type of seller.

Supermarkets sell food that customers find attractive because they are surer of the quality. Therefore, as supermarkets become more prevalent and more accepted, and as incomes in Hanoi rise rapidly to make them more affordable, more people are likely to come to believe that the positives of supermarkets outweigh the negatives. As greater numbers of people move into the new urban districts that are proliferating on the edges of the expanding city, a smaller and smaller percentage of Hanoians will come into regular contact with roving street vendors: supermarkets are a feature of these districts, as are wide streets and an absence of the small alleyways that characterize the older parts of the city.

It is tempting to hypothesize that more shopping at supermarkets signals a smaller likelihood of using street vendors, but we found no statistical relationship between the frequency of purchases from supermarkets and street vendors. Since they have existed in Hanoi for only a short period of time, however, the proliferation of supermarkets in the past few years suggests that the hypothesis about supermarket use being inversely related to buying from street vendors is one that should be tested again as shoppers become more accustomed to this new alternative. The availability of more supermarkets also suggests to us that future government campaigns to reduce the presence of street vendors in the city could have even more support among Hanoi residents than they did only a few years ago because consumers will have a wider choice of places to buy food.

In addition, even though almost 80 per cent of food shoppers buy from roving street vendors, and many buy quite often, the things that buyers dislike about them may begin to be more important as another phenomenon occurs: a government-sponsored upgrade to many markets. (*Vietnam News* 2005; May 2006). Improvements to markets can only increase their already high attractiveness. This development also bodes ill for the street vendor.

As food-buying options increase in both number and quality, 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. In fact, their very presence in those areas of the city is part of the problem. Street vendors may find in the future that customers desert them because increased traffic and use of cars makes buying from them more difficult, and to the extent that customers agree with the government claims that the vendors contribute to congestion, obstruct traffic, and disturb order, they may turn away from street vendors and choose other sources of food. The new urban districts, characterized as they are by high-rise buildings, are far less conducive to the type of selling that the typical street vendor does than are the more-established parts of town. In addition, most new urban districts are located far from the wholesale markets used by most roving street vendors.

Finally, street vendors may be labouring under at least two additional disadvantages: the usual city dwellers' disdain for country folks (as we noted above, the vast majority of street vendors of the type we work with come from rural families) (Jensen and Peppard 2003), and the public campaign being waged to eliminate them from the streets of a city that is striving to be modern.

Consumer Attitudes toward Street Vendors

In addition to asking customers about their buying habits, we asked a number of questions about their attitudes. These questions included some about banning roving street vendors and some about what customers thought vendors would do and should do if they were banned. The reason for these attitude questions has nothing to do with what the vendors will actually do as a result of any possible banning. Whether they favour banning roving street vendors or not, what Hanoians think should happen to them and what they think will happen to them is further indicative of Hanoian attitudes toward those vendors as a group. In addition, we have asked similar questions of the vendors themselves, and the answers offer an interesting comparison.

Should Street Vendors Be Banned?

Overall, 51 per cent of customers agreed that roving street vendors should be banned; 47 per cent did not agree; and 2 per cent were of two minds, citing reasons on both sides of the issue. There is a significant relationship between the type of customer and her (95 per cent were women) opinion on banning.[3] At the same time, there is a range of opinion on the issue of whether they ought to be banned: depending on which customers were being asked, from 43 per cent to 61 per cent agreed with the ban. Not surprisingly, customers of street vendors were less willing to have them banned (only 43 per cent approved of a ban) than market shoppers (53 per cent approved of the ban) or supermarket shoppers, 61 per cent of whom favoured the ban.

There were many reasons cited on both sides of the banning issue. For example, among the 150 respondents who opposed the ban on street selling, the most commonly cited (by 47 per cent) reason to oppose a ban on street selling was because the sellers are poor and this is how they make their living. In addition, the convenience of having an almost ubiquitous presence throughout the city was often cited: customers mentioned that it was convenient to buy when they saw a seller, that it saved time not having to travel to the market, and that it was a habit of daily life to buy from street vendors. Finally, 14 per cent mentioned that street vendors are part of the culture of Hanoi.

