

# EatSafe: Evidence and Action Towards Safe, Nutritious Food

## Report of EatSafe Launch in Nigeria with next steps

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*Held at*

*Ladi Kwali Hall, Sheraton Hotels, Abuja*

*Organized by*

*Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) IN Collaboration with USAID*

*On*

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## BACKGROUND

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates foodborne disease is responsible for over 600 million illnesses and 420,000 premature deaths globally each year. In Nigeria, unsafe food results in an estimated 173 million cases of diarrhea due to foodborne illness, and approximately 33,000 deaths, according to the Consumer Advocacy for Food Safety and Nutrition Initiative (CAFSANI). Kebbi State, although an agrarian state with diverse animal and plant-based food products, still battles a high level of malnutrition and food insecurity alongside foodborne diseases. As reported by the Nigerian National Population Commission and ICF International, an estimated 61% of children are stunted in Kebbi State, the highest rate in Nigeria. The EatSafe: Evidence and Action towards Safe and Nutritious Food project aims to enable lasting improvements in the safety of nutritious food in informal markets by focusing on the consumer. Consumer demand can be a critical driver to increase the supply of safe foods in Nigeria. EatSafe aims to gather knowledge and understand consumers' and food vendors' values and perceptions of food safety and the gendered roles that govern food safety-related behaviors. This knowledge will be used to develop interventions to improve food safety for consumers and vendors selling and sourcing foods in informal markets in Kebbi State.

## OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the launch were to:

- Introduce EatSafe to key Stakeholders.
- Create opportunities for networking and collaboration.
- Foster commitment of government leaders and stakeholders.
- Facilitate networking among stakeholders.

## OPENING REMARKS BY COLLIN DREIZIN, OFFICE OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND ENVIRONMENT, USAID NIGERIA

Collin Dreizin, the Director, Office of Economic Growth and Environment, USAID representing Anne Patterson, the Mission Director, USAID Nigeria welcomed participants to the event. In his background address, he mentioned that the challenges surrounding food safety are the reason for the gathering. In 2010, the global burden of foodborne disease was estimated at 600 million and nearly half a million deaths. More than 40% were children under 5 years old, while the other half were people living in low- and middle-income countries. Unsafe food is responsible for hundreds of diseases ranging from diarrhea to cancers, etc. resulting from contaminated food and causing deaths around the world. In Nigeria, some of these diseases also include chemical contamination and adulteration which exacerbates these challenges. Collin Dreizin expressed the delight of USAID to be working with GAIN and the Nigerian government to reduce the burden of foodborne illnesses and increase food safety in the country.

## WELCOME STATEMENT BY THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF GAIN, LAWRENCE HADDAD

Lawrence Haddad in his remarks pointed out that if food is unsafe, it cannot be nutritious and children consuming such food will not fulfill their potential or be productive. Unsafe foods are not nutritious regardless of how many nutrients or how much protein they contain. There are over 600 million cases of foodborne illnesses and about 420,000 are dying prematurely because of unsafe food i.e., 1 out of 10 people are affected by unsafe food. More importantly, in Kebbi State, the statistics are about 60%. To reduce this number, stakeholders must pay attention to food safety by approaching the government, consumers, and businesses to make food safety work for food systems. In demanding for food safety, an enabling environment must be created as well as creating the appropriate policies, necessary regulations, incentives and by connecting the public and private sectors, and a few NGOs to operate in the same regard.

To make food safety work, consumers must be made aware of where safe food comes from; what safe food looks like, and what it does not look like; and businesses need to realize that for their businesses to last long term, their business proposition is to make sure that food is safe. Governments also must make appropriate regulations that will drive towards safe and nutritious food. He expressed his pleasure that GAIN is working with USAID, the U.S. Mission in Nigeria and Kebbi State.

## WELCOME STATEMENT BY THE GOVERNOR OF KEBBI STATE

The chairman of the event, His Excellency, Senator Abubakar Atiku Bagudu, the Governor of Kebbi State, commended USAID for all the support they have been giving to Kebbi state, among other states; especially the EATSAFE project where Kebbi State is the principal beneficiary.



