

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC ROLES IN SMALL-SCALE AGRIFOOD MARKET SYSTEMS: IMPLICATIONS FOR HOUSEHOLD INCOME AND SUSTAINABILITY

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Article history:

Received: August 12, 2024

Accepted: November 15, 2024

Published: April 12, 2025

Keywords:

agrifood market, agrifood systems, household livelihoods, income contribution, sustainability traders, women traders.

ABSTRACT

Small-scale agrifood market systems play an important role in supporting household livelihoods and local food supply, particularly in regions where traditional vegetable markets dominate. Women increasingly participate as vegetable traders within these systems, yet their economic roles are often underrepresented in agrifood sustainability analyses. This study examines women's economic roles by analyzing income generation, cost structures, and contributions to household income within a small-scale agrifood market system. A quantitative descriptive approach was employed using a census survey of women vegetable traders operating in a traditional morning market in Bone-Bone Subdistrict, Indonesia. Data were collected through structured interviews and analyzed using cost-income analysis and household income contribution measures. The results indicate that women traders generate substantial net income, with variable costs comprising the largest share of total production costs. Women's trading income contributes approximately 80% of total household income, indicating that women act as primary economic providers. These findings demonstrate that vegetable trading represents a viable livelihood strategy. Overall, women traders support both household economic sustainability and the stability of small-scale agrifood markets by maintaining daily market circulation and food supply continuity, contributing to more resilient local food systems.

Keywords:

kontribusi pendapatan, mata pencaharian, pasar agribisnis, pedagang berkelanjutan, pedagang perempuan, sistem agribisnis.

ABSTRACT

Sistem pasar agribisnis skala kecil memainkan peran penting dalam mendukung mata pencaharian rumah tangga dan pasokan pangan lokal, khususnya di daerah-daerah yang didominasi pasar sayur tradisional. Perempuan semakin banyak berpartisipasi sebagai pedagang sayur dalam sistem ini, namun peran ekonomi mereka seringkali kurang terwakili dalam analisis keberlanjutan agribisnis. Studi ini meneliti peran ekonomi perempuan dengan menganalisis penghasilan, struktur biaya, dan kontribusi terhadap pendapatan rumah tangga dalam sistem pasar agribisnis skala kecil. Pendekatan deskriptif kuantitatif digunakan dengan menggunakan survei sensus terhadap pedagang sayur perempuan yang beroperasi di pasar pagi tradisional di Kecamatan Bone-Bone, Indonesia. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara terstruktur dan dianalisis menggunakan analisis biaya-pendapatan dan ukuran kontribusi pendapatan rumah tangga. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa pedagang perempuan menghasilkan pendapatan bersih yang substansial, dengan biaya variabel yang merupakan bagian terbesar dari total biaya produksi. Pendapatan perdagangan perempuan menyumbang sekitar 80% dari total pendapatan rumah tangga, menunjukkan bahwa perempuan bertindak sebagai penyedia ekonomi utama. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa perdagangan sayur merupakan strategi mata pencaharian yang layak. Secara keseluruhan, para pedagang perempuan mendukung keberlanjutan ekonomi rumah tangga dan stabilitas pasar agribisnis skala kecil dengan menjaga sirkulasi pasar harian dan kontinuitas pasokan pangan, sehingga berkontribusi pada sistem pangan lokal yang lebih tangguh.

INTRODUCTION

Small-scale agrifood market systems play a crucial role in supporting food distribution (Hasan et al., 2018; Khoirudin & Kurniati, 2024), rural–urban linkages (Berkhout et al., 2023), and household livelihoods in many developing regions (Andersson & Kugbega, 2024; de Bruin et al., 2021). Within these systems, informal and traditional markets remain dominant channels for the circulation of fresh agricultural products, particularly vegetables, which are closely linked to daily food security and local economic sustainability (Berti & Mulligan, 2016; Borsellino et al., 2020). The functioning of such markets is shaped not only by production and distribution processes but also by the social and economic actors involved, including women who actively participate in trading and household income generation (Aldilla et al., 2024; Kruijssen et al., 2018; Wekwete, 2014).

