

Street Foods

URBAN FOOD AND EMPLOYMENT IN
DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Irene Tinker



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Urban Food and Employment
in Developing Countries

IRENE TINKER



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Preface

The Street Food Project on which this book is based encompasses a decade; revisiting the sites and writing the book took another five years. Thanking everyone who supported and encouraged this ground-breaking project is not possible: it would take another book. Further, the usual way of acknowledging assistance presumes that the author created the book alone.

Such is definitely not the case with the Street Food Project, which was a collaborative effort from the start. Based at the Equity Policy Center (EPOC), a research policy center established in Washington, D.C., to insert the differential concerns of women and men into the international development discourse, the entire enterprise was geared to principles of feminist research. Colleagues in each of the countries are featured in the appropriate chapters and in the bibliography, but deserve to be mentioned here as well: Naomi Owens and Naseem Hussain in Bangladesh; Sarah Loza in Egypt; Barbara Anne Chapman in Indonesia; Olufemi O. Kujore, Tola Olu Pearce, and V. Aina Agboh-Bankole in Nigeria; Gerald Barth and Mei-Jean Kuo in the Philippines; Jill Posner in Senegal; and Cristina Blanc Szanton, Amara Pongsapich, and Napat Sirisambhand in Thailand. The excellence of their initial studies can only be partly captured in this book; their assistance in reading over draft chapters, sending photographs and maps, and clarifying conclusions, after many years doing other work, cannot be overestimated.

Here I wish to credit the broader circles of support. Congressional hearings initiated by Congressman Donald Fraser in 1973 gave legitimacy to the arguments undergirding the Women in Development movement. Arvonne Fraser, as director of the WID Office in the U.S. Agency for International Development, supported this burgeoning effort with funds and enthusiasm; EPOC was only one of the centers and groups that benefited from her leadership, but the cumulation of activity launched the WID movement. Paula Goddard provided agency support, through which Jean Ellickson, Jane Jaquette, and John Hourihand served as program officers and good

friends. In the field, Tom Timberg and Bob Barnes in Bangladesh, Gary Cook in the Philippines, and Bill Fuller in Indonesia championed the project.

The Ford Foundation had more bureaucratic difficulty fitting this urban-based study of women and men into their hierarchy: Katherine McKee, our program officer, was situated in the rural section. In Jakarta, Tom Kessinger was instrumental in both the Indonesian and Thai studies; Ann Sutoro supported the Bogor study. Cynthia Mynitti in Cairo and Lillian Trager in Lagos made those respective studies possible. The long-term interest of Susan Berresford in street foods facilitated my return visits; regional staff opened their files and offices to me: Natalia Kanem in Lagos, Akwasi Aidoo in Dakar, and Heba El-Kholy in Cairo.

Crucial to these return study trips were colleagues who were themselves associated with projects or policies related to street vending. In Lagos, Clara Osinulu of the African-American Institute helped immeasurably by setting up meetings and arranging accommodations and travel; her careful reading of the Nigeria chapter was much appreciated. Interviewing Isaac Olaolu Akinyele in Ibadan about his extensive street foods studies in Nigeria was a delight; I thank him, too, for recognizing that I needed more than tea at mid-morning, having eaten nothing before leaving Lagos. Lillian Trager connected me with Clara Osinulu and offered salient comments on the chapter.

In Iloilo, my return visit was programmed by Mayor Malabor, who met me at the airport with his retinue and wreaths. Most helpful in filling gaps in the 10 years between visits were former Mayor Herrera and Alex Umadhay, who also read over the draft of my chapter on the Philippines. In Bogor, Joep J. M. Bijlmer provided me with extensive materials on the follow-up study and on his earlier research. In Thailand, young scholar Gisele Yasmin brought me up to date on Bangkok's burgeoning street food trade. In Dhaka, Aroma Goon had moved from USAID to PACT (Private Agencies Collaborating Together) and provided recent information on the Manikganj Association for Social Service (MASS). It was Sarah Loza's enthusiasm for the Street Food Project in Minia, and its amazing impact, that propelled me to study the long-term impact of the project in all the countries; her current street food project in Cairo deserves worldwide attention.

The two street food studies supported by the International Development Research Centre utilized the methodology and resources of EPOC. But without the determination of Meera Bapat and Christopher Benninger in Pune, that study would not have happened. Elsa Chaney, a member of the EPOC board, stimulated Dorian Powell in Jamaica to undertake the project in Kingston and served as volunteer advisor.

