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# MSMES and Their Role in Encouraging Sustainable Healthy Diets in Viet Nam

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# Micro-, Small- and Medium-Sized Enterprises and Their Role in Encouraging Sustainable Healthy Diets in Viet Nam

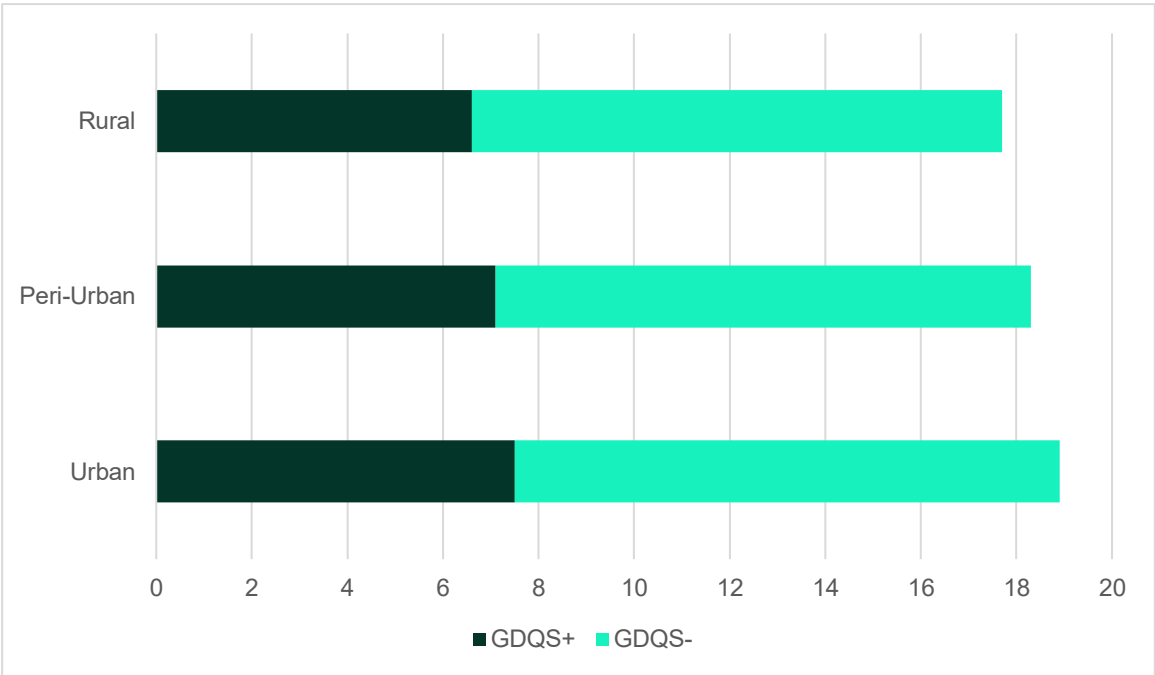
Viet Nam is working to guide the transformation of its food system by directing resources from national to sub-national pathways. Its government has the goal of improving diet quality from a nutritional perspective while ensuring that greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture decline and continuing to grow incomes. Markets between consumers and producers, as well as businesses in the food environment that sell food directly to consumers, are opportunities to engage and potentially increase the accessibility, availability and affordability of healthy foods.

In collaboration with strategic partners, CGIAR collected and analyzed data on consumers and businesses selling food to consumers within the same food environments, from the perspective of learning about what dietary gaps exist, the type of businesses selling those foods, and factors constraining MSMEs from selling more healthy foods. The data collection included some information from suppliers of businesses in the food environment as well. In this brief, we describe highlights from that analysis, with an eye towards ways the analysis can provide evidence on how MSMEs contribute to and their roles in providing healthy foods that can inform actions taken to catalyze food systems transformation at the sub-national level.

## Consumption of healthy foods

First, the survey data (collected in 2023) studied dietary intakes among both adolescents and their mothers. From this data, we construct the Global Diet Quality Score (GDQS), which combines indicators for the consumption of healthy (GDQS+) and unhealthy (GDQS-) dietary components (Nguyen et al., 2024). The index is higher when more healthy foods are consumed, and higher when less unhealthy foods are consumed. We illustrate GDQS scores among adolescents, by location, in Figure 1. We observe that adolescents do not eat too many unhealthy diet components; the unhealthy score is relatively high. However, they also do not consume many healthy components, as the healthy score averages between 6.6 (rural) and 7.5 (urban) out of 32 possible points. The individual food data suggest that the only healthy foods that are consumed in reasonable amounts are liquid oils, several vegetable categories, and eggs. So interventions that target any types of healthy foods beyond vegetables would potentially help improve the GDQS+ score, at least among adolescents.

