Immigrant Interactions with Urban Food Systems:

A Study of the Bangladeshi Community in Detroit

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Abstract

This paper explores how Bangladeshi households and food businesses serving Bangladeshi immigrant communities interact with the food system within the cities of Detroit and Hamtramck. Interviews with constituents from the community and outsiders working in the community, who were selected based on their positions within or relationship to our target demographic, were conducted and peer-reviewed research was reviewed to identify how raw materials for food preparation are procured, whether or not culturally appropriate food items are easily accessible within city limits, the challenges faced by the community and the strategies used to cope with those challenges.

This research not only uncovers some of the problems Bangladeshi families have interacting with the city's food system, it addresses why solutions are important to the greater good of the food system, methods currently in place to address problems and recommendations for future change.

Target Research Area

Many of Southeast Michigan's Bangladeshi and Bangladeshi-American families reside in the neighborhood that straddles the North Side of Hamtramck, extending into Detroit. In fall of 2016, the State of Michigan officially recognized the area as "Banglatown," a nickname locals have been using for years to describe the growing Bangladeshi business and residential neighborhood (Warikoo, 2015). Both the State and the City of Detroit have turned their focus on Banglatown as they push to make the region more immigrant-friendly and hope to use it as a template to revitalize other neighborhoods and cities that have experienced population loss.

The cross section that is Banglatown stretches between Harold Street and the Davison Freeway, along Conant and for several blocks on either side of Conant. Racially, the

neighborhood is a mix of people of Polish descent, African Americans and South Asians. According to the most recent census data, about 6,000 individuals from Bangladesh live in Wayne County. The median household income of a Bangladeshi family living in Banglatown is about $17,474 (Carducci, 2014), which is about $3,000 below the poverty line for a family of three according to federal guidelines (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2016).

History of Bangladeshi Immigration to Detroit

Individuals and families have been immigrating to Detroit from Bangladesh in larger numbers since the 1930s, when the booming auto industry brought promise of a more sustainable future. But since the 1980s, a second two-part wave of immigration has occurred: Bangladeshi immigrants who had been living in New York City, the United States' largest South Asian settlement, also began moving to Detroit. They cited one reason: cheaper housing (Kershaw, 2001). However, since establishing a strong presence along the Detroit and Hamtramck border, they have had an unprecedented effect on the local food system, and vice versa.

With their arrival comes the expectation that both city and people will accommodate one another. There have been struggles. However, Banglatown also showcases the possibility of culturally-inclusive cuisine within an urban context.

I. Problems in Banglatown's Food System

As with any immigrant population, there are cultural needs that likely are not being met within Detroit and Hamtramck's Bangladeshi community. Or rather, they are not being met in the traditional sense. For example, the typical methods of procuring food grown in a family garden changes with the shorter growing season. Also, the traditional process of raising, slaughtering, processing and selling halal meat is not necessarily being accommodated and has caused some friction between city officials and residents.

Bengali populations, both in Bangladesh and the United States, have become increasingly at-risk for developing diabetes or pre-diabetic symptoms later in life. On the flip side, extreme poverty has an adverse effect on Detroit's most vulnerable. People from all classes and socioeconomic statuses are seeing unique problems that will need to be mitigated. The following problems have been observed by residents, business owners and city stakeholders.

Access to Land, Altered Agricultural Practices and Business Knowledge for Women

In Banglatown, women primarily are in charge of tending to the garden. For many families, this is the only way to acquire fresh produce. The combination of limited land, forced deviations from traditional Bengali agricultural traditions and a makeshift glass ceiling in the entrepreneurial sector often prevent women from meeting their own needs.

The area's sheer density of households makes most land plots smaller and closer together. For families who use agriculture as their main source of produce, such as those in Banglatown, this limits their farming. The shorter growing season also complicates matters.

Ali Lapetina, who facilitates Women of Banglatown, a social group for women and children, said the women she works with use their entire backyards to grow squash, strawberries, cilantro, chili peppers and much more. She noted they have to get creative due to lack of space and a shorter growing season, using trellises and growing inside during the cold months then transplanting outside once it gets warm.

The language barrier means Lapetina often works with the women's bilingual children for translation. The group often relies on local donations and grants to thrive. This year, she said they received a grant to renovate the garage they've been using for their projects.

Most of the women in the group come from Sylhet, one of the largest cities in Bangladesh, and were accustomed to having more space to farm to support themselves. As a

result of the close quarters, Lapetina said the women often can't grow enough food to support themselves. Burnside Farm, a small urban farm in Banglatown started by artist Kate Daughdrill in 2011, offers a number of plots for neighbors to garden if they are in need of space. But, there is still demand for more.