The Food and Agriculture Organization in Rome observed the Street Food Project from its inception and incorporated many aspects in their voluminous studies of the sector. Many staff provided research materials and arranged meetings over the years. After I interviewed him in Rome in 1994, Alan Randell rounded up an almost complete collection of FAO street food studies and sent them to me. Zak Sabry is now my valued colleague at Berkeley.

EPOC board member Laure Sharp reviewed survey instruments. Esther Ocloo,

Nkulenu Industries, Accra, Ghana; Per Pinstrup-Andersen, International Food Policy Research Institute; Gelia Castillo, University of the Philippines at Los Baños; John Bardach, East-West Center, Honolulu; and Terrence McGee, University of British Columbia have all maintained interest in the project long after the completion of their tour on the project's International Advisory Committee. Monique Cohen, director of the Street Food Project during its most intensive period, continues her research on nutrition and street foods and reminds her Washington colleagues of the importance of this microentrepreneurial activity. Pamela Hunte and Coralie Turbitt worked diligently on the project while at EPOC; Naresh "Kuku" Johri performed miracles in the budget office and provided us all with a model of courage before her untimely death. Many other staff and interns added their support and enthusiasm to this major effort.

The University of California, Berkeley, has provided research grants to encourage the completion of this book. Many students have utilized the country studies in their own research, and provided insights into the findings. Susanne Freidberg took my first class on the topic and, along with William Mazzarella, assisted in the final editing. Their searching questions and comments contributed significantly to the framing of the debates relating the project to contemporary theory. Jennie Freeman utilized state-of-the-art computer technology to design the maps, and Kate Blood tested and adapted some recipes; Pat Kimball translated French materials on Senegal and compared those street foods with his favorites in Niger.

Rose Grant wrote a recipe book entitled *Street Foods* in 1988. Seeing this book encouraged me to include a few recipes in this otherwise scholarly publication: after all, everyone eats. She was delighted to contribute four recipes to this volume.

The Bellagio Study and Conference Center of the Rockefeller Foundation insulated me from my usual frenetic schedule long enough to concentrate on the final draft of the book. At the center, Louisa Green and Bessie Carrington commented on several chapters; Gianna Celli and Pasquale Pesce were gracious hosts.

The willingness of Oxford University Press to produce this unusual, many-faceted book is much appreciated. I am especially grateful to Herb Addison for agreeing to a simultaneous publication of a paperback edition and to Cynthia Garver for her thoughtful editing.

Throughout this journey and many preceding it, I have been nurtured mentally and physically by my husband, Millidge Walker, whose contribution to my life and this book are inestimable.

Berkeley, California
November 1996

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Introduction

Street foods are sold in almost every country in the world; they are so familiar that there is a tendency to look past the vendors without registering their existence, unless of course you are hungry. Then you see vendors selling foods for quick meals or snacks from daybreak until night. In Senegal, women sit on the ground outside the market place to sell *monie*, porridge made from millet, from large calabashes. In Peru, fried fish is a cheap and satisfying meal; women cook it before the customer so it is crisp and fresh. Men push carts to major intersections and sell kebabs of different types with different spices in different countries: in Indonesia, the small chunks of meat or chicken or rows of shrimp are served with peppery peanut sauce and called *sate*; meat chunks, usually beef, are larger in Senegal; ground lamb is encased in dough for *samosas* served in Bangladesh. Fried bean curd is a favorite lunch food for school-children in Indonesia; flatbread sandwiches of *foul* and *tamia*, both made from dried beans, are preferred in Egypt. Soup meals are ubiquitous throughout Southeast Asia: the stock is kept hot, with noodles and meat added to order. Soup is really a thick sauce served over farina or corn pudding in Nigeria; it is sold from gaily painted roadside stalls called *buka* that provide shaded tables for customers.

Looking at this entrepreneurial activity through a development lens, I wondered: Do the women and men selling the foods make a good living? Why do women dominate the trade in Nigeria or Thailand, but hardly a woman can be seen selling food in Bangladesh? Why, if street food is so popular, do many governments embark on street cleaning exercises, destroying stalls and confiscating supplies?

These questions eventually led to a series of comparable studies in seven provincial towns in Asia and Africa, which form Part I of this book. The studies were a means to the objective of improving the income of the vendors or the safety of the food they sold. They were designed and carried out by the Equity Policy Center (EPOC), a small think tank in Washington, D.C., which I founded in 1978 to document the differential impact of development on women and to design interventions that might assist women to attain greater equity with men.

