Challenges of management of food safety in African countries

Peter Obimbo Lamuka
University of Nairobi,
Department of Food Science, Nutrition and Technology,
P.O. Box 29053-00625, Nairobi
Email: lamukapeter@yahoo.com
Introduction

Food Safety Management in African countries

- Priority
  - Access to international markets
- Less attention
  - Domestic food safety issues
Changes in food Trade

- Changes in food trade:
  - Increased trade in fresh produce than processed foods
  - High level of consumer protection
  - Strict food safety controls
  - Food scares

- Have alleviated concerns in international, regional and national food safety policy

Q- How are African countries integrating these into their food safety management system?
Challenges facing African countries in managing food safety
Food production, handling and marketing systems

- Large number of small-scale farmers and middlemen
  - Large quantities of food passing through a multitude of middlemen and food handlers
- Low literacy rate among farmers and food handlers, leading to:
  - Low adaptation of modern technologies
  - Increased risk of exposing food to unhygienic environment conditions and contamination
Types & complexity of Food Processing Industry

- Sophisticated state-of-the-art facilities to small artisanal operations
- The small units lack incentives for adaptation of better technologies
- Premises are not equipped to deal with food safety in a scientific and sustainable manner
- Reliability and timely delivery of safe and quality raw materials is lacking
- Lack of infrastructure for conservation and preservation of raw materials, resulting in variability in raw material safety and quality
Strict International Food Standards

The challenges of strict food safety standards:-

- How African countries can competitively position themselves to enhance their export performance in high value markets
- Cost of not meeting these strict standards
- Administrative, technical and scientific capacities to comply with dynamic and increasingly strict food safety standards.
- Lack of harmonization of Private food safety standards
Evolution of Food Safety and Quality Systems

- The Food Safety and Quality Systems include:
  - Good practices and GlobalGap/EurepGap
  - Quality management system - ISO 9000 standards and HACCP principles
  - Farm-to-fork strategy

- The technical limitations in implementation of these systems is a challenge in meeting food safety requirements.

- The large number of stakeholders in the food system is also a challenge to the management of farm-to-folk approach.
A Shift from Traditional “Command and Control” approach

- There is a shift from end-product testing to process-based quality management
- Which shifts the primary responsibility of food safety management from government to the industry sector.
- The government only acting as auditors of the industry’s food safety program.
Infrastructure and Services in Marketing System

- Poor and inadequate marketing infrastructures at farm and distribution level are a challenge in:-
  - Meeting either public or private standards
  - Reducing food safety risks from the farm to markets
  - Waste management and pest control (weak)
- There is need for significant public and private investment in upgrading the market infrastructure and services.
Recent Trends in International Food Safety Management

- The recent developments in international food trade include:
  - Increased emphasis on food safety regulations,
  - Strict food safety standards,
  - A shift towards process-based standards
  - Reorientation towards preventive quality management,
  - Mandatory Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP)
  - Increased consumer awareness on food safety risks and sanitary and photosanitary (SPS) measures
  - Extensive media coverage on food safety risks

An effective, well coordinated and stakeholders driven food safety management system is not only a challenge but a prerequisite for African counties access these markets.
International Food safety Standards and Regulations

- The SPS requirements poses clear, specific challenges to African countries due to limited access to scientific, and technical expertise and information.

- Food production and marketing systems are incompatible with SPS requirements such as traceability.

- Hence increased number of technical notifications for African countries to WTO.

- Sustainability food safety control systems is a challenge.

- African countries do not influence international legislative process due to lack capacity and financial facilitation to participate in international meetings.
Food safety control Infrastructure and Resources

- Regulatory infrastructures is inadequate due to limited resources
- Multiplicity of independent agencies under different acts of parliament and government departments
- This makes management and coordination of food safety control measures difficult
- Poorly or inadequately developed compliance regulations
- Most of the regulations are outdated and have regulatory vacuum in several fields for several products
Concerns

These agencies have:-
- No clear vision or focused strategies
- Overlapping of activities and divergence on priorities

The limited resources are not properly utilized due to lack of overall national strategy.

There is need for:-
- Collaborative planning and effective communication
- All food safety activities should be integrated into a single independent and coordinated system
Food Safety Control Laboratories

- Are limited in number and scope of testing
- Understaffed or lack suitably qualified personnel
- Poorly equipped or have outdated equipment
- Inability to detect same accuracy as in developed countries and certain emerging sensitive foodborne hazards
- Testing for safety of foods derived from biotechnology (GMO) is a challenge for most African countries
- A few laboratories are now modernizing their equipment
Modern Food Safety Control Systems

- Are science-based, transparent and have preventive approach
- This requires qualified and trained personnel in all disciplines.
- However, in African countries there is limitation in human resource base.
- The current training curricula are limited in food safety issues
- Need for focused training programmes
Foodborne diseases and Surveillance systems

- In African countries, food is a major factor in transmission of diarrheal diseases, however the role of food is ignored.
- The cause of diarrheal diseases is traditionally attributed to untreated water and unhygienic sanitation.
- Control efforts has focused on improvement of water supply and sanitation.
- Preventive measures do not adequately include food safety control measures.
Food Poisoning in Nairobi Slum (Kenya) - 16 April 2014
NTV News [edited]
http://ntv.nation.co.ke/news2/topheadlines/2-children-die-as-6-others-are-admitted-following-suspected-food-poisoning/
Six children have been hospitalized for suspected food poisoning, Kenyan media reports. The children are residents of Mefag Children’s Home in Kware, Mathare slums near Nairobi. Two children have died. Although the specific cause of the food poisoning is unknown, it is suspected that the foodborne contamination is due to the substandard sanitary conditions typical of the slum’s children’s homes.
Foodborne diseases and Surveillance systems

- Most African countries lack or have weak surveillance system
- Investigation of FB disease causative factors and magnitude of exposure are inadequate
- There is significant underreporting of foodborne illness
- Data are not well documented and analyzed for use during risk analysis, hence wrong decision making
- Management of infectious diarrheal is under public health sector, while food safety is associated with regulatory agencies under different ministries i.e. Agriculture and Trade sector
Food Safety and Domestic markets

- Consumers in African countries face a higher level of exposure to unsafe foods.
- The climate favours proliferation of pests, diseases and naturally occurring toxicants.
- Water for cleaning equipment and processing food is unsafe or not available.
- The existing food safety standards are poorly enforced.
- The food controls only ensures that end product adhere to regulations and fair business practices.
- Need for adoption and enforcement of more appropriate food safety policies, legislation and standards suitable to local food risk conditions.
Food Safety and Domestic markets

- Weak extension system that is not focused to changing needs of food safety requirements
- There is poor research-extension-farmer linkage due to weakly coordinated research at national level.
- The domestic consumer’s food safety level of knowledge and awareness is low.
- The main concern being food security rather than food safety
Trends in domestic markets and consumer food safety concerns

- Increasing consumer income, urbanization and literacy
- Improved infrastructure i.e. ownership of refrigerators and closer ties to global trends
- Increased vigilance by NGOs, consumer groups, and research institutions is raising consumer awareness and advocacy
- Growing consumer preferences for convenience foods and increased exposure to media (TV & Internet),
- All these demand an efficiency domestic food safety system
Peter Lamuka is a Borlaug Fellow in International Food Safety Regulatory Framework
