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Exploring the Business Sustainability of Small-Scale Vegetable Vendors: A Phenomenological Inquiry in the Public Market of Malaybalay City, Bukidnon

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ABSTRACT

In Malaybalay City, many individuals depend on vegetable farming and vending as a vital source of livelihood, yet sustaining these small businesses is often uncertain. Faced with unstable income, high costs, and external challenges, the struggles of vendors reveal the pressing need to understand their resilience and survival strategies. The inquiry gathered insights from small-scale vegetable vendors in Malaybalay City through in-depth interviews to reveal the meanings behind their lived experiences and everyday challenges. The findings reveal that small-scale vegetable vendors sustain their livelihoods through a combination of adaptive business strategies, emotional regulation, social support, and personal motivation. These practices enable them to remain resilient and operational despite ongoing financial pressures, unstable supply, and daily uncertainties in the public market. The results imply that business sustainability among small-scale vegetable vendors depends on flexible, low-cost strategies that respond directly to daily challenges rather than on formal systems alone. Strengthening these adaptive capacities can help vendors maintain continuity, reduce vulnerability, and improve long-term livelihood stability.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Malaybalay City, known as the “South Summer Capital of the Philippines,” has fertile soil and favorable climate, making it a thriving area for farming. Many families in the city rely on vegetable farming as a source of livelihood, with small-scale vending serving as one of the most accessible ways to bring farm produce to the market (Abendaño *et al.*, 2022; Walt, 2025). For many, selling vegetables provides not only an income but also a means of sustaining household needs affordably and practically (Bendijo *et al.*, 2024). As a result, small-scale vegetable vending forms part of the everyday economic activities that help sustain both the local community and the agricultural identity of Malaybalay.

Despite its importance, small-scale vegetable vending is often fragile and faces constant challenges. Vendors struggle with unstable income, rising costs of goods, stiff market competition, and unpredictable weather conditions that directly affect their supply (Back, 2019; Roa, 2023). These factors create uncertainties in maintaining consistent earnings and hinder long-term stability. Because of these difficulties, many vendors find it hard to achieve financial security, much less expand their businesses, leaving them vulnerable to setbacks that threaten their means of livelihood (Mercado, 2018).

While the role of vegetable vendors in supporting local communities is well acknowledged, limited attention has been given to their lived experiences and everyday struggles. Much of the discussion on sustainability tends to focus on large-scale enterprises, leaving out the voices of those working at the grassroots (Peimani

& Kamalipour, 2022; Dhillon & Moncur, 2023). There remains a lack of studies that carefully explore how small-scale vendors in places like Malaybalay manage their businesses, navigate challenges, and find ways to survive in the face of uncertainty. Addressing this gap is essential to shed light on the realities of these vendors and give value to their perspectives.

Exploring the realities of small-scale vegetable vending provides an opportunity to understand better how this sector contributes to community livelihood and local economic activity. By focusing on the experiences of the vendors themselves, the study may uncover practical insights into their strategies for survival and the barriers they face along the way. This understanding is not only important for improving their quality of life but also for guiding future support systems that can strengthen their resilience and sustainability.

The study seeks to explore the experiences of vegetable vendors in Malaybalay City and understand how they manage to sustain their businesses despite various problems and challenges. The study aims to uncover both their struggles and adaptive strategies, providing a fuller picture of what it means to sustain small-scale vegetable vending in a local context.

Statement of the Problem

Many individuals in Malaybalay City rely on small-scale vegetable vending as a primary means of livelihood, yet this source of income often faces instability brought by fluctuating market conditions and environmental challenges. Vendors frequently encounter issues such as inconsistent earnings, rising costs of goods, competitions,

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and adverse weather affecting their supply. These difficulties limit their ability to achieve stability and hinder growth opportunities. To better understand these realities, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What challenges do they commonly face in maintaining their livelihood?
2. How do they adapt and cope with these difficulties to ensure continuity of their business?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Socioeconomic Role of Vegetable Vending in Local Communities

Vegetable vending plays an important role in local communities, particularly in areas where formal employment opportunities are limited (Peimani & Kamalipour, 2022). It provides a source of daily income for households while also ensuring the steady supply of fresh and affordable food for nearby residents. In many communities, small-scale vegetable vendors serve as a link between farmers and consumers, helping agricultural products reach local markets efficiently (Dhillon & Moncur, 2023; Labitad, 2025). This activity supports both household survival and local food security, making it a vital part of everyday economic life in many cities and towns.

