



GENDERED MARKETPLACE ASSESSMENT

OE-CUSSE, TIMOR-LESTE 2022

**A JOINT ASSESSMENT CONDUCTED BY BIFANO, AFFOS, MANEO,
RHTO AND OXFAM IN TIMOR-LESTE, AND FACILITATED BY BRIDGING
PEOPLES**



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Photo Cover: Sabina Tunis sells vegetables at Maumate Market, Oe-cusse | Photo: Taku Oliveira | Oxfam in Timor-Leste

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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This assessment was funded through the Hakbi'it Project, which is supported by the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP). This publication has been funded by the Australian Government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The views expressed in this publication are the author's alone and are not necessarily the views of the Australian Government.

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ABOUT OXFAM IN TIMOR-LESTE

Oxfam in Timor-Leste (OiTL) has a long and widely acknowledged track record in humanitarian response and development in Timor-Leste since 1999. For over 20 years, OiTL has partnered with over 70 different organisations, and today OiTL works with and funds 19 national and local NGOs and networks. OiTL's country strategy (2021-25) focuses on three pillars of Gender Justice, Economic Justice and Climate Justice. OiTL takes an influencing approach to all of its programming across these pillars, including a combination of social norm change work, promoting inclusion of diverse voices including women and people with disabilities, and increasing government and public understanding and use of relevant evidence.

OiTL's approach to Gender Justice is rights-based, holistic, systemic, and aims to challenge mainstream thinking which systematically discriminates against women. A key initiative to achieve this is our women's economic empowerment project, Hakbi'it (Empower Collective Action for Equality and Inclusion in Timor-Leste). The project is implemented by Asosiasaun Futuru Foin Sa'e Sustentavel (A-FFOS), Binibu Faef Nome (BIFANO), Empreza Di'ak, Kdadalak Sulimutuk Institute (KSI), Masine Neu Oe-cusse (MANEO), Ra'es Hadomi Timor-Oan (RHTO), and Oxfam in Timor-Leste.



Lucia Suni, Luiza Tobe da Cunha, Cenia and other women at Maumate Market, Oe-cusse | Photo: Taku Oliveira | Oxfam in Timor-Leste

INTRODUCTION

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Marketplaces are extremely important for economic and social development in Timor-Leste. They are a vital link in the value chain for agricultural activity, as the majority of fresh food that is produced for sale in Timor-Leste is sold via the marketplace. They also form an important local economic hub, as vendors buy and sell goods for daily use including clothes, kitchen supplies and a variety of fresh and processed foods.

As workplaces, markets are particularly important in supporting women's economic activity, with an estimated 75-90% of vendors in municipal and sub-municipal (*posto*) markets being women.¹ Previous research facilitated by Bridging Peoples in five marketplaces in Timor-Leste indicate the importance of supporting women's work in marketplaces.² By contrast with men vendors, who may spend a significant part of their income on items or leisure activities such as alcohol or gambling, women vendors typically invest their income for their family's benefit—for example, paying for their family's meals or for children's schooling.

This assessment is a gender and disability assessment of two marketplaces in Oe-Cusse: Maumate market located approximately 15 minutes' drive from the centre of Oe-Cusse, and Pune market located in the mountains close to the Indonesian border, approximately 3 hours' drive from the centre of Oe-Cusse. Research results indicate that similarly to other Timor-Leste marketplaces that have been investigated using the same methodology, there is an urgent need to provide basic facilities and improve market management, with current arrangements posing a public health risk for vendors and consumers, negatively impacting on women's livelihoods, and posing a security risk for women.

The major issues identified by vendors and stakeholders in both marketplaces include the need for water and drainage systems, proper waste management, functioning toilets, and rehabilitation of building

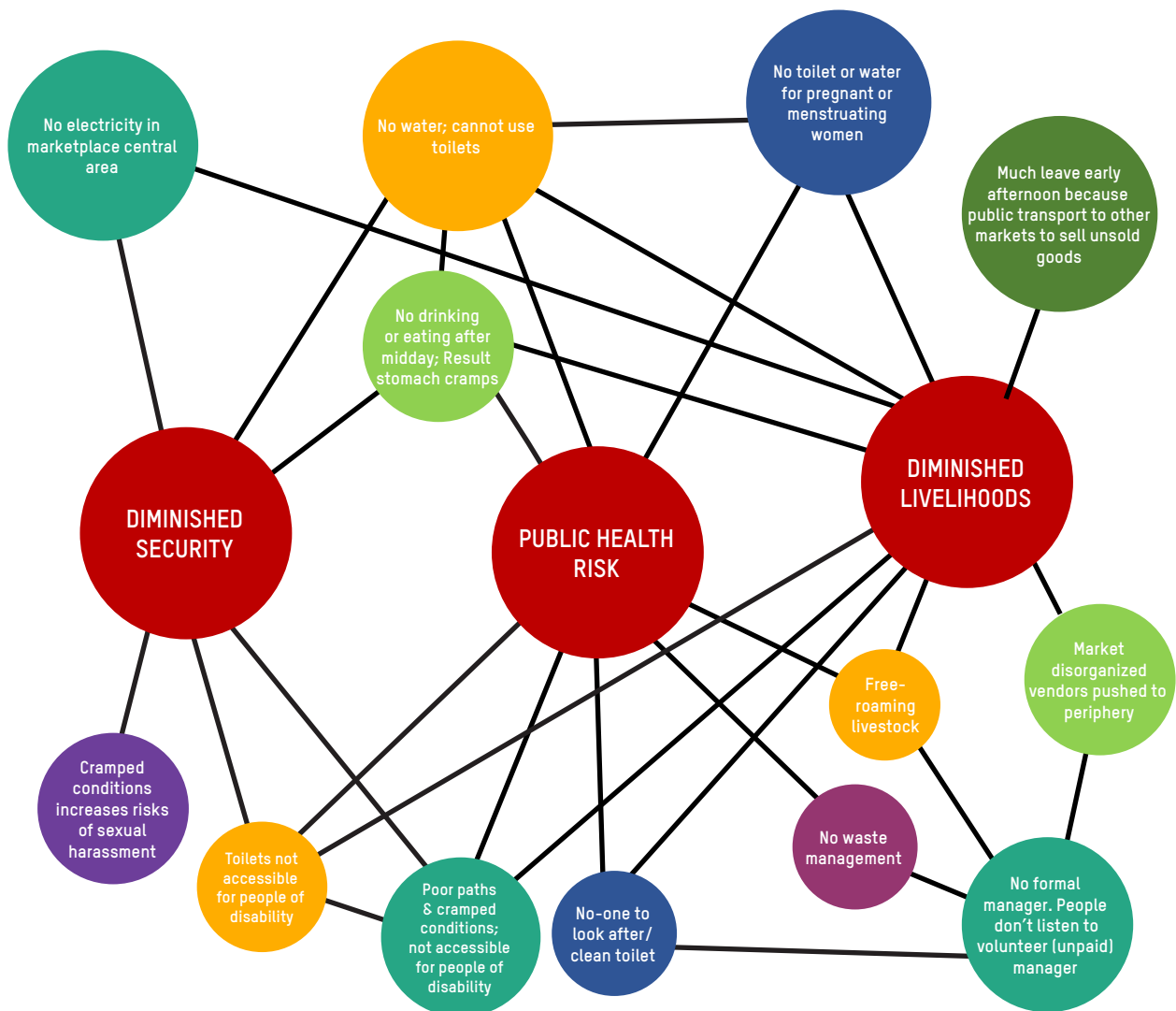
1 TOMAK marketplace observation visits, conducted in 2018.

