

FOOD SAFETY IN TANZANIA

Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition
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Key Messages

- A healthy diet starts with safe food.
- The food safety regulatory framework in Tanzania is characterized by the absence of a comprehensive, overarching policy framework dedicated solely to food safety. Instead, food safety governance is fragmented across various laws and regulations managed by different institutions each addressing specific aspects of food safety.
- There is a lack of clear separation of roles and responsibilities among regulatory agencies, leading to implementation challenges. The historical functional overlap between Tanzania Bureau of Standards (TBS) and Tanzania Food and Drugs Authority (TFDA) resulted in both agencies being involved in similar functions creating redundancy and inefficiency. The current, food safety policy frameworks emphasize the safety of food after harvesting; less attention is given to pre- and primary production processes where major food safety issues lie. This creates a regulatory gap for production, harvesting and handling across other food value chain segments, leaving Tanzanians at risk
- We call on the Government to strengthen food safety for all Tanzanians by reviewing the regulatory framework and set out a comprehensive regulatory framework from the earliest stages of production, to plate.

Introduction

Over the last three decades, food safety standards have attracted increased attention worldwide. This has been attributed to a rise in consumer awareness to do with food production and processing. This development has compelled developing countries, including Tanzania, to adopt food safety standards to participate in international trade.

However, much emphasis has been placed on regulating food and safety standards for the export supply chain and less attention has been placed on the fast-growing domestic food markets in terms of regulatory instruments to protect local food consumers. The lack of



Figure 1: Food safety – the current context in Tanzania

awareness on the impact of food safety malpractice has been realized during various stakeholders' engagements made at both national and subnational levels in Tanzania demonstrating a large gap in understanding of the extent of the food safety challenges. This lack of knowledge is coupled with inadequate regulatory enforcement of food safety control measures in the domestic market.

Food safety and nutrition are technically linked – they have an impact on one another. This is due to the fact that optimal human health and wellbeing includes being well-nourished and free from foodborne disease. Access to safe, nutritious, and healthy food is a fundamental human right that should be available and affordable to all people.

Foodborne illnesses represent a significant health challenge worldwide. According to the World Health Organization (WHO)¹. Food safety is a critical issue affecting both public health and economic development. Tanzania's food safety system faces numerous challenges, including outdated regulations coupled with fragmentation across different institutions with specific types of food products and limited enforcement capacity. The current legislative framework in Tanzania which guides enforcement includes a broad array of laws and regulations addressing various aspects of food safety across different sectors, namely the Tanzania Food, Drugs and Cosmetics Act, the Standards Act, the Atomic Energy Act, the Meat Industry Act, the Dairy Industry Act, the Fisheries Act, the Sugar Industry Act, and the Cashew-nut Industry Act (**Table 1**).

These challenges have resulted in several high-profile food safety incidents, highlighting the need for a more robust and coordinated regulatory framework. For example, in 2017, a severe aflatoxin outbreak in maize in the Dodoma and Manyara regions resulted in 61 reported cases and 17 deaths. Investigations revealed that 52 out of 115 maize samples tested had aflatoxin levels exceeding the WHO's threshold of 5 micrograms per kilogram². This incident reinforced the need for coordinated action on food safety.

1 World Health Organization. (2015). Global estimates and regional comparisons of the burden of foodborne disease in 2010. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241565165>

2 FAO STRENGTHENING FOOD SAFETY AND SECURITY IN THE UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/content/bitstreams/2978370f-dc07-4752-94fc-b9758802bf4d/content>

