



**FEED THE FUTURE**

The U.S. Government's Global Hunger & Food Security Initiative

# EatSafe: Evidence and Action Towards Safe, Nutritious Food

## Story Sourcing in Hawassa, Ethiopia

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*This EatSafe report presents evidence that will help engage and empower consumers and market actors to better obtain safe nutritious food. It will be used to design and test consumer-centered food safety interventions in traditional markets through the EatSafe program.*

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Feed the Future's EatSafe: Evidence and Action Towards Safe, Nutritious Food aims to improve the safety of nutritious foods in traditional food markets. As part of its Phase I (formative research) activities, EatSafe seeks to understand knowledge, attitudes, and practice (KAP) related to food safety in the target area. Story Sourcing – the use of journalistic techniques to uncover stories and anecdotes from the daily lives of a target audience (i.e., consumer and vendors in traditional food markets) – is a foundational activity during Phase I of program implementation. In Ethiopia, EatSafe operates in the Aroge Gebeya traditional food market in Hawassa City.

**This memo is a supplemental overview of the [interactive website](#) that contains the stories and photographs from the Story Sourcing activity.**

Story Sourcing provides critical insights into people's motivations, fears, and aspirations related to food safety, and is foundational to the development of a social and behavior change communication (SBCC) media intervention.

In May 2022, following recruitment and training, four Story Scouts conducted 79 in-depth interviews with 54 consumers and 25 vendors. Interviews were primarily conducted in Amharic. Women comprised the majority of the sample (65% vs. 35% male). About two-thirds of interviewees were between the ages of 26 and 45 years old. Of the vendors interviewed, 60% were women who sold grains, fruits, and vegetables.

Following the completion of interviews, Story Scouts produced 24 (six each) vivid, specific, emotional, and impactful stories about the experience of food safety in Hawassa. This resulted in a multi-faceted montage of people's worlds. In these stories, EatSafe identified four themes:

- Adventures with Food
- Family Dramas
- Community Support; and
- Dreams and Aspirations.

During Phase II of program implementation, EatSafe will use these 24 stories to create culturally relevant behavior change interventions, including media content (e.g., television or radio dramas, videos for trainings) in Amharic and other local languages that integrate key food safety messages that resonate with consumers and vendors in Hawassa, Ethiopia.

## I. INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS STORY SOURCING?

Feed the Future's EatSafe: Evidence and Action Towards Safe, Nutritious Food aims to improve the safety of nutritious foods in traditional food markets using a two-phased approach: in Phase I, EatSafe conducts formative research to understand consumers' and vendors' existing knowledge, attitudes, and practice (KAP) related to food safety in the target area, while interventions are developed and implemented in Phase II using the learnings and insights previously developed. Across both phases, social and behavior change communication (SBCC) is foundational, allowing EatSafe to craft media interventions and food safety messages that resonate with target audiences. Further, interventions can only be effective if the media itself is designed for, and to some extent by, the target audience. Story Sourcing, an SBCC tool, helps make that possible.

This memo summarizes the methodology and results of EatSafe in Ethiopia's Story Sourcing activity. Story Sourcing – the semi-formal process that uses journalistic techniques to gather stories directly from the audience of interest – provides anecdotes from people's daily life at home, at the market, and within the community to guide the writing and design of compelling and memorable SBCC media interventions.

EatSafe previously conducted this work at three traditional food markets as part of Phase I activities in [Birnin Kebbi, Nigeria](#). In Ethiopia, EatSafe operates in the Aroge Gebeya market in Hawassa City. **This memo is a supplemental overview of the [interactive website](#) that contains the stories and photographs from the Story Sourcing activity.** Navigating the interactive site, users can journey through the vivid photographs and compelling stories of the people who buy and sell foods at the market in Hawassa.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

Overseen by EatSafe consortium partner Pierce Mill Entertainment and Education (PME), EatSafe recruited four Story Scouts who were familiar with Hawassa, had deep contextual knowledge of the traditional market environment, spoke local language(s), and had strong English writing skills. PME provided training to Scouts, who were obligated to abide by a comprehensive Code of Conduct and Ethics, covering topics such as safety and privacy for both parties; honesty, humility, and active listening as key principles; and establishing trust and rapport with interviewees. The biographies of the selected Story Scouts are available at the bottom of the interactive website.