2 TOMAK. (2018). Gendered Marketplace Assessment - Women Vendors' Voices & Aspirations for Change; International Women's Development Agency (IWDA), Centro Comunidade Covalima (CCC), & Oxfam in Timor-Leste (OiTL). (2020). Gendered Marketplace Assessment - Saiu, Covalima.

infrastructure including roofing which currently leaks when it rains. The marketplaces in Maumate and Pune are cramped and need expansion. To protect vendors and their goods from animals, and also as a public health measure, fences to keep livestock at bay need to be fixed. Electricity supply needs to be repaired, with lighting provided for the centre of the market, so that temporary vendors can sleep in safety. There needs to be a designated parking space for cars and trucks in both markets so cars and trucks do not enter the central market area, endangering pedestrians (including children) and negatively impacting vendor activity.³ Vendors also emphasised that access to both markets is an issue, with Maumate market only accessible via bumpy roads and off the main thoroughfare, and Pune market only accessible by even worse roads, which during the wet season involves perilous river crossings. In Maumate market, vendors specifically requested that the authority take measures to protect the market from flooding, such as that which occurred in 2020.

The issues that are detailed throughout this report are not limited to their impact on market vendors. As important hubs for local economic activity and food supply, the various interlocking problems that were raised during this assessment carry important implications for anyone working on issues of community livelihoods, women's security, and public health.

Figure 1. Market factors impacting on women and persons with disabilities' security, livelihoods and public health



3 Secretary of Usitasea Village Council, interview conducted 9 November 2022, Usitasea Village

METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this assessment is adapted from two previous projects conducted by Bridging Peoples. The first was conducted for the TOMAK program, investigating the experiences of women vendors in four marketplaces located in the municipalities of Bobonaro and Baucau.⁴ The second was conducted for IWDA and Oxfam in Timor-Leste (OiTL) in one marketplace in Suai.⁵

The purpose of this assessment was to investigate, analyse and document the current conditions, usability, and opportunities for improvements in Maumate and Pune marketplaces in Oe-Cusse. The methodology was entirely qualitative with a focus on participatory techniques, using the research process as a first step in developing practical strategies for improvement, together with key stakeholders in the special administrative region of Oe-Cusse.

For this project, the process of carrying out the research and opening potential paths for local advocacy was just as important as the findings. Oe-Cusse-based staff from local NGOs BIFANO, AFFOS, MANEO and RHTO were supported in carrying out the research, with Bridging Peoples largely taking a facilitating, mentoring and training role. A key focus of the project was to demystify the research and advocacy process, and to teach and support OiTL local partners who carried out the vast majority of key informant interviews in Baikeno (Oe-Cusse local language). As the participatory focus group discussions (FGDs) involved more advanced research skills, this aspect of the research was facilitated by OiTL staff member Ana Paula Sequeira, who is also fluent in Baikeno.

Research respondents included market vendors, marketplace managers, civil society representatives and government representatives. The research focussed on people's perceptions and experiences across four key areas: (i) access and usability for people with disabilities; (ii) market infrastructure; (iii) marketplace management; and (iii) safety and security.

The research team included: Rosalina Caet (RHTO), Paul Siki (MANEO), Marcos Oqui (AFFOS), Joao Quefi (BIFANO), and Ana Paula Sequeira (OiTL). Research was facilitated by Deborah Cummins (Bridging Peoples) and Abel Boavida dos Santos (Bridging Peoples.)

Fieldwork for the assessment was conducted by the research team in November 2022 over a period of four days, as follows:

1. Two observational 'audit' walks in Maumate and Pune marketplaces, plus one visit to Numbei marketplace;
2. 25 semi-structured interviews with selected market vendors, the market manager, civil society representatives and government representatives;
3. Two participatory focus group discussion (FGD) with 24 women vendors (including two women vendors with a disability), for participants to discuss and identify the most important issues to be addressed, from their own perspective.

A follow-up verification workshop was then conducted with 36 participants (26 female and 10 male) in April 2023, to present and verify findings and to discuss how marketplace conditions might be improved with vendors and some officials from the Special Administrative Region of Oe-Cusse-Ambeno (RAEOA).

Given only a few RAEOA officials attended the verification workshop, and most were junior RAEOA staff, it is strongly recommended that, at minimum, a further follow-up stakeholder workshop and ongoing meetings and discussions be conducted with senior RAEOA decision-makers, to make them aware of the pertinent issues from vendors' perspectives, as they work to improve marketplace conditions.

4 TOMAK. (2018). Gendered Marketplace Assessment - Women Vendors' Voices & Aspirations for Change

5 International Women's Development Agency (IWDA), Centro Comunidade Covalima (CCC), & Oxfam in Timor-Leste (OiTL). (2020). Gendered Marketplace Assessment - Suai, Covalima.

ABOUT THE MARKETS AND THE VENDORS

MAUMATE MARKET

Maumate Market is located about 15 minutes' drive from the centre of Oe-Cusse. While there is some activity throughout the week, with permanent vendors opening their small convenience stores (kios) every day for people who may visit during non-market days, the 'big' market day is on Tuesdays when many temporary vendors come to sell their goods. Unlike its previous location in Tono, which was located close to a bus interchange with regular foot-traffic, very few consumers visit Maumate market during non-market days because it is disconnected from main roads. Only individuals who actively intend to visit the market tend to make their way there.