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The origins of the EPOC Street Foods Project cannot be comprehended without situating the ideas and the organization in its historical context. The idea of studying a microenterprise in which women in some countries were making money was a response to the well-meant but poorly conceived spate of “knitting and sewing” projects proliferating among organizations trying to help poor women in developing countries survive. The pertinence of studying a sector, not just women’s roles, was grounded in the appreciation of the role of family and its precedence over individual aspirations. The relevance of working with municipal authorities was a move away from confrontational approaches of earlier women in development formulations in recognition of the bureaucratic minefields that await any shift in institutional direction. The significance of identifying interventions that would improve the income or enhance the quality and safety of the food sold was fundamental to an applied project.

EPOC was not embarked on an academic project challenging concepts of the informal sector. After all, most studies of this ephemeral sector focused on enterprises large enough to hire employees, and thus effectively erased from consideration most women who were primarily self-employed or who ran or participated in family enterprises. The ultimate project goal was to chip away at the walls of assumptions embedded in development theory that assigned women to maternal and passive roles, discounted their economic contributions, and dismissed their altruistic notions of feeding their children as behavior that was neither rational nor economic.

The success of the project can be measured in many tangible ways. Most significant is the influence of EPOC’s viewpoint on working with vendors, which has influenced the position of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Moving away from a focus on the enforcement of unrealistically high food safety standards on street food vendors, FAO has instituted an impressive series of studies of street foods around the world for which they have even adopted the term “street foods”, which EPOC coined. These studies detail the trade and its epidemiological problems in order to identify the most serious health issues in each city so that municipal governments can work with the vendors to change the most dangerous practices. The FAO-funded follow-up study in Bogor is extensively reported to illustrate the symbiotic relationship of the two studies. In Nigeria, studies done in three cities, but not including the EPOC site in Ife, add immeasurably to the understanding of the regional variations of the street food trade and consequently of the interventions needed to improve safety standards.

EPOC studies emphasized the critical nature that water played either in spreading disease or in avoiding contamination; many cities sought ways of providing improved access at the same time that they issued tighter regulations. Renewed efforts to train vendors in water use and food handling were a consequence of the attention locally garnered by the staff and its work with municipal and health officials. In Ife, training initiatives by faculty at the local university actually led to the EPOC project; this model was so persuasive that EPOC promoted it elsewhere. Interventions for improving the income of the vendors that were suggested by project teams in different

cities have had important impacts. Insights about the interplay of vendors with government, about methods of organizing vendors, and about the types of services the vendors needed emerged in many cities. Perhaps the most impressive is the formation of the Street Food Vendors Organization in Minia, Egypt. This organization for vendors is distinct from other organizations, established or encouraged in other EPOC cities, in the composition of its government board, which includes both vendors and local decision makers. The issues raised about middle-class intermediaries and their role vis-à-vis their intended beneficiaries speaks to the concerns of the development community about ways to work with and help the world's urban poor, and adds to the *literature* about the growing importance of nongovernmental organizations globally.

The rich data that was produced by the EPOC study has pertinence in the academic community as well. Policy and consulting groups in Washington feed on academic research; unfortunately the reverse is seldom true. Too often, hasty writing and absence of arcane footnotes in government documents leads academics to discredit the insightful findings and robust data that are produced, which often challenges the assumptions and conclusions in scholarly discourse. The result is the production of separate streams of knowledge that would become more powerful if joined.

Many distinct discourses converge in this book: development policy, practice, and theory regarding women, poverty, training, and microenterprise; government, anthropology and economics; nutrition and epidemiology. No one, certainly not the author, can claim expert knowledge within such an array. But because the Street Food Project contributes to all of these discourses, I have sketched the range of interactions and suggested both how the findings of this project contribute to these focused debates and how these various discourses might weave among themselves to add reality to the scholarly view.

Organization of the Book

This book reflects the stages of the project and the styles of the research teams who carried out the studies. The remaining sections of the introduction trace the origin of the project in the heady atmosphere of Washington, D.C., during the early days of the second wave of the women's movement. Women were organizing to influence national legislation and international policy. "Women in development" was becoming an acceptable concept to international agencies. EPOC was a major player at the time, documenting women's economic role in development and critiquing development policies regarding energy and technology, which ignored constraints on women's time. The Street Food Project exemplifies this research at its most innovative.

The seven EPOC studies of street foods are presented in Part I: Bogor, Indonesia; Iloilo, Philippines; Chonburi, Thailand; Manikganj, Bangladesh; Minia, Egypt; Ziguinchor, Senegal; and Ile-Ife, Nigeria. Based on the original and much longer country reports that were written predominantly by anthropologists, each study provides a geographic and gastronomic tour of the city, its vendors, and the food they sell. A brief economic and political sketch of the country helps explain the particular prob-

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lems faced by vendors in each city. A few typical recipes are provided to allow readers to experience the variety of tastes. Events since the studies were completed detail the local impact of each study and the interventions suggested.

