Feature

Let's adopt and implement the draft national food safety policy

ACCORDING to World Health Organisation (WHO) statistics, about two million people die every year from eating unsafe food in developing countries.

Food-borne diseases are major causes of ill-health, especially among the poor who are vulnerable because they do not have necessary knowledge and the means to access facilities that can ensure food safety.

To mark World Health Day on April 7, 2015, WHO chose Food Safety as its theme.

Due to the global changes in patterns of food production, new risks have been identified in developing countries such as Ghana.

Food is sold by many small-scale producers or cottage industries, many of whom have inadequate training and lack access to clean water, adequate refrigeration (in light of frequent power outages) and inadequate food handling facilities and sanitation.

With changing life styles and modernisation, many Ghanaians resort to street-vended foods for their daily meals and some of these meals are prepared with either substandard quality of ingredients, in unhygienic places and are not temperature controlled during sale.

Some of these foods are offered for sale at the mercy of flies and dust or are sited near gutters or wastelands.

Safe food is food that is free of physical, chemical and microbiological hazards.

In accordance with International Standards, the guiding principle of a food safety system is to ensure that food sold on the market is safe and provides a high level of protection of human life and health.

A modern food safety system applies process controls from farm to consumer, to maintain food hygiene throughout the production and supply chain.

To ensure a co-ordinated food safety system in Ghana, all foods on the market must be safe to eat and the primary responsibility for food safety lies with the food business operators.

To be doubly sure, all food business operators must be registered under the appropriate body to enable supervision, traceability and integration.

Imports and exports must meet set standards and there must be co-operation with International Standards.

In addition, there must be a food law to operate a National food Safety System.

> **Governments must enact laws that will compel all food business operators to have HACCP in place in their establishments, be it small, medium or large scale.**

By Anthonia H. Andoh, Nina Bernice Ackah & Dr Lawrence D. Abbey

The following points would help in a successful establishment of a National food Safety System. It is necessary to develop a national policy for food safety, with set objectives, scope, principles, priorities and responsibilities for the Food Safety System.

The policy should also review current laws and regulations and make proposals on how it can be updated and possibly harmonised with International Standards.

There must be a component for risk rnalysis comprising risk assessment, management and communication to enable identification and implementation of priority actions and provide systems for rapid response to matters arising and then addressing these issues in an effective manner.

There should also be control systems in place for Food and Feed businesses to place on them the responsibility to ensure food safety through good practices, as well as through the application of Food Safety management Systems such as Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP), British Retail Consortium Standard for Food (BRC) and Safe Quality Foods (SQF).

Official controls such as surveillance, checks, inspections, verifications, audits, sampling and testing serve as a check in ensuring food safety.

Food Business Operators must also be registered and approved to operate. Persons preparing food and vendors also must undergo regular medical checks to ensure they are healthy and do not pass on any communicable diseases.

The role of specialised laboratories in analysing samples taken during official controls helps in ensuring food safety. However, these laboratories must have the necessary infrastructure, competence, expertise and resources to carry out their duties.
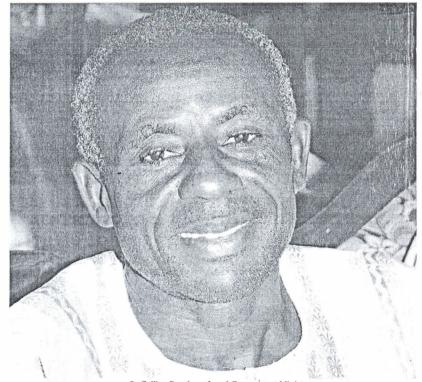
Communication is also very crucial to deliver information, train and advise food chain stakeholders, as well as consumers on food-borne diseases, reported outbreaks and actions taken.

There must be training of both food business operators and their administrative staff on food safety issues.

Last, access to appropriate information by all stakeholders in the food chain helps in achieving compliance in operations of the Food Safety System.

In developing countries including Ghana, there are challenges facing the development and implementation of a food safety control system and these include a lack of infrastructure and resources, out of date policies, strate-

gies and legislation, lack of knowledge on the use of agrochemicals, gaps in availability of standards for the domestic market whereas there may be standards for export.

Governments must enact laws that will compel all food business operators to have HACCP in place in their establishments, be it small, medium or large scale.

Another area that presents a challenge with regard to food safety is the enforcement of legislation. Insufficient enforcement leads to contaminated food, insufficient consumer protection, offering for sale of unsafe food and food fraud.

The food sector is dominated by many cottage industries, many of whom do not have the adequate knowledge on food safety and in Ghana, not all food business operators are registered with the regulatory authorities.

Other challenges with food safety are that some activities that ensure food safety are being duplicated in various institutions and this does not allow for effective co-ordination and evaluation through the food chain.

The Food Research Institute of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research in conjunction with other governmental agencies over a period of time has undertaken activities to create awareness to address some of these challenges. These have been in the form of training programmes on food hygiene, good manufacturing practices and HACCP.

● *Collins Dauda — Local Government Minister*

> **Scientists and regulators need to do more in order to establish national standards for local foods.**

Available food standards are mostly adopted from Codex and other International Standards. The Ghana Standards Authority (GSA) has developed some local standards. However, a lot needs to be done through extensive research and gathering of data.

Scientists and regulators need to do more in order to establish national standards for local foods.

The Food and Drugs Authority (FDA) also works extensively to ensure food safety. The FDA, together

with other stakeholders, has a draft Food safety Policy aimed at streamlining various legislations that govern food safety in the country, building the capacity of all institutions involved in food-safety management, strengthening inspections and laboratory services as well as import control.

Currently, food regulation lies not only with FDA; institutions such as the Customs and Ghana Standards Authority also do some level of regulation.

The policy, when implemented, would address overlaps in the roles of the various organisations, with the FDA co-ordinating their activities. The policy also encourages the establishment of private laboratories to complement the efforts of government laboratories.

The adoption and implementation of this drafted National Food Safety Policy, as well as monitoring of its performance will ensure the long-term management and control of food safety ensuring consumer confidence, assuring public health and improving our competitiveness on global markets.

In conclusion, the effectiveness of the efforts of these institutions would depend on government support in funding of their activities to ensure a holistic national effort in achieving food safety and security.

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