

Status of Informal Work Force in Urban Masses: a Case Study of Northern Ethiopia



Geography

KEYWORDS: Informal sector, ethnicity, income, education, integrated development

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ABSTRACT

The present paper is an attempt to identify ethnic, religious and demographic features, to analyze their income, assets and common problems. On basis of random sampling 120 respondents were selected to collect data and analyse the results. Orthodox Christianity and tigray ethnicity was common. Illiteracy, poor education, insecure work and residents were prevailed universally; however, female traders were better conditions than their counterpart.

INTRODUCTION:

The recent growth performance of the Ethiopian economy with 8.4% growth rate has been strong as largely a broad recovery process from early 1990s. But simultaneously the expansion of magnitude of 'jobless population growth' has been experiencing, because of the demographic profile and the preponderance of youth, workforce is proportionately much larger (51.9%) which presents the unbalance shape of the growth (CSA, 2006). To maintain the socio-economic equilibrium, the informal economy has become 'sink hole' for the growing jobless population in Ethiopia. Approximately 1.8 million people were engaged in the urban informal economy in 2005. It was noted that the relative share of workers in the informal economy has shown an increasing in recent years: it increased from 15% in 1999 to 20.6% in 2005 (Brixiova, 2010).

In the mid-1950s, W. Arthur Lewis developed a theoretical model of economic development based on the assumptions; there was an unlimited supply of labour in most developing countries and that this vast pool of surplus labour would be absorbed as the modern industrial sector in these countries grew. It was therefore assumed that the traditional sector comprised of petty traders, small producers and a range of casual jobs would eventually be absorbed into the formal economy and disappear (Chen & Lund, 2001). This might be due to the fact expanding and promoting micro-enterprises and also allowing periodic, weekly, bi-weekly and holiday markets for informal workers. Thus, Informal sector of economy is the main source of employment and livelihood for the growing urban labor force, confirming the importance of the sector in terms of absorbing employment and income generation for a remarkably high share of workers in the country, owing to the weakness of the formal sector in creating additional job opportunities (Charmes 1998). But the contribution of the informal operators is not duly recognized and they are subjected to discrimination in achieving in social security coverage in a country like Ethiopia where, there is formal sector better in the regards of social protection coverage, so their socio-economic condition continuously deteriorating. The workers of informal sector get realized that they have a marginal role in economy despite having a lion's share society.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The present work was conducted keeping the view economically and socially vulnerable sections of the informal workers, i.e., pity traders in mekelle city of Ethiopia with following objectives

1. To identify ethnic, religious and demographic features of pity traders.
2. To analyze socio-economic characteristics of pity traders.
3. To ascertain problems faced by pity traders in the study area

DATA AND METHODS:

The study is based on primary sources of the data those were gathered by field survey through schedule method regarding ethnic groups, gender, age, education, income, housing conditions, and sanitation facilities. On basis of random sampling 120 respondents were selected. By using descriptive research methods collected data were processed in tabular form and represented with help maps and diagrams.

STUDY AREA:

Mekelle city, capital of Tigray region is situated 780 km away from Addis Ababa near North border of Ethiopia. Population of the city is 215,456. Population growth has been associated with immigrants to get work as the city has been emerged as hub for regional political and economical development.

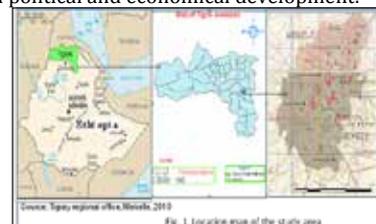
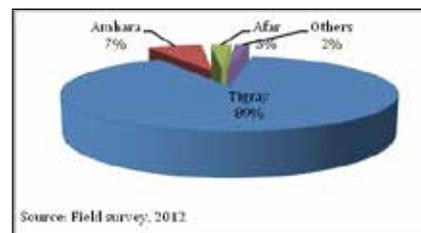


Fig. 1. Location map of the study area

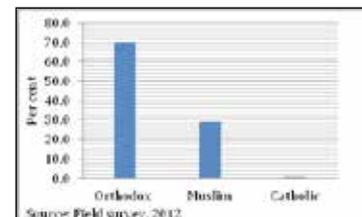
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

Fig 1 depicts that 89% pity traders who involved in transaction of vegetable, fruits, poultry product, and manufactured items in small quantity in street, along the roads and at crossing of the city. It is high due to prevailing unemployment and under employment in the study area. Immigrants from Eritrea added more number of pity traders for their livelihood or supplement their income to sustain lives. Other traders belonged to Amhara ethnic group (7%), Afar (3%) and others (2%) respectively.



