



most all the recommendations and in all probability, the policy will be tabled as a Bill in Parliament with some minor modifications," says a member of NCEUS. Once the Centre passes the Bill, the state governments and municipal authorities would have to carry out the necessary changes in the local laws within a year of the date of the policy's announcement.

Although the policy has found support from various quarters, it has its share of critics who say that it will not have much of an impact on the people on the street.

"One of the major weaknesses of the policy is that it treats all vendors as uniform and homogeneous. But that is not the case. The sector is diverse and the needs are varied," says Shrawan Kumar Acharya, professor, Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology (CEPT), Ahmedabad, and an urban policy expert who has written extensively on street vending.

But there are some departures from the 2004 policy. The proposed law does not limit the percentage of vendors in a town or a city. The earlier policy allowed a vending space of a maximum of 2.5 per cent of the total area of the town or city population. "I support the idea of not having a limit on the number of hawkers. Hawking works on the principle of demand and supply," says Acharya. But there are others who see a sinister motive behind this move.

"The government wants big malls and giant retail markets to develop. It does not see any role for hawkers. Therefore, by removing the restriction, it wants to virtually signal an end to hawking in urban

areas," says Shaikh Pervez, president, Urban Street Vendors Lok Seva Kendra, Mumbai. "It is an unwanted change. The percentage allotted for hawkers earlier was better," says Arbind Singh of NASVI, who was a member of the committee that drafted the new policy.

According to the new policy, town vending committees (TVCs) comprising municipal authorities, the police, and representatives of the street vendors or hawkers' associations will decide on the issue of licences and also on the number of vendors on each street. "Normally, it is the bureaucrats who decide about vending zones without having any knowledge of the actual ground situation, and hence it was decided that a committee involving different stakeholders would be more participatory and practical," says Singh. The decision on "no-vending zones" has also been left to the TVCs.

"Associations of residences, shop owners and other business organisations have not been represented in TVCs. This could cause problems as these bodies may try to stall implementation of the policy. If they are included in the TVCs, their resistance would be muted," says Bhowmik. On the fears of overcrowding on streets, Bhowmik says that TVCs can take a realistic view of street vendors. "One must remember that street vendors certainly do not want overcrowding on the streets as that would hamper their business. If vendors are regulated properly they will not crowd the pavements and cause inconvenience to pedestrians," he says.

"The policy focusses only on the needs of street vendors without any reference to public space management in cities and metropolis. TVCs have no local stakeholders or guidelines to follow," says Neera Punj, convener of CitiSpace, a Mumbai-based NGO fighting to keep open spaces from being encroached.

"A people-centric approach to traffic and transportation planning will automatically integrate the hawkers in the plan. We need a mobility plan and not a traffic plan. This aspect needs to be highlighted in the policy," says Acharya.

"We are so fed up with constant court orders and threatening postures by municipal authorities that any policy that gives us some relief from daily harassment is welcome, but I don't think the administration will let go of such an easy way of making money," says a member of the National Hawkers' Union, Calcutta.