

Street Food Vending: For Economic and Social Empowerments of Women Street Food Vendors in Dumaguete City, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

The study examined economic and social empowerment among women street food vendors of Dumaguete City in the central part of the Philippines. The study focused on women street food vendors who sold in areas where most people gathered, particularly in four locations: near the schools; at Rizal Boulevard and the pier area; the premises near the Dumaguete Cathedral; and, at Quezon Park area including surrounding streets. Purposive sampling was used to gather field data in this descriptive quantitative study. A set of questionnaire was the main instrument of the survey to a total of 96 women street food vendors as respondents. Helping the family was the primary reason why respondents engaged in street food vending. Street food vending empowered women-vendors economically – all respondents earned profits every day from 25% to 100% of their daily capital, no matter how small the capital. On the other hand, respondents' social empowerment showed having more time for family togetherness like interpersonal communication among family members; and, bonding at home was enhanced by listening to radio for drama and watching TV for news or soap opera and entertainment together with family members and neighbors; moreover, owning cell phones provided respondents to establish contacts - friends, food buyers or customers aside from their families.

Keywords: street food; women vendors; economic empowerment; social empowerment

INTRODUCTION

Street food vending is prevalent in Asian cities. *Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing* or WIEGO (2014) described that women form a majority of street traders in some cities in Asia and Latin America, including Lima with 65%, Ho Chi Minh City with 67%, and Hanoi with 79%. Chung, Ritoper, and Takemoto (2010) cited that in most of the enterprises in Bangkok, 82% employ less than four people and are owned and operated by women. Acho-Chi (2002) noted that street food enterprises are operated by a

single, usually female vendor, or a couple without employees.

In Dumaguete City, the capital of Negros Oriental in central Philippines, street food vendors mostly women, sell different street food items along side streets and near the entrance gates of school or university campuses. Dubbed as a *University Town*, with about 130,000 population, Dumaguete has four universities – Silliman University, Foundation University, Saint Paul University of Dumaguete, and Negros Oriental State University, plus many other types of schools and colleges. Fresh fruits and *tempura*

and other assorted items like candies, biscuits, and hot cakes are common food items being sold near the school premises. Other food items are banana cues, green mangoes with salt, soy sauce or fish sauce and vinegar for dipping, deep fried sweet potato locally known as *camote* sprinkled with brown sugar, and many more local food items the women vendors could think of selling. During summer/warm days, there is fruit mix – in disposable paper cups where sliced bits of variety of fresh fruits with iced/cold milk and sugar are mixed.

Still, in Dumaguete, women street food vendors are a common sight at Rizal Boulevard near the pier or seaport area - preparing to cook different food items as early as 5:00 in the afternoon for night time food vending where table and chairs are provided on the streets for the customers. The women street food vendors sell street food items such as squid balls, fish ball, *tempura*, *tocino*, chicken/pork barbecue, boiled eggs and even *balut*, a 16-21-day boiled pre-hatched duck egg partnered with soft drinks, juices, and/or beverages and other drinks.

FAO (2009) defined street food as ready-to-eat food and beverages prepared and/or sold by vendors or hawkers especially in the streets and other similar places. The following are specific street food favorites found in almost every street food area in the Philippines with localized or invented names -- wherein Tacio (2012) who wrote for *SunStar-Davao* described these food items as follows: *kwek-kwek*, made of quail eggs covered in orange dough and deep fried; *isaw*, chicken intestine put on a stick and grilled; fish balls, minced fish rolled into balls; *balut*, pre-hatched duck egg; *betamax*, a cubed, curdled blood of chicken; *adidas*, the marinated grilled chicken feet; *atay*, marinated and barbecued liver of chicken; and *helmet*, the grilled head of a chicken; *kikiam*, made of ground pork and vegetables wrapped in bean curd sheets then

deep fried until golden; *calamares*, deep-fried buttered squid rings; *mais* or corn on a cob, but it could also be salted boiled corn; and green mango with *bagoong* or unripe mango on a stick with a salty fermented sauce or paste made from tiny shrimps or fish; and, drinks include *buko* juice or coconut juice that can be drunk directly from the *buko* itself; *iskrambol*, a simple shake with artificial flavors; and, sago and *gulaman*, a refreshingly cold drink made of tapioca and jelly. In addition, *Business Mirror* (2014) mentioned *maruya*, a combination of bananas and flour with small amount of sugar which are deep fried until golden brown.

