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INITIATIVE ON
Transforming Agrifood Systems in South Asia

Food purchasing behavior in Surkhet, Nepal:

Shopping practices, food perceptions, and aspirations

Data Note 26

December 2023

ABOUT THIS DATA NOTE | The Transforming Agrifood Systems in South Asia (TAFSSA) district agrifood systems assessment aims to provide a reliable, accessible, and integrated evidence base that links farm production, market access, dietary patterns, climate risk responses, and natural resource management with gender as a cross-cutting issue in rural areas of Bangladesh, India, and Nepal. It is designed to be a district-level multi-year assessment. Using data collected in March- April 2023, this data note describes who is shopping for food in households, frequency, place of purchase, reasons for preferences for places of purchase, and perceptions about food. This is one of a set of data notes that together provide a holistic picture of the agrifood system on the themes of climate, gender, production, markets, and diets in the district.

Figure 1. District location in Nepal

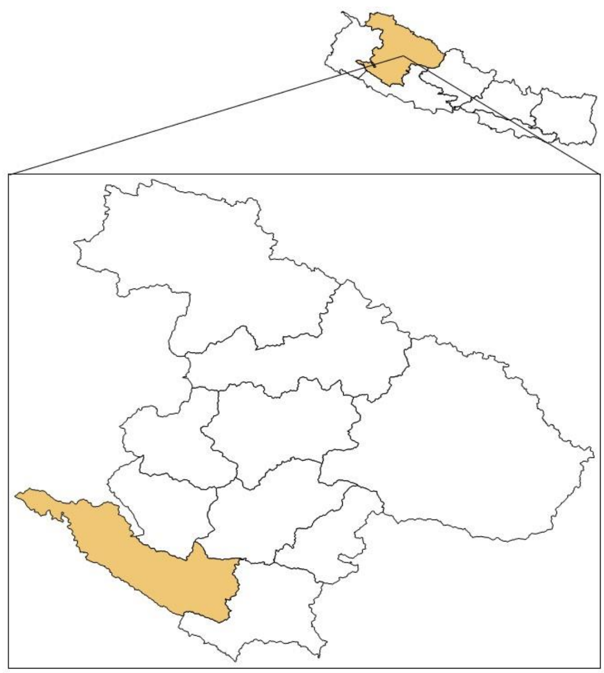


Figure 2. Highlights from this data note

75% of shoppers in Surkhet are females

~50% of shoppers buy unhealthy foods

79% of shoppers buy food items from retail outlets

~50% of shoppers prefer to shop at retail outlets because of time and distance

91% of shoppers perceive healthy foods to be expensive

OVERVIEW OF CONTENTS

TAFSSA's district agrifood systems assessment aimed to interview three members from each household: an adult female (aged 20+ years), an adult male (aged 20+ years), and an adolescent (aged 10-19 years). Details on the household and respondent sampling strategy are provided at the end of this data note.

This data note begins by presenting background characteristics of households, focusing on the female and male adults responsible for purchasing food for their households. It then examines the frequency of food purchases of seven common food items (dal, eggs, green leafy vegetables, bananas, biscuits, deep fried foods, and instant noodles) in the past 12 months and the cost of the most recent purchase. Furthermore, the data note provides insights into the top three sources of food acquisition, the distance to these sources, and the reasons for preferring them.

Finally, this data note delves into what drives respondents' purchasing decisions and their aspirations regarding food purchases. Definitions of different market types discussed in the data note and a list of the figures and tables, are provided below.

MARKET DEFINITIONS

City market: A multi-vendor urban food market held daily in a fixed location where traders and farmers set up shops during the day.

Roadside market: A group of at least 5 vendors in close proximity selling food products along the street, without any formal organizational setup.

Retail outlet: Any type of single vendor shops at a fixed location selling groceries, vegetables, fruits, or any animal-source foods such as meat, fish, and dairy.

Wholesale market: A market where food products are sold in bulk directly by manufacturers, farmers, or artisans at a fair price, usually in a permanent or semi-permanent structure.