Some neighboring farmers are not happy with the presence of the Maumate market, complaining about the flow of marketplace users damaging their rice fields.⁶ The market grounds are also prone to flooding, being located close to the river. As a result of these and other problems, the Authority for the Special Administrative Region of Oe-Cusse and Ambeno (RAEOA) is actively seeking to relocate the Maumate market, with the plan that this will address location constraints as well as various infrastructure problems, including accessibility constraints for people with disabilities and older people with limited mobility.⁷ While RAEOA officials have made plans and allocated a budget for a new marketplace, the primary issue that persists is the availability of suitable land. As a RAEOA official explained during the verification workshop conducted in April 2023, community members are hesitant to offer their land to use as the market, and it is likely that landowners will have conditions for allowing use of their land for this purpose.⁸ One option under discussion is to hire the landowners as staff to oversee the market's operations, thereby providing some compensation for the use of their land.⁹ However, this solution may result in a conflict of interest if issues arise between market vendors and neighbouring community members, which is a common enough occurrence. If the execution of the market plan does not happen in 2023, it is likely that the budget allocated for it will need to be returned to the state.¹⁰

Many permanent vendors are opposed to moving from their current position in Maumate because they invested their private funding into building their kios, which also doubles as their home.¹¹ Moving the market would necessitate abandoning their homes, which permanent vendors are opposed to. Temporary vendors are less opposed to the idea of moving the marketplace, since they don't live at the market. Their biggest concern is whether or not the new location will be easily accessible by public transport, so they can come and go easily. Because it is unclear how long it will take before the new marketplace is ready, both permanent and temporary vendors recommend rehabilitation of current infrastructure as a stop-gap measure, to provide a dignified working environment.¹²

PUNE MARKET

Pune Market is located several hours' drive from Oe-Cusse centre, in the mountains near the Indonesian border, in the village of Pune. The market is very small, occupying one half of a block of land, with the

6 Verification workshop, conducted 14 April 2023, Oe-Cusse vila, Oe-Cusse

7 Verification workshop, conducted 14 April 2023, Oe-Cusse vila, Oe-Cusse

8 Verification workshop, conducted 14 April 2023, Oe-Cusse vila, Oe-Cusse

9 Verification workshop, conducted 14 April 2023, Oe-Cusse vila, Oe-Cusse

10 Verification workshop, conducted 14 April 2023, Oe-Cusse vila, Oe-Cusse

11 Maumate market manager, interview conducted 7 November 2022, Maumate market; Verification workshop, conducted 14 April 2023, Oe-Cusse vila, Oe-Cusse

12 Verification workshop, conducted 14 April 2023, Oe-Cusse vila, Oe-Cusse

other half occupied by the village (suku) council office. Vendors complain that during 'big' market days on Thursdays it is very cramped. Like Maumate market, there are permanent vendors living and selling from their kios every day of the week. Temporary vendors come and go to sell their goods on big market days. Vendors explained that during the dry season it can become quite busy, with temporary vendors coming from many different suku. During the rainy season, however, only a few temporary vendors come from neighbouring suku, due to the difficult roads & river crossings, and associated increased cost of travel which reduces their already-small profit margins.

Responding to the cramped conditions in Pune market, there are plans in place to expand the market by moving the neighbouring suku council office to a new location, in order to use the entire plot for the market. The budget and design for the new market are already in place.¹³ Coordination with the land property administration is needed to proceed with the execution, as the government is conducting feasibility planning for the next 10 years to ensure the long-term benefits of the project.¹⁴

ABOUT THE VENDORS

As with other markets across Timor-Leste, the majority of vendors in both Maumate and Pune marketplaces are women. They comprise a mix of permanent and temporary vendors. Permanent vendors are a mix of men and women who sell a variety of staple goods from their kios. They open their kios even during non-market days, but do most of their business on 'big' market days when temporary vendors also arrive to sell their goods.

Temporary vendors are mainly women, who come and go from the market, generally arriving the day before market day to secure their spots and set things up for the market, ready to sell their goods the next day. Most temporary vendors must sleep in the open-air market, because they cannot be assured of public transport being available early enough on market day, and/or they must walk a long distance. Temporary vendors sell a variety of goods. Some are farmer-vendors who bring their own produce (fresh fruit, vegetables, livestock, betel nut) to sell; others travel from one market to the next selling dry goods, housewares and/or second-hand clothes; yet others are larger traders who come from Oe-Cusse vila or Dili, buying and reselling goods. Some also make and sell woven baskets. In both Maumate and Pune, some women bring their young children or babies to the market, while they are attending their stalls.

Only two vendors with disabilities¹⁵ were identified by the team for this study. It is possible that there are more vendors with disabilities in Pune and Maumate markets who were not identified as such—or who were not there during the assessment team's visit, but there was insufficient scope in this assessment for a full census on vendors which would have given a more complete picture.

VENDOR INCOMES

While this research did not gather specific information on vendors' income, it is known from other research that profit margins for market vendors are tight, and are generally insufficient on their own to meet household needs.¹⁶ Vendors in Maumate and Pune explained that they need additional sources of income, generated by other family members including older children. They sometimes also borrow from Savings and Loans groups such as Oxfam in Timor-Leste's ROMANSA groups,¹⁷ and/or borrow money with

13 Verification workshop, conducted 14 April 2023, Oe-Cusse vila, Oe-Cusse

14 Verification workshop, conducted 14 April 2023, Oe-Cusse vila, Oe-Cusse

15 One with a visual impairment and another with a mobility impairment

16 TOMAK. (2018). Gendered Marketplace Assessment - Women Vendors' Voices & Aspirations for Change

17 A savings and Loans group supported by Oxfam in Timor-Leste (OITL)

interest from other family members. Sometimes, also, they must resort to negative coping strategies such as selling livestock, to make ends meet.¹⁸

There are some vendors who are larger operators, buying staple goods, processed food, and housewares from Dili or Oe-Cusse vila at a lower price, then reselling at a profit. This can make it difficult for small permanent vendors who must compete with their lower prices, and who are not able to take advantage of economies of scale. This is particularly the case for permanent vendors in Pune, who are not in a position to travel the long distances to Oe-Cusse vila, paying increased rates to navigate the difficult roads and cross rivers during the wet season.¹⁹

The situation is also difficult for temporary farmer vendors. They sell whatever they can produce and carry to the market, competing with other farmer-vendors who are growing and selling similar or the same items. They must also pay for transportation, which becomes quite expensive during the wet season. During the dry season, farmer-vendors in Pune explained they pay \$1.50-\$2.00 for transportation to and from the market; this increases to around \$12.00 during the rainy season. In addition, for vendors who must cross the river, they have to pay someone to help them transport their goods across the river by motorbike, which costs them about \$2.50 just to carry their goods. In addition to this, they must also pay about \$2.50 per person, to help them cross the flooded river.