*Sen. Abubakar Atiku Bagudu, the Executive Governor of Kebbi State, during his remarks at the launch of EatSafe in Nigeria on 3<sup>rd</sup> December, 2020.*

The Federal Government has also been supporting the states through its social investments program, school feeding program, and the Nigerian food security initiative. Senator Abubakar Atiku Bagudu mentioned that the Federal Ministry of Agriculture & Rural Development has been helping to promote modern means of technological farming. The issue of unsafe food is a global problem that has generated greater attention among consumers, industry and other stakeholders. He highlighted the challenges affecting safe and nutritious

food, such as poor packaging of food, lack of storage/ preservative facilities, lack of capacity building for food handlers and vendors, etc. He concluded by adding that there is need for collaboration between the ministries of health, water, education, and planning as these would help in achieving safer and nutritious food best practices in the country.

## KEYNOTE ADDRESS ON “CONSTITUTION RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE GOVERNMENT IN ENSURING FOOD SAFETY IN NIGERIA” BY HONORABLE MINISTER OF HEALTH, DR OSAGIE EHANIRE

Dr Osagie Ehanire, the Honorable Minister of Health, commended the organizers of the project and thanked them for their support and drive for safe food in Nigeria. He commended USAID for funding EatSafe and applauded GAIN for its transformative work in Nigeria on food safety.

In 2020, the World Health Assembly recently adopted resolution EB146.R9 on food safety as an essential tool for ensuring good health, noting that to achieve the gender and sustainable development goals by 2030 especially on ending hunger and poverty and promoting good health and wellbeing, all member states must ensure that food safety is mainstreamed into policies of Health, Agriculture, Trade and Environment. The global market is where food safety issues for one can quickly becoming everyone’s issues. To truly protect consumer health, governments must focus not only on the formal market but the informal markets as well. Therefore, the intersection of informal markets and consumer is essential for the health indices of Nigeria.



*Dr. E. Osagie Ehanire (The Honourable Minister of Health, Federal Republic of Nigeria) during his keynote address at the launch of EatSafe in Abuja, Nigeria on December 3, 2020.*

EatSafe keys into the goals of the National Policy on Food Safety and its implementation strategy in ensuring that communication and educational tools for consumers are available to communicate essential and vital messages of food safety. These communication tools should not only be in English but also translated into multiple Nigerian languages to ensure greater communication reach.

The Honorable Minister added that every government has its constitutional responsibility of ensuring that the health of citizens is safeguarded and not endangered or abused. That is why the mission of the Federal Ministry of Health is to develop and implement policies that strengthen the National health system for effective, efficient, accessible and affordable delivery of health services in partnership with other stakeholders. To strengthen any health system, health-related issues, including promoting safe nutritious food, should be prioritized. In 2018, the World Bank released a report on safe food, noting that food safety systems are realized only when the essential elements of healthy diets are safe to eat and only when consumers recognize them. The report gave a detailed analysis on the impact of unsafe foods

to the health and economy of lower- and middle-income countries like Nigeria. From the report, one can see lower- and middle-income countries in the sub-Saharan African account for a dangerously high percentage of foodborne diseases and deaths in the world. Besides these health challenges, the economic cause of unsafe foods in lower- and middle-income countries were also estimated to be up to 95.8 billion US Dollars per year and out of this figure, Nigeria loses about one billion Dollars per year. These figures are saddening especially if one considers that the nation is oblivious of the fact that even milder cases of foodborne illness can impact the productivity and livelihoods of those individuals.

