



**PROCEEDINGS 2026-27**

Urban Studies Program

# Night Markets in the Philippines: Between Precarity and Inclusivity

A Public Forum

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5 December 2025

UP Mindanao CHSS Audio Visual Room



UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES  
CENTER FOR  
INTEGRATIVE AND  
DEVELOPMENT  
STUDIES

ISSN 2718-9295 (PRINT)  
ISSN 2718-9309 (ONLINE)



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UP CIDS Proceedings is published by the

**University of the Philippines  
Center for Integrative and Development Studies**

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**ISSN 2718-9295 (Print)  
ISSN 2718-9309 (Online)**

**Cover Image Credit**

"Night market vendors and Davao City LGU representatives listen to the presentations from Baguio City and Cebu City."

Photo courtesy of Ryan Songcayauon, UP Mindanao

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## Stakeholder Collaboration for Sustainable Iloilo-Batiano River System

Consultation Outcomes with Barangay Officials  
of Iloilo City

28 October 2025

LEDIPO Meeting Room, Iloilo Business Center, Aduana St. Iloilo City

Alan Dino E. Moscoso, Rhodella A. Ibabao, Brian C. Ventura, Jeestin Kent S. Gabinera,  
and Nicko Jay S. Miranda



ISSN 2718-9295 (PRINT)  
ISSN 2718-9309 (ONLINE)

### PROCEEDINGS

Stakeholder Collaboration  
for Sustainable Iloilo-Batiano  
River System: Consultation  
Outcomes with Barangay  
Officials of Iloilo City



DISCUSSION PAPER SERIES 2026-15

## River Governance in Focus

A Survey of Council Members and  
Barangay Leaders in the Iloilo-Batiano  
River System

Alan Dino Moscoso



Urban Studies Program

ISSN 2619-7449 (PRINT)  
ISSN 2619-7456 (ONLINE)

### DISCUSSION PAPER

River Governance in Focus:  
A Survey of Council  
Members and Barangay  
Leaders in the Iloilo-Batiano  
River System



# About the Proceedings

## *Invited Participants and Stakeholders*

Participants in the Roxas Night Market vendor study, key informant interview (KII) participants from Davao City local government offices directly involved in or supervising the Roxas Night Market's operations, research fellows, and paper writers from the Cebu City and Baguio City study sites were all invited. Their involvement made it possible to compare various urban settings concerning night markets in the Philippines.



# Introduction

In Philippine cities, night markets have grown to be significant aspects of urban life, especially considering the country's post-pandemic economic recovery. Night markets serve as vital livelihood infrastructures various urban residents, including women, older workers, migrants, and households with limited access to formal employment, despite being frequently portrayed as informal, transient, or peripheral spaces. Examining night markets as socio-economic and spatial institutions shaped by governance arrangements, labor conditions, and daily negotiations between vendors and the state was the goal of the Public Forum recorded in these proceedings.

On December 5, 2025, the University of the Philippines Mindanao and the UP CIDS Urban Studies Program team with Asst. Prof. Ryan C. Songcayauon as Project Leader, convened a public forum titled "Night Markets in the Philippines: Between Precarity and Inclusivity." This event brought together local government representatives, researchers, and night market vendors from Davao City, Baguio City, and Cebu City to validate research findings and stimulate dialogue on the changing realities, challenges, and potentials of Philippine night markets as vital public spaces. The opening ceremonies were followed by a framing of the dual nature of night markets: while they are lively economic lifelines for many, their complexity as sites of migration, governance, and social resilience—remains underexplored in urban studies.

## Study Areas, Research Context, Framework and Methodology

Ms. Anna Mae N. Dalugdog, Senior Research Assistant, contextualized the study. Drawing from Lefebvre's theory of the social production of space, the research views night markets as spaces shaped by power, daily routines, and symbolic meaning. Two central themes underpin the analysis: precarity, which addresses the uncertainty inherent in street vending, and inclusivity, understood as the capacity of night markets to accommodate diversity without discrimination.

The forum used data from completed and ongoing research on night markets in the Philippines, particularly in three study areas: Davao City, Cebu City, and Baguio City. These locations were chosen to represent differences in urban size, capacity for governance, tourism focus, and past associations with unofficial vending. Despite these contextual variations, night markets in all the study areas have certain things in common: they function in highly regulated but unstable streetscape environments, depend on negotiated access to public

space, and are crucial places for workers to make a living while dealing with economic precarity.