Women's participation in agrifood market systems has expanded significantly over the past decades, reflecting broader structural changes in rural and peri-urban economies (Nurwani et al., 2023; Rietveld et al., 2023; Simanullang et al., 2024). Beyond their traditional roles within households, women increasingly engage in income-generating activities that contribute directly to family welfare and economic resilience (Jabeen et al., 2020; Milania & Saputra, 2024). Previous studies have shown that women's involvement in productive work can influence household economic dynamics, decision-making processes, and social status, often leading to changes in livelihood strategies and intra-household roles (Nurseha & Arafat, 2024; Samosir, 2024). In many cases, women's economic activities serve as a stabilizing mechanism when households face limited employment opportunities (Amelia et al., 2024), health constraints (Abramsky et al., 2019), or other socioeconomic vulnerabilities (Ayferam, 2015; Rosaliza et al., 2023).

In traditional vegetable markets, women commonly operate as small-scale traders who bridge agricultural production and consumption (Balayar & Mazur, 2022; Marson, 2022). Their activities are embedded within agrifood systems that integrate elements of agriculture, trade, transportation, and household labor allocation (Njuki et al., 2023; Ramirez-Santos et al., 2023). Through daily trading practices, women not only generate income but also contribute to the continuity of local food supply chains (Ningsih, 2024; Santosa et al., 2024). Empirical evidence suggests that women traders can make substantial contributions to household income (Bulyt & Tulu, 2016), sometimes exceeding that of other household members (Kabeer, 2021), thereby positioning them as key economic actors rather than supplementary earners (Fischer et al., 2020; Jabeen et al., 2020).

Despite the growing recognition of women's roles in agrifood markets, existing studies often emphasize descriptive socioeconomic characteristics or focus on isolated income measures without sufficiently situating women's trading activities within the broader context of small-scale agrifood systems and household sustainability. Moreover, analyses frequently overlook how women's income contributions interact with cost structures, market operations, and household dependence on agrifood-based livelihoods, particularly in local and traditional market settings (Arodhiskara et al., 2022; Nurwani et al., 2020; Rahman, 2018; Yuliana et al., 2024). As a result, the economic significance of women traders within integrated agrifood systems remains insufficiently articulated, especially in relation to household income dynamics and long-term livelihood sustainability (Adam et al., 2024; Singh et al., 2024).

In the context of local agrifood markets, such as traditional morning markets, women traders often operate under resource constraints, limited formal education, and fluctuating market conditions (Borsellino et al., 2020; Davies et al., 2022). Nevertheless, their accumulated experience, adaptive strategies, and integration within local market networks enable them to sustain trading activities and support household income (Upadhyaya & Rosa, 2019). Understanding the structure of costs, revenues, and net income generated by women traders is therefore essential for capturing their actual economic contribution and for assessing the sustainability of small-scale trading as a livelihood strategy (Ayalu et al., 2022; Buluy & Tulu, 2016).

Against this background, this study examines women's economic roles within a small-scale agrifood market system by analyzing the income generated by women vegetable traders and their contribution to household income. Specifically, the study focuses on women traders operating in a traditional local market and evaluates their cost structure, revenue, net income, and relative contribution to total household earnings. By situating women's trading activities within the functioning of a local agrifood market system, this research seeks to provide empirical insights into how women's economic participation supports household livelihoods and contributes to the sustainability of small-scale agrifood market systems.

RESEARCH METHODS

Study Area and Research Design

This study was conducted in the Bone-Bone morning market, located in Bone-Bone Subdistrict, North Luwu Regency, South Sulawesi Province, Indonesia. The market represents a typical small-scale agrifood market system where locally sourced vegetables are traded daily through informal market arrangements. Such markets function as critical nodes connecting agricultural production, distribution, and household consumption, particularly in rural and peri-urban contexts.

A quantitative descriptive research design was employed to examine women's economic roles within the local agrifood market system. This approach was selected to capture income generation patterns, cost structures, and household income contributions of women vegetable traders in a real-market setting. The design enables a systematic assessment of livelihood outcomes derived from small-scale trading activities, which are central to understanding household economic sustainability within agrifood systems.

Population and Sampling

The population of this study was defined as women vegetable traders operating within the small-scale agrifood market system of Bone-Bone Subdistrict, North Luwu Regency, South Sulawesi Province, Indonesia. This population represents a functional group of economic actors engaged in daily vegetable trading activities that connect local agricultural production with household consumption and income generation within traditional market settings.

Within this agrifood market system, the Bone-Bone morning market serves as the primary trading hub for vegetable commodities in the subdistrict. During the study period (November 2023–January 2024), a total of 24 women vegetable traders were identified as active and regular

participants in this market. These traders constituted the core operational population responsible for the circulation of vegetables and income flows within the local market system.

