Keeping Food Markets Working: Rawalpindi and Peshawar (Pakistan)

Qualitative Rapid Needs Assessment

This Qualitative Factsheet, developed by the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), presents a selection of key findings from key informant interviews and focus groups that were conducted in Rawalpindi and Peshawar, Pakistan. Together with surveys, satellite image analysis and desktop studies, this qualitative study forms part of a mixed method Rapid Needs Assessment, intended to provide an understanding of these cities and their traditional food markets during COVID-19. Urban food systems stakeholders, like policymakers, market vendors, and SMEs participated in the study. This Assessment is part of GAIN's Urban Governance for Nutrition programme's Keeping Food Markets Working during COVID-19. The presented findings help inform the co-design of policy and coordination options with local policymakers and other stakeholders.

COVID-19 in Pakistan

- Lockdowns, began in March 2020; and included closures of borders and schools, gathering restrictions, and mandated wearing of masks. Focus on 'Hot spots', with stronger enforcement measures.
- Numerous measures e.g. I) Regulation and coordinated response, under National Coordination Committee and National Command and Operation Centre; II) Quarantines imposed; with UN Population Fund advocating for women and girls', specific quarantine provisions and reproductive health services.; III) Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF) partnered with organisations to provide support to poor districts; IV) Ehsaas Emergency Cash Program, launched by government, provides immediate cash relief to millions of families with daily wage earners; and V) Communications e.g., Health Ministry provides Twitter updates of the COVID-19 situation, a WhatsApp service was set-up to report regulation transgressions; and announcements were recorded for mobile phones in a manner that ensured users had to listen to them first before making a call.

National Food and Nutrition Context

- District Commissioner responsible for food markets; and market committees oversee day-to-day operations.
- Conflict and climate extremes impacting economy, health, well-being, and food security.[1]
- Prevalence of malnutrition: Children under 5 years: approximately 7% wasting and 37% stunting; Anaemia in women of reproduction age: 41%; Obesity in adults: 7% in 2020.[1]
- State of Emergency declared, in February 2020, due to swarms of desert locusts, in Eastern Pakistan, decimating food staples like wheat, and income/employment from crops like cotton.

City Context

Peshawar

- Capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, close to the border with Afghanistan and east of the Khyber Pass. Population, predominately Pushtun.
- Experienced instability due to periods of local as well as conflict in Afghanistan, over many years.
- Benefits from vegetable imports from Afghanistan e.g. potatoes, tomatoes and onions.
- KP Food Safety and Hallal Authority strives to ensure safe and healthy food for residents, as per the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Food Safety and Halal Food Authority Act (2014). (See: *https://kpfsa.gov.pk/*)

Rawalpindi

- 'Twin city' of Pakistan's capital, Islamabad.
- Combination of wholesale and small traditional food markets.
- Shortages of wheat (staple food) and pulses reported in early lockdowns.
- Punjab Food Authority oversees the food system as per the Punjab Food Authority Act (2011) e.g., regulation and monitoring, food safety, licencing, scientific advice. (See: *https://www.pfa.gop.pk/*)

Qualitative Rapid Needs Assessment (RNA)

- Conducted: December 2020 - February 2021, in Rawalpindi and Peshawar.
- 12 Key informant interviews (n=6 Rawalpindi, n=6 Peshawar).
- 8 focus groups (4 per city). 5 - 9 participants per group with a total of 52 focus group participants.
- Initial findings also reviewed by GAIN's Expert Advisory Panel (EAP) (12 in-country and international experts).
- Findings shared with food systems stakeholders, in both cities, during participatory, policy design workshops (June - August 2021).

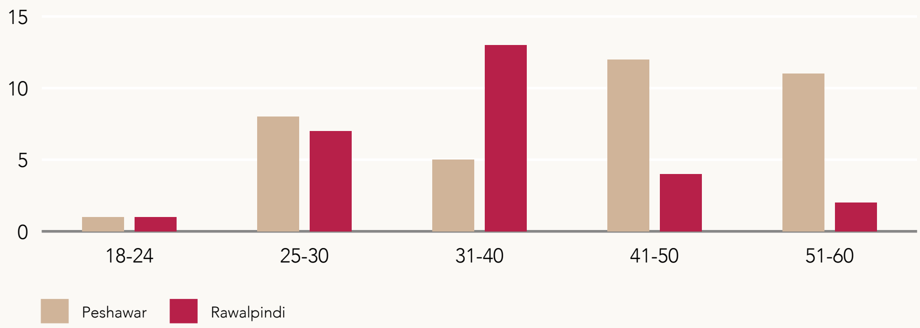
Participants

Gender

- Key informant interviews: 92% male (1 female participant from Rawalpindi).
- Focus groups: 100% male participants.

Age

Key Informant Interview and Focus Group Participants: Age



Selection of key findings

"You will find people from almost all parts of Pakistan here [in the markets]. These include the middlemen, the labourers, the handcart owners, the hoteliers."
(Focus group participant [Market Committee], Rawalpindi)

Covid-19

Transport

- Transport restrictions, including curfews, impacted deliveries of produce to the markets within the city and from rural production areas, forcing price increases and shortages.
- Supply to fruit and vegetable markets disrupted, and large amounts of perishable goods wasted.

"There was a shortage of eggs, so the prices of eggs went up… because the supply was cut off … the government ordered to close the roads completely… they could not reach here."
(Focus group participant [Market Committee], Rawalpindi)

Safety measures

- Government safety measures, e.g. sanitisation at market entry points, perceived as ineffective and for the benefit of the local media. Some participants felt that government-mandated safety measures were enforced too strictly, e.g. through heavy fines and market raids.

