An effective food safety system is vital to protect the public from foodborne diseases. In Nigeria, responsibility for food safety regulations is spread across the three tiers of Government – Federal, States, and Local Government Area Council (LGACs). Therefore, implementation effectiveness depends on the competence and efficiency of the agencies responsible at each level.\(^1\)

At the federal level, over a dozen Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs); (Figure 1) oversee food safety policy. Regulations that confer authority to MDAs often use vague or different definitions for the same terms, simultaneously resulting in overlapping authorities and coverage gaps.\(^1\) Of the 16 existing federal policies related to food safety, 14 were enacted 10 to 100 years ago – reflecting opportunities to revise regulations according to innovations in food safety best practices.\(^2\)

To clarify responsibilities related to food safety regulation between MDAs, the Federal Ministry of Health developed the National Policy on Food Safety and its Implementation Strategy in 2014.\(^3\) This effort resulted in the 2019 National Food Safety and Quality Bill (HB.19.01.1598), though it has yet to be passed into law by Nigeria’s 9\(^{th}\) National Assembly.\(^4\)
FOODS EXCHANGED IN TRADITIONAL MARKETS ARE UNREGULATED

As in other countries, 90% of domestic food exchange in Nigeria occurs in traditional (i.e., informal or wet) markets. These markets generally have lower prices than formal markets, are closer to consumers’ homes, and are important livelihood sources for Nigerian food vendors. Traditional markets usually fall under the authority of State and LGACs, bodies that may take regulatory action through cessation or suppression. In the absence of consistent, nationwide food safety standards and compliance requirements, traditional markets elude formal inspection by any of the federal MDAs described above. Vendors and other food value chain actors in traditional market contexts (e.g., suppliers, wholesalers, etc.) often lack knowledge and training on effective food safety risk management practices in these settings. Furthermore, they often operate without permits or licenses and in unapproved places that pose significant hygienic and environmental and/or food contamination risks.

POLICY OPTIONS: HARMONIZE AUTHORITIES AND PROVIDE RESOURCES

Enact the Food Safety and Quality Bill into law (HB.19.01.1598) during Nigeria’s 9th National Assembly.

Provide LGACs with resources, training, facilities, and dedicated personnel to develop, implement, and monitor vendor compliance to food safety guidelines for traditional markets.

Encourage LGACs to formulate simple messages on food safety and hygiene, translated into local languages and using visual graphics that are easily understood by the vendors and consumers at the community level.

CALL TO ACTION: STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC HEARING SESSIONS

The 9th National Assembly should enact into law (Act) the Food Safety and Quality Bill before their tenure ends on May 28, 2023. Without enacting the Bill, the Food Safety Policy itself is a lone document without legal backing for its implementation. The Bill would give legal, budget and enforcement authority to the policy when passed into law. Stakeholders will have an opportunity to make observations and advocate for the passage of the Bill during Public Hearings.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

4. See Nigeria, 2019. Food Safety and Quality Bill HB1598

For more details on EatSafe program activities, visit gainhealth.org/eatsafe or contact EatSafe@gainhealth.org.

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