List of figures

WHO IS PURCHASING FOOD?

Table 1. Household and individual characteristics

Household characteristics	
Number	500
Female-headed, %	54
Education of head, years	5
Average household size, members	4
Involved in agriculture, %	96
Has improved toilet, %	100
Drinking water source	
Piped into yard or plot, %	61
Public taps/standpipe, %	12
Main source of income	
Crop cultivation, %	34
Remittance, %	27
Salary, %	13
Type of fuel used for cooking	
Wood, %	97
LPG/natural gas, %	74
Electricity, %	10

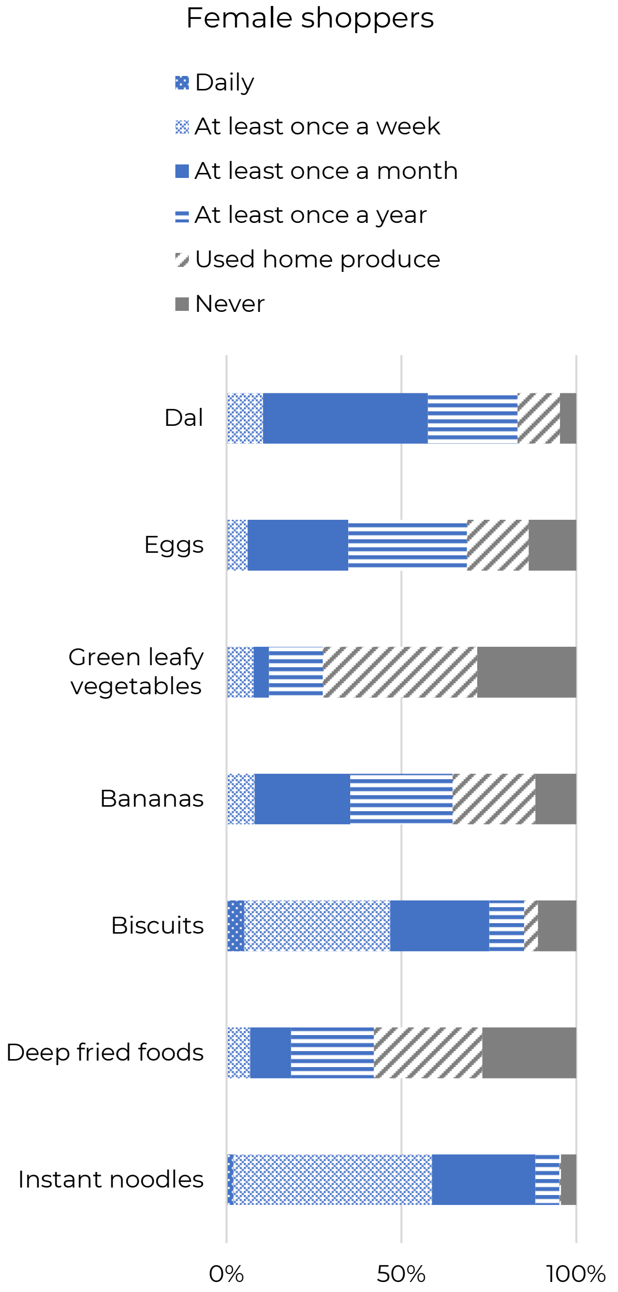
Individual characteristics	**Number of shoppers = 337**	
	Female shoppers (N=253)	Male shoppers (N=84)
Average age (years)	37	46
Relation to household head		
Household head, %	90	98
Spouse, %	6	2
Other relation, &	5	0
Education completed (years)	5	6
Employment status		
Employed, %	71	81
Primary occupation		
Farming, %	74	61
Unpaid household work, %	13	0
Own business/ self employed, %	7	18
Casual non-farm labour (paid), %	4	4
Salaried employment, %	2	12