A large fraction of food-buying customers who opposed street vending did so because of its adverse effects on traffic and the perceived problems it poses for cleanliness and orderliness of the streets. As noted, 51 per cent of respondents agreed that street vending ought to be banned, and they cited most commonly — by 61 per cent of those shoppers — reasons related to traffic problems. In addition, 54 per cent either objected to the lack of cleanliness caused by street vendors or claimed that banning street vending will make the city more civilized. Finally, 13 per cent believe banning is appropriate because of the inferior quality of the goods sold by street vendors.

Still, it is interesting to note that concerns about traffic and cleanliness were cited only in answer to the question about whether and why street vendors should be banned. As Table 5 shows, and as we noted above, when customers were asked a more general question about what they disliked about street vendors, these same concerns were barely mentioned. That fact leads us to believe that the government is having some success with its long-standing efforts to ban them: in the absence of those attempts and the claims about the adverse effects of street vendors, it is possible that fewer customers would try to make a case against their activities.

Nonetheless, given the bad traffic problems in Hanoi, the suggestion that street vendors make them even worse might become persuasive by itself, while the need to maintain order and cleanliness could also be convincing if cited often enough. In fact, the terms used by both customers and news reports of government activities use precisely the same words: ban people who cause a loss of "văn minh" (civilization), "trật tự" (order), "mỹ quan" (beauty), and who "cản trở giao thông" (obstruct traffic) (*Tin Tuc* 2003).

Working in favour of the vendors is a sort of sympathy vote from some of their customers, a feature that Koh also points out (2006, pp. 188–89), and a recognition that, whatever other problems there may be with buying from them, this type of selling has become part of some people's lives, part of the fabric of Hanoi life. However, we believe that this support is likely to be rather easily swayed by continued emphasis on the negative consequences of street vending and by further public efforts to gain support of the government's position on the ban.

What should Street Vendors Do to Make Up for Lost Income if They are Banned?

Since roving street vendors come from the country and remain firmly connected to rural life (Jensen and Peppard 2003; Nguyen 2005; Djamba, Goldstein, and Goldstein 1999), it is no surprise that many Hanoians believe that, if banned from selling in Hanoi, the street vendors should return to the countryside. Almost half — 46 per cent — of respondents suggested that they return to the country to do either farm work (26 per cent), some other job (15 per cent), or sell in rural markets (5 per cent). That their families already do the former is partially recognized by some respondents who suggested that they increase their agricultural output.

A tiny fraction (2 per cent) of shoppers said that there was nothing else for street vendors to do if they lose this job, but 26 per cent suggested that they find other work, in factories, as porters, or as servants. Changing the way they sell in Hanoi, by moving into fixed or regulated markets, renting shops, or selling door-to-door, was the advice of 21 per cent of those surveyed.

What will Street Vendors Do to Make Up for Lost Income if They are Banned?

We wanted customers both to make suggestions, as above, and then to speculate about what street vendors will actually do. Ten per cent of those surveyed answered that they did not know, only 2 per cent said they believed street vendors will be poor or miserable without this source of income, and 3 per cent said that they will become unemployed. Forty-nine per cent believed that street vendors will change the type of work that they do, and 10 per cent thought that they would change the way they sell in Hanoi, in the same ways as mentioned above. With respect to returning to the country, as was suggested by many shoppers, 31 per cent believed that is what street vendors will do, with most thinking that they will go back to farming. A little more than 10 per cent of shoppers anticipated that street vendors will continue selling, perhaps in "more secret ways."

We asked these questions to see how customers think about the alternatives for street vendors because we have also asked the vendors about their own views on that issue: what would you do if the ban were to succeed? Buyers' views are similar to those of vendors in one respect: most vendors also say that they would try to farm more intensively. However, vendors give this answer because virtually none of them can think of alternative types of work for which they are either qualified or likely to get.