In addition to lack of space, another issue facing Banglatown's urban gardeners is the cost of water to grow the food. Many of the families who garden have expressed concern to Lapetina about their rising water bills and are interested in rain catchment systems as a solution. Lapetina responded to the need by contacting a company that was willing to donate 55-gallon drum barrels to be converted into rain barrels for the women to install in their backyards.

But, for those whose gardens are thriving and producing more than the family can consume, the option of food entrepreneurship for women is limited with issues such as the language barrier, lack of financial literacy and differing gender roles. In an effort to bridge this gap, Emily Staugaitis created Bandhu Gardens, a network of family-owned plots that allows the women to sell their produce to local restaurants as a source of income.

"When men move here, there's a whole network of industry, and men can hook into this network, but there's not a similar network for women," Staugaitis said. "(Bandhu Gardens) is about recognizing this amazing skillset and looks to figure out how to parlay that incredible skill they have (and say) 'How do we elevate that and put that into the food system?'"

In 2015, they established wholesale accounts with Ferndale restaurants, Public House and Imperial and Detroit restaurant, Rose's Fine Foods. This year she said they are developing plans to add Antietam, located on Gratiot, and The Farmer's Hand, a new market in Corktown to their growing list of clients. She is also looking into options to help women become paid delivery drivers for their produce in the future.

Access to culturally-appropriate food

The overwhelming response to whether or not members of the Bangladeshi community in Detroit and Hamtramck currently have access to culturally appropriate food items was "yes." But, it hasn't always been that way and there are still a few things left to be desired. Just two decades ago, Bangladeshi families would drive to the Detroit suburbs or into Canada to purchase familiar food items. They often shopped at Indian grocery stores and found foods that were similar. Families would carpool to farms to purchase poultry that was raised and butchered according to Halal practices.

In 2016, along a bustling stretch of Conant Street, Bengali markets, butchers, restaurants and retail shops thrive. According to business owner Zak Ahmed, Bangladeshi, African, Arab and American families drive in from the suburbs, from Canada and even as far away as Kentucky to do their shopping in this neighborhood. They will "make a day of it" by coming into the neighborhood to do their grocery shopping, have lunch at a local restaurant and maybe attend a prayer service or other events that may be happening.

Ahmed opened Bengal Spices in 1987 because his family's preferred spices were not available in the area and he was tired of having to cross the border to go into Windsor to purchase them. "I figured if we can't end up running the store profitably, we can at least consume these spices ourselves," Ahmed said of his decision to open the market. He began importing spices from New York, Los Angeles and Canada. He imported some spices directly from Bangladesh but the import process can be lengthy and often requires more work than it's worth. In addition to spices, produce, frozen foods and pantry items, Bengal Spices also features a Halal poultry butcher and imports fish from Bangladesh, Pakistan, India and Myanmar.

However, recent restrictions on placement of halal meat butchers has put a strain on the community's relationship with the city. In a lecture to Wayne State University's Cities and Food class on April 18, 2016, city planner Kathryn Lynch Underwood said business owners wanted to open butcher shops on commercial strips in the past, and it had created potentially unsavory health issues with animal remains not being disposed of properly. Ultimately, she said the problems with illegal dumping near dumpsters and in storm drains created foul odors and too many risks of disease to be near residential areas.

From the restaurant owner's perspective, Mahabub Alil Chowdhury, owner of Aladdin Sweets & Cafe, also feels that he has access to all of the culturally appropriate food items he needs to run his business and said everything he orders for the restaurant is sourced locally. He recalled 2003 as the year when enough resources became available in Detroit and Hamtramck that he no longer had to import his ingredients.

Overall, availability of culturally appropriate food in local markets and restaurants has not been a problem for years, said Imam Abdul Latif Azom, of Banglatown's Masjid al Falah. Because of the globalization of the food industry, access to unhealthy foods has never been simpler, in Detroit and Bangladesh alike.

"There's plenty of food," he said. "Anything you want you can have it now. And if you go to Bangladesh now you'll find Burger King."

Diabetes as a Public Health Risk

Failure to meet food and nutritional needs, in turn, could be leading to overconsumption of food lacking in nutrition, increasing the risk of type II diabetes in adults. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Bangladesh is home to the third largest population living with diabetes in the world. The rate of diagnosis has grown from four percent in 1995 to 10

percent in 2010 (WHO, 2013). The 2013 Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey found that 40 percent of diabetics who participated in the study lived comfortably in the uppermost quintile of income. With growing globalization, there is more access to processed food, and as South Asia becomes increasingly urban, its people are relying less on agriculture. The problem has made its way into cities in the United States, such as New York City and Detroit.

