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THE EXPERIENCE OF IMPROVING THE SAFETY OF STREET FOOD VIA INTERNATIONAL TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Country Paper proposed by China

ABSTRACT

In the recent two decades, the overall food safety in China has been greatly improved. These achievements are the results of capacity building in government control agencies and also industries, including the technical assistance from international organizations. This paper describes the implementation of two programs on street food control by the Ministry of Health, China, FAO sponsored pilot program on improving the safety of street food in cities and WHO sponsored program on the improvement of street food safety by the application of HACCP principles, as examples to demonstrate the contribution of technical assistance provided by international organizations to the progress of food safety control in developing countries.

The implementation of the above two international technical assistance program combined the advanced measures of food safety control with Chinese traditional control methods and proved to be very effective in improving the hygiene status of street foods. These two programs could serve as model examples of successful international technical assistance. The following experiences were learned from the implementation of these two programs.

The program selected for technical assistance shall be the prioritized food safety issue of that country or area. The local government or authority should be aware of the importance of the problems to be solved. This is critical for the success of the program. Because only in this case, strong resources and manpower support to the program will be provided by the local government or authority.

The implementation of the program shall have a detail plan and design. The preparation of program plan and design per se is a process of personnel training and technical support. In the above two programs, program experts not only conducted plan preparation, training and guidance, but also carried out field visit and provide assistance in the preparation of summary report.

3. The selected program should be able to sustain and fit to the economy and social development of the specific country. The street food program conducted in China is in line with the plan of hygiene city and hygiene town in China, which is an important prerequisite for the success of these programs.

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1. INTRODUCTION

China is the largest developing country in the world. The 1.3 billion population is comprised of 56 nationalities and live in very different geographical areas with various ecological characteristics. These features make the food safety control very complex. In the recent two decades, the overall food safety has been greatly improved. Many large food enterprises have applied advanced food safety control measures, such as GMP, HACCP and laboratory control. Those small and middle size enterprises have also taken necessary measures to improve the food hygiene condition of food manufacturing and handling. Even the wide spread traditional food business, street food, is making some progress in food hygiene. These achievements are the results of capacity building in government control agencies and also industries, including the technical assistance from international organizations. This paper will describe the implementation of two programs on street food control by the Ministry of Health, China, as examples to demonstrate the contribution of technical assistance provided by international organizations to the progress of food safety control in developing countries.

2. PROGRAM ACTIVITIES AND EXPERIENCES

Two technical assistance programs on street food control were carried out in China in the 1990s.

2.1 THE FAO SPONSORED PILOT PROGRAM ON IMPROVING THE SAFETY OF STREET FOOD IN CITIES.

By the end of 1993, there were 3 million street food vendors in China, involved about 5.16 million of people in this business. In those years, this business was referred as one of the symbols of “activated economy”, which made significant contributions to the economy development of the society, improvement of people’s living and increase of job availability. However, due to the lack of necessary sanitary facilities and job training, the safety of street food became a big challenge to the government control authority.

In order to understand the safety and hygiene status of street food, explore the control measures to the contamination of street food and improve the hygiene status of street food, sponsored by the FAO, the Institute of Food safety Control and Inspection of the Ministry of Health conducted a pilot program on improving the safety of street food in cities in 1991-1993, in collaboration with local health institutions in Shanxi, Zhejiang and Liaoning provinces. Five cities (Xian, Hangzhou, Dalian, Baoji and Yiwu) with different sizes and characteristics were selected as pilot study sites. The major achievements obtained in the three years are as follows.

1) Investigations on the basic condition and hygiene status of street food in the pilot sites. By field inspection and laboratory sample analysis, the following features of street food were identified.