Tacio (2012) noted that street foods represent a significant part of urban food consumption for millions of low-and-middle-income consumers in urban areas on a daily basis; and, street foods may be the least expensive and most accessible means of obtaining a nutritionally balanced meal outside the home for many low-income people. Abella (2011) stated that Cebu known in the Philippines as the Queen City of the South, is peppered with as many local street food vendors, and, when it comes to Cebu's local diet, street food is not just a quick solution to the problem of an empty stomach – it is a way of life. Muzaffar, et al (2009) said, it is largely recognized that street foods play an important socio economic role in terms of employment potential, special income for women, and in serving the food at prices affordable to the lower and middle-income groups.

WIEGO (2014) noted that street vending is one of the most significant categories of informal work for women; the low costs of entry and flexible hours make street vending an attractive option for poor women; for many, it is the only option. Lumampao (2012) emphasized that the roles of informal markets can tackle poverty and empower women who engage in street food vending, as seen from the study on street

food vendors at Intramuros, Manila -- with over a hundred street/ambulant food vendors where more than half are women, these individuals start with a capital of not less than 200 pesos per day. Wang and Kusakabe (2012) noted that informal economy is the employer of the majority of poor people in most developing countries; that many people view the market and street activities as a vital source of income and contribution to household livelihoods, thus, contributing largely to the empowerment of women.

The study aimed to determine how street food vending served as a tool for women empowerment, specifically in terms of economic and social empowerment. The study is anchored on a "theory on street vending" referred to as "focus conglomeration" described by Nirathron (2006) quoting McGee (1973) as: *where people assemble, vendors sell; and, that different types of street foods are proliferating in areas where people converge*. McGee (1973) divided vendors according to three main types of locations: 1st, vendors who sell in places where people assemble; 2nd, those who sell on the street – sometimes posing problems on congestion and obstruction; and, 3rd, those who sell in a bazaar equivalent to the seasonal or periodic market. This study concerning women street food vending in Dumaguete focused only on the first type of location as mentioned by McGee (1973) – *vendors who sell in places where people assemble* – with four specific sites in Dumaguete City identified by the researchers: near the schools; the Rizal Boulevard and part of the pier area; at the premises of the Dumaguete Cathedral; and at Quezon Park including surrounding streets – in the heart of Dumaguete City, a city beside the sea.

Golla, *et al* (2014) of the International Center for Research on Women or ICRW emphasized that a woman is economically empowered when she has both the ability to succeed and advance economically; she also has the power to make

and act on economic decisions. Golla *et al* (2014) further explained that to succeed and advance economically, women need the skills and resources in markets, as well as fair and equal access to economic institutions; and, to have the power to benefit from economic activities, women need to have the ability to make and act on decisions and control resources and profits. The Philippine Commission on Women (2014) noted that women empowerment works to raise the level of participation that will enable women to make decisions based on their views and perspectives.

METHODOLOGY

The study picked only four locations in Dumaguete City where more people gathered/ converged, and where women street vendors sold varied food items: 1st location focused on the schools near the Provincial Capitol area or the provincial government center; 2nd location was the Rizal Boulevard/seaport area; 3rd location focused on the church premises of the Dumaguete Cathedral; and, 4th location -- on the surrounding streets of the city's main public park which is Quezon Park in front of the City Hall. Three of the four sites -- the 2nd, 3rd and 4th locations had 15 questionnaires each, aimed to get a sum of 45 respondents; the other location – a cluster of schools had 25 questionnaires -- giving the total target number of respondents to 70.

The study aimed to know the profile of street food women vendors in Dumaguete City who sell in these four locations in terms of age and educational attainment; marital status; number of children as well as number of children in school; year started selling food items and how much was the capital; time of the day and average number of hours spent selling street food items; participation in trainings offered by the government; reasons for engaging in street food vending; list of street

food items and drinks sold; most popular food item and most popular drink being sold; ratings concerning the flow of business, frequency of buying materials for food items being sold and where to buy; and, name of training/assistance offered by the state university in the province. The research study was descriptive quantitative, using purposive sampling. Statistical tools used were frequency, percentage, weighted mean, ranking, and Likert scale -- particularly in rating the given economic and social empowerment statement indicators using the scale of 1-5 where 5= Strongly Agree, 4= Agree, 3= Neutral, 2= Less Agree, and 1= Least Agree.