To ensure reductions in foodborne diseases, the onus lies on government at all levels to continuously monitor that:

1. Food regulators are trained and re-trained in food safety management system policies.
2. Food handlers are properly trained on the importance of food safety and food safety management systems.
3. Technical standards for food regulators, medical personnel, environmental health practitioners are deployed to ensure effective prevention and management of food safety.
4. Consumers are constantly sensitized and made aware of the impact of unsafe food and the right to choose to become partners of food safety through their own actions.
5. There is effective partnership with development partners.
6. There is effective collaboration between policy makers, researchers, and academia.
7. An enabling environment needed to leverage and intensify the food safety capacity and infrastructure.
8. Transparency in decision making and consultation.

Food safety is everyone's business. The collaboration of all stakeholders in the food supply chain i.e., the food producers, food transporters, food processors, food handlers, marketers and final consumers are essential to ensure comprehensive and integrated approach.

### *The Role of the Government in Reducing Foodborne Illness in Nigeria*

The Federal Government of Nigeria through the Federal Ministry of Health and other stakeholders with the support of partners in the past 8 years has been working to strengthen food safety. Nigeria is one of the few countries to have food safety policy and legislation, and a formal regulator. The Federal Government has made efforts to sensitize, train and re-train food handlers and regulators of food safety management systems. They have also met with top government officials in about 15 states to ensure that they prioritize issues of food safety. The Ministry of Health is currently conducting the nationwide assessment of foodborne surveillance and responses. This report will enable the ministry to identify gaps that may stand in the path of achieving the sustainable development goals, including through improving the surveillance and response systems in the country. The Minister also hopes that the recommendation of the World Health Assembly resolution ED146 for implementation will be applicable at federal levels and would ensure that it is presented in the next hearing for adoption and implementation by all stakeholders. The Minister has also approved further



initiatives to help increase awareness for food safety in the country and ensure that food safety is properly handled and funded.

The Minister concluded by stating that supported by the demands of increased globalization and technological advances in food science, improvements in regulatory and production processes are vital to meet the demands of modern food safety systems. Food safety is critical to health, economic sector and the wellbeing of citizens of all countries and the duty of the government is to protect the health of its citizens and to reduce the burden of foodborne disease in Nigeria.

## FOOD SAFETY AS A GLOBAL CONCERN; AN OVERVIEW BY BONNIE MCCLAFFERTY – DIRECTOR OF FOOD SAFETY, AND CHIEF OF PARTY FOR EATSAFE AT GAIN

Bonnie McClafferty started with the introduction of the USAID funded EatSafe program that focuses on food safety, nutrition, and health. One that faces the consumers first and investigates their ability to use market forces to check the availability of safe nutritious food into the future. The key priorities of this project are to gather more evidence to better understand how to improve the safety of food in the traditional markets.

GAIN is delighted to be launching this project in partnership with USAID as it is targeted to break grounds, communicate the goals, objectives and articulate the plans. The launch is intended to inspire and to thank the Nigerian Government for trusting them in helping to relate new knowledge and assets to start this project in Nigeria particularly in Kebbi State.

In 2015, it is estimated that 420,000 people died from unsafe food; 75% of all those deaths were in South Asia, South East Asia, and some sub-Saharan Africa; and 125,000 deaths were among children under years old. In most low- and middle-income countries where there are food safety legislation policies, enforcement on food safety policy is always lacking. Informal markets are popular and these informal food sectors are generally self-organized, they do not require any law binding procedure to thrive. As it relates to overall nutrition, there is clear evidence linking foodborne illness, stunted growth, nutrient absorbent, and nutrient loss. There is a concerning correlation between foodborne disease and malnutrition as such, one cannot be talked about one without paying attention to the other.

GAIN is worried about prevention of microbial pathogens, virus, pests, we are worried about



*A cross section of participants during the launch of EatSafe in Abuja, Nigeria on December 3, 2020.*

physical contamination, glass, rocks, chemicals, pesticides, preservations agents, allergies, adulterations, and finally crops which pose an enormous food safety challenge and they applaud the good work of food safety partners in Nigeria such as the International Institute for Tropical Agriculture (IITA) that working to remove harmful micro toxins and aflatoxins from the food supply.