The analytical chapters in Part II are grounded in scholarly discourses from many academic disciplines and address debates drawn from both theory and practice. Chapter 8 presents and analyzes the findings of the seven studies, including as appropriate the studies of Kingston, Jamaica, and Pune, India, that utilized the EPOC design. The comparative data are robust. Nine case studies conducted in highly variable areas but based on a common design and methodology produced impressively consistent results.

The food aspects of the trade are presented in chapter 9, which explores first what foods people eat on the street, and where the foods are produced and prepared. A section on demand looks at the importance of prepared food in total household food consumption across the countries, and then compares types of street food customers, when they eat, and how often. The discussion of the nutritional value of street foods focuses on the role of street foods in the diet of schoolchildren and how vendors are welcomed into schools in several countries. The chapter concludes with a section on the current food handling problems typical of the trade, and on the various training programs launched to improve vendors' practice.

The impact of the study at the micro and macro levels is explored in chapter 10, which describes the interventions recommended by the country projects and their effectiveness. The two conflicting approaches to small entrepreneurs—the microenterprise perspective of the development community and the informal sector debate that characterized scholarly research—are discussed in reference to the findings of the EPOC study. Neither approach reached to the individual or family enterprise that characterizes the street food trade, and consequently overlooked the gender aspects of their theories. The convergence of these approaches in the last decade has brought the debate to the household level, where gender analysis is imperative, especially in light of the current debate about home-based work.

In the afterword I have summarized the importance of the street food trade and speculated about its future in the next century.

Policy Origins of the EPOC Project

The Street Food Project was conceived specifically to challenge the assumptions in the development community about how best to help poor women earn an income. It was also designed as an action research project: findings from the study were meant to be utilized by members on local advisory committees for the benefit of the street food vendors themselves. The project was a logical expansion of a series of reports by Equity Policy Center staff identifying critical needs of women as rapid development often adversely affected their lives. The immediate stimulus was the failure of many early attempts to provide poor women with a means of earning an income by producing garments or knitted goods without first ascertaining a market for them.

Even when sweaters or dresses made in these “income-generating” projects for women (projects for men produced income) were sold, they provided only minimal returns for the women’s work. Seeking some way to identify and support an economic activity in which women had for years been active, I brought up the idea of snack food vendors in Southeast Asia. The metamorphosis of this idea into a research design, and the challenges of securing funding and study sites, are recounted in the next section of the introduction.

Women Affecting Public Policy

Washington, D.C., in the 1970s provided many opportunities for women to change public policy. Feminists had discovered organizing; the Women’s Yellow Pages, published in 1978, listed over 250 organizations, centers, and groups in the metropolitan area alone. The purpose of all this organizing was to change the way government and business and associations had been doing business. At the time of strong federal government, the key to change was found in government legislation and regulations. At first the focus was on domestic issues; but the realization that the United States was replicating abroad those same gender systems that we were trying to change at home led a group of us to focus on the impact of international development on women.

But we needed research to support our views when testifying before congressional committees and when recommending alternative programs. At the time, studies about women in the United States were minimal and were based on tiny samples; research on women in developing countries was buried in anthropological essays or in obscure government documents. To remedy this situation, many of us sought research grants, first through our professional organizations and later through research centers: I was a co-founder of the Wellesley Center for Research on Women in 1974 and a founder of the International Center for Research on Women in 1976.¹

As a result of our testimony before Congress and at the State Department, combined with phone calls, meetings, and reports, Congress passed an amendment to the U.S. Foreign Assistance Act of 1973 that required the integration of women into development programs. Called the Percy amendment, its passage precipitated similar directives for U.N. agencies and bilateral organizations around the world (Tinker 1976, 1983). This policy shift generated a new field of research that explored women’s multifaceted roles in societies around the world. Informed by the standpoint of American feminists, these studies tended to emphasize women’s economic roles and to view women as independent actors; because previous development programs viewed women as adjuncts to motherhood, we downplayed and often ignored their interrelationships with family, kin, and community. The Street Food study corrects this imbalance by revealing street food vending as a family strategy (Tinker 1993a, 1995.)

A stint in the government as an appointee of President Jimmy Carter undermined my naive view that if policy makers were presented with facts about the negative impacts on women of present or proposed programs or legislation, they would accept

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the accuracy of the findings and change their policies. I became acutely aware of the resistance and inertia of bureaucracy. Despite my convictions, my suggestions and changes were often stymied; no wonder that others, for whom women's rights was their third or fourth priority, could not effect change. I also learned that even with excellent programs in place and enthusiastic staff, implementation was often frustrated by indigenous male-dominated groups in recipient countries, and that projects designed to assist women that did not take into account their position within the family and community were likely to fail. After resigning from ACTION, the U.S. government agency then comprising both international programs including the Peace Corps and domestic programs including VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America), I set up the Equity Policy Center in 1978 specifically to analyze the roles of both women and men relating to the sector under study, and then to work with appropriate agencies on the problems of design and implementation of development projects.

