

# Care About The Poor

That the deadline of vending prohibition in Hanoi was postponed until April 1, 2008, shows that the Government is not well-prepared when issuing a decision without considering its impacts and an implementation roadmap



A street vendor in HCM City

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By Thanh Trung

**T**et holiday is one of the scarce occasions for Nguyen Thi Thay, a street vendor in Hanoi, to bring her little savings of the whole year back to her hometown for a family reunion. Thay and her "co-venders" were finally able to catch a late bus to return to their native land on the afternoon of the 29th of the lunar 12th month bringing with them the sweat-soaked sums earned from the baskets of goods on shoulder-poles vending breadth and width the capital city all the year round.

Not only are Thay's earnings used for celebrating Tet for a family of four people

with only a 1,000-square-meter piece of land in a rural area impoverished by harsh conditions, but they are also a source of hope for her two little children waiting for her to come back.

Thay is only one of more than 10,000 street vendors, 93% of them women, wandering all street corners of Hanoi to earn a living. Two baskets of tomatoes on a shoulder pole are the source of income she could send back to her hometown for her husband and children.

Among the street vendors like Thay, 75% according to the Hanoi Trade Service or 90% according to ADB's statistical figures are from the countryside where cultivated land is occupied for the modernization process.

Having no land and labor skills is the main cause for their fleeing away from their native villages though their chances for getting a decent job in the cities are not very realistic.

According to the World Bank, Vietnam has 13.5 million people living in poverty, among those 5 to 6 million people do not have enough food to eat. Basing on the new poverty standards defined by the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs in 2006, a monthly income of VND260,000 (US\$16.25) in urban areas is considered within the poverty standards while in rural areas that figure is VND200,000 (US\$12.5).

As estimated by the Institute of Social Sciences, at

present 7 million people in rural areas do not have land for cultivation and this figure will increase since the population is growing and the need for agricultural jobs is high. Moving to big cities to look for jobs seems to be the only way for poor people in rural areas to survive.

Migrant laborers can choose to sell goods either in markets or on streets. Sarcastically, most of them cannot afford to rent a place in any market to realize their dream. Therefore, becoming street vendors is the only choice they can take.

"A peddled ware costs only VND400,000 (US\$25) while a place in the market costs up to VND12 million (US\$750) on average," said an expert

of the Asian Development Bank (ADB). However, those peddlers themselves provide fresh food for most people in Hanoi everyday since not many people have enough time and money to shop at markets or supermarkets.

Given the amount of goods sold out and job creation capability, this unofficial economic sector contributes far more than supermarkets and other retailing outlets. According to an investigation of ADB in 2005 on the amount of sold goods compared with the number of jobs available at vegetable retail outlets in Hanoi, peddling creates 52.2% of jobs and sells up to 46.5% of goods compared with 0.4% and 0.9% by supermarkets.

Peddled wares have got to be very familiar with poor people, both sellers and buyers. When consumer prices are getting higher and higher, peddled wares become the first choice thanks to their ability of providing fresh foods at lower prices and at anyone's most convenience.

consumers buy fresh goods there every week.

Therefore, "Peddling is a big element in the economy of Vietnam in the process of transformation and it is also a part of the urban transportation network," said Dr. Nguyen Si Dung.

Not only do farmers find their way to big cities to earn money, many city dwellers also make money through selling goods on peddled wares. With 17 years of experience in selling fresh

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flowers on Ba Trieu Street, 60-year-old Tam said she felt very anxious about having to say goodbye to her flower baskets, which are the source of income for her two children to study at universities, as from the first of April this year.

However, the woman, who used to have a position in the army, still believes that the Government will have rational solutions for peddlers rather than "forbid" them. Tam, who is 60 years old, and two children, who are going to schools, are the only source of strength for her to get up at 3 o'clock every morning to bike to Quang Ba Market to buy flowers and come back to sell until 6 in the evening.

"I can earn VND1.5 million to VND2 million (US\$94-125) a month, just enough to pay school tuition for my children. Expenses on foodstuff I have to manage to earn from other sources," said

the woman with her face laden with harshness.

The government of Hanoi believes that forbidding peddling can solve the problems of transportation and city view. Nguyen The Thao, chairman of the Hanoi People's Committee, said that pavements had to be returned to pedestrians. However, whether that idea can be feasible since 80% of the pavements are occupied by motorbikes and only 20% by small traders, according to Dr. Nguyen Si Dung.

Dr. Trinh Duy Luan, rector of the Institute of Sociology, said that from the sociological viewpoint, the urban economy of a developing country always has the presence of unofficial economic sectors with their own functions and features. The so-called "sidewalk economic activities" come into existence due to the demands of a group of middle-class and poor people who make the

most of the population on cheap products.

These demands are satisfied by a source of laborers migrating from other provinces and suburban areas. Peddling, after all, comes into existence due to the consumption behavior of buyers in an agricultural country. "That unofficial economic sector will still be preserved regardless of any administrative methods since it is originated from natural demands," Luan said.

According to Dr. Nguyen Minh Phong, Hanoi Socio-economic Research and Development Institute, a regulation that affects the major source of income of most people cannot be issued in a hurry for any reason. It has to be considered carefully, and most importantly it has to come from a heart. Moreover, peddlers should have time to prepare for changes as well as observation of such regulation. ■

## Recruitment

### Requirements:

- University graduate or senior student
- English language skills: Level C or higher
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- Ability to work under pressure

### Application:

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- A resume with a passport photo
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**Deadline for application:** March 14, 2008

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