

Impact Story22: Increasing Food Safety in Traditional Markets

THE OPPORTUNITY

Traditional markets are particularly important for the health and nutritional status of communities in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). These informal and often open-air markets are where most people get their food from. However, food safety can be a problem, with unsafe food causing significant illness (600 million illnesses per year) and economic losses (over \$110 billion), particularly in LMICs. Foodborne disease is closely linked with nutrition: unsafe food increases the risk of malnutrition, and malnourished individuals can be more susceptible to foodborne disease.



These challenges also present an opportunity: improving food safety in traditional markets can quickly protect health, boost economies, and enhance local access to nutritious food. Making food safer in traditional markets requires positive behaviour change led by consumers themselves; the adoption of best practices and technologies by vendors; and an enabling environment that is supported by policy, infrastructure, and social networks.

THE SOLUTION

EatSafe: Evidence and Action Towards Safe, Nutritious Food (EatSafe) is a USAID Feed the Future programme that works in traditional markets in Nigeria and Ethiopia to improve food safety. The objective is to engage and empower consumers and people who work in markets to demand safe, nutritious food through food safety interventions. Using extensive formative research to guide implementation, EatSafe looks to demonstrate practical ways that can advance food safety at three levels.



Local: Most food safety actions happen locally – hence it is at the local level where most of EatSafe’s work is based. EatSafe is testing seven collaboratively designed food safety interventions (see figure below left) that change the behaviours of local market

actors to generate demand for safer food. The seven interventions include Nigeria’s Association for Promotion of Food Safety and Improved Nutrition (APFSAN), which convenes stakeholders to implement food safety



programming amongst market actors, and Ethiopia’s Market Improvement Initiative (MII), which uses collective action to bring stakeholders together to work as a task force towards a common goal—the improved health and safety of a local traditional market in Hawassa. They also include interventions that work directly with consumers to change not only how much they know about food safety but also how serious they consider it, such as a radio drama and an in-market information stand.

National: EatSafe has supported the creation of an enabling policy environment that improves governance coordination for the informal sector. This is exemplified through technical support and the development of Nigeria’s Food Safety and Quality Bill, which is awaiting its final passage.

Global: Within the global standard setting Codex Alimentarius, EatSafe is facilitating the development and adoption of international standards for food safety in traditional markets. These global guidelines will help local governing bodies and regional authorities advance food safety in their markets.



THE IMPACT

EatSafe is an evidence-based and learning programme, meaning the focus is primarily on generating knowledge that can be applied in different contexts and geographies. Through EatSafe interventions, over 600 vendors and market actors have been trained on food safety best practices. Early findings show that 94% of those trained have maintained those best practices. In addition, over 800,000 Ethiopians and Nigerians have been reached with the project’s interventions. Qualitative findings show that these activities bring new information that is well received by programme participants — suggesting that it may have a strong impact on shifting behaviours and attitudes.

While EatSafe focuses on food safety, the impact of its activities resonates across food system sectors and supply chains. For instance, vendors are seeing benefits for their business, as illustrated in the quote at right, indicating the potential for such interventions to support economic empowerment. Interventions such as the Market Improvement Initiative that help to bring together diverse stakeholders to address shared challenges in the market have led to connecting people who do not normally interact to jointly problem-solve towards long-term solutions that work for all.

As the EatSafe program concludes, the programme interventions will be supported through local partnerships to ensure continuity and sustainability, and the lessons learned and tools developed can be taken up by future projects and initiatives to more broadly spread the impact of safer food for all.

For more information visit
www.gainhealth.org/EatSafe

Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN)

Rue de Varembe, 1202 Geneva, Switzerland

T: +41 22 749 18 50 E: info@gainhealth.org

www.gainhealth.org



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