Source: Field survey, 2012.

The highest share of pity traders (70%) was of Orthodox religion, followed by Muslims (29%) and catholic (1%) respectively (Fig 2). Christianity is considered a way of life, the culture and the economic life of the people in the study area. Muslims forming second main religious group, they were mainly engaged as merchants from centuries.



Source: Field survey, 2012.

Fig 2. Pity traders by religion

Informal sector particularly pity traders provides work especially women round the year for earning cash. It has been noted during the field surveys that about 52% women were engaged in this job (Fig 3). However, proportion of male traders was lower about 48%. Migration from rural masses to the city, earning for surviving daily lives were basic factors those force engage-

ment of women in this informal tertiary economic sector. Many female traders arrived to city from the peripheries to sell their small horticulture and poultry products.



Informal sector; Pity Traders in Mekelle; photo by author, Oct 2012

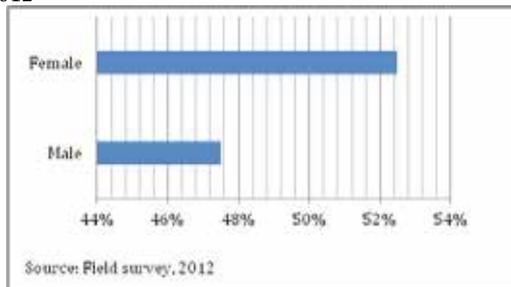


Fig 3. Pity traders by gender

Fig 4 highlights that 56% pity traders were married followed by separated (23%), unmarried 15% and 6% widow. The married life is accepted as a life of responsibility when persons are married they need money for sustenance their family life smoothly; tiny trade is a suitable option for the poor residents.

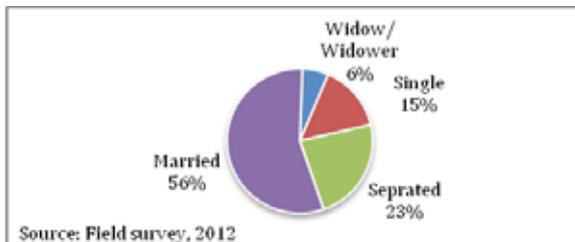


Fig 4. Pity traders by marital status

Table 1 illustrates that among the traders' family (about 47%) belonged to working age group 15-59 years. While about 38% were below 14 years; and senile population was 5.04% respectively. Females were more active in working age (47.06%) than their counter part.

Table 1 Age & Sex structure of pity traders

Age group	Average	Male	Female
Below 7	19.30	19.27	19.33
7-14	28.51	28.44	28.57
15-59	46.93	46.79	47.06
Above 59	5.26	5.50	5.04

Education among pity traders was poor in the forms illiteracy (63.3%), only literates without any formal education (14.91%), primary (9.21%) respectively (Table2). Since, they are socio-economically backward so they like to earn for bringing up of their family instead of getting a good education.

Table 2 Pity traders by education

Education	Average	Male	Female
Illiterates	63.60	65.74	61.67
Literate	14.91	14.81	15.00

Primary	9.21	7.41	10.83
Secondary	6.58	5.56	7.50
10+2 & Above	5.70	6.49	5.00

Fig 5 shows that at least 26.67% pity traders earned below 1000 birr per month. Income of the traders depend location, mobility of the traders, and demand. Average 44.17% pity traders monthly earned between 1000-2000 birr and 19.87% traders have their earning 2000-3000 and 10% had above 3000 birr/. The high proportion of traders 60% found in the category who earned less than 2000 birr/month shows that pity business provides not a good earning but it offers employment over the year.

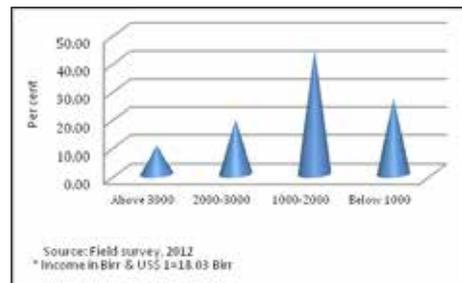


Fig 5. Pity traders by monthly income

Fig 6 shows that 39.17% pity traders was residing in rented houses, they spent 75% of their total income for the rent of the houses. However, 25% pity traders had their own houses and 17.5% lived in huts/slums those were congested, dirty without basic amenities. There were 18.33% pity traders spent their nights along the road, street, pedestrian, inside of pipe under tree and the open sky.