Once in the market, Scouts selected consumers and vendors to interview, using the following inclusion criteria: age 18 or older; interest in participating and sharing personal information; willing to give informed consent.<sup>1</sup> Interviews could be conducted in different local languages or English based on interviewee preference. Scouts recorded interviews (e.g., using a digital video

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<sup>1</sup> Interviewees were identified in one of four ways: (1) referral from a partner organization or individual contact; (2) spending time in the market to find visually identify, then approach, people who likely satisfy the selection criteria; (3) discovering interviewees through reviewing social media, past TV and newspaper reporting, and/or (4) recommendations from other interviewees (i.e., snowball sampling).

camera, tablet with a microphone, or standalone digital recorder) and took photographs of the interviewees and surrounding market area.

Each Scout was responsible for 20 interviews. Once the interviews were complete, Scouts compiled themes that were both unique and shared across interviewees. They were then tasked with developing six vivid, specific, emotional, and impactful stories.

### 3. RESULTS

In-person interviews took place in the Aroge Gebeya traditional market in Hawassa, Ethiopia during May 2022. Scouts conducted a total of 79 interviews, comprising 54 consumers and 25 vendors (68% and 32%, respectively).

#### 3.1. PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Women comprised most of the sample (65% vs. 35% male). Most interviewees (62%) were between the ages of 26 and 45 years old, with some aged 18-25 (17%) or 46-60 (14%). Almost 90% of the interviews were conducted in Amharic, with the remaining 10% in Sidama, and none in English.

Of the vendors interviewed, women comprised 60%, while men were 40%, and almost all sold grains, fruits, and vegetables – the latter of which cover EatSafe’s Key Commodities in Ethiopia.

#### 3.2. IDENTIFIED THEMATIC AREAS

In the 24 stories developed by the Story Scouts, EatSafe identified four themes, explored in detail in the sections below. The interactive website allows users to fully explore these four themes. Included below is a screenshot of one story, *My Community Is My Insurance*, from the “Community Support” thematic area.

##### 3.2.1. ADVENTURES WITH FOOD

As most of the interviews were conducted in the market and since our journalists identified themselves as being part of EatSafe, the theme of food was present in many of the stories. The accounts here ranged from funny to serious, but all showed the importance of good and safe food for the community.

##### 3.2.2. FAMILY DRAMAS

Many of the stories focused on dramatic happenings within a family. Universal in nature, this theme was top-of-mind for many interviewees as family dramas have a way of searing themselves into memory and frequently represent pivot points in one’s life. These stories revolved around marital issues, parenthood, and loss, providing compelling stories leading to empathy on part of the listener.

##### 3.2.3. COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Supporting one another emerged as an important theme in many of the stories, which included remarkable acts of compassion and help to those that had fallen on difficult times. As noted by many, life in the market is challenging and requires a lot of hustle, so when an unexpected circumstance, like a fire or a theft, ruins one’s capacity to earn a living, the community would

step up to help. This idea of community support appears to be culturally engrained, as these stories followed a very similar pattern with the community gathering funds together to help someone who had lost something essential to their livelihood.

#### 3.2.4. DREAMS AND ASPIRATIONS

Many of those interviewed used the opportunity to talk about either their dreams and aspirations or of those who are close to them. In several instances, men talked about how, even in the face of ridicule, they happily took on domestic duties typically handled by women. They not only felt it was their obligation to help the family, but also wanted to be a role model for their children by normalizing activities for men like shopping or cooking. Story Scouts also heard numerous accounts of consumers and vendors sacrificing their dreams for the good of their family or for economic reasons. These sacrifices did not lead to bitterness or resentment; rather, they were noted as a key part of one's identity.

