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Resilience of Women Producers and Retail Intelligence Strategy: Bandung Culinary Gastrodiplomacy at Bandung Food Centre Al Wakrah, Qatar

Dewi Turgarini[1], Heri Puspito Diyah Setiyorini[1], Gitasiswhara[1], Yudhiet Fajar Dewantara[2], Muhammad Akbar Gumilang[1], Savina Azzahra[1]

[1]Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Indonesia
[2]Bunda Mulia University, Indonesia

*Correspondence: E-mail: dewiturgarinireserach@upi.edu

ABSTRACT

Gastro diplomacy through local food and beverage products produced by Indonesian Small, and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) has massive potential in the global market, including in Qatar. The sustainability of these SMEs' supply depends on the resilience of upstream producers and downstream retail governance. This community service project uses an integrated Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach to explore the role of female culinary SMEs in Bandung as primary suppliers, while also providing retail intelligence interventions in their product displays at the Bandung Food Centre (BFC) Al Wakrah, Qatar. Qualitative data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews with nine local female producers, followed by selection of retail quality at overseas partner locations. The research results in the upstream sector indicate that female culinary SMEs are driven by family economic resilience, where they master local gastronomic production techniques (such as cireng, basreng, and batagor) through self-taught methods and are able to create a multiplier effect for their surrounding environment. In the downstream sector, the application of Indonesian Retail Intelligence through ABC Analysis has successfully identified the circulation of product movements (such as tempeh chips and basreng as fast-moving goods), reduced dead stock numbers, and optimized layouts through visual merchandising engineering (Planogram). Furthermore, the innovation of bilingual shelf talkers (English-Arabic) has proven effective as a cross-cultural educational medium, increasing the understanding and purchasing power of non-diaspora consumers towards Indonesian gastronomic products. This synergy between women's empowerment at the local level and retail intelligence at the global level is a strong model of sustainable gastro diplomacy.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Gastronomic tourism is no longer limited to consuming local food in one's hometown, but has transformed into an instrument of cultural diplomacy (soft power) on the international stage. Amidst the high flow of global mobility, the Indonesian diaspora plays a central role as an agent of gastro diplomacy. Qatar, with its dominant expatriate population, is a strategic market for the penetration of Indonesian culinary delights. The Bandung Food Centre (BFC), located in the Al Wakrah district of Qatar, serves not only as a logistics shopping center for Indonesian migrant workers but also as a "living showcase" introducing the richness of local gastronomy to the international community (Turgarini, 2021; Widjaya et al., 2023).

However, this international gastronomic supply chain faces complex challenges that span from upstream (production) to downstream (retail marketing). In the upstream sector, the production of traditional foods based on local wisdom such as basreng, tempeh chips, cireng, and cuanki relies heavily on Small, and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), the majority of which are driven by women (Fahmi M.R, Ningsih, C., 2026; Ningsih C., et.al, 2024; Anjum, T, et.al, 2021). Sociological and economic studies show that women entrepreneurs in the culinary sector often start out motivated by survival due to the domestic economic crisis, but have evolved into pillars of preserving heritage recipes and driving the circular economy in their communities (Rahmawati & Wijaya, 2022). Despite their vital role, these women producers often face limitations in food preservation technology, financial management, and supply chain management literacy (Asmy, et.al, 2024).

In the downstream sector, the challenges of managing Indonesian SME retail products at BFC Qatar center on inventory inefficiencies and limited visibility. Based on an initial situation analysis, dead stock (the accumulation of goods past their expiration date) is frequently encountered due to the lack of databased retail intelligence. Furthermore, conventional visual merchandising, coupled with language barriers and local residents' unfamiliarity with how to consume specific Indonesian products, limit BFC's market expansion (Setiawati & Prihantoro, 2024).

Addressing this gap, this research and community service program aims to dissect the ecosystem from upstream to downstream. First, analyzing the resilience profile of female gastronomy producers in Bandung City as suppliers. Second, implementing the Indonesian Retail Intelligence program at BFC Qatar through inventory audits (ABC Analysis), visual merchandising engineering, and a consumer education strategy based on shelf talkers. This comprehensive intervention is expected to optimize the performance of Indonesian gastro diplomacy in line with the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) pillars 5 (Gender Equality), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Gastro diplomacy and Cultural Identity

Gastro diplomacy describes structured campaigns that use food as a means to increase cross-cultural understanding and awareness. Unlike culinary diplomacy, which tends to be elitist, gastro diplomacy targets a broader audience (civil society in the destination country) (Rockower, 2012 in Chapple-Sokol, 2023). Street food and traditional snacks have a unique appeal because they convey historical narratives and authentic regional identities. Recently, social media has become prominent tool for tourism promotion and evolution of sustainable tourism (Ismarizal, B., et.al., 2026; Gai, AM. et.al., 2026).