Diabetes is becoming more common mostly among older generations, which has prompted the children of some Bengali immigrants to change their eating habits. Nushrat Rahman, a member of Wayne State University's Bangladeshi Student Organization, said many of her older relatives are now living with diabetes.

Diet. Some researchers and Bengali Detroiters posit that the increase in diabetes and cardiovascular disease has the most to do with diet, be it through consuming more of the usual food or more processed food than their body was accustomed to in Bangladesh.

Rahman said her grandmother still eats as she traditionally would in Bangladesh - rice with every single meal, even snacks. Her mother is also diabetic. Because the body processes most white rices as sugar, this could quickly create a diabetic predisposition.

Rahman's family tries to steer clear of processed food, with her dad only venturing to Walmart once a month to get "bad food for the kids," aka cereals and frozen foods.

There also might be a decrease in physical activity as Bangladeshis in the U.S. are more likely to travel via car rather than walking in an unfamiliar neighborhood.

Biological Predisposition. For some, diabetes might come as a result of food insecurity in earlier generations, which genetically altered the body's way of processing food. Neel's "thrifty gene" theory hypothesizes that history of famine causes the body to store leftover nutrients consumed in food as fat due to previous generations going long periods of time without

food. Parts of Asia, such as India (of which Bangladesh was a part until 1971) and China, have been more predisposed to obesity and therefore type II diabetes (Patel & Bhopal, 2007).

Another possible explanation is impaired glucose tolerance. Rates of food insecurity are extremely high in Bangladeshi children, which can permanently alter how their bodies process glucose and create problems later in life (Ramachandran, 2010).

Poverty

Bangladesh is one of the most food insecure countries in the world. USAID reports that 41% of children under age five in Bangladesh are considered "chronically malnourished" (USAID, 2015).

Poverty often carries over to the U.S. as well. While middle and upper-class Bengali immigrants live in the suburbs, Banglatown has a poverty rate of 70 percent. When families can afford to move out of the city, they take the chance. "We call it the start of home," Ahmed said. "They all come here (to Detroit) first and when they are able to move out they do. I did it too."

Chowdhury echoed this sentiment. "I would have stayed in Hamtramck for the rest of my life, but then I had two children," he said. In the end, he and his wife wanted more space for their children to play outdoors, on a street that wasn't littered with fast food wrappers, soda cans, broken glass and other waste.

These changes put pressure on local social service agencies. Conversely, lack of cultural competency and adept interpreters on the part of social service agencies also has created friction between providers and residents in need. In the past, Staugaitis said she has helped women in Banglatown apply for food assistance with state and local agencies and has been frustrated with the response. She said most didn't offer interpreters, and when they did have them they only offered written translation, which often does no good because the clients also are illiterate.

“I can’t imagine what it’s like to navigate such a system without an ally,” she said. “The barrier to access is so high, even for a higher-level native English speaker. There was not one person (in the agency) who speaks Bengali. It is absolutely insane. Its really a very complicated issue and there’s not one miracle solution for it.”

She said the problem also applies to food pantries, which often rely on donations of culturally-inappropriate foods to provide for families in need. “There’s some culturally relevant stuff, but then there’s six boxes of Pillsbury orange cookie mix, and for a woman that doesn’t have an oven, you don’t need that,” she said. “There’s a difference between charity and establishing food security and sovereignty in the level of dignity and cultural appropriateness.”

II. Why are these issues important to solve for the community/bigger food system?

Growing influence on politics

The Bangladeshi community has continued to grow steadily in Metro Detroit since the 1980s, and their presence in local politics also has increased. Three of Hamtramck’s six incumbent city councilmembers are Bangladeshi, and Hamtramck was the first city in the United States to print ballots in Bengali in the last election.

Thus far, the community has fought to make their voices heard and have been successful. If given the chance, they will advocate strongly for their needs. The language barrier often means residents cannot voice their needs within the community, and having other Bengali-speakers in local politics could make sure those needs are heard and met.

Could speak to ever-present issue of racial intolerance

Often, food system issues are laden with other overlapping social issues, racial discrimination included. Until these problems are brought into the open and addressed, they

could remain an implicit barrier to access within the Bangladeshi immigrant experience in Detroit.