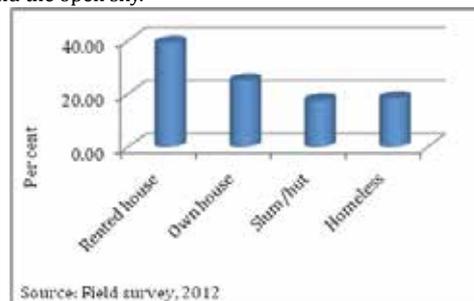


Fig 6. Pity traders by dwelling

Table 3 shows the among the houses of pity traders, 36.67% used wood and rubber without mattress for sleeping purpose, followed sleeping on ground (23.33%), use of animal skin-hide or grass as mattress (16.67%) and bed of wood using rubber (20%) and wooden bed with mattress (8.33%) respectively. Generally, good quality beds were absence. The iron beds were used more because they were comparatively cheaper, more durable and unproblematic in transportation as well as easy in return value of the market and good whenever they are sold. Using as bed of wooden-rubber, hide of animal, grass, and ground for spending nights is a sign of the poor economic conditions.

Table 3. Fig 1. Pity traders by belongings used for sleeping,	
Belongings used for sleeping	(%)
Sleeping on ground	23.33
Iron beds with mattress	20.00
Wood +rubber without mattress	34.17
Wooden with mattress	8.33
Animal skin-hide/ grass	4.17

Table 4 indicates that a great chunk of pity traders used sources of drinking water as tabs (72.5%) followed by hand pumps (16.67%) and springs (10.83%) respectively. The tabs at public places were normally seen, but at outer of the town, due to undulating topography, the major sources of water were springs where a queue to take was a usual work.

Table 4 Pity traders by drinking water

Source of drinking water	%	Distance (km)	%
Taps	72.50	Within premises	74.83
Springs	10.83	Below 1 km	19.83
Handpumps	16.67	1-2 km	5.33

However, those pity traders belonged to high income, education, and standard of living; they consumed mineral water. Generally 2/3 households of pity traders used the sources of supply of water were within premises. However, members of 19.83% households fetched water within 1 km and 20% covered distance more than 1 km by a journey of 2-3 hours for fetching water.

Table 5. Pity traders by toilet facility

Toilet facility	%	Type of toilet	%
Yes	35.83	Modern	8.33
No	64.17	Traditional	27.5

Table 5 deals with status of toilet facilities among the households of immigrants whereas toilet facilities were recorded in 35.83% households where the proportion of traditional toilets (uncovered without walls and roof) was 27.5%. Generally, such toilets are not advisable to carry on the health and hygiene.

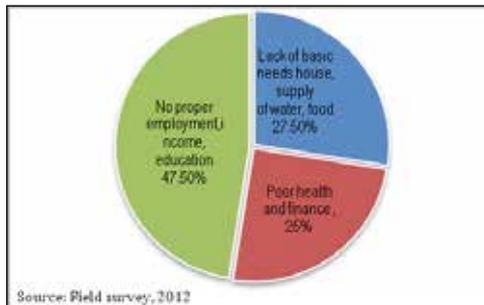


Fig 7. Pity traders by facing problems

Fig 7 shows that three problems were commonly faced by pity traders among as unemployment and employment, irregular earning as well as poor education (47.5%), deficiency in good health services, water supply, house, and proper food (27.5%), and lack of finance & proper place to sell (25%) Moreover, majority of them faced combined problems.

CONCLUSIONS

Analysis of the socio-economic conditions of pity traders shows that 89% traders belonged to Tigray ethnicity. Majority of pity traders were orthodox Christian followed Muslims and catholic. Women were more active in pity trade than their counter part particularly in working age group. The share of married pity traders was 56% followed by separated, unmarried and widow. Illiteracy and poor education was common but female were in better position. Only 1/4th pity traders resided their own dwelling, remain spent their nights in rented houses, slums/huts or along road where bed without mattress, sleeping on the ground and animal skin and hide was common among 36.67%, 23.33%, and 16.67%. Source of drinking water from taps was among 72.5% households, rest fetched water from 1-2 km. Sanitation facilities were commonly absence among 64.17% households of pity traders. Moreover pity traders face social, economic, infrastructural and institutional difficulties as unemployment and under employment, irregular earning as well as poor education, deficiency in good health services, water supply, houses, proper food, finance and no proper place for install the trade. There is an urgent need to reduce these problems to improve their socio-economic conditions for integrated development.

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