How will doing as the Customer Suggests Affect the Lives of Street Vendors?

Over half (52 per cent) of the people who answered this question believe that the lives of street vendors will become worse: they will lose income, become unemployed, or the quality of their lives will go down. There are also 26 per cent of shoppers who believed that the lives of street vendors will become more stable and that they will have higher incomes. Less than 10 per cent of respondents believed there will be no effects on the lives or incomes of street vendors. We concluded the survey with another hypothetical question:

If Street Vendors are Allowed to Continue to Sell in Hanoi, Do You Want Them to Change Their Ways? How?

A large majority (87 per cent) of shoppers would like street vendors to change the way they sell if they are going to continue their activities. Of those people, 67 per cent said that street vendors should sell in markets or other fixed places. The preferred changes of 21 per cent of shoppers range from not cheating on weight or lying about the origin of goods to being more polite, while 19 per cent would like them to sell in a way that does not make the city look bad or interfere with traffic.

Discussion

The demand side threat, as we have shown, comes from a variety of influences on consumers' willingness to buy from roving street vendors. While many do buy, there is much that those customers do not like about the experience, and there is much to like about buying from other sources. In addition, the social influence on consumer beliefs, unfortunately for the vendors, appears to reinforce negative economic feelings: a majority agreed with the government's view on street vending, often using the same phrases to describe the problems caused by street vendors. Those customers want street vendors to change their ways, and they expect them to take up other jobs or return to the countryside if a ban were to become effective.

We believe that many of these customer wishes will be frustrated. For example, the vendors, too, would like to sell from places in fixed markets, but there are not enough to go around and they are expensive, thus making that particular change unlikely. If customers want the same quality goods at lower-than-fixed-market prices, as vendors often tell us, the pressure on vendors to "cheat" on the weight will persist. Thus, these aspects of the behaviour of vendors are unlikely to be different, which may further alienate customers and increase the threat to their livelihood.

The people who were interviewed seem to be more optimistic than we are about the prospects for street vendors if they were to be banned and could no longer sell in Hanoi. The group of street vendors about which we know the most — those who sell from baskets carried on the ends of a pole — is made up almost entirely of women who have completed a median of seven years of schooling and who have had no vocational training of any sort. Even if or when factories are built near their villages, these women would not meet the usual minimum employment requirement of having a high school diploma. They come to Hanoi to sell because farming does not yield enough income to support their families. Thus, to suggest that they can or should "change jobs" or go back to farming shows a significant misunderstanding of the options that are realistically available to street vendors. As noted above, the vendors themselves cannot think of alternatives to what they are doing now, which implies that a loss of this type of work will have important effects on them and their families.

As we have learned from our conversations with street vendors, they strongly desire to maintain their connection to agriculture and rural life: in most cases, they cannot even imagine the circumstances that would cause them to leave their villages permanently and relocate to a city. However, the abstraction of losing their off-farm livelihood is becoming increasingly real, and many of them have a good sense of the precariousness of their urban income-earning activities. For example, in 2000, when we began asking large numbers of vendors about their experiences with police, the most common answer was that when the police caught a street vendor, the result was a relatively small fine. Now, when police catch street vendors, they more often confiscate both the goods and the baskets and pole (as they did in the previous crackdowns that Koh (2006) discusses), and the fines have increased as well. Vendors tell us that the frequency with which they are caught, combined with the higher costs, imposes a far higher cost on the them than did the average reported fine of 20,000VND that prevailed before 2003 (Jensen and Peppard 2000: 42).

In addition, a process common to many markets is at work in Vietnam as well: as newer, more attractive alternatives to one product become increasingly available, consumers buy less of the original product. Also, when there is a negative relationship between purchases of a good and customer incomes, that is, when incomes rise and purchases of the good decline (economists call that good an "inferior" good), there is yet another reason for falling sales of the original item. The following quotation from a newspaper article describes the combination of these effects quite well: "Local incomes are increasing and shopping styles shifting from outdoor markets to supermarkets and department stores." (*Vietnam News* March 2006). While the quotation does not mention roving street vendors and says only that what is sold in outdoor markets meets the definition of an "inferior" good in economic terms, the results of our survey suggest that if these goods are "inferior," it is very likely that goods sold by street vendors are as well.