Given that the study aimed to capture the complete structure of income generation and household livelihood dependence within this specific agrifood market system, a census-based sampling approach was adopted. All active women vegetable traders meeting the inclusion criteria—regular market participation and vegetable trading as a primary or significant income source—were included as respondents.

The use of a census approach is methodologically justified in system-focused agrifood market studies, where the objective is not statistical generalization to a national population but analytical generalization to similar small-scale agrifood market systems (Arikunto, 2017). By encompassing the entire population of women vegetable traders within the Bone-Bone market system, the study minimizes selection bias and ensures that observed income patterns, cost structures, and household contribution levels accurately reflect the economic dynamics of the system under investigation.

Although the numerical size of the respondent group is limited, the population represents a complete and functionally significant market system, allowing for robust analysis of women's economic roles and livelihood contributions within traditional agrifood markets. Findings from this population are therefore relevant for comparative analysis with similar small-scale and informal agrifood market systems in other regions with comparable socioeconomic and institutional characteristics.

Data Collection

Primary data were collected through structured interviews using a standardized questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to obtain detailed information on: Socioeconomic characteristics of respondents (age, education level, and trading experience); Cost components associated with vegetable trading activities; Revenue generated from trading operations; and Household income sources and the relative contribution of women's trading income. To address recall limitations commonly encountered in informal market studies, daily revenue data were recorded and subsequently extrapolated to monthly values. This method has been widely used in small-scale trading research to improve income estimation accuracy when respondents do not maintain formal financial records. Secondary data were obtained from relevant literature, statistical reports, and previous studies to support contextual analysis and interpretation of findings within broader agrifood and livelihood frameworks.

Cost and Income Analysis

The economic performance of women vegetable traders was assessed using a cost-income analysis commonly applied in farm and non-farm enterprise studies (Suratiah, 2006). Total production costs (TC) were calculated using equation (1) as the sum of fixed costs (FC) and variable costs (VC).

Fixed costs included equipment depreciation and market retribution fees, while variable costs comprised expenditures related to trading activities, such as vegetable purchases, packaging materials, and transportation fuel. This cost classification reflects the operational structure of small-scale vegetable trading within informal agrifood market systems.

Total revenue (TR) was defined as the monetary value of vegetables sold over one month. Net income (π) was calculated as in equation (2). This approach provides a clear estimation of actual economic returns generated by women traders and supports the evaluation of vegetable trading as a household livelihood strategy.

$$TC = FC + VC \quad (1)$$

$$\pi = TR - TC \quad (2)$$

Household Income Contribution Analysis

Women's economic roles at the household level were examined by calculating the percentage contribution of women's trading income to total household income (Sofwan, 2016), equation (3). Total household income comprised women's vegetable trading income and other household income sources, primarily spouses' earnings. Contribution levels were categorized as low (<50%) or high (>50%) to indicate the relative economic significance of women's trading activities within household livelihood systems.

$$\text{Contribution}(\%) = \frac{\text{Women's trading income}}{\text{Total household income}} \times 100 \quad (3)$$

Analytical Perspective

The analysis was conducted within a livelihood and agrifood system perspective, recognizing women vegetable traders as integral actors in small-scale market systems that link agricultural production to household welfare. By combining cost-income analysis with household contribution assessment, the methodology captures both enterprise-level performance and household-level livelihood outcomes, which are central to evaluating economic sustainability in integrated agrifood systems.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socioeconomic Characteristics of Women Traders within the Agrifood Market System

As presented in Table 1, women vegetable traders operating in the Bone-Bone agrifood market system are predominantly within the productive age group (40–64 years), accounting for 83% of respondents. This age composition indicates that vegetable trading functions as a primary livelihood strategy rather than a transitional or supplementary activity. Similar patterns have been reported in other traditional market studies, where middle-aged women dominate informal agrifood trading due to accumulated experience and household responsibility (Manginsela et al., 2018; Sahetapy et al., 2016).

Trading experience further reinforces this interpretation. Nearly 38% of respondents have been engaged in vegetable trading for more than 11 years, while 42% report 1–5 years of experience. This distribution suggests a combination of long-term livelihood engagement and ongoing entry of new actors into the agrifood market system. Such dynamics indicate that small-scale vegetable trading remains economically attractive and accessible, particularly for women with limited alternative employment opportunities.

In terms of education, the majority of traders possess primary education or less (63%), reflecting the informal nature of the market system. Formal education appears less decisive for

income generation in small-scale trading contexts, where practical knowledge, social networks, and market familiarity play a more significant role (MacDonald, 2014; Phadungkiati & Connell, 2014). From an agrifood system perspective, this highlights how traditional markets absorb labor with diverse educational backgrounds while maintaining functionality and continuity (Bidwell, 2020; Surya et al., 2021).