The main instrument used was the questionnaire. The researchers printed 100 copies in case there would be more than the targeted 70 respondents. Each set had two main parts: first, was to get the profile of women street food vendors, such as demographic profile and some personal questions pertaining to women respondents' engagement in street food vending; and second, empowerment – focusing on two types, economic empowerment which consisted of nine statement indicators; and, social empowerment which consisted of seven statement indicators. Both economic and social empowerment statement indicators were based on ICRW (2014) and Golla, *et al* (2014) with slight modifications by the researchers. Economic Empowerment nine statement indicators are: 1st, *I can decide to do something for myself*; 2nd, *I can decide to spend money for my children*; 3rd, *I can buy more healthy food for the family for better health and nutrition*; 4th, *I have set aside some amount for savings*; 5th, *The income takes care of household expenses*; 6th, *The income is not adequate for the family*; 7th, *The income helps provide allowance for my kids to school*; 8th, *Our daily food meals are provided*; and, 9th, *Sometimes income is not enough, I tend to borrow money*. Social Empowerment seven

statement indicators are: 1st, *I am now a member of an association*; 2nd, *I have more time for family togetherness*; 3rd, *I have time for Parents-Teachers-Association meetings*; 4th, *I have time to attend/ participate some church activities*; 5th, *I own a cell phone – for contacting family members as well as friends and food buyers or customers*; 6th, *I have radio set where I listen to drama, music and news*; and, 7th, *We have TV at home for news and entertainment*.

RESULTS

A total of 96 women street food vendors responded to the study - 26 more than the targeted number, 70. Majority of them or 67% were originally from Dumaguete City while 33% were from different places in the country: one from Manila; the rest from Mindanao and other provinces in the Visayas. Those from Mindanao came from Davao, Iligan, Lanao del Norte and Zamboanga. Those from the Visayas were from Cebu, Leyte, Negros Occidental, Negros Oriental, and Siquijor. Aside from Dumaguete City in Negros Oriental, some came from Valencia, Siaton and Bayawan City in the southern part of the province, and from Sibulan, Pamplona, Bais City, Mabinay, Bindoy, Ayungon, Guihulngan City, and Vallehermoso in the northern part of the province. It was in 1969 when two women respondents first started selling food items; but, it was in 2013 and 2014 when more women started to venture in street food vending. On rating about the flow of their business, the average rating was 3.53 or around 4.0, equivalent to Satisfactory.

On age, 56% were of middle age, 30-39 and 40-49 years old; followed by combined age groups of 50-59 and the 60 and above years old, 25%; then, 20-29 and those below 20 years old, 19%. On educational attainment, 47% reached high school level and high school graduates combined; and 40% elementary graduates. There

were 8.3% who reached college level; and, at least 4.2% indicated college graduates. However, 1.0% revealed not having been to school at all.

On civil status - 70%, married; 16%, single; 8.3%, widow; and, 6.2%, separated. There were 53% of them who said their husbands had jobs, but no mention on what type of job; 47% said No. On number of children, 47% said two or three -- wherein 23.6% mentioned two children, while 22.5%, had three. Some answered having only one child, 14.6%; having four children, 13.5%; and five children, 9%. At least 1.1% said, nine children. Table 1 shows number of children schooling. Table 2 shows 22.5% of them have children who are in college; the rest are in other school levels.

The primary reason why a vast majority of respondents engaged in street food vending was to help the family, 83%. Other reasons indicated

were: to have extra money to spend for children in school, 75%; to augment income, 73%; to have free meals - getting their meals or snacks from the food items being sold, 63%; and, street vending being the only option for a living, 50%.

Of the 96 respondents, around 40% had a starting capital of at least Php 1,051. The highest amount for their starting capital was Php 1,250. On their average capital per day, over half of the total number of respondents or close to 62% had less than Php 1,000. Around 38% had more than Php 1,000 average capital daily. Table 3 shows profits gained through street food vending.