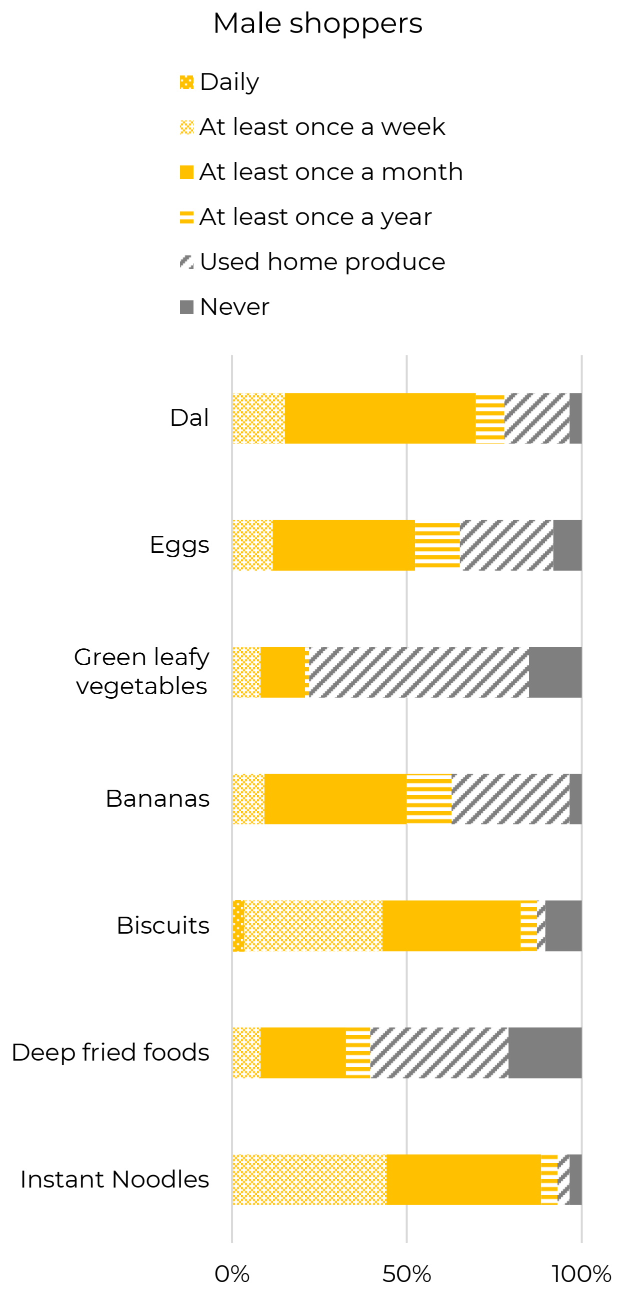
FINDINGS

- ✓ More females shop for food than males.
- ✓ Most shoppers were household heads and had some level of education.
- ✓ Most female and male shoppers were engaged in farming

WHAT FOOD IS BEING PURCHASED, AND HOW OFTEN?

Figure 3. Frequency of purchase of food items *in the last 12 months*





FINDINGS

- ✓ More males than females purchased dal, green leafy vegetables, eggs, and bananas at least once a month.
- ✓ 88% shoppers frequently purchased instant noodles.
- ✓ 83% male and 75% female shoppers frequently purchased biscuits.
- ✓ More male than female shoppers purchased deep fried foods at least once a month.

WHAT, WHEN, AND FOR HOW MUCH FOOD WAS PURCHASED?

Table 2. Time of and amount spent for the *most recent* food purchase

	Dal (N=276)	**Eggs** (N=222)	**Green leafy vegetables** (N=88)	**Bananas** (N=216)	**Biscuits** (N=286)	**Deep fried foods** (N=136)	**Instant noodles** (N=318)
Within past 7 days (%)	29.7	26.1	38.6	31.0	68.9	31.6	78.0
Within the past 30 days (%)	38.8	36.0	26.1	36.1	19.9	32.4	17.0
>30 days ago (%)	31.5	37.8	35.2	32.9	11.2	36.0	5.0
Average quantity bought and amount spent on food items during the most recent purchase							
Within past 7 days (%)	2.0 kg *298 NPR*	17 eggs *236 NPR*	1.3 kg *31 NPR*	1.1 dozen *141 NPR*	3 pkt *37 NPR*	3 nos *47 NPR*	2 pkt *43 NPR*
Within the past 30 days (%)	3.6 kg *553 NPR*	24 eggs *311 NPR*	1.8 kg *76 NPR*	1.6 dozen *134 NPR*	8 pkt *75 NPR*	5 nos *64 NPR*	4 pkt *71 NPR*
>30 days ago (%)	4.5 kg *629 NPR*	24 eggs *334 NPR*	3.7 kg *61 NPR*	1.1 dozen *128 NPR*	2 pkt *67 NPR*	4 nos *45 NPR*	4 pkt *75 NPR*