Women and Work

Efforts to understand the reality of women's existence in near subsistence societies centered first on time-use studies or on detailed research on women's work in agriculture (Acharya and Bennett 1981; Dixon-Mueller 1985; Kandiyoti 1985; Tinker 1976, 1984). By documenting the extent of women's work in rural areas, these findings questioned data on which development programs were based, and instigated pressure to revise statistical collection and analyses. Further research demonstrated that rapid social change often leads to a one-sided breakdown of the sexual division of labor, with women assuming male tasks in addition to their own while men often gain additional leisure. The growing feminization of poverty was caused in large measure by men, who left their families to search for jobs elsewhere, and sometimes failed to return.

What became clear was that poor women worked, had always worked, and needed to continue to work. What had changed was the economy: subsistence exchange was not enough, as women needed money to survive. Many traditional products that women had made to earn income, such as pottery or basket weaving, were often replaced by plastic products; beer making was declared illegal in many countries. It seemed incumbent upon planning agencies to identify and support new job opportunities. Early "income-generating" activities were largely unsuccessful, not only because women living in subsistence societies knew how to farm, not sew, but also because products were developed with no attention either to demand or marketing. Many good intentions resulted in heightened expectations and minimal returns.

Why not study an activity in which women were already earning money, and find out what might be done to improve their income? While West African agricultural produce and cloth traders had been well studied, there were indications that both politics and competitive modern delivery systems were undercutting their economic power.² Street vending of prepared food snacks, on the other hand, seemed to be increasing in developing countries as urban populations rose. Available literature

raised as many questions as it answered; EPOC would itself have to conduct the primary research.

To obtain funding we needed a project with a title that was instantly recognizable and which reflected the importance of the topic. The term “snack” itself diminished the economic importance of the foods sold. After considerable brainstorming, envisioning the *sate* vendor in Indonesia or recalling the pungent smells of a Bangkok street, we realized that what we were talking about was food being sold on the street. “Street foods” became not only the name of the EPOC project; today it defines the study of all the meals and snacks and sweets sold on the street, and it is used by many who do not know its origin.

Designing the Study

EPOC’s project design was dictated, first, by the lack of previous data. Since no data existed on street food vendors, the sector had to be studied before women’s roles within it could be understood. Secondly, the project was informed by our philosophical commitment to action research, undertaken in collaboration with local research staff and benefiting the people studied. Because EPOC was a small center with no long-term funding, any suggested interventions would have to be continued by residents in the cities to be studied. To stimulate involvement in the project and its results, and to advise the research staff about everything from translations of local food products to provincial politics, participation of local decision-makers was essential at every stage of the project. As a product of the U.S. women’s movement, EPOC was determined to include as many women scholars and NGO (nongovernmental organization) leaders as possible; we correctly predicted that most municipal officials would be men.

Given these parameters, we designed a generic approach that could serve as the template for each of the city studies. Actual data collection was planned to take place over the course of a year to allow for seasonal variations in food sold and any regular fluctuations in the number of vendors. Another three months were allocated for preliminary activities such as selecting sites, hiring staff, and setting up contacts in each city, and for completing the project, writing the report, and presenting the findings at local seminars.

Collecting Data

The popular image of street vendors finds them clustering around the market and clogging downtown sidewalks. But vendors also sell to travelers at bus stops, along highways, and near boat landings. They sell to celebrants at festivals and weddings, and outside temples and movie theaters. Hospitals and schools in developing countries often rely on vendors to supply food for patients, staff, and visitors.

To capture all these potential sites where vendors might sell, the first step in each study was to map the city, creating a census of street food vendors by sex and type:

mobile, semi-itinerant, and permanent. Depending on the pattern of food consumption in each town, this initial survey was taken two or three times a day to pick up those vendors selling only one meal as well as those who sold from more than one site during each day. To compensate for seasonal variations, the census was repeated several times during the year of study. As it turned out, these variations were based as often on religious holidays as on climatic or agricultural cycles.

Part of the purpose of the census-taking was to identify and list the foods that were being sold on the street. Details were recorded about when and where each food was sold, and who sold it: men or women, and specific ethnic groups. In every city, the plethora of available food astounded the research staff. Since one of the criteria for the vendor sample was to be based the type of food they sold, staff in each city had to group the foods into manageable categories that reflected local sensibilities. Some categorized the foods by their dominant ingredient, such as cassava, millet, wheat, or rice; others grouped foods by type: breakfast foods, full meals, sweets, or snacks. Others selected the most popular foods as the basis of their sample.