- a) 32.2% of the street food vendors had no license.
- b) Lack of sanitary facility, e.g. 60.2% without clean water, 54.2%
- c) Without facilities for washing and sterilizing eating utensils.
- d) Lack of hygiene knowledge in food handlers, e.g. 56.7% of the
- e) food handlers failed in the hygiene examination.
- f) Violation of hygienic practices by food handlers was common, e.g. 66.4% of the food handlers did not wash hands before manufacturing or selling foods, 64.4% of the food handlers did not use separate tools or utensils for raw and cooked food.
- g) Most (55%) eating utensils have not been disinfected.
- h) Low compliance rate of products; among the 1,000 samples examined, only 47.3% met the hygiene standards.

2) Main factors affected the hygiene status of street foods

- a) The hygiene status of containers stored cooked foods and the storage temperature.
- b) The legal status of the street food vendor – license and business scope.
- c) Personal hygiene of the vendors or food handlers.
- d) The construction type and basic facilities of the vendors.
- e) Type of food manufacturing – cold or heated process; cooking temperature, etc.
- f) The quality of raw materials.

3) The identification and implementation of intervention measures.

- a) The establishment of self inspection and control system by street food vendors.
- b) Improve environment and facilities – assign special sites for vendors, provide water, electricity and gas, etc.
- c) Carry out special studies on high risk foods, such as the application of HACCP in cooked meat business.
- d) Strengthen the training of food vendors and food handlers.
- e) Establish central heated sterilization station.

After the implementation of the above measures, the compliance rate of street food increased from 47.3% to 85.9%; and the rate of utensil sterilization increased from 20% to 94.9%.

4) The above experience were disseminated to other 20 provinces and the summary report of this program was sent to other countries by FAO.**2.2 THE WHO SPONSORED PROGRAM ON THE IMPROVEMENT OF STREET FOOD SAFETY BY THE APPLICATION OF HACCP PRINCIPLES****2.2.1 Objectives and activities of the program.**

In 1995, with the technical assistance provided by WHO, the institute of Food Safety Control and Inspection of the Ministry of Health conducted the program on improvement of street food safety by the application of HACCP principles, in collaboration with the Health Department of Wurumuqi city (a minority area in western China). The objectives of the program are to apply HACCP in the control of high risk street foods, and to present the experience learned from this program at a training course. Under the guidance of WHO experts, the safety control of five types of high risk traditional street foods were studied and satisfactory results were obtained. At the same time, a large number of personnel were trained.

2.2.2 Achievements

- (i) After a comprehensive survey on the hygiene status of local street food and past food poisoning outbreaks, meat and poultry products were identified as high risk foods.
- (ii) Five HACCP application groups were established to apply HACCP in five different street foods, following uniformed principles and methods.
- (iii) CCPs were identified for the manufacturing process of each food. For example, the process of live chicken purchasing, salting, roasting, cooling and cutting were identified as CCPs for the manufacturing of electric roasted chicken. It not only significantly reduced the level of microbiological contamination, but also improved the taste of the product and saved fuel.

- (iv) Based on the achievements obtained in this program, the city health department organized training course on food safety and HACCP. As a result, the level of food safety control was greatly improved among food business.

3. SUMMARY

The implementation of the above two international technical assistance program combined the advanced measures of food safety control with Chinese traditional control methods and proved to be very effective in improving the hygiene status of street foods. These two programs could serve as model examples of successful international technical assistance. The following experiences were learned from the implementation of these two programs.

1) The program selected for technical assistance shall be the prioritized food safety issue of that country or area. The local government or authority should be aware of the importance of the problems to be solved. This is critical for the success of the program. Because only in this case, strong resources and manpower support to the program will be provided by the local government or authority.

2) The implementation of the program shall have a detail plan and design. The preparation of program plan and design per se is a process of personnel training and technical support. In the above two programs, program experts not only conducted plan preparation, training and guidance, but also carried out field visit and provide assistance in the preparation of summary report.

3) The selected program should be able to sustain and fit to the economy and social development of the specific country. The street food program conducted in China is in line with the plan of hygiene city and hygiene town in China, which is an important prerequisite for the success of these programs.