Challenges of Micro and Small Enterprises in Rural Settings

Micro and small enterprises in rural settings often face a range of challenges that affect their ability to operate and grow. Limited access to capital, unstable income, and rising costs of goods and transportation are commonly reported concerns (Mercado, 2018). These enterprises also tend to rely on daily sales for survival, making them highly vulnerable to market changes, weather conditions, and shifts in customer demand. As a result, maintaining steady operations becomes difficult, especially when financial reserves are minimal (Back, 2019; Dhillon & Moncur, 2023).

In addition to financial concerns, small enterprises in rural areas often experience limited access to government support, training, and formal business networks. Competition among similar small businesses further reduces profit margins, while weak infrastructure can affect supply and customer access (Roa, 2023; Dodge, 2025). These combined challenges place continuous pressure on small entrepreneurs, highlighting the need to understand how they manage daily risks and sustain their livelihoods over time.

Small-Scale Entrepreneurship and Livelihood Sustainability

Small-scale entrepreneurship is widely recognized as a key means of livelihood for individuals and families who depend on informal or semi-formal economic activities (Bendijo *et al.*, 2024). These ventures often operate with limited resources but are sustained through personal effort, family support, and adaptive strategies.

Sustainability in this context is closely tied to the ability of entrepreneurs to manage daily challenges, adjust to changing conditions, and continue generating income despite uncertainty (Roa, 2023; Peimani & Kamalipour, 2022; Dodge, 2025).

Livelihood sustainability among small entrepreneurs is not only measured by financial gain but also by stability, resilience, and the capacity to meet basic household needs. Studies highlight that endurance, flexibility, and social relationships play important roles in sustaining small businesses over time (Abendaño *et al.*, 2022; Derla & Balongoy, 2023; Labitad, 2025). Understanding these experiences provides insight into how small-scale entrepreneurs maintain their livelihoods and respond to ongoing challenges within their local environments (Sumayang *et al.*, 2025).

Conceptual Framework

The study anchors itself on the Entrepreneurial Sustainability Theory (Muñoz & Cohen, 2018), which emphasizes the ability of small enterprises to balance economic viability with long-term adaptability. This theory is relevant to the experiences of vendors as it highlights how business survival depends not only on profit but also on resilience against uncertainties and external pressures. When applied to small-scale vegetable vending, the theory serves as a guide in understanding how vendors balance limited resources with their need for stability and growth.

In support of this, national policies such as Republic Act 9178 or the Barangay Micro Business Enterprises (BMBEs) Act of 2002, Republic Act 11337 or the Innovative Startup Act of 2019, and Republic Act 7160 or the Local Government Code of 1991 provide institutional frameworks that can shape the opportunities available to small vendors. These laws are intended to provide financial relief, encourage innovation, and enhance local government support for micro and small enterprises. In the context of vegetable vending, they reflect the structural conditions that can either assist or limit their business operations.

Together, the theory and laws complement each other in explaining how business sustainability can be achieved. While the Entrepreneurial Sustainability Theory focuses on the vendors' strategies for survival and adaptation, the laws emphasize the role of external support systems that may strengthen or weaken their efforts. Looking at both perspectives allows for a balanced understanding of how individual resilience interacts with institutional support, offering a holistic view of what it takes to sustain small-scale vending in local communities.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design and Locale

The study employed a phenomenological research design (Pilarska, 2021) to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of small-scale vegetable vendors. This

approach was chosen because it allows for the exploration of personal perspectives, struggles, and strategies that are often overlooked in quantitative measures. Through phenomenology, the study focused on how vendors make sense of their daily realities and sustain their livelihoods in the face of challenges. The research was conducted in Malaybalay City, a location where vegetable vending plays a vital role in the local economy, making it an appropriate setting for capturing the voices and experiences of the participants.