Ms. Dalugdog also added that methodologically, the team combined surveys, interviews, focus group discussions, site observations, and spatial mapping to capture both the formal structures and informal dynamics of night market operations. This approach foregrounded the lived experiences of vendors and the specificities of each city's context.

## **Preliminary Findings**

### ***Davao City: Roxas Night Market***

*Asst. Prof. Ryan C. Songcayauon*

Asst. Prof. Songcayauon presented the findings for Davao's Roxas Night Market, highlighting its unique draw-lots selection system, which is held quarterly to ensure equitable access among thousands of applicants. Furthermore, he shared that vendors are oriented and assigned stalls, and pay low daily rental fees - varying from daily dues of PHP 80.00 for non-food section, to PHP 100.00 for food section. Such an amount keeps vendor participation feasible. Following security incidents in the past, the local government has implemented robust measures, including restricted entry and exit points, CCTV System, and a Bomb Sniffing Dog to check out the whole area before official opening.

Asst. Prof. Songcayauon also shared that during their observation, despite formalization efforts, informal vending persists around the market's perimeter, and a culture of space-sharing between official and unofficial vendors exists. The absence of permanent structures leaves vendors vulnerable to weather disruptions, exacerbating their economic precarity. To end his presentation of results, Asst. Prof. Songcayauon discussed proposals deduced from the preliminary results such as market expansion, provision of standardized tents, creation of child-minding facilities for working mothers, and provision of rent discounts during adverse weather conditions.

### ***Baguio City: Harrison Road Night Market***

*Assoc. Prof. Rozel Balmores-Paulino and Asst. Prof. Donna Mae Ponce-Batnag*

Assoc. Prof. Rozel Balmores-Paulino and Asst. Prof. Donna Mae Ponce-Batnag shared findings from Baguio, where the night market operates under a formal

administrative order and comprises 18 blocks, each led by a block leader. Vendors are divided between food and dry goods, with alternating schedules that were introduced to manage crowding during the pandemic. Vendors pay weekly rents, for which receipts are issued, though formal business permits are not provided.

The challenges confronting vendors in Harrison Road Night Market include vulnerability to weather, the temporary and experimental nature of the night market, the lack of formal recognition, and competition from other events, especially trade fairs which also happens during the Peak Season. Suggestions that emerged from the previously mentioned findings included the following: (a) enhanced information dissemination, (b) installation of CCTV and public announcement systems, (c) improvement of market aesthetics, and (d) regular dialogue between LGU and vendors. Asst. Prof. Balmores-Paulino stated that inherently, vendors recognized the night market's broader contribution, from supporting livelihoods and other businesses to fostering social integration and revitalizing Baguio's night life.

### ***Cebu City: Colon Night Market***

*Inst. Loreen Legaspi and Inst. Gelyn Puracan*

Instructors Lucky Loreen Legaspi and Gelyn Puracan presented insights from Colon Night Market, located along the country's oldest street. They shared that results show that most vendors are women supporting extended families, with many migrants from Mindanao. Notably for Cebu, the vendors view the night market as a crucial site for affordable food, apparel, and accessories.

Cebu team's initial findings shows how Colon Night Market vendors face significant financial pressures, with higher monthly rents (and payments enforced even during disaster-induced closures) and little transparency about fee structures. The "bunot system" is used for stall allocation, while recent management transitions have led to confusion and a perceived decline in sanitation and coordination. Relations with the LGU are mediated through a convenor, leading to fragmented governance. Vendors are also vulnerable to environmental hazards, safety and security gaps, and spatial inequalities.

Instructor Lucky Loreen then presented the following recommendations from the initial findings: (a) improved transparency in fee collection, (b) clarified division of responsibilities among LGU, barangay, and convenor, (c) enhanced security and sanitation, (d) rent relief during disasters, and (e) rationalized operations and traffic management.

## Recurring Themes Across Study Areas

### *Night Markets as Primary Livelihood Spaces*

In all study areas, research findings consistently showed that night markets serve as primary sources of income for many vendors, not just supplementary ones. During the interviews, vendors pointed out that their earnings from night market vending support entire households. This finding challenges the ongoing narratives in policy that view night market vending as temporary or opportunistic work. In Davao City, vendors noted their livelihoods were relatively stable because of established operating schedules, organized coordination with the local government unit (LGU)—particularly with the City Economic Enterprise, and reliable security provided by the concerned barangays and the military. Despite those factors mentioned earlier, their income still heavily relied on weather conditions, changes in enforcement, and rising input costs.

