

FSN FORUM DISCUSSION No. 39
DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING FOOD SAFETY MECHANISMS
FROM 30 JUNE TO 23 JULY 2009

Dear Forum Members,

We are Harun K.M. Yusuf and Lalita Bhattacharjee, working for the last three years as Nutritionists on the National Food Policy Capacity Strengthening Programme (NFPCSP) implemented by FAO in collaboration with the Food Planning and Monitoring Unit (FPMU), Ministry of Food and Disaster Management, Bangladesh. The overarching goal of the NFP is to 'ensure a dependable food security system for all people at all times', the term food security here encompasses all dimensions – availability, economic, social and physical access and utilization/nutrition. Food safety is one of the priority issues in the NFP strategic framework.

Food safety is a major public health concern in Bangladesh, as probably also in many other developing countries. Food growers, particularly fruits and vegetable growers resort to unscrupulous use of pesticides and insecticides, the wholesalers and retailers use artificial, toxic colourants, ripening agents and preservatives, and the food handlers at large do not have adequate knowledge or attitude on hygienic and sanitary aspects of food handling, preparation and service. The helpless consumers who are at the receiving end face risks of consuming heavily contaminated food. In the absence of any effective control system, the food twisters are so rampant that sometimes it seems that it would be impossible to find a single food item in the market which is not contaminated or adulterated. Unaware of the rampant use of toxic substances, the consumers continue to buy and eat foods. In most cases the consumers are not even aware of the potential dangers of food adulteration and contamination. While the development of the marketing system of the rapidly growing processed foods and other foods is important, maintaining quality of all foods at levels of marketing (assembling, cleaning, sorting, processing and packaging) is a key concern and challenge.

The above are some of the challenges that face Bangladesh and possibly other developing countries. This warrants the need for developing/strengthening the implementation of a comprehensive national system for enhancing food safety, quality and food control. Priority needs to be given to the assessment and prevention of risks involved in the distribution of safe food along the entire chain from production to consumption.

We would like FSN Forum members to highlight from their country experiences:

How are the basic issues and challenges of food safety being addressed and mechanisms implemented in overcoming these?

Some specific questions include:

- 1) **How are the legislation on food hygiene and HACCP systems implemented in your country?**
- 2) **How did you put in place your monitoring mechanisms? What are the key food safety indicators used in monitoring the implementation of your programmes?**
- 3) **What are the mechanisms in place to collect/share food safety data across sectors and organizations? We find that one of the main constraints to effective monitoring is lack of collaboration and coordination between sectors and ministries.**
- 4) **What are the steps taken in strengthening consumer awareness, consumer education and empowering consumer associations for protecting food safety and sale of safe foods?**
- 5) **Is the street food vending system institutionalized in your country? How was this achieved? What is the extent of women's involvement in street food vending?**

In requesting your responses, we would like to review the comparative situation and distil the best practices and pick up key policy lessons for strengthening implementation in our situation.

We thank you in advance for your suggestions and ideas.

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