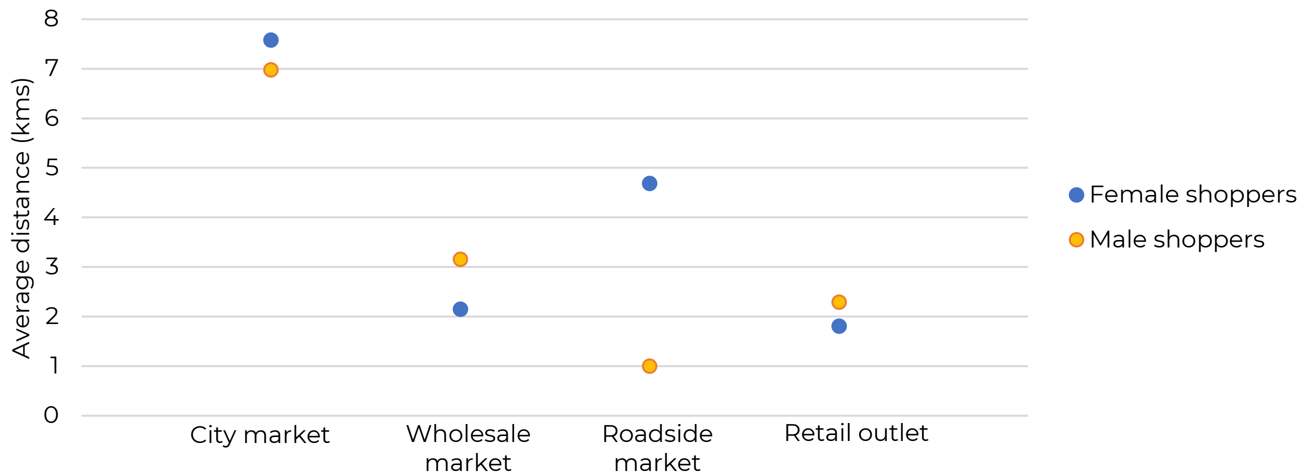
Notes: kg: kilogram; pkt: packets; nos: numbers; NPR: Nepalese Rupee

FINDINGS

- ✓ Healthy foods: More than a third of shoppers purchased dal, eggs, and bananas within the past 30 days.
    - More money was spent on purchasing dal, eggs, and bananas more than any other food item at any time during the most recent purchase.
- ✓ Unhealthy foods: More than two-thirds of the shoppers purchased biscuits and more than three-quarters purchased instant noodles within the past 7 days.
    - <100 NPR were spent in purchasing biscuits, deep fried foods, or instant noodles at any time during the most recent purchase.

WHERE IS THE FOOD PURCHASED?

