



MANJULA



MITALAAPA



NAGARAJU

Bindu Gopal Rao

Bangalore runs on street food. Not metaphorically, but quite literally. Estimates suggest that 6 to 8 million people in Bangalore regularly consume street food, and 1.4 to 2 million depend on it as a daily source of sustenance.

And yet, the men and women frying those bajjis, boiling that chai, ladling out that dal, they remain, stubbornly, an afterthought. Most operate with limited infrastructure, near-zero visibility, and little to no access to structured support.

That's the gap. And that's precisely where change is quietly beginning - not through splashy funding rounds or corporate CSR galas, but through something far less glamorous.

Enter The Food Project by Udhya Vyapaar. Born from a deceptively simple observation. Street food vendors are not charity cases. They are entrepreneurs running viable, essential businesses, in one of India's most economically dynamic cities. "The project was designed to address these gaps through sustained, one-on-one engagement. Rather than offering standardised solutions, we work alongside street food vendors to understand their businesses and identify practical changes that can improve customer experience, operational efficiency, and income," explains Krishnan Ranganathan, co-founder, Udhya Learning Foundation, and head of the Udhya Vyapaar vertical.

As part of the programme, each vendor is paired with a field officer who regularly visits their business and works closely with them over an extended period of about three months. The mentoring is highly contextual. Field officers observe how the business operates, understand customer patterns, identify bottlenecks, and help vendors experiment with solutions.

"This could include improving stall layout, redesigning customer flow, introducing higher-margin products, improving

The project currently works with over 400 food vendors across Bangalore. Among this cohort, average revenues have grown by approximately 23%, while customer numbers have increased by around 27%

GROWING STREET SMART

BY TREATING VENDORS AS ENTREPRENEURS, THIS INITIATIVE IS UNLOCKING GROWTH ACROSS BANGALORE'S VAST STREET FOOD ECONOMY



KRISHNAN RANGANATHAN, CO-FOUNDER, UDHYA LEARNING FOUNDATION

food presentation, strengthening hygiene practices, optimising sourcing, or helping vendors establish a digital presence through Google Maps and social media," says Ranganathan.

Lending a hand

These interventions have helped make a big difference. Take the case of Kavitha, who runs Annapoorneshwari Kitchen.

When the team first began working with her, she offered only four items on her menu. Through the project, she received an oven that helped her increase production capacity and experiment with new offerings.

Likewise, Dhanalakshmi, who runs Manjunatha Kitchen, initially sold a limited range of food items and faced challenges during periods of LPG scarcity. Through the Food Project, she received an oven and an electric stove, which enabled her to continue fulfilling customer orders even when LPG supplies were disrupted.

Then there is Tareh, the owner of Mahadeshwara Chats. Like many street food vendors, his business was vulnerable to disruptions in fuel availability. Through battery and electrical support, Tareh was able to continue operating during LPG shortages and maintain service for his customers.

The project currently works with over 400 food vendors across Bangalore. Among this cohort, average revenues have grown by approximately 23%, while customer numbers have increased by around 27%. Most significantly, 304 vendors have reported income growth. Beyond financial outcomes, vendors report greater confidence in making business decisions, experimenting with products, engaging customers, and planning for future growth.

One of the biggest lessons from the project is that meaningful business growth often comes from solving everyday operational challenges. "A larger vessel may allow a vendor to serve more customers during peak hours. Better stall design can improve visibility and attract footfall. Improved workflows can reduce waiting times. Small investments in presentation and hygiene can increase customer trust and repeat business. Such changes, when implemented and followed consistently, can lead to substantial improvements in income, customer growth, and business sustainability," says Ranganathan.

Street food vendors already possess the entrepreneurial drive, market understanding, and customer relationships needed to succeed. Often, what they need is practical support that helps them act on those strengths.

They may work behind humble carts and roadside stalls, but street food vendors are business minds in action every day. The Food Project proves that when these entrepreneurs get the right backing, a small push can spark big change.