Sampling Method and Respondents

The study employed criterion sampling to select participants, ensuring that only individuals who met specific conditions were included. The criteria required that vendors must have been operating in Malaybalay City for at least two years, be identified as low-income or small-scale sellers, actively engage in vending at public markets or designated vending areas, and be at least 18 years of age. This sampling method was employed to ensure that participants had sufficient experience in the trade and could offer meaningful insights into sustainability in small-scale vending. By applying these criteria, the study was able to focus on participants who are most representative of the realities faced by vegetable vendors in the city.

Table 1: Demographic profile of the vegetable vendors.

Participant	Sex	Age
Vendor 1	Female	39
Vendor 2	Female	44
Vendor 3	Female	34
Vendor 4	Female	35
Vendor 5	Female	42

The participants, as presented in Table 1, were small-scale vegetable vendors actively selling in public markets and recognized vending areas across Malaybalay City. They represented a range of backgrounds but shared common experiences of working within the local economy as vendors. Their participation provided a firsthand account of how they sustain their livelihoods amid challenges, offering valuable perspectives that reflect the conditions of grassroots enterprises in the community.

Data Gathering Procedure

Data were collected through a researcher-designed interview questionnaire, which aimed to capture the lived experiences and challenges faced by the vendors. The instrument was carefully developed and validated by three experts, resulting in a Content Validity Index (CVI) of 0.910, which indicates a high level of reliability and appropriateness for the study. This process ensured that the questions were relevant, clear, and aligned to capture meaningful narratives from the participants. The instrument thus served as an effective tool in gathering data that reflected both the struggles and adaptive

practices of the vendors.

Data were gathered through face-to-face interviews with the participants at locations convenient and familiar to them, such as public market areas and designated vending spaces. Each interview lasted approximately twenty to thirty minutes, allowing sufficient time for participants to share their experiences in a natural and unhurried manner. The interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the participants to ensure accuracy and completeness of the data. Prior to the start of each interview, the researchers clearly explained the nature of the inquiry, the general flow of the interview, and the role of the participants in the process, creating an atmosphere of openness and mutual understanding.

Participation in the interviews was entirely voluntary, and informed consent forms were signed before any data were collected. The interviews were conducted in Bisaya to allow participants to express their thoughts comfortably and clearly. After data collection, the recorded interviews were carefully transcribed and translated into English by a language expert to preserve the original meaning of the responses. Throughout the process, respect for the participants' time, privacy, and willingness to participate was maintained, ensuring that the data gathering was carried out in an ethical and orderly manner.

Data Treatment

The responses were analyzed using van Manen's (2023) Hermeneutic Analysis, a method that emphasizes interpreting the meaning of lived experiences. This approach allowed the researchers to go beyond surface-level descriptions and uncover deeper insights into how vendors understand and respond to the realities of their work. Through systematic reflection and interpretation, themes were drawn from the narratives, ensuring that the voices of the participants were meaningfully represented and their experiences faithfully conveyed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the lived experiences of small-scale vegetable vendors as captured through their shared narratives in the public market. The results highlight patterns that emerged from their daily struggles and practical responses, providing a grounded understanding of how livelihood is sustained under uncertain conditions. These findings offer insight into the realities faced by vendors and the ways they navigate ongoing challenges in their work and personal lives.

Challenges Faced in Maintaining Livelihood

The vendors' experiences reveal the complex conditions that shape their everyday work in the public market. Their accounts reflect the pressures brought by unstable income, rising costs, environmental factors, and personal responsibilities. These challenges illustrate the difficult balance vendors must manage to keep their livelihoods going while responding to factors often beyond their control.