Table 1. Socioeconomic characteristics of women vegetable traders in the Bone-Bone agrifood market system

| Characteristic | Category | Number of Traders (n) | Percentage (%) |
|----------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Age (years) | ≤39 | 3 | 13 |
| | 40–64 | 20 | 83 |
| | ≥65 | 1 | 4 |
| Trading Experience (years) | 1–5 | 10 | 42 |
| | 6–10 | 5 | 21 |
| | ≥11 | 9 | 38 |
| Education Level | No formal education | 1 | 4 |
| | Primary school | 15 | 63 |
| | Junior secondary | 3 | 13 |
| | Senior secondary | 5 | 21 |
| Total | | 24 | 100 |

Cost Structure and Economic Vulnerability in Small-Scale Agrifood Trading

The cost structure of women vegetable trading activities is dominated by variable costs, as shown in Tables 2–4. Variable costs account for 98.46% of total monthly costs, with vegetable procurement representing the largest component (Table 3). This cost composition reflects a high dependency on daily market turnover and exposes traders to price volatility and supply fluctuations within the agrifood system.

Table 2. Average monthly fixed costs of women vegetable traders in the Bone-Bone market

| Cost Component | Average Cost (IDR/month) |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Equipment depreciation | 159,444 |
| Market retribution fees | 60,000 |
| Total Fixed Costs | 219,444 |

Table 3. Average monthly variable costs of women vegetable traders

| Cost Component | Average Cost (IDR/month) |
|---|--------------------------|
| Vegetable procurement (trading capital) | 13,520,000 |
| Packaging materials (plastic bags) | 37,500 |
| Ties and auxiliary materials | 17,500 |
| Transportation fuel | 460,909 |
| Total Variable Costs | 14,035,909 |

Fixed costs, by contrast, constitute only 1.54% of total costs (Table 4), largely associated with equipment depreciation and market retribution fees. The relatively low fixed-cost burden lowers entry barriers for women traders but simultaneously increases vulnerability to shocks affecting

variable inputs, such as rising commodity prices or transportation costs. Similar cost patterns have been observed in other traditional vegetable markets, where trading sustainability is closely tied to stable supply chains and predictable market access (Chagomoka et al., 2014; Marson, 2022).

From a system-level viewpoint, this structure underscores the role of women traders as price-takers within the agrifood market system, operating with limited buffering capacity against external shocks. Nevertheless, the ability to sustain operations under such conditions also indicates adaptive capacity embedded in informal market arrangements.

Table 4. Cost structure of women vegetable trading activities

| Cost Category | Amount (IDR/month) | Share of Total Cost (%) |
|----------------|--------------------|-------------------------|
| Fixed costs | 219,444 | 1.54 |
| Variable costs | 14,035,909 | 98.46 |
| Total costs | 14,255,353 | 100.00 |

Revenue Generation and Livelihood Viability

As shown in Table 5, women vegetable traders generate an average monthly revenue of IDR 22,145,833, resulting in a net income of IDR 7,890,480 after deducting total costs. This level of income is notably higher than that reported in several comparable studies of traditional markets in Indonesia, such as those documented by Nirwan et al. (2019), where average net income was considerably lower.

The relatively strong income performance observed in the Bone-Bone market suggests that small-scale vegetable trading can constitute a viable and competitive livelihood strategy within local agrifood systems. This finding supports earlier arguments that informal agrifood markets continue to provide meaningful economic opportunities, particularly for women, despite limited institutional support (Barrett et al., 2022; Borsellino et al., 2020).

At the enterprise level, these results demonstrate that women traders are not merely marginal actors but economically productive participants who sustain market circulation and household income generation. This reinforces the importance of traditional markets in supporting local food distribution while simultaneously enabling livelihood sustainability.

Table 5. Average monthly revenue and net income of women vegetable traders

| Indicator | Amount (IDR/month) |
|---------------|--------------------|
| Total revenue | 22,145,833 |
| Total costs | 14,255,353 |
| Net income | 7,890,480 |

Contribution to Household Income and Gendered Livelihood Dynamics

The contribution of women's trading income to household income is substantial, as shown in Table 6. Women's vegetable trading accounts for 80% of total household income, significantly exceeding income derived from other household members. This level of contribution places women traders as primary economic providers rather than supplementary earners.