Lack of amenities in the market increases their difficulties. In Maumate market, vendors explained that they must also carry jerry cans of water for their personal use due to lack of water supply in the market.²⁰ This significantly reduces the amount of produce that they are able to carry for sale. For any unsold goods at the end of the market day, most temporary farmer vendors barter their unsold goods for non-perishable food, such as sugar. Depending on their circumstances, some vendors may carry their excess goods back home and try to sell them in the afternoon. If neither approach succeeds, the produce is disposed of for a loss.²¹

VENDOR PRIORITY ISSUES

The team conducted two participatory FGDs with a mixture of temporary and permanent women vendors: one in Maumate (12 vendors) and one in Pune (13 vendors). The purpose of the FGDs was to identify the priority issues from their own perspective, and then to develop recommendations for improvement.

The FGDs had a dual purpose: to empower women vendors in expressing their own experiences and seeing these respected and raised with RAEOA decision-makers, while also producing information that is useful for reporting and advocacy with decision-makers. In seeking to empower women vendors, process is as important as outcome. While discussions were facilitated by the team, the recommendations were developed by the women themselves. Facilitators were very careful not to lead or give examples to participants when eliciting comments from the women. Women who could not read or write were supported by other women in the group.

The most important obstacles or challenges for these women vendors working in the two marketplaces, using their own words, were identified. These were then formulated into recommendations for improvement, together with the women vendors. The recommendations from Maumate market were as follows:

18 Vendors in Pune market, FGD conducted 9 November 2022, Usitasae Village

19 Pune market manager, interview conducted 9 November 2022, Pune market; Secretary of Usitasae Village Council, interview conducted 9 November 2022, Usitasae Village; Vendors in Pune market, FGD conducted 9 November 2022, Usitasae Village


20 Vendors in Maumate market, FGD conducted 8 November 2022, Naimeko Village

21 Vendors in Pune market, FGD conducted 9 November 2022, Usitasae Village

ISSUE	RECOMMENDATION
Market management	Recommended to work together with government and stakeholders to strengthen market regulations
Maintenance of market facilities	Recommended to socialise and work with vendors to contribute to maintenance of market facilities
Organise market by vendor type	Recommended to organise vendors so that they are grouped together by type of goods that they sell
Sexual harassment	Recommended to expand marketplace and market paths, to reduce sexual harassment that can take place in cramped conditions
Collaboration between stakeholders	Recommended that market manager work with xefe suku and other stakeholders to improve and repair market facilities
Vendor contributions	Recommended that vendors make regular contributions in order to pay someone to manage and clean the toilets

In Pune, the recommendations that were produced were as follows:

ISSUE	RECOMMENDATION
Cramped market space	Recommended to enlarge market area to improve access, in particular for people with disabilities.
Poorly maintained market paths	Recommended to organise proper paths in market area to allow free movement of people when buying things.
Poor market management	Recommended to strengthen marketplace management, including clear regulations for the manager to control market activities
Water supply	Recommended to manage water supply, by fixing pipes that are damaged by animals, and strengthening the local water management group (GMF) regulations
Infrastructure	Recommended to repair market buildings, toilets and water supply
Children play area	Recommended to create a safe place for vendors' children to play
Animals	Recommended to fix the market fencing, to stop animals from Pune village from entering the marketplace
Waste management	Recommended to fix the rubbish area, and to find a person to manage the market including controlling waste management

A high-angle, wide shot of a bustling outdoor market in Maumate, Timor-Leste. The market is set on a dirt road flanked by lush green trees. Numerous people, mostly women, are seen walking through the market, carrying goods or shopping. Stalls are set up along the sides of the road, covered by large, colorful umbrellas in shades of blue, yellow, and red. The umbrellas are used to protect the goods and people from the sun. The market is filled with various items, including bags of rice, sacks of flour, and other foodstuffs. The scene captures the daily life and commerce of the community.

*When it rains, we must
huddle together in
one place, setting up
temporary tarpaulins
to protect their goods.
Even though it's
raining, we have to
stand guard to prevent
animals like goats and
cattle from damaging
our produce*

MARKET ACCESSIBILITY AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

There are many accessibility constraints for persons with disabilities due to poor road and market conditions, which have direct implications for people with disabilities' livelihoods, leading to decreased income and limited independence. Since market locations lack the facilities or conditions to cater to the needs of persons with disabilities, they often cannot use the market to carry out their business, instead paying others to transport and sell their products.



Maumate Market on the weekend in Oe-cusse | Photo: Taku Oliveira | Oxfam in Timor-Leste

As one woman with a disability who runs a kiosk outside of the market explained, she sources most of her goods from the market. However, transportation presents a significant challenge, as market conditions often prevent her from accessing markets independently.²² While she lives close to Oe-Cusse centre, transport options such as minibuses or motorbikes sometimes drops her off far from the market stalls, requiring her to carry her products for a considerable distance, so she sometimes pays a family member to buy the goods for her. For persons with disabilities living in more remote areas, these issues are further compounded. Vendors often have to walk significant distances over difficult terrain, sometimes crossing rivers, in order to bring their produce to market. This is not an option for people with limited mobility.

Inside the market, the paths are narrow and bumpy, there are no ramps, and there is often a lot of litter on the market paths, making it perilous for people who have difficulty walking, and almost impossible for people using wheelchairs. These same conditions make the market difficult to navigate for people with limited vision. During the rainy season, market paths become filled with water which further obstructs accessibility. Toilets (even if they were functioning) were not designed for wheelchair-users.