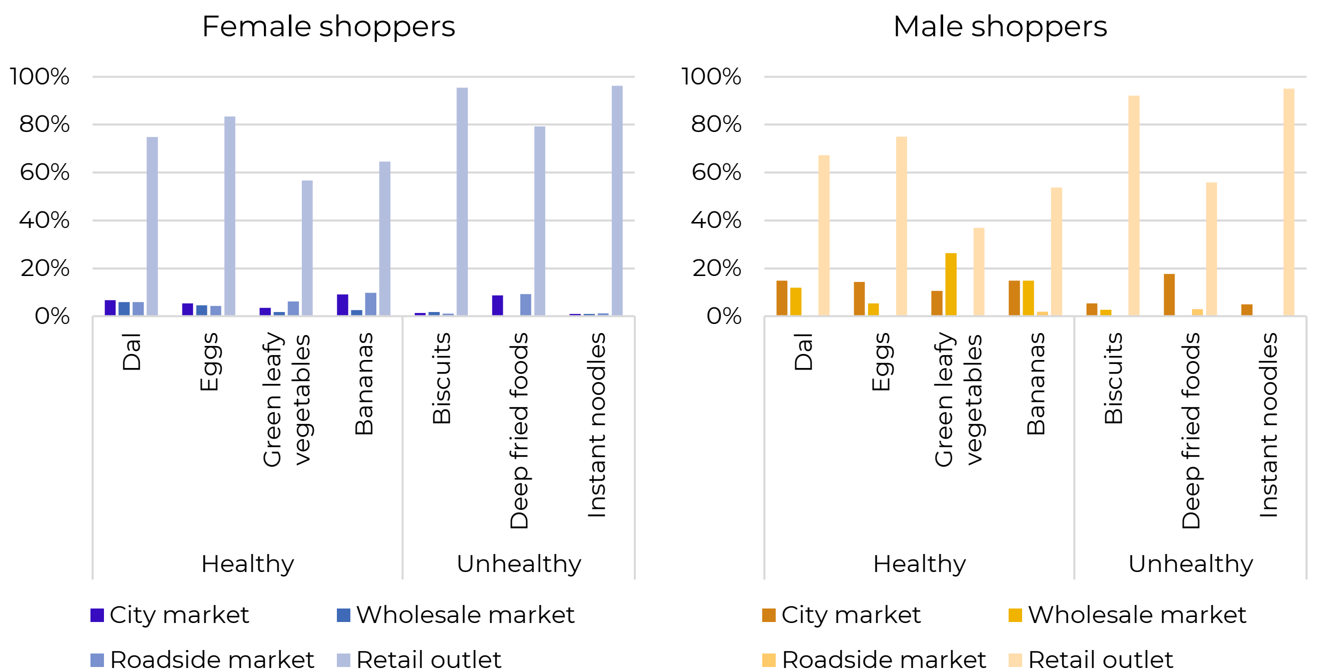
Figure 4. Distance to most recent source of food purchase



FINDINGS

- ✓ Shoppers traveled the farthest to access city markets.
- ✓ Female and male shoppers primarily purchased both healthy and unhealthy foods from retail outlets.
- ✓ More male shoppers accessed wholesale markets to purchase green leafy vegetables and bananas.