Figure 1. Average GDQS scores, adolescents in Viet Nam, 2023, by location



Source: Adapted from Nguyen et al. (2024).

Note: Total GDQS+ possible points are 32, and total possible GDQS- points are 17.

## Where do consumers purchase healthy foods?

When households reported purchasing food items, they were asked to report the type of retailer at which they purchased each item. By matching these categories to those that are clearly MSMEs, we can examine whether consumers purchase specific types of foods at MSMEs (Table 1). With the exception of dairy products, among those purchasing products, over 80 percent of consumers report they purchased them from some type of MSME. Therefore it is clear that MSMEs play an important role in providing many different types of healthy foods.

Table 1. Purchasing behavior for healthy foods, Viet Nam, 2023

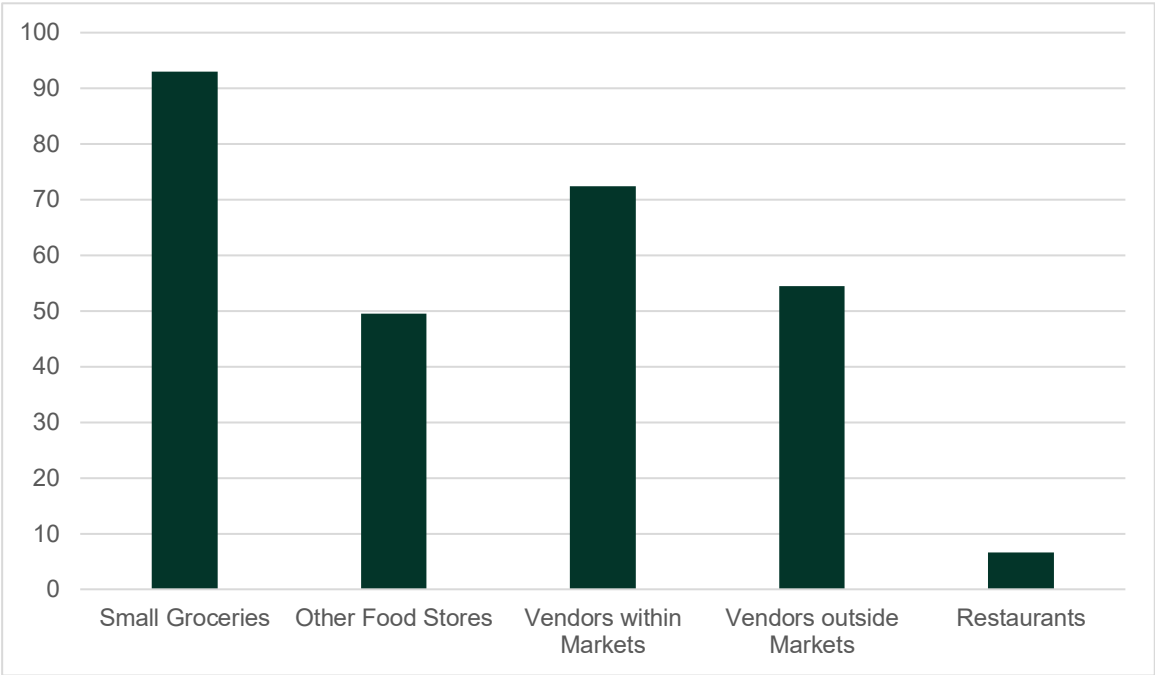
Type of Healthy Food (adapted from GDQS+)	Purchased in past 7 days?	If purchased, purchased from an MSME type outlet?
Legumes	80.1%	97.2%
Nuts, seeds	38.4%	89.5%
Deep orange fruits	74.5%	95.5%
Citrus fruits	62.6%	92.6%
Other fruits	71.2%	90.0%
Whole grains	21.7%	89.0%
Liquid oil	27.4%	91.1%
Fish shellfish	72.4%	93.5%
Poultry, game meat	80.0%	94.5%
Low-fat dairy	59.4%	<b>46.4%</b>
Eggs	53.8%	84.6%
Cruciferous vegetables	61.5%	92.6%
Deep orange vegetables	76.9%	94.2%
Other vegetables	65.5%	92.1%

**Source:** Viet Nam consumer survey (2023).

We know that there are some gaps in consumption of healthy foods, and we know that consumers tend to buy them at MSMEs. The next question is – how do we match types of MSMEs with types of healthy foods? Answering this question will help us consider how to target advice to sub-national governments about plans to improve diets. We now turn to the data collected among MSMEs to answer this question.