Financial Instability and Lack of Capital

The results indicate that financial instability and the lack of capital are persistent difficulties faced by vendors in sustaining their livelihood. As shared by the vendors:

"It's hard because we don't have capital. We borrow money and vegetables, and at the end of the day the sales just go to paying debts." (Vendor 1)

"Our sales are very small, just enough to buy rice or pay what we owe." (Vendor 2)

"I only earn a little because I don't have enough capital. I just get by with whatever is available." (Vendor 4)

"Sometimes we don't earn enough to cover our fare or snacks." (Vendor 5)

The accounts highlight how daily operations are often dependent on borrowed money or goods, with earnings immediately used to settle debts rather than to build savings or reinvest in the business. Income is described as minimal and inconsistent, frequently just enough to meet basic needs such as food, transportation, or small daily expenses. This situation reflects a cycle where limited capital restricts purchasing power, which in turn limits sales potential and keeps income at a subsistence level.

These findings imply that the continuity of vending activities is strongly affected by the inability to accumulate or access sufficient capital. The constant reliance on borrowing prevents vendors from expanding their stock, improving their selling conditions, or stabilizing their income. As a result, livelihood sustainability becomes fragile, with vendors focusing more on day-to-day survival than long-term stability (Bendijo *et al.*, 2019; Peimani & Kamalipour, 2022; Dhillon & Moncur, 2023). This condition underscores the importance of supportive local mechanisms that can help ease financial strain and create opportunities for small vendors to gradually strengthen their business operations.

Unpredictable Customer Flow and Inconsistent Sales

The results indicate that vendors experience irregular customer flow, resulting in inconsistent daily sales. As shared by the vendors:

"Some days it's quiet, sometimes it's busy. It's never consistent." (Vendor 2)

"When it gets quiet, it becomes a big problem because the vegetables are expensive." (Vendor 3)

"There are days when customers barely buy anything, and my goods end up rotting." (Vendor 4)

Periods of high activity are often followed by days of low or almost no customer turnout, making income unpredictable. This fluctuation becomes more challenging when vendors deal with perishable goods, as unsold vegetables lead to losses rather than profit. The irregular nature of customer presence directly affects the vendors' ability to earn steadily and manage their daily expenses.

The implications of these findings point to increased vulnerability in the vendors' livelihood. Inconsistent sales limit their capacity to plan finances, manage inventory effectively, and reduce waste. This uncertainty

places pressure on vendors to continuously adjust their selling practices just to maintain operations (Mercado, 2018; Muñoz & Cohen, 2018; Peimani & Kamalipour, 2022; Bendijo *et al.*, 2024; Labitad, 2025). Sustaining a livelihood under such conditions requires resilience, but it also highlights the need for a more stable market environment that supports regular customer access and fair opportunities for small-scale sellers.

Competition with Other Vendors

The results indicate that competition among vendors significantly affects their ability to maintain their livelihood. As shared by the vendors:

"We have neighbors whose vegetables are from their own farms, so they can sell cheaper. Customers go to them instead." (Vendor 1)

"There is a lot of competition here, but even then, we still manage to sell little by little." (Vendor 3)

"Others sell cheaper, while mine seem more expensive, so customers choose them." (Vendor 5)

Vendors operate in close proximity to others who may offer similar products at lower prices, often due to differences in sourcing or production. This situation influences customer choice and reduces sales for those who cannot match lower prices. Despite this, vendors continue to sell in small amounts, indicating persistence even in highly competitive conditions.

This finding suggests that competition shapes not only income levels but also the overall sustainability of vending as a livelihood. Limited pricing flexibility places some vendors at a disadvantage, making it harder to attract customers and increase earnings (Mercado, 2018; Peimani & Kamalipour, 2022; Dhillon & Moncur, 2023; Bendijo *et al.*, 2024). While competition is a normal feature of market activity, the results emphasize the need for conditions that promote fairness and support small vendors in remaining viable despite unequal resources and market pressures.

Mobility Issues and Frequent Stall Relocation

The results indicate that frequent relocation of vending stalls presents a significant challenge to livelihood stability.