It is important to note that this research does not adequately capture the perspectives of people with disabilities, because there was only limited sampling of market vendors with disabilities. This indicates a bias in the research design and sampling; the research is designed to focus on the experiences of vendors, but because of accessibility constraints, the team was only able to identify a small number of vendors with disabilities. It is recommended that future marketplace assessments include community-based approaches to engage with people with disabilities who do business outside of the market. This would potentially help to uncover the factors contributing to their limited use of the market and shed light on their perspectives.

22 Permanent vendor, interview conducted 7 November 2022, Pune market

MARKETPLACE INFRASTRUCTURE



Condition of infrastructure at Maumate Market, Oe-cusse | Photo: Taku Oliveira | Oxfam in Timor-Leste

MARKET BUILDINGS

Both Maumate and Pune marketplaces are cramped, and the open-air buildings are in poor condition, with the roofs leaking during the rainy season. When there is heavy rain, temporary vendors try to bring their goods under a leaking roof and/or cover them with a tarpaulin for protection from the rain. As one vendor in Maumate explained,

When it rains, we must huddle together in one place, setting up temporary tarpaulins to protect their goods. Even though it's raining, we have to stand guard to prevent animals like goats and cattle from damaging our produce.²³

In 2020, the market buildings and permanent vendors' kios buildings in Maumate were further damaged because of flooding. Although the Ministry for Tourism, Commerce and Industry (MTCI) and the Timor Red Cross (CVTL) went to collect data and assess market conditions and needs, vendors explained that they have not seen any action taken to fix or improve the market, or to help them in flood recovery or flood mitigation.²⁴

PATHS AND DRAINAGE

In Maumate market, the paths are bumpy with many potholes, and become slippery during the wet season. In Pune, there are no clear paths set out, so vendors simply place their stalls wherever they can. There is inadequate drainage in both markets, and the walking areas become very slippery during the wet season. There are no ramps for the benefit of people with disabilities, or others who may have difficulty walking.

²³ Vendors in Pune market, FGD conducted 9 November 2022, Usitasae Village

²⁴ Maumate market manager, interview conducted 7 November 2022, Maumate market; Vendors in Maumate market, FGD conducted 8 November 2022, Naimeko Village

ELECTRICITY

Electricity infrastructure is in place in both markets, however electricity is only provided to permanent vendors who set up a meter and pay for electricity. In the central public areas where temporary vendors sell their goods, there is no lighting. This forces temporary vendors to seek alternative shelter in the front of permanent vendors' kiosks during the night-time, as they do not feel safe in the dark.

TOILETS

While toilets exist in both markets, there is no water supply, and the toilets are not available for public use. In both Maumate and Pune, many permanent vendors have set up their own toilet and bathing facilities, with water that they source privately. By contrast, temporary vendors must go to the forest near the river for their toileting needs. In Maumate, the toilet is locked and the key is held by the volunteer market manager, as per the suco chief's directions. The market manager largely uses it as a private resource, organising and paying for water. As he explained, it is not possible to make it a public resource because the water that he buys is only limited. If others wished to use the toilet, were willing to provide their own water, and were willing to regularly clean the toilet, he explained that he would be happy to give them access.

Because women vendors are frightened to leave the marketplace in the dark, they must control their bodily urges so they go to the toilet and have a final wash before the sun goes down, and then must wait until the sun comes up the next morning before going to the toilet again. As one woman explained,

it is very difficult, we have to carry our own water. Here there is no toilet. That is why, if we feel sick in the stomach, we have to go to the toilet in the forest. At night we feel scared going to the toilet in the forest, because it is too far and there is no light, and we only use a torch. We have to ask friends to accompany us to the toilet because we are afraid. If I need to go to the toilet during the daytime, I feel embarrassed, I am afraid of someone seeing me while I go to the toilet.²⁵

Many vendors resort to unhealthy measures such as stopping eating or drinking before noon while working under a hot sun, to avoid needing to use the toilet in the evening. Many women complained of stomach cramps and other health issues because of these coping mechanisms. As another woman explained,

There are no toilets in the market. Therefore, sometimes if we get sick in the stomach, we just have to endure, waiting for our goods to be bought, and then must leave the market to go to the toilet on the road.²⁶

The lack of accessible toilets has a particular impact on the livelihoods of women who are pregnant or menstruating, because they are unable to look after their sanitation needs and so avoid selling in the marketplace. As one woman explained,

Those of us who come a long way, we bring our own food to eat and then sleep. In the afternoon, we go to bathe in the river and go to the toilet in the river itself. Sometimes, for us women, if we have our period, we decide to go back home because we only have one piece of clothing. Those who are pregnant also face significant difficulties because there is no bathroom, and sleeping in the market is not safe.²⁷

WATER SUPPLY

Access to water is a major issue in both the villages and marketplaces of Maumate and Pune. In Maumate, there is some water supply to the village but not to the marketplace. As part of the COVID-19 response in

25 Vendors in Pune market, FGD conducted 9 November 2022, Usitasae Village

26 Vendors in Maumate market, FGD conducted 8 November 2022, Naimeko Village

27 Vendors in Maumate market, FGD conducted 8 November 2022, Naimeko Village

Maumate market, a water source to supply water to the marketplace was identified, and infrastructure including a new toilet was built in 2021.²⁸ However, up until the time of fieldwork (November 2022) the water had not been switched on, and vendors are unclear whose responsibility it is to bring water into the marketplace.²⁹ The new tanks that were installed now have cracks in them, because they have been sitting empty under a hot sun for years³⁰. In Pune, water supply to both the village and the marketplace is problematic. During the wet season, there is sufficient water for everyone; during the dry season this reduces significantly so that only those who are close to the water source can access water, and others further down the line are dry.³¹

The result in both Maumate and Pune is that there is no freely available water supply in the marketplaces. To deal with this, permanent vendors have come up with different solutions, depending on their financial capability. Some vendors organise together to fetch water from other areas, renting a truck to transport the water, with each vendor contributing \$5 towards the cost.³² In Maumate, one vendor has dug a well and bought a generator to access water that is located underground. Because these vendors invest their own money for this water supply, they do not share it with other vendors.³³ Temporary vendors who do not have these resources must make do as they can, carrying their own water in jerry cans (which reduces the amount of produce they can carry for sale) and toileting in the forest rather than the toilets that are established in the marketplace, with associated public health and security concerns.³⁴

As with other parts of Timor-Leste, problems with water supply are mainly because of poor water management rather than lack of availability of water. In the suku of Maumate and Pune there are community water management groups called Grupu Maneja Fasilidade (GMF.) GMF are tasked with maintenance of pipes and other basic water infrastructure, and organising households to contribute for keeping the water source clean, the pipes functioning, and making any small repairs where necessary.

