

Policy Brief

Ensuring Food Safety And Quality In Ghana

Background

There is increasing realization that most foodborne diseases are caused by food contamination at all levels of food chains, from production to consumption. It is necessary, therefore, that food produced should be safe and nutritious to meet people's dietary needs and food preferences for active and healthy lives (SDG2).

For food to be safe it must be free of substances that might be harmful to a person's health. Food quality refers to characteristics that determine the value of food, particularly its nutritional value, and/or acceptability to consumers.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), about 600 million people in the world fall ill each year from consuming contaminated food and about 420,000 people from this number die each year.

Africa and Southeast Asia tend to have the highest incidence and death rates associated with foodborne diseases.

Food contamination can result in kidney and liver failure, brain and neural disorders, as well as some non-communicable diseases such as cancer. It can also adversely affect reproductive health and the immune system.

There are serious food safety challenges in Ghana, including unsafe use of agrochemicals, use of banned chemicals, unsanitary food handling, poor food storage practices, and use of dangerous additives in foods. Food safety is also compromised by the use of chemicals to hasten the ripening of fruits, and misuse of insecticides and fungicides on vegetables,

which can lead to antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

Despite the fact that these challenges are well-known, food safety and quality issues have received very little attention in Ghana and many other African countries.

The purpose of this policy brief is to present an analysis of prevailing situations that hinder the promotion of food safety and quality in Ghana and to propose effective actionable interventions to address the problem.



Methodology

The research was undertaken by Professor Saa Dittoh and Ms Naomi Kandawini of the University for Development Studies (UDS), Tamale. The goal was to analyze key food safety and quality policies and strategies with regards to modern and conventional food production and related agri-food systems in Ghana. We also explored the barriers that hinder, and enablers that promote, food safety and quality in Ghana.

Qualitative research design consisting of systematic literature review of published and unpublished material, key informant interviews (KII), focus group discussions (FGDs) and field observations was used to gather data. The information obtained from these varied sources was analyzed using content and thematic analyses techniques.

The main stakeholders that were targeted in the study included the directorates and departments of the Ministry of Food and Agriculture, particularly Plant Protection and Regulatory Services Department (PPRSD), Veterinary Services Department (VSD) and Women in Agriculture Department (WIAD) at national and district levels. Other stakeholders were

nutrition and environments health departments of the Ghana Health Service, Food and Drugs Authority (FDA), Ghana Standards Authority (GSA), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs), and farmers and community members.

Key Findings

The research revealed the following key findings, which inform how to improve food safety and quality in Ghana:

- Ghana's food policies, strategies, plans, programmes and projects over several decades hardly mention food safety and quality, though all of them are very concerned about food security.
- Food contamination takes place at all levels of the food chain in crop, livestock (including poultry) and fisheries/aquaculture production.
- Contamination is also at different levels of severity and seriousness in both conventional and modern food production systems, depending on the sources of contamination and the types of food.
- Chemical contamination tends to be more in the modern crop production systems, while aflatoxin and other mycotoxins contamination seem to be more in conventional production systems.
- With respect to livestock, unsafe food production is from zoonotic sources (such as anthrax, TB, bird flu, salmonella) and others. AMR is also a serious problem in livestock production.
- AMR and heavy metals are the critical food safety problems in fish and fishery products.
- Insanitary production, storage, transportation, and processing facilities are critical sources of food contamination.
- Inadequate attention paid to personal hygiene by persons involved in the production and storage of food leads to food contamination.
- Inadequate infrastructure (laboratories, drying and storage facilities, roads etc.) contribute to increasing food contamination and adulteration.
- There are few food safety best practices and success story interventions in local food production and marketing of raw produce in Ghana. Safety practices tend to be limited to export produce and imported foodstuffs.

- The FDA/WIAD/GIZ collaboration in providing stainless steel tables (with training in food safety and quality) for the sale of vegetables and meat in some districts in the country is probably the best food safety practice and success story in the country. It has, however, been limited to a few MMDAs in the Greater Accra Region.
- Another “success story” is the provision of community drying facilities in Ada by the Ada District Assembly in the Greater Accra Region.



Palm oil processing



Weedicides



Local storage system



Drying produce on road pavement



Drying produce on road tapaulin

Policy Recommendations

Based on the findings of our research, we make the following recommendations for consideration by policy makers and politicians at the local and national levels, NGOs and development partners (DPs):

- The Environmental Health personnel of MMDAs should intensify supervision and monitoring of agriculture produce markets to decrease or prevent the deliberate adulteration of produce and “forced ripening” of fruits and vegetables. They should be adequately resourced to undertake these critical activities.
- Well-constructed farmer markets, based on high sanitation and food standards, should be established along major highways.
- There should be food safety testing laboratories in all regions of the country and simple toxins’ testing kits made available at community and farm levels for routine and constant testing.

- PPRSD (of MoFA) should train food safety and quality and/or agricultural extension personnel on food safety issues and the MMDAs should pay for such training since the personnel are under the local government service. The local government service should also fund all critical food safety and quality activities.
- Robust legislation that will bring all food safety players on board for effective food safety interventions should be enacted. There should be a comprehensive review of the Public Health Act and all the key stakeholders (e.g. FDA, GSA, PPRSD, VSD, MoFAD, Fisheries Commission, EPA) should actively participate in the making of the new act.
- MMDAs are the key institutions for planning and implementation of food policies, plans, programmes and projects. Food safety issues must therefore be incorporated into their medium-term plans.
- To achieve food and nutrition security, there must be workable policies, programmes and projects towards making food safety and quality key components of all food production systems.

References

Odonkor, S. T. and C. J. A. Odonkor, 2020. An Assessment of Food Safety Knowledge and Practices in the Ghanaian Hospitality Industry. *Hindawi Journal of Food Quality* Volume 2020, Article ID 5618492, 9 pages <https://doi.org/10.1155/2020/5618492>

WHO. 2019. Global Situation of Pesticide Management in Agriculture and Public Health: Report of a 2018 WHO-FAO Survey; WHO: Geneva, Switzerland. SADC.

Acknowledgements

This brief presents findings and policy recommendations on food waste outlined in a synthesis report developed by researchers engaged under the DARAP Project. The report, titled “Chemical Usage in Farming and Food Safety in Ghana” is accessible via the DARAP website, www.darap.isser.edu.gh. Opinions stated in this brief and the report it draws from are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of DARAP and its partners.



About DARAP

The **Data Repository and Advocacy for Policy (DARAP)** project focuses on promoting the access and effective use of data and knowledge products to influence policymaking processes and outcomes. It contributes to evidence-led policymaking through data management services and capacity building in research data interpretation and usage, collaborating with civil society organisations and academics. DARAP is funded by The Open Society Institute and based at the Measurement, Learning, and Evaluation (MLE) Unit at the Institute of Statistical Social and Economic Research (ISSER), University of Ghana.

Website: www.darap.isser.edu.gh;
Email: darap.isser@ug.edu.gh

About the Authors

Prof. Saa Dittoh, University for Development Studies (UDS), Tamale, Ghana. saaditt@gmail.com

Ms. Naomi Kandawini, University for Development Studies (UDS), Tamale, Ghana. knaomi@uds.edu.gh