Figure 5. Sources of most recent food purchases*



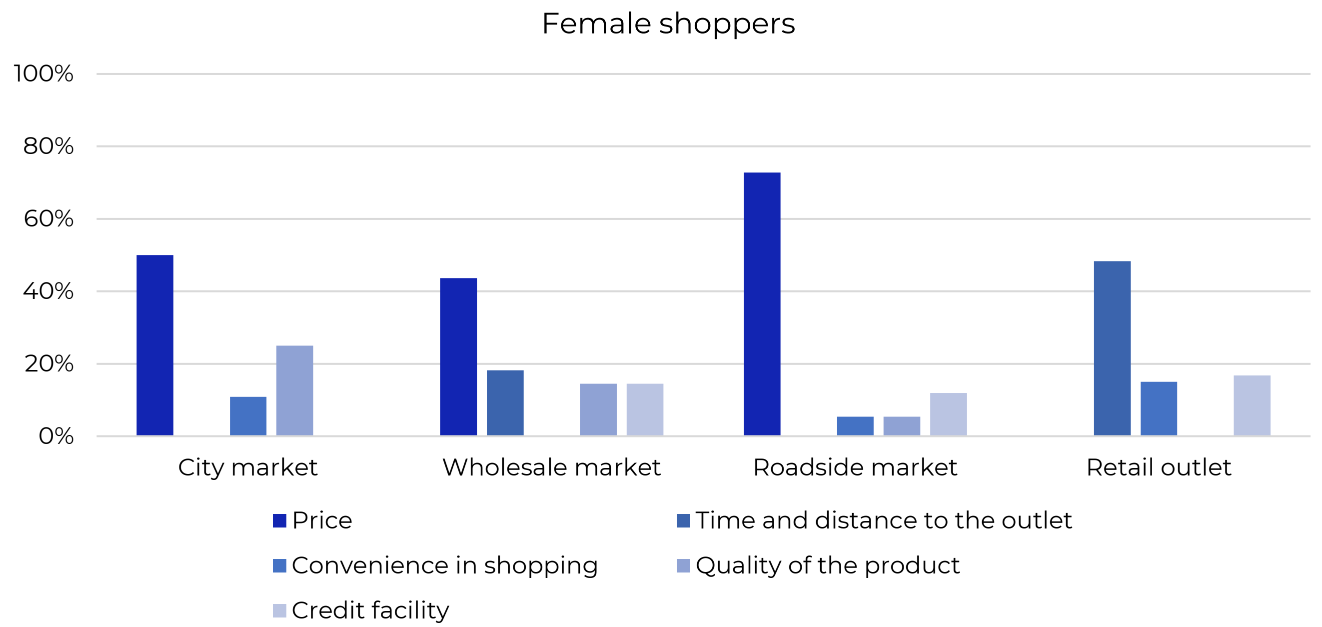
**Note: Based on the top sources accessed by the shoppers*

PREFERENCE FOR SOURCES OF FOOD PURCHASES

FINDINGS

- ✓ City, wholesale, and roadside markets were the preferred source of purchase because of the price.
- ✓ Time and distance to the outlet influenced choosing of retail outlets by all shoppers.
- ✓ For some female shoppers, availability of credit facility at retail outlets was yet another reason.

Figure 6. Reasons for preferring a source of purchase*



**Note: Based on the top three reasons mentioned by the shoppers*

WHY DO THEY PURCHASE DIFFERENT FOODS?

Figure 7. Perceptions of food shoppers (% who agree with each statement)

100%

0%

		Dal	Eggs	Green leafy vegetables	Banana	Biscuits	Deep fried foods	Instant noodles
Know of shop that sells	Female	97	95	86	93	99	87	99
	Male	98	98	90	94	100	95	100
Safe to eat	Female	93	91	99	92	24	19	13
	Male	99	88	95	93	35	20	24
Easy to acquire	Female	72	82	75	62	94	53	96
	Male	88	94	80	76	99	74	99
Affordable	Female	8	10	37	20	49	15	38
	Male	29	38	75	52	73	35	69
Family enjoys	Female	92	96	90	99	82	82	90
	Male	94	98	100	100	77	75	75