Community water management is not an easy task, and involves multiple stakeholders with sometimes competing interests. In both Pune and Maumate, there have been various attempts to improve water supply over many years. Water pipes and other infrastructure has been put in place via various programs including one involving OiTL local partner BIFANO, MAF and an international NGO,³⁵ and another under the Planu Nasional Dezenvolvimentu Suku (PNDS).³⁶ However, community management and systems of contribution are often weak, and despite attempts at regular meetings between Servisu Agua no Saniamentu (SAS) team, GMF and suku councils, the water management problems have not been resolved.³⁷

Water management and access problems are amplified in marketplaces, because vendors are not considered part of the community because they come and go from different suku. And while markets are a public space, used by the public to buy their food, water supply is not provided for and managed by the state. As a result, marketplaces are generally at the bottom of a community's priority list. There is a need for RAEOA to take direct responsibility for ensuring adequate water & sanitation supply, recognising market cleanliness as an important public health issue.³⁸

28 Pune market manager, interview conducted 9 November 2022, Pune market

29 Maumate market manager, interview conducted 7 November 2022, Maumate market

30 Maumate market manager, interview conducted 7 November 2022, Maumate market

31 Secretary of Naimeko Village, interview conducted 8 November 2022, Naimeko Village; Previous xefe suku, interview conducted 10 November 2022, Naimeko Village ; Secretary of Usitasae Village Council, interview conducted 9 November 2022, Usitasea Village; Pune market manager, interview conducted 9 November 2022, Pune market

32 Vendors in Pune market, FGD conducted 9 November 2022, Usitasae Village

33 Vendors in Maumate market, FGD conducted 8 November 2022, Naimeko Village

34 Verification workshop, conducted 14 April 2023, Oe-Cusse vila, Oe-Cusse; Vendors in Maumate market, FGD conducted 8 November 2022, Naimeko Village

35 BIFANO supervisor, interview conducted 11 November 2022, Oe-Cusse

36 Verification workshop, conducted 14 April 2023, Oe-Cusse vila, Oe-Cusse

37 BIFANO supervisor, interview conducted 11 November 2022, Oe-Cusse

38 Chief of Department of public Affairs and sanitation RAEOA, interview conducted 11 November 2022, Oe-Cusse

MARKET MANAGEMENT

MARKET MANAGERS

There are volunteer market managers in both Maumate and Pune markets, chosen from the permanent vendors in collaboration with the xefe suku of the area. The market manager of Maumate was chosen in 2011 when the market was moved from Tono.³⁹ The market manager of Pune was chosen in 2005.⁴⁰ There is no system in either place for regular changing of market managers.

Marketplace management is not an easy task, and volunteer managers do not carry significant authority with the vendors. Temporary vendors vary from one week to the next, and are focused on ensuring they secure a good spot that will increase their visibility and customer sales. Vendors in both markets complained that obralan (second hand clothes) sellers often take over the marketplace, blocking access to various kios (sometimes including the manager's own kios) and pushing farmer-vendors to the periphery.⁴¹ Efforts from the market manager to organise the vendors' use of space are often unsuccessful, as temporary vendors do not listen. As a result, while the market managers have attempted at different times to organize the vendors according to the type of goods they sell, the vendors did not comply and so the markets remain unorganised.⁴²

Due to the difficulties in controlling the vendors, plus the limited authority and lack of incentives given to the volunteer market managers,⁴³ vendors in both markets complained that managers are quite passive. Meetings are few and far between, with one Maumate market vendor noting that he could not remember a single meeting taking place between the market manager and the permanent vendors to discuss various issues related to the market.⁴⁴ Some vendors did not know who the market manager was. One vendor in Pune stated that they had never seen any market manager and believed the xefe suku was responsible for market management and oversight.⁴⁵

It is also difficult for the xefe suku or suku secretary to assert their authority with temporary vendors; while the suku council carries significant authority with community members from that suku, temporary vendors who come from other suku often do not feel obliged to follow their guidance or requests.⁴⁶

In response to these various management difficulties, a RAEOA official explained in the verification workshop that they have new plans. When the Maumate market is relocated, a market manager will be identified by RAEOA and that person will be paid. This will ensure the manager is empowered by RAEOA to manage market affairs, and be recognised and compensated for his or her efforts. However, current negotiations are that land owners be appointed in this management role in exchange for use of their land.⁴⁷ Such a person could not be considered to be a neutral representative of vendors' interests, and there may be a conflict of interest when dealing with issues between market vendors and the host community.

39 Maumate market manager, interview conducted 7 November 2022, Maumate market

40 Pune market manager, interview conducted 9 November 2022, Pune market

41 Vendors in Pune market, FGD conducted 9 November 2022, Usitasae Village

42 Secretary of Usitasae Village Council, interview conducted 9 November 2022, Usitasea Village; Vendors in Maumate market, FGD conducted 8 November 2022, Naimeko Village

43 Secretary of Usitasae Village Council, interview conducted 9 November 2022, Usitasea Village

44 Permanent vendor, interview conducted 7 November 2022, Maumate market

45 Permanent vendor, interview conducted 9 November 2022, Pune market

46 Suku council meetings take place once every three months; Secretary of Usitasae Village Council, interview conducted 9 November 2022, Usitasea Village

47 Verification workshop, conducted 14 April 2023, Oe-Cusse vila, Oe-Cusse



Cleaning Service company collecting waste at the Numbel Market, Oe-cusse | Photo: Taku Oliveira | Oxfam in Timor-Leste

WASTE MANAGEMENT

An important issue for marketplace management is waste management. While the market is in theory a public space, garbage collection trucks do not enter the market space to clean and collect rubbish, and the concrete rubbish collection bins have been allowed to fall into disrepair.⁴⁸ As a result, there is no proper waste management system and rubbish is thrown randomly in the marketplace paths.