The three (3) big areas to focus on as mentioned by His Excellency and the Honorable Minister are:

1. **Supply chain:** There is need for farm services particularly veterinary services, vehicles for transportation and storage of food.

Ultimately, the industries need to be accountable for safety of foods, primary processing; packaging and labelling are also things to focus on putting in consideration wholesale, retail, restaurants, and street foods, traceability of food system and traceability of its functions.

2. **Regulatory Capacity:** There is need to build capacity to provide oversight for the entire supply chain.
3. **Laboratory:** Sufficient testing resources are needed to identify critical problem areas so appropriate surveillance, measurement and mitigation steps can be developed to target and reduce the incidence of food borne illness outbreaks.

In order to help the consumers, they cannot be asked to wait until government's capacity, infrastructure, oversight, training and enforcement are all in place; rather, it is important to ensure that the mothers, fathers, grandparents, those under 5 (children) do not lose the food and nutrients they consume. They need to advocate for safer food and be free from disease. Consumers need to understand that they play a very important part of this puzzle and market drivers and as such should be the drivers for safer and nutritious food all the way down to supply chain; because when food is unsafe, it cannot be nutritious.

## OVERVIEW OF EATSAFE NIGERIA – AUGUSTINE OKORUWA, HEAD OF EATSAFE COUNTRY PROGRAMS, GAIN

Augustine Okoruwa, the Head of EatSafe Country Programs, GAIN presented the overview of EatSafe:

- **Evidence:** this is gathered through research, interactions.
- **Action:** decisions are made based on the information gathered from the research to respond to the challenges and gaps found in the food safety system in Nigeria.
- **Aim:** to enable lasting improvements in the safety of nutritious food in informal markets by focusing on the consumers. Food is safe when it is handled correctly, prepared the right way, eaten the right way, and does not cause illnesses.
- **Lead Implementation:** The Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) will be leading the implementation of this project globally.
- **Implementing Partners:**
  - International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) – expertise in food safety
  - Pierce Mill Entertainment Education (PME) – expertise in media and communication.

These partners will be supporting GAIN as implementing partners in the project.



## Objective

The objectives of the EatSafe Project are to:

1. Consolidate and generate knowledge and evidence on food safety through formative research.
2. Develop and test tools for informal market vendors.
3. Generate evidence of how to engage and empower consumers – a conscious consumer that is concerned about food safety will be very selective about the type of food to buy or not to buy.

## Implementing Phases

The implementation of the project will be in two (2) phases – phase 1 and phase 2.

1. Formative Research: (PY1/PY2 2019 – 2020): In this phase, there will be an in-depth qualitative and quantitative assessments of consumer and vendor attitudes, practices and beliefs, gender roles and norms and other factors driving food safety behaviors in informal markets. This phase will also include an ethnographic study, stakeholder mapping, risk assessment and a cohort baseline assessment.
2. Experimental interventions (PY3 – PY5 2021 – 2024): experimental interventions to generate an evidence of how to engage with and empower consumers to demand for safe and nutritious foods. Phase 2 will include targeted media and communication activities to support improving food safety practices and demand for safer foods, focusing particularly on informal markets.



*EatSafe Head of Country Programmes, Dr. Augustine Okoruwa, giving an overview of the EatSafe Project in Nigeria at the launch in Abuja on December 3, 2020.*

Food safety is a public health challenge in Nigeria. An estimated 173 million cases of diarrhea are caused by foodborne illness annually and about 33,000 deaths result from these illnesses. EatSafe will generate knowledge and test tools for consumers and vendors in informal markets. From this, EatSafe hopes to learn from the project in Kebbi State, the best approaches to engage and empower consumers to demand safe, nutritious foods. Kebbi state is an Agrarian state but with a high level of malnutrition alongside foodborne diseases. Over 61% of children under 5 are stunted; the state has the highest burden of stunting in Nigeria (Nigeria Demographic & Health Survey 2018).