When Ahmed first moved to Detroit and began establishing his business, he said he was hit with roadblock after roadblock and met a great deal of resistance from the city. “I had to hire an attorney to get my rights in the city,” he said. “Back then it was really tough to open a business. I had to wait a month and a half, 9-5 outside (an office every day) to get an inspector. I had to wait five weeks just for a general business license. I had to go to the media.”

Because of city regulation, halal butchers are not permitted to set up shop within a certain radius of a residential area. Underwood said the approach is meant for safety and public health protection, but past mishaps with the city could lead Bangladeshi residents to perceive the slight as discrimination, therefore causing more friction and catching on in local government.

Cross cultural benefits for Detroit’s other immigrant communities

When Chowdhury mentioned that there was a turning point at which he was able to stop importing ingredients for his kitchen, he cited the ever-growing population of South Asians and Arab and non-Arab Muslims throughout Southeast Michigan as being the catalyst for that change – not just the Bengali community.

Rahman spoke about the diversity in her school, Al-Ikhlas Training Academy, which is housed within Masjid Al-Falah. Not only were Bengali kids from the immediate neighborhood attending the school, but there were also Yemeni students, Senegalese students who drove from across the city to attend and other Muslim students of varying nationalities. She recalled how much they enjoyed lunch time, which was a communal experience where students would trade their prepared lunches from home with each other so that they could try foods from other cultures.

The Banglatown neighborhood provides culturally appropriate foods for many Muslim and South Asian cultures. Yemeni businesses thrive next door to Bangladeshi businesses and it is not uncommon to see people from many ethnic backgrounds shopping in Bengal Spices or dining in Aladdin on any given day.

Chowdhury said much more than just Bangladeshis are patronizing his restaurant. Many of their clientele are from other immigrant communities in Detroit, Hamtramck and the suburbs and a great deal of their catering business comes from Americans who hire Aladdin for weddings, corporate functions and holiday parties. Despite the diverse clientele, he has never felt pressured to cater a portion of his menu to the desires of his American or Western customers.

Residents can contribute skills to Detroit's food system

Bangladeshi families have a unique set of skills when it comes to growing and storing food in large amounts, and it could create employment or entrepreneurial opportunities for them if their skills were utilized.

Staugaitis said she is working to increase English language skills among the women she works with, but that assimilation beyond that is not the goal. She believes the unique skills the women bring could also bring cultural understanding to the forefront of the conversation, with cooking and shared meals becoming the universal language.

III. Methods Used to Address Problem

Myriad systems in Detroit and Hamtramck work together to make sure basic needs are met, including individual families, places of worship, social services, schools and local businesses.

Familial/community mitigation

Community as a family unit is a belief that is not unique to South Asian culture, but it remains especially apparent in Indian and Bangladeshi neighborhoods. Banglatown is no exception. Several residents expressed that when there is need in the community, they do their best to meet it "in-house." For example, the family in need will be hosted for dinner at a different home each evening so as not to bring shame to them for being considered "needy" and so that the responsibility to help is shared by the whole community.

This is common among South Asian families. McGoldrick writes that within families there is a general mistrust of social service agencies, and when they are invoked a sense of shame often is placed on that individual (McGoldrick, 2005).

Religious organization

Giving alms to the needy is a fundamental aspect of Islam. There are a few mosques in Banglatown that many residents frequent, and one in particular, Masjid al Falah, often hosts dinners as a way of lifting up and giving back to their community. The problem with the dinners, however, is that the community perceives them as something in which only poor or less-fortunate individuals need to partake, therefore attaching a stigma to the well-intended practice. Rahman said she knew families who attended the dinners but also was under the impression they were intended for families that were food insecure.

One key event that brings Bengali Muslims together is Ramadan, a month of fasting from sunup to sundown that is revered in Islam. Each night, when the neighborhood breaks fast, Imam Azom said mosque-goers in the neighborhood get together and share a meal and foster a strengthened sense of community through their faith.

"At the beginning of night time you have some extra prayer, everybody comes together," he said. "It brings you closer. When you're not eating you have more time to read and concentrate. Food can take us apart."

Local entrepreneurship.

Business owners such as Ahmed paved the way to make entrepreneurship more feasible for other Bangladeshi immigrants. There is a connection between food, art and industry that could be completely bridged in the business sector. Perhaps if more opportunities existed in the commercial sector, such as through Eastern Market Corporation, less families would be forced to live in poverty.

