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Subsistence Marketplaces: Journal, Knowledge-Practice Portal, and Organization

With great enthusiasm, we launch a journal, knowledge-practice portal and organization on subsistence marketplaces. This initiative brings out the unique, bottom-up, interdisciplinary approach of the subsistence marketplaces stream that bridges research, education, and practice. That I write this introduction is mainly from having the privilege of being at the intersection of extraordinary people and institutions around the world. They range from subsistence communities to researchers, educators, students, practitioners, and our leadership team. This endeavor comes in the third decade of the origins of this work and about a decade and a half from the first conference entitled *subsistence marketplaces*. The time that has passed is an indication of the enduring nature of the work as well as the deliberate, collective journey toward this important initiative. Below, we elaborate on our purpose, and our journey to date. We then think aloud about some processes we anticipate that are specific to this endeavor.

Subsistence Marketplaces is an interdisciplinary, inter-sector (including business, social, and governmental sectors), international peer-reviewed, open-access journal, knowledge-practice portal, and organization focused on research, education, and practice. This stream of work takes a bottom-up approach to studying the broad range of low-income consumers, entrepreneurs, communities and marketplaces around the world. Our purpose is to create a space that begins with micro-level foundations that this stream of subsistence marketplaces represents with a number of defining characteristics. We aim to provide a forum for research,

education, and practice at the intersection of a wide-range of low-income contexts and marketplaces, from extreme poverty to the cusp of low and lower-middle income. This encompasses urban, semi-urban/rural, rural, and isolated tribal settings as well as refugee settlements and other contexts of extreme resource constraints. Our objectives are threefold - to provide a forum for research, education, and practice at the intersection of a wide-range of low-income contexts and marketplaces; to highlight work on subsistence marketplaces that is grounded at the micro-level or reflects ground reality; and to provide an ecosystem through the entire research-practice value cycle from formulation to completion.

Our initiative builds on ten conferences over 15 years ranging in mode from in-person to immersion-in-the-field to virtual, several special issues or sections of journals, and research, education and practice from around the world about subsistence marketplaces. The journey provides a road-map in being bottom-up, bringing out voices of those with the least resources, and involving communities, researchers, educators, students, and practitioners from around the world. We envision a knowledge-practice platform and affiliated organization encompassing a variety of facets from a journal with refereed articles to a hub for research and practice.

By subsistence, we refer to the wide range of low-income from extreme poverty to those at the cusp between low and lower-middle income, essentially people and communities barely meeting basic conditions for living. We use the term “marketplaces” in its broadest and most diverse sense, meaning where goods, services, information, and ideas are exchanged, versus a meaning that restricts the focus to a physical marketplace. Such marketplaces could cover different domains of subsistence, such as health, nutrition, education, and livelihood,

different geographies, and different modes, such as physical and virtual. We emphasize an approach that begins at the micro-level of marketplaces, consumers and entrepreneurs, rather than the meso or macro levels. Thus, the journal welcomes a broad range of work at different units of analysis from individual to community to organization and society.

Our portal and affiliated organization will be a home for work that begins at the micro-level, examining these contexts in their own right, inside-out rather than outside-in. What this means is studying these contexts, not because they are a means to an end, such as new markets for companies, but because they represent the way much of humanity does business and engages in marketplaces. Thus, we aim to highlight work on subsistence marketplaces that is grounded at the micro-level or reflects ground reality; i.e., at the ground level of phenomena rather than the 30000 feet altitude of macro or 15000 feet altitude of meso level approaches.. The micro-level represents the starting point and foundation, although *bottom-up* implies developing insights for meso and macro levels. Work may focus on any level of aggregation as long as it draws from grounded reality. Our work complements other approaches by filling an important gap. Unique here will be an emphasis on grounding in the circumstances at different units of analysis. Work that begins and remains at high altitude does not fit our stream, although we will strive to be inclusive just as we hope potential contributors will strive to understand our unique approach.

Before, during, and after publication, we aim to add value, in connecting research, education and practice, enriching all aspects in the process. Symbiotic academic-social enterprise, which is distinct from action research, is a characteristic of this stream of work,

through sustained, mutually enriching knowledge-practice partnerships. We aim to cocreate an ecosystem to support the research-practice endeavor end-to-end, before, during and after the review process.¹ This will mean new approaches to research and practice and opportunities for inter-sector, interdisciplinary pathways, bringing together practitioners, researchers, and educators. Our initiative is not bound by discipline, but rather by the phenomenon of marketplace activities in the broad range of low income. The aim here is to be truly interdisciplinary, bridging social and technical disciplines. This will mean having insights from practice speak in compelling ways while couching them in what has come before. We emphasize the cycle between research and practice and ask for very specific and detailed development of this aspect of submissions including but not limited to piloting. We emphasize translating findings to practice with specificity (e.g., such as through proposing and/or piloting specific initiatives for practice), rather than through implications that remain at a broad or generic level. The supporting web portal will provide a bridge between research, education and practice.

Our approach will also mean a proactive relationship between authors and our leadership team. Indeed, as Editor-In-Chief, I have the special responsibility of evaluating submissions and suggesting pathways forward while making the process efficient for our contributors, leadership team, editorial board, ad-hoc reviewers, and other stakeholders. This may mean iterations between authors and myself before a submission is ready for review,

¹ Means to do so include connecting researchers to practitioners, creating forums for development of research, providing a space for protocols of planned research, providing an outlet for research, enabling the translation from research to practice, enabling the translation from practice to research, creating a platform for knowledge-practice or academic-social enterprise, and envisioning new metrics for gauging impact to a broad audience. In summary, we aim to add value before, during, and after publication.

while maintaining the independence and anonymity of the review process as subsequent steps of assignment of executive editors take place.

The journal will also be distinct in allowing for more balance between rigor and creativity, as well as between cleanly interpretable results and messy reality. Rather than view rigor narrowly, we take a realistic view of the limits of methods when studying complex phenomena. Indeed, subsistence marketplaces vary in so many ways, distinctiveness of each context being a hallmark of the phenomena we study. In turn, we eschew an approach that works back from an answer, rather emphasizing emergence of findings, even if messy and not subject to clear interpretation. Creativity also means that we encourage submissions that think outside of conventional templates, methods, theories, and practices. In the final analysis, we seek relevant insights that are well-supported by the method(s) and couched in work that has come before both within this stream and outside.

The journal welcomes submissions from academic scholars, researchers, educators, practitioners, consultancies, social enterprises and thought leaders in all sectors. . The journal will be fully online. Authors will hold all rights to their work. Authors will take responsibility for copy-editing to bring their work to the highest quality of presentation. Before submission, contributors are advised to understand the nature of the journal and work that has come before in this stream and in related literature. Contributors are advised to devote attention to specific translation of research to practice and vice versa.

Our aim is to develop the journal to its full potential, along with a supporting ecosystem. Together, we have developed a track record in developing this stream of work and reflected in

the individuals involved in the journal and the contributors to the stream. However, we also note that metrics such as citations are quite narrow in capturing impact on the ground. Perhaps, our approach can evolve new metrics that capture a wider form of impact.

In closing, we are excited to launch this chapter the journey to subsistence marketplaces. It comes at a time when the world faces unprecedented challenges, with the stark reality for those living in subsistence marketplaces during Covid-19 in being unequal, yet essential for the well-being of others. The ultimate test of this initiative engendering positive impact on those whose lives are so much cheaper, those living in subsistence marketplaces. Thank you for joining us on this exciting journey!

Madhu Viswanathan on behalf of the leadership team

Founding Editor-In-Chief

Subsistence Marketplaces