First we examine the data collected among all outlets. There are five broad categories of MSMEs: small groceries, that sell a variety of foods; other food shops, which include specialty shops (e.g. butchers, fruit shops) and coffee shops; vendors who sell food in official markets; vendors who sell food outside markets; and restaurants and other outlets that primarily sell prepared foods. We first examine what share sell any categories of healthy foods (Figure 2). Notably, almost all small groceries sell some healthy foods (93 percent), while almost no restaurants are selling (uncooked) healthy foods (6 percent). Specialty shops include coffee shops that only sell prepared foods, reducing the share that sell some healthy foods. Finally, we observe that a much larger share of vendors in markets (72 percent) sell healthy foods than vendors outside markets (54 percent), likely as some vendors outside markets either sell prepared food or are only selling prepared foods.

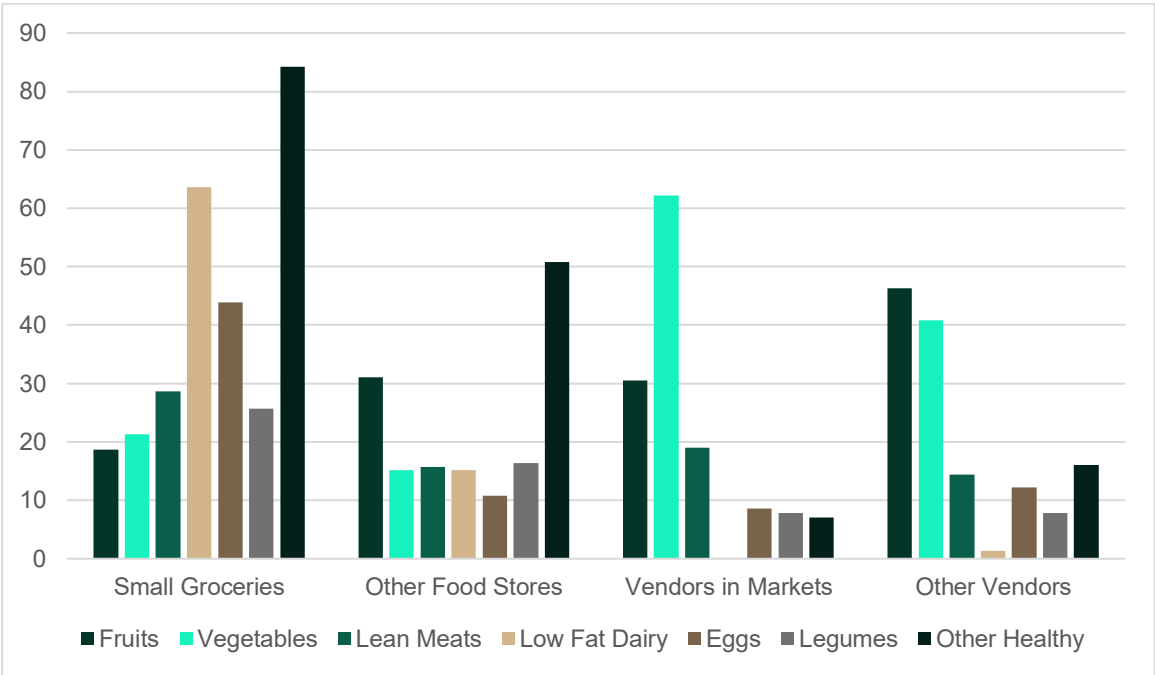
Figure 2. Percent of outlets that sell some healthy foods, Viet Nam 2023



Source: Viet Nam MSME survey (2023).

Among outlets that sell healthy foods, we next want to understand which foods are available in different types of outlets. We aggregated the GDQS+ foods into seven categories: Fruits, vegetables, healthy meats, eggs, low-fat milk, legumes, and “other” healthy diet components (liquid oils, nuts, and seeds). We then examine the share of each type of retailer that report selling at least one item in each category (Figure 3). We find that small groceries are good sources of many categories of healthy foods; specifically, they are clearly the outlets most likely to sell dairy, eggs, and oils or nuts and seeds. They are also the most likely to be selling poultry, fish or shellfish, though a smaller percentage of outlets sell those products. We also find that on average, small groceries tend to offer 3.1 of the GDQS+ categories, if offering any of them, while other types of outlets offer less than 2 on average. So small groceries would appear to be a good target for dietary interventions, as they more regularly sell multiple types of healthy foods (de Brauw, Anh, and Pham, 2024).