Urban Farming

Banglatown is dense in family gardens, mostly smaller plots because of the dense placement of homes in the area. It can be assumed this practice was continued from Bangladesh, a society much more dependent on agriculture. It mitigates two large problems in the Banglatown food system: lack of income and lack of access.

Social services

Typically, Bengali residents are choosing to receive assistance through smaller nonprofit organizations geared toward their ethnic or religious background. Irum Ibrahim, who works at Muslim Family Services in Banglatown, said the center must keep its small food pantry open daily because they receive visits from so many clients in need throughout the week. She said a majority of their clientele are Bengali.

Through their experiences, Lapetina and Staugaitis both said the women they work with often utilize federal food assistance programs, such as SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) and WIC (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children).

However, it typically goes hand-in-hand with assistance from loved ones due to the shame that comes with seeking charity. In many families, but particularly in Bangladeshi families, there is a sense of personal failure that comes with not being able to manage problems within the family. In times of trouble they may be more likely to consult spiritual leaders than a case worker or even family and friends.

Also, McGoldrick writes that identity in Bangladeshi culture is more collective than individualist (McGoldrick, 2005). The concept of making sure nobody goes hungry is pervasive in the region, but many are discouraged from going to social services due to many fears that could be well-placed due to racial or ethnic discrimination.

IV. Recommendations for Change

More recognition of the community as a whole.

Banglatown has become more visible with a recent naming ceremony commissioned by Governor Rick Snyder, but not much is widely known about their food system (Warikoo, Nov. 7, 2015). Research literature on the community is scarce, and the everyday efforts of most residents to stay afloat largely go unnoticed. Aside from Burnside Farm, a majority of the local efforts discussed in this paper have not been covered by the media, local or national. Lapetina is also a freelance photographer for The New York Times, so this could change in the coming months.

Continued inclusion of Bangladeshi farmers in urban agriculture initiatives.

Burnside Farms initially came into being to bring about a larger sense of community between ethnic groups in the area. There seems to be a palpable divide within the agricultural community in Detroit among cultural methods and practices, and a mutual sharing of knowledge could only benefit all parties involved.

Staugaitis is working to bridge the language divide, although her efforts are currently small-scale with a few families at a time. Bandhu Gardens has partnered with Keep Growing Detroit to offer free educational programming, with a Bengali interpreter, through their Garden Resource Program (GRP). But, it would also be helpful to see GRP applications, events calendars and other education materials printed in Bengali so that they are inclusive of and accessible to this demographic.

Large corporations such as Eastern Market are also starting to do their part to encourage local entrepreneurs from Banglatown. The corporation supports local business owners by allowing them to sell products in their market. The women of Bandhu gardens are now using their lifelong growing skills to sell produce to local restaurants, in addition to selling traditional Bangladeshi produce items at Eastern Market on Saturdays.

A particular focus on Bengali-owned businesses could catapult visibility of their efforts into the public eye, garnering further economic success for both parties and further encouraging community involvement among the business owners. Since halal butchers are allowed within a more commercial space, perhaps more butchers could set up shop within Eastern Market and further increase their business.

Efforts such as this must continue to address two key issues: the language barrier as well as the cost barrier. Bengali agricultural workers have skills to contribute, and their unique needs often keep them from accessing building blocks to their own economic success through food.

Wider availability of appropriate social services.

Most individuals in the community rely on smaller-scale, community-based organizations to stay afloat, such as mosques and Muslim Family Services, who cannot possibly accommodate the entire need ratio. If more partnerships with culturally competent government-based agencies,

nonprofits and religious organizations exists, it would bridge the gap for those who still fall through the cracks.

In terms of equalizing access to services, interpreters who can speak Bengali are needed for progress to occur. Also, calling attention to what foods are culturally appropriate to donate can only help. For example, around the holidays many nonprofits compose wish lists of specific products they need - this concept is the perfect opportunity to encourage donor awareness.

For those who do work with a largely Bengali population, cultural competency training should be provided to educate case workers about the daily lives of their clients. The International Institute of Metropolitan Detroit hosts such trainings several times per year and often works with social service agencies. They also offer interpretation services in Bengali.

More inclusive government conversations.

City planners must find a way to marry city needs with the needs of the average Bengali family. Access to halal meat is a must, and there needs to be development of a safe way to house, slaughter and sell these animal products in a suitable place. Also, it's important to consider their needs in future development of land meant for agricultural uses.

Continued education about healthy eating

The prevalence of type 2 diabetes among the Bengali community is concerning for future generations. The extreme oversaturation of food availability can be overwhelming, so combining education with cultural understanding is crucial. In some ways, it could be as simple as hosting nutrition workshops in Bengali or translating food pyramids into Bengali and using symbols and pictures for clients who are illiterate. But pervasive social structures could complicate matters.