Since part of the transition in Vietnam is for the population to become increasingly urbanized, the problems associated with need for many rural people to find other jobs and other places to live are similar to the difficulties that we predict roving street vendors will have in changing their lifestyles. The rapidity of change means, in fact, that some vendors will have been forced to make two such changes in their lifetimes: the first change pushed them to become temporary urban dwellers while they supplemented rural household income; the second change will come as they are forced to find another way and perhaps another place in which to earn that necessary income.

Conclusion

In this article, we have tried to describe how the customs of food-buying customers both illustrate the effects of economic development in Vietnam and are themselves having an effect on rural families. Moving toward a more urban society at a fast pace can involve wrenching changes for many people. Unfortunately, a large number of those most affected will be relatively poor rural dwellers like those who make up the group of roving street vendors in Hanoi.

Street vendors represent for the government and for many Vietnamese people as well a vestige of the past that ought not to be part of the future of a modern Hanoi. While the sight of women in conical hats walking the crowded streets of Hanoi and stopping occasionally to sell may be charming to visitors and part of the city's attractive mixture of the modern and the traditional, an increasing number of Hanoians seem to agree with their government that street vendors also contribute to "chaos on the pavements [sidewalks] and traffic jams" (*Vietnam News* January 2006).

Our suggestions for how to reconcile the need for urban jobs everywhere in Vietnam — not just in Hanoi — and the need for rural families to supplement inadequate farm incomes with increasingly crowded streets and sidewalks are relatively simple: (1) Make the rules clear, which includes clearly posting areas of the city off-limits to street vendors and enforcing existing bans on certain uses (parking and vending, for example) on certain sidewalks; (2) Do not single out roving street vendors for enforcement. There are many violators of the rules of sidewalk usage, especially parking, and any observer of Hanoi's streets knows that the contribution of roving street vendors to congestion is minuscule; and (3) Continue both urban and rural job-creation programs so that those displaced from this work will have realistic alternatives and so that new young potential vendors (many of whom will be the daughters of current street vendors) will not find it necessary to flock to the largest cities for work. For street vendors and potential vendors whose official residences remain rural, the most meaningful jobs will be those that require few skills and which are located in smaller population centres.[4]

One way to characterize our suggestions is that the government should allow street vending to fade gradually away, the victim of modernizing forces that will cause consumers to make choices that could ultimately make roving vendors largely obsolete. In the meantime, keeping order on the sidewalks does not have to mean putting a large group of women out of work without alternative employment.

NOTES

1. The authors wish to thank Nguyễn Thị Hồng Hải, Phạm Thùy Linh, and Trần Thế Lân, of the Faculty of Economics, Vietnam National University — Hanoi, and Vũ Thị Minh Thắng, of the Department of Political Science, Vietnam National University — Hanoi, for their assistance. We also appreciate the helpful suggstions of an anonymous reviewer.
2. Between 1992–93 and 1997–98, per capita consumption in urban areas rose by 1.6 times (General Statistical Office 2000, p. 255).
3. A cross tabulation of type of buyer with the yes/no question about banning was significant at the 2.4 per cent level with a chi-square of 7.4.
4. As Djamba, Goldstein, and Goldstein (1999, p. 8 of online version) note, "…towns seem to offer special opportunities for persons from rural areas who may wish to maintain strong rural connections while still taking advantage of urban employment."

REFERENCES

An Ninh Thu Do. "800 Hoi Vien Hoi Phu Nu Ky Cam Ket Khong Mua Hang Rong Tren He Pho". 13 September 2004, p. 7.

Bradsher, Keith. "Vietnam's Roaring Economy is Set for the World Stage". *New York Times*, 25 October 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/25/business/worldbusiness/25vietnam.html?> ex=1319428800&en=d30d15747694acae&ei=5088&partner=rssnyt.