## "My Community Is My Insurance" by Solomon Yimer

From shoe shiner to daily laborer, from merchant to carriage driver, the 64-year-old Hawassa resident Hailu Sakato had to work tirelessly to feed his family. But it took years of hard work and dedication for the father of seven just to have a relatively fair and permanent income. Last year, when Hailu, a veteran military member, bought his first Bajaj, a three-wheeler with his savings, the joy was not only from him and his family. Everyone in his neighborhood was happy for his success.

Having a three-wheeler is a secure source of income among the community. Hailu started to work with better energy and dedication. Every morning he woke up at 6:30 pm to transport people to and from Aroge Gebeya. Most of the time he returned home late at night. For Hailu, who now lives with his three daughters and has a new wife, that was a happy time and felt very secure. "That time I was working harder than ever and earning a very good daily income, and everything was fine," Hailu explained.

In February last year, one terrible event changed his life overnight. When he went to pick the three-wheeler in the place he usually parked at night, he found it burned. "I didn't believe my eyes. I found everything turned into ash," Hailu said. "It was a shocking experience." According to him, there were also other vehicles including one minibus damaged due to the fire—the cause of which is still unclear. As Hailu only bought partial insurance coverage for third party damages, his insurance wouldn't pay reimbursements for his property loss. Hailu said that time he became hopeless to start afresh.

"I'm getting too old to work a labor job, and I was clueless on how to feed my kids. I cried and told God to kill me or bring me out of that mess," said Hailu, a devout Christian who does not go to sleep without praying. Meanwhile, two weeks later, people from his neighborhood contributed some cash and gave him money to buy a replacement. There is a kind of cooperation in this community to share in problems that happen to each other. If someone is the kind of person who extends his hand for others when faced with problems, he will be paid his turn when he needs it. "That time I felt overwhelmed," he said. "That moment really taught me a life lesson: I noticed how cooperation can make even the biggest problem simple."

Now Hailu bought a new Bajaj with the collected money and started working with new energy again. He promised himself to better serve his community with everything he can. He gives free rides for those who can't afford to pay and doesn't take payments from elderly and sick people as well.



**Figure 1.** My Community Is My Insurance, from the "Community Support" thematic area on the [interactive website](#)

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

EatSafe aims to generate evidence and knowledge on culturally appropriate methods for leveraging increased consumer demand for safe food to substantially improve the safety of nutritious foods in traditional market settings. Central to EatSafe's work is understanding (and potentially shaping) the motivations, attitudes, beliefs, and practices of consumers and food vendors. Taken as a whole, the stories the Story Scout's collected during the Story Sourcing activity provide a unique and rich landscape of life in Hawassa and in Aroge Gebeya itself. This landscape highlights specific dramatic events in people's lives that offer clues into the broader trends of life as a consumer and vendor. EatSafe identified what people care about in their lives, and those themes will be foundational in the creation of original interventions aiming to impact behavior around food safety.

### 4.1. IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERVENTION DESIGN

Key recommendations for EatSafe interventions targeting consumer and food vendors, flowing from the results of Story Sourcing, are to create communications and media interventions that build on the themes emerging from the collected stories. These themes provide context for the development of immersive stories and identifiable characters for the market consumer and food vendor audience, including:

- *Adventures with Food.* Stories about the cultural importance of food for consumers and how food plays a key role for food vendors' livelihood will be essential in developing stories for EatSafe media interventions.
- *Family Dramas.* Interviewees shared many stories of seminal moments with close family members. These kinds of stories should be used in media interventions as they elicit an empathetic response that can then be used to deliver food safety messaging.
- *Community Support.* Many of the interviewees highlighted how the community helped them in their time of greatest need. As this kind of support seemed to be grounded in cultural expectations, community support can be a key story component in food safety media programs for EatSafe interventions.
- *Dreams and Aspirations.* Interviewees were very motivated by their dreams and aspiration—both as an expression of what they have lost and what they hope for in the future. Several stories focused on the hope that gender roles would change and that men could play a more active part in domestic obligations.