> **"Our major issue is strict enforcement of corona [measures] by government. If they see any of us without mask, they fine us."**
> (Focus group participant [Vendor], Peshawar)

- Market committees/vendors took their own measures, e.g. distributing masks.
- Government COVID-19 relief packages seen as inaccessible.
- No organised system of stall allocation/ distribution – some vendors monopolise space, others forced to sell outside the market.

Social

- Typically, vendors view their trade as a family vocation.

> **"This market has been here for more than 200 years. My grandfather had bought this shop. I am fourth generation continuing our ancestral business of slaughterhouse."**
> (Focus group participant [Vendor], Peshawar)

- Participants considered the markets to be a social hub, with information sharing and connecting people from different walks of life who would not otherwise meet. This was positively conveyed. Occasionally the challenge of misinformation was also raised. For example, there were rumours that chickens sold at the market were infected with COVID-19 which negatively impacted sales.
- Many vendors noted that they suffered from poor mental health because of the pandemic and response regulations.

Governance

- Many participants e.g. vendors, committees, SMEs, expressed disappointment and/or frustration with the government. General view was that government was not meeting its responsibilities in supporting market workers and maintaining market infrastructure (and some stakeholders were using own means to support this infrastructure).
- The sentiment was that government needed to enforce safety measures to protect market workers, use taxes to directly support the market and facilitate better two-way communication between participants.

> **"There is no government here, we all do everything on our own. All the government does is take fines and charges. They don't give anything in return."**
> (Focus group participant [Vendor], Rawalpindi)

> **"We can't feed our families and you [government] is putting taxes over everything."**
> (Key Informant Interview [Food Officer], Peshawar)

- A few government and administration related key informants were sympathetic to the pressure vendors and markets were under e.g. economically (due to local and external drivers) and hygienically but felt these were complex, systemic (more than pandemic) challenges and they needed to also implement their mandates.
- Some vendors think the government should implement policies to assist farmers, thereby supporting the whole food industry.

"If something is cheap in the local market, it should be exported so the farmer earns something for himself and can improve his situation. The government should purchase on their own or import items if they are too expensive."
(Focus group participant [Vendor], Rawalpindi)

Infrastructure, Economy and Employment

- Some markets have poor drainage or an inadequate sewage system.

"I think Pakistan should learn from [other] countries how they operate their markets and try to emulate some of those practices. Overseas, most wet markets are covered, have running water supply and electricity."
(Focus group participant [Market Committee], Rawalpindi)

- Widespread impact of pandemic on the financial situation of people working in the traditional food system. E.g. Some vendors were forced to close their shops. Many, even those with savings, became dependant on day-to-day income and loans. Some key informants reported people could not pay for basic utilities and rent. Daily wage workers were viewed as most vulnerable to financial hardship. Fewer customers led to rising unemployment, financial difficulty, and a lack of purchasing power.

"Markets were closed and many people unemployed, so the purchasing power of the people went down."
(Focus group participant [Vendor], Peshawar)

"I have taken a loan and I don't know how I can pay."
(Focus group participant [Market Committee], Peshawar)

- Fruit and vegetable vendors felt especially vulnerable as their product is more perishable.

"We would bring vegetable and we could not sell it so it would get rotten."
(Focus group participant [Market Committee], Peshawar)

- Some reports that vendors illegally sold in the markets (through paying bribes), or outside gates (and forcibly removed) and others were 'informal mobile vendors' without necessary licences, difficult to monitor and regulate.

Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) COVID-19 Response

The necessary COVID-19 responses, such as lockdowns and/or curfews, have placed a spotlight on the weaknesses of food systems across the world. In the COVID-19 context, the single most important thing that can be done for the health and resilience of people and economies is to protect the nutritional status of current and future generations. GAIN has developed the *Keeping Food Markets Working (KFMW) program* an emergency response to the COVID-19 crisis, providing rapid support to food system workers, to small and medium enterprises supplying nutritious foods, and to keeping fresh food markets open. While disease control responses to the pandemic are essential, they also disrupt food systems, depress income, and put a strain on social protection programs, which can threaten the nutritional status of the most vulnerable. The KFMW program is focused on mitigating those risks and keeping affordable nutritious foods flowing in African and Asian markets to the people who most need it.

Supporting effective policymaking and coordination during the pandemic, is one of several initiatives under this KFMW program. This initiative focuses on 6 cities, in 3 countries i.e., **Machakos and Kiambu (Kenya); Beira and Pemba (Mozambique); Rawalpindi and Peshawar (Pakistan)**, with the aim of better understanding city-context specific experiences of the urban food system during the pandemic – most especially traditional food markets which provide vital access to food for the most vulnerable. Valuably, the evidence reveals food system, everyday realities as experienced and practiced by urban residents and policy makers. Together with a snapshot vendor survey in markets in Rawalpindi and Peshawar, as well as satellite imagery and desktop studies, this qualitative rapid assessment helps better inform and align urban food system policy and coordination for all.

For more information, please view our other factsheets on the survey findings of this rapid assessment and future co-designed policy toolkits:

gainhealth.org/impact/our-response-covid-19/effective-policymaking-and-coordination-during-pandemic

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References

1. FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. (2021). The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2021. Transforming food systems for food security, improved nutrition and affordable healthy diets for all. Retrieved from *http://www.fao.org/3/cb4474en/online/cb4474en.html*

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