In Cebu City, vendors reported greater income volatility, experiencing sudden losses after natural disasters such as the recent 6.9 magnitude earthquake on September 30, 2025, and Typhoon Tino on November 4, 2025— all of which resulted in temporary suspensions. Meanwhile, vendors from Baguio City mentioned that in their area, demand is seasonal and closely linked to tourist flows, which worsens income unpredictability during off-peak times. A recurring point of agreement during the open forum was that livelihood vulnerability is structural rather than individual, rooted in governance arrangements that fail to provide long-term stability.

### *Labor Precarity and Conditions of Work*

Across the three study sites, labor precarity is a defining feature of night market vending. Vendors face significant uncertainty—not only in terms of income due to fluctuating customer flows and seasonal demand, but also from external shocks such as typhoons, earthquakes, and even security incidents. The drawlots or “bunot” systems for stall allocation in Davao and Cebu introduce an additional layer of unpredictability, as even long-term vendors must regularly re-compete for their spot. In Baguio, alternating vending schedules further complicate earning potentials and routine stability.

Economic vulnerability is compounded by the lack of permanent infrastructure, exposing vendors to weather-related disruptions. High and inflexible rents, as seen in Cebu, can be especially burdensome during periods when the market

is closed due to disasters. Often, vendors are still charged, with little or no relief. Vendors, many of whom are women supporting extended families or are migrants, juggle night market work with other jobs and caregiving responsibilities. The absence of social protection, lack of formal business permits, and limited access to support services intensify their precarity.

### ***Governance, Regulation, and Everyday Negotiation***

Governance of night markets is marked by a mix of formal regulation and everyday negotiation between vendors, LGUs, and, in some cases, market convenors or associations (as in the case of Cebu City). Davao's night market is regulated by local ordinances with direct LGU oversight, while Baguio operates under a formal administrative order, with block leaders serving as intermediaries. In Cebu, governance is more fragmented, with a convenor acting as de facto market manager and the LGU focusing on broader issues like traffic and urban planning but remaining distant from everyday operational concerns.

Everyday life in the markets involves constant negotiation as vendors must navigate evolving rules, unclear or shifting fee structures, and fluctuating management practices, especially in the wake of leadership transitions. Transparency and communication are recurring issues, particularly on how rents and fees are determined and used. Vendor associations, where present, provide not only social support, but also serve as a measure of collective voice and negotiating power, but their effectiveness and applicability vary by city and over time. The lack of such associations in Davao reflects a more individualized relationship with the LGU.

### ***Spatial Regulation and Urban Inclusion***

Comparatively, Baguio City vendors faced the strictest spatial constraints due to tourism and heritage considerations, while Davao City vendors experienced more spatial stability, but remained vulnerable to redevelopment initiatives. Cebu City occupied an intermediate position, with frequent relocations linked to infrastructure projects and political transitions. Spatial regulation in the night markets is closely tied to questions of inclusion and exclusion. The allocation of stalls (via draw-lots or association-based management), control of entry and exit points, and enforcement (or relaxation) of rules about informal vending shape who can participate and under what conditions. Davao's security-focused spatial regime, with restricted entrances and exits, contrasts with the more open, albeit crowded, arrangements in Baguio and Cebu.

Spatial inequalities emerge within the markets themselves—favorable locations see higher customer traffic and better lighting, while peripheral stalls suffer. The design and uniformity of tents, the presence or absence of sanitation facilities, and the management of pedestrian and vehicular flow all affect vendor opportunities and customer experience. The presence of informal vendors along the peripheries and ongoing debates about possible relocations (as in Baguio) highlight the contested nature of urban space and the ongoing struggle for inclusion.

Efforts to enhance urban inclusion are visible in proposals for expanding market areas, providing childcare to support working mothers, and celebrating cultural diversity through dedicated spaces or events for specific groups or products. However, the temporary, experimental, and sometimes exclusionary character of night market spatial regulation means that inclusion is always a work in progress, subject to ongoing negotiation among stakeholders.

## **Open Forum Proper: Dialogue Towards Inclusive and Resilient Night Markets**

The open forum encouraged all attendees—including night market vendors, local government representatives, research fellows, and civil society participants—to voice their insights, questions, and experiences.

Local government representatives responded to questions by outlining the rationale behind current policies and administrative procedures. In Davao, officials explained the security-driven design of the night market, while acknowledging challenges in balancing order with inclusivity. Baguio's representatives discussed the role of block leaders and the importance of maintaining regular dialogue with vendors to address emerging issues. Cebu Research Fellows and Paper Writers were candid about the complexities of market management, especially regarding the division of responsibilities and the need for greater transparency in the collection and use of vendor fees.

