

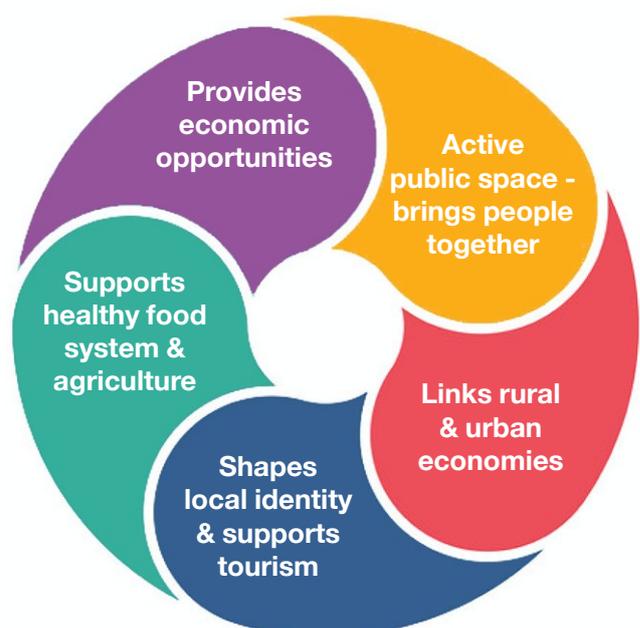


Women Vendors' Voices & Aspirations for Change

Findings and recommendations from a gendered marketplace assessment

Traditional or local marketplaces are extremely important for economic and social development in Timor-Leste, where the majority of households in rural areas depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. Marketplaces are essential economic hubs, where consumers and vendors buy and sell a variety of goods for daily use. They are a vital link in the market system for agricultural products, as the majority of fresh food that is produced for sale is sold via the local marketplace and then on to urban centres. Local marketplaces are particularly important in supporting women's economic activity, with an estimated 75-85% of vendors in municipal and sub-municipal markets being women.

Marketplaces by nature are rich with informal agricultural, market and business-related activity, enabling people to gain access to important information and networks that can assist them in making production and trade decisions.



Characteristics and benefits of efficient, vibrant and safe marketplaces

Listening to the priorities of women vendors

TOMAK was interested in exploring how well local marketplace facilities and operations meet the needs of vendors, particularly women vendors and traders. Toward this end, TOMAK partnered with the Secretary of State for Equality and Inclusion (SEII) and UN Women to understand better the current context of local marketplaces through a gendered marketplace assessment (GMA).

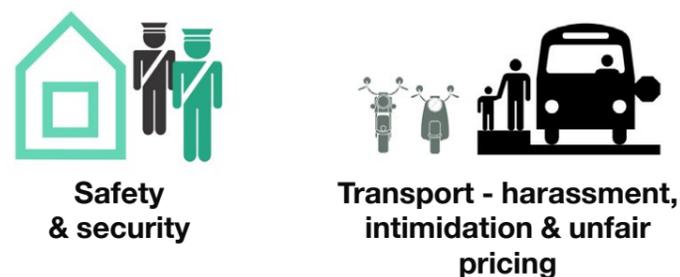
The GMA was conducted in two municipalities across Timor-Leste over a 3-month period (April-June 2018). Various data collection techniques were used to construct a picture of the situation and solicit the views of a broad range of stakeholders, both women and men. The assessment made considerable efforts to ensure the voice and aspirations of women were captured throughout the process and that the Municipal Presidents of Baucau and Bobonaro had a strong leadership role in the process. Overall, the assessment involved 197 stakeholders (75% female and 25% male) across the municipalities of Bobonaro and Baucau. Following the assessment, the validation results process brought together 163 stakeholders (65% female and 35% male) at the municipal and national level in Dili.

Very similar issues were raised across all four marketplaces. Viewed together, the top three priority issues for women vendors were 1) toilets and water; 2) waste management; and 3) management, governance and control of market spaces.