With the patriarchal family structure that exists within most Bangladeshi households, it can be difficult for women to leave the house or find the time to exercise. Perhaps a program that

travels to their homes would be useful - for example, a yoga or exercise workshop hosted in one home in the neighborhood that all the women on the block could attend.

Conclusion

This research concluded that the main problems in the city's food system for the Bangladeshi community are: access to land and other resources for urban agriculture, access to culturally-appropriate food, the growing prevalence of diabetes among this demographic and poverty. While community organizations, business owners and government services are meeting many of the Bangladeshi community's needs, there are still some gaps. For example, while there are plenty of options for sourcing culturally-appropriate food products right within the Banglatown neighborhood, the city needs to ensure that an entire community is not alienated if laws are changed or more strictly enforced regarding the processing of halal meat. And, more can be done to ensure that the Bangladeshi community is able to access the available resources and secure the food they need to sustain themselves. The recommendations made can help to mitigate some of the problems that have been identified by raising awareness, encouraging inclusivity, expanding accessibility of social services and increasing education. The immigrant population of this area of Detroit and Hamtramck will only continue to grow, so it is important that these problems be remedied.

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Appendix 1: Interview Subjects

In order of appearance

Ali Lapetina is a documentary and freelance photographer who lives in Corktown, Detroit. She also is the founder of Women of Banglatown, a small grassroots organization that specializes in the relationship between food, art and community for women and children. The program hosts events every Sunday in a refurbished donated garage. She also collaborated with Kate Daughdrill to make Burnside Farm come together. Her work has been featured online and in the Wall Street Journal, the Huffington Post and NPR.

Emily Staugaitis is a local artist and founder of Bandhu Gardens, an agricultural collective that took root in Banglatown in 2015. The mission of the garden is to create more opportunities for Bengali women in the area to sell produce and make a profit. On the part of the buyers, she also is seeking to bridge gaps created by language and cultural barriers and make markets more accessible for the women.

Zak Ahmed is the owner of Bengal Spices, located at 11645 Conant in Hamtramck. The market sells everything from fish and other staples to household items. Ahmed said he was the first Bangladeshi immigrant to buy a house in Hamtramck in 1986, and he helped many other Bangladeshi immigrants move to Detroit. For example, those who needed a reference for a visa

to get into the U.S. would list Ahmed as their reference on applications. He also brought Imam Abdul Latif Azom from New York to start Masjid al Falah. He currently lives in Sterling Heights.

Kathryn Lynch Underwood is an urban planner with the City of Detroit. She spearheaded the effort to bring urban agriculture legislation to the city in 2009.

Mahabub Alil Chowdhury is co-owner of Aladdin Sweets & Café, a long-running Bangladeshi restaurant on the corner of Conant and Commor. Chowdhury moved to Hamtramck from Bangladesh in 1998, after spending one month in New York City. He spent years honing his restaurant industry skills at Joe Muir Seafood and Ruth's Chris Steakhouse prior to becoming a partner in Aladdin. Chowdhury lived in Banglatown for 16 years and now lives in Sterling Heights with his wife and two children.

Imam Abdul Latif Azom is one of the religious leaders at Masjid al Falah, also called the Islamic Center of North Detroit. The mosque, donated by the Catholic church it formerly hosted, houses programs for religious classes and ceremonies, as well as community dinners. Al-Ikhlas Training Academy is also located upstairs in the mosque.

Nushrat Rahman is an undergraduate student at Wayne State University and also a member of the school's Bangladeshi Student Organization. She's extremely passionate about food sovereignty - in high school she raised money for a project that would create a community garden that incorporated food, flowers and art. Due to the timing of graduating from high school and starting college, she had to put the project on hold, but hopes to continue it as she gains more experience. She also attended the academy above Masjid al Falah. She and her family live in Banglatown, in the same house her father bought when he first came to the United States in the mid-90s.

Irum Ibrahim is a case worker at Muslim Family Services, located at 12346 McDougall Street in Banglatown. Her background is in media - she has written and photographed for local outlets, including Hour Detroit.

Appendix 2:

Number of Asian Americans Served by Muslim Family Services in 2015

*Note Ibrahim said 95% of Asian clientele are Bengali

Month	Number of Individuals Served
January	153
February	194
March	303
April	346
May	316
June	191
July	133
August	263
September	282
October	318
November	252
December	299