The Implementation of EatSafe will be in 3 markets: Central Tsohon, Kasuwa and Yaryara in Birnin Kebbi). Birnin Kebbi, the state capital, is one of the six local government area councils

with the highest burden of malnutrition in Kebbi state (NDHS 2018). The other five are Arugungu, Koko-Besse, Gwandu, Bagudu and Bunza.

### *PY1 – Lessons Learned*

- Consumers and Vendors have limited knowledge of food safety and hygiene best practices.
- Nigeria operates a complex multi-agency food safety control system.
- Several bacteria (*Salmonella Spp S. aureus & E. Coli*), chemical hazards, mycotoxins, heavy metals, etc. are most common in foods and beverages consumed in Nigeria.
- While there have been 15 food safety investments (6 in Nigeria), most focused on aflatoxin and none were 100% food safety focused.

### *Next Steps*

- State Level project launch: Kebbi State Q1 2021.
- Stakeholders Engagement – to look at issues on ground for possible interventions.
- Linkages with other Ftf-USAID – watch for design workshop July 2021.
- Co-creation of interventions with stakeholders based on research findings: GAIN, USAID, Government MDA's, Private Sector, Research and Academia, Development Partners, Civil Society organizations, Farmers, Consumers and vendors Association, Professional Associations etc.

## ACTIVITY (OFFICIAL) LAUNCH

The proclamation for the official launch of EatSafe in Nigeria was made by Collin Dreizin who also (on behalf of Anne Patterson and USAID) thanked participants for their attendance and said it is an honor to be working with the government of Nigeria.

## CLOSING REMARKS

John Pilaku, Head of Finance/Administration, gave the closing remarks and a vote of thanks on behalf of Michael Ojo, GAIN Nigeria Country Director. He thanked His Excellency, the Executive Governor of Kebbi State for not just gracing this event but for his exemplary display of punctuality. He appreciated the Minister of Health who also made out time to be present. He appreciated and thanked the stakeholders who have travelled from Kebbi state for this event and all participants both physically and virtually present. He also thanked those championing the project for their commitment, resilience and support and the team that put this project together and will implement it. He thanked the ladies and gentlemen of the press, GAIN team, and USAID team both virtually and physically present as well as the Moderator Prof. Olugbenga Ben Ogunmoyela for wonderfully anchoring the program. He concluded his remarks by thanking the Director of Food Safety for putting this together and wished everyone safe journey to their various destinations.

## NEXT STEPS

After concluding the EatSafe project launch at the national level, the next steps are outlined below:

- Preliminary Visit: Due to the restrictions on travel brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, the EatSafe team has not been able to travel to Kebbi State. When restrictions have eased, the team intends to travel to make formal introductions and have meetings with the stakeholders at Kebbi state where the project will be implemented. This visit will also aid in planning for the state launch. This visit is planned for Q1 2021, in February.
- State Level Project Launch: The official launch of EatSafe will be held in Kebbi State- also in Q1 2021, also planned for February.
- Linkages with other Feed the Future/USAID Funded Projects in Kebbi State: Currently we have plans underway to collaborate with the Agricultural Extension and Advisory Services. Other USAID activities that offer collocation opportunities include: Agribusiness Investment, West African Trade Investment Hub (WATIH), Integrated Health Programme (IHP), Breakthrough Action (BA) and Breakthrough Research (BR).
- Stakeholders Engagement: Under sub-activity 1.19.4 on the EatSafe workplan, a municipal roundtable with Nigerian stakeholders on the design of safe, nutritious food markets will be held around May/June 2021. This is to foster co-creation of interventions with Stakeholders-based on research findings.
- Field work to better understand consumer and vendor risks and behaviours related to safety of nutritious foods in markets in Kebbi
- Design Workshop: A consultative workshop would be held in July 2021 to consolidate and review learnings from Phase I and design interventions with the USAID Mission for Phase II.

## ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTS

The following documents and materials related to the launch are available upon request:

1. Launch concept note.
2. Agenda.
3. Speeches (available ones).
4. Media files (audio-video).
5. Photos.