Table 1: Different Acts which have food safety provisions

Name of Act	Key challenges:
Tanzania Food, Drugs, and Cosmetics Act (2003)	The legal framework involves multiple agencies like TBS, TMDA, and the Ministry of Health, leading to confusion and inefficiency. For example, both TBS and TMDA were responsible for food safety regulation, causing overlap until a Memorandum of Understanding was established that more clearly separated who was responsible for what aspects of food safety regulation.
The Standards Act (2009)	There are laws that regulate specific foods without clear cross-references to the Standards Act, resulting in unnecessary bureaucracy and increased compliance costs. For instance, the Finance Act, 2019, which amended the Standards Act, did not address the positions of other laws dealing with food safety and quality, perpetuating confusion and inefficiency.
The Atomic Energy Act (2002)	Poor inter-agency coordination results in functional overlap and conflicts. For instance, the Atomic Energy Act requires radioactivity analysis certificates from TAEC, which must be read with TFDA regulations, leading to confusion post the TFDA's rebranding to TMDA.
The Meat Industry Act (2006)	Both TBS and TMB are responsible for meat safety and quality, resulting in overlapping roles that cause confusion and inefficiency. For example, both agencies require separate certificates for meat processors. Lack of clear guidelines on collaboration between TBS and TMB leads to regulatory conflicts including delays and increased compliance costs.
The Animal Diseases Act (2003)	The Animal Diseases Act requires coordination with other bodies such as TBS and TMDA for comprehensive food safety. However, overlapping responsibilities between these agencies often lead to conflicts and confusion about roles and responsibilities. For example, while TBS is responsible for food safety standards, TMDA oversees veterinary drugs, leading to potential overlaps in regulatory enforcement. Differences in regulatory frameworks and enforcement practices between agencies can create conflicts and hinder effective implementation of the Act. These conflicts can result in inconsistent enforcement of food safety and animal health standards.
The Dairy Industry Act (2004)	The Dairy Industry Act makes references to the Tanzania Food and Drugs Authority (TFDA), which has been replaced by the Tanzania Medicines and Medical Devices Authority (TMDA). This needs to be reviewed as TMDA no longer handles food safety. Otherwise, it brings stakeholders due to lack of clarity as to which agency should they specifically be responsible to for specific regulatory issues, hence delays in compliance and enforcement of regulatory functions.
The Fisheries Act (2010)	Both the Fisheries Division and TBS regulate fish products, leading to potential conflicts and increased compliance costs. For example, fish inspectors must issue health certificates, while TBS regulates import permits. The absence of TBS inspectors at various border stations increases the risk of importing substandard or unsafe fish products.
The Sugar Industry Act (2001)	The Sugar Industry Act and The Cashew-nut Industry Act have overlapping provisions, causing confusion and increasing compliance costs.
The Cashew-nut Industry Act (2009)	The Cashew-nut and Sugar Industry Acts and the Standards Act have overlapping provisions, causing confusion and increasing compliance costs.

Tanzania's adoption of international standards helps ensure that food products meet global safety requirements, aligning with guidelines and codes of practice established by the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) and International Organization for Standardization (ISO). Sector-specific policies, such as the National Livestock Policy (2006) and the National Fisheries Policy (2015), promote safe practices in the production and processing of livestock and fishery products. Tanzania's active participation in international networks, such as the International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN) and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), helps the country stay updated on global food safety practices and facilitates collaboration in managing food safety issues.

However, inadequate coordination and overlapping mandates among the multiple laws and institutions have led to inefficiencies in enforcing food safety regulations. This challenge in coordination can hinder effective implementation and monitoring. Additionally, significant challenges relate to understaffing,

inadequate funding, and limited resources for regulatory bodies³. These constraints affect institutions' ability to effectively enforce food safety standards and conduct regular inspections. While the effectiveness of food safety regulations at the local government level varies, there is a widespread need for better incorporation of food safety frameworks into local government plans and budgets to ensure consistent enforcement across different regions.

Historical changes and challenges

Summary of recent changes in authorities regulating food safety

In 2019, the Tanzanian government amended the Tanzania Food, Drugs, and Cosmetics Act⁴. The aim was to streamline food safety regulation and reduce regulatory burden to businesses while ensuring that food products meet national quality standards. Following these reforms, the responsibility of regulating medicines and medical devices remained with TFDA; hence the name changed to Tanzania Medicines and Medical Devices Authority (TMDA). This authority focuses on regulating the quality, safety, and effectiveness of medicines, medical devices, diagnostics, biocidal, and tobacco products. The TBS in contrast, has responsibility for food safety and quality assurance across the entire food production chain in Tanzania.

While the restructuring of TFDA to TMDA and TBS aimed to reduce the overlapping functions between regulatory bodies, the food safety situation in Tanzania seems to be more challenging and risky to domestic consumers, as highlighted in the analysis⁵ conducted recently by GAIN that implies, a notable weakness in coordination, and alignment across specific sectoral policy frameworks, and reduced clarity for government departments, businesses, and consumers after these reforms.

Call to action

Five recommendations are proposed to provide a comprehensive regulatory framework to facilitate the transformation of Tanzania's food safety agenda:

1	Review existing sector specific food safety regulatory frameworks, pull them together/harmonize them to have a strong and effective regulatory framework to address the current food safety situation in Tanzania
2	Develop one comprehensive regulatory framework for food safety covering seed to plate/ farm to fork, aligning with current sectoral legislation and setting out clear roles and responsibilities, coordination, and communication
3	Address the current capacity gaps to enable enforcement of food safety regulatory functions
4	Leverage, adhere, and align national and local standards and bylaws with international standards
5	Enhance consumer awareness on food safety

Food safety is the cornerstone of a safe and nutritious diet. Prompt action is required to review the food safety regulatory framework in Tanzania and invest in an overarching framework which aligns with current policies to bring clarity in roles and responsibilities for effective enforcement that will help to provide safe food for all Tanzanians.

3 GAIN Food Safety Policies Analysis Report 2024

4 <https://www.tmda.go.tz>

5 GAIN Food Safety Policies Analysis Report 2024

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