A 10% sample of vendors was drawn from the initial census, based on the vendors' locations and the type of food they sold. Subsequent interviews collected information about their socioeconomic background and the economics of running their enterprise. The questionnaire also inquired about relations with government officials and the existence and objectives of networks or organizations among vendors. Recognizing both the difficulty many vendors might have in reporting profits, as well as the predilection of many entrepreneurs to over- or underestimate income based on their assessment of how such information might be used, staff were asked to calculate profits of each enterprise based on their own knowledge of the costs of ingredients, fixed expenditures, and sale price of each item. In addition to the formal interview, just spending time around the selling sites provided information and insights about the vendors, their helpers, and their methods.

Staff were asked to record the food handling practices of the vendors as well as any other habits, either of vendors or customers, that might affect the sanitary conditions of the immediate environs. Was food cooked to order? How was cooked food handled before sale? Were left-overs recycled, thrown out, or eaten at home? Was water available to wash dishes or hands? Was the stall set up along a dusty road or open sewer, or in a protected area? Were children playing underfoot? Were toilets available nearby?

In addition, food samples of at least five of the most popular foods were tested for contamination. Local nutritionists were consulted on the food value of popular foods and asked for suggestions on ways to enhance nutrient value, especially for food consumed by schoolchildren. Of course, most of the researchers sampled the food they were studying, but the staff in Iloilo decided on their own to sample each type of food themselves to test its wholesomeness; only ceviche, raw fish cured with vinegar, caused any unpleasantness.

A customer survey was administered to clients of the sample vendors to elicit socioeconomic information about who eats street foods. For instance, do well-off

people eat street food, or only the poor? Are consumption patterns based on occupation? Do women eat street foods as often as men? We were also curious about the frequency of consumption and whether customers were loyal to a particular vendor. Where funding allowed, household surveys were also carried out in neighborhoods representing different economic levels to find out how important street foods were to a family's diet.

The final study component in the design involved the daily observation of fifteen vendors for an extended period to examine how they allocated their time for buying, preparing, cooking, and selling their wares. The objectives of this close observation were not only to confirm earlier data, but to investigate more closely the gender divisions of labor within the street food trade. How long did it take from purchase to produce edible food? Was the food preparation area clean, and were the utensils well washed? Did wives make the food their husbands sold? Did husbands help their vendor wives in any way? Did other adult women in the household assist in food preparation or take over household and childcare duties for the vendor? Did children help with any of the enterprise activities?

Engaging the Community

From the first visit to the city, the study director was expected to call on appropriate municipal authorities both to request permission to work in their town and to involve them in the project. Usually the mayor was asked to join a project advisory committee or to appoint a member of his staff to attend. Professors in social sciences or nutrition at local universities were sought out for advice on references and potential staff; the most enthusiastic were also invited to join the advisory committee. Wherever non-governmental organizations were active in the community, their leaders, too, were invited to participate. Some committees met monthly, helped test translation of the questionnaires into the local languages, and commented on results at every phase of the study. Other groups met only once or twice during the project; advisors in some cities were consulted individually when group meetings did not appear feasible. Whatever the form, these local contacts were invaluable to legitimize the research, provide local contacts and assistance, interpret survey results, and help identify realistic interventions that could be introduced by government or NGOs to assist the vendors and their enterprises.

At the end of each city project, advisory committee members, vendors, and anyone else with interest in street foods were invited to a final seminar held at the municipal office or local university. A draft summary of project data was available both in English and the local language. In keeping with local custom, these seminars were formally opened by local dignitaries; summary findings were immediately presented so that the governor or district officer or university rector would learn something about the study results before he left. Often these dignitaries were so intrigued by the employment or income figures presented that they stayed for the ensuing discussions about policy changes and program implementation. The magnitude of the

trade was everywhere unanticipated. And the local street foods we always served were enjoyed by all.

This seminar in the city studied was followed by a similar presentation in the capital of the country. These seminars provided a superb way of ensuring that appropriate ministers or planners heard the results: we asked them to speak. The audience was always a mixture of academics and practitioners of development, both local and foreign. At the time, urban projects were not common. Our information on income, credit, and organizations was of great interest to community organizers. Challenges to the conventional wisdom concerning the informal sector intrigued the scholars. UN Agencies such as UNICEF (U.N. Children's Fund) and FAO focused their attention on the data about nutrition and food safety. Local planners found the employment and income statistics most valuable. Questions and ideas from these meetings helped sharpen recommendations for subsequent interventions and occasionally provided the mechanism for implementing these suggestions.