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2.2. Ecological Feminism and the Role of Women in Culinary MSMEs

In gastronomic tourism studies, women are recognized as gatekeepers for the preservation of ancestral recipes (UNWTO, 2021). Women's role in home-based food production is often viewed as an extension of domestic duties. However, the commodification of these skills within the SME sector creates double empowerment. They not only strengthen families' financial resilience but also trigger a multiplier effect through the recruitment of local workers from vulnerable groups (widows, laid-off workers) and the creation of markets for local farmers (Setyaningsih et al., 2022).

2.3. Retail Intelligence and ABC Analysis in Supply Chain

Retail intelligence refers to the integration of data analytics to understand customer-purchasing behavior and manage inventory precisely. In international supply chain management involving high logistics (shipping) costs, efficiency is key. ABC analysis is rooted in the Pareto Principle (80/20 Rule), which classifies inventory into three categories: Category A (high absorption/fast-moving, low stock percentage), Category B (medium absorption), and Category C (slow absorption/dead stock, high stock percentage) (Ramdani et al., 2023). This analysis prevents inflated costs of maintaining unsold goods.

2.4. Visual Merchandising and Cross-Cultural Communication

Visual merchandising is the art and science of presenting products visually to maximize their appeal at the point of sale. The use of planograms as visual models for product placement on shelves ensures strategic product placement at eye-level (Budiarto & Pratama, 2024). Meanwhile, to bridge language barriers in foreign markets, shelf talkers (educational labels placed on shelves) serve as a passive yet effective marketing communication tool in guiding foreign consumers about the flavor profiles and preparation methods of ethnic products (Castillo Córdova & Castillo Palacios, 2024).

3. METHODS

This research uses a Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework with a Mixed Methods approach (qualitative and quantitative). PAR was chosen because it aims not only to explore the phenomenon but also to implement structural changes in the partner's (BFC Qatar) operational system. The program will be implemented in 2026 through two spatial stages: Bandung City (Upstream) and Al Wakrah, Qatar (Downstream).

Stage 1: Qualitative Exploration of Upstream Ecosystems (Bandung)

Understanding the roots of product resilience, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 9 (nine) key informants. The informants represent female culinary SME owners in Bandung City (producers of cireng, basreng, batagor, sate jando, donuts, chili sauce, and sweet potato keremes) who distribute their products, both locally and partly into the export supply chain (for example through the product curation of "Warung Cetaaarrr"). Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic data reduction.

Stage 2: Quantitative Audit and Downstream Retail Intervention (Qatar)

This stage was implemented at Bandung Food Centre, Qatar, with three tactical steps:

a. Digital Audit & Inventory Optimization (ABC Analysis): Extracting shipping data (such as the product list of "Warung Cetaaarrr") and historical sales to map the speed of inventory turnover.
b. Visual Merchandising Engineering (Planogram): Redesigning shelf mapping geometrically based on visit flow (store heat map) to increase the visibility of priority products.

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c. Market Education Strategy (Shelf Talkers): Design and install physical descriptive signage in bilingual format (English and Arabic) containing tasting notes and consumption instructions for non-Indonesian expatriates.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Upstream: Resilience, Motivation, and the Role of Female Gastronomy Suppliers in Bandung

The strength of a country's gastro diplomacy rests on the authenticity of products produced by grassroots communities. Based on a thematic analysis of nine interview transcripts, four central patterns were identified that describe the characteristics of women suppliers of local gastronomic products:

a. Survival Motivation for Business Expansion: The majority of informants initiated culinary businesses in response to the domestic economic crisis. For example, Informant 3 (Yanti, a 15-year Batagor entrepreneur) started the business when her husband was laid off from a textile factory, while Informant 5 (Ani, Instant Cuanki) innovated by creating packaged dry products due to the ban on mobile vendors during the COVID-19 pandemic. These businesses, which began out of necessity, gradually became the backbone of the family's economy.
b. Tacit Knowledge Mastery (Self-Taught): Rather than formal culinary education, gastronomic production techniques, such as heating the rice flour for crispy cireng (Rina) or grilling Sate Jando (Yuli), are acquired through trial and error and the use of digital platforms (YouTube). This tacit knowledge inherent in women creates a qualitative barrier to entry that maintains the authenticity of the product's flavor.
c. Multiplier Effect and Circular Economy: Crucial findings indicate that womenpreneurs have a strong social bias in their supply chains. Informants consistently empower vulnerable local labor (widows, school dropouts, and homemakers) and source raw materials directly from local traditional markets (e.g., mackerel from Caringin Market, tapioca flour from Cikurubuk). This represents the concept of local socio-economic sustainability at the micro level (Ningsih et al., 2023).
d. Scaling-Up Constraints : Despite having superior products, export market penetration is hampered by a lack of knowledge about Food Technology , especially safe preservation techniques (vacuum/retort) so that products such as wet cuanki or batagor can withstand the duration of shipping between countries without using chemicals (artificial preservatives).