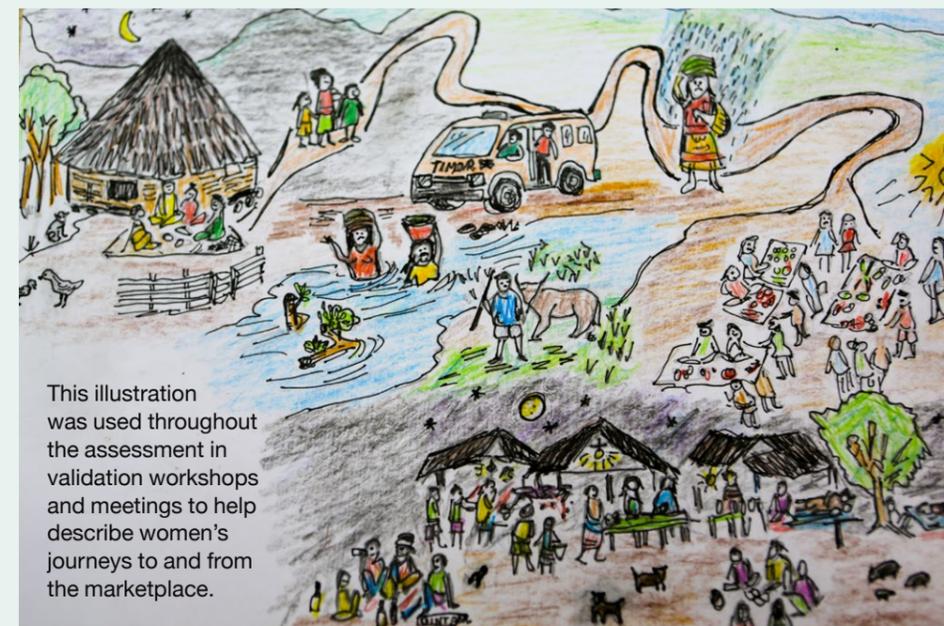


Priority issues for women across all marketplaces

Throughout this assessment, women vendors also regularly raised concerns about safety and security risks they face both within the marketplace, and in their journeys to and from the market. These threats, together with issues of unsafe and unfairly priced transport, represent major issues for women vendors.



Other serious concerns for women vendors



This illustration was used throughout the assessment in validation workshops and meetings to help describe women's journeys to and from the marketplace.

As with any other group of people, vendors in Timor-Leste vary in their circumstances and experiences in selling at the market. The following image and narrative tells a collective story of the many experiences that were shared with us during the assessment.

Women's journeys to and from the market

"We go to the local market because it is usually the only place we can sell our produce for cash. No one buys from our farms much. We do this to get money for our families, so we just get on with it even though we know there are risks in selling at the local market."

"Some of us leave home in the dark and travel long distances to the market, so we can get there in time for the early trade. We have to decide whether or not to take our children with us. The children may miss school if they come to the market with us and if they sleep overnight in the marketplace, they can be frightened. If our children stay behind, we need to rely on older children or family members to look after them and we need to set up everything before we go so our husbands are not too put out. There is always the thought in the back of our minds that something could happen to our children."

"Some of us walk alone, while others walk together in groups. No one likes walking to the market at night. We are afraid of someone following us and attacking us or taking our produce. We worry about coming across wild animals or falling off the narrow mountainous paths. If we walk, we have to carry our produce and drinking water and sometimes young children. In the end, this means we can't carry a lot of produce to sell. It is often hard to see where we are going and sometimes it rains heavily. Some of us have to cross rivers up to our shoulders, or we must wait hours for the river to recede so we can cross safely. We go back and forth across the river sometimes, in order bring our children and produce over."

"Sometimes we travel on local transport, but doing this can make us vulnerable. There are men who annoy us and sexually harass us on buses and mikrolets. Sometimes we are forced to pay higher transport prices than we should. Our big fear is being the last passenger on the bus or mikrolet and being alone with the driver."

"Most of us come to the market very early in the morning, when it is still dark. Our markets often don't have electricity or lighting or any places for us to really rest. After we arrive, we have to negotiate space to sell. Some vendors get into fights over space. We sometimes end up sitting on the ground in areas of the market that have no cover and are out in the sun. We stay until our produce is sold and sometimes we have to stay overnight in the market. It can be scary to sleep in the market, so sometimes we sell our produce very cheaply to other vendors, so we can leave before dark. When we leave early, we miss the evening sale period, where we can make good money in the municipal market."

"At night we have to protect our produce and ourselves at all times. The only toilet is locked and it can be hard to find a place to rest. The marketplace is not a safe place for us at night because there are men who drink, gamble and fight in the market. We are often verbally and sexually harassed. We try to stay quiet and not bring attention to ourselves, but we don't sleep well and it can be very stressful. We spend most of the night hoping we will sell our produce quickly tomorrow so we can go home early, feeling proud of ourselves for the money we have earned."



Women vendors rank their priority issues, and share their experiences and ideas for the future as part of a gendered marketplace assessment

Key findings & recommendations

Overall finding

There is a need for long-term economic and social investments in gender-responsive marketplaces.

The assessment identified three overarching issues that need to be addressed:

1. Current levels of investment in marketplaces do not reflect the economic value that marketplaces bring to the local economy.
2. Marketplace planning, governance and management arrangements are poor, unregulated and reinforce existing gender inequalities.
3. Unsafe marketplaces and travel to marketplaces restrict women's economic business potential, harm their wellbeing and that of their families, and limit broader economic growth.

Overall recommendations

1. Long-term gender-responsive public planning and investment in marketplaces is needed to build efficient, vibrant and safe marketplaces that promote economic opportunities and social cohesion.
2. Stakeholders planning future investments in marketplace infrastructure should conduct gender and socially inclusive assessments to ensure the voice and needs of all stakeholders are taken into consideration.
3. Any infrastructure built should include a representative governance mechanism to ensure infrastructure and facilities are sustainable, fit for purpose, maintainable and provide equitable access to all stakeholders.

The full report in [English](#) and [Tetun](#) can be found on the TOMAK website: www.tomak.org/resources