Getting into the Field

We now had a distinctive title and an innovative research design. Our next step was funding. At the time, our proposal to study the roles of both men and women was a departure from the women-focused projects usually funded with Women in Development (WID) grants. However, the topic intrigued two of our previous funders: the Women in Development Office of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Ford Foundation. Funding was ultimately dependent on lining up support from staff of these agencies in field offices, finding cooperative organizations to sponsor and conduct the research, and obtaining permission from the host government to carry out the project.

During this planning phase, the International Development Research Centre of Canada (IDRC) supplied EPOC with copies of early studies of hawkers and vendors that it had funded (McGee and Yeung 1977). IDRC does not fund U.S. organizations directly, but at our suggestion they eventually funded centers in Kingston, Jamaica, and in Pune, India. These studies utilized the EPOC methodology, background materials, and reports from the first EPOC studies. During the Jamaica study, EPOC affiliate Elsa Chaney worked with the project staff in an informal arrangement.

Overall, nine comparable studies on street foods were completed between 1983 and 1992. Each project published its report separately in English, and in the local language where appropriate. The country reports and subsequent publications that utilized the project data are listed by author in the bibliography. A comparative analysis of all nine countries is presented in Chapters 8 and 9. Because I visited Jamaica and Pune only once, and met only briefly with the project staff, I have chosen to present case studies in Part I only of the seven EPOC cities.

Situating the Indonesian Project Indonesia exemplifies the difficulties in putting a project in place and the convolutions through which EPOC staff had to go to complete

the study. Barbara Chapman, a medical anthropologist, had recently completed her doctorate at the University of Hawaii on market women in Indonesia and was anxious to return to that country. We had met in 1979; her comments on the Indonesian food system helped trigger the idea of studying women vendors.

Indonesia was one of the largest USAID missions, and finding project officers willing to take on this small, centrally funded project in addition to their regular work was difficult. The mission director, Bill Fuller, had just joined the agency, having previously headed the Bangladesh office for the Ford Foundation. This background made him sympathetic toward small research projects, and he eventually proposed a hybrid project: the USAID mission would agree to accept central USAID funding if the local Ford office would provide oversight for the study. Tom Kessinger, Ford's country director, was enthusiastic and later funded the EPOC Thai study. The Ford Foundation was already funding Lembaga Studi Pembangunan, or LSP, a local NGO that was helping to organize street vendors in several Javanese cities, and thought the two projects might complement and inform each other. Further, a newly established women's research center at the University of Indonesia was anxious to utilize the study to train their graduate students in research methods.

Chapman arrived in Indonesia in February 1983 and spent the next three months simultaneously trying to secure Indonesian government permission to conduct the study, talking to national and international organizations who might utilize the findings, and traveling around Java evaluating various cities as possible sites for the project. For governmental permission, an Indonesian sponsor was needed that would then request ministerial support. While such permission was in process, Chapman could continue her work on a three-month tourist visa given automatically to incoming visitors. But Indonesian politics and bureaucratic blunders on all sides required several shifts in sponsorship. By the end of the project, she had seen a lot more of Singapore than was either intended or budgeted for; she completed her work before official permission was granted.

While in Jakarta, Chapman met with representatives of national and international agencies both to learn about current projects in the country dealing with issues related to the EPOC project and to inform them about our project in the hope that some of them might wish to utilize our findings or to pursue interventions with vendor groups. For example, UNICEF was starting a credit program in Solo for small traders; the International Labour Organization (ILO) was sponsoring a project on women, nutrition, and firewood; the Ministry of Trade and Commerce was producing a publication on the informal sector; the Women's Study Center at the University of Indonesia was involved in a variety of studies about contemporary roles of women; and the National Body for Family Planning (BKKBN) had received U.N. funds to provide credit and technical assistance to women's groups active in the informal sector. All these contacts received invitations to the final seminar in Jakarta so that they could have copies of the country report and discuss possible follow-up projects.