4.2. Downstream: Inventory Audit and Supply Chain Performance (ABC Analysis) at BFC Qatar

In the downstream ecosystem at Bandung Food Centre, Qatar, the main problem is the high holding cost for imported goods from Indonesia due to the mismatch between the number of orders and the speed of market absorption (Izzaty, W., & Aslami, N., 2021; Siwelani, M., & Nyikana, S., 2025). The community service team (PkM-LN) analyzed product delivery data from local curation (e.g., "Warung Cetaaarrr"). From a total initial delivery sample of 370 units of local snack products, inventory distribution can be categorized using ABC Analysis as follows:

Table 1. ABC Classification of Bandung SME Product Samples in Qatar

Category	Product name	Supply Quantity	Absorption Rate	Stock Percentage
A (*Fast Moving*)	Tempeh Chips, Mustopa Potatoes	170 units	< 14 days	46%
B (*Medium*)	Basreng, Finger Banana Sale,	160 units	14 - 30 days	43%

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Category	Product name	Supply Quantity	Absorption Rate	Stock Percentage
C (*Slow Moving*)	Rengginang, Opak Seblak Crackers, Coconut Serundeng	40 units	> 30 days	11%

Source: Author, 2026

Audit Discussion: Category A products (Tempeh Chips and Mustopa Potatoes) have proven to be highly sought after by both Indonesians and foreign expatriates due to their neutral-savory taste and crunchy texture (familiar to global palates). However, Category C products (such as Seblak Crackers and Coconut Serundeng) move very slowly and are prone to dead stock. This is not due to low quality, but rather due to foreign consumer confusion regarding the intended use of these products (e.g., serundeng should be eaten as a side dish, not as a snack). Through retail intelligence, BFC Qatar was recommended to increase the quantity of Category A re-orders by 30%, and implement a bundling method for Category C to maximize cash flow.

Visual Merchandising Interventions

Shelf layouts in ethnic retail stores often ignore the psychological aspects of customer movement. A community service team from UPI redesigned the layout based on a planogram, taking into account the store's heat map (a heat map of the area is most frequently visited by customers).

Visual engineering interventions carried out include:

a. Eye-Level Placement: Moving Category A products (previously placed haphazardly) to shelves at eye level (approximately 120-160 cm from the floor). This psychologically triggers impulse buying (Ramdani et al., 2023).
b. Cross merchandising: Placing Category C products next to their complementary products. For example, coconut serundeng (Serundeng Kelapa) is placed next to a rack of rice or fried rice seasoning, creating the visual association that these products are carbohydrate companions (Husin, S., et.al., 2023).
c. Gastronomic Zoning (Grouping): Strict separation between sweet snack areas (finger banana sale, dodol) and savory/spicy snacks (basreng, seblak crackers, rengginang) to facilitate consumer navigation.

4.3. Cross-Cultural Consumer Education through Shelf Talkers

International market expansion for local products is highly vulnerable to language barriers. Buyers from Arab, South Asian, and Filipino communities in Wakrah have high interest in BFC products, but are hampered by the fact that SME packaging is generally only in Indonesian (without international nutrition labels).

As an inclusive gastro diplomacy strategy, the team designed and implemented bilingual (English and Arabic) Shelf Talkers. These signs not only list prices but also include:

a. Sensory Descriptors (Taste Profile): Example in Basreng: "Spicy and savory fish crackers with aromatic kaffir lime" (مقرمشات سمك حارة ولذيذة).
b. Serving Suggestions: Example in Serundeng: " Best served over warm rice or as a topping for meat" (أفضل تقديم مع الأرز الدافئ).

Based on cultural literacy, has proven to stimulate curiosity among foreign customers. Local Qatari consumers who were previously reluctant to purchase due to unfamiliarity with ingredients (e.g., concerns about the halal status of an exotic food item) felt reassured by the transparency of information on the shelves. This has had a positive impact on expanding the target demographic, transforming BFC from a mere "diaspora nostalgia" store into a culinary

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exploration destination for global citizens.

5. CONCLUSION

The integration of resilience in the upstream sector and business acumen in the downstream sector is an essential foundation for the success of Indonesian SME products in the international market. This study concludes that female SME culinary suppliers in Bandung are not merely commodity producers, but agents of gastronomic heritage preservation, which has a massive socio-economic multiplier effect. Their resilience in producing a variety of local culinary delights serves as a pillar for informal exports to Middle Eastern countries.

Downstream, the Indonesian Retail Intelligence intervention, initiated by a team of UPI academics at the Bandung Food Centre, Qatar, has proven effective in improving business governance. The use of ABC analysis effectively mitigated the risk of losses due to dead stock, while visual merchandising engineering enabled the store's sales flow to be more profitable. The gastro diplomacy strategy, manifested through bilingual shelf talkers, successfully broke down cultural communication barriers, educated the global market about Indonesia's gastronomic richness, and sparked interest from foreign buyers.

Recommendation: For future acceleration, pentahelix intervention is needed, especially from the government and academics (such as the National Research and Innovation Agency - BRIN) to provide continuous guidance on Food Packaging Technology (Vacuum/Retort) for women producers in Bandung to increase product shelf life. Furthermore, integrated inventory digitization that is directly connected (in real-time) between partners in Qatar and producers in Indonesia will enhance the automation of this supply chain.

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