As shared by the vendors:

"We keep getting transferred from one place to another. We don't even know where we're moving next." (Vendor 2)

"It's tiring because we have to pack up and move again and again." (Vendor 4)

Vendors describe repeated transfers from one location to another, often without clear information about where they will be moved next. This constant movement disrupts daily routines, affects visibility to customers, and adds physical strain due to repeated packing and setup. Such conditions make it difficult for vendors to establish a consistent customer base.

The implications of this challenge highlight how physical and organizational instability affects business continuity. Frequent relocation weakens vendors' ability to maintain regular sales and build trust with customers. Over time, this instability can reduce income and increase

exhaustion, further straining livelihood sustainability (Muñoz & Cohen, 2018; Roa, 2023; Dhillon & Moncur, 2023; Bendijo *et al.*, 2024). These findings point to the importance of consistent and organized market arrangements that allow vendors to operate with greater security and predictability.

Difficulty Securing Change and Handling Transactions

The results indicate that difficulty in securing change is a recurring issue in daily vending transactions. As shared by a vendor:

"It's hard to find change. Sometimes customers bring big bills and we struggle... Some vendors can't give change, so it becomes a problem for us as well." (Vendor 1)

Vendors often face situations where customers pay using large bills, while they themselves have limited cash on hand to provide proper change. This challenge affects the smooth flow of transactions and may cause delays, misunderstandings, or missed sales. The difficulty is not isolated to individual vendors, as the lack of available change among nearby sellers further complicates the situation, creating a shared operational problem within the market setting.

The implications of this result suggest that transaction-related challenges directly affect income stability and customer interactions. When vendors are unable to complete sales efficiently due to cash limitations, their earning opportunities are reduced. Over time, repeated transaction difficulties can weaken customer trust and add strain to daily operations (Mercado, 2018; Peimani & Kamalipour, 2022; Roa, 2023; Bendijo *et al.*, 2024; Labitad, 2025). This finding highlights how basic financial tools and access to small operational support play a role in sustaining vending activities and ensuring smoother business continuity.

Perishable Goods and Product Loss

The results indicate that the perishable nature of vegetables exposes vendors to frequent product loss. As shared by the vendors:

"Some vegetables rot because they don't sell fast enough." (Vendor 1)

"It's hard because if they don't sell today, they spoil quickly and we lose money." (Vendor 3)

When goods are not sold within a short period, spoilage occurs, leading to direct financial loss. This challenge is closely linked to slow customer flow and limited selling days, where unsold items cannot be carried over for long periods. As a result, vendors bear the risk of losing both their products and the money invested in them.

This result implies that product loss weakens livelihood stability and reduces already limited income. Spoilage forces vendors to absorb losses without compensation, making it harder to recover costs or reinvest in their business. Over time, repeated losses from unsold goods can discourage vendors and limit their ability to sustain operations (Abendaño *et al.*, 2022; Dhillon & Moncur, 2023; Bendijo *et al.*, 2024). The findings emphasize the importance of conditions that help reduce waste

and protect small vendors from the risks tied to selling perishable products.

Harsh Working Conditions and Emotional Stress

The results indicate that vending involves physically demanding work conditions and emotional strain. As shared by the vendors:

"It's tiring, especially when customers are rude." (Vendor 2)

"It's hard when you have no financial stability. It becomes stressful." (Vendor 4)

"Sometimes it's really difficult, but we just endure it." (Vendor 5)

Vendors describe fatigue from long hours, combined with stress arising from financial uncertainty and difficult customer interactions. These experiences show that vending is not only a financial activity but also an emotionally taxing form of work that requires constant endurance and patience.

The implications of these findings suggest that emotional stress and harsh conditions affect vendors' well-being and capacity to sustain their livelihood. Persistent stress may reduce motivation, affect decision-making, and weaken overall resilience. Despite these challenges, vendors continue their work out of necessity, highlighting how livelihood sustainability is closely tied to personal endurance rather than stable working conditions (Back, 2019; Dhillon & Moncur, 2023; Roa, 2023; Bendijo *et al.*, 2024). This underscores the need for a more supportive environment that recognizes both the economic and human aspects of small-scale vending.