In her *Indonesian Site Report* of May 1983, Chapman summarized her trips by train, bus, and *becak* (pedicab) to the six cities that were potential study sites, where she "met

with social scientists interested in the informal sector,” city officials, street vendors, and consumers; and visited *pasars* (markets), schools, hospitals, and residential neighborhoods to assess the level and patterns of street food selling. In the two smallest towns, Salatiga in Central Java and Cianjur in West Java, she found most sellers around the market keeping the same short hours; in contrast, in the larger cities, street food activity spilled out into the neighborhoods and congregated around the modern institutions, from bus stops and movie theaters to hospitals and universities. Bandung was particularly attractive, with its strong research institutions and the recent founding of vendor cooperatives by LSP, but the 1.5 million population seemed daunting. The other large town considered, the Central Javanese port city of Semarang, revealed a distinct pattern of vending in the poorer sections, but it had few street food sellers in commercial areas, and so was of less interest to one who had studied markets. Yogyakarta, the precolonial court city and now a separate province located on the south-central coast of Java, would have been a logical choice, not only because of its lively street food activity and strong university, but because student NGOs had already organized several vendor cooperatives in town. However, a sidewalk construction project had temporarily pushed a quarter of the vendors out of the city, disrupting both vendors and customers. Bogor was selected for its vital street food trade, its medium size, and the offer of institutional support from both the sociology and nutrition departments of its university, Institute Pertanian Bogor.

Differences between West and Central Java were immediately evident. In Central Java about half the vendors were women who worked alone, using fairly simple traditional equipment for preparation, and who sold very small portions of inexpensive food, often containing ingredients such as eels, pits, cassava, and seeds, that are no longer craved by the Westernized elite. In contrast, only one in three vendors in West Java was a woman; family operations were more conspicuous; well-made pushcarts and tents suggested greater capital investment in the operation; and the food sold was more Westernized, including more bread and dishes containing meat.

These analyses of regional differences, added to Chapman’s comments on the variations in the street food trade by city size, emphasize how dissimilar the food system could be in cities within a few hundred miles of each other, and provide a cautionary reminder about the perils of generalization based on limited studies. Throughout the book I have tried to use data as indicative of trends and as challenges to contemporary wisdom rather than as hard immutable facts.

Refining the Design

With sites selected, an advisory committee in place, and interviewers hired, the mapping of cities and the enumeration of street food vendors began. Suddenly the plethora of foods and the complexity of the street food trade became obvious. Questions about definitions and procedures, too complicated to solve by letter, began to surface. Basically, the generic design of the project had to be adapted to a series of very different real-life situations. In October 1982, EPOC convened a small method-

ological workshop that included the first three country study directors. Three concepts were particularly troublesome since they formed the basis of the research design: the definition of street foods, the description of a street food enterprise, and the delineation of city boundaries.

1. *Street foods* in our original definition is any minimally processed food sold on the street for immediate consumption. In practice, the definition of certain foods was not clear-cut. When was fresh fruit a street food? A large bunch of bananas was considered a market commodity but a woman selling servings of one or two bananas along the street was selling street foods. What of food that was not nutritious and not meant to be swallowed, like chewing gum, or *pan* (betel nut with lime and spices) in Bangladesh, or kola nuts in Nigeria? We certainly were not including cigarettes, so we excluded these chewing foods.

Purchased food, that could be eaten on the spot but that was carried home or to the office, was classified as street food. Ready-to-eat food that was carried through the streets by the preparer rather than the purchaser, for eating at home or office, and was not for sale *on* the street, we labeled “invisible street foods.” This category designates street foods supplied regularly to workers, usually on contract, and prepared in or served from the basement of the office building or from a nearby home. The foods were termed “invisible” because they were not sold from a visible shop or cart.

Catering—food prepared sporadically on contract—seems to be a microentrepreneurial activity in most places; women prepare special treats and traditional dishes for weddings and wakes, graduation celebrations, and birthday parties. More unusual are contract meals, usually prepared by women, consisting of many different foods, each in its own metal container, that are stacked five high and held in place by a handle. Called *rantangan* in Indonesia, *pin-to* in Thailand, or *tiffin* boxes in India, the meals are delivered to the buyer’s desk at midday or at home in the evening. In Bangkok I observed a wealthy customer picking up several *pin-to* in her Mercedes, to heat the food for her family in her microwave at home: an upper-class version of the “plastic ladies,” described in the Thai study, who carry dinner home in plastic bags. Bombay was famous for an elaborate distribution system of these tiffin boxes: women cooked food mid-morning at home, after which it was picked up and taken by railroad, bus, or bicycle into town, to arrive on the right desk for the midday meal. However, urbanization seems to have diminished this practice.

Textile workers in Bombay often contract for lunch in this manner, but take the evening meal in the home of the cook who, like these workers, lives in the squatter settlement; often the meal payments were irregular, so these *kanivallab* were encouraged to organize (Savara 1981). Such home catering on contract is called *pension* in many Latin America cities, where a two-hour meal break is customary, but where public transport systems are too costly and the distances too far for most white-collar workers to return home to eat. While none of these systems of serving food are classed as street foods, neither are they included as formal sector food service activities. Only a total census of all types of food services available to urban residents will