



FEED THE FUTURE

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

EatSafe: Evidence and Action Towards Safe,
Nutritious Food

REPORT BRIEF

Food Safety, Traditional Markets, and Consumer Demand in Low- and Middle-Income Countries

A landscape synthesis

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BACKGROUND

Feed the Future's EatSafe: Evidence and Action Towards Safe, Nutritious Food seeks to improve the safety of nutritious foods bought and sold in traditional food markets globally. This brief summarizes the program's landscape synthesis of food safety, traditional markets, and consumer demand in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). The report synthesizes insights from 11 literature reviews conducted during EatSafe's formative research.

The report dives into the motivations and behaviors impacting food safety decision-making, delves into how food safety ties into nutrition and health across the food system, and pinpoints what makes traditional markets a good fit for safety improvements. It outlines EatSafe's approach to improve food safety in these markets: fostering positive behavior change, incorporating best practices and technologies, and enabling a supportive environment. Finally, the synthesis concludes with recommendations for programs looking to improve food safety behaviors in traditional markets.

The full report is available [here](#).



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FOOD SAFETY

ACROSS THE FOOD SYSTEM

Unsafe food carries significant consequences, yet it is frequently sidelined in nutrition and food system frameworks. Despite this oversight, food safety and nutrition are deeply interlinked across the food system through various pathways.

Health and Foodborne Disease Burden

Contaminated food cannot provide the vital nutrients needed for development and can lead to acute or chronic foodborne illnesses. These can hinder nutrient absorption, raising the risk of adverse health outcomes like undernutrition in young children, gastrointestinal issues, and diseases like cancer.

Unsafe food is not food.

Consumers and Market Dynamics

The choices of market actors, like consumers, often involve tradeoffs between cost, quantity, and perceived quality and/or safety, all of which influence nutrient intake. Likewise, safer but higher-cost products may reduce household budgets for other nutritious foods.

Governance, Policy, and Regulation

Standards that ensure safe processing and storage practices throughout the supply chain may improve food safety but could also impact nutrient levels.



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FOOD SAFETY

IN TRADITIONAL MARKETS

Estimates suggest up to 60% of foodborne disease burden in LMICs can be attributed to foods sourced from the informal food sector.

This reflects inadequate policy, regulation, infrastructure, surveillance, and food tracing systems for informal sector settings like traditional markets. Despite these risks, markets are hubs for nutritious food, livelihoods, community, and food security.

Nutrition Hub

In LMICs, traditional markets are responsible for up to 95% of domestic food access and provide highly nutritious fresh produce and animal-source foods (ASF).

Social Capital

Traditional markets are the preferred shopping environment for many people due to location, freshness of products, negotiable prices, and relational experiences that support socialization and community.

Food Safety Risks

While important for nutritious diets, ASF and fresh produce are often leading causes of foodborne disease globally. Market conditions can exacerbate these risks.

Economic Opportunity

Traditional markets are crucial to the economies of LMICs, as they are a key livelihood source for vendors and enable local development.



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FOOD SAFETY

BEHAVIORS OF MARKET ACTORS

Consumers and vendors are motivated to improve food safety but face a variety of context-specific internal and external constraints to changing their behavior. Psychosocial and emotional mechanisms are key motivators for positive behavior change. Changes in consumers' and vendors' food safety behaviors can be considered using measures of knowledge, attitudes, and practices.

CONSUMERS



Consumers value convenience and price over safety and may not be aware of the health consequences of unsafe food.



Food safety is seen as a set of practices rather than a calculation or perception of risk.



Most consumers have preexisting, culturally-specific food safety risk mitigation practices related to handling, preparation, and storage.

VENDORS

Informal food sector vendors generally have lower levels of knowledge about food safety than consumers.

Most vendors appear willing to receive information on food safety or to practice food safety-improving behaviors.

Though vendors generally self-report high adherence to food safety best practices, observations often find their actions are less than reported.



IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAM DESIGN



Consumer-focused interventions should highlight the health and financial implications of choosing safer and higher quality food from traditional markets.

Vendor-focused interventions should improve their capacity to handle food safely while addressing barriers faced in applying best practices. This includes improving the enabling environment.





FOOD SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS

Merely disseminating information about food safety falls short of creating a tangible, lasting difference. It's imperative that initiatives go beyond just imparting knowledge and instead focus on transforming behaviors. To achieve sustainable change, programs should integrate robust strategies rooted in social and behavioral change communications and insights from behavioral economics. This combination serves as a catalyst for reshaping both consumer and vendor behaviors in a way that endures over time.

When addressing food safety in traditional markets, practitioners can reinforce their efforts through a multi-dimensional approach to program development. This entails a comprehensive blend of elements, ranging from fostering positive behavior changes to implementing best practices, leveraging appropriate technologies, and cultivating an enabling environment. All these facets are indispensable in ensuring that food can be safe in traditional markets.

To read the full report, [click here](#).

Behavior-focused interventions are critical to achieving improvements in food safety.

Physical, political, and social constraints must be addressed to enable change.

Program design must be culturally appropriate and collaborative with local stakeholders.

Fostering demand requires understanding the salient factors that influence consumer choice.





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