Synthesizing these points, the results show that vendors face interconnected challenges that affect their ability to maintain a stable livelihood. Financial instability and lack of capital limit purchasing power and growth, while unpredictable customer flow and strong competition reduce daily income. These difficulties are further intensified by frequent stall relocation, which disrupts customer access, and operational issues such as the lack of change and losses from perishable goods. Each challenge does not occur in isolation but overlaps with others, creating continuous pressure on vendors' daily operations.

The combined findings suggest that livelihood sustainability among small-scale vendors is shaped by both economic and structural conditions within the market environment. The constant need to adapt to financial limits, unstable sales, physical movement, and operational constraints places vendors in a cycle of survival rather than long-term stability. Despite these difficulties, vendors continue to operate through persistence and adjustment, reflecting their resilience but also pointing to the need for more consistent and supportive systems that can help ease these overlapping challenges and strengthen their capacity to sustain their livelihood.

Coping and Adaptation of the Vegetable Vendors

In response to these difficulties, the vendors demonstrate practical ways of adjusting to their situation to remain active in their trade. Their experiences show how

personal effort, emotional strength, and resourceful decision-making support their continued participation in the market. These adaptive practices reflect how vendors respond to hardship while striving to sustain their daily operations.

Endurance and Persistence Despite Hardship

The results indicate that endurance and persistence are central ways vendors cope with daily difficulties. As shared by the vendors:

"We just continue even if it's hard... just keep going and never surrender." (Vendor 1)

"Still continue even when it's quiet or slow." (Vendor 2)

"I just continue selling because I have no other choice." (Vendor 3)

"Even if it's tough, we survive—that's why they say just keep fighting." (Vendor 4)

"I will just sell because I have no one else to depend on but myself." (Vendor 5)

Vendors consistently described continuing their vending activities despite slow sales, limited income, and lack of alternatives. This persistence reflects a pattern of sustained effort, where vending is maintained not because conditions are favorable, but because it remains the most available means of livelihood. The data indicate that vendors accept hardship as part of their routine and respond by maintaining their presence in the market, even when outcomes are uncertain.

The implications of this result suggest that continuity of vending relies heavily on personal determination rather than external support or stable conditions. While endurance allows vendors to survive day to day, it also highlights their vulnerability, as persistence alone does not remove the structural challenges they face (Roa, 2023; Derla & Balongoy, 2023; Bendijo *et al.*, 2024; Dodge, 2025). This coping approach enables short-term survival but places long-term sustainability at risk if supportive systems are not strengthened to match the effort vendors already invest in their work.

Reliance on Prayer and Spiritual Coping

The results indicate that spiritual coping plays an important role in how vendors manage stress and uncertainty. As shared by the vendors:

"I endure it and just pray that the problems will be solved." (Vendor 1)

"I work hard and pray for good health and that someone will still lend me vegetables even on credit." (Vendor 3)

Vendors described prayer as a source of comfort and strength, especially during periods of financial difficulty or limited resources. This form of coping appears to support emotional balance, allowing vendors to endure challenges with a sense of hope and calm despite ongoing hardships.

The implications of this finding suggest that spiritual practices help vendors maintain resilience when material support is limited. While prayer does not directly resolve financial or operational problems, it provides emotional

stability that enables vendors to continue working (Roa, 2023; Bendijo *et al.*, 2024; Sumayang *et al.*, 2025). This highlights the importance of recognizing non-material coping strategies that support mental well-being and persistence in livelihood activities.

Borrowing Capital and Goods to Sustain Daily Operations
The results indicate that borrowing money and goods is a common strategy used to sustain daily vending operations. As shared by the vendors:

"This is all on credit—if there's none, I borrow; if there's some, I pay." (Vendor 2)

"We have no capital so we borrow money and borrow vegetables. Our earnings go straight to paying debts." (Vendor 3)

"Sometimes I look for lending just to have capital again." (Vendor 4)

"I have no proper capital so I just get by with whatever is available." (Vendor 5)

Vendors rely on credit to secure vegetables and basic capital when personal funds are insufficient. This approach allows them to continue selling despite limited resources, with daily earnings often directed toward repaying debts rather than generating profit.