With regard to the ratings on nine statement indicators of economic empowerment -- getting the highest mean value was the statement indicator, *"I can buy more healthy food for the family for better health and nutrition"* with a mean of 4.46 or Strongly Agree. Table 4 shows

Table 1: Number of children schooling

Number of Children schooling	None	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Total
Percent (%)	13.5	35.1	29.7	12.2	8.1	1.4	100

Table 2: Children's school level

Children's School Level	Percent (%)
None	15.0
Kinder	11.2
Elementary	15.0
High School	13.8
College	22.5
College and High School	6.2
College and Elementary	5.0
High School and Elementary	6.2
College and High School and Elementary	3.8
College and Elementary and Kinder/Prep	1.2

Table 3: Profits gained through street food vending

Profits	I get 100% profit	I get at least 75% profit	I get at least 50% profit	I get at least 25% profit	I only get below 25% profit
Percent (%)	12.6	16.8	31.6	26.3	12.6

the rest of the ratings on statement indicators of economic empowerment.

Street food vending enhanced social empowerment among the respondents. The statement indicator, having the highest mean of 4.95 or Strongly Agree is, *"I own a cell phone for contacting family members as well as friends and food buyers or customers"* while the indicator getting the lowest mean of 2.91 or Neutral is, *"I am now a member of an association"*. Data showed that the statement, *"Owning a cell phone for contacting family members as well as friends and food buyers/customers"* received the highest mean, Strongly Agree, which implies that owning a cell phone provided the street food women-

respondents the opportunity to establish contacts aside from their families. The second statement, *"I have more time for family togetherness"* received the next highest mean. Table 5 shows the rest of respondents' ratings on statement indicators of social empowerment.

On sources of women vendors' capital, *"borrowed money,"* topped the list getting 36%; followed by *"myself"* – from personal savings, 30%. Other sources were *members of the family*. When asked if they ever tried to borrow money from *"loan sharks"* popularly known as *"5-6"* where the payment is almost double the borrowed amount, the majority or 70% said *"Yes"* while the remaining 30% responded *"No"*.

Table 4: Ratings on nine indicators of economic empowerment

Indicators	Mean	Remarks
I can decide to do something for myself.	3.75	Agree
I can decide to spend money for my children.	4.35	Strongly Agree
I can buy more healthy food for the family for better health and nutrition.	4.46	Strongly Agree
I have set aside some amount for savings.	3.42	Agree
The income takes care of household expenses.	4.11	Agree
The income is not adequate for the family.	3.66	Agree
The income helps provide allowance for my kids to school.	4.16	Agree
Our daily food meals are provided.	4.31	Strongly Agree
Sometimes income is not enough; I tend to borrow money.	4.03	Agree
Grand Mean	4.03	Agree

Table 5: Ratings on statement indicators of social empowerment

Indicators	Mean	Remarks
1. I am now a member of an association.	2.91	Neutral
2. I have more time for family togetherness.	4.22	Strongly Agree
3. I have time for Parents-Teachers-Association meetings.	3.90	Agree
4. I have time to attend/participate some church activities.	3.99	Agree
5. I own a cell phone – for contacting family members as well as friends and food buyers or customers.	4.95	Strongly Agree
6. I have a radio set where I listen to drama, music & news.	3.76	Agree
7. We have TV at home for news and entertainment.	3.98	Agree
Grand Mean	3.96	Agree

On whether the respondents got support from the government for the 15 training activities listed in the study, only two activities got positive responses -- health seminar, 82%; and proper food handling, 59%. Moreover, the respondents identified 15 types of training that they would want to undergo or participate in the future: 1st, to learn more about entrepreneurship or financing; 2nd, how to handle customer and how to budget/manage money; 3rd, food display and learn how to slice fruits properly; 4th, learn things about business and earning more; 5th, food safety and proper preparation; 6th, attractive food display and food packaging; 7th, how to make tempura; 8th, food processing; 9th, learn how to cook more food dishes; 10th, learn how to make different types of sweets; 11th, food selling and food handling; 12th, proper garbage disposal; 13th, hygiene; 14th, nutrition; and, 15th, community organization.

