

## Strategies and goals

There are two aspects that have very different strategies and goals within the IFS. The first is a survival strategy, whose primary aim is daily food security. The second is characterized by micro-companies or small enterprises (including family enterprises), whose primary aim is economic growth. The policies and their implementation of these two aspects radically differ. In the first aspect, the applied policies have a high social content, while in the second, the content is mainly economic.

regulations on land occupancy and use, food quality standards, rules of hygiene, traffic circulation and pollution could be established.

Recently, some governments have begun to encourage and work with, rather than against, the IFS. In 2000, a group of mayors and city planners met in Bangkok, Thailand, for the FAO regional seminar *Feeding Asian Cities*. The resulting *Agenda for Action* stated that cities must recognize the importance of the IFS, especially to the urban poor (Yasmeen, 2001b). FAO and development agencies can help central and local governments understand the sector.

## Bringing status to the informal food sector: background and context

Since the mid-1990s, a number of studies have documented the importance of the IFS in addressing urban economic and nutritional problems (e.g. Yasmeen, 2001a; Argenti, 1999, 2000; Argenti, François and Mouawad, 2003; Tinker, 1997; Nirathron, 2005). This research demonstrated the value of informal food production, processing and retailing in providing employment and income for the poor, particularly women, who are often more active than men in the sector (Yasmeen, 2001a; Tinker, 1997; Simon, 2003). Studies also show that IFS provides low-income urban consumers with access to affordable, nutritional food.



Research also points out the challenges of the sector, including the lack of recognition by municipal authorities of IFS as a legitimate land use activity, leading to conflicts in land use (De Soto, 1989). Lack of recognized rights for vendors to set up mobile vending stands in regulated places discourages sustainable investment. IFS actors do not have access to state institutions to resolve conflicts or secure and enforce their rights.

By its very nature, the sector lacks the formal legal status that would facilitate improvement in food hygiene and access to credit. Vendors also suffer from traffic, noise, personal safety and hygiene problems, while consumers face food safety risks (Argenti, 2000).



**Table 2 ~ Importance of street food in selected cities**

City	Consumption	Value of trade
Calcutta, India (1995)	Approximately 130,000 street food vending stalls; 33% of the customers purchase street foods each day	Sales estimated at US\$60 million per year.
Bangkok, Thailand	Street foods were found to contribute up to 40% of total energy intake, 39% of total protein intake and 44% of total iron intake for the residents; 88% of total daily energy, protein, fat and iron intake of children 4-6 years old.	Sales of registered street food businesses exceed US\$98 million per year.
Santiago de Chile, Chile (1991)	Approximately 14,000 vendors.	Approximately US\$70 million per year.
Guatemala City, Guatemala (1994)	Approximately 20,000 vendors.	
Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire (1995)	700,000 street food meals per day in 1993.	

Source: Aragrande and Argenti, 2001

Evidence shows that IFS contributes to the economy in terms of gross domestic product (GDP) and employment. The contribution of the informal sector to GDP, where such statistics are available, ranges from 13 percent in Mexico to 58 percent in Ghana (ILO, 2002: 24). IFS employment contribution ranges from 48 percent of non-agricultural employment in North Africa to 72 percent in sub-Saharan Africa (ILO, 2002: 19).

There are many different kinds of street vendors, including those at fixed kiosks and mobile stands, those who sell from vehicles (carts, bicycles, trucks, etc.) or from plastic or cloths set out on the street, and street hawkers (Table 2). They may be individuals, members of families, or even disguised workers of established businesses reaching out to new markets. Vending activity greatly varies according to gender, ethnicity and age. Municipal cooperation with the sector can provide employment to vendors while providing food and an attractive urban environment to local consumers and tourists.





“...it is possible for the local state to both support and regulate this sector (...) it is not an ‘either/or’ situation and there are plenty of examples from around the world of local authorities finally accepting food micro-enterprises (and in fact embracing their existence) and facilitating their access to space and training, etc. while at the same time licensing vendors, regulating for hygiene, etc.”

G. Yasmeeen, cited in Macchi, 2006: 13