A recurring theme in the discussion was the tension between formal regulation and everyday negotiation. Some inquiries highlighted that informal arrangements—such as space-sharing or rotating schedules—filled gaps left by official rules, underscoring the importance of flexibility and mutual trust. Several participants called for more structured associations or vendor committees to serve as bridges between market stakeholders and

local authorities. There were also questions about sanitary practices and requirements, and how strict these were implemented.

The forum also surfaced creative suggestions to improve night market conditions, practically aiming for visions of a world-class night market system. Proposals included improved lighting and aesthetic aspects, the establishment of child-minding centers for vendor-parents, the installation of better lighting and sanitation facilities, the use of technology (such as CCTVs and digital payment systems) to enhance safety and efficiency, and the expansion of market spaces to accommodate more vendors and diverse products. Participants reflected on the need to preserve the unique cultural identities of each market, advocating for special events or sections that celebrate local delicacies and artisanal goods.

## **Special Message from Davao City Economic Enterprise Office Representative**

The forum also featured a message from Mr. Manuel Nobleza of the City Economic Enterprise Office of Davao City. Mr. Nobleza was one of the key persons who made conducting interviews and observations in Roxas Night Market possible and according to timeframe by his timely and active coordination with the UP Mindanao-USP team.

He expressed gratitude to UP CIDS for conducting the study, believing that this is a step towards helping vendors—since there is an undeniable research gap, and the lack of established groups that went through this extent of studying the night market. He further added that this study will become the basis for other bigger night markets that would be located in other parts of the city to help not only the economy, but also the daily livelihood of local street vendors.

## **Synthesis of Forum Questions and Responses**

Professor Raymundo R. Pavo, UP Mindanao - USP Team Research Fellow, synthesized the forum's insights, emphasizing the role of local ordinances in regulating night market activities, and encouraging Cebu to consider similar frameworks. He highlighted the value of Baguio's block leader system and Davao's security protocols, and underscored the proposal for child-minding

centers as crucial support for vendor-parents. Promoting cultural diversity through local delicacies was suggested to enrich the night market experience and attract a broader clientele. The proceedings closed with a call for continued collaboration and knowledge-sharing to build more inclusive, resilient, and globally competitive night markets.

## Policy and Research Implications

The findings from this public forum underscore the importance of adopting holistic and participatory approaches to night market governance in the Philippines. Policy frameworks need to move towards institutionalizing participatory mechanisms - such as vendor associations and block leader systems that empower stakeholders and promote shared responsibility in market management. Transparent and accountable fee structures are also crucial; policies must require clear reporting on the collection and allocation of vendor rents to foster trust and ensure that funds are reinvested into improving facilities, security, and vendor welfare.

Addressing labor precarity requires the integration of social protection measures for informal workers, including access to emergency aid, health services, and protective infrastructure—especially in the face of disasters or abrupt market closures. Flexible and context-sensitive regulations can help vendors to better cope with uncertainties inherent in informal work. Urban planning policies should also prioritize inclusive spatial arrangements, ensuring equitable stall allocation, adequate lighting, sanitation, and the provision of child-minding centers to support women and parent vendors. Cultural diversity and economic innovation, hallmarks of Philippine night markets, should be actively supported through policies that celebrate local products, crafts, and migrant contributions, thus strengthening both inclusion and urban vibrancy.

## Conclusion

The Public Forum on Night Markets in the Philippines provided a space for critical engagement with the realities of informal urban livelihoods. By comparing experiences across multiple cities and foregrounding the voices of vendors, the forum revealed night markets as sites where economic necessity, governance practice, and urban inclusion intersect.



# **Center for Integrative and Development Studies**

Established in 1985 by University of the Philippines (UP) President Edgardo J. Angara, the UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS) is the policy research unit of the University that connects disciplines and scholars across the several units of the UP System. It is mandated to encourage collaborative and rigorous research addressing issues of national significance by supporting scholars and securing funding, enabling them to produce outputs and recommendations for public policy.

The UP CIDS currently has twelve research programs that are clustered under the areas of education and capacity building, development, and social, political, and cultural studies. It publishes policy briefs, monographs, webinar/conference/forum proceedings, and the Philippine Journal for Public Policy, all of which can be downloaded free from the UP CIDS website.

## **The Program**

The thrust of the Urban Studies Program is to bring to the fore the critical issues around urbanization and urban humanity in the policy discourses for the country. It brings together studies on cities especially with acute vulnerabilities such as coastal cities across the Philippines that directly respond to emerging concerns on urbanism with a specific lens on inclusive and just resilience framework.

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