Waste management is an important issue, particularly disposal of organic waste, which attracts flies and poses a health risk. It is clear in both Pune and Maumate markets that there is a general disregard among temporary vendors in tending to their rubbish; despite requests by the marketplace manager and permanent vendors to dispose of waste in designated areas, they still throw waste at random.⁴⁹ At the end of the market day, the garbage is left to permanent vendors to clean up the entire market area and burn the garbage, sometimes having to pay others to transport the rubbish to the designated area.⁵⁰

There was some dissension as to who should be responsible for which elements of waste management. During the verification workshop, government officials emphasised the need to 'socialise' vendors on proper separation of plastic, vegetables, bottles, and cans; however, the usefulness of such measures is dependent on whether RAEOA waste management services provide recycling of different types of waste.⁵¹ A related suggestion in the workshop was that vendors should be educated on taking leftover vegetables home to compost, instead of leaving them at the market.⁵² However, such a response fails to recognise temporary vendors' reality, who need to travel many hours to return home, sometimes by foot, carrying unsold goods and jerrycans that they use to carry their own water. It is unlikely that they will carry their organic waste home. In addition, neighbouring farmers already complain about the market's impact on their fields, and are therefore unlikely to contribute their land for the making of compost with waste from the market.

48 Pune market manager, interview conducted 9 November 2022, Pune market

49 Vendors Pune market; Pune market manager, interview conducted 9 November 2022, Pune market

50 Pune market manager, interview conducted 9 November 2022, Pune market; Permanent vendor, interview conducted 7 November 2022, Maumate market

51 Verification workshop, conducted 14 April 2023, Oe-Cusse vila, Oe-Cusse

52 Verification workshop, conducted 14 April 2023, Oe-Cusse vila, Oe-Cusse

While it is clear that vendors should take responsibility for disposing of waste properly, there also needs to be a system for waste management which goes beyond individual responsibility. Given the marketplace is a public space, it is important that the concrete waste collection areas be rehabilitated, and be located where garbage collection trucks and vendors can both access it, maintaining some distance from the market space to reduce the public health risk. RAEOA waste collection services need to be extended to marketplaces to support market management in managing vendors' waste management, since no single group of vendors or customers are responsible for the waste that is generated and currently thrown to the ground.⁵³

ANIMALS

A significant problem for vendors in both Pune and Maumate is free-roaming community livestock, including cattle, goats and pigs, that make their way into the marketplace. These animals are generally owned by neighbouring community members; sometimes also by permanent vendors within the market. This is a major public health issue, as the animals excrete waste on the ground where temporary vendors sit, sleep, and display their products, including fresh food. It also leads to loss and damage of vendors' produce, as goats or cattle may eat or trample their goods if their stall is left unattended even for a short time. As one vendor explained,

*a major problem is the lack of proper fences in the market, which allows animals like goats and cows to enter and damage some vendors' products. We have informed the community to keep their animals away, but they don't take any action.*⁵⁴

In an effort to control their disruptive presence, local leaders in each village erected fences around the marketplaces, but the fences have fallen apart and have not been rebuilt.⁵⁵ In Pune market, local leaders also came together to agree on a Tarabandu⁵⁶, prohibiting animals from wandering freely into the marketplace, however this is not being followed. Similarly in Maumate, local leaders have instructed community members on managing their animals properly, but they do not follow these guidelines and animals still roam free in the marketplace.⁵⁷

Given the ongoing nature of this problem in both markets, it is likely that market managers and local leaders need support from RAEOA officials in ensuring community members stop their livestock from entering the marketplace.

VENDOR CONTRIBUTIONS

In both marketplaces in the past, there was a system of vendor contributions to maintain basic market infrastructure and contribute to the surrounding community, with vendors contributing between \$0.10 and \$0.50 depending on their vendor type.⁵⁸ The manager also brought in young people to clean the market and manage waste, with the plan that vendors make small contributions for this purpose.⁵⁹ However, in both markets these systems are no longer functioning, with vendors refusing to contribute.⁶⁰

53 Maumate market manager, interview conducted 7 November 2022, Maumate market; Verification workshop, conducted 14 April 2023, Oe-Cusse vila, Oe-Cusse

54 Permanent vendor, interview conducted 7 November 2022, Maumate market

55 Permanent vendor, interview conducted 9 November 2022, Pune market

56 Verbal cultural prohibitions

57 Permanent vendor, interview conducted 7 November 2022, Maumate market

58 Maumate market manager, interview conducted 7 November 2022, Maumate market; Pune market manager, interview conducted 9 November 2022, Pune market; Secretary of Usitasae Village Council, interview conducted 9 November 2022, Usitasea Village

59 Permanent vendor, interview conducted 9 November 2022, Pune market

60 Maumate market manager, interview conducted 7 November 2022, Maumate market; Pune market manager, interview conducted 9 November 2022, Pune market; Xefe suku Usitasae, interview conducted 9 November 2022, Usitasae Village

It was unclear during fieldwork exactly why vendors have stopped contributing, since all vendors who were interviewed expressed a willingness to contribute to improve market management. They also all expressed a keen desire to extend contributions to hiring someone to look after the toilet, if that would solve their toilet problem. While this was not stated outright, it is possible that the stopping point is not an unwillingness to contribute, but rather a lack of trust that the money will be used appropriately—making it important that the market manager be someone who is trustworthy from the vendors’ perspective, and who they can hold accountable.

SAFETY AND SECURITY

Unlike some other marketplaces investigated using this same methodology,⁶¹ the markets of Pune and Maumate do not appear to experience significant violence or public nuisance. Nonetheless, there is an opportunity to improve the safety of women vendors in these places.

There are no designated security guards or police officers patrolling the market. The police sometimes patrol the roads near the marketplaces, but this is not regular. In Maumate, vendors explained that the National Police of Timor-Leste (PNTL) only tend to enter the market if they need to follow up on a complaint, or if they are chasing down someone in the market.⁶² In Pune, the suku police official (OPS) together with xefe suku and suku secretary are on standby, ready to step in if needed.⁶³ Vendors explained in both markets, people agreed that suku chief and secretary are generally the first point of call if there is a dispute. While there are very few security concerns in Pune market, it is possible that this may change when the suku council office moves to a new location, as the suku chief and secretary will no longer be a consistent controlling presence next to the market.