Figure 3. Type of healthy foods sold, by outlet type, Viet Nam, 2023



Source: Viet Nam MSME Survey (2023).

## What policy levers could potentially be used to help nudge MSMEs to deliver healthy foods?

So far, we have focused on data collected among consumers and retailers. We next focus on how existing interventions could be adapted or expanded to target MSMEs in targeted sub-national areas (Pham et al., 2024). Nationally, there are three potential opportunities/enabling conditions

1. The National Action Plan on Food Systems Transformation Towards Transparency, Responsibility, and Sustainability (or NAP-FST 300). The NAP highlights an important role of MSMEs in FST implementation and spotlights creating an enabling environment for MSMEs across the food system, helping them meet market requirements, comply with food-safety regulations, access higher-value supply chains, and expand market opportunities. Under the umbrella of the NAP-FST and FST-Partnership, MSMEs can join the partnership and leverage the network to enable their network for opportunities to expand their business related to healthy foods.
2. The National Target Program (NTP) on integrated New Rural Development (including sustainable poverty reduction for socioeconomic development for ethnic and mountainous people) also offer an opportunity to expand work to target MSMEs. The consolidated NTP enables cooperatives and household businesses to potentially participate in nutrition-sensitive agri-food systems projects focusing on producing and supplying nutritious foods. These programs could also work to target more MSMEs selling nutritious foods.
3. The National Extension Network manages the Agricultural Extension Program, which offers several training courses annually. The network could increase offerings on business skills trainings to cooperatives that produce and trade nutritious foods, as well as to provincial and commune staff.

There are also several province level initiatives we have identified, and similar policy levers could either be activated or catalyzed in other provinces:

1. In Son La, Provincial Plan PIP 161 already highlights opportunities for MSMEs in Son La province to supply nutritious products through an improved enabling environment.
2. The Hanoi School Meal program involves both schools with and without canteens, and relies heavily on MSME food-service providers. The program strengthens the delivery and consumption of healthy foods among school-aged children.
3. The recently announced scheme entitled “Support for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises in Hanoi City for the 2026–2030 Period” will partially target MSMEs in food processing and high-tech; decision makers could be strongly encouraged to target MSMEs selling nutritious foods.

In sum, there are several opportunities for government policies that already exist to be adapted to encourage the sale of more components of sustainable healthy diets.

## Summary

In this brief, we explore diet quality gaps in survey data collected in a transect of locations in Vietnam, including an urban district, a peri-urban district, and a rural district. We find that healthy foods are relatively under-consumed, at least among adolescents. We find that when households report purchasing most types of healthy foods, they buy them from MSMEs. Among types of healthy foods that are underconsumed, we find they are most commonly available at small groceries.

Therefore, as Vietnam begins to implement policies to guide food systems transformation at the subnational level, it would seem worthwhile to target small groceries as a conduit for selling more components of healthy diets. De Brauw, Anh and Pham (2024) find that some business skills are particularly lacking among small groceries; for example, they find that very few small groceries have financial records, record sales, or have a written budget. Small groceries also lack access to finance. However, many of them also sell less healthy foods, such as refined grains (such as white rice), sweets, and sugar sweetened beverages. Therefore it is important to combine any business skills with nutrition education, to try to ensure that business owners do not use newfound skills to promote the sale of additional unhealthy products.

There are several policy levers, existing at both the national and provincial levels, that could be used to help MSMEs sell more healthy products. However, it is important to monitor these policies to ensure that they are catalyzing food systems transformation towards healthy diets. With appropriate training and potentially additional finance, MSMEs selling healthier foods can be encouraged to grow and improve the accessibility of healthy foods.



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## About BDN

The CGIAR Science Program on Better Diets and Nutrition (BDN) identifies, co-designs and tests consumer-oriented solutions to ensure sustainable healthy diets for all while enhancing livelihoods, social equity, and environmental sustainability. Through evidence-based research and collaboration, BDN supports country-led food system transformation in low- and middle-income countries. To learn more about BDN, please visit <https://www.cgiar.org/cgiar-research-portfolio-2025-2030/better-diets-and-nutrition/>.

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