EatSafe aims to improve the safety of nutritious foods in traditional markets.

In Nigeria, millions of consumers buy food from traditional markets. These open air markets are critical for sustaining vendors’ livelihoods and consumers’ food security. However, traditional markets in the informal food sector can pose significant food safety risks, particularly for highly nutritious foods (i.e., animal-source foods (ASF) and fresh vegetables). EatSafe’s market-based interventions in North West Nigeria educate and empower market actors, primarily vendors and consumers, to demand safer foods. Below is a summary of the formative research EatSafe conducted to inform the design of these interventions.

**CONSUMER DEMAND**

Consumers understand food safety as avoiding contaminated food and properly handling food to prevent illness for themselves or their families.

**FOODBORNE ILLNESS**

Some consumers report previously getting sick from eating food purchased in traditional markets. Among foodborne hazards, consumers often worry most about the presence of chemicals or insects in or on foods. However, bacterial contamination is actually the primary cause of foodborne illness, and EatSafe seeks to address this misconception.

**USE OF CUES FOR DECISION-MAKING**

Consumers use cues, or shorthand signals, to make purchasing decisions. Generally, people rely on their senses to determine how safe foods are.

**CUES CONSUMERS USE TO CHOOSE FOODS**

- Freshness
- Price
- Safety
- Nutrition
- Health

**VENDOR PRACTICES**

Vendors’ main concern about food safety is how contaminated foods could impact business.

**PROCURING SAFE FOOD**

Vendors are confident in their ability to identify suppliers of safe food. Most indicate they would spend more time and money to ensure the food they sold was safe.

**VISIBLE FOOD SAFETY PRACTICES**

While vendors acknowledge that visible hygiene and food safety practices are important to consumers, their knowledge about safe food practices may not translate to behavior.

- 20% had food handling tools (e.g., tongs)
- 90% touched food and money with the same bare hands
- 60% reported covering foods
- 12% displayed food with coverings

**VENDOR RELATIONSHIPS**

Consumers generally trust vendors to source and sell safe foods in the market. However, 4 in 5 consumers feel that some vendors care more about food safety than others.

**CUES VENDORS USE TO CHOOSE VENDORS**

- Market cleanliness
- Vendor cleanliness
- Product quality
- Price

**GENDER CONSIDERATIONS**

Male consumers tend to make quicker purchasing decisions, while women are more discerning and spend more time shopping and asking questions.

Most women don’t have the freedom and time that men do. Businesses require getting supply and then selling it. You have to move from one place to another, which most women don’t have [the] privilege to do.

Female vendors were rare, concentrated with consumers and vendors.

**FOOD SAFETY RISKS**

Consumers could be exposed to a very high risk of foodborne illness from a variety of nutritious foods purchased at traditional markets.

**ENABLING ENVIRONMENT**

Improving food safety at the market level requires thoughtful stakeholder engagement and policy advocacy.

**RESEARCH METHODS**

- **SURVEYS**
  - Cross-sectional surveys with consumers and vendors; observations of a subset of vendors.
- **INTERVIEWS**
  - In-depth interviews and focus group discussions with consumers and vendors.
- **HAZARD REVIEWS**
  - Review of foodborne hazards in Nigeria, microbial field sampling and analysis.
- **ETHNOGRAPHY**
  - Semi-structured interviews using cognitive mapping tools with consumers and vendors.
- **ADVOCACY ANALYSIS**
  - Stakeholder mapping and engagement; policy recommendations with institutional mapping.