The implications of this result indicate that access to credit is essential for short-term continuity but also reinforces financial vulnerability. While borrowing enables vendors to keep operating, it limits their ability to save or expand their business (Mercado, 2018; Bendijo *et al.*, 2024; Labitad, 2025). This coping strategy reflects adaptability but also reveals the need for more stable financial support mechanisms that can reduce reliance on continuous debt.

Diversifying Income Through Other Jobs

The results indicate that some vendors cope with income instability by taking on additional work outside vending. As shared by a vendor:

"I have another job—I wash clothes, clean houses, anything that can help support my business." (Vendor 4)

Engaging in tasks such as household labor provides supplemental income that helps cover daily needs and supports vending activities. This strategy reflects flexibility and a willingness to balance multiple roles to maintain livelihood stability.

The implications of this finding suggest that income diversification helps reduce immediate financial pressure but increases physical and emotional demands on vendors. While additional work supports survival, it may also limit rest and recovery, affecting long-term well-being (Peimani & Kamalipour, 2022; Roa, 2023; Bendijo *et al.*, 2024). This pattern shows how vendors compensate for unstable earnings by extending their labor beyond the market setting.

Negotiation and Maintaining Good Relationships with Suppliers

The results indicate that maintaining good relationships with suppliers is a key coping strategy among vendors. As shared by the vendors:

"I just borrow money or vegetables, and they allow it as long as I

pay.” (Vendor 2)

“We continue by not being ashamed to ask for vegetables from suppliers. We can borrow as long as we pay properly.” (Vendor 3)

Through negotiation and trust, vendors are able to access vegetables or money on credit, allowing them to continue operations despite limited capital. These relationships are built on mutual understanding and the commitment to repay obligations.

The implications of this result suggest that social connections play a crucial role in sustaining small-scale vending. Strong supplier relationships help vendors remain active in the market even during financial strain. However, dependence on personal networks also highlights the informal nature of support systems, emphasizing the need for more reliable and structured assistance to strengthen long-term livelihood sustainability (Muñoz & Cohen, 2018; Peimani & Kamalipour, 2022; Bendijo *et al.*, 2024; Labitad, 2025).

Adapting Sales Strategies by Focusing on Fast-Selling Goods

The results indicate that vendors cope with slow sales by adjusting the types of products they sell, focusing on items that are easier and faster to sell. As shared by a vendor:

“Sometimes when there are no sales, I just sell banana leaves because those sell faster.” (Vendor 5)

When regular vegetables do not move quickly, vendors shift to goods with steady demand and shorter selling time. This adjustment reflects a practical response to unstable customer flow and limited capital, as vendors aim to avoid losses from unsold and spoiled goods while still generating daily income. The data indicate that flexibility in product selection is an important way vendors respond to changing market conditions.

The implications of this result suggest that adapting sales strategies helps vendors maintain continuity in their livelihood despite limited resources. By prioritizing fast-selling goods, vendors reduce the risk of waste and improve their chances of earning enough to meet daily needs. However, this also points to constrained business choices, where decisions are shaped by survival rather than growth (Abendaño *et al.*, 2022; Dhillon & Moncur, 2023; Bendijo *et al.*, 2024). While effective for short-term stability, such strategies may limit opportunities to expand product offerings or increase income over time.

Emotional Regulation

The results indicate that emotional regulation is a key coping strategy among vendors facing constant pressure and uncertainty. As shared by a vendor:

“Just chill. It’s really difficult, so you can’t just stay stressed at home. You need to look for ways to get capital again.” (Vendor 4)

Vendors described the importance of staying calm and avoiding excessive stress, even when financial problems arise. Rather than withdrawing from work, vendors manage their emotions to remain active and focused on finding ways to continue their business. This approach

reflects an awareness that emotional strain can hinder decision-making and daily functioning.