FINDINGS

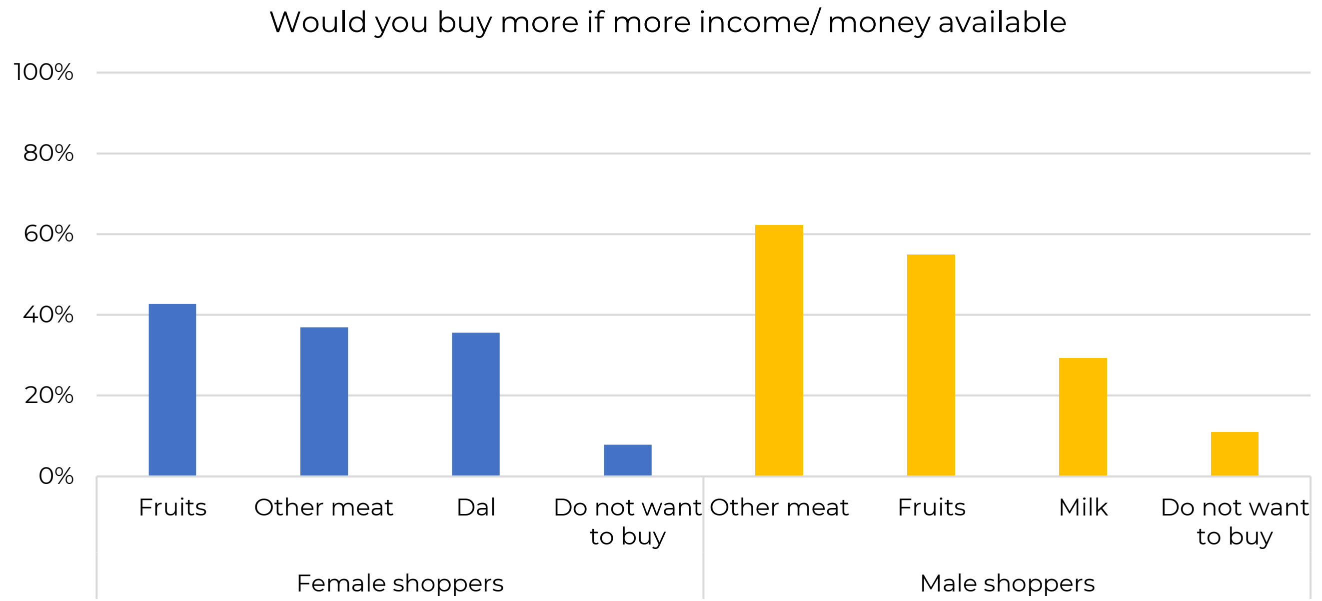
- ✓ Fewer shoppers perceived healthy foods to be affordable.
- ✓ Families enjoyed healthy foods slightly more than unhealthy foods.
- ✓ Both female and male shoppers agreed that unhealthy foods were unsafe to eat.
- ✓ Both female and male shoppers agreed that biscuits and instant noodles were easy to acquire, but more male compared to female shoppers perceived them to be affordable.

