



TH1.2: Women's hidden roles in urban food systems in Dhaka – A pilot study

Farhana Ibrahim and Nozomi Kawarazuka
International Potato Center (CIP)

CGIAR GENDER Science Exchange, Nairobi, 12-14 October 2022



Introduction/Background

Resilient Cities Through Sustainable Urban and Peri-urban Food Systems will strengthen evidence and capacities for improved management of urban food systems in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. It will improve access to technologies, skills, and information to help improve the diets and livelihoods of the urban poor and reduce the environmental footprint of food systems serving the world's growing urban population.

This Initiative aims to support a vibrant, largely informal urban and peri-urban agrifood sector, to help improve sustainability, equity and opportunity growth, and mitigate risks to human and environmental health.

Theoretical underpinning:

Feminist Urban Theory (Peake et al., 2021)

- Urban space is highly unequal
- Urban space is led by capitalist production systems
- Urban studies often neglect the aspect of social reproduction and how it shapes urban future
- Urban space (including urban food systems) are sustained by women and marginalized social groups (e.g. migrants)



Research Study Site:

After visiting many urban and peri-urban sites in Dhaka we selected Kawran Bazar for our study site.

Kawran Bazar is a business district and is one of the biggest commodity marketplaces in Dhaka city, the capital of Bangladesh. It is one of the largest marketplaces in South Asia.



Kawran Bazar, Dhaka, Bangladesh



Kawran Bazar, Dhaka, Bangladesh









Research Questions:

- What roles do women play in urban and peri-urban food markets?
- How do women vegetable sellers contribute to urban and peri-urban consumers?
- Are there any differences among women vegetable sellers?

Methods:

- Field visit to several markets in urban and peri-urban to understand women's involvement and identify study site.
- Key-informant interviews with market managers to understand the market systems and regulation.
- In-depth interview with small scale women vegetable sellers.
- Life histories to understand the family background
- Observation to explore the activities and relationships with customers

Key Findings: Two Women's stories

Rashida Begum



A story of Rashida Begum (45)

- Rashida Begum lives in footpath (concrete pavement) in Hatirjheel lakeside. Homeless people helped her with clothes. Barely manages a meal a day.
- Sells waste vegetable in lower price. Sometimes need to pay to buy these waste vegetables.
- Her customers are mostly beggars, homeless people and sells from morning to lunch.
- Doesn't pay any fees or rent for the space but pays to the cleaners.
- Never faced any extortion or nor were forced to leave the spot because she is poor.
- Earning – Around Tk50 to Tk150 (USD 0.47 – USD 1.42) in a day.

Ruma Begum



A story of Ruma Begum (35)

Ruma lives with her husband and youngest daughter (2) in slums. Other two children lives with their grandmother at their hometown and studies in madrasa (religious educational institute). She herself never studied.

She has been selling vegetables here for the past 7 years along with her husband under a big mobile umbrella from big baskets of different vegetables.

A proper shop inside the building requires an advance of Tk100,000 (\$950 approx.) and monthly rent of Tk30,000 (\$285 approx.). Here in open there is no advance but need to pay monthly Tk300. Gives cleaners some money.

Sells vegetable from morning till 12pm or 1pm or until the vegetables are sold. When it rains then it takes longer time to sell everything.

Buys vegetables from wholesaler at night. Buys them in kg and sells with a profit of Tk5/Tk10 per kg. Because she is known to the wholesaler and buying for several years, sometimes buys in credit but must return by next day.

She mentioned that there is no gender biasness whether she or her husband buys from the wholesaler neither selling vegetables to customers. She also sells in credit to regular customers.

Income from selling vegetables are spent on house rent and living cost mostly. Barely can save for herself or for her children to send home.

Conclusions:

- ❖ Women play significant but hidden roles in maintaining urban food systems for poor consumers.
- ❖ Women sellers also help reducing food waste.
- ❖ Food market space is designed for (wealthy) men. Women's needs and their working conditions are not taken into account.
- ❖ Market space is also used as family/reproduction space with young children staying with their mothers.
- ❖ Women sellers' economic and social statuses are diverse. In the male-dominated market space, women who do not have male relatives are very vulnerable.





The International Potato Center (CIP) is a research-for-development organization with a focus on potato, sweetpotato, and Andean roots and tubers. CIP delivers innovative science-based solutions to enhance access to affordable nutritious food, foster inclusive sustainable business and employment growth, and drive the climate resilience of root and tuber agri-food systems.

www.cipotato.org



CIP is a CGIAR center

CGIAR is a global research partnership for a food-secure future. Its science is carried out by 15 Research Centers in close collaboration with hundreds of partners across the globe.

www.cigar.org