The implications of this result highlight the role of emotional control in sustaining livelihood activities. Staying calm allows vendors to think clearly, seek solutions, and continue working despite difficulties. While emotional regulation does not remove financial challenges, it supports persistence and adaptability (Roa, 2023; Bendijo *et al.*, 2024; Sumayang *et al.*, 2025). This finding underscores the need to recognize emotional well-being as an important factor in sustaining small-scale livelihood activities.

Drawing Strength from Family and Personal Motivation

The results indicate that family responsibilities and personal goals strongly motivate vendors to continue their work. As shared by the vendors:

“My family and my dreams motivate me.” (Vendor 1)

“My family—always my family.” (Vendor 2)

“My children are my inspiration so they have food, fare, and school allowance.” (Vendor 4)

“I push myself because I have no husband now. I need to survive and pay debts.” (Vendor 5)

Vendors consistently identified their families, especially children, as their main source of strength and purpose. This motivation helps vendors endure hardship and remain committed to vending, even in the absence of stable income or external support. Personal responsibility and the need to provide basic needs drive continued effort despite ongoing challenges.

The implications of this result suggest that family-centered motivation plays a critical role in livelihood sustainability. This sense of responsibility encourages persistence and resilience, allowing vendors to push through difficult conditions. However, it also reflects the heavy burden placed on vendors, as family needs leave little room for rest or alternative choices (Roa, 2023; Bendijo *et al.*, 2024; Sumayang *et al.*, 2025). While motivation sustains effort, it also highlights the importance of broader support systems to ease this pressure.

The findings collectively show that vendors rely on a combination of practical, emotional, and social strategies to cope with livelihood challenges. Persistence, prayer, borrowing resources, taking on additional work, maintaining supplier relationships, adjusting product offerings, managing emotions, and drawing strength from family all work together to support daily survival. These strategies reflect flexibility and determination, allowing vendors to continue operating despite limited capital, unstable income, and demanding working conditions.

Synthesizing these points, these coping and adaptation patterns show that livelihood sustainability is shaped by personal effort and informal support rather than stable systems. While these strategies help vendors endure and remain active in the market, they also reveal ongoing vulnerability and dependence on short-term solutions. The results emphasize the need to understand coping

not only as resilience, but also as a response to persistent structural challenges that affect long-term stability.

CONCLUSIONS

The study generated new knowledge on how small-scale vegetable vendors sustain their businesses amid persistent economic, environmental, and social challenges by relying on practical, experience-based strategies rooted in everyday realities. The findings show that business sustainability is shaped not only by economic actions such as adjusting products, borrowing capital, and diversifying income, but also by personal and social resources, including emotional regulation, family motivation, spiritual coping, and maintaining good relationships with suppliers and customers. These combined practices allow vendors to remain operational despite unstable income, rising costs, and uncertain market conditions. Overall, the study highlights that sustainability among small-scale vendors is a continuous process of adaptation, resilience, and decision-making grounded in lived experience rather than formal business planning.

Based on the findings, support mechanisms for small-scale vegetable vendors should focus on strengthening practical skills that align with their existing coping and adaptation practices. Local stakeholders may consider providing accessible programs on basic financial management, product diversification, and market adaptability that reflect the vendors' real conditions. Initiatives that support emotional well-being, family-centered livelihood support, and stronger supplier relationships may further enhance sustainability. Improving access to small capital, flexible assistance, and market-based support can help vendors reinforce the strategies they already use to sustain their businesses.

Future studies may explore the long-term effects of these coping and adaptation strategies on income stability and overall well-being of small-scale vendors. Comparative studies involving vendors from other public markets or different livelihood sectors may provide deeper insights into shared and unique sustainability practices. Further research may also examine the role of community-based support systems and local interventions in strengthening business resilience. Using mixed or longitudinal approaches could help capture changes in coping strategies over time and provide a broader understanding of sustainability among small-scale entrepreneurs.

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