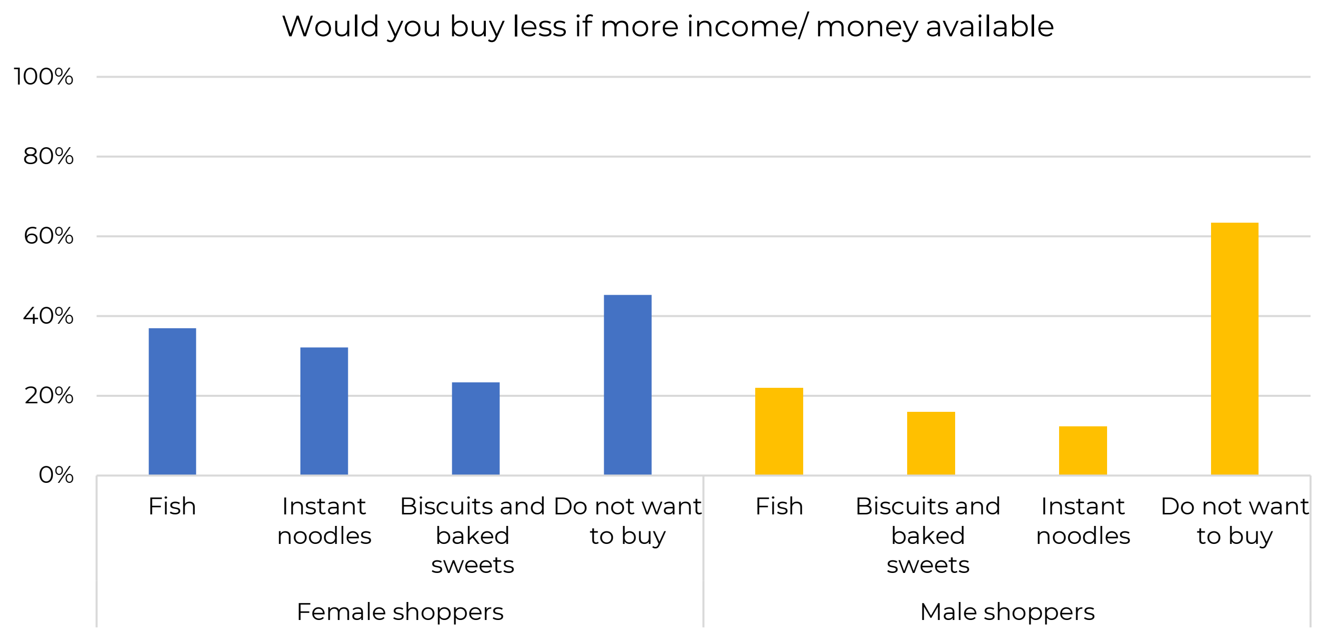
FOOD ASPIRATIONS

Figure 8. Changes to food purchase behavior *if* more disposable income or money were available*

FINDINGS

- ✓ Female and male shoppers aspired to buy more meat and fruits and less fish, biscuits, and noodles.
- ✓ Only male shoppers aspired to buy more milk.
- ✓ Only female shoppers aspired to buy more dal.
- ✓ 45% female shoppers and 63% male shoppers did not intend to reduce their purchase of any food.





**Note: Based on the top three food items mentioned by the shoppers*

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Gender-based purchase patterns

- More females than males shopped for food.

What and how often?

- Healthy foods: More male than female shoppers purchased healthy foods frequently.
- Unhealthy foods: Both female and shoppers frequently bought biscuits and instant noodles whereas more male shoppers frequently bought deep fried foods.

Where and why?

- Majority of shoppers most recently purchased food items from retail outlets.
- Retail outlets were closer than other types of markets.
- City markets were the preferred source of food purchase due to price for all shoppers.
- Both female and male shoppers had similar perceptions about safety, acquisition, and enjoyment of healthy and unhealthy food items.
  - ✓ Healthy foods were perceived to be safe to eat, enjoyable to eat, and easy to acquire, but not affordable.
  - ✓ Unhealthy foods were perceived to be enjoyable to eat, but not safe to eat. More male than female shoppers perceived these foods to be affordable.

What would be done with more access to income/money?

- Shoppers aspired to purchase more meat and fruit and less fish, biscuits, and noodles.
- Most male shoppers and fewer than half of female shoppers did not intend to buy less of any food.

KEY QUESTIONS FOR ACTION

1. What are the reasons for high frequency purchase of unhealthy foods (e.g., biscuits, noodles and deep-fried foods)?
2. How can healthy foods be made more affordable?
3. Can retail shops, which are the most accessed markets, increase the availability and affordability of healthy food items?
4. What additional information is needed to facilitate actions to improve purchasing behaviors in the district?

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Ward and household sampling

We selected 25 wards in the district with a probability proportional to the number of households that reside in each village. Within each village, we conducted a household listing to identify eligible households, that is those with adolescents (10-19 years old). From the households with adolescents, we randomly invited 20 households to participate in the survey. If a household refused, we replaced that household with another randomly selected eligible household, to retain a total of 1,000 households in the district. Thus, the findings reported in this data note are representative of rural households from this district that include an adolescent.

Respondent selection

Within households, one adult female aged 20+ years, one adult male aged 20+ years, and one adolescent aged 10-19 years were selected as the respondents for the survey. When multiple adolescents were living in a household, the oldest adolescent was selected. In some households, an adult male was not available (often due to migration for work). In such households, the female was the only adult respondent (See Table 1 for respondent sample sizes). At the beginning of the interview, the adult in the household primarily involved in agriculture (either male or female) and the adult primarily responsible for food purchasing (either male or female) were identified as the primary respondents.

Photo credit: : Abdul Momin

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ABOUT TAFSSA

TAFSSA (*Transforming Agrifood Systems in South Asia)* is a CGIAR Regional Integrated Initiative that supports actions improving equitable access to sustainable healthy diets, that boosts farmers' livelihoods and resilience, and that conserves land, air, and water resources in a climate crisis.

ABOUT CGIAR

CGIAR is a global research partnership for a food secure future. Visit https://www.cgiar.org/research/cgiar-portfolio to learn more about the initiatives in the CGIAR research portfolio

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