Cohen, Margot. "Neat Streets". *Far Eastern Economic Review* 166, no. 21 (2003): 38.

Dang, Anh Nguyen. "Viet Nam: Internal Migration: Opportunities and Challenges for Development". Paper presented at Regional Conference on Migration and Development in Asia, Lanzhou, China, 14–16 March 2005.

Djamba, Yanyi, Alice Goldstein, and Sidney Goldstein. "Permanent and Temporary Migration in Viet Nam during a Period of Economic Change". *Asia-Pacific Population Journal* 14, no. 3 (1999): 25–48, (online version at http://www.unescap.org/esid/psis/population/journal/1999/v14n3a2.htm).

General Statistical Office. *Viet Nam Living Standards Survey, 1997–1998*. Hanoi: Statistical Publishing House, 2000.

Harris, John R. and Michael P. Todaro. "Migration, Unemployment, and Development: A Two-Sector Analysis". *American Economic Review* 60 (1970): 126–42.

Jensen, Rolf and Donald M. Peppard Jr. "Roving Street Sellers in Hanoi: A Look at the Urban Informal Sector". *Vietnam's Socio-Economic Development* 24 (Winter 2000): 35–43.

———. "A Case Study of Roving Street Vendors". *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 38, no. 1 (2003): 71–84.

Knodel, John, Vu Manh Loi, Rukmalie Jayakody, and Vu Tuan Huy. "Gender Roles in the Family: Change and Stability in Vietnam". Population Studies Center at the Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, Report No. 04-559, Ann Arbor, 2004.

Koh, David Wee Hock. *Wards of Hanoi*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2006.

Nguyen, Cham Thi Phuong. "The Voices of Trinh Xa Women Who Earn Money for a Living in Hanoi". Paper presented at New Voices From the Mekong Region: Women in the Public Arena, Chiang Mai University, Thailand, 7–10 November 2005.

Ranis, Gustav, and Frances Stewart. "V-Goods and the Role of the Urban Informal Sector in Development". *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 47 (1999): 259–88.

Tin Tuc. "Ha Noi: Tu 20-11, cam danh giay, ban rong". 21 November 2003, <http://tintuc.vnn.vn/details.asp?topic=BT1711032890&tiep=11/17/2003%208....41%20A>.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). *Hanoi, Expanding Choices for the Rural Poor*. Hanoi: UNDP, 1998.

———. *Ha Noi: An Urban Profile*. Ha Noi: UNDP, 2000.

Vietnam News. "City Officials Open Markets to Bidding". 25 September 2004, <http://vietnamnews.vnagency.com.vn/2004-09/24/Stories/06.htm>.

———. "Ha Noi to Take up Charge of Markets". 28 October 2005, <http://vietnamnews.vnagency.com.vn/showarticle.php?num= 01BUS281005>.

———. "HCM City Street Economy Too Precious to Discard". 19 January 2006, p. 4.

———. "Domestic Retailers Urged to Think Big". 10 March 2006, <http://vietnamnews.vnagency.com.vn/showarticle.php?num=03BUS100306>.

———. "Ha Noi Municipal Authorities Call for a Cleaner, Greener Capital City". 2 May 2006, <http://vietnamnews.vnagency.com.vn/showarticle.php?num=05SOC020506>.

Webster, Douglas, "Urbanization Dynamics and Policy Frameworks in Developing East Asia". Working Paper no. 8, September 2004,<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/EASTASIAPACIFICEXT/EXTEAPREGTOPURBDEV/0,,contentMDK:20460990~ pagePK:34004173~piPK:34003707~theSitePK:573913,00.html>.

World Bank. *Data, Urban Development*, 2007 <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/DATASATISTICS/0,,content MDK:20394948~menuPK:1192714~pagePK:64133150~piPK:64133175~theSitePK:239419,00.html>.

Rolf Jensen and Donald M. Peppard Jr are Professors of Economics at Connecticut College in New London, Connecticut, USA.