On food items commonly sold -- emerging as "top five food items sold" were: fruits, particularly green or unripe mangoes, and fruit mix; junk food; candies; *tempura*; and fishballs/squid balls. However, junk food is not specifically defined but may pertain to items such as *Chippy*, corn chips, *Oishi*, *Nova*, among others.

The "second top five food items sold" were peanuts, hotdog, *balut*, biscuits, and chicken nuggets. The "third top five" were noodles, *tocino*, rice-*puso* known as hanging rice, chorizo/sausage, and fried chicken in small cuts or slices. The "fourth group" consisted of banana cue, sweet potato or camote cue, hotcake, *chicharon*, and corn on the cob or boiled corn. Finally, "fifth group" included various chicken parts cooked in different ways, boiled eggs, *lumpia* or spring rolls, fried fish, and *kikiam* balls or *kwek-kwek*. Usually, there were food items for meals, and desserts. Some street food women vendors also sold other different food items as needed or when there were occasional orders. On drinks

commonly sold -- top two were soft drinks and mineral/bottled/ice water. Next were pineapple juice, fresh coconut juice or *buco* and *sago* juice as well as ice candy and snow cream. Pertaining to the question whether respondents receive extra order to cook for any of the food items they sell, 64% said No. However, for those who received orders, their responses were: "*Yes, but seldom*," 22%; "*Yes, more than once a week*," 10%; and "*Yes, once a week*," 4%.

The data on the economic empowerment of the respondents showed three out of nine statement indicators got top three mean values. These are: "*I can buy more healthy food for the family for better health and nutrition*," 4.46 or Strongly Agree; "*I can decide to spend money for my children*," 4.35 or Strongly Agree; and, "*Our daily food meals are provided*," 4.31 or Strongly Agree. The rest of the statement indicators, six of them - in terms of meeting their family needs, were also rated positively, 3.42 - 4.16 or Agree.

The data on the social empowerment of the respondents showed that two of the seven statement indicators got high mean values. These were: first, "*I own a cell phone for contacting family members as well as friends and food buyers or customers*," 4.95 or Strongly Agree; and, second, "*I have more time for family togetherness*," 4.22 or Strongly Agree. Four statement indicators were rated 3.76 – 3.99 or Agree. Only one statement indicator was rated 2.91 or Neutral, "*I am now a member of an association*."

DISCUSSION

The study aimed to determine whether street food vending economically and socially empower women street food vendors in Dumaguete City, Philippines. Women street food vendors are seen in different places in the city where people converge, but most particularly near the schools

– Dumaguete, as a “University Town,” has a high student population. The study is anchored on the *theory on street vending*, or focus conglomeration by Nirathron (2006) and McGee (1973) who explained focus conglomeration as an activity where proliferating vendors sell different types of fresh as well as cooked and ready-to-eat-food in areas where people gather or converge.

During the interview survey, the researchers learned that the respondents themselves were the ones responsible for making decisions to engage in selling street food items -- thus showing that street food women vendors have independent minds. The Philippine Commission on Women (2014) emphasized that women’s empowerment works to raise the level of participation that will enable women to make decisions based on their views and perspectives. In a report by Tacio (2012), the lady mayor in Davao stressed that the city government had been continuously monitoring the safety of street food. Moreover, the city government distributed carts that are ideal for street food cooking and display; vendors use hair nets; go through food handling seminar, and get identification cards from the City Health Office. In this connection, the Local Government Unit of the City of Dumaguete checked the standards for the sale of street foods by requiring vendors to submit themselves to a physical examination by the health department and required certificates of food handling in compliance with Republic Act 10611 or the *Food Safety Act of 2013*.

The women respondents mentioned five different reasons for engaging in street food vending: 1st, to help the family; 2nd, to have extra money to spend for children in school; 3rd, to augment income; 4th, to have free meals, and, 5th, street vending is the only option for a living. Regardless of the amount of capital, all women vendor-respondents in this study earned profits daily; and thus, implied that street food vending is beneficial. The respondents’ daily wish was

to maintain good health. Women street food vendors in Dumaguete City gain access to make a living, and access to food, snacks or meals for the families. These finding are in consonance with the study of Chung, Ritoper, and Takemoto (2010) who stated that this gender-based employment creates a dual benefit: women getting access to both income and food for families.