Comparable findings have been reported by Kabeer (2021) and Kristjanson et al., (2014), who observed that women traders in traditional markets often contribute more than 60% of household income. Such patterns highlight a broader shift in gendered livelihood dynamics, where women's

economic roles increasingly underpin household resilience, particularly in contexts marked by employment instability, health constraints, or household restructuring.

Within an agrifood system framework, these findings illustrate how women’s participation in market-based activities strengthens household capacity to cope with economic uncertainty. The reliance on women’s trading income also reflects the integration of household livelihoods with local food market systems, reinforcing the mutual dependence between agrifood market sustainability and household welfare.

Table 6. Contribution of women’s trading income to household income

| Income Source | Amount (IDR/month) | Contribution (%) |
|----------------------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| Women’s vegetable trading income | 7,890,480 | 80 |
| Other household income (spouse) | 2,000,000 | 20 |
| Total household income | 9,890,480 | 100 |

Implications for Agrifood Sustainability

The results of this study highlight women vegetable traders as central actors linking household livelihoods and small-scale agrifood market stability, as illustrated in Figure 1. Women’s trading activities generate substantial income that directly supports household economic sustainability, with trading income contributing the majority of total household earnings. This dominant income role strengthens household resilience and reduces vulnerability to economic shocks, particularly in households with limited alternative income sources.

At the same time, women traders contribute to the continuity of local agrifood market systems through their daily trading activities, which sustain market circulation and the availability of fresh vegetables. By maintaining regular market participation, women traders support the stability of food supply channels that connect agricultural production with local consumption. This dual function—supporting household livelihoods while sustaining market operations—positions women traders as key contributors to the overall functioning of small-scale agrifood systems.

However, the strong dependence on variable costs and daily turnover, as identified in the cost structure analysis, indicates that both household livelihoods and market stability remain sensitive to disruptions in input availability, price volatility, and transportation constraints. Strengthening women traders’ access to affordable inputs, improving market infrastructure, and increasing institutional recognition of women’s roles within local food systems could enhance the resilience of both household economies and agrifood markets.

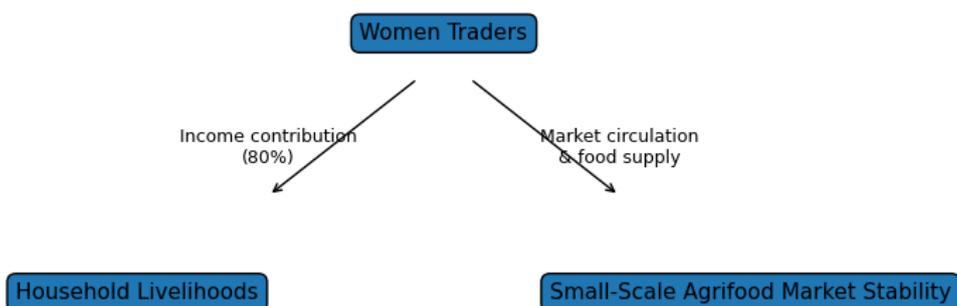


Figure 1. Women vegetable traders as key actors supporting household livelihoods and small-scale agrifood market stability

Overall, the findings demonstrate that supporting women's economic participation in traditional vegetable markets contributes not only to household livelihood sustainability but also to the stability and sustainability of small-scale agrifood market systems, reinforcing the interconnected pathways depicted in Figure 1.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that women vegetable traders play a central economic role within small-scale agrifood market systems, functioning not only as income earners but as key actors sustaining household livelihoods and local food market operations. The findings show that women's trading activities generate substantial net income and contribute the majority share of total household earnings, positioning women as primary economic providers within their households. This highlights the significance of women's participation in informal agrifood markets as a stable and viable livelihood strategy.

Beyond the household level, the study reveals that women's trading activities are integral to the continuity and stability of small-scale agrifood markets. Through daily market participation and management of trading costs and revenues, women traders support the circulation of fresh vegetables and maintain local food supply chains. The strong reliance on variable costs underscores both the adaptive capacity of women traders and their vulnerability to market fluctuations, emphasizing the importance of market conditions in shaping livelihood outcomes.

Overall, the results underscore the interconnected nature of gender, livelihoods, and agrifood sustainability, where women's economic roles simultaneously strengthen household resilience and local market stability. Recognizing and supporting women traders within traditional agrifood markets can therefore contribute to more resilient and sustainable food systems. Future research could extend this analysis across different market contexts to further explore how women's participation influences agrifood system performance and sustainability outcomes.

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