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## Thriving Amidst Informality

The Development of Vendor Business Schools in Metro Manila

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## Title page

**Title**

Thriving Amidst Informality –  
The Development of Vendor Business Schools in Metro Manila

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## Abstract

Rapid urbanization has brought forth numerous challenges, highlighting the utmost importance of addressing issues such as unemployment, poverty, and food insecurity. Recognizing the significance of informal markets in this context, the Resilient Cities Initiative endeavors to foster innovation in the effective management of urban food systems. As a part of this initiative, this study investigated the business challenges faced by small food vendors in Quezon City and Pasay, focusing on enhancing decent work opportunities through the development of Vendor Business Schools (VBS) in Metropolitan Manila. Through a comprehensive analysis, topics of interest and relevance to the vendors were identified, and practical aspects to foster alignment with local authorities were explored.

Based on data collected from sixteen focus group discussions, the results indicate the primary business challenges faced by vendors, including income instability, the adverse impact of weather conditions, and a lack of business knowledge. Besides, the findings demonstrate the intricate interplay between these challenges and the socio-political field surrounding them, where challenges are greatly influenced by gender dynamics and city-specific operations. Drawing upon Practice Theory, this study emphasizes the importance of addressing the unique habitus and capital of different vendors within the inclusive development of a capacity building program.

It is proposed to align the VBS curriculum closely with the entrepreneurial context of its beneficiaries and foster a supportive political framework to enhance long-term effectiveness. With this, new insights for more inclusive and tailored development programs are provided, highlighting the role of a healthy transition to the formal sector in addressing the challenges of rapid urbanization.

*Keywords:* small food vendors, Metropolitan Manila, informal markets, vendor business school, capacity development, urban, resilient cities.

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## Acronyms

CGIAR	Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research
CIP	International Potato Center
ILO	International Labour Organization
IRRI	International Rice Research Institute
LGU	Local Government Unit
MDAD	Market Development and Administration Department
MMDA	Metropolitan Manila Development Authority
SFV	Small Food Vendor
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VBS	Vendor Business School
QC FSTF	Quezon City Food Security Task Force



## Definitions

**(a) Informal food market** – A market where food vendors predominantly operate outside formal establishments and public services, often understood as a ‘shadow economy’, since most vendors involved lack registration with the city. These loosely organized small-scale activities, such as street food vending play a significant role in food distribution within Metro Manila by providing the poor with opportunities to secure food and income (Alderslade et al., 2006; Resnick, 2017; Roa, 2023).

**(b) Small food vendor** – An individual engaged in the sale of food products within micro or small enterprises with limited financial resources and minor infrastructure. Often operating in informally organized markets and settings such as street corners, talipapa, or sidewalks (Nurhayati, 2020; Roa, 2023).

**(c) Decent work** – The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines decent work as “productive, delivering a fair income, security in the workplace, social protection for all, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, participate in the decisions that affect their lives, and equal opportunities and treatment to women and men”, an integral element of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (ILO, 2018; ILO, 2023).

**(d) Street dynamics** – Refers to the social, cultural, economic, and political interactions that take place in the public congested spaces of Metro Manila. Street dynamics are shaped by aspects such as street vendors, informal economies, social events, and community interactions. It involves the informal and sometimes unconventional ways in which power is negotiated outside of formal structures (Africa & Roitman, 1990).

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## Introduction

### A Problem Statement

#### *Resilient Cities*

Metropolitan Manila, officially the Philippines' National Capital Region, embodies a vibrant urban landscape. Throughout the metropolis, informal food markets<sup>(a)</sup> abound, characterized by crowded venues and lots of street vendors. Referred to as Metro Manila, the region is home to 15 million residents and faces the pressures of rapid urbanization such as unemployment, poverty, food insecurity, and congested settlements (PSA, 2020; UN, 2018). The urban economy is struggling to effectively translate its growth into improved public health, emphasizing the need, among other issues, for the development of more resilient food systems (UN Philippines, 2021).

In response to improving Manila's food systems, this study is undertaken as part of the One CGIAR wide Resilient Cities Initiative. The initiative operates within the context of strengthening research-based evidence, innovations, and enhanced skills to improve the effective management of urban food systems and enhanced stability of livelihoods in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

In this research, the informal sector is the focus area being addressed, given its indispensability in terms of physical proximity to the urban poor and crucial role in the Philippine economy (Alderslade et al., 2006; ILO, 2018; Resnick, 2017). Specifically, the informal food sector serves as a critical driver of food security, ensuring the availability and accessibility of commodities (Lee-Smith et al., 2019; Tshofuti et al., 2016). Moreover, informal markets generate livelihood opportunities, particularly for the marginalized and otherwise unemployed (Roa, 2023; Scott, 2007).

Innovative thinking is crucial, as policymakers and urban planners often overlook informal markets and fail to allocate adequate attention to their development (Tefft et al., 2017). In the given context, it is crucial to work with the rising number of small food vendors<sup>(b)</sup> in order to foster economic empowerment, social inclusion, and equal access to affordable food (United Nations, 2018).

### *Vendor Business Schools*

As part of the Resilient Cities Initiative, this thesis aims to contribute to the capacity development of small food vendors (SFVs) and critically examines their informal field. Specifically, this study explores the potential of Vendor Business Schools (VBS), providing recommendations for its development as the primary output of this research.

VBS draw upon the model of Farmer Business Schools (FBS), which have, through participatory action and the strengthening of agribusinesses, proven to be beneficial for over 3,500 farmers in India, Indonesia, and the Philippines (CIP, 2019).

This study serves as the first validation study for the development of VBS, aiming to address significant gaps in the design and pilot implementation of the program. Through a comprehensive analysis, topics of interest and relevance to the vendors will be identified, and practical components to foster alignment with local authorities will be explored. In doing so, I aspire to offer new insights for more inclusive and tailored development programs in urban areas with a focus on policymakers operating within Quezon City and Pasay, the chosen cities for the VBS pilot<sup>1</sup> in the Philippines.

Furthermore, while various studies have examined market dynamics and the policy environment surrounding small vendors (Recio & Gomez, 2013; Roa, 2023; Sia Su et al., 2012; Yeung, 1994), research on their intricate interplay affecting the potential of capacity building are rather limited. Moreover, such studies do not include the role of problematizing informality or contextual entrepreneurship in light of inclusive development. Additionally, apart from the implications for policy and intervention, a stronger theoretical foundation for the Practice Theory is addressed when applied to the agency of small food vendors in Metro Manila.

## **Literature Review**

### *A Precarious Balance*

The pioneering research conducted by anthropologist Keith Hart in Ghana (1973) sparked a growing body of literature on informal economies in both developing and developed regions (UNHSP, 2017).

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<sup>1</sup> The VBS pilot will be implemented in Kenya and the Philippines.

Their operating nature is characterized by a precarious balance, as described by Rothchild and Chazan (1988, p. 13) as "a constant movement between the official and unofficial... and the private and the public". A significant degree of overlap exists, with individuals seamlessly transitioning between both sectors as opportunities arise (Bremner, 1976; Hart, 1973; Milgram, 2014; Recio & Gomez, 2013). Nonetheless, the prevailing notion of urban dualism that emerged after World War II remains, accentuating the divide between the formal and informal. To foster a deeper understanding of *decent work*<sup>(c)</sup> – promoting increased stability –, this dissertation deliberately adopts the term ‘small food vendor’ instead of informal food vendor, minimizing the emphasis on labor that falls beyond any traditional boundaries and disregarding the potential lack of legitimacy and respect associated with it (Allison et al., 2021; Maglumtong & Fukushima, 2022; Roa, 2023).

### *The Exclusive Heart of Policies*

Research has revealed that many developing Asian countries have adopted policies that are unfavorable toward the informal sector, often reflecting continuations of colonial policies (McGee & Yeung, 1977). From a structuralist perspective, SFVs lack a defined status, being neither capitalist nor urbanized working class, leading to uncertainties in their activities because social and institutional support are insufficient (Recio & Gomez, 2013). In the Philippines, the government's ability to address this issue has been constrained by short electoral cycles, as evidenced by programs like Estrada's ‘*Lingap Para Sa Mahirap*’ (Caring for the Poor) in 1998 and Arroyo's ‘*Kapit-Bisig Laban sa Kahirapan*’ (Arm in Arm against Poverty) in 2001, which were not sustainable due to frequent changes in leadership. Additionally, despite decentralization granting more autonomy to local government units (LGUs), there remains a lack of responsiveness in meeting all market needs through essential policies. At the national level, the Philippine Constitution implicitly upholds principles<sup>2</sup> that support micro-enterprises such as food vending. However, it is crucial to note the contradictory

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<sup>2</sup> Mentioned in national laws such as the Local Government Code of 1991 and Executive Order 452, which ensure the security of vendors within their working spaces (Africa & Roitman, 1990; Recio & Gomez, 2013).

existence of policies that do not consider street vending as a lawful activity, as hawking<sup>3</sup> has been declared illegal (Milgram, 2014; Recio & Gomez, 2013; Yeung, 1994).

The regulatory activities undertaken by authorities such as the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) often still reflect a rigid dualistic mindset, building upon informality as inferior when compared to formal businesses, potentially harmful, or disorderly (Recio & Gomez, 2013). As a result, most action fails to recognize the potential of informal activities as a healthy transition towards the formal, rather than a problematized hindrance. The work of Breman (1996) emphasizes the significance of this transition and acknowledges structural barriers like limited opportunities in the formal sector and discriminatory practices that impede access to formal employment. Additionally, Breman highlights the role of collective associations in advocating for rights (Breman, 1996). A case in Singapore on formalizing street vendors in the 1960's proves the potential of a transition. Along the Singapore River, vendors got increasingly recognized for their market share and community role, increasing government investments (Ghani, 2011).

### *The Boundaries of Entrepreneurship*

Inclusion in the definition of entrepreneurship is crucial because of the prevailing discourse that portrays entrepreneurship as a masculine endeavor (Hamilton, 2013; Hughes et al., 2012). Studies tend to rely on male experiences when theorizing entrepreneurship, despite the dominating presence of women in this field (De Vita et al., 2014; Hamilton, 2013; Hughes et al., 2012; Tinker, 2003). As a result, there is a lack of recognition in policies regarding gender differences (Jennings & McDougald, 2007). Research in Nepal highlights the difficulties faced by women engaged in informal activities in patriarchal contexts, as they encounter obstacles in accessing support and resources to reconcile business and family responsibilities (Xheneti et al., 2018). Concluding, the deeply embedded nature of women in domestic relationships is an essential consideration for inclusive VBS development.

Additionally, the current literature on entrepreneurial and adult learning tends to focus on individuals outside of poverty, leaving limited insights into the learning processes of individuals in

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<sup>3</sup> A street vendor that is regularly moving from one location to another.

developing regions (Brak, 2021). Informal entrepreneurs are often classified as survivalists and therefore ‘necessity entrepreneurs’, and while the latter play a vital role in poverty alleviation, it is often seen as having limited potential for entrepreneurial growth (Acs, 2006; Boer, 2013; Naudé, 2010; Poschke, 2012). A study conducted in an Aqua-Based Business School highlights the challenges of translating a capacity program into business opportunities, potentially due to resource limitations and learning trajectories that are based upon traditional forms of entrepreneurship (Brak, 2021).

To acknowledge that no theory toward entrepreneurship appears to be universally applicable, this dissertation explores the interplay of 1) a structuralist theorization that portrays informal entrepreneurs as mere survivalists in an exploitative system, 2) a neo-liberal perspective highlighting informal work as a way to directly avoid costs and efforts associated with registration, and 3) a post-structuralist perception where vendors are ascribed agency to value the social motivations for their livelihoods rather than purely financial gain (Biles, 2009; Perry et al., 2007; Williams, 2004; Williams & Nadin, 2011). In the development of an effective VBS program, it is crucial to explore the contextualized entrepreneurial intent and potential of SFVs (Boer, 2013; Lans, 2009).

### *A Critical Discourse of Capacity Development*

Lastly, it is crucial to critically reflect on development programs, as they involve significant social stakes at the local and (inter)national levels, with interactions between actors from different social, cultural, and professional backgrounds. Many institutions – as being input oriented – will remain focused on securing resources from donors. As highlighted by anthropologist Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan (2005), development initiatives risk a disconnection between discourses and the actual on-field practices, emphasizing the need to evaluate curriculums before they reach the intended beneficiaries (De Sardan, 2005; Hilhorst, 2000; Ortner et al., 1995).

It is important to acknowledge the tendency of some critics, as illustrated by Hobart (1993) and Escobar (1984; 1997), to portray development as a top-down monolithic enterprise that disregards local knowledge. These critics prompt an examination of the differences between imperialism and development, which is essential to consider within the development of VBS.

Similarly, the introduction of participatory approaches in the 1990's needs critical assessment, including the actor-oriented paradigm from Long (2001) as it has been criticized for being unrealistic and stated to “naively promote research on peasants to be carried out by the peasants themselves, in which researchers would play the role of mere facilitators” (De Sardan, 2005, p. 9; Long, 2001). However, often forgotten in such criticisms is the discrepancy between the public discourses of officials and the nuanced private conversations among field experts understanding the complexity of the on-site context (De Sardan, 2005).

## **Theoretical Framework**

### *Practice Theory*

In an effort to explore the day-to-day business practices of SFVs within their informal operating environment, this study employs Practice Theory (Figure 1), a concept originally introduced to analyze the interplay of culture, structure, and social actors during the Algerian War of Independence (Bourdieu & Nice, 1977). Later refined by sociologists such as Pierre Bourdieu (1977) and Anthony Giddens (1984), Practice Theory examines the concept of practice, referring to individuals' everyday activities and behaviors, influenced by the nature of a field (in which social, cultural, and economic capital shape an ever-changing set of roles and expectations), and the habitus, which represents individually internalized structures (norms and values) guiding behavior.

In this thesis, particular attention will be given to doxa, the collective beliefs and societal presuppositions that inform the actions of agents, as they are commonly not integrated as a core component in Practice Theory. In doing so, I aim to utilize doxa as a lens to assess the different viewpoints of various vendor typologies and gender groups. Moreover, by emphasizing the role of the agent, this study contributes to the advancement of the Practice Theory, which traditionally solely emphasizes the triangularity of field, habitus, and capital.

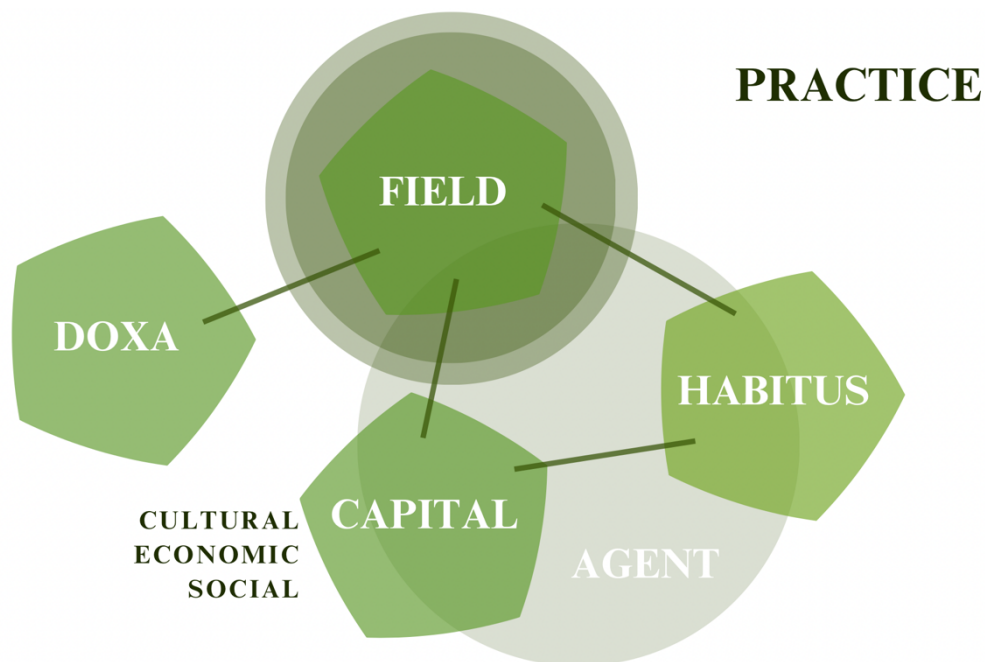
Whereas previous studies – such as Hill et al. (2019) in African countries – have examined street vending using system dimensions, this study aims to understand the field and its actors without boundaries and scales. Practice Theory recognizes that action is shaped through the interaction of



internal and external structures, where actors are both influenced by and shape their field; known as the duality of structure (Giddens, 1984; Whittington, 2010).

**Figure 1**

*Practice theory, derived from Bourdieu (1977). Source: author's own.*



*Note.* Practice results out of the interplay between an agent's habitus, and the utilization of their forms of capital, within the field of social structures and related doxa.

### *Inclusive Development*

The approach of inclusive development has gained significant recognition since the announcement of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, emphasizing the need to address social inequalities, promote inclusion, and consider the diverse needs of SFVs from different backgrounds in fostering decent work (Gupta & Ros-Tonen, 2015; Maglumtong & Fukushima, 2022; Pouw & Gupta, 2017). Through the integration of this approach, the study aims to ensure that all potential participants are equally given the chance to enhance their business capabilities. Furthermore, this approach offers a critical lens to facilitate the development of a tailored VBS curriculum, and to analyze its role in inclusive development, evaluating how – and if – it can contribute to valuable capacity building.

## Research Questions

The empirical action research focuses on the following design-based research question, aiming to simultaneously investigate the issue as it is solved:

**What key components need to be considered in developing a  
Vendor Business School to effectively address the business challenges  
of small food vendors in Quezon City and Pasay?**

Answering the following four sub-questions will lead to the formation of recommendations for VBS development and insights into the specifics of capacity building within informal markets:

1. From the perspective of SFVs, what are their primary business challenges?
2. How does the socio-political field influence the businesses of SFVs?
3. What curriculum components need to be included in the VBS to equip SFVs with the necessary knowledge and skills to address their identified challenges?
4. What practical components are important to ensure that the VBS curriculum aligns with the socio-political field<sup>4</sup>, facilitating successful implementation?

These questions offer a highly novel exploration of the interplay between market dynamics and an inclusive policy environment, considering the role of problematizing informality and contextual entrepreneurship. As a note, it is essential to explore the assumption that vendors themselves can articulate their needs, requiring a comprehensive qualitative methodology. Furthermore, the expectation that the (social) field, habitus, and capital shape the unique challenges faced by SFVs will be investigated.

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<sup>4</sup> Encompassing local street dynamics<sup>(d)</sup> and city regulations.

## Methodology

### Study Design

My role involved gaining an overview of how small food vendors – as the main unit of analysis – manage their daily business practices as well as understanding their challenges in the socio-political field around them (Figure 2) (Miles et al., 1994). To achieve the main research objective: *provide insights into the development of Vendor Business Schools*, primary qualitative data was collected to explore the practices of SFVs, examining their field, capital, habitus, and doxa (Miles et al., 1994).

Sixteen focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted as part of the research methodology (n = 88, 47 women and 41 men). Additionally, each participant completed a questionnaire that captured general characteristics, documented in Appendix A. The objective of the FGDs included capturing the inherent flexibility of the local context and shedding light on the entrepreneurial environment of SFVs.

To minimize language barriers, two Tagalog-speaking facilitators, one female and one male, were employed. Each FGD was led by one facilitator corresponding to the gender<sup>5</sup> of that group. Furthermore, the fieldwork involved two notetakers-translators. The personal profiles of all team members – which were carefully selected to ensure their alignment with the research objectives – and an elaboration on biases are provided in Appendix D. The FGDs were held twice a day (before and after lunch) at different locations, arranged in accordance with the LGUs of Quezon City and Pasay and their market administration offices such as MDAD. The average discussion lasted two hours, not seldom preceded and/or followed by informal conversations, and included an introduction, a fifteen-minute break, and an in-depth debriefing session (45 hours total). Prior to the fieldwork, the FGD protocol underwent pre-testing and refinement through two semi-structured interviews with vegetable vendors in the Los Baños public market.

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<sup>5</sup> When addressing the concept of gender within this dissertation, the analysis is limited to the distinction between women and men.

**Figure 2**

*The analytical framework of the study. Source: author's own.*



*Note.* To explore the potential of Vendor Business Schools (VBS) as a capacity development program, the business context encountered by four types of small food vendors (SFVs) in Quezon City and Pasay was assessed through sixteen focus group discussions (FGDs). With the use of thematic data analysis, particular attention was given to Practice Theory and inclusive development, aiming at generating recommendations for the VBS curriculum and additional practical components.

## Participant Sample and Recruitment

### *Quezon City and Pasay as Pilot Sites*

Based on three criteria, Quezon City and Pasay were selected as the pilot sites for this study from the sixteen cities of Metro Manila (Figure 3) (Roa, 2023). The criteria were developed to enhance the effective and sustainable implementation of the VBS both in the pilot phase and in the long term.

1. Larger informal food markets with more public and private market infrastructures compared to other cities, serving predominantly low- to middle-income households.
2. Prior experience in urban agriculture initiatives in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture and/or private sector.
3. Progressive leadership within the local government.

Additionally, apart from the City of Manila, Quezon City (landlocked, three million inhabitants; 18.000/km<sup>2</sup>) and Pasay (coastal, 441.000 inhabitants; 24.000/km<sup>2</sup>) are ranked<sup>6</sup> as the most urbanized cities within Manila, making them highly relevant for the Resilient Cities Initiative (PSA, 2020; Roa, 2023).

Notably, both pilot cities demonstrate a progressive approach to the informal food sector, acknowledging its contribution to the economy. Both have taken measures to support formalization, including streamlining registration processes, involving SFVs in market cooperatives, and planning for the relocation to better market facilities. Moreover, both have invested in enhancing market infrastructures and facilities to improve aspects such as food safety (Roa, 2023).

### Figure 3

*The geographical positioning of Quezon City and Pasay within Metropolitan Manila, the National Capital Region of the Philippines. Source: author's own.*



<sup>6</sup> Ranking based on the sum of scores of four pillars, being economic dynamism, government efficiency, infrastructure, and resiliency. The index is an annual ranking of Philippine cities and municipalities developed by the National Competitiveness Council with the assistance of USAID and DTI.

### *Small Food Vendor Typologies*

Participants were purposively recruited based on specific inclusion criteria, requiring active involvement as the stall/cart owner and/or the main person selling for at least six months. Four vendor typologies (photos in Appendix E) have been selected to ensure a representative analysis of different markets, commodities, and administrative practices<sup>7</sup>. A total of four FGDs was conducted for each vendor type, ensuring the representation of two genders (2) in both cities (2). The recruitment of participants was coordinated with the LGUs since both cities are partners of the Resilient Cities Initiative and have proven to be instrumental in the conduct of previous assessment studies.

**A] Vegetable vendors in public markets** – engaged in selling a range of vegetables from permanently rented stalls that include a business permit, operated and administered by the LGU.

**B] Vegetable vendors in private markets** – engaged in selling a variety of vegetables in stalls and carts operated and administered by private entities, typically owned by a family or a private business group that rents out the market space. Talipapa, which are popular privately owned Filipino markets, consist of SFVs clustered in strategic areas within the barangay<sup>8</sup>. The facilities strongly depend on the entities involved, not always including permanent stalls or business permits.

**C] Street food vendors** – selling animal-based street foods and processed products that are renowned as native delicacies. Street food vendors operate from temporary stalls, tents, or carts strategically positioned at street corners, talipapa, or sidewalks. They predominantly use a small cart and move around (designated) areas while selling their products. It depends on the city whether a designated area or any form of registration is involved.

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<sup>7</sup> Although many vendors have been operating for at least fifteen years, the majority is not registered with the city. Vendors' administrative practices vary, with some obtaining a business permit, while others make daily payments to the market inspector (city treasurer), pay rent, or only cover utility expenses.

<sup>8</sup> The smallest administrative division in the Philippines, typically consisting of several neighborhoods or communities. The barangay serves as a basic political and community unit, responsible for delivering essential public services and maintaining peace and order within its jurisdiction, headed by a barangay captain.

**D] Vegetable hawkers** – selling a variety of vegetables in temporary makeshift stalls in (designated) areas such as privately operated markets, streets, and talipapa. The stall, rug, tent, or cart can be easily transported, and the vendor is often moving from place to place selling its products. It depends on the city whether a designated area or any form of registration is involved.

## Data and Measurements

Data was collected through sixteen FGDs. The development of the discussion protocol was guided by previous assessment studies (Milgram, 2014; Recio & Gomez, 2013; Roa, 2023) and the Practice Theory, resulting in a list of six themes (topic list in Appendix C). All interviews were recorded and additional data was collected with the use of photographs and observation notes. Data was operationalized by defining key concepts both prior to the data collection and throughout the collection and analysis. Because of time constraints, this study did not comprise any other method than group discussions. To complement the data, a description of my positionality is included in Appendix B.

## Thematic Data Analysis

To analyze the qualitative data and address all research questions, a primarily inductive thematic analysis was employed. This approach allowed for flexibility in managing the rich amount of data by organizing it into broad themes. Following the six-step process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), the researcher aimed to minimize the influence of confirmation biases (Pohl, 2012; Smith, 2015). Initially, a provisional list of codes was established to prompt deeper reflection on the data's meanings, serving as a means of condensing the material (Miles et al., 1994). As the field experience progressed, codes were reviewed and revised, facilitating a process of continuous analysis (Miles et al., 1994). *ATLAS.ti* data software was utilized for the coding process, enabling the systematic organization of the qualitative data. Additionally, a code tree was created using *Lucidchart* software to illustrate the interrelationships of codes (Appendix F, Code Tree).

## Empirical Findings

### Section 1: The Primary Challenges of Small Food Vendors

#### *Income Instability from Climate Impact and Debt Burdens*

The experiences of the participants in Quezon City and Pasay shed light on the first research question: *from the perspective of small food vendors, what are their primary business challenges?* A recurring issue that emerged from the discussions was the instability of their income, at times only sufficient to cover immediate daily expenses. Factors contributing to this instability include the inconsistent supply of products<sup>9</sup>, fluctuating purchasing prices, and time constraints. Participants unanimously expressed their struggles with economic capital and material poverty, shaping the field in which they operate. A vendor operating in a public market in Pasay stated that “our income is not enough. When the prices increase, we are short on capital; it’s hard”. A fellow participant acknowledged this situation, affirming, “yes, that’s true. Our capital runs out”. When discussing the concept of capital, a sense of solidarity in the face of common hardships was observed among the participants. Some expressed to financially support one another, and there was a notable form of fellowship when participants became emotional while discussing financial circumstances. Throughout this topic, there were occasional comments from outsiders, such as an officer from the public market vendor cooperative in Pasay, urging the participants to stress their capital-related hurdles, exclaiming to the participants, “just share all our problems with them”.

Moreover, the Philippine climate significantly impacts SFVs, especially the fields of those operating outdoors or utilizing temporary stalls. The intense heat during the dry season causes vegetables to wilt quickly and results in limited sales opportunities due to low foot traffic. On the other hand, the rainy season and cyclones deter people from going out and lead to rising prices and vegetables to spoil quickly. A street food vendor expressed his resentment by “we’re losing anyways; we get sick because of the intense heat and rain”. All participants confirmed this, sharing similar experiences regarding the disposal of spoiled products at the end of the day. Some choose to consume

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<sup>9</sup> Participants attributed these inconsistencies to supply shortages caused by issues faced by farmers, transport difficulties, and adverse weather conditions; the latter resulting in the delivery of vegetables in poor condition.



these items themselves or give them away for free, others “sell the products at a cheaper price to still break even, at least to avoid financial loss”, also illustrating their fellowship.

Vendors voiced their concerns over the decline<sup>10</sup> in the number of regular customers (*suki*), further worsening their income instability. There was a shared sentiment among street food vendors and hawkers – reporting their capital to be the lowest – using the term “surviving”<sup>11</sup> to describe their situation, which influenced the group dynamic, including focusing more on the problems rather than any opportunities. Many vendors associated their struggle for survival with reliance on informal money lenders (*Bombay*), leading to pressure in repaying their debts. Becoming less reliant on debts emerged as one of the foremost priorities expressed by participants, reflecting their habitus to improve their financial situation. In female discussions, given that Filipinas mostly take the lead in financial management, divergent perspectives emerged regarding *Bombay*, as some stated that their debts “are a motivation... I am actually living for these debts”, while others fiercely responded with “no, it’s all about having no debts anymore” (hawkers in Pasay).

Some vendors stated to have worked in the formal sector before but opted to operate outside of those structures due to reasons such as inflexible working hours, additional costs, and the perceived constraints of having a boss. Vendors frequently highlighted the value of the social aspects of their livelihoods, particularly the interactions with their *suki*. When the facilitator asked them about their enthusiasm to enhance their businesses through training, all – including those perceiving themselves as survivalists – responded unanimously with a resounding “yes”.

### *Business Knowledge to Increase Capital*

A street food vendor emphasized the significance of business knowledge in managing their finances, stating that “having enough capital is useless without sufficient knowledge on how to manage your capital”. Fellow participants agreed, “yes, in financial management, right, we should be

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<sup>10</sup> Participants identified several factors contributing to the decline in sales, including increased competition from other vendors (including online platforms), customers seeking cost-saving measures by purchasing directly from the market, concerns about the quality of products, and the adverse impact of weather conditions.

<sup>11</sup> The notion of ‘survival’ was utilized by these participants predominantly to describe their profit margins as being sufficient to cover their daily expenses, without much room for additional savings or material growth.

knowledgeable enough, because otherwise how are we going to spend our money and how can we avoid our vices?”. Especially participants from public and private markets frequently expressed a shared aspiration to improve their businesses. Remarkably, while vendors from public markets noted the least inconveniences regarding their economic capital, they paradoxically expressed the lowest level of perceived business knowledge. Furthermore, street food vendors and hawkers primarily tended to highlight opportunities for improvement only when prompted by the facilitator, which played a crucial role in bringing forth potential areas of enhancement. Although articulating specific areas of knowledge improvement was challenging for many groups, apparent in long silences and the facilitator needing to rephrase questions regularly, valuable ideas emerged.

In general, recurring aspects for improvement included enhancing financial management skills as saving money, strategies to attract (regular) customers (such as product arrangement and the visual appeal of their stalls), better communication with suppliers, and resourcefulness (*diskarte*) to explore additional incomes (expansion of products). Furthermore, vendors expressed seeking guidance on how to overcome challenges related to seasonality, such as effective vegetable preservation and seasonal procurement. Similarly, vendors operating in temporary stalls expressed a desire to expand their stalls or acquire (permanent) stalls in more strategic locations.

Additionally, street food vendors frequently mentioned the notion of nutrition, as they prioritize the satisfaction of their customers. They acknowledged a lack of knowledge regarding the quality of their products and taste, highlighted by a street food vendor as “more knowledge about enhancing the quality of our products has become the real competition now, if customers are not satisfied with the taste and quality of our food, they won’t return”. A fellow vendor agreed that “we are aware that our products are not healthy, but it’s impossible not to think of nutrition because our customers ask us about this”. Several anecdotes were shared, including references to ‘magic sugar’ and ‘eggs for an empty stomach’, reflecting varying personal beliefs and differences in habitus.

## Section 2: Social Roles

### *Family Support as a Determinant of Success*

The subsequent two sections adopt a broader perspective by investigating the second research question: *"how does the socio-political field shape the businesses of small food vendors?"* For the majority of participants, the desire for increased profits stems from their deep-rooted commitment to providing their children with quality education, ensuring a (better) future for the next generation. Additionally, meeting the needs of their families, ranging from daily sustenance to offering them a comfortable life, is considered another meaningful benchmark of success. In many group discussions, both female and male, it was evident that the concept of family held immense significance, as one hawker highlighted that "a vendor is successful as long as he can support his family". Similarly, a vendor from a private market mentioned that "I am only looking forward to earning money so that I can support my family". Furthermore, the significance of family could also be indirectly drawn from the discussions, as even less active participants became more engaged when this topic was addressed.

### *The Gendered Doxa of Small Food Vendors*

Gender-segregated groups played a significant role in shaping the discussions. A common agreement between women and men was the perception that female vendors tend to be more successful in their work. This was attributed to their stronger focus on profitability and their ability to build better customer relationships. A male vendor from a public market emphasized "when it comes to sales, women can do it better because they are more capable of attracting customers". Such sentiments were frequently mockingly echoed by fellow participants, mentioning that "females are closer to customers, we, men, are not that good-looking", followed by "right, especially when the female vendor is beautiful". However, more serious comments were also made as "yes, female vendors have higher profits. For example, when I am done with my deliveries, I always want to go home. My wife then wants to stay longer in the market to sell even more vegetables". It was noticeable that male participants placed greater emphasis on the topic of customer relations compared to their female

counterparts. This discrepancy may stem from the fact that male vendors face more challenges in this area, which prompted them to discuss their social capital more extensively.

When asked to discuss gender, male groups remarkably valued this notion<sup>12</sup> as particularly more important in comparison with female participants. Most female groups agreed on a strong sense of empowerment, emphasizing that they do not consider any gender differences, as expressed by a female vendor from a public market as “women can do everything”. While men – although expressing that gender is more important to them – rarely made explicit statements about their experiences of masculinity, women consistently emphasized their empowerment through statements such as:

“Women are wiser. Men can be resourceful, but there are times when they are dumb. They need full instructions before working, that’s why there are times when it is better that we, women, do all the work. Our brains are at least functioning” (female street food vendor).

Still, both genders acknowledged that the *diskarte* of a vendor depends on the habitus of an individual. Besides, in cases where a married couple runs a business together, a cooperative approach was mentioned with gendered activities being assigned. Notably, female vendors were willing to dedicate more time to business-related training compared to men (Appendix A, Table 5).

Another difference between women and men was their doxa on household management<sup>13</sup>. Male participants conveyed satisfaction, indicating that support is not required. In contrast, women expressed great discontent and a desire for increased assistance, highlighted by a female street food vendor as “all the work is on me, it is really necessary that we get support because there is no help we can expect otherwise”. This difference – albeit not stated by the female participants as a gender difference earlier – suggests that women face greater challenges in managing household responsibilities alongside their businesses, leading to unequal competition.

It is worth mentioning that in some female groups, there was a certain hesitancy to openly discuss domestic support. As a result, participants started whispering and indirectly answered to not face any problems, however, without providing the elaboration as usual.

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<sup>12</sup> The notion of gender was presented to the participants as the similarities and differences between women and men regarding their businesses, behavior, and relationships with others.

<sup>13</sup> The notion of household management was presented to the participants as encompassing responsibilities such as childcare and looking after the elderly.

### Section 3: The Influence of Informality

#### *A Precarious Balance Shaped by City Operations*

Throughout the FGDs, participants voiced unanimous discontent with the support received from their local government units (LGUs). Notably, this dissatisfaction was less prevalent when LGU officials were present, despite joking remarks made by the officials such as “come on, we won’t point a gun at you”. A significant difference in the field emerged between both cities, as street food vendors and hawkers in Quezon City expressed some recognition from the LGU (MDAD/QC FSTF), as being assigned designated areas to sell and the availability of tents for some vendors (Appendix E-C1). Contrastingly street vendors and hawkers in Pasay operate without designated areas.

Additionally, while some Quezon City private markets were praised for their near-perfect provision of electricity and water, certain Pasay private markets were described as having inadequate utility services. Especially street food vendors and hawkers operating in mobile stalls expressed grave concerns over the lack of access to necessities such as electricity and water.

Diverse informal practices contribute to doxa of frustration among vendors, as emphasized by a vendor from a public market “we pay to secure a business permit, others should too”. Another participant agreed that “there is increased competition nowadays, illegal<sup>14</sup> vendors are selling nearby and even inside of our market”. All participants were noticeably frustrated, noting that “yes, that’s one of the reasons we have fewer customers and low sales” (public market vendor).

Vendors without a form of registration, particularly street food vendors and hawkers, stated to encounter severe hurdles due to clearing operations conducted by authorities such as the MMDA. During these operations, mostly reported in Pasay, products are confiscated and stalls are dismantled because the government does not consider vendors without a permanent stall eligible for a business permit. Some participants seemed to accept their status and agree with these clearing operations. This was highlighted by a street food vendor in Pasay, expressing “we’re illegal vendors, we do not even own our areas...”, and a hawker in Pasay stating that “it’s just right to follow the MMDA, we should

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<sup>14</sup> When participants mention the notion of illegality, they are referring to vendors who do not possess a business permit and/or engage in selling activities outside of or without a designated area.

not be hard-headed”. This was echoed by fellow hawkers, saying that “yes, we’re okay with this situation because if we get a permanent stall (*pwesto*), paying for that is another problem, so we are content here on the sidewalk”. Participants agreed, clearly expressing “I prefer to stay illegal”.

It is important to note that there is a distinction between clearing operations for vendors from private markets obstructing the streets, and vendors without designated areas. The former are typically asked to clean their area, while the latter experience more severe consequences. Additionally, it is crucial to also shed light on the participants that mentioned to not accept their status, as a street food vendor from Pasay stated "although we’ve been here for decades, when we get arrested, they will destroy our stalls and take away our goods. No more will be left with us, we will just cry in our homes". A hawker in Pasay mentioned that “the clearing operation is a major cause of conflict because, when you leave your cart unattended during a clearing operation, all your belongings will be gone”. A fellow participant responded to this with “indeed, when the officer arrives in a bad mood, we are really panicking and getting prepared to get raided... it’s a big deal for us”. Consequently, many participants who currently still operate without permits disagreed with others who expressed a desire to remain ‘illegal’, as they aspire to register their businesses. These disagreements highlight the precarious balance of informality and its diverse impacts on habitus. It is worth noting that all vendors who were operating in a less formal context before and have obtained permits now stated to prefer their registered status. Lastly, the public market vendor cooperative<sup>15</sup> in Pasay stands out, which enables it to receive formal support from the local government. Some participants expressed caution on the latter, such as one hawker highlighted, "yes, but then you must be obedient to rules...".

### *A Field of Cunning Street Dynamics*

On the one hand, the streets in Quezon City and Pasay overflow with vibrant activity, fostering a strong sense of social cohesion among vendors who share common struggles and extend support to one another. However, amidst the solidarity, confrontations and exploitations also occur. The majority of participants expressed that they find it easy to approach market masters and barangay captains to

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<sup>15</sup> In Metro Manila, it is commonly observed that for a group (of vendors) to receive any kind of formal support from the LGU, the establishment of an organized cooperative is required.

report issues or seek resolution for conflicts; especially if the vendor is paying for a permit. A hawker in Quezon City highlighted this by stating that “when there’s a problem, we report it to the barangay captain. At times, an open forum is organized in which we can report complaints”. A fellow participant fiercely reacted to this with “yes, but people who are close to barangay officials are more favored (*kampi-kampi*), even if they were the ones who did something wrong”. Verbal conflicts between vendors are prevalent, as they often sell the same products in each other’s vicinity. Although quickly resolved, conflicts occasionally took over the discussion, as a male street food vendor got mocked for his answer admitting competition, and frustratedly responded with: “I am the one who is bullied... I’m still capable to fight you know. You’re an idiot if you think I am stupid”.

Furthermore, bribery was mentioned as a regular occurrence, with participants providing examples, yet almost no one openly admitted engaging in such practices themselves. A street food vendor stated that “during clearing operations, they allow the illegal vendors who are paying extra, to stay”. Another participant reacted to this and mentioned knowing vendors “that are friends with the MMDA being notified beforehand if there would be a clearing operation”.

Frequently, topics such as politics created an atmosphere of hesitancy as participants took a long time to answer and mostly just started laughing. Nonetheless, there were instances where the group encouraged each other to share experiences, particularly when discussing cases of theft, being frequently mentioned despite the presence of video surveillance in some markets. While cases of physical violence and harassment among vendors were only occasionally shared, no notable differences were mentioned in terms of frequency or extent between women and men.

Lastly, vendors often expressed their preferences for a teacher in an upcoming business training, including statements such as "we hope to get along with the teacher, someone who is genuinely concerned with our lives..." (female vendor from a private market). Other women expressed a preference for female teachers, mentioning that "I feel shy and uncomfortable if the teacher is male". However, fellow women disagreed, stating that "the person just needs to be a good teacher, but if he or she has a different status than us and therefore does not understand us, I won't join". Such statements underscore the significance of street dynamics, shaping habitus and the complex field in which small food vendors operate.

## Discussion

### Overview: the Potential of Vendor Business Schools

#### *Implications for Learning*

The experiences of small food vendors revealed their business challenges, such as income instability, a lack of support, a decline in customers, and weather extremes. While enhancing business knowledge was stated as crucial for improving income stability, vendors with greater resources tended to focus more on identifying opportunities. This suggests that vendors with more capital perceive that enhanced knowledge can optimize their capital deployment, whereas others might find limited capital their main constraint, considering their existing knowledge sufficient for what they do. Perhaps with more capital, other vendors too would recognize opportunities that would benefit from enhanced knowledge. To ensure inclusive development, it is essential to promote targeted participant recruitment, including reaching out to vendors with the least capital.

The participants faced challenges when confronted with comprehensive questions and misconceptions<sup>16</sup> regarding climate change, nutrition, and the value chain were recurring. This indicates the need for accessible guidance in these areas. It is noteworthy that concepts like market development and the value chain were not mentioned by the participants themselves. Instead, they emphasized the significance of things such as customer relationships, exploring additional incomes, and expanding their stalls, reflecting their contextualized entrepreneurial intent. Although the agency of vendors showed limited influence on their capital and the expectation of external resolution was apparent, the discussions revealed an entrepreneurial intent that holds potential for growth.

#### *Navigating the Socio-Political Field*

In essence, the field in which SFVs operate is characterized by power dynamics, hierarchies of informal complexity, and a vibrant social livelihood, shaped by city-specific operations. These

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<sup>16</sup> These misconceptions involved the notions that climate change means weather, nutritional means tasty, and that solely suppliers or middlemen are involved in the value chain. As a note, it is highly understandable that vendors may possess limited knowledge on these matters since they received little to no training in these areas.



dynamics, including the problematization of informality, shape interactions as well as experiences of unfair treatment, social control, and perception of business opportunities. Dualistic challenges such as clearing operations are likely to diminish only when city policies increasingly support the informal sector. The need to address such structural issues and enhance business services is highlighted by the disapproval of minimal support, represented in doxa regarding low expectations and norms of recognition. While Pasay is still in the process of supporting the informal sector, Quezon City has made more progress in this regard. However, the public market cooperative in Pasay thrives and exemplifies the role of collective action and structure.

Previous capacity development programs that prioritized formalization rather than *decent work* have proven to be ineffective. Therefore, an approach that encourages vendors to obtain permits and promotes participation in cooperatives, coupled with the improvement of business skills, holds the potential to enhance the long-term position and prospects of vendors within the field. However, it is important to acknowledge that vendors may (initially) exhibit apprehension when it comes to participation in programs that involve transparency and accountability, showcased by hesitancy about rules and the tendency to assign blame to others instead of themselves.

## Outline of Recommendations

### *Curriculum Components*

The curriculum of Vendor Business Schools needs to be tailored to meet the specific challenges and entrepreneurial habitus of its beneficiaries. Answering the third research question, “*what curriculum components need to be included in the VBS to equip SFVs with the necessary knowledge and skills to address their identified challenges?*”, practical business skills must be prioritized, as key modules require financial management, customer relations (perhaps with a focus on continually attracting new customers instead of relying solely on a small group of *suki*), and climate resilience practices.

Additionally, business opportunities need to be explored regarding product expansion and communication with suppliers. Within these topics, competition and changing market conditions are recommended to be presented as a driver for creativity, helping SFVs identify their unique selling

points such as close customer interaction and flexibility. Furthermore, an accessible understanding of marketing and value chain concepts is crucial.

Altogether, the curriculum must foster aspirations towards *decent work* through aspects such as registration, obtaining permits, and better remuneration; and promote constructive coexistence between the formal and informal sector. Vendors need to be educated on the benefits of registration while recognizing the social and cultural capital embedded within their practices. This requires changes both by SFVs and (local) authorities.

To address gender-specific needs and inclusive development, the curriculum is recommended to predominantly include gender-separated modules, at times interchanged by gender-combined modules to create opportunities for mutual learning and open discussions on aspects such as work-family dynamics. Moreover, customized modules are necessary for distinct vendor typologies, considering diverse challenges such as the specific emphasis on nutrition by street food vendors.

### *Practical Components*

To promote the long-term effectiveness of VBS in Quezon City and Pasay, this paragraph addresses the fourth research question “*what practical components are important to ensure that the curriculum aligns with the socio-political field, facilitating successful implementation?*”.

First and foremost, the pilot program must be closely tied to strengthening governmental support. Mechanisms need to be explored to ensure fairness in the market (bribery, theft), addressing issues of competition and promoting business ethics. Furthermore, supporting cooperatives is warranted to be a key component, enhancing the benefits of collaborative efforts within the regulatory hurdles of Metro Manila.

In light of inclusive development, equal opportunities should be provided to ensure that all potential participants are given the chance to enhance their business capabilities, irrespective of whether they currently hold permits or not. Furthermore, it is crucial to acknowledge the hierarchy within street dynamics, including potential power structures between the VBS and its beneficiaries, ensuring that the program empowers vendors rather than demonstrates dependency. This necessitates the involvement of local authorities in education regarding the significance of *decent work*.

Considering the time constraints faced by vendors, it is recommended that sessions are designed to be concise. To maximize participation, sessions need to be limited to a maximum of 90 minutes, with a total commitment of two hours per week, based on attentiveness during FGDs.

It is worth noting that SFVs exhibited varying levels of engagement throughout the FGDs based on the environment of the discussion. Sessions conducted in a more natural setting, such as near the market, tended to elicit higher participation. However, sessions held in locations provided by the LGUs, offering advantages like air conditioning, facilitated longer durations of concentration. Striking a balance between creating a conducive learning environment and ensuring the authenticity of the participants is recommended to maximize their engagement.

## **Findings in Relation to Other Research**

The findings of this study provide insights that highlight the need for a more nuanced understanding of informal entrepreneurship. Regarding the neo-liberal perspective of Perry et al. (2017), the deliberate choice of some vendors to work in the informal sector reflects the autonomy associated with this form of self-employment. However, their emphasis on relationships confirms a more post-structuralist perspective as stated by Biles (2009), Williams (2004), and Williams & Nadin (2011).

The study also reveals that none of the vendors consider the entrepreneurial aspect of food vending as a motivating factor for their work, indicating that they are more likely necessity entrepreneurs driven by economic survival rather than pursuing growth and expansion, as stated by Acs (2006), Naudé (2010), Poschke (2012), and Boer (2013). However, it is pivotal to consider their potential in a different light, taking into account their aspirations.

In terms of gender, the challenges faced by female vendors in reconciling business and family responsibilities are highlighted, aligning with other studies (Jennings & McDougald, 2007; Xheneti et al., 2018). This underscores the need for VBS to address feminine entrepreneurship and provide tailored support to empower women. Furthermore, the importance of collective action in the transition toward formalization aligns with the work of Breman (1976; 1996).

In applying the Practice Theory to the context of informal markets in Metro Manila, this study uncovered innovative insights. In addressing the limitations of the theory – such as perceiving behavior mainly driven by capital and governing rules –, by incorporating the concept of doxa, the gendered dimensions of capital and practices were better explored. Additionally, by applying the significance of individual agency to creativity in entrepreneurship, the specific inclusion of the agent enriched the theoretical framework. Both have facilitated the broader application of the theory within a precarious environment and a nuanced approach to its implementation in developing regions.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

This dissertation demonstrates several strengths that contribute to its significance. Firstly, it covers a wide range of topics, resulting in rich data. A comprehensive understanding of this data is enhanced through the exploration of group dynamics, which facilitated real-time validation. Additionally, the number of participants allows for meaningful generalizability to Quezon City and Pasay.

The unique interdisciplinary combination of sociology, anthropology, economics, urban development, and a food systems approach provided an innovative understanding of the issue, uncovering the complexities of informal food markets and serving as a reliable validation study in assessing the potential of VBS. Furthermore, my six months of immersion in the local context added depth and authenticity, ensuring a hands-on vision and a nuanced understanding of the subject matter.

Alongside its strengths, this study also acknowledges certain challenges such as the complexity of the focus group exercises which at times proved challenging to navigate. This complexity also questions the assumption that vendors themselves can articulate their needs in a multifaceted business context. The content-related complexity may have influenced the accuracy and representativeness of the answers, emphasizing the need for caution when drawing definitive conclusions. Another challenge faced was the language barrier, which occasionally hindered my immediate intervention during data collection. Additionally, potential negative effects of group dynamics were also observed, as participants exhibited submissiveness towards dominant voices.

Lastly, it is important to acknowledge that the sample in this study is limited to a specific group of vendors who primarily belong to the same community, as already having connections with their LGU.

### **Enhancing the Reach of Vendor Business Schools**

To fully harness potential, ethical considerations need to encompass transparency, the on-field reality of a participatory approach, gender differences, and fair governance within the initiative itself. When transitioning the VBS policy to local authorities, it is crucial to promote inclusivity and the agency of entrepreneurship, avoiding favoritism or duality. Any authorities involved need to consider the limitations of problematizing informality and focus on a transition, rather than rapid formalization.

Furthermore, it is important to examine the potential role of VBS, as well as the role of the broader Resilient Cities Initiative, in addressing structural hurdles such as the establishment of vendor cooperatives and policy advocacy; even though these aspects may fall outside the primary scope of the program. Therefore, in the absence of such a framework, it is important to consider the potential limitations on the effectiveness of Vendor Business Schools.

Continued exploration of alternative strategies is essential for building resilient cities. Fostering innovative perspectives from previously less-involved actors, such as urban planners, remains crucial in effective decision-making. Alternative options for promoting decent work need to be explored, including aspects such as diversifying food supply sources and urban agriculture as viable pathways for sustainable food production and job creation.

In terms of further research, conducting an impact assessment study would be valuable to understand the long-term effectiveness and impact of VBS, as such types of studies have been rarely conducted before due to the complexities of its longitudinal scope. Additionally, more research is needed to explore the institutional environments that facilitate the success of capacity building and identify barriers within regulatory frameworks that hinder innovation and reform.

## Conclusion

This study is a small contribution to the spectrum of inclusive and tailored development programs. However, ultimately, by closely giving thought to the contextual curriculum and practical recommendations stated in this thesis, while also highly considering a supportive political environment, Vendor Business Schools have the potential to not only thrive amidst informality but significantly enhance decent work opportunities, addressing the challenges posed by urbanization.

While a sweeping conclusion for other cities in Metro Manila may not fully capture the nuanced socio-political and city-specific field, this study provides a valuable comparative case and framework for holistically analyzing business challenges in those areas. The direction of investigation has the potential to enhance our understanding of the underappreciated role of informal entrepreneurship and foster innovation in the effective management of urban food systems.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A. Participant Profiles

This appendix presents some general characteristics of the individuals who took part in the FGDs (Table 1 – Table 5), along with some additional answers related to their viewpoints on potential training (Table 6). The survey also gathered data on education, the volume of products sold by the vendor, other household incomes, registration fees, business permits (if applicable), and the role of climate seasonality on their selling volume. The latter are not included in this dissertation.

**Table 1**

*Number of participants per group (n= 88).*

Vendor typology	Number of participants		
	Female	Male	Total
Vegetable vendors from public markets	13	11	24
Vegetable vendors from private markets	12	9	21
Street food vendors	9	12	21
Vegetable hawkers	13	9	22
<b>Total number of participants</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>88</b>
Total number of participants from Quezon City	30	18	48
Total number of participants from Pasay	17	23	40

The group discussions consisted of five to six participants on average. Three groups consisted of eight participants while four FGDs had less than five participants<sup>17</sup> being:

1. Male vegetable hawkers in Quezon City (3)
2. Male vegetable vendors in private markets in Quezon City (4)
3. Female street food vendors in Pasay (3)
4. Female vegetable vendors in private markets Pasay (4)

<sup>17</sup> A minimum of five participants was stated as a study condition to allow for diverse perspectives, meaningful interaction, and rich discussions. It ensures a range of opinions and experiences, encourages participation from various individuals, and minimizes the influence of dominant voices.

Only four participants were neither the owner of the stall/cart nor the main person selling the products. \* If not the owner, this is mostly a family member (free labor).

**Table 2**

*Share of participants being the stall/cart owner or the main person selling (n= 88).*

Stall/cart owner and the main person selling products	78.5% of all participants
Either the stall/cart owner or the main person selling*	17% of all participants

Eight participants had less than two years of experience in food vending (stated as a study condition). On average, those had nine months of experience. The least was three months.

**Table 3**

*Average years of experience in small food vending (n= 88).*

Average years of experience	15.5 years
Average years of experience of female participants	19 years
Average years of experience of male participants	12 years

Vendors in Pasay generally have fewer employees compared to those in Quezon City, with public markets and street food vendors having more employees than vendors in private markets and hawkers. No significant gender differences were found in age, number of kids, household size, or number of employees. The number of women having food vending as their only source of household income was higher (81%) in comparison with their male counterparts (63%). \* Other sources of income were parking attendance, another (food) business, online selling, tricycle driving, or delivery.

**Table 4**

*Household and employees (n= 88).*

Food vending is the only source of household income*	73% of participants
Average participant age	43 (range: 23-70)
Average number of kids	3
Household size	6 (range: 1-22)
Average number of employees (almost always family)	2

The participants expressed a preference for a group learning environment, where they can engage with their peers, share experiences, and learn from one another. They value the opportunity to collaborate, exchange ideas, and support each other throughout the learning process.

**Table 5**

*The learning environment and time availability for a training program (n= 88).*

Preference for group-learning environment above individual learning	97.7%
All participants - hours willing to make available per week for a training	<b>2,4 hours</b>
Female participants - hours willing to make available	2,6 hours
Male participants - hours willing to make available	2,1 hours

The following answers encompass the responses that were stated in the group discussions to some specific questions. These responses provide valuable insights into the participants' motives and constraints of taking part in a training program.

**Table 6**

*Motivations and barriers to participation in training program (n= 88).*

**What are the motivations to take part in business training?**

Improve knowledge

Gain more business success

Share new knowledge with others

If it would improve capital

**What are barriers that could challenge participation in business training?**

Already satisfied with current business

Cannot leave the stall unattended / no one to look after stall

Potential of missing out on possible earnings during the training

The insecurity of whether to experience increased profit gains from the training

Location of training (too far) or transport costs

Family constraints: no permission of other family members or no one taking care of children

## Appendix B. Author's Reflection

Inevitably, my position as a cultural outsider had an impact on the data collection and analysis. Participants perceived me as an outsider, potentially influencing their responses and the group dynamic, as at times jokes were made about my presumed wealth or participants expressing a desire to have photos taken with me. The awareness of the presence of me as an outsider may have made the participants more self-conscious when discussing sensitive topics or may have highlighted any power dynamics, potentially affecting the authenticity of their answers. To navigate these cultural challenges, I adopted a more passive role during the focus group discussions, allowing the facilitators to lead. Language barriers also persisted, as achieving full proficiency in Tagalog proved to be unattainable.

Additionally, although I prioritized building strong relationships with the facilitators and notetakers before the fieldwork – ensuring shared expectations and collaborative decision-making regarding translations –, team members remained hesitant regarding real-time translations on topics such as bribery or informality due to concerns about my potential disapproval. Nonetheless, I had the perception that there were fewer translation barriers throughout the transcription of the data, as it included a multitude of local terminology and encompassed detailed descriptions of sensitive subjects. Additionally, to ensure accuracy and reliability, a Filipino colleague, who was present as an observer during the FGDs, cross-checked the transcriptions based on her live interpretation and also verified the analysis in accordance with the collected data.

Lastly, despite my long-term immersion in Philippine culture, it is important to acknowledge that personal assumptions and preconceptions may have inadvertently influenced the research process. My education and background may have shaped my understanding of social norms and values, particularly in relation to household and gender dynamics.

## Appendix C. FGD Topic List

The following topic list served as a guiding framework to facilitate all sixteen group discussions and interactive group exercises. Participants were encouraged to provide detailed explanations in open dialogue and share relevant examples for each topic.

### 1. Orientation of challenges and opportunities

#### Introduction

- a. Self-introductions
- b. Experience in food vending
- c. Motivations - "What do you look forward to every day as a food vendor?"

#### Challenges

- d. Business and marketing challenges
- e. Location arrangement (market, registration, and permits)
- f. Support received (national government, local government, and other organizations)
- g. Social constraints (pressure)
- h. Domestic challenges (household)
- i. External challenges (pandemic, economy, climate, politics)

#### Opportunities

- j. Perceptions of a successful vendor
- k. Utilities (infrastructure, water, and electricity)
- l. Increased support from the LGU
- m. Capital
- n. Vendor knowledge and business skills
- o. Support for childcare
- p. Social cohesion and fellowship (small food vendor networks)



## **2. Social norms and cultural practices**

### **Safety**

- a. Decision-making and freedom of expression
- b. Violence
- c. Political autonomy
- d. Safety differences between women and men
- e. Relationship with authorities and community leaders

## **3. Motivation**

### **Vendor Business School**

- a. Goals for learning
- b. Time investment
- c. Foreseen challenges

## **4. Facilitator**

### **Education**

- a. Prior education
- b. Role models and mentors
- c. Teacher characteristics

## **5. Curriculum**

### **Business skills**

- a. Teaching methods
- b. Learning environment
- c. Perceptions of food safety
- d. Hygiene and sanitation
- e. Gender dynamics
- f. Nutritional knowledge

- g.** Climate change
- h.** Understanding of the value chain
- i.** Ability to make profit
- j.** Business ethics

**Value chain inclusivity**

- k.** Relationships with other value chain members (farmers, middlemen, suppliers, customers)
- l.** Difficulties (quality of products, delays, efficiencies, fluctuating prices)

**6. Ending**

- a.** Option for any additions from the participants

## Appendix D. Team Profiles

The inclusion of personal profiles of the two facilitators and two notetakers/translators involved in this study serves the purpose of providing transparency regarding any biases that may have influenced the research process. By presenting these profiles as an annex, I acknowledge that individuals involved in data collection and translation bring their own unique experiences, which can influence the interpretation and representation of data. Additionally, these profiles offer valuable insights into the cultural and linguistic context within which the research was conducted and helps to understand the dynamics of the interactions between the primary researcher, facilitators, and notetakers.

It is important to note that none of the facilitators and notetakers involved in this research were from the communities being studied. Additionally, all four were new to the scene of capacity building for small food vendors, which enhanced the objectivity of the data collection. Moreover, considerable effort was made to establish positive and respectful relationships with the facilitators and notetakers, fostering an engaging atmosphere. Clear agreements were made regarding the expectations of the main researcher, flexibility in formulating non-anticipated sub-questions, and the accuracy of translations (including swear words, proverbs, and sensitive topics).

### **Female facilitator**

Name	C. Britanico
Age	36
Education	BSc in Development Communication and MSc in Community Development at the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB)
Background	Masbate, Philippines (rural area, island province)
Work experience	10 years of experience in rural development
Mother tongue	Masbateño
Language skills	Tagalog and English

Facilitator experience Experienced in FGDs with community members and leaders of rural resettlements and indigenous people in protected areas.

### **Male facilitator**

Name D.R.M. Roc

Age 25

Education BSc in Community Development (University of the Philippines Diliman) and PhD in Development Communication (UPLB)

Background Zamboanga, Philippines (underdeveloped city in Mindanao)

Work experience Teaching undergraduate courses on interpersonal and participatory communication, as well as community research.

Mother tongue Tagalog

Language skills English, Bisaya, and Chavacano

Facilitator experience Experience in facilitating FGDs for nine years with communities from both urban and rural areas. Facilitated for various NGOs, working with farmers, informal settlers, youth, LGBTQ+, individuals displaced by armed conflict, people with disabilities, and more.

Note First time facilitating exclusively with male participants.

### **Notetaker**

Name M.C.S.A. Yu

Age 23

Education BSc in Production and Industrial Forestry (UPLB)

Background Bay, Laguna, Philippines (rural and agricultural municipality)

Mother tongue Tagalog

Language skills English

Experience Experienced in conducting FGDs with community members to discuss environmental issues occurring in their area.

**Notetaker**

Name	A.A.V. Timanil
Age	23
Education	BSc in Environmental Forestry (UPLB)
Background	La Mesa, Calamba City, Philippines (urban area)
Mother tongue	Tagalog
Language skills	English
Experience	Experienced in conducting FGDs with barangay officials and stakeholders concerning environmental conservation strategies.

## Appendix E. Vendor Typology Photos<sup>18</sup>

### A) Public market in Quezon City.



*Note.* Murphy market in San Roque operated by the LGU (Quezon City), 24<sup>th</sup> May 2023.

<sup>18</sup> Source: all are author's own.

**B| Private market in Quezon City.**

*Note.* Kamuning, utilities well-provided by the private owner (Quezon City), 11<sup>th</sup> March 2023.

**B| Private market in Pasay (talipapa).**



*Note.* Talipapa, vendors clustered in strategic areas. Barangay 91 (Pasay), 29<sup>th</sup> March 2023.



C] Street food vendor (1. tent) in Quezon City; street food vendor (2. cart) in Pasay.



*Note C1.* Shelter tent provided by the LGU. Central Quezon City, 17<sup>th</sup> May 2023.

*Note C2.* Street food vendor using a parasol. Barangay 40 (Pasay), 25<sup>th</sup> May 2023.

**D| Vegetable hawkers in Pasay.**

*Note.* Mobile vendors moving from one place to another. Barangay 91 (Pasay) 30<sup>th</sup> May 2023.