Vendors in Maumate in particular felt less safe sleeping in the open-air market, but this was mainly due to the need to leave the market to go to the toilet. There have been very few security problems in the marketplace itself.⁶⁴ A few years back in Maumate, young men started using the market to gamble and consume alcohol in the evenings, but they were chased off by the market manager and other men in the market, and relocated to the river.⁶⁵ Since then there have not been any significant disturbances during the evening. Similarly in Pune, market vendors explained there was an issue the previous year with young men getting drunk and noisy, and the women vendors getting scared, but they were chased off and have not returned.⁶⁶

Numerous respondents noted that the lack of safety is normalised among vendors, who have no choice but to accept the market conditions, and who put in place various strategies to try to stay safe. As the market manager for Maumate explained, “They feel safe, but sometimes some people create disturbances and frighten women and children who sleep in the market.”⁶⁷ Because the central areas of the market are very dark, with no lighting provided, temporary vendors (mainly women, with some young children, and a few men) generally sleep on the verandas of surrounding kios, where there is lighting provided for by permanent vendors.

61 TOMAK marketplace observation visits, conducted in 2018

62 Permanent vendor, interview conducted 9 November 2022, Pune market

63 Permanent vendor, interview conducted 9 November 2022, Pune market

64 Pune market manager, interview conducted 9 November 2022, Pune market; Permanent vendor, interview conducted 9 November 2022, Pune market; Vendors in Pune market, FGD conducted 9 November 2022, Usitasae Village

65 Maumate market manager, interview conducted 7 November 2022, Maumate market

66 Pune market manager, interview conducted 9 November 2022, Pune market; Secretary of Usitasae Village Council, interview conducted 9 November 2022, Usitasea Village

67 Maumate market manager, interview conducted 7 November 2022, Maumate market

The underlying vulnerability of women and children sleeping in the open-air marketplace was also confirmed during the verification workshop, with a PNTL official explaining that they regularly receive complaints from incidents that occur in the market, but that when they go to investigate they are unable to find the complainant or other witnesses who can verify. For this reason, she is lobbying for a permanent police post in the larger marketplaces, to be able to respond to issues as soon as they arise.⁶⁸

Sometimes children accompany their mothers to the marketplace because they either need to be breastfed or there is no one available to care for them at home while the mother sells goods at the market. Interviewees generally agreed that bringing young children to the market is not ideal, but there is no other choice for many women. In some cases, vendors leave their children with other family members, such as older siblings or grandparents, but this is not always possible for vendors who are scraping a living. As the suku secretary for Pune explained,

*Children sometimes get sick because of all the dust, and may be verbally abused by people who are drunk. There is no space for them to freely and securely play, and they must sleep next to their mother on the ground, and it is not safe for them roam around, particularly after dark.*⁶⁹

To make the market more child-friendly, some respondents suggested creating a small dedicated area for children to play, safe from the hustle and bustle of the market.⁷⁰

As noted in previous sections, the biggest security issue in both marketplaces is access to toilets during the nighttime. Security for women vendors in the market is mainly a case of 'safety in numbers', with temporary vendors sitting, cooking and sleeping together. Because there are no functioning toilets in the market, people must leave the group to go to the nearby forest, where there is no lighting. Most women do not feel safe going to the toilet under these conditions. Sometimes women will go as a group, asking family members or friends to accompany them. Most of the time, they prefer to stay in the marketplace and simply ignore their bodily needs to the point they feel sick, or dizzy for lack of water.

Some women also described cases of sexual harassment because of the cramped market and narrow paths when people are passing through, providing an opportunity for men to brush up inappropriately against women.⁷¹ Women do not tend to openly discuss such incidents, as they are considered an ordinary aspect of the market environment. As one woman described,

*Because of narrow paths, walking around the market is not comfortable. Sometimes sexual harassment can happen, but people think it's not sexual harassment; they say it's just a crowded market with many people walking around.*⁷²

To support the safety of women, and the children who accompany them, it is essential that toilet and water is provided in the markets, including provisions for ongoing maintenance and cleaning of the toilet. In addition, providing lighting in the central areas of the market would allow women to sleep near their stalls, instead of having to sleep at the front of kios because they feel unsafe in the darkened marketplace. There is opportunity for awareness-raising about sexual harassment in public places. And it is also important that stakeholders do not become complacent about marketplace security; the ongoing controlling presence of police and village leadership is important in maintaining this situation.

68 Verification workshop, conducted 14 April 2023, Oe-Cusse vila, Oe-Cusse

69 Secretary of Usitasae Village Council, interview conducted 9 November 2022, Usitasae Village

70 Vendors in Pune market, FGD conducted 9 November 2022, Usitasae Village; Secretary of Usitasae Village Council, interview conducted 9 November 2022, Usitasae Village

71 Vendors in Maumate market, FGD conducted 8 November 2022, Naimeko Village; Vendors in Pune market, FGD conducted 9 November 2022, Usitasae Village

72 Vendors in Pune market, FGD conducted 9 November 2022, Usitasae Village

CONCLUSION



Sabina Tunis sells vegetables at Maumate Market, Oe-cusse | Photo: Taku Oliveira | Oxfam in Timor-Leste

As workplaces, there are many issues that need to be attended to in Maumate and Pune markets, to allow women to work with dignity. Toilets with water need to be provided, and made available to temporary vendors. The market buildings need to be repaired to provide shelter from the rain. Paths and drainage needs to be improved, for easier accessibility. Lighting needs to be provided in the central areas of the market, as a basic safety measure for women and children sleeping in the marketplace overnight. Animals need to be stopped from entering their workplace. Children need some level of safety in a busy, dusty market.

Market management also needs to be improved. Regulations are needed to organise vendors according to category, and to minimise pushy vendors from pushing farmer-vendors to the periphery, and avoid the central area being overtaken by sellers of second-hand clothes. Regulations to stop cars and trucks entering the market area need to be put in place, and drivers controlled. Good waste management systems with functional waste collection areas located some distance from food vending need to be established, including rubbish collection trucks coming to collect the waste, and vendors all contributing to keeping the market clean. Animals need to be stopped from entering the market, where they damage vendors' produce and excrete in the same places that people work, eat and sleep.

Very importantly, vendors (including people with disabilities) need the opportunity to advocate for their own interests. While RAEOA officials, local leaders and civil society have a strong role to play in improving the workplace conditions for women vendors, and for making markets accessible for people with disabilities, they are not the experts in vendors' experiences. This research clearly demonstrates that when given the opportunity, women vendors are ready and able to advocate for their own interests. It is essential that women are respected and listened to, as RAEOA officials and stakeholders continue to advocate to improve marketplace conditions.



Luiza Tobe da Cunha waters her fresh vegetables at Maumate Market, Oe-cusse | Photo: Taku Oliveira | Oxfam in Timor-Leste