Women street food vendors in Dumaguete City not only earned profits but also gained more *suki*, the local term for a regular buyer or consumer of food items in one’s food stall. The *suki* would usually make extra food orders any time of the day or week - that would mean additional income for the respondents. Attracting or gaining a *suki* is developed through the customer’s constant or regular purchase from a particular vendor for several reasons, such as, the food from her stall tastes good, she has charisma, and there is the element of trust.

Women street food vendors in Dumaguete City worked so hard to earn a daily living -- as shown by 60 percent of the respondents engaged in street food vending in the morning and afternoon. The rest sold street food items only in the afternoon, those selling food items during night time, in the morning, and those in the afternoon and night time altogether. Regarding the number of hours of selling street food items, slightly over 50 percent worked daily for 6-8 hours; some spent 9-11 hours. Others spent only 3-5 hours, and less than 3 hours. Still, there were others who worked 12 hours and above -- alternated number of hours during daytime and night time.

As to the places where the women street food vendors have been selling since they started in this venture, top five areas were identified: 1st, at Rizal Boulevard and near the pier area; 2nd, at the Cathedral premises and streets close to the market; 3rd, at Quezon Park and streets close to the City Hall; 4th, Negros Oriental State University

and Negros Oriental High School at the Freedom Park - Capitol area; and, 5th, West City Elementary School. These locations are still their favorites.

Even though the respondents showed skills in preparing and cooking some food items, the respondents themselves felt the need for more training skills to alleviate their standard of living. They believed that providing various types of training should be part of any organization or agency's community engagement or extension program for street food women vendors. The training should not only be for women vendors, but also male street food vendors. It would be of great help to extend these types of training to other food vendors and to those who still plan to engage in food vending in the city and neighboring towns.

The top three food items popular among customers in Dumaguete City are *tempura*, *balut*, and green mangoes. *Tempura* is deep fried shrimp-flavored flour served with sweet vinegar-garlic-flavored sauce, a favorite food item mostly among high school and college students. *Balut* is a pre-hatched duck egg which is regularly available or sold at the Dumaguete Rizal Boulevard or pier area during night time. The green mango or unripe mango is thinly sliced and served with *bagoong* or preserved salted fish sauce or with salt and regular vinegar or hot/peppered vinegar – another favorite food item among high school and college students. Other customers prefer *uyap*, the Visayan term for preserved salted shrimp sauce instead of *bagoong* to partner with unripe mango.

CONCLUSION

Street food vending in Dumaguete City seemed to be a good source of income, or extra income providing enough daily profits and requiring low capital investment. Hard work and perseverance are the main requirements

in this venture. Street food vending, no matter how small-scale the business, provides adequate income – thus, empowering the women street food vendors economically. Varied street food items charmed local and foreign visitors/tourists in Dumaguete, specifically those at the boulevard area during night time where *balut* and *tempura* are saleable. Women street food vendors rated the flow of their small-scale business as satisfactory. Street food vending also enhanced women's social empowerment. By gaining profits, women vendors could buy essential affordable communication gadgets like cell phones, radio set, and TV set. Owning cell phones provided the street food women-respondents the opportunity to establish contacts like future food buyers or customers aside from their family members, thus enhancing their social empowerment. Further, watching TV at home or listening to radio programs with family members also contributed to family togetherness.

Although some of the respondents confirmed that they borrowed money to start small scale food businesses, one positive aspect showed that the women street food vendors knew how to make the instant borrowed money to grow— and they had “word of honor” or the element of trust of paying their credit or borrowed money. In fact, a few identified borrowing money from loan sharks referred to as “5-6” several times for continued food business operation because there was no hassle in their transaction. On bank savings accounts, only one-third of the respondents claimed to have bank accounts. However, for those who have bank savings accounts, a majority indicated having bank accounts in credit cooperatives; the remaining few, in commercial banks. The presence of a number of credit cooperatives in Dumaguete City plays a vital role among women street food vendors; worth mentioning are those two leading credit cooperatives, the Dumaguete City Credit Cooperative or DCCCO,

and the Perpetual Help Credit Cooperative, Inc. or PHCCI. This is another positive aspect, that at least, the women street food vendors value the importance of savings. Also, the